

Elevated anxiety risk in sexual minority adolescents

Adolescents that are not exclusively heterosexual (“sexual minority”) are at an increased risk of developing an anxiety disorder compared to their heterosexual counterparts, according to recent data from a prospective birth cohort study. The study, conducted by researchers at King’s College London, investigated the relationship between sexual orientation at 15.5 years-of-age and the development of an anxiety disorder by 17.5 years-of-age in a large cohort of >4,500 young people. The results showed that more sexual minority adolescents experienced early childhood gender nonconformity (CGN), low self-esteem and incidents of bullying from ages 12-16 years compared to exclusively heterosexual adolescents. Consequently, those identifying as sexual minority at 15.5 years-of-age had ~2.5 times higher risk of developing an anxiety disorder than those identifying as heterosexual; bullying and low self-esteem were found to be key contributing factors. Interestingly, CGN had little effect on the association between sexual orientation and risk of developing an anxiety disorder. The researchers propose that interventions for anxiety disorders in sexual minority adolescents should consider prior experiences of bullying and low self-esteem.

Jones, A., Robinson, E., Oginni, O., Rahman, Q. & Rimes, K. A. (2017), Anxiety disorders, gender nonconformity, bullying and self-esteem in sexual minority adolescents: prospective birth cohort study. J. Child Psychol. Psychiatr. 58, 1201-1209. doi:10.1111/jcpp.12757