

# Academic achievement for sexual and gender minority and heterosexual cisgender Students: What is significant in Aotearoa New Zealand

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SOCIAL WORK**

# Outline

- Aims
- Background/Context
- Methodology
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- Conclusions
- Future Research

# Aims

- Identify factors associated with achievement for Sexual and Gender Minority (SGM) young people.
- Assess SM and GM factors separately.
- Include structural as well as individual features.

# Background

- Health and wellbeing disparities well known
  - Achievement also significant factor in health
- Very few international studies (USA predominates)
  - Across urban, rural, big/small states, significant disparities exist.
- Meyer's (2003) Minority Stress Model
- Achievement traditionally linked to:
  - Demographics: SES, Ethnicity, Sex assigned at birth
  - School Victimization
  - School Belonging
  - Teacher Expectations
  - Caregiver Support
  - For SGM students: Presence of Supportive Structures (policies/practices, diversity groups, curriculum inclusion, non-harassing teachers, etc.

# Methodology

- Youth '12 Nationally Representative Survey Data
  - $N = 8,500$ 
    - Achievement: Scale items 1-3 vs non-achievement 4-5:
      - “How well do you do at school?” (1) “near the top”; (2) “above middle”; (3) “about the middle”; (4) “below the middle”; (5) near the bottom”.
    - Logistic regression on achievement vs non-achievement
      - $n = 5,998$  heterosexual cisgender
      - $n = 252$  gender minority
      - $n = 415$  sexuality minority

# Descriptive Findings

- Self-reported achieving was greatest for:
  - heterosexual cisgender students 92.2% >
  - sexual minority students 89.4% >
  - gender minority students 82.9%.
- Self-reported intention to pursue further education among *achieving* students was greatest for:
  - heterosexual cisgender students 68.8% >
  - sexual minority students 66.7% >
  - gender minority students 59.8%.

# Initial Findings (Odds Ratios)

- Taking into account differences relating to Sex, Ethnicity, and SES, the following variables were significant predictors of achievement...
  - For ALL students:
    - School belonging (2.7 - 4.1), Teacher expectation (3.6 - 11.8), Bullying (0.4 - 0.5).
  - For Cisheterosexual students:
    - Caregiver Support (2.6)
  - For sexuality minority students
    - SM Supportive Structures at school (2.2).

# Full Model (Odds Ratios)

- Taking into account and considering all variables simultaneously, the following were significant...
  - For ALL students:
    - SES (0.3 - 0.6), School Belonging (2.5 - 3.6), Teacher Expectation (2.8 - 14.3)
  - For cisheterosexual students:
    - Caregiver Support (2.1), Ethnicity (0.6 - 1.9), Bullying (0.8)
  - For sexuality minority students:
    - SM Supportive Structures at school (3.4), Ethnicity (2.6 - 3.0), Male sex (0.5)
  - For gender minority students:
    - Male sex (0.7)
- 8 – Demonstrates distinct differences between all three groups.



# Strengths/Limitations

- Nationally representative data & beyond the USA
- School-based sample
  - Participants who are no longer in school not a part of the study.
  - Bullying produces truancy and earlier school leaving, those most affected by bullying may have already left school.
  - Low numbers of ethnic minority SGM youth requires some caution.
- Self-report
  - Many students, particularly those struggling with their identity, may not disclose this in the survey, meaning an over-sampling of more confident SGM young people, which may skew the data to be more positive than is otherwise the case.

# Conclusions

- Demonstrates distinct differences between all three groups
  - A one size fits all approach is ineffective.
- SES deprivation disproportionately reduces achievement for SM (2.9x) and GM (2.6x) compared to Cisheterosexual (1.5x).
  - Evidence for the Minority Stress Hypothesis (compounding oppression).
- Conversely, ethnicity differences across all three categories draw attention to intersectional aspects:
  - Disadvantages for Māori and Pacific cisheterosexual students not exacerbated, or slightly reversed for SM Pacific youth, relative to their NZ European peers.
  - NZ European and Asian academic advantage disabled by SGM status.

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# Conclusions

- School belonging is important for all students, and moderates the effects of bullying (esp. for SGM students!).
  - Critical alternative lever to bullying prevention and rationale for supporting inclusive practices.
- Teacher expectations are important for all students, but particularly for sexual minority students (14x!)
  - Pedagogical approaches that increase teacher expectation, along with anti-bias training for teachers are critical.
- SM Supportive structures are invaluable and need to be inclusive of GM student needs.
  - Evidence that SM and GM needs include some similarities, but significant differences, and a focus on GM student-specific supports is required.

# Future Research

- Needs to include collection of SGM identities
- Needs to assess SM and GM youth distinctly
- What affects and improves teacher expectations of SGM students
- What factors support belonging for SGM students and is there a “silver bullet” and/or a dosage effect
- What disproportionately dissuades GM achieving secondary school students from intending to complete further study
- What are the mechanisms/pathways that mediate ethnicity differences in achievement for SGM students

# Thank you

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