Title: Research Proposal Topic

Key Words: LGBTQ Youth, Victimisation, School Discipline, Criminology, Ireland.

Topics: Irish LGBTQ youth's experience (of victimisation, discrimination and exclusion) in school.

Research Question

Do Findings in the United States Align with Ireland Context? What caused Irish LGBTQ Youth's school-based victimisation experience?

Literature Review

This literature review was conducted to examine the hypotheses of whether LGBTQ youth are more vulnerable in terms of frequently being victimised in schools and further sheds light on the potential harm and consequences. It identified that the relevant research findings are highly American context-based and, thus, potentially insufficient and inadequate for understanding Irish LGBTQ youth's victimisation experience. This review justifies the American-inspired nature of this research, demonstrates the prevalence and consequences of school victimisation of LGBTQ youth, and further provides a solid comparable theoretical and factual basis for this research.

Research indicated that individuals who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Queer (LGBTQ) experience a high victimisation rate throughout their life course (Herek, 2009: 54; Roberts *et al.*, 2010: 2433). It is, therefore, reasonable to suspect that young people at school are also more likely to be victimised. According to a recent survey conducted in the United States, fifty-nine per cent of LGBTQ youth experienced bullying and teasing at school in the prior year, and fifty-one per cent of LGBTQ youth were victimised specifically due to their sexual identity, gender identity, and/or gender expression (Goldberg *et al.*, 2023). In terms of victimisation, another American national survey reported that eighty-nine per cent of LGBTQ students reported having experienced some form of victimisation at school in the past year,

including relational aggression, cyberbullying, and sexual harassment, versus seventy-one per cent of non-LGBTQ students (Greytak *et al.*, 2016: 22-25). Comparing these two surveys, the schools in 2023 seem safer for LGBTQ youth. However, the statistics are still disturbing.

Substantial research has documented the impact of victimisation experience on LGBTQ youth's well-being (Kosciw *et al.*, 2012; Kosciw *et al.*, 2020). The effect of victimisation includes academic failure, missing or dropping out of school, lower self-esteem, and higher levels of depression and loneliness (Kosciw *et al.*, 2020: 45). The negative effects on well-being caused by victimisation are more severe when the victimisation explicitly targets LGBTQ identities (Toomey *et al.*, 2010: 1580; Russell *et al.*, 2012: 493-495). Furthermore, Himmelstein and Brückner (2011: 51-52) found a higher frequency of expulsion from schools among LGBTQ youth, particularly females and individuals of colour, who are disproportionately expelled from schools compared to their heterosexual peers for similar violations. Furthermore, Majd, Marksamer and Reyes (2009: 19) highlighted the disproportionate representation of LGBTQ youth in the U.S. juvenile justice system, noting that although they comprise only five to seven per cent of the youth population, they account for thirteen to fifteen per cent of those within the juvenile justice system. In the United States, this phenomenon is known as the *School-to-Prison Pipeline* for LGBT youth. Mitchum and Moodie-Mills (2014) investigated how the education system contributes to the incarceration of LGBTQ youth.

The previous paragraphs have demonstrated the prevalence of victimisation experience of LGBTQ youth and the severe consequences it produces. It highlights their vulnerability as young people and minorities and signals the necessity of greater policy endeavours. However, the above research findings are heavily American context-based, which raises doubts as to whether the situation is identical for LGBTQ youth in Ireland. Therefore, this research aims to investigate Irish LGBTQ Youth's school-based victimisation experience, shedding light on this field that had been less

researched. The following Case Study section will introduce the research relevant to Irish LGBTQ Youth's school-based victimisation experience to contextualise this research in Irish settings and dynamics.

Case Study

Although limited, some Irish researchers reported some concerning factors that potentially cause and imply Irish LGBTQ Youth's school-based victimisation experience, proving that Irish LGBTQ youth might face similar challenges and situations as LGBTQ youth in America. The primary concerning factor is the denominational structure of Irish education, which potentially spreads structural homophobia in schools and is the critical context for relevant research and policymaking (Bailey, 2017: 25, 32; Bryan, 2019: 256). Over ninety per cent of schools in Ireland are either under the patronage of Roman Catholic religious orders or owned and administered by the local Roman Catholic Diocese (DES, 2015; Fahie, 2016: 397). This nature has not changed since the mid-nineteenth century (Coolahan, 1981). Irish schools, predominantly shaped by their denominational nature, often embody heterosexual spaces where conventional heteronormative perspectives on gender and sexuality form the basis of everyday experiences for all students, including those who are LGBTQ (Bailey, 2017: 33). In 2009, research conducted by the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN) indicated that fifty-eight per cent of respondents reported experiencing homophobic bullying, resulting in five per cent leaving school early due to this; twenty-four per cent of females and fifteen per cent of males had attempted suicide at least once, with eighty-five per cent of these individuals attributing their first suicide attempt to their LGBTQ identity (Mayock *et al.*, 2009: 67-68, 100). These data highlighted the vulnerability of LGBTQ youth to suicidal behaviours, indicating a substantial risk within this social group. In more recent research, researchers at GLEN confirm that LGBTQ youth continue to experience victimisation in their daily lives, while they showed higher levels of self-harm, attempted suicide and severe/extremely severe stress, anxiety and depression (Higgins. *et al.*, 2016: 3, 8).

In summary, the unique context of Ireland has led to a robust presence of religion in primary and secondary schools. This potentially allows homophobic bullying and negatively impacts LGBTQ youth's experience in schools (Bailey, 2017: 33-35) Combining the literature review and the results of the 2009 survey, further research that addresses Irish LGBTQ Youth's school-based victimisation experience is necessary. There are some relevant studies in the Irish context, but unfortunately, none in the last five years are particularly relevant. Norris and Quilty's (2020) report is the only work that held some levels of relevance since they consider LGBTQ youth's experiences of school in their investigation of their homelessness. Therefore, this study is valuable and meaningful because it fills part of the research gap and sheds light on the experiences of vulnerable groups in Irish society.

Methodology: Gathering Data

Primary data from Irish LGBTQ youth is essential and highly valuable to understanding Irish LGBTQ Youth's school-based victimisation experience. Therefore, participation by youth and adult advocates in this research is critical. Further, it makes semi-structured interviews and focused groups the most suitable approach to collect data for this research. BeLonG To Youth Project has consistently provided support services to vulnerable young LGBT people (Minton *et al.*, 2008: 180). Assistance from similar organisations such as LGBT Ireland would be a great support in terms of getting in touch with both Irish LGBTQ youth and adult advocates. Lastly, Snapp *et al.*'s (2015) research is referenced when designing to improve the feasibility of this section. In addition, some modifications based on the Irish context secure its originality.

In terms of adult advocates such as educators, including school administrators, teachers, counsellors, policymakers, staff at youth-serving organisations, and activists could offer insights into Irish LGBTQ Youth's school-based victimisation experience. Thus, this research plans to conduct 10-20 Zoom/phone interviews or personal interviews with those Irish adult advocates who have knowledge, expertise or direct experience relevant to this research. Participants would not be remunerated but would

receive a copy of the research findings after the study's completion. They are expected to answer several open-ended questions about LGBTQ youth and their experiences in school (e.g. "In your experience, what are some of the most common forms of victimisation experienced by LGBTQ youth in Irish schools?"; "What is your role within the educational or youth-serving organisation context, and how does it relate to supporting LGBTQ youth?"; "Can you share any specific instances that highlight the challenges faced by LGBTQ youth in accessing support or resources within the school system?"), therefore, the interviews are semi-structured (Dawson, 2013a, pp. 96-97). Participants may skip any question and terminate the interview at their will; they are expected to give formal or oral consent before the interview.

In terms of youth participants for focus groups, they will be recruited through an online survey that has been developed and distributed by the researcher, hopefully also through a survey developed and administered through organisations such as the National Youth Council of Ireland, BeLonG To Youth Project (also see LGBT Ireland, 2024). By sending out the survey to their email listserv and recruiting youth at the annual NYCI National Conference, this survey will reach the maximum possible wide range of LGBTQ youth in Ireland. Potential focus group participants will receive a detailed informed consent/assent briefing, which will be presented on the first page of the survey. This briefing will outline the nature of the study, including any potential risks and benefits. Subsequently, youth participants will be required to indicate their agreement or refusal to participate in the survey or focus groups before proceeding (Palmer and Greytak, 2017: 169-170).

The selection of participants was based on the following criteria: (a) Youth had stated they have experienced penalised by the school for their self-expression, (b) they agreed to be contacted and provided contact information (phone or email), (c) they self-identified as LGBTQ members, and (d) they were currently in Grades 9 to 12. The aim is to recruit 40-45 youth to participate in the focus groups and invite youth from potentially underrepresented groups within the remaining eligible sample. The youth

participants will engage in Zoom/in-person focus groups of five to seven. Before every focus group, they will be provided with sufficient information and be asked to introduce their name and pronoun and give verbal consent (Dawson, 2013b, pp. 90-93). Participants, as minors, usually need parental consent when participating in research. The ethics section will explain why this study does not require parental consent. Youth are encouraged to speak and will be asked a similar set of open-ended questions about the victimisation experiences of LGBTQ youth (e.g. "Are there variations in the ways in which students are penalised because of their sexual orientation or gender identity?"; "Are there recurrent events that deterred you from attending school?", cited in Snapp *et al*. (2015: 61)). Participants may skip any question and end the focus group anytime.

Methodology: Analysing Data

Content analysis facilitated by MAXQDA software will be employed to analyse the data collected for this research. Content analysis systematically classifies and sorts textual data, identifying recurring themes and patterns within the transcripts of interviews and focus groups. MAXQDA would be a valuable tool for conducting content analysis and thematic analysis in this research since there will be a large amount of text and interviews. It will support coding data, memoing, visualisation and managing data, thereby enhancing the efficiency of the analytical process.

In the first phase of content analysis, the researcher will use MAXQDA to import and manage textual data, transcripts and audio. Then, the researcher will develop a coding scheme based on participants' stories of being victimised, their observations and comments on those experiences, and their explanations for what caused Irish LGBTQ youth's victimisation experience at school (Mayring, 2004: 162-163). In addition, the researcher will create a codebook outlining definitions and examples for each code, which ensures consistency in coding adult interviews and youth focus groups. Three rounds of coding are necessary, which code the interview and focus groups together and then separately code the interview and focus groups again. This is to identify predominant and consistent experiences regarding reasons and consequences of

LGBTQ youth's victimisation, as well as spotting differences in perceptions between adults and youth, indicating areas for attention. Thus, the knowledge and patterns identified in the literature review and case study could be tested for their relevance to Irish realities.

Primarily, this content analysis will concentrate on what caused Irish LGBTQ youth's school-based victimisation and its negative consequences. Therefore, the emotional sides of the text and the emotional analysis will be excluded from this analysis. Presumably by generating descriptive statistics or visual representations of the data, the findings of this section will align with previous literature: LGBTQ youth are frequently identified as a "problem" by schools, where they are treated unfairly, such as punished for public displays of affection and self-expression or penalised for self-protection (Snapp *et al*., 2005). In addition, the relationship between victimisation experiences and self-harm, suicide, and depressive symptoms would be clear.

Ethics 300

This research requires minors' participation. Considering their LGBTQ identities together, the dual vulnerabilities require more attention to potential ethical issues. Firstly, the research ensures that all participants, especially minors, fully understand the nature of the research and provide consent to participate. Given the nature of the survey and focus groups, coupled with a commitment to safeguarding participant anonymity, the requirement for documentation of informed consent/assent and parental consent could be waived. Requiring documentation from LGBTQ youth who may not have come out to parents or peers could expose them to harm or deter their participation in the study (Palmer and Greytak, 2017: 170).

Secondly, in terms of the process of data collection and storage, protecting the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, especially considering the sensitive nature of the topics discussed, is essential. This includes safeguarding their identities during the process and ensuring that their stories are presented in a way that prevents

identification (Snapp *et al*., 2005: 62). Additionally, there is a risk that discussing experiences of discrimination and mistreatment in schools could re-traumatize participants or worsen existing mental health issues. Therefore, the researcher needs to pay extra attention to creating safe spaces and encouraging them to withdraw whenever they feel like it. In addition, the researcher also needs to take precautions, such as inviting the appropriate participants to avoid harm.

Lastly, regarding participants' intersectional vulnerability, the researcher needs to provide contact information or resources for support if needed. At the end of the focus group, it is desirable to acknowledge their well-being individually and express appreciation for their participation.

Word Count: 2197

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