

# **Bullying Experiences among Sexual Minority Youths in England: the Nature, Prevalence and Association with Life Satisfaction**

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## **Biography**

Dr Morag Henderson is Co-Investigator of Next Steps and Senior Research Officer at UCL Institute of Education. Her research interests lie in explaining inequalities in education, with a focus on family resources, parenting, childhood adversity, gender issues and bullying. She holds a doctorate in sociology from the University of Oxford.

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## **Abstract**

This study investigates whether Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) young adults are more at risk of bullying than their heterosexual peers using Next Steps, a nationally representative longitudinal dataset from England. The experiences of more than 7,200 young adults from across England who were born in 1989-90 are examined. At age 20, the young adults were asked about their sexual identity and whether they had been bullied in the previous 12 months and during secondary school. The findings show that young LGB adults had a 52 per cent chance of having been bullied in the past year at age 20, compared to a 38 per cent chance for their heterosexual peers, after taking into account other characteristics that may make someone more likely to be targeted, such as gender, ethnicity, disability, or family socioeconomic background. The situation had improved slightly since their school years. Between the ages of 14 and 16, young people who later went on to identify as LGB had a 56 per cent chance of having been bullied in the past year, compared to a 45 per cent chance for their heterosexual peers. Moreover LGB young people were at considerably greater risk of being bullied frequently – that is, once or more every fortnight – during secondary school. LGB young people were found to be more than twice as likely as their heterosexual classmates to be regularly physically bullied and excluded from social groups. This paper also examines the association between being bullied and life satisfaction: the findings show that by the time they reached age 20, young LGB adults were less likely than their heterosexual peers to report being ‘very satisfied’ with how their lives had turned out so far. However, all young adults – regardless of sexual identity – were less likely to be very satisfied with their lives if they had been bullied. In summary, although all people are less likely to be bullied as they get older, young LGB adults remain at higher risk than their peers. These findings suggest that in order to tackle the problem, anti-bullying interventions cannot be focused only at schools and their pupils. Policymakers, employers, further education institutions and others working with young adults need to do just as much in order to challenge discrimination at all ages.

## **Keywords**

Bully-victimisation, England, lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB), Next Steps, sexual minority.

## **Introduction**

The detrimental effects of bullying, intentionally harmful and repetitive forms of aggression which involves an imbalance of power, are well documented. For example previous studies have shown that those who experience bullying in childhood have increased mental health problems, including increased levels of anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts and self-harm (Arseneault, Bowes and Shakoor, 2010) as well as poorer health (Nansel et al. 2001). This relationship has also been found to persist into early and late adulthood (Olweus, 1993; Takizawa, Maughan, Arseneault, 2014). These pervasive negative associations highlight the importance of understanding who is at risk of being bullied. Recent research has shown that those from minority groups are at a greater risk, for example those with special education needs (e.g. Chatzitheochari, 2015), ethnic minorities (e.g. Durkin et al. 2012) and sexual minorities (e.g. Fedewa & Ahn, 2011).

This paper addresses the question of whether individuals from sexual minorities are more or less likely to experience being bullied throughout their teenage years and into early adulthood in England. To our knowledge there is little research examining sexual orientation and victimisation in England which uses longitudinal data. As a result, this provides an exciting opportunity to explore the social experiences of this minority group and how these experiences vary over time. This contributes to the existing literature by describing the risk to young people over their teenage years and identifies the effect of experiencing bullying as well as the critical periods to focus interventions and support. The specific aims of this paper are to identify the association between sexual identity and bullying, including severity, form of bullying and prior experiences of bullying. The moderating role of sexual identity on the link between bullying experiences and life satisfaction at age 20 is also explored.

## **Review of Literature**

Bullying is defined as repeated exposure to conduct which is intended to cause discomfort or injury upon another person (Olweus, 1993). More specifically, the conduct involves a power imbalance between the bully and the victim (Rigby, 2002). There is a large body of research which documents the relationship between being bullied and negative health outcomes, academic outcomes, suicidal ideation and increased risk behaviours (Fedewa and Ahn, 2011; Hinduja and Patchin, 2010; Turner et al. 2013). Furthermore evidence from around the world indicates that sexual minority youth (i.e. lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) disproportionately experience bullying victimisation (Fedewa and Ahn, 2011) and a number of studies document the high prevalence of school-based harassment among sexual minority youth (O'Shaughnessy et al., 2004; Kosciw et al. 2012; Birkett, Espelage, and Koenig, 2009). The context in which the bullying in early adulthood occurs may also vary. Previous research has shown that although rates of being bullied reduce as people age, bullying in early adulthood can occur at work or at university/college by peers rather than by older colleagues or people in positions of authority (Rivers, 2011). The aim of the current paper is to focus on victimisation and harassment of young LGB adults, the exposure and effect as well as their experiences during compulsory schooling. Few previous studies in England have explored bullying experiences in early adulthood, this paper seeks to address this gap.

One of the first studies to look into the lives and experiences of young LGB people took place in the UK (Warren, 1984). The aim of this study was to identify the pressures that LGB teenagers face in schools and in what ways they were discriminated against. Their study was informative regarding the difficulties these young people face, but the data was collected using a small sample which lacked a comparison group. More recently Ellis and High (2004) replicated Warren's work and found that there was some suggestion that there has been an increase in rates of bullying for lesbian, gay and bisexual youth. They found that compared to 1984, students surveyed in 2001 were found to be three times more likely to be physically

assaulted, five times more likely to experience name calling and seven times more likely to be teased. These studies are typical of much of the research in this field (see Pilkington and D'Augelli, 1995; Gross, Aurand, and Adessa, 1988; Mason and Palmer, 1996; Hunt and Jensen, 2007), their starting point is with a sample of sexual minorities and then they examine the bullying experiences they face, rather than starting with bullying experiences of a whole population more generally to enable comparison. More recently the METRO Youth Chances project has found that sexual minority young people feel less accepted by the community, and are more likely to experience physical, verbal and sexual abuse in England (METRO Youth Chances, 2014).

Elsewhere research has shown that LGB youth reported daily experiences of within-school violence which they perceived as to be a result of sexual minority bullying (D'Augelli, Grossman, and Starks, 2006; Grossman, D'Augelli, & Salter, 2006). More specifically, a third of young people experience of violence at school within the previous year because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity by peers aged between 13–18 (Harris Interactive and GLSEN, 2005). In addition they find that motivations for victimisation, such as those which relate to actual or perceived religion, disability, ethnic group and gender are more often experienced by LGB youth (90%) than by non-LGB youth (62%) in the previous twelve months.

The effects of such exposure to bullying have also been examined, for example Bontempo and D'Augelli (2002) found a negative association between the effect of sexual orientation status, bullying and health. Furthermore they find that victimised LGB youth are at an increased risk of substance abuse, suicidality, and sexual-risk behaviours than their victimised non-LGB peers. Russell et al. (2011) took a sample of individuals aged between 21 and 25 to examine the association between victimisation in school (measured retrospectively) and social integration, life satisfaction, self-esteem, depression and suicidal ideation. They found significant associations between school victimisation and higher levels of depression and suicidal ideation. With respect to health risk, they found an increased risk for STDs and HIV and no association between school victimisation and adult substance abuse. Similarly, the METRO Youth Chances (2014) survey found that sexual minorities experienced significantly higher levels of mental health problems including anxiety, self-harm and suicidal thoughts. And non-heterosexual young people in England are found to be more unhappy (Chakraborty et al. 2011).

More recently McCormack has argued, based on his own ethnographic research, that there is evidence of more progressive attitudes towards homosexuality among heterosexual young people in schools (McCormack, 2011a, 2011b, 2012a). More specifically, he shows that young heterosexual men are happy to challenge homophobic views, maintain friendships with openly gay young people and advocate for gay rights (McCormack, 2012b). It is important to make the distinction however, between homophobic attitudes and bullying behaviour directed toward LGB students. While it may be true, and indeed encouraging, that young people have recently reported being more accepting of homosexuality, it may also remain true that LGB young people remain at an increased risk of being victimised. Testament to this statement is the necessity for support platforms for young sexual minorities such as campaigns such as the 'It Gets Better' in the USA and the Stonewall campaign in the UKs.

### *Mechanisms*

Bullying, by definition, involves asymmetric power relationships (Faris and Felmlee, 2014). Sociological research suggests that bullying takes the form of highlighting the 'other', e.g. those young people who in some way are different or occupy marginal positions.

Goffman (1968) suggests that bullying is a manifestation of frustration towards not meeting the subliminal ideal, and that we are essentially challenged by the ‘other’ as this threatens our perfect existence. Acceptance by peers is important for young people and when the expectations of the group are not met, the individual may be rejected and bullied (Garcia-Continete et al. 2013; Richter et al. 2009; Schumann, Craig, and Rosu, 2014). The concept of ‘other’ may be particularly true of sexual minorities as they may be perceived as different as result of being a statistical minority.

Sexual minorities are found to be more at risk of having mental health problems than the general population (Meyer, 2003). One explanation for this finding is due to an increased stigma, prejudice, and discrimination which creates a more stressful social environment (Friedman, 1999). This is known as the minority stress hypothesis (Meyer, 1995) and includes stress, prejudice, experiences and perception of rejection, hiding and concealing and, in the case of sexual minorities, homophobia. The reason for these experiences is that the minority group clashes with the dominant culture and its norms (Meyer, 2003). Meyer argues that the minority stress hypothesis is particularly relevant to sexual minorities as they are likely to experience stressful events; they are also likely to have expectations about these stressful events which requires vigilance and they may also internalise negative societal attitudes. In addition, young people who are LGB are likely to face experiences that are unique to their group. For example ‘coming out’ to family and friends, familial conflict as a result of their sexual orientation (Remafedi, 1987) as well as cognitive dissonance and stress related to their sexuality (Rosario, Rotheram-Borus, and Reid, 1996). Pharr (1997) identified that young people who are gay, lesbian or bisexual are under more strain as a result of their sexual identity, the strain is as a result of complex family relationships, threats on safety, and dealing with homophobia. While there is some evidence that society is becoming more accepting of people sexual minorities, and young people are having more positive experiences when they ‘come out’ to others than before (Eccles et al. 2003), it may not entirely mitigate the effects of these stressful experiences.

1. Are those who identify themselves as sexual minorities at age 20, defined as Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB), more likely to experience concurrent bullying and report ever being bullied in school?
2. Are LGB more likely to experience a particular type of bullying e.g. verbal, physical, relational and cyber bullying?
3. Do bullying experiences differentially affect LGB youth’s life satisfaction?

## **Data**

The Next Steps (formerly known as the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE)) began in 2004 when the sample members were aged between 13 and 14 years. Each year the same young people and their parents have been interviewed, resulting in seven waves of data. For the purpose of this analysis we examine whether those who identify as a sexual minority at age 19/20 (wave seven) are more likely to be bullied at this age, and whether they were more likely to be bullied during their compulsory schooling (wave one to three). The association between timing of bullying and life satisfaction is also explored.

The sample is composed by taking wave seven data which was collected in 2010 where 8,682 young people took part in the survey. Observations were included in the analytic models if the dependent variable response is complete and they appeared in the sample at waves one, two, three and seven. 863 young people did not respond to the sexual identity question and an additional 599 did not respond to the bullying questions at age 19. To check whether this information is missing at random, a missing data analysis was run using a logistic regression with socio-demographic measures as independent variables. We found that

these results were not statistically significant and therefore we can be confident that they were missing at random on observables. Following these exclusions, we are left with a sample of 7,220 young people.

### ***Variables of Interest***

#### *Bullying experience*

Slonje and Smith (2008) document some of the ways to conceptualise different types of bullying behaviour. For example they note that the most common forms are physical, verbal and relational forms. More recently they propose cyber bullying as another form. The Next Steps data enable measurement of these types of bullying which are described below.

We code a number of different bullying variables which capture both the frequency, nature and timing of the bullying that the young people experience. During compulsory schooling (wave one to three) young people are asked the following questions: In the last 12 months: have you ever been upset by being called hurtful names by other students, including getting text messages or emails from them; have you ever been excluded from a group of friends or from joining in activities; have other students at your school ever made you give them money or personal possessions; have other students ever threatened to hit you, kick you or use any other form of violence against you; and have other students ever actually hit you, kicked you or used any other form of violence against you?

For each question there is a follow up about the frequency of the bullying they experienced in the last 12 months. The response categories are: every day; a few times a week; once or twice a week; once every two weeks; once a month; less often than this; it varies; don't know; don't want to answer. At wave one to three, young people are not asked directly about cyber bullying, instead the main parent responses are used. The wording of the question is: As far as you know, have any of these things happened to (the young person) at (his/her) school in the last 12 months? One response is: Sent offensive or hurtful text messages or emails. This question is followed by the same question about frequency as before.

At wave seven the wording of the question to the young person varies slightly: In the past 12 month, how often (if at all) have you experienced the following while (text fill: at work/in your training/on your apprenticeship/college/at university)...? The response categories are: name calling, being the butt of jokes or other verbal abuse; had gossip spread about you, been ignored or other emotional abuse; been punched, kicked, assaulted or other physical abuse; been harassed or bothered via mobile phone or email; had pictures of you or rumours spread about you via phone, email or the internet; and had things stolen from you. They are given the same frequency response categories as in the earlier waves.

We create a binary variable which captures whether the young people have ever experienced being bullied in the previous 12 months at age 19. In addition we identify whether they were ever bullied in school between the ages 13-15 (during compulsory schooling). This is a composite from three waves of the data asking whether they had experienced bullying in the previous 12 months. For both the age 19 measure and the compulsory schooling measure, we also adopt a strict definition of being bullied, e.g. those who experience being bullied 'once every two weeks' or more following the convention set by Chatzitheochari, Parsons, and Platt (2015). We refer to this variable as experiencing frequent bullying. The advantage of making this distinction is that it captures the important aspect of repetition which is a crucial element across bullying definitions<sup>2</sup> (Olweus 1993). Additionally we combine the types of bullying experienced to identify whether the young person experienced physical, verbal, relational or cyber bullying. We define physical forms of bullying as whether the young person experienced frequent physical attacks which may include punching, kicking or theft; frequent verbal aggression includes being called names or

threatening behaviour; frequent relational bullying which includes social exclusion; and frequent cyber bullying which is aggression which occurs through the internet and mobile phones.

### *Sexual identity*

In order to measure the sexual identity of the young person, one item was asked at wave seven when the respondent is aged 19: Which of the following best describes how you think of yourself? The response categories are: heterosexual or straight; lesbian or gay, bisexual, or other. We recode the responses to create a binary outcome of heterosexual and lesbian, gay, bisexual or other (LGB) in order to increase power and avoid a Type II error. 3.64% of young people identify as LGB in this sample. In the general population of the UK, estimates of the proportion of people who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual varies between 1.5% and 5%<sup>1</sup>(ONS, 2010; Johnson et al. 2001), our sample seems consistent with this estimate.

### *Life satisfaction*

We use the report of the participants' life satisfaction at age 19 which is captured by the question: and how dissatisfied or satisfied you are about the way your life has turned out so far? The respondents are given five response categories: very satisfied; fairly satisfied; neither satisfied nor dissatisfied; fairly dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. We code this to run from 1-5 where 1 is 'very dissatisfied' to 5 is 'very satisfied'. Life satisfaction is not measured during compulsory schooling.

The expanding literature on happiness has focussed on a number of outcomes, including wellbeing, life satisfaction and mental health. These terms are often used interchangeably which can lead to confusion and conflation (Seligman, 2002). To clarify the interrelationships between these concepts for the present purposes, Diener (1984) argues that the overall judgment that 'life is good' is a cognitive appraisal and is considered to be an assessment of life satisfaction, which is a component of wellbeing. Further, mental health is an important condition for life satisfaction which can promote wellbeing (Nelson, Lord, and Ochocka, 2001; Jones, 1942).

Much of the life satisfaction research examines the perceptions, mechanisms and dynamics involved in the relationships between reported wellbeing and situational circumstances (Diener et al., 1999). For example relationship harmony also influences life satisfaction (Reid, 2004), as do characteristics such as ethnicity, sex, highest level of education achieved, income and employment (Keyes and Waterman, 2003). And particularly relevant for the present study, peer victimisation has been found to be related to lower life satisfaction (Valois, Kerr, and Huebner, 2012).

There are a number of assumptions upon which life satisfaction literature rests which are worth noting, albeit briefly. Some of these are problematic, not least the assumption that people are able to assess their own experiences and place them accurately on a single scale (Campbell, 1981). The nature of the report it is susceptible to multiple biases including dependence on mood, the preceding questions and innumerable unobserved contextual factors. However because life satisfaction is a subjective phenomenon it can therefore be assessed well through self-report.

### *Covariates*

Next Steps data enable us to control for a number of possibly confounding factors that may influence both the likelihood of being bullied and life satisfaction. Gender, ethnicity, young person's disability status, highest parental education level achieved, social class, household tenure and family size are used. These independent variables are all taken from

wave one. For the models which predict life satisfaction, some additional control variables are included: the young person's activity status at age 19, which captures whether they are studying or working; maternal disability; marital status of parents and young person's ability (measured by key stage 2 scores) have been shown to influence life satisfaction.

### ***Methods***

The risk of being bullied is measured using logistic regression analysis. We control for the socio-demographic characteristics outlined above in these models. We convert the results from the logistic regressions into predicted probabilities in order to ease comparison between models and classes. We make use of ordered logistic regression models to assess the association between being bullied and life satisfaction, as the dependent variable is an ordered categorical response where we do not know the spacing between responses<sup>3</sup>. Again these results are converted into predicted probabilities to enable comparison across models.

### **Results**

Before presenting the results from the multivariate analysis, we present the descriptive statistics on the independent variables by sexuality in Table 1. In general we find similar patterns by sexuality for most of the independent variables. In our sample a higher proportion of young people who report being LGB are female. We find that a smaller proportion of young people who report being a sexual minority are ethnic minorities than the heterosexual group and a higher proportion of young people who report being sexual minorities also report disabilities (their own and their mother's) compared to the heterosexual group.

[TABLE 1 HERE]

#### *Sexual identity and experience of bullying*

Table 2 shows bullying experience by sexual identity. From these raw percentages we can see that for all measures of being bullied, a greater proportion of LGB youth are bullied during compulsory schooling and at age 19 (both frequent forms and ever) compared with heterosexual young people.

[TABLE 2 HERE]

We turn now to the results from a logistic regression which predict being bullied adjusted for family and individual characteristics. The results in Table 3, Model 1 show that young people who identify as LGB have significantly higher odds of ever being bullied in the previous 12 months at age 19/20 compared with heterosexual young people (OR 1.76,  $p > 0.05$ ). In Model 2 we see that young people who are LGB have higher odds of experiencing frequent bullying compared with heterosexual young people at age 19/20, however this is not only weakly significant (OR 1.43,  $p > 0.10$ ). Model 3 shows that relative to heterosexuals, LGB young people have higher odds of ever experiencing being bullied in school (OR 1.54,  $p > 0.01$ ). Lastly the odds of experiencing frequent bullying in school are measured (Model 4), the results show that LGB young people have significantly higher odds of experiencing intense bullying during their compulsory schooling (OR 3.29,  $p < 0.001$ ).

[TABLE 3 HERE]

Figure 1 presents the predicted probabilities of bullying experience by sexuality. LGB young



people have a 52% probability of being bullied at age 19/20 and a 10% probability of being bullied frequently at age 19/20. In both cases this is higher than heterosexual young people, although this is not a significant difference for frequent bullying. During schooling the probabilities are higher for LGB young people, they have a 56% probability of ever being bullied during school and a 17% probability of being frequently bullied during compulsory schooling.

[FIGURE 1 HERE]

To summarise, there are differences in bullying experiences by sexual identity. LGB young people have higher odds of reporting bullying experiences. These differences are statistically significant if the young person ever experienced bullying in the previous 12 months at age 19/20 and during compulsory schooling, and if they experienced frequent bullying at age 13-15.

#### *Sexual identity and type of bullying experienced*

Adjusting for family and individual characteristics the results in Table 4 show that young people who identify as LGB have higher odds of experiencing all types of bullying during compulsory schooling. Specifically, LGB youth have higher odds of experiencing intense physical bullying (OR 2.76,  $p < 0.001$ ), verbal bullying (OR 3.37,  $p < 0.001$ ), relational bullying (2.44,  $p < 0.001$ ) and cyber bullying (OR 1.38,  $p < 0.10$ ) compared to heterosexual young people. The results are all strongly significant, except that for cyber bullying, which is only significant to the 10% level.

At age 19/20 LGB youth also have higher odds but these results are not strongly significant.

[TABLE 4 HERE]

The odds ratios have been converted into predicted probabilities in order to ease comparability and magnitude across groups. The results are shown in Figure 2. The results confirm that the risk of experiencing all types of bullying is greater for LGB youth. In addition we see that the probability of experiencing all types of bullying reduces as young people age, except that the probability of experiencing verbal bullying increases at age 19 for heterosexual young people.

[FIGURE 2 HERE]

#### *Bullying experiences and life satisfaction*

The results from Table 5, Model 1 indicate that being bullied frequently during compulsory schooling lowers the log odds of reporting satisfaction with life, independent of familial and individual characteristics. We also see that experiencing frequent bullying at age 19/20 yields a significant and negative log odds. Compared to heterosexual young people LGB young people have lower log odds of being satisfied with life, this lends some support to the Minority Stress Hypothesis.

[TABLE 5 HERE]

So far we have looked at the effects of bullying and sexual minority separately, we now wish to see whether the *interaction* between bullying and sexual minority produce a result which is different from what each would produce alone. That is, whether the relationship between bullying and life satisfaction differs by sexual identity. Non-significant interaction effects would show that the effect of being bullied is the same on life satisfaction at all levels of sexual identity status. This is the case for being bullied intensely during compulsory schooling (Model 2). The interaction term between frequent bullying at age 19/20 and LGB is weakly significant ( $p < 0.10$ ) and negative (Model 3).

Interpreting log odds is complex, therefore to ease comparison between models we calculate predicted probabilities and test the significance of the contrasts. The results which predict being 'very satisfied' are shown in Figure 3. This graphical representation reiterates that there is a small reduction in life satisfaction for those who have experienced bullying, and that young people who are sexual minorities have lower life satisfaction than young people who are heterosexual.

[FIGURE 3 HERE]

## **Discussion**

The findings from this paper show that young people who identify LGB are more likely to have experienced any bullying during compulsory schooling and at age 19. LGB youth are also more likely to experience frequent bullying during compulsory schooling. This paper also explored whether sexual identity influences the type of bullying experienced in more depth. The findings show that LGB young people have a higher probability of experiencing frequent physical, verbal and relational forms of bullying during compulsory schooling (the finding for cyber bullying was not statistically significant). We see the same pattern at age 19: LGB have a higher probability of experiencing frequent forms of all bullying types, however these results are not statistically significant. This increased risk may be a result of the social environment which rejects those who do not conform to the norm.

It is also interesting to note that the probability of experiencing bullying falls considerably as young people reach early adulthood. This finding is consistent with previous literature in this field (for example, Green, Collingwood, and Ross (2010)). This may be the result of a number of different mechanisms, for young people may develop strategies to avoid bullies as they get older such as developing confidence, establishing stronger support networks, or it may reflect greater awareness about unacceptable bullying behaviours. Alternatively it may be related to the exposure to and behaviour of bullies. As people age they are more likely to select into social groups which are similar to their own, this is less easy to do during compulsory schooling as it comprises a heterogeneous group. Or it may be a function that as bullies age they may become less aggressive and more likely to conform to social norms which exclude victimising behaviours. In addition, heterosexual young people are more likely to experience frequent verbal bullying at age 19 compared with heterosexual young people during compulsory schooling. This finding runs contrary to previous research.

Turning to life satisfaction, identifying as LGB significantly lowers life satisfaction, independent of bullying experience, familial and individual characteristics. This finding supports previous research which has shown that sexual minorities are found to be more unhappy (Chakraborty, 2011), and experience more stressful social environments (Friedman, 1999). We also find that being bullied frequently during school and being bullied frequently at age 19 is associated with a reduction in the probability of being very satisfied with life. Although there is a scarring effect of being bullied during school on life satisfaction at age 19, the association of being bullied frequently at age 19 and life satisfaction is a little

stronger. This suggests that concurrent experiences of being bullied are more salient for young people's life satisfaction.

### *Limitations*

Although the present analysis has provided critical findings which are applicable to young people, teachers and other professionals who with youths there are some limitations which should be addressed. This study utilised as single method of measurement, namely self-report of bullying victimisation. Although self-report is considered to be the most appropriate method of assessing bullying experiences because it is a perceptual experience (Olewus, 2003). It does offer some limitations due to people being unable to compare and anchor their experiences with others. We adopt a stricter definition of bullying therefore our findings are conservative.

Our analysis relies on sexual identity as measured by self-report at age 19/20, and in addition to looking at concurrent bullying experiences, we look back at their reports of bullying experiences during compulsory schooling. This may present some challenges in terms of temporal ordering as the young person and their peers may not be aware of their sexual identity during schooling. However previous research suggests that many young people do not self-identify as a sexual minority until they are aged 19.7 on average (Floyd and Bakeman, 2006), more recently just over half of the respondents of the Youth Chances survey knew they were LGB, Transgender and Questioning by the age of 13 (METRO Youth Chances, 2014). Therefore even if there was data available on sexual identity at the earlier waves, it is likely to be quite a noisy measure. Previous studies of this nature take sexual identity at a current time point and ask them to retrospectively report their bullying experiences (for example Russell et al., 2011 and Greene, Britton, and Fitts, 2014) the present study advances work in this field as it reduces the recall period and therefore reduces bias. However it is important to reiterate the limitations regarding causal inference that this study presents, it is not asserted that young people are bullied *because* they are a sexual minority, instead only an association can be established.

When examining issues that are sensitive and prone to social stigma, such as being bullied and sexual identity, there is no way to validate recall accuracy or truthfulness of reports. We recognise that there may be some under-reporting of behaviour which is stigmatised.

### **Conclusion**

Although there is an abundance of literature which examines bullying and a growing quantitative literature which examines bullying among sexual minorities, the current research contributes to this by making use of a large-scale study in England. This study is unique as it is a longitudinal study of young people which provides the opportunity to compare the probabilities of LGB youth being bullied with heterosexual youth over time. The longitudinal nature of the data reduces recall bias, and provides a rich set of variables which enable the examination of the timing and nature of bullying and its effect on life satisfaction.

Knowledge about the bullying experiences of sexual minority groups is important for monitoring social inequalities, allocating resources and using targeted interventions. This is important particularly as bullying is also found to be associated with a number of persistent negative life outcomes which affect their health and wellbeing (Arseneault, Bowes and Shakoor, 2010; Nansel et al. 2010; Olweus, 1993; Takizawa, Maughan, Arseneault, 2014).

We find evidence that young people who are gay, bisexual or other are at a greater risk of experiencing bullying during compulsory schooling and in early adulthood in England. This is consistent with previous research in this field (for example, Rivers (2011)). We also find evidence that the prevalence bullying exposure reduces as the young people age,

more specifically, the probability of being bullied at age 19/20 is lower than during compulsory schooling. With respect to the type of bullying experienced, we find that young people who identify as LGB have a higher probability of experiencing physical, verbal, relational and cyber bullying during compulsory schooling. The pattern is the same at age 19/20 but are not statistically significant. Furthermore there is evidence that there are some adverse effects on life satisfaction of this bullying exposure during school and in early adulthood. However there is little evidence that the effects of bullying is differentially experienced by sexual minorities. The results confirm that sexual minorities report lower levels of life satisfaction than heterosexual groups which may be picking up differences in stress exposure in their social environment.

A number of implications can be put forward to policy makers and practitioners based on this research. Most notable is that those who identify as being a sexual minority are more likely to experience being bullied both in early adulthood and during compulsory schooling. Teachers and support staff should be aware of this vulnerability, in particular they should take some responsibility for ensuring that bullying behaviours are dealt with swiftly and appropriately, ensure that homophobic behaviour is challenged at all levels within schools and encourage an understanding of alternative lifestyles and sexualities. School counsellors and other professionals working with young people should be mindful of the effects of bullying on life satisfaction and offer appropriate support to young people who experience it, with a particular focus on LGB youth. There is also an opportunity for peer support groups where LGB young people can discuss the issues they face in a safe space, particularly as they reach early adulthood. However it should be noted that although it is important to provide the opportunity of specialist support to LGB youth, it should not be assumed that these young people automatically need this support as this can reinforce sexual minorities' negative experiences (Formby, 2015).

Rivers (2011) suggests that those who experience traumatic events in childhood and adolescence have long term and debilitating effect upon the quality of adult life. We have found this to be true in the medium term with respect to bullying. However it is concerning to note that LGB youth are disproportionately more likely to experience bullying in the first place. Future research should concentrate on developing an understanding of resilience strategies for LGB youth during the transition to adulthood.

There remains an opportunity to examine the experiences of LGB youth using this dataset, for example examining the motivation for bullying. In addition there remains an opportunity to explore the efficacy of social support and parental support in reducing the risk of bullying exposure and mitigating the effects of bullying exposure on life satisfaction.

## **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> This variation is as a result of whether the question posed relates to sexual behaviour or same sex attraction.

<sup>2</sup> According to Olweus bullying occurs when a person is “exposed, repeatedly and over time, to the negative actions on the part of one or more other students” (Olweus, 1993, p9).

<sup>3</sup> The proportional odds assumption was tested using a likelihood ratio test to compare constrained and unconstrained models.

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## Tables and Figures

**Table 1. Descriptive statistics by sexual identity column %/mean values**

	Heterosexual	LGB %/mean	All
<b>Family Characteristics</b>			
<i>Housing</i>			
Home owner	76.8	72.6	76.6
Renting	23.2	27.4	23.4
<i>Education</i>			
Degree or higher	35.4	38.4	35.5
A Level	17.7	16.0	17.7
GCSE	23.2	24.0	23.2
Level 1 or below	11.0	11.4	11.1
No qualifications	12.6	10.3	12.6
<i>Household Type</i>			
Single Parent	19.7	21.7	19.7
Workless household	15.3	12.2	15.1
Mean no. of children	2.3	2.2	2.3
Mother disabled	18.7	25.1	19.0
<b>Young Person characteristics</b>			
Male	47.6	46.0	47.52
Minority ethnic group	28.7	14.8	28.2
Disability	12.3	19.4	12.6
Mean Key stage 2 score	27.7	27.8	27.7

**Table 2. Descriptive statistics of bullying experience by sexual identity**

	Ever Bullied in School %	Frequent bullying in School %	Ever Bullied age 19 %	Frequent bullying age 19 %
Heterosexual	45.4	6.1	38.0	7.8
LGB	60.5	19.0	53.2	11.0

**Table 3. Logistic regression predicting bullying at age 19/20 and 13-15**

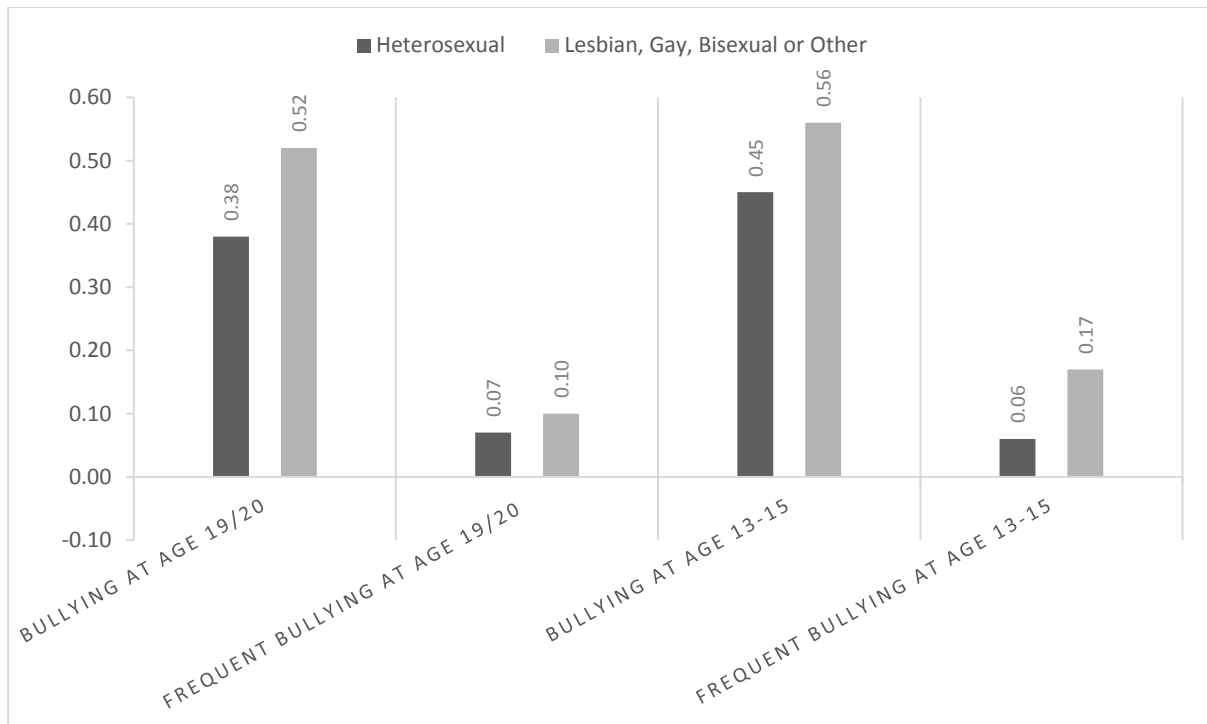
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	Bullying at age 19/20		Frequent bullying at age 19/20 >Two weeks		Bullying at age 13-15		Frequent bullying 13-15 > Two Weeks	
	OR	SE	OR	SE	OR	SE	OR	SE
<b>Ref: Heterosexual</b>								
LGB	1.76***	(0.22)	1.43+	(0.29)	1.54**	(0.21)	3.29***	(0.55)
Observations	7,220		7,220		7,220		7,220	

Controlling for housing, parental education, social class, number of children, gender, ethnicity, young person's disability status.

Standard Error in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05, + p<0.10

**Figure 1. Predicted probabilities of bullying experience by sexuality**



**Table 4. Logistic regression predicting types of bullying experienced**

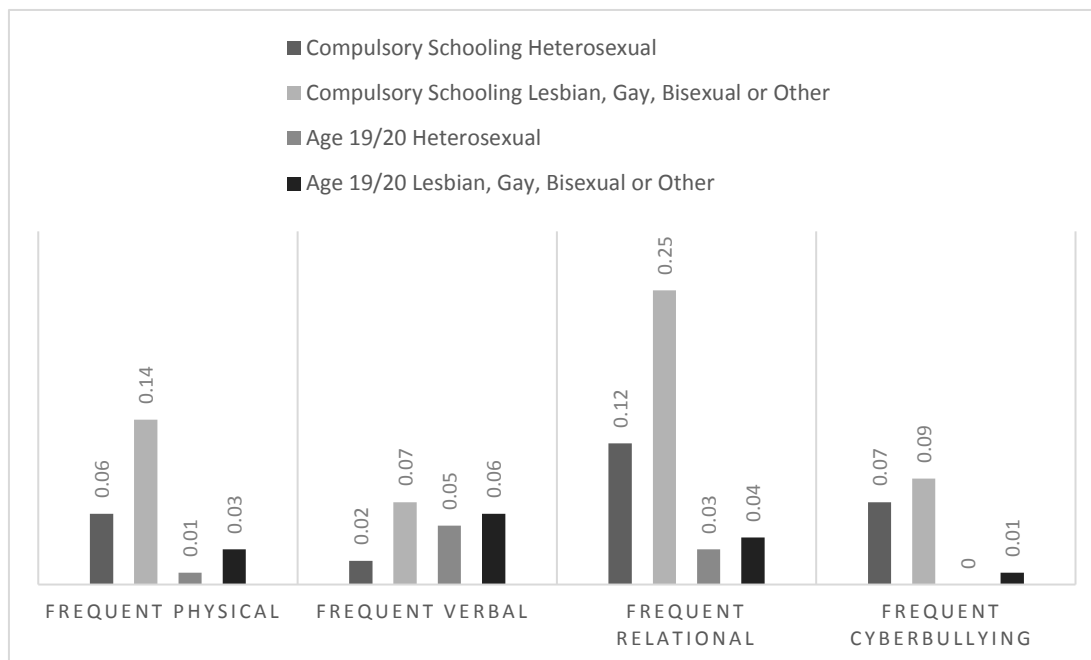
	Model 1 Frequent Physical Bullying		Model 2 Frequent Verbal Bullying		Model 3 Frequent Relational Bullying		Model 4 Frequent Cyber bullying	
	OR	SE	OR	SE	OR	SE	OR	SE
<u>Compulsory Schooling</u>								
<b>Ref: Heterosexual</b>								
LGB	2.76***	(0.49)	3.37***	(0.79)	2.44***	(0.35)	1.38+	(0.25)
<u>Age 19/20</u>								
<b>Ref: Heterosexual</b>								
LGB	2.07+	(0.83)	1.16	(0.28)	1.73+	(0.53)	3.24+	(2.01)
Observations	7,220		7,220		7,220		7,220	

Controlling for housing, parental education, social class, number of children, gender, ethnicity, young person's disability status.

Standard Error in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05, + p<0.10

**Figure 2. Predicted probabilities of type of bullying experienced during compulsory schooling and at age 19/20 by sexuality**



**Table 5. Ordered logistic regression predicting life satisfaction**

	Model 1 Main Effects		Model 2 Sexual ID X Bullying in School		Model 3 Sexual ID X Bullying at age 19	
	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE
<b>Reference: Heterosexual</b>						
LGB	-0.61***	(0.12)	-0.61***	(0.13)	-0.52***	(0.13)
Bullying in School	-0.26**	(0.09)	-0.26**	(0.10)	-0.25**	(0.09)
Bullying at age 19	-0.35***	(0.08)	-0.35***	(0.08)	-0.31***	(0.09)
LGB X Bullying in School			0.02	(0.31)		
LGB X Bullying at age 19					-0.69+	(0.36)
Cut 1	-4.85***	(0.26)	-4.85***	(0.26)	-4.85***	(0.26)
Cut 2	-3.46***	(0.25)	-3.46***	(0.25)	-3.46***	(0.25)
Cut 3	-2.35***	(0.25)	-2.35***	(0.25)	-2.34***	(0.25)
Cut 4	0.07	(0.25)	0.07	(0.25)	0.07	(0.25)
Observations	7,200		7,200		7,200	
Log likelihood	-9267		-9267		-9265	
DF	14		15		15	
Pseudo R2	0.02		0.02		0.02	

Controlling for housing, parental education, social class, number of children, gender, ethnicity, young person's disability status, young person's activity status at age 19, mother's disability, marital status of person and key stage 2 score.

Standard Error in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05, + p<0.10

**Figure 3. Predicted probabilities of being 'very satisfied' with life**

