



## Original article

Longitudinal Associations of Homophobic Name-Calling  
Victimization With Psychological Distress and Alcohol Use  
During AdolescenceJoan S. Tucker, Ph.D.<sup>a,\*</sup>, Brett A. Ewing, M.S.<sup>a</sup>, Dorothy L. Espelage, Ph.D.<sup>b</sup>, Harold D. Green Jr., Ph.D.<sup>a</sup>,  
Kayla de la Haye, Ph.D.<sup>c</sup>, and Michael S. Pollard, Ph.D.<sup>a</sup><sup>a</sup>RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, California<sup>b</sup>Department of Educational Psychology, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Champaign, Illinois<sup>c</sup>Department of Preventive Medicine, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, California

Article history: Received November 19, 2015; Accepted March 14, 2016

Keywords: Adolescent; Homophobic victimization; Anxiety; Depression; Alcohol; Longitudinal

## A B S T R A C T

**Purpose:** Homophobic victimization, and specifically name-calling, has been associated with greater psychological distress and alcohol use in adolescents. This longitudinal study examines whether sexual orientation moderates these associations and also differentiates between the effects of name-calling from friends and nonfriends.**Methods:** Results are based on 1,325 students from three Midwestern high schools who completed in-school surveys in 2012 and 2013. Linear regression analysis was used to examine the associations among homophobic name-calling victimization and changes in anxiety symptoms, depressive symptoms, and alcohol use one year later, controlling for other forms of victimization and demographics.**Results:** Homophobic name-calling victimization by friends was not associated with changes in psychological distress or alcohol use among either students who self-identified as heterosexual or those who self-identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB). In contrast, homophobic name-calling by nonfriends was associated with increased psychological distress over a one-year period among LGB students and increased drinking among heterosexual students.**Conclusions:** Homophobic name-calling victimization, specifically from nonfriends, can adversely affect adolescent well-being over time and, thus, is important to address in school-based bullying prevention programs. School staff and parents should be aware that both LGB and heterosexual adolescents are targets of homophobic name-calling but may tend to react to this type of victimization in different ways. Further research is needed to understand the mechanisms through which homophobic victimization increases the risk of psychological distress and alcohol use over time.

© 2016 The Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine. All rights reserved.

IMPLICATIONS AND  
CONTRIBUTION

Homophobic name-calling victimization in high school is associated with an increase in alcohol use and psychological distress over time. However, the sexual orientation of the victim and the victim's relationship to the perpetrator are important factors to consider in efforts to address the adverse effects of this form of victimization.

The use of homophobic epithets at school is commonplace among adolescents. National data indicate that nearly two-thirds of sexual minority (e.g., lesbian, gay, or bisexual [LGB])

students report hearing students make derogatory remarks such as “dyke” or “faggot” often or frequently in school [1]. Although LGB youth are more likely to experience homophobic name-calling than their heterosexual peers [2,3], it can be directed toward youth of any sexual orientation. Homophobic name-calling often goes unchecked by school staff for a variety of reasons [1], yet there is growing evidence that homophobic

\* Address correspondence to: Joan S. Tucker, Ph.D., RAND Corporation, 1776 Main Street, Santa Monica, CA 90407-2138.

E-mail address: jtucker@rand.org (J.S. Tucker).

name-calling can have serious deleterious effects on its victims. Understanding the ways in which homophobic name-calling adversely affects adolescent well-being over time, and the conditions under which it is most likely to have an impact, is important for addressing this important and pervasive problem.

Minority stress theory posits that individuals from stigmatized social categories are exposed to excess stress as a result of their marginalized social (often a minority) position and that this stress increases their likelihood of mental health problems [4]. It is often used to explain the relatively high rates of psychological distress and substance use found in studies of sexual minorities [5,6]. Being called homophobic epithets may reinforce this marginalized status among LGB youth and induce something akin to “minority stress” among heterosexual youth as a result of others conferring a marginalized minority identity on them. Homophobic name-calling victimization might be expected to lead to increased psychological distress and heavier substance use for both LGB and heterosexual youth at least in part through its association with social marginalization.

Cross-sectional and longitudinal research indicates that students with diverse sexual orientations fare poorly from homophobic name-calling victimization. Specifically, LGB students targeted with these epithets and other forms of homophobic victimization experience greater psychological distress (e.g., [7]) and are at increased risk for suicidal ideation and attempted suicide [8]. Similar associations between homophobic name-calling victimization and psychological distress have been found among middle school and high school students in general [9–11], and one study specifically of heterosexual high school students found that males who experienced homophobic victimization at the beginning of the school year showed increased anxiety and depressive symptoms by the end of the school year [12]. Although victimization by peers, in general, tends to have a greater impact on psychological distress for LGB than heterosexual youth [13], the limited research examining whether this is the case for homophobic name-calling victimization in particular has yielded mixed results. Of two cross-sectional studies, one of high school students from a midwestern US public school district found a stronger association with psychological distress for LGB youth [14], whereas another study of youth ages 11–17 years in Amsterdam did not [3]. Longitudinal studies examining whether sexual orientation moderates the effects of homophobic name-calling victimization on subsequent psychological distress are lacking.

In understanding the effects of homophobic victimization on adolescent well-being, substance use has received less empirical attention than psychological distress. Cross-sectional data indicate that adolescents who experience homophobic victimization tend to engage in more alcohol use than those not experiencing this type of victimization [9,15], with some evidence that this association may be stronger for LGB youth [2,10,14]. However, longitudinal studies such as the present one are needed to examine whether homophobic victimization during adolescence is a risk factor for escalated substance use over time. This study focuses specifically on alcohol use given the pervasiveness of this behavior among high school students [16] and the importance of understanding risk factors for underage drinking.

There may also be certain social conditions which affect the extent to which being called these epithets is perceived as threatening. One potentially important factor that has received little empirical attention is whether the name-calling is by a

friend or nonfriend, which may influence how this behavior is perceived and reacted to by the target of the epithet. Adolescents often engage in bullying behaviors such as homophobic name-calling in an attempt to establish dominance over other youth [17] and, as such, it may be stressful to some extent for the victim regardless of its source. However, compared to homophobic name-calling from nonfriends, it may be the case that name-calling from friends feels more threatening because adolescents spend more time with these peers and share more intimate emotional connections, and therefore have more to lose from any adverse social effects of the name-calling. However, another possibility is that homophobic name-calling from friends may feel less threatening because the adolescent is still part of a friendship network and reaping the benefits that this status affords or because the name-calling is being delivered with a less aggressive or marginalizing intention. A better understanding is needed of the extent to which homophobic name-calling from friends and from nonfriends have adverse effects on adolescent psychological distress and alcohol use over time.

This study furthers research on the effects of homophobic name-calling victimization on adolescent well-being in several important respects. First, it extends existing cross-sectional research by examining how victimization experiences predict changes in psychological distress and alcohol use over a one-year period. Second, it investigates whether the associations of homophobic name-calling victimization with psychological distress and alcohol use vary depending on the victim's sexual orientation and the nature of the victim-perpetrator relationship (friend vs. nonfriend). We hypothesized that positive associations would be found for both sexual minority and heterosexual youth but would be stronger for sexual minority youth. We did not have an *a priori* expectation for how the effects of name-calling from friends versus nonfriends might differ and considered these analyses to be exploratory. Third, this study investigates whether the associations between homophobic name-calling victimization and poorer adolescent outcomes can be accounted for by other forms of peer victimization. This is an understudied, yet important question given that victimized youth often experience multiple forms of bullying [9]. Finally, this study explores whether the frequency of name-calling victimization is positively associated with social marginalization, either perceived (self-ratings of friend support) or actual (number of school-based friendship nominations). If so, we were interested in testing whether social marginalization mediates the associations of homophobic name-calling victimization with psychological distress and alcohol use, as suggested by minority stress theory.

## Method

### Participants

Students enrolled in three midwestern public high schools were invited to complete in-school surveys in Spring 2012 (Wave 1) and Spring 2013 (Wave 2) for a study on social networks and adolescent risk behavior. The Wave 1 survey was completed by 2,009 9th–11th grade students; of those who completed Wave 1, 1,420 students (70.68%) also completed the Wave 2 survey. Those who completed Wave 1 only tended to be slightly older (mean [M] = 15.97, standard deviation = 1.01,  $p < .001$ ) and were more likely to be African American (66.67%) and less likely to be

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/10511285>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/10511285>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)