

Homophobic name-calling at school and the mental health of same-sex attracted and gender non-conforming adolescents

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Background & Purpose

- Homophobic verbal harassment is prevalent in secondary schools.
- What is the impact of homophobic name-calling at school on the mental health of adolescents, and on same-sex attracted or gender non-conforming adolescents in particular?

Method

- Sample: 513 students (ages 12 to 15) in 8 secondary schools in Amsterdam, the Netherlands
- The survey included
 - Items on feelings of same-sex attraction
 - Scenario-based assessment of the respondent's gender conformity
 - Homophobic Content Target Sub-scale¹ (modified)
 - Brief Symptom Inventory² to assess mental health (shortened)
- After testing for relationships between same-sex attraction, gender non-conformity, experiences with name-calling, and mental health we conducted multiple hierarchical regression analyses to test whether name-calling mediated the relationship between same-sex attraction, gender non-conformity, and mental health (controlling for gender).

Results

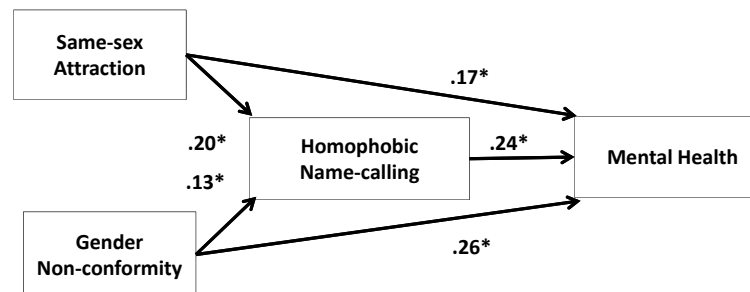
Gender non-conformity, experiences with name-calling, and mental health among participants with and without same-sex attractions.

	Gender Non-conformity M (SD)	Homophobic Name-calling M (SD)	Mental Health M (SD)
Same-sex attracted (n = 57)	2.31 (1.38)	1.90 (1.16)	2.12 (.98)
Not same-sex attracted (n = 456)	1.82 (.96)	1.40 (.71)	1.68 (.63)
Total sample (n = 513)	1.87 (1.02)	1.46 (.78)	1.73 (.69)

Note. Gender non-conformity was assessed on a 5-point scale, with higher scores indicating greater non-conformity. Five items assessed name-calling within the past month (1 = never called names, 5 = called names 7 or more times). Mental health symptoms were assessed on a 5-point scale; participants indicated how often they had experienced symptoms (1 = not at all, 5 = very often). Independent samples t-tests showed that differences between adolescents with and without same-sex attractions were statistically significant.

Conclusions

Homophobic name-calling contributes to mental health problems among adolescents.
Name-calling mediates the relationship between same-sex attraction and mental health.



Bivariate relationships among same-sex attraction, gender non-conformity, experiences with name-calling, and mental health.

* $p < .001$

Hierarchical regression of sexual attraction, gender non-conformity, and experiences with name-calling on mental health problems (controlling for gender).

		b (SE)	β	P
Step 1	Gender	.05 (.06)	.04	.392
	R ²		.00	.392
Step 2	Gender	.00 (.06)	.00	.994
	Sexual attraction	.27 (.10)	.13	.006
	Gender non-conformity	.16 (.03)	.24	<.001
	R ²		.09	<.001
	ΔR^2		.08	<.001
Step 3	Gender	.09 (.06)	.07	.166
	Sexual attraction	.19 (.10)	.09	.058
	Gender non-conformity	.14 (.03)	.21	<.001
	Homophobic name-calling	.18 (.04)	.21	<.001
	R ²		.12	<.001
	ΔR^2		.04	<.001

References

1. Poteat P, Espelage DL. Exploring the relation between bullying and homophobic verbal content: The Homophobic Content Agent Target (HCAT) Scale. *Violence Vict.* 2005;20(5):513-528.
2. Derogatis LR. *The Brief Symptom Inventory: Administration, Scoring, and Procedures Manual.* Minneapolis, MN: National Computer Systems; 1993.