

Poster #24

Research Study

Title: “The Effect of Partisan State Politics on the Relation Between Sexual Orientation and Suicidal Ideation Among High School Students in the USA”

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Category: Mental Health

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Introduction and Objective. Sexual minorities have an increased prevalence of suicidal behavior relative to heterosexuals. Poor mental health outcomes in this population have been attributed to discriminatory acts and differences in individual coping. However, there are also macroscopic forms of discrimination that impart environmental stress experienced collectively by sexual minority groups, such as conservative political climates and inequitable state legislation. To better understand this phenomenon, the current study utilizes Meyer’s 2003 Minority Stress Theory as a framework to investigate the potential effect modification of state partisanship on the relation between sexual orientation and suicidal ideation. Little is known about such effect particularly among youth. Objectives: To examine if state political partisanship serves as an effect modifier on the association between sexual identity and suicidal ideation.

Methods. Cross-sectional data on sexual orientation and suicidal ideation were obtained from 33 U.S. states from the 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance (YRBSS) Survey. State political partisanship (Democrat, mixed, Republican) was classified based on the state legislature makeup (Governorship, House, Senate). Baseline characteristics were analyzed. Multivariable logistic regression examined the associations between the two variables while considering the potential effect modification.

Results. Our sample included 139,685 U.S. adolescents (9th-12th grade). Bivariate analysis showed a two-to-three-fold higher prevalence of suicidal ideation in gay/lesbian [33% (CI 0.30, 0.37)], bisexual [48% (CI 0.46, 0.50)], and questioning adolescents [30% (CI 0.27, 0.33)], as compared to heterosexual adolescents [15% (CI 0.14, 0.17)]. Stratifying by state political partisanship, sexual minorities had marginally increased odds of suicidal ideation in Republican states as compared to Democratic states. Questioning adolescents in conservative states [aOR 3.23 (CI 2.58, 4.04)] had significantly greater odds of suicidal ideation compared to those in liberal states [aOR 1.77 (CI 1.22, 2.57)]

Conclusions-Implications. Sexual minorities have a disproportionately increased likelihood of suicidal ideation. Furthermore, political partisanship may serve as an environmental modifier in the social-stress-to-mental-illness pathway outlined by the minority stress theory. Additional research, with participation from all 50 U.S. states, is needed to further investigate this disparity from a socio-ecological standpoint.