A survey of homophobic bullying in schools

Homophobic bullying is a common aspect of school life, and affects many pupils, regardless of their sexual orientation. Research has been conducted around the extent and effects of homophobic bullying, yet the quantitative evidence for this research has been drawn from lesbian and gay adults talking about their school days. There has been no comprehensive, national survey of lesbian and gay young people at school and their experiences.

Research has been conducted in America, by GLSEN (see below), and the findings of their survey have been used to help demonstrate a need to develop policies to tackle the problem. The survey has provided a means to better assess the needs and experiences of young lesbian and gay people.

There has been no equivalent research in Great Britain. Stonewall therefore is conducting a national survey into the incidence of homophobic bullying in schools in order to shape policy developments to tackle the issue.

How the survey looks
The survey, which is currently in draft form, has five sections, and 50 questions. Section 1 asks for background information, including region, gender, age, sexual orientation, type of school, year group, and grades achieved. Section 2 asks about information about the respondent and whether they strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree or strongly disagree with a series of statements about school climate. Section 3 asks about the school in general. It asks whether the school has an explicit anti-homophobia bullying policy, and so on.

Section 4 asks about bullying. Section 5 asks for equal opportunities information, including ethnicity, disability status, and religion or belief of respondents. The survey is principally available online, but there is also a paper version available. The survey can be accessed at the website: www.speaksoutonline.org.uk, and the survey itself is on one of SHU's survey websites.

Eventually, questions have been translated into Welsh, and respondents given an option about which language they want to answer in.

The sample
We would like young people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or not sure about their sexuality to complete this survey whether they have been bullied or not. If everyone who has been bullied skips the survey, then our answers will not be so representative; we do recognize that this will be a bias to this part of the research, but this is not the only research we plan to do.

The launch
The survey was launched on Thursday 1st June through press releases, postcards, e-mails and items in magazines. We would welcome further publicity for the survey, so that as many young people as possible know about it: this article is part of it. Please photocopy this article if you want to.

What’s next?
What’s next for this study is:
- We will write a report of what we found and its policy implications.
- A copy of the report will be made available on the Stonewall and SHU websites.
- We will send a summary of the research to journalists in mainstream and “pink” media.
- We will follow up with campaigning and more research about the issue, depending on what we find.

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