



News Articles, Adolescent Health/Medicine, Bullying

Study: Public campaigns may influence behavior

by Melissa Jenco, News Content Editor

Public campaigns may not only influence how people vote, but how they act toward each other.

A new study found rates of homophobic bullying in California schools increased when the state was considering a ban on same-sex marriage.

The referendum on Proposition 8 was held in November 2008, preceded by public campaigns and debate. Researchers looked at the impact of the campaigns on bullying by analyzing data on nearly 5 million California students from California Health Kids Surveys. The surveys spanned 2001-'14, covering the time before, during and after the referendum.

About 7.6% of students reported homophobic bullying in 2001-'02, which rose each year until peaking at 10.8% in 2008-'09 when the referendum occurred. Afterward, the rate gradually decreased, falling to 9.2% in 2014-'15, according to "Proposition 8 and Homophobic Bullying in California," (Hatzenbuehler ML, et al. *Pediatrics*. May 13, 2019, <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2019/05/09/peds.2018-2116>).

The study showed smaller increases in homophobic bullying when schools had a Gay-Straight Alliance. Researchers also found that while homophobic bullying was increasing leading up to the referendum, rates of bullying based on race, religion and gender were going down.

Authors noted the findings should be considered in light of recent public debates around the country related to the treatment of immigrants, Muslims, African Americans and people who are transgender.

"Our results provide evidence that public campaigns communicating stigma against particular groups may confer risk for bias-based bullying among youth and suggest that the public health consequences of such frequent campaigns on common forms of peer aggression may be more wide-ranging than previously realized," they wrote.

Authors of a [related commentary](#) said the study "represents a call to action for pediatricians" who can identify youths at risk of bullying and discrimination and provide counseling. They also can study the impact of public policies on LGBT children, speak out against discrimination and support schools in starting Gay-Straight Alliances or Genders & Sexualities Alliances.

"As advocates, pediatricians wield powerful voices that have contributed, and can continue to contribute, to change in the political discourse surrounding LGBT civil rights," authors wrote.

Resources

- [Information for parents from HealthyChildren.org about bullying](#)
- [AAP policy "Role of the Pediatrician in Youth Violence Prevention"](#)
- [AAP policy "Office-Based Care for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Youth"](#)
- [AAP Connected Kids violence prevention resources](#)



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