

Bullying is common factor in LGBTQ youth suicides, study finds

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Researchers at the Yale School of Public Health have found that death records of LGBTQ youth who died by suicide were substantially more likely to mention bullying as a factor than their non-LGBTQ peers. The

researchers reviewed nearly 10,000 death records of youth ages 10 to 19 who died by suicide in the United States from 2003 to 2017.

The findings are published in the current issue of *JAMA Pediatrics*.

While LGBTQ [youth](#) are more likely to be bullied and to report [suicidal thoughts](#) and behaviors than non-LGBTQ youth, this is believed to be the first study showing that bullying is a more common precursor to suicide among LGBTQ youth than among their peers.

"We expected that bullying might be a more common factor, but we were surprised by the size of the disparity," said lead author Kirsty Clark, a postdoctoral fellow at Yale School of Public Health. "These findings strongly suggest that additional steps need to be taken to protect LGBTQ youth—and others—against the insidious threat of bullying."

Death records from LGBTQ youths were about five times more likely to mention bullying than non-LGBTQ youths' death records, the study found. Among 10- to 13-year-olds, over two-thirds of LGBTQ youths' death records mentioned that they had been bullied.

Bullying is a major public health problem among youth, and it is especially pronounced among LGBTQ youth, said the researchers. Clark and her co-authors used data from the National Violent Death Reporting System, a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)-led database that collects information on violent deaths, including suicides, from death certificates, law enforcement reports, and medical examiner and coroner records.

Death records in the database include narrative summaries from law enforcement reports and medical examiner and coroner records regarding the details of the youth's suicide as reported by family or friends, the youth's diary, social media posts, and text or email messages,

as well as any suicide note. Clark and her team searched these narratives for words and phrases that suggested whether the individual was LGBTQ. They followed a similar process to identify [death](#) records mentioning bullying.

"Bullies attack the core foundation of adolescent well-being," said John Pachankis, the Susan Dwight Bliss Associate Professor of Public Health at the Yale School of Public Health and study co-author. "By showing that bullying is also associated with life itself for LGBTQ youth, this study urgently calls for interventions that foster safety, belonging and esteem for all young people."

More information: *JAMA Pediatrics* (2020). [DOI: 10.1001/jamapediatrics.2020.0940](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2020.0940)

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