



# BULLYING AND VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS

All forms of discrimination and violence in schools are an obstacle to children and young people's fundamental right to quality education. Violence in schools and other educational settings is a worldwide problem and students who do not conform to prevailing sexual and gender stereotypes, including lesbian, gay, bi, trans (LGBT) and intersex students, are significantly more vulnerable.

Bullying and violence against LGBT and intersex students has been condemned by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, which have called on Governments to step up their action to tackle this harmful practice.

## What is homophobic and transphobic violence in schools ?

Homophobic and transphobic violence targets students who are, or are perceived as, lesbian, gay, bi or trans. It also targets other students whose gender expression does not fit into society's norms and expectations, such as boys perceived as 'feminine' and girls perceived as 'masculine'.

Homophobic and transphobic violence includes physical, sexual and psychological violence and bullying. Like other forms of school-related violence, it can occur in the classroom, playgrounds, toilets and changing rooms, on the way to and from school, and online. While this kind of violence mostly occurs among students, it can also take place between teachers and students. Such violence can sometimes target school staff, particularly teachers. Violence can

be perpetrated by students, school staff or educational authorities. LGBT students consistently report a higher prevalence of bullying and violence compared to their non-LGBT peers. For instance, a study from New Zealand shows that lesbian, gay and bi students are three times more likely to be bullied than their heterosexual peers, and trans students are five times more likely to be bullied than non-transgender students.

Students and staff who fail to conform to 'masculine' norms – including men and boys who are gay or bi, and trans women and girls – are more likely to be the targets of violence. Although homophobic and transphobic violence is typically perpetrated by boys and young men, girls and young women also carry out such violence.

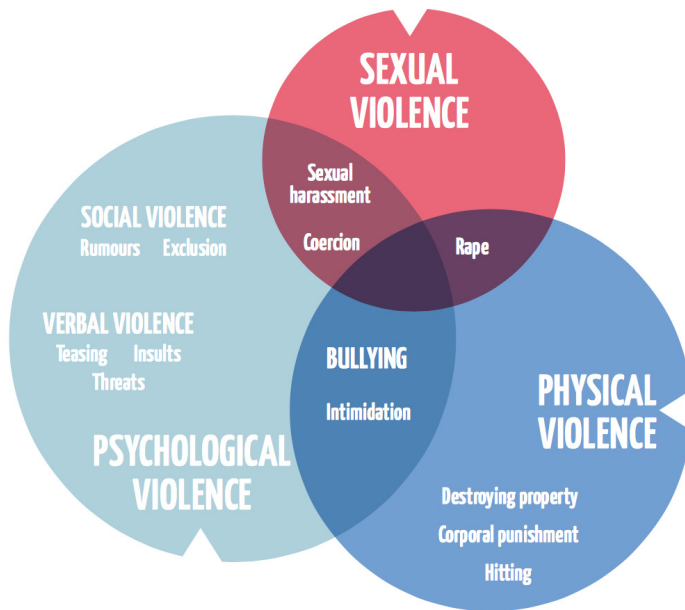
Students and adults who witness homophobic and transphobic violence often fail to react. This is in part because this kind of violence is rooted in deep cultural beliefs about gender roles related to masculinity and femininity.

The school environment can also be hostile to LGBT students in more implicit ways. Examples include teachers or school administrators asserting that some subjects are better suited to students based on their sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, or reinforcing stereotypes in curriculum materials. This can reinforce prejudice and a biased understanding of LGBT people, which are often at the root of homophobic and transphobic violence.





**MORE THAN BULLYING:**  
HOMOPHOBIC AND TRANSPHOBIC VIOLENCE MANIFESTS IN A NUMBER OF WAYS



While less research has been done on the risks facing intersex people, research from Australia suggests that intersex children are also at increased risk of bullying and violence in school.

Intersex children are also frequently subjected to unnecessary and repeated medical treatment and surgery, causing significant physical and mental pain and suffering. This is linked to prolonged and repeated periods of absence from school and lower completion rates of secondary education compared to the general population.

## What is the impact of school-related bullying and violence?

School-related bullying and violence has a significant negative impact on students' education and employment prospects, as well as on their health and well-being.

Children and young people who study in discriminatory environments or who suffer bullying or violence because they are seen as lesbian, gay, bi, trans or intersex are more likely to feel unsafe at school, avoid school activities, miss classes, skip or drop out of school entirely, and achieve lower academic results than their peers. For instance, a study from the United States found that 70 per cent of LGBT students felt unsafe at school, and a survey in China discovered that 59 per cent of LGBT respondents reported that

bullying had negatively affected their academic performance. Trans students are particularly at risk. In Argentina, a 2007 study showed that 45 per cent of trans students dropped out of school, either due to transphobic bullying by their peers or being excluded by school authorities. A 2015 Australian study found that 18 per cent of intersex people had not completed secondary education, compared to two per cent of the general population.

Students who have a lower academic achievement or leave school early have fewer qualifications, which, in turn, influences their employment prospects. Such violence can also have a detrimental effect on physical and mental health,

including increased risk of anxiety, fear, stress, loss of confidence, low self-esteem, loneliness, self-harm, depression and suicide. Studies from Belgium, the Netherlands, Poland and the United States suggest that LGBT students and young people are between two and more than five times more likely to think about, or attempt, suicide than their peers.



## Education sector responses

There is increasing recognition of the negative impact of bullying and violence in schools against LGBT and intersex people. While only a few countries have put in place comprehensive responses, States in all regions are taking measures to tackle these challenges.

In Namibia, the Life Skills Syllabus includes learning and discussion about different sexualities. In the Philippines, the Implementing Rules and Regulations for the Anti-Bullying Act includes references to bullying on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.

In the United States, the Department of Education issued guidelines to schools on respect for the gender identity of transgender students.

In Colombia, the Department of Education of the Bogota District conducted a survey on homophobic bullying in secondary schools. Malta has adopted an anti-discrimination policy that specifically addresses the situation of trans and intersex students in schools.

### Action points

States should:

- 1** Systematically monitor the prevalence of violence in schools, including violence based on sexual orientation, gender identity/ expression and sex characteristics, and evaluate education sector responses.
- 2** Provide training and support to teachers and other school staff to prevent and address violence in school, including homophobic and transphobic violence and violence against intersex students.
- 3** Develop and implement comprehensive national education sector policies to prevent and address such violence and ensure that curricula and learning materials are inclusive.

You, your friends and others can make a difference too:

- 1** Listen to your LGBT and intersex peers and educate yourself about the issues that they face.
- 2** Speak out when you see any form of bullying, violence, insults or slurs against LGBT and intersex people.
- 3** Make sure to use respectful language and to refer to a person using the terms, pronouns, gender and name that they use to identify themselves.



Schools and teachers should:

- 1** Ensure that school environments are safe, inclusive and supportive for all students, including those who are LGBT and intersex.
- 2** Give students and their families access to objective, accurate information on sexual orientation, gender identity/expression and sex characteristics.
- 3** Offer teachers in-service training and support on how to deal with bullying and violence against LGBT and intersex students.
- 4** Take action to tackle cases of bullying, insults and slurs against LGBT and intersex students.
- 5** Lead by example: Do not propagate negative and harmful stereotypes about LGBT and intersex people.
- 6** Refer to a person using the pronouns, gender and name that they use to identify themselves.
- 7** Do not refer to, or reveal, a person's sexual orientation, gender identity or intersex status without their consent.
- 8** Partner with local civil society organizations and the wider school community to mobilize action or mark specific days to combat discrimination against LGBT and intersex people.

