Gay Teenagers And Suicide Essay, Research Paper

Community and School Support for Gay Youth

Many gay and lesbian youths are fortunate to have families that are supportive. Some are fortunate to go to high schools that have gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender groups that met on the premises. Some schools make outstanding efforts to be safe places, both physically and emotionally. But this is some, not all ? and certainly not most. Most efforts to organize for teen gays are met with disdain in communities and schools. Efforts are often rallied against.

Fortunate gay youth have family and friends that support them and keep them out of the grip of adolescent depression. Being homosexual in the conformist and often homophobic atmosphere of junior and senior high schools drives many to make extreme choices. If untreated, the sense of despair kids feel when they don?t flow with the mainstream can lead to suicide.

Although a recent University study said homosexuality and bisexuality are not significant factors in suicide attempts, suicidal thoughts or suicide intentions for teenage girls, the same cannot be said for the boys.

The study, published in an August edition of the American Journal of Public Health, claimed homosexual or bisexual junior high school and senior high school boys are seven times more likely than heterosexual boys of the same age to report suicide attempts. The research said 131 male respondents identified themselves as “bisexual or mostly/100 percent homosexual.” More than 28 percent of them reported suicide attempts. That is compared to more than 4 percent of heterosexual counterparts claiming suicide attempts.

Traditionally, females are up to nine times more likely to attempt suicide than males, according to American Association of Suicidology documents. Males, though, are six times more likely to complete a suicide, a fact attributed to greater handgun use for suicide by males. The University findings placed heterosexual girls in the 14 percent range for reported suicide attempts. About 20 percent of homosexual or bisexual teenage girls responded similarly.

Researchers used the findings to suggest that homosexuality/bisexuality in itself is not a lone determiner of suicide risk for teens. Heterosexual and homosexual or bisexual girls had nearly uniform rates of suicidal thoughts or intent. These statistics led researchers to conclude that sexual orientation is not the cause of suicide attempts because it does not operate that way in girls.

Instead, researchers point to other factors for the high rates of reported suicide attempts for gay males. Factors such as verbal and physical harassment, substance use or isolation of boys thought of as sexually different than their heterosexual peers contribute to their high rates of suicide.

In 1989, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services released a report stating that up to a third of all teen suicides were committed by gay youths. The validity of these findings has been at the heart of heated debate ever since.

The University study is one attempt to legitimize the relationship between homosexuality/bisexuality and suicide.

The study utilized data from a 1987 survey of more than 36,000 Minnesota students in grades seven to 12. The survey was filled out by 95 percent of the students. Researchers from the University’s Youth and AIDS Project said their “unbiased” findings end contentions over whether there is a relationship between homosexuality and suicide.