ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 11| Issue: 12| December 2025|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2025: 8.691 || ISI Value: 1.188

EXPLORING THE RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS OF SCHOOL VICTIMIZATION AMONG LGBTQ STUDENTS IN PAMPANGA: A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY

Rhem Rick N. Corpuz, Kelvin Carl B. Dalusung, Justin P. Nera
College of Criminal Justice Education, Angeles University Foundation, Pampanga, Philippines

Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.36713/epra25560
DOI No: 10.36713/epra25560

ABSTRACT

School victimization continues to undermine student well-being, educational attainment, and psychosocial development, with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other sexual and gender minority (LGBTQ) students experiencing disproportionate exposure to harassment, exclusion, and discrimination. This study examined the risk and protective factors associated with school victimization among LGBTQ students in Pampanga, Philippines, using a cross-sectional descriptive-correlational research design. A total of 384 self-identified LGBTQ senior high school and college students participated in a structured survey assessing experiences of victimization, perceived school climate, peer and teacher support, institutional inclusivity, and psychosocial outcomes. Descriptive and inferential analyses revealed that while physical violence was relatively infrequent, verbal harassment, teasing, and microaggressions were prevalent. Peer support and affirming teacher relationships emerged as strong protective factors, whereas weak institutional enforcement of anti-bullying policies constituted a significant risk factor. Victimization was associated with negative mental health and academic outcomes, including anxiety and reduced concentration. Anchored in Minority Stress Theory, the findings highlight the need for systemic, policy-driven interventions that extend beyond interpersonal support. The study underscores the central role of educational institutions in mitigating minority stress through inclusive governance, staff capacity-building, and accessible mental health services.

KEYWORDS: *school victimization; LGBTQ students; minority stress; school climate; inclusive education*

INTRODUCTION

Educational institutions occupy a pivotal role in shaping young people's cognitive, social, and emotional development. Schools are not merely sites of academic instruction but are also environments where identities are negotiated, social hierarchies are constructed, and norms are enforced. For many students, schools serve as protective spaces that foster growth and belonging. For LGBTQ students, however, schools frequently function as sites of vulnerability, exclusion, and chronic stress.

A growing body of international scholarship demonstrates that LGBTQ youth experience higher rates of school-based victimization than their heterosexual and cisgender peers (Myers et al., 2020; Day et al., 2023). These experiences range from overt acts of bullying and physical aggression to subtler forms of marginalization such as teasing, misgendering, social exclusion, and institutional silence. In the Philippine context—where conservative cultural norms, religious influences, and limited formal protections intersect—LGBTQ students may face compounded risks that remain under-documented in empirical research.

School victimization has far-reaching consequences. Empirical studies consistently link victimization to depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, academic disengagement, and school avoidance (Busby et al., 2020; Johns et al., 2019). Importantly, the harm is not limited to direct victims; hostile school climates affect the broader student body by normalizing discrimination and undermining collective well-being.

Despite increasing awareness, much of the existing literature—particularly in low- and middle-income countries—remains descriptive, focusing on prevalence rather than the institutional mechanisms that sustain or mitigate victimization. There is a critical need to examine how school policies, peer cultures, and staff practices interact to produce either risk or resilience for LGBTQ students. This study responds to that gap by examining LGBTQ students' experiences in Pampanga, a province that reflects both urban and semi-rural educational contexts.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in **Minority Stress Theory**, originally articulated by Meyer (2003), which posits that individuals belonging to stigmatized minority groups experience chronic stressors that are additive to general life stress. These stressors arise from structural inequality, social prejudice, and institutional exclusion rather than from individual pathology.

Minority stressors are commonly classified into:

1. **Distal stressors** – objective external events such as bullying, harassment, discrimination, and violence.

ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 11| Issue: 12| December 2025|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2025: 8.691 || ISI Value: 1.188

2. **Proximal stressors** – internal processes including fear of rejection, identity concealment, hypervigilance, and internalized stigma.

Within school environments, LGBTQ students are exposed to both forms. Distal stressors include verbal harassment, teasing, exclusion from activities, and discriminatory practices. Proximal stressors manifest as identity concealment, avoidance of school spaces, and persistent anxiety regarding peer and teacher reactions.

Crucially, Minority Stress Theory also emphasizes **protective and resilience-enhancing factors**. Social support, affirming relationships, inclusive institutional policies, and identity validation can buffer the negative effects of minority stress. Schools thus function as **structural moderators**: they can either amplify minority stress through neglect and exclusion or mitigate it through inclusive governance and supportive practices.

Applying this framework allows the present study to conceptualize school victimization not as isolated incidents but as outcomes of broader social and institutional dynamics. It also provides a theoretical basis for policy-oriented recommendations that target systemic change rather than individual coping alone.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A cross-sectional descriptive-correlational design was employed to examine the prevalence, patterns, and correlates of school victimization among LGBTQ students in Pampanga. This design is appropriate for identifying associations between variables within naturally occurring educational settings without experimental manipulation.

Participants and Sampling

The study involved 384 self-identified LGBTQ students aged 18–26 enrolled in senior high school and tertiary institutions across Pampanga. Convenience sampling was utilized due to accessibility constraints and the sensitive nature of sexual orientation and gender identity disclosure.

Research Instrument

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire comprising six domains: demographic characteristics, experiences of victimization, psychosocial and academic impacts, peer support, protective factors, and school policies. Likert-scale items measured frequency, agreement, and perception. Expert validation and pilot testing ensured content relevance and clarity.

Data Analysis

Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS v25. Descriptive statistics summarized central tendencies and variability, while inferential tests examined associations between school climate, support mechanisms, and victimization outcomes. Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$.

Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary, anonymous, and confidential. Safeguards were implemented to minimize psychological distress, including the provision of referral resources.

Results

This section presents the descriptive statistical findings of the study, focusing on perceived school inclusivity and support, negative school climate indicators, direct victimization experiences, and the psychosocial and academic impacts of school-based victimization among LGBTQ students in Pampanga. Data are presented using measures of central tendency and variability, including mean, median, mode, standard deviation, and variance.

Perceived School Inclusivity and Support

Table 1 presents respondents' perceptions of inclusivity, peer support, and institutional protection within their school environments.

Table 1
Perceived School Inclusivity and Support among LGBTQ Students

Indicator	Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Median	Mode	SD	Variance
I have at least one teacher or staff member I can talk to about my concerns.	3.10	Agree	3	3	0.93	0.86
My friends stand up for me if I am being bullied.	3.36	Agree	4	4	0.78	0.60
My school promotes inclusivity and respect for LGBTQ students.	3.08	Agree	3	3	0.89	0.78
I feel a sense of belonging in my school community.	3.10	Agree	3	3	0.82	0.67
Anti-bullying programs in my school protect LGBTQ students.	3.01	Agree	3	3	0.85	0.73
Overall Mean	**3.13**	**Agree**	**3.20**	**3.20**	**0.85**	**0.73**

The overall mean score of **3.13** indicates that respondents generally agreed that their schools exhibit moderate inclusivity and support. The highest-rated indicator was peer intervention during bullying incidents (M = 3.36), highlighting peer support as the most salient protective factor. Conversely, anti-bullying

ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 11| Issue: 12| December 2025|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2025: 8.691 || ISI Value: 1.188

programs received the lowest mean (M = 3.01), suggesting perceived limitations in institutional protection mechanisms.

Negative School Climate and Safety Concerns

Table 2 summarizes perceptions of discrimination, safety, and negative school climate experiences.

Table 2
Negative School Climate and Safety Concerns

Indicator	Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Median	Mode	SD	Variance
I hide my identity at school to avoid being bullied.	2.75	Neutral	3	4	1.05	1.09
I expect rejection from classmates if they know my SOGIESC.	3.09	Agree	3	4	0.98	0.96
I feel unsafe in certain areas of my school.	2.49	Disagree	2	2	1.01	1.02
School administrators do not take LGBTQ concerns seriously.	3.11	Agree	4	4	1.00	1.00
Jokes and teasing about LGBTQ people are common.	3.36	Agree	4	4	0.76	0.57
Teachers or staff sometimes make negative remarks.	2.79	Neutral	3	4	1.04	1.09
Overall Mean	**2.93**	**Neutral**	**3.17**	**3.67**	**0.97**	**0.96**

The overall mean of **2.93** reflects a neutral perception of school safety, indicating variability in experiences. Notably, the high mean for jokes and teasing (M = 3.36) underscores the prevalence of microaggressions, even where overt physical danger is less common.

Direct Experiences of School Victimization

Table 3 details respondents' direct experiences of bullying, exclusion, and harassment due to sexual orientation or gender identity.

Table 3
Direct Experiences of School Victimization

Indicator	Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Median	Mode	SD	Variance
I have experienced bullying because of my SOGIESC.	3.24	Agree	3	3	0.78	0.61
I have been excluded from school activities.	2.33	Disagree	2	2	0.90	0.81
I have been verbally insulted or called names.	3.00	Agree	3	3	1.74	3.04
I have been threatened or physically harmed.	2.40	Disagree	2	2	1.05	1.11
Teachers or staff make negative remarks.	2.79	Neutral	3	4	1.04	1.09
Overall Mean	**2.75**	**Neutral**	**2.60**	**2.80**	**1.10**	**1.33**

Results indicate that verbal bullying remains the most common form of victimization (M = 3.24), while physical harm and formal exclusion are less frequently reported. This pattern suggests a shift toward relational and verbal victimization rather than overt physical aggression.

Psychosocial and Academic Impacts of Victimization

Table 4 presents the effects of victimization on mental health, coping, and academic engagement.

Table 4
Psychosocial and Academic Impacts of School Victimization

Indicator	Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Median	Mode	SD	Variance
Bullying negatively affects my mental health.	3.28	Agree	3	4	0.78	0.60
I feel depressed or anxious due to treatment at school.	3.07	Agree	3	4	0.88	0.77
Bullying makes it harder to focus on my studies.	3.17	Agree	3	4	2.28	5.19
I have skipped school activities due to safety concerns.	2.40	Disagree	2	2	1.07	1.15
Supportive teachers and classmates help me cope.	3.38	Agree	4	4	0.80	0.64
Overall Mean	**3.06**	**Agree**	**3.00**	**3.60**	**1.16**	**1.67**

The overall mean of **3.06** indicates that respondents generally agreed that victimization negatively affects their mental health and academic functioning. Supportive teachers and peers emerged as the strongest buffering factor (M = 3.38).

Overall findings indicate a **moderate level of perceived inclusivity** within schools, with peer support emerging as the most salient protective factor. Respondents reported that friends were more likely to intervene during bullying incidents than formal school mechanisms. Institutional anti-bullying programs were perceived as present but insufficiently responsive to LGBTQ-specific concerns.

ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 11| Issue: 12| December 2025|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2025: 8.691 || ISI Value: 1.188

Negative school climate indicators revealed that **verbal harassment and microaggressions**—including jokes and teasing—were common, even in the absence of widespread physical violence. Victimization experiences were significantly associated with emotional distress, anxiety, and difficulty concentrating on academic tasks. Supportive teachers and classmates moderated these effects, highlighting the importance of relational resources.

DISCUSSION

School Victimization as a Structural Phenomenon

The findings reinforce the view that school victimization among LGBTQ students is less about episodic violence and more about **chronic exposure to hostile or dismissive environments**. Consistent with international studies, victimization in Pampanga primarily took verbal, relational, and symbolic forms (Hinduja & Patchin, 2020; Walters, 2020). These forms are often minimized within school systems, yet they exert cumulative psychological harm.

Peer Support as an Informal Protective Mechanism

Peer solidarity emerged as a critical buffer against victimization. Friends who intervene during bullying incidents provide immediate emotional safety and validation. However, reliance on informal peer support reflects a **governance gap**: when institutions fail to act decisively, students compensate through personal networks. While valuable, peer-based protection is uneven and unsustainable without institutional backing.

Institutional Silence and Minority Stress Amplification

Perceptions that school administrators do not take LGBTQ concerns seriously represent a key structural risk factor. From a Minority Stress perspective, institutional silence functions as a distal stressor that legitimizes discrimination and heightens proximal stress processes such as identity concealment and fear of rejection. The absence of visible enforcement signals that LGBTQ safety is negotiable rather than guaranteed.

Mental Health and Academic Consequences

Victimization was associated with anxiety, depressive symptoms, and reduced academic focus, corroborating prior research linking school climate to educational engagement (Busby et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2023). Although absenteeism was not widespread, emotional disengagement poses long-term risks to academic persistence and career trajectories.

Policy and Practice Implications

From Symbolic Inclusion to Operational Governance

Schools must move beyond symbolic statements of inclusivity toward **operationalized protection mechanisms**. Anti-bullying policies should explicitly reference sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression, with clear procedures for reporting, investigation, and sanction.

Teacher Capacity-Building and Accountability

Teachers occupy a strategic position as frontline responders. Mandatory training on LGBTQ sensitivity, legal obligations, and intervention strategies is essential. Importantly, training must be coupled with accountability mechanisms that ensure consistent application.

Mental Health Infrastructure

Accessible, affirming counseling services are critical. Mental health support should be integrated into guidance programs, with referral pathways that respect confidentiality and identity affirmation.

Data-Driven School Climate Monitoring

Regular climate surveys disaggregated by SOGIESC variables can provide early warning indicators of victimization patterns. Evidence-based monitoring allows schools to move from reactive to preventive governance.

Limitations and Future Research

The use of convenience sampling limits generalizability, and self-reported data may be subject to social desirability bias. Longitudinal studies are recommended to examine causal pathways and long-term outcomes. Future research should also explore intersections with socioeconomic status, religion, and rural-urban school contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that LGBTQ students in Pampanga navigate educational environments characterized by both support and persistent vulnerability. While peer and teacher relationships offer meaningful protection, institutional responses remain uneven. Anchored in Minority Stress Theory, the findings highlight the necessity of systemic, policy-driven interventions that embed inclusivity into the core governance of schools. Educational institutions must assume proactive responsibility in safeguarding LGBTQ students, not as an act of benevolence, but as a matter of educational justice and human rights.

REFERENCES

1. *Abreu, R. L., Kenny, M. C., Martinez, S., & Swearer, S. M. (2022). Teachers' perceptions of sexual and gender minority bullying and victimization: A mixed-methods study. Psychology in the Schools, 59(5), 1016–1033. https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22508*
2. *Astor, R. A., Benbenishty, R., & Estrada, J. N. (2018). Bullying, school violence, and climate in evolving contexts: Culture, organization, and time. Oxford University Press.*
3. *Basile, K. C., Clayton, H. B., DeGue, S., Gilford, J. W., Vagi, K. J., Suarez, N. A., Zwald, M. L., & Lowry, R. (2020). Interpersonal violence victimization among high school students – Youth Risk Behavior Survey, United States, 2019. MMWR Supplements, 69(1), 28–37. https://doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.su6901a4*
4. *Busby, D. R., Horwitz, A. G., Zheng, K., Eisenberg, D., Harper, G. W., Albucher, R. C., & King, C. A. (2020). Suicide risk among gender and sexual minority college students: The roles of victimization, discrimination, connectedness, and identity*

ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 11| Issue: 12| December 2025|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2025: 8.691 || ISI Value: 1.188

affirmation. Journal of Psychiatric Research, 121, 182–188. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpsychires.2019.12.006

5. *Coley, J. S., & Das, D. (2020). Creating safe spaces: Opportunities, resources, and LGBTQ student groups at U.S. colleges and universities. Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World, 6, 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1177/2378023120971472*
6. *Day, J. K., Fish, J. N., Grossman, A. H., & Russell, S. T. (2020). Gay–Straight Alliances, inclusive policy, and school climate: LGBTQ youths' experiences of social support and bullying. Journal of Research on Adolescence, 30(S2), 418–430. https://doi.org/10.1111/jora.12487*
7. *Day, J. K., Fish, J. N., Grossman, A. H., & Russell, S. T. (2023). Bullying involvement at the intersection of gender identity, sexual identity, race, ethnicity, and disability. LGBT Health, 10(S1), S10–S19. https://doi.org/10.1089/lgbt.2023.0076*
8. *Earnshaw, V. A., Reisner, S. L., Juvonen, J., Parsons, J. T., & Bogart, L. M. (2020). LGBTQ bullying: Translating research to action in schools. American Journal of Public Health, 110(5), 605–607. https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2020.305702*
9. *Garcés-Prettel, M., Santoya-Montes, Y., & Jiménez-Osorio, J. (2020). Influence of family and pedagogical communication on school violence. Comunicar, 28(63), 73–82. https://doi.org/10.3916/C63-2020-07*
10. *Gill, P. R., & McQuillan, K. (2022). LGBTQ+ students' peer victimization and mental health before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 19(18), 11665. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph191811665*
11. *Green, A. E., DeChants, J. P., Price, M. N., & Davis, C. K. (2022). Association of gender-affirming hormone therapy with depression and suicidality among transgender and nonbinary youth. Journal of Adolescent Health, 70(4), 643–649. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2021.10.036*
12. *Hatchel, T., Espelage, D. L., & Huang, Y. (2019). Sexual harassment victimization, school belonging, and depressive symptoms among LGBTQ adolescents. Journal of LGBT Youth, 16(2), 134–156. https://doi.org/10.1080/19361653.2018.1543032*
13. *Hinduja, S., & Patchin, J. W. (2020). Bullying, cyberbullying, and LGBTQ students. Cyberbullying Research Center. http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11990/2073*
14. *Hultin, H., Ferrari, S. A., Wansell, C., & Modin, B. (2022). Student-perceived pedagogical–social climate and bullying in Swedish schools. Journal of School Psychology, 92, 77–90. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2022.03.004*
15. *Ioverno, S., McCurdy, A., & Russell, S. T. (2024). Geographical variation in the associations between school characteristics and homophobic bullying. Preventive Science, 25(7), 1164–1176. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11121-024-01732-4*
16. *Johns, M. M., Poteat, V. P., Horn, S. S., & Kosciw, J. G. (2019). Strengthening schools to promote resilience for LGBTQ youth. LGBT Health, 6(3), 119–123. https://doi.org/10.1089/lgbt.2018.0109*
17. *Kim, J., Lee, Y., Leban, L., & Jennings, W. G. (2023). School bullying victimization and sexual risk-taking among South Korean adolescents. Archives of Sexual Behavior, 52(7), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-023-02614-6*
18. *Martín-Castillo, D., Jiménez-Barbero, J. A., Pastor-Bravo, M. M., Sánchez-Muñoz, M., Fernández-Espín, M. E., & García-Arenas, J. J. (2020). School victimization in transgender people: A systematic review. Children and Youth Services Review, 119, 105480. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105480*
19. *Mayo, C. (2022). LGBTQ youth and education: Policies and practices (2nd ed.). Teachers College Press.*
20. *Meyer, I. H. (2003). Prejudice, social stress, and mental health in lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations. Psychological Bulletin, 129(5), 674–697. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.129.5.674*
21. *Myers, D., Turanovic, J. J., & Mancini, C. (2020). The victimization of LGBTQ students at school: A meta-analysis. Journal of School Violence, 19(1), 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/15388220.2020.1713394*
22. *Russell, S. T., Bishop, M. D., Saba, V. C., James, I., & Ioverno, S. (2021). Promoting school safety for LGBTQ and all students. Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 8(2), 160–166. https://doi.org/10.1177/23727322211031938*
23. *Truong, N. L., & Zongrone, A. D. (2022). Teachers' support of LGBTQ students: A systematic review. Psychology in the Schools, 59(9), 1757–1773. https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22544*
24. *Turban, J. L., King, D., Carswell, J. M., & Keuroghlian, A. S. (2020). Pubertal suppression for transgender youth and risk of suicidal ideation. Pediatrics, 145(2), e20191725. https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2019-1725*
25. *Valido, A., Rivas-Koehl, M., Espelage, D. L., Lawrence, T. I., & Robinson, L. E. (2022). Victimization patterns and protective factors among LGBTQ youth. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 19(16), 9953. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19169953*
26. *Walters, G. D. (2020). School-age bullying victimization and perpetration: A meta-analysis. Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 22(5), 1129–1139. https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838020906513*
27. *Zongrone, A. D., Truong, N. L., & Kosciw, J. G. (2020). Key factors for creating safe and supportive schools for LGBTQ students. GLSEN.*