

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Civilian

The Impact Of Role Models On Health Outcomes For Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, And Transgender Youth

Bird, D. P. J., Kuhns, L., & Garofalo, R. (2011). The Impact of Role Models on Health Outcomes for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 50*(2012), 353-357. doi:10.1016/j.jadohealth.2011.08.006

SUMMARY: For youth having access to a good role model can largely influence their behaviors and health outcomes. This study involved 496 lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth, observing the impact of role model accessibility on participants behaviors and health outcomes. Participants used a computer-assisted interview program to assess their demographics, sexual behaviors, substance use, and psychological health. The study concluded that having a role model did not have significant impact on participants' behaviors or well-being.

KEY FINDINGS:

- In the past year, 64% of participants reported binge drinking, 61% reported illicit drug use, 35% reported they met criteria for a mental health disorder, and 27% reported ever having a sexually transmitted infection diagnosis.
- Participants with inaccessible role models (e.g., someone whom they could not continually speak with) were shown to have more psychological distress compared to those with no role model. However, having a role model did not have a significant impact on binge drinking, drug use, or STI diagnosis.
- Sixty percent of participants reported having a role model and the majority of those with role models were younger (i.e., 16-19 year olds). However, of the participants with role models, 60% reported inaccessibility to their role model.
- Transgender youth were found to be least likely to have a role model, with only 39% of identified female and 41% identified male of transgender youth reporting a role model. Black youth had the highest report of inaccessibility to their role model.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Provide programs educating LGBT youth on the risks of substance abuse and risky sexual behaviors
- Attend trainings about how to be inclusive and avoid discrimination of individuals from the LGBT community

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Develop a community outreach and mentorship program for LGBT youth
- Host informational sessions for families and professionals who work with military families regarding important issues relevant to LGBT youth

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage the development of mentoring programs for LGBT youth in military families
- Encourage Service members to attend educational workshops regarding mental health issues in the LGBT community

This product is the result of a partnership funded by the Department of Defense between the Office of Military Community and Family Policy and the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture through a grant/cooperative agreement with The University of Minnesota.



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METHODS

- Participants were recruited from a variety of community-based sources that include LGBT-serving agencies, high schools and college list-server websites, distributed flyers, and participant referrals.
- The study was presented and administered from Project Q in Chicago. Participants were recruited over a 12 month period between 2004-2005.
- Information was gathered from participants using a confidential, computer-assisted interview procedure.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 496 LGBT youth, ages 16-24-years old, residing in the Chicago area.
- The participants reported their ethnicity as 34% White, 28% Black, 26% Latino and 12% unanswered/unknown.
- Participants identified themselves as mostly male (62%). In addition, most participants identified as gay and lesbian (70%).

LIMITATIONS

- The study had minimal information regarding family involvement in the participants lives, limiting knowledge of possible family contributions toward risky behaviors.
- Information regarding the sexual orientation and gender identity of the role models is absent from the study, leaving the study missing data on the potential impact of heterosexual versus homosexual role models.
- Sixty percent of role models in the study were inaccessible persons (e.g., famous musicians, actors/entertainers, and political leaders), making it harder to determine the impact of present role models.
- Information regarding level of education of both the participants and role models was absent, limiting knowledge on whether education level contributed to behaviors.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Conduct research on family involvement in at-risk LGBT youth
- Examine the number of LGBT-identified role models participating in mentoring programs and their reasoning
- Investigate whether education levels of at-risk LGBT youth are a factor in their behaviors

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