

13. Contextual effects on sexually and gender diverse youth's school outcomes and health

Aim: To examine how sexually and gender diverse youth's social environment affect school outcomes and health.

Theoretical background:

Despite a rising acceptance of sexual and gender diversity in society, sexually and gender diverse youth experience stigma. These stigma experiences are hypothesized to contribute to disparities in health and school outcomes based on sexual orientation and gender identity. However, there is a lack of research on how social environments might influence sexual orientation and gender identity-based disparities in health and school outcomes (Hatzenbuehler & Pachankis, 2016). That is, the social environments sexually and gender diverse youth traverse might differ in their level of acceptance of sexual and gender diversity, which could impact the size of disparities. Given the saliency of the school context and friendship networks in the lives of sexually and gender diverse youth (Goldbach & Gibbs, 2017), the characteristics of especially these social contexts could determine the size of disparities in health and school outcomes.

This project is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on the school context and school-related outcomes in secondary and vocational education. More specifically, this part of the project aims to answer how different characteristics of the school context affect sexual orientation and gender identity-based disparities in school outcomes. Examples of such school characteristics are the school's policies and practices focused on creating an inclusive school climate for sexually and gender diverse students. Examples of student outcomes are bullying victimization and feelings of unsafety. The second part of this project focuses on the role of one's immediate friendship network and both school and health-related outcomes. More specifically, does the friendship network of sexually and gender diverse youth affect disparities in health and school outcomes? Examples of relevant characteristics of a network are the quality of the relationship with others and closeness with one's friends. Examples of health outcomes are substance use and mental health. Together, this project aims to examine how sexually and gender diverse youth's social environment affect school outcomes and health.

Research Design:

For the first part of this project, existing data from the Social Safety Monitor will be used. This Dutch school-based study includes measures of both sexual orientation and gender identity/expression of students in secondary education and vocational education. The data contain school administrator data on the characteristics of schools as well. For the second part of this project, data from the GUTS project will be used. GUTS is an NWO Gravitation project: growinguptogetherinsociety.com. In a team with other GUTS researchers (based in Leiden and Amsterdam), prospective longitudinal network data, survey data, and neuroimaging data will be collected among young adults (e.g., a cohort of students at an applied university). These cohort data, in which information on ego networks will be collected, will be used for the dissertation.

Literature:

- Goldbach, J. T., & Gibbs, J. J. (2017). A developmentally informed adaptation of minority stress for sexual minority adolescents. *Journal of Adolescence*, 55, 36–50.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2016.12.007>
- Hatzenbuehler, M. L., & Pachankis, J. E. (2016). Stigma and minority stress as social determinants of health among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth: Research evidence and clinical implications. *Pediatric Clinics of North America*, 63(6), 985–997.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pcl.2016.07.003>

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