

Stigma & Sexual Orientation



During adolescence, when sexual orientation usually unfolds, research shows high schools in most Western countries have tended to be unsupportive, and even unsafe, environments for gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) teens. The stigma associated with a GLB orientation may be experienced as rejection and exclusion, insults and harassment, destruction of property, even threats and actual violence, or more subtly as indifference.

The results presented here characterize the stigma that Asian GLB students and heterosexual students experience with respect to two areas: stigmatizing events and feeling unsafe in school. Among Asian youth, 2% of boys and 4% of girls identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual: this is about 500 male and 1000 female students across the province.

Are GLB youth the targets of more stigmatizing events than their heterosexual peers?

The Adolescent Health Survey included a number of questions about the stigmatizing events that youth experienced in the previous year:

- Verbal sexual harassment
- Verbal harassment at school
- Physical fights
- Physical assaults at school
- Purposeful exclusion at school
- Discrimination due to race
- Discrimination due to sexual orientation
- Discrimination due to physical appearance

Asian GLB youth were more likely than Asian heterosexual peers to report stigmatizing experiences. For example, compared to heterosexual students, GLB youth were more likely to report:

- Being discriminated against due to sexual orientation
 - » 33% of GLB males vs. 2% of heterosexual males
 - » 31% of GLB females vs. 1% of heterosexual females

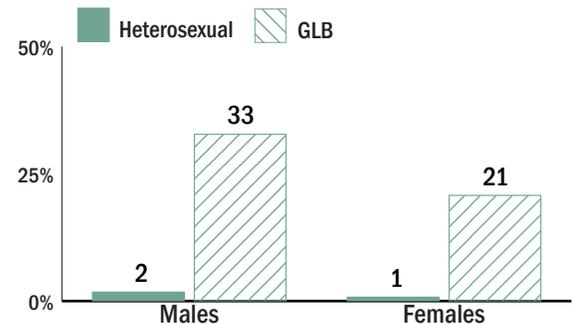
Asian Youth

SURVEY DATA:

Data used in this fact sheet were collected in 2003 through the BC Adolescent Health Survey III, conducted by the McCreary Centre Society. The BC AHS was administered to students in Grades 7-12 across British Columbia, and responses were weighted to represent the 290,000 students enrolled in public schools. The results shown here are for the estimated 48,000 students who, when asked “What is your background?” marked “East Asian (e.g. Chinese, Japanese, Korean, etc.)” or “Southeast Asian (e.g. Cambodian, Filipino, Indonesian, Vietnamese, etc.)” and also identified as either GLB or heterosexual.

More information about the BC AHS and McCreary Centre Society can be found at www.mcs.bc.ca

Discrimination due to sexual orientation experienced in past year



- Verbal harassment at school
 - » 42% of GLB males vs. 28% of heterosexual males
 - » 42% of GLB females vs. 32% of heterosexual females

An overall score of “Enacted Stigma” was created by adding up the number of kinds of stigmatizing events youth reported experiencing in the past year. The score ranges from 0 (none of events reported) to 8 (all events reported). It is important to note that this score does not reflect how often the stigmatizing events were experienced; only that an event occurred at least once.

For example, an Enacted Stigma score of 1.00 means that one stigmatizing event, such as physical assault, was experienced; but the student could have been assaulted once or several times.

For both Asian males and females, GLB youth had higher enacted stigma scores on average compared to their same-aged heterosexual peers.

Average Enacted Stigma Scores		
	Heterosexual	GLB
Asian Males	1.55	2.40
Asian Females	1.52	2.07

Note: Score ranges from 0 to 8, with a higher score indicating a greater number of stigmatizing events experienced.

Do GLB youth feel less safe at school?

The survey also included a series of items dealing with feelings about school and school safety:

- Feel like part of school
- Treated fairly by teachers
- Feel safe at school
- Frequency of feeling safe
- at school
- in classroom
- in washrooms
- in hallways
- in library
- in cafeteria
- outside on school property during school hours

Compared to Asian heterosexual teens, Asian GLB teens were more likely to report feeling unsafe at school (i.e., feeling safe sometimes/rarely/never as opposed to always/often)

- 43% of GLB males vs. 26% of heterosexual males
- 36% of GLB females vs. 25% of heterosexual females

More specifically, Asian GLB male students were twice as likely as their heterosexual male peers to feel unsafe in the library while Asian GLB females were twice as likely as their heterosexual peers to feel unsafe in their classrooms or the cafeteria.

An overall score of “Perceived Safety at School” combined the 10 different school items to create an average of how safe a youth felt at school. This score ranges from 1 to 3, with a higher score indicating feeling less safe.

On average, Asian GLB males and females felt less safe than Asian heterosexual students of the same age and gender.

Average Perceived Safety in School Scores		
	Heterosexual	GLB
Males	1.44	1.52
Females	1.41	1.57

Note: Score ranges from 1 to 3, with a 1 indicating feeling more safe and a 3 indicating feeling less safe

Conclusions and recommendations

Asian GLB youth are more likely than their heterosexual peers to be the targets of enacted stigma, facing higher levels of discrimination and harassment. GLB teens also feel less safe in their school environments than heterosexual teens.

Students deserve to have a safe environment in school, one which fosters their academic, emotional, and social development. It is important to reduce sexual orientation stigma and violence in schools, to provide safer school environments for sexual minority youth, and culturally sensitive support to Asian GLB students.

This fact sheet is one in a series reporting results from the study, *Stigma, Risk and Protective Factors for Vulnerable Youth*, an international study to explore how stigma links to health disparities, and ways we can enhance protective environments to promote healthy development of all youth. The study includes school-based survey data from Canada, New Zealand, and the USA. The study focuses on Indigenous, Asian, and European-heritage youth in school in all 3 countries; the project team includes Indigenous, Asian, and European-heritage researchers, of whom some identify as GLB, or who work with GLB youth. Researchers are from the University of British Columbia & McCreary Centre Society, Canada; the University of Auckland, New Zealand; and the University of Minnesota, USA.

The results for youth from these three ethnic groups in BC are reported in separate fact sheets. Because the samples are overlapping, results should not be compared across different ethnic groups.

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Further information about the study, and fact sheets from the other countries, are available at: www.mcs.bc.ca/partners/