



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

FROM INSULT TO INCLUSION

Asia-Pacific report on school bullying, violence and discrimination
on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity



FROM INSULT TO INCLUSION

Published in 2015 by the United Nations Educational,
Scientific and Cultural Organization,
7, place de Fontenoy, 75352 Paris 07 SP, France
and UNESCO Bangkok

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Publication of this report was made possible with financial contributions from Ministry of Education, Culture and Science of the Netherlands and UNAIDS United Budget, Accountability and Results Framework (UBRAF) funding for UNESCO.

Design/Layout: www.alikecreative.com

TH/DOC/HP2/15/042



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Acronyms

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BGCA	Boys' and Girls' Clubs Association
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GID	Gender identity disorder
GLCAC	Gay and Lesbian Campus Association of China
GLBTIQ	Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer
GPA	Grade Point Average
GSA	Gay Straight Alliance
GSHS	Global School-based Student Health Survey
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICRW	International Center for Research on Women
ICT	Information and communication technologies
IDAHOT	International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia
IGLHRC	International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (now known as OutRight International)
KRYSS	Knowledge and Rights with Young People through Safer Spaces
LGB	Lesbian, gay and bisexual
LBT	Lesbian, bisexual and transgender
LGBT	Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender
LGBTI	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MSM	Men who have sex with men (includes adolescents and young people)
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
PDR	People's Democratic Republic
PE	Physical education
PNG	Papua New Guinea
QSA	Queer Straight Alliance
SAR	Special Administrative Region
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SOGI	Sexual orientation and gender identity
SOGIE	Sexual orientation, gender identity and expression
SRGBV	School-related gender-based violence
SSAGQ	Same-sex attracted and gender questioning
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNGEI	United Nations Girls' Education Initiative
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WHO	World Health Organization
WPATH	World Professional Association for Transgender Health

Acknowledgements

This review was prepared by Karen Humphries-Waa, UNESCO Consultant, in collaboration with Justine Sass, Chief of the HIV Prevention and Health Promotion Unit (HP2) at UNESCO Asia-Pacific Bureau for Education (UNESCO Bangkok). Kimiko Ebata and Do-Hyeong Myeong, interns in the Unit, also provided significant additional research support.

UNESCO would like to thank all individuals who contributed data, experience, programme and policy examples and reviewed and provided feedback on the report. This includes from: Australia, Dr Gávi Ansara (National LGBTI Health Alliance), Morgan Carpenter (Organisation Intersex International Australia Ltd.), Bonnie Hart (Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome Support Group Australia Inc.), Dr Tiffany Jones (University of New England), Dr Debbie Ollis (Deakin University, Australia), Sally Richardson (Safe Schools Coalition Australia) and Dr Sam Winter (Curtin University, Australia); Brunei Darussalam, Iswandy Ahmad (Youth LEAD); Cambodia, Chhoeurng Rachana (CamASEAN Youth's Future) and Nimol Soth (UNESCO Phnom Penh); China, Chen Du (Gay and Lesbian Campus Association China), Li Hongyan (UNESCO Beijing), Professor Liu Wenli and Wei Chongzheng (Beijing Normal University), Professor Peng Tao (Harbin Medical University), and Xu Bin (Common Language) and Hong Kong SAR, Miu Sze Man (Project Touch); Fiji, Noelene Nabulivou (Women's Action for Change), Josua Naisele (Ministry of Education) and Sulique Waqa (House of Khameleon); India, Sarita Jadav (UNESCO New Delhi), Sunil Menon (Sahodaran), Shivane Sen (Tagore International School in Delhi) and Sunita Siwatch (University Grants Commission); Indonesia, Anna Arifin and Yuli Rustinawati (Arus Pelangi), and Yuliana Tri Nirmayanti (Eager Beaver Learning Center); Malaysia, Thilaga Sulatireh (B-Change) and Professor Teh Yik Koon (National Defence University of Malaysia); Myanmar, Dr Pyi Pyi Phyoo (UNESCO Yangon); Nepal, Badri Bahadur Pathak (Ministry of Education), Pinky Gurung and Manisha Dhakal (Blue Diamond Society); New Zealand, Jack Byrne (TransAction), Dr Terryann Clark, Dr John Fenaughty, and Dr Mathijs Lucassen

(University of Auckland); Pakistan, Qasim Iqbal (Naz Male Health Alliance); Philippines, Dr Sylvia Estrada Claudio (University of the Philippines), Renee Facelo, Rina Fulo, Kelly Ann Rala and Ryan Silverio (Miriam College) and Leah Patricia Magdaleno-Galgo (Department of Education); Republic of Korea, Jihye Kim (Korean Society of Law and Policy on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity); Samoa, Andrew Peteru (UNESCO Apia); Sri Lanka, Himali Jinadasa (Sri Lanka National Commission of UNESCO Secretariat), and Dr Dayanath Ranatunga (UNAIDS); Thailand, James Burford (Thammasat University), Pompran Netayavichitr (Plan International), Timo Ojanen and Piotr Pawlak (Mahidol University), Prempreeda Pramoj Na Ayutthaya (UNESCO Bangkok) and Wijit Wongwareethip (Independent researcher); Viet Nam, Bui Thanh Xuan (Vietnam Institute of Educational Sciences), Dr Hoang Tu Anh and Quach Thi Thu Trang (Center for Creative Initiatives in Health and Population), Professor Nguyen Thi Hoang Yen (National Institute of Education Management) and Tran Khac Tung (ICS Center); and from a regional perspective Ging Cristobal (International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission) and Jensen Byrne (UNDP Bangkok Regional Hub). Technical reviewers from beyond Asia-Pacific included Dr Joseph Kosciw (GLSEN, USA), and Professor Ian Rivers (Brunel University London, United Kingdom). There are a number of persons who also contributed but who preferred not to have their names mentioned in the report.

This review would not have been possible without the generous funding provided by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture of the Government of the Netherlands. UNESCO also acknowledges the support provided to advance country action on this issue from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Embassy of Sweden in Thailand to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the UNESCO-UNDP partnership through the Being LGBTI in Asia initiative.

Glossary: Common terms and concepts

This report aims to use neutral language that is widely accepted globally but also employs terms commonly used in the region and within countries, as well as the original language used by researchers, where appropriate. Definitions for common terms and concepts in the report include:

Adolescent	Defined by the United Nations as a person aged 10-19 years.
Asexual	A person not interested in sexual activity in their relationships.
Being outed	The experience of having one's sexual orientation or gender identity disclosed without consent.
Biphobia	Fear, discomfort, intolerance or hatred of bisexuality and bisexual people.
Bisexual	A person who is attracted to and/or has sex with people of more than one gender.
Bullying	Behaviour repeated over time that intentionally inflicts injury or discomfort through physical contact, verbal attacks, or psychological manipulation. Bullying involves an imbalance of power.
Child	A person under 18 years of age, unless domestic law specifies majority earlier.
Cisgender	A term used by some to describe people whose gender identity and/or gender expression is aligned with the assigned sex at birth. May also be called cissexual.
Coming out	The process of acknowledging and accepting, privately and/or publicly, one's sexual orientation or gender identity.
Cyberbullying	A form of bullying using the Internet (e.g. on chat rooms, social networking sites, e-mail), or mobile phones (e.g. text messages) to inflict discomfort or harm.
Discrimination	The exclusion or unfair treatment of a person/group of people on different traits such as sex, class, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, or ethnicity.
Drop out	Leave school prematurely or abandon a course of study.
Equity	Fair and impartial treatment, including equal treatment or differential treatment to redress imbalances in rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities.
Gay	A person who is primarily attracted to and/or has sex with someone of the same gender. Commonly used for men, some women also use this term.
Gender	Refers to the attitudes, feelings, and behaviours associated with a person's assigned sex at birth. Behaviour that is compatible with cultural expectations is referred to as gender-normative, and incompatible behaviour considered gender non-conforming.
Gender-based violence	Violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering against someone based on gender discrimination, gender role expectations and/or gender stereotypes.
Gender diverse	An umbrella term referring to those who do not conform to either of the binary gender definitions of male or female or identify as being gender-fluid, as well as those whose gender expression may differ from standard gender norms.
Gender dysphoria	A diagnosis for people who identify with a gender different from their sex assigned at birth. This term replaces 'gender identity disorder' in the <i>Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)</i> , and is applied to those with clinically significant distress or impairment in their functioning as a result of this condition.
Gender expression	How a person communicates one's gender to others including clothing, hairstyle, voice, behaviour and the use of pronouns.
Gender-fluid	The perception that one's gender can change and switch between male, female, third gender or gender neutral, or have combinations at the same time.
Gender identity	How a person identifies as being a man, woman, transgender, third gender, or another culturally-specific gender identity. Unlike gender expression, gender identity is not visible to others.
Gender identity disorder	A diagnosis for people who identify with a gender different from their sex assigned at birth. This term is still used in some countries, although it was recently removed from the <i>Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)</i> to be consistent with sexology terminology, and to remove the stigma of a clinical diagnosis of being 'disordered'. (See <i>gender dysphoria</i>)
Gender norm	What society considers as acceptable, appropriate or desirable behaviours, roles or expressions of a person based on their actual or perceived gender.
Gender policing	The enforcement of normative gender expressions on an individual who is perceived as not adequately conforming, through appearance or behaviour, to the sex assigned at birth.

Gender questioning	The process of reconsidering the usefulness or validity of one's assigned sex and/or assigned gender.
Gender variance	Expressions of gender that do not match that predicted by one's assigned sex at birth, including people who identify as transgender, transsexual, queer or intersex.
Heteronormativity	The belief/bias that heterosexuality is the normal or default sexual orientation.
Heterosexual	A person who is attracted to and/or has sex with someone of the opposite gender.
Homophobia	Fear, discomfort, intolerance or hatred of homosexuality or sexually diverse people.
Homophobic bullying	A gendered type of bullying that is based on actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. Can also be called bullying on the basis of perceived sexual orientation.
Homosexual	A clinical term for a person who is attracted to and/or has sex with someone of the same gender. Some people find this term offensive, and prefer same-sex or same-gender attracted, sexually diverse or sexuality diverse.
Intersex	An umbrella term for people born with sex characteristics, such as physical, hormonal or chromosomal features that do not fit typical binary notions of male and female bodies. Intersex persons may have any sexual orientation or gender identity.
Lesbian	A self-identified woman who is attracted to and/or has sex with other self-identified women. A lesbian can also be asexual, transgender, queer, etc.
Queer	A reclaimed word that can be used as an umbrella term for a range of sexual and gender identities including gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender or gender questioning. It is also used by some people who don't want to label themselves. This term is seen by some as offensive.
School-related gender-based violence	Acts or threats of sexual, physical or psychological violence occurring in and around schools, perpetrated as a result of gender norms and stereotypes and enforced by unequal power dynamics.
Sex	The classification of people as male, female or intersex, assigned at birth, typically based on anatomy and biology.
Sexual identity	How a person identifies one's sexual orientation or attractions.
Sexual orientation	Emotional and sexual attraction to another person or other people, who may be of the opposite gender, same gender, or another gender identity.
Sexually diverse	A broad term used to include people who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, pansexual or questioning their sexuality.
Stereotype	A generalised or simplified idea about people based on one or more characteristics.
Stigma	Opinions or judgments held by individuals or society that negatively reflects a person or group. Discrimination occurs when stigma is acted on.
Third gender	A person who identifies as being neither male nor female, and a legal identity in some countries including those in South Asia.
Transgender	An umbrella term for people whose gender identity or expression differs from the sex assigned at birth. Transgender identity is not dependent on medical procedures. Includes, for example, people assigned female at birth but who identify as a man (female-to-male or trans man) and people assigned male at birth but who identify as a woman (male-to-female or trans woman).
Transition	The process some transgender people undergo to live as the gender with which they identify, rather than their assigned sex at birth. This can include personal, medical and legal steps.
Transphobia	Fear, discomfort, intolerance or hatred of transgender, transsexual and others perceived to transgress gender norms.
Transsexual	A transgender person who has undergone medical procedures to align their bodies with their gender identity.
Violence	Any action, explicit or symbolic, which results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm.
Young person	Defined by the United Nations as a person aged 10 to 24 years.
Youth	Defined by the United Nations as a person aged 15 to 24 years.

Executive summary

Education is a fundamental human right and essential for the exercise of all other human rights. Governments of Asia and the Pacific have, by and large, signed on to international legal obligations that promote and develop the right of every person to enjoy access to education of good quality, without discrimination or exclusion.

However, learning environments are not always inclusive and safe places in the region, and can be sites of physical, verbal, psychological and sexual violence, and social exclusion. For children and young people who are perceived as 'different' and who do not fit into dominant cultures in societies, schools can be alienating and marginalising spaces.

This is true for some lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) youth who face discrimination, bullying and violence from their peers and adults in schools, and institutional discrimination through non-inclusive school cultures, facilities, rules and curriculum. This experience also doesn't end at the school gates, and extends to virtual spaces through cyberbullying among an increasingly "connected" Asia-Pacific youth.

In response to this issue, the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights has recommended that States establish national standards on non-discrimination in education, develop anti-bullying programmes and helplines and other services to support LGBTI youth, and to provide comprehensive, age-appropriate sexuality education.

As part of a programme to ensure respectful and inclusive school environments for all learners, UNESCO has undertaken this review to better understand school violence, bullying and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and intersex characteristics or status in Asia-Pacific. For simplicity, this is referred to as SOGIE-based bullying, violence and discrimination in this report. This report investigates the current situation and responses to the issue and makes recommendations for further action.

Situation

Historically, many cultures and societies in Asia-Pacific have recognised and been inclusive of LGBTI people. Some researchers suggest that colonisation brought considerable negative change in cultural norms and attitudes regarding sexual and gender diversity in many parts of the region. This period also significantly influenced the legal environment, with many of the present punitive laws relating to same-sex conduct being a legacy of this time.

Nearly ten countries have taken steps to protect LGBTI people from discrimination and abuse, including explicit reference to intersex persons in one country (Australia). More than ten countries have introduced reforms that, to varying degrees, make it easier for transgender people to obtain legal recognition of their gender identity. And nearly 20 of the 96 States supporting related UN resolutions in the General Assembly are in the Asia-Pacific region.

Research in the region and globally suggests that young people today may think about sexual orientation and gender identity and expression in a way that is different from previous generations. In public opinion research in Asia-Pacific, younger respondents are typically more likely than older ones to call for societal acceptance of sexual diversity. And while religious beliefs and affiliation are typically seen as powerful predictors of attitudes about sex, sexuality and gender diversity, cross-national differences suggest that the role religion has in influencing public opinion may depend on a nation's cultural context. Expanded access to information and communication technologies (ICTs), increased mobility, and expanded access to the media, including a growing number of LGBTI role models in popular media and public life, are also believed to be influencing these developments.

This is not to say that all young people in the region are accepting of diversity. In many cultures, social order, family honour, and sexual purity provide a longstanding foundation for what is considered to be acceptable behaviour. This includes societal expectations of heterosexual marriage, and the importance of having children to ensure care of elders and the family lineage. Research demonstrates that homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, intersex prejudice, heteronormativity and intolerance characterise peer interactions among many young people in schools of Asia-Pacific.

Research on school violence, bullying and discrimination on the basis of sex, sexual orientation and gender identity is growing in the region. Some countries, such as Australia and New Zealand, have multiple studies enabling trend analysis across time. Many other countries, including China (mainland and also Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR)), Japan, Mongolia, Republic of Korea and Viet Nam, have used online surveys to assess the situation while a handful of others (including Thailand and forthcoming research in Viet Nam) draw on school-based assessments. Many also use mixed methods including qualitative research to understand the social context and drivers of this violence and exclusion.

For other parts of the region, including South Asia and the Pacific, there is a dearth of information. Information is also limited on the situation among intersex learners, and many reports present the findings for “LGBT” populations together in the analysis, although each of these populations has unique challenges and concerns. Finally, there are little data on young adolescents (aged 10-14 years) despite recent longitudinal research from other settings that suggests that peer victimisation begins at an early age.

While further steps are needed to strengthen the evidence base in the region, common themes emerge from available research:

- The majority of LGBT students report having experienced bullying, violence or discrimination.
- Verbal bullying is the most common, however social bullying such as exclusion is also prevalent, followed by physical bullying and sexual harassment.
- Violence is often highly gendered with gay and bisexual men and transgender students reporting higher levels of victimisation and physical bullying.
- It is not only those who self-identify as LGBT who are targeted for this violence and discrimination but also those who do not conform to gender norms, including societal expectations for heterosexual relationships.
- The perpetrators are largely other learners; however, in some instances those working in the education sector are also responsible for violence and discrimination.
- Institutional level discrimination and exclusion are common including mis-representation in textbooks and curricula and an absence of gender-appropriate regulations and facilities.
- In many instances those targeted by violence and bullying do not seek help, as schools have insufficient support or response mechanisms to deal with the issues.

The impacts of this violence, bullying and discrimination are far reaching. They contribute to a hostile or unsafe school climate, not only affecting those who are targeted but also those who witness or perpetrate these acts. Those who are victimised are at greater risk of physical and mental health problems including depression and anxiety, suicidal ideation and behaviour, and substance abuse. There is evidence from the region that educational performance and achievement are also affected, leading to life-long impacts on employment and economic prospects and broader societal level impacts.

Response

This review determined that the education sector response to prevent or address SOGIE-based violence, bullying and discrimination is progressing at different rates, and using different entry points, across the region. Comprehensive programmes are rare, and while there are many initiatives underway, they are generally being implemented in a fragmented manner, with insufficient documentation and evaluation. In many settings, NGOs and universities are taking the lead on interventions with LGBTI organisations, in particular, often playing a pivotal role. There are many good practice examples from around the region; however, overall the response from the education sector is inadequate.

Most countries have specific education policies, laws and/or guidelines that uphold the rights and dignity of children in the educational environment, which include the legal prohibition of violence. The Philippines, however, was the only country found to include specific reference to bullying on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity in a national law. Australia was also the only country found to have addressed intersex status and gender identity through federal or national education policy measures. Recently, a few countries, such as India and Japan, have demonstrated a commitment to preventing discrimination by introducing policies that address gender non-conforming learners. Fiji’s Child Protection Policy by the Ministry of Education has also included clauses requiring schools to respect children’s sexual orientation and to take action against bullying including addressing homophobic remarks. However, in a number of countries throughout the region, prohibitive legal and social environments are still significant barriers to addressing issues of violence and discrimination against LGBTI young people.

Few education ministries have institutionalized professional development for teachers, incorporated topics about sexual orientation and gender identity into national curricula or developed supporting teaching and learning materials. Australia and New Zealand were found to have the most comprehensive guidance on curriculum, resources and professional development programmes for teachers, while Nepal provides an example of an NGO-government partnership to strengthen teacher capacity to implement curriculum inclusive of SOGIE-related topics. Most programmes to support teachers are being delivered through in-service trainings, often by NGOs, while Australia was found to have the most comprehensive pre-service training for teachers.

There are many examples throughout the region of support programmes for learners that address SOGIE-related bullying, violence and discrimination. These interventions include peer support programmes, links to counselling services and awareness-raising activities. Diversity groups, such as Gay Straight Alliances are widespread in many of the universities of Asia-Pacific; however, only a limited number of groups supporting secondary school students were identified. A good example from India is the high school group Breaking Barriers, which recently won the Khemeka Foundation national youth leader award for socially conscious leadership.

Many support programmes for young people are led by NGOs. The Boys' and Girls' Clubs Association (BGCA) of Hong Kong SAR provides a particularly comprehensive range of services, through Project Touch, including counselling, support groups, school workshops and professional training for school staff, awareness-raising in mass media and research. Online initiatives are becoming an increasingly common channel for delivering support to young LGBTI people. One regional service, BE, is available in English and five Asian languages, and provides online chat, peer support forum, and maps linking users to service providers in major cities of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Further research is needed to understand effective sources of counselling and other support services for LGBTI youth in the region.

Many of the events to raise awareness of discrimination and violence tend to be one-off, organised on international days or for particular campaigns. Some are designed to generate support for sexual and gender diversity, such as events in Japan and Taiwan province of China, where students wear clothes traditionally worn by the opposite sex, to highlight the impact of regulations on gender expression. Others have a particular focus on discrimination and/or bullying such as IDAHOT (International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia). There was limited information, overall, on the effectiveness and coverage of many of the support programmes identified in our review. It is important to strengthen the evidence based on what works, what doesn't, and why.

Conclusions and recommendations

This review finds that there are common critical elements of a comprehensive education sector response to SOGIE-based bullying, violence and discrimination. This includes: enabling policy environments; inclusive curriculum and learning materials; professional development programmes for teachers and other school staff; support for learners including awareness-raising activities, peer support and counselling services; and an overall school climate that is safe, and that understands and appreciates diversity.

The response in many Asia-Pacific countries is currently inadequate. There is a need for comprehensive programmes that are based on evidence and supported by policy; strengthened partnerships with other sectors including health and child protection; and more systematic data collection of the situation and the response. It is through such policies, programmes and partnerships that the rights of LGBT and intersex young people will be recognised, including their rights to education, non-discrimination, and health.

This report calls for scaled-up action to:

- 1. Analyse the situation:** The data gaps found in this report need to be urgently addressed. Studies are needed to better understand the nature, scope and impact of bullying, violence and discrimination in schools, including forms driven by homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, intersex prejudice, heteronormativity and intolerance. Adaptation of existing instruments including school case reports and periodic surveys could be cost-effective, while online surveys and school-based research can provide a snapshot of current issues and school practice. Assessments should be part of regular school evaluations and surveys, and data used to inform interventions.

- 2. Develop an inclusive policy framework:** Education authorities should mandate protection from violence, bullying and discrimination in schools including clear references to harassment and violence directed at learners and staff because of their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or intersex traits or status. National and federal policy and regulatory measures as well as school-level policies (e.g. codes of conduct) should be effectively communicated and reinforced. Other policies to remove barriers to education, including affirmative action, gender-neutral uniform options, and the establishment of gender-neutral toilets and sleeping quarters for school camps/excursions should be encouraged. More research is needed on the implementation and impact of school policy in the region.
- 3. Mainstream diversity and inclusion in curricula and learning materials:** Inaccurate and stigmatising images and text against LGBTI persons in existing curriculum and textbooks should be removed as a priority. Evidence-based age-appropriate educational content challenging prejudice and intolerance and embracing sexual, gender and sex diversity should be promoted. In particular, recognition of diversity in sex, sexuality and genders should be included in sexuality education and related curriculum, and encourage learners to question gender stereotypes and assumptions about sexuality. Students should learn early (e.g. early childhood and primary education) that discrimination and prejudice in any form is unacceptable, and be equipped with skills to interact in positive and prosocial ways.
- 4. Support teachers to deliver inclusive education and effective responses to bullying, violence and discrimination:** Teachers should be supported by school authorities and senior leadership to foster respectful relationships and inclusive practices. This includes through pre- and in-service training programmes and/or access to information to understand issues facing LGBTI students and strategies to support all learners. Teachers and other school staff must model inclusive language and behaviour, and address any prejudices, stereotypes and derogatory language that may arise during the teaching practice. Teachers also need guidance and skills on what to do if they witness, suspect or are informed about incidents of social stigmatisation and SOGIE-based bullying.
- 5. Promote safe and inclusive school cultures and environments:** School leaders, including principals, teachers and management, must foster a culture of diversity, inclusion and respect. Students should be able to express an appearance that corresponds to the gender with which they identify, and have their preferences for name and gender pronouns respected. Processes should be established to safeguard the privacy of students who transition while in school, and the confidentiality of students' intersex status, if preferred. Leadership, extracurricular sports and other activities must be available to all members of the school community, and peer support networks and alliances encouraged. School "hot spots" for bullying should be identified and monitored, and particular attention made to ensure all students have access to safe toilets and bathroom facilities. Links to counselling, health, or other support services should be made available in ways that respect students' right to privacy and confidentiality. Opportunities to engage parents and caregivers in creating inclusive school cultures and environments should be created.
- 6. Build a stronger evidence base:** More robust evaluations of interventions are needed to inform and scale up good practice in the region. Education sectors should develop a better understanding of factors that contribute to more inclusive school communities and the benefits that are achieved by doing so at the individual, system and societal levels.

“Everyone has the right to education... Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the... maintenance of peace.”

**The Universal Declaration
of Human Rights¹**

1.0 Overview

Why was this report developed?

The right to education is a basic human right, recognised in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and enshrined in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international treaties and commitments.¹⁻⁴ Governments throughout the Asia-Pacific region have, by and large, signed onto these commitments, which support the right of children and young people to access quality education in safe and secure learning environments.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are also guided by the overarching principle that development efforts must leave no one behind.⁵ The fourth goal is to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education” including by 2030, that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills to promote human rights, gender equality and peace and non-violence and for education facilities to be built and upgraded to be gender-sensitive and provide non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all.

There is evidence, however, that schools and other educational institutions are not always safe spaces in the region and around the world.⁶⁻⁹ For children and young people who do not fit into the dominant cultures in a society or who are perceived to be ‘different’, school can not only feel unsafe but attending school can be a marginalising and alienating experience.

Some learners face not only discrimination, bullying and violence from their peers or from adults, but also institutional discrimination through non-inclusive school cultures, facilities, rules and regulations, and invisibility or marginalisation in the curriculum. This is true for many sexually and gender diverse learners, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) youth. The severity of this experience can be compounded by other intersecting factors such as ethnicity, class, and age, and the simultaneous intersection of these and other characteristics.¹⁰⁻¹⁴ Intersectionality is specific to each context; however, in many settings this intersection creates disadvantages and vulnerability to violence for LGBTI youth.

This review recognises the complexity in terminology globally, and within the region, on sex, sexuality and gender. For simplicity, ‘SOGIE-based bullying, violence and discrimination’ is used to refer to the various manifestations of violence and exclusion based on gender discrimination, gender role expectations and stereotypes, intersex prejudice, and societal expectations for heterosexual relationships. This is sometimes referred to as homophobic or transphobic bullying, violence and discrimination.

This report considers violence experienced by children and young people because of actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity or expression, or because their bodies differ from typical definitions of male or female. The term ‘LGBTI people/youth’ is used in this report when inclusive of intersex persons, and LGBT when the situation or needs of intersex people/youth have not been considered. Local terms and those from original studies are also included, and the glossary provides information for readers on concepts and terms in this report.

In 2003, the Committee on the Rights of the Child specifically clarified that States are obliged to protect adolescents from discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation:

“States Parties have the obligation to ensure that all human beings below eighteen enjoy all the rights set forth in the Convention without discrimination...These grounds also cover adolescent’s sexual orientation...[All] adolescents subject to discrimination are made more vulnerable to abuse, other types of violence and exploitation... Therefore they are entitled to special attention and protection from all segments of society.”¹⁵

The Committee on the Rights of the Child has, in treaty monitoring processes, also expressed concern about discrimination against LGBTI youth in Asia-Pacific schools.¹⁶ Other human rights bodies including the Committee on Torture and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights have also called for attention to intersex persons, with the latter explicitly mentioning that *“persons who are transgender, transsexual or intersex often face serious human rights violations, such as harassment in schools or in the workplace.”*¹⁷

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has also recognised SOGIE-based discrimination and violence in education to be *“of particular concern,”* and made recommendations to States to address it.^{18,19} In September 2014, the Human Rights Council adopted a groundbreaking resolution condemning all forms of violence against people based on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and called on the Commissioner to again review the evidence and good practice.²⁰ The May 2015 report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights recommends that States take action to end discrimination and violence against LGBTI persons, including by *“establishing national standards on non-discrimination in education, developing anti-bullying programmes and establishing helplines and other services to support LGBT and gender non-conforming youth, and providing comprehensive, age-appropriate sexuality education”*.²¹

Recently, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights convened a meeting to specifically address the human situation of intersex persons, during which he drew attention to the life-long discrimination that intersex persons face in many areas including education.²² A subsequent fact sheet on intersex people published by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) calls for action to prohibit discrimination in educational institutions including training for education officials to respect and provide equal treatment to intersex persons.²³

Within the UN system, UNESCO has been examining SOGIE-based bullying, violence and discrimination in education globally since 2011.²⁴ This report aims to clarify the situation, the response, and the need for further action in the Asia-Pacific region to ensure inclusive school environments for all learners. Specifically, it aims to:

- Build understanding of manifestations, scale and impact of individual and institutional SOGIE-based discrimination and violence in Asia-Pacific educational institutions and identify evidence gaps;
- Document how governments, the education sector, and other partners, are addressing the issue and emerging good practice; and
- Provide recommendations on how to assess and scale up the education sector response in the Asia-Pacific region.

Who is this report for?

The primary audience for this report is education policy-makers and other stakeholders responsible for child protection and human rights protections in Asia-Pacific. This includes, most importantly, ministries of education, but also ministries responsible for child welfare and development, health, and youth, as well as national human rights institutions. This includes both those working at the central level, as well as those at sub-national levels.

Other secondary audiences for this report include:

- **Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)** currently implementing school-based programmes or lobbying government institutions for policy or programme reform or scale-up.
- **School administrators, teachers and counsellors** interested in preventing bullying and violence and promoting acceptance of sexual and gender diversity in their educational institutions.
- **Learners, parents and communities** advocating for safe and inclusive school environments, or leading awareness-raising campaigns on bullying, diversity or related issues.
- **University lecturers and professors** supporting coursework on gender, sexuality and human rights as well as those preparing teachers for service.
- **Media professionals** concerned about discrimination and intolerance in education.
- **Development partners** supporting education, human rights, gender equality and gender-based violence interventions and programmes.

How was this developed and what are its limitations?

This review was primarily desk-based, drawing on published and unpublished reports, peer-reviewed literature and media reports from nearly 40 countries in the Asia-Pacific region.²⁵ It also draws on information from individuals from NGOs and governments in many countries, including stakeholders participating in the February 2015 Regional Dialogue on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) Rights and Health in the Asia-Pacific hosted by UNDP.²⁶

A draft of this report was distributed prior to the Asia-Pacific Consultation on School Bullying based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity/Expression²⁷ in Bangkok, Thailand in June 2015. The consultation, organized by UNESCO and UNDP regional offices, had over 100 participants including delegations from 13 countries in the Asia-Pacific region and provided a platform for participants' feedback, and for the sharing of additional data and programme experience.

Photo: ICS Viet Nam



A peer review process also elicited input on particular thematic issues and from a broader range of countries. This included input from more than 50 academic, government and civil society stakeholders.

There are several limitations to this report. First, while every effort was made to gain information from all countries, some data may have been missed including reports, policies or news articles published in local languages. Second, there may be data or programme evaluations that were not available in the public domain that are critical to advancing our understanding of the situation and the response. Third, it is impossible from this report to say much about coverage, and the evaluation data are insufficient to make broad recommendations through the region. In particular, information on the situation facing intersex youth is sparse. Finally, there may be efforts to address these issues through broader school programmes on citizenship, health or gender that were not included. As such, UNESCO sees this as a living document that can be updated as further information and programme experience become available.

What does the report contain and how can it be used?

This report considers what is known about discrimination and violence against LGBT, intersex and gender non-conforming youth in Asia-Pacific educational institutions and what is being done to address it. This includes the broader societal and historical understandings of diversity of sex, gender and sexuality in the region, and how this impacts on schools as a microcosm of society. The main focus of this review is the formal educational system of primary and secondary schools and to a lesser extent tertiary institutions including colleges, universities or other settings of higher education.

Depending on your needs and interests the report can help you:

- **Learn** about the situation of LGBTI youth in schools of Asia-Pacific and evidence gaps.
- **Analyse** what is happening in your own context and whether there is an adequate education sector response.
- **Advocate** for inclusive school environments that respect and value diversity in all of its forms.
- **Act** to improve policy and programmes so that all learners can achieve their right to education.

2.0 Understanding the context

The Asia-Pacific region covers over 40 countries and more than half of the world's population. There is an incredible range of cultures, religions and languages. The prevailing attitudes towards LGBTI people also vary greatly, as do the legal and policy frameworks to protect them. Because the attitudes and behaviours prevalent in a school often reflect the outlook, beliefs, ideology and culture held by a society, this section explores this context in further detail.

2.1 Historical context

References to LGBTI people in the region appear in historical texts dating back thousands of years. In particular, in many parts of Asia, transgender people historically held special roles in society as spiritual mediums, healers or performers. In Southeast Asia, there are historical reports in both **Myanmar** and the **Philippines** of shamans,²⁸ generally men with feminine behaviour and/or dress, who were accepted and even revered in society, and performed at celebrations and ceremonies.^{29,30} In **Thailand**, transgender women enjoyed social status as healers or spirit mediums,^{31,32} and a recent renaissance of this social role is reported in northern Thailand.³³ In **Indonesia**, there are legends of deities with both masculine and feminine characteristics; historical reports of diverse gender expressions in some ethnic groups, particularly for spiritual leaders and shamans; and male same-sex relationships in some rituals, initiations and performing arts.³⁴ The *Bugis* people of Sulawesi, for example, recognise five gender categories: male, female, female-born or male-born individuals who identify as neither woman nor man, and shamans who embody both female and male elements.³⁵ The *hijra*³⁶ populations of countries in South Asia also have historically had a revered place in celebrations and ceremonies and "third gender" people are considered in some Hindu texts as being semi-divine.³⁶⁻³⁹ Representations of sexually and gender diverse gods and goddesses, including androgynous deities, can also be found on many temples and other cultural monuments in **Nepal** and other South Asian countries dating back several centuries.⁴⁰

In the Pacific, gender diverse people also appear, historically, to have been valued members of the community, particularly among the Polynesian communities.^{41,42} Local terms differ (such as *akava'ine* in the **Cook Islands**, *vakasalewalewa* in **Fiji**, *whakawahine* in **New Zealand**, *akafifine* in **Niue**, *palopa* in **Papua New Guinea (PNG)**, *fa'afafine* in **Samoa**, *fakaleiti* in **Tonga** and *pinapina'aine* in **Tuvalu**). Many suggest that these communities, typically assigned male at birth but taking on traditionally female roles, were valued for their ability to carry out tasks of both genders and may have had greater freedom than women and girls in their social networks and behaviours.⁴³⁻⁴⁶



"They've always been part of the family, part of the village, and part of the tribe"

Description of *Akava'ine* in the Cook Islands⁴³

In **Australia**, the aboriginal population historically operated under a complex variety of codes and laws. In many tribes, homosexual acts were completely forbidden but among some tribes, unmarried men entered into sexual relationships with other young men with the understanding that the relationships would end once they married. In other tribes certain individuals were referred to as "Two-One" people and were believed to possess male and female spirits in one body and permitted to engage in same-sex relationships.⁴⁷ These individuals are known as Sistergirls (assigned male at birth but living partly or fully as women) and Brotherboys (assigned female at birth but living partly or fully as men) in some communities or *yimpininni* in the Tiwi Islands.^{35, 48}

In East Asia, there have been historical periods and places of tolerance towards same-sex sexual relationships, particularly between men. In **China**, same-sex relationships were at one time reportedly fashionable amongst the higher social classes, with even a few references to same-sex marriage.⁴⁹⁻⁵¹ They were also believed to have been common among samurai and Buddhist monks in both **Japan** and **Tibet**, **China**.⁵²⁻⁵⁵ In the **Republic of Korea**, there are a number of historical references to diversity in gender expression, including male shamans who would take on women's roles.⁵⁶ Other historical references suggest that sexual relationships between adolescent males and older males may be acceptable in other contexts historically, despite being understood now as more likely sexual exploitation and abuse.⁵⁷

Historical texts refer to considerable sexual fluidity and permeability in gender roles in Southeast Asia, including **Indonesia**, **Malaysia**, **Myanmar** and the **Philippines**; however, this review found little information in historical texts on women's expressions of sexual and gender diversity.⁵⁸⁻⁶³ And while some traditional Buddhist texts include reference to four genders and males with variations in genital and other physical characteristics, apart from these references and the **Indonesian** deities referred to above, no other examples were found on intersex persons.^{31,32,34}

Photo: Warren Field



Some suggest that colonisation brought considerable change in cultural norms and attitudes regarding sexual and gender diversity in many parts of the region.^{29,54,64,65} This period also significantly influenced the legal environment, with many of the present laws relating to same-sex relations being a legacy of this time (see next section).^{66,67}

Many researchers also indicate the corresponding, often negative, influence of religion that was introduced during this period. In the Pacific, it is believed that some forms of Christianity introduced were hostile toward LGBTI people, often removing them from a traditional place of acceptance and respect to one of stigma and shame.³⁵ In **Japan**, the influence of Christian missionaries and other political and social reforms in the late 19th Century were also reported to contribute to prejudice of these communities during that time.⁶⁸ Similar changes have also been reported in **India** and the **Philippines**.^{65,69}

Finally, a more recent development commonly cited as having influenced public opinion is the onset of the HIV epidemic in the 1980s. As the initial cases clustered among gay men, what is now known as AIDS was initially called the 'gay plague' or 'gay-related immune disorder'.⁷⁰ The complex relationship between HIV and homosexuality over the last 30 years has contributed to misinformation, stigma, discrimination and violence, even in countries where most infections are not related to unprotected sex between men.^{56,69,71}

There is a growing body of research showing that the increased burden of disease is not explained by higher risk sexual practices, but by structural factors such as homophobia and transphobia, stigma, discrimination, violence and lack of human rights protections, that contribute to reduced access to information and services and increased HIV acquisition in some settings among for men who have sex with men (MSM) and transgender people.⁷²

2.2 Legal context

At least 19 countries in Asia-Pacific have laws that criminalise consensual adult sex between men, and at least seven also have laws that could be applied for sex between women.⁷³ As indicated earlier, most of these countries inherited these laws from the colonial era and one analysis suggests from a single law that British rulers imposed on **India** in 1860.⁷⁴ In **India**, a lengthy campaign to decriminalize homosexuality was reversed by the Supreme Court decision in 2013.

In some countries, customary and religious laws operate alongside formal statutory laws. For example, Muslim personal law or principles of *Sharia* law are applied in Muslim communities at national or provincial levels in at least ten countries.⁶⁷ For example, in **Brunei Darussalam**, the Aceh province of **Indonesia** and some states of **Malaysia**, Muslim personal law or principles of *Sharia* law also exist and prohibit *liwat* (sodomy) and *musahaqah* (sex between women).⁷⁵

Laws against 'cross-dressing', 'impersonation' or 'imitating the opposite sex' may also be invoked against people with non-conforming gender expression in **Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Tonga** and some districts of **Indonesia**.^{66,67,76,77} Prohibitions enforcing gender norms are generally either another legacy of British colonial criminal codes or a reflection of Islamic religious beliefs.³⁵

Some countries have decriminalised consensual, adult same-sex sexual relationships, such as **Australia, China, Fiji, Mongolia, Nepal, New Zealand, Palau, Timor-Leste** and **Vanuatu**.⁷⁵

For transgender people, the right to legal recognition of self-defined gender identity is a basic aspect of self-determination and dignity.^{78,79} Some countries have introduced reforms that, to varying degrees, make it easier for transgender people to obtain legal

recognition of their gender identity. **Bangladesh, Nepal** and **Pakistan** created a legal 'third gender' category,⁸⁰ and new passport policies in **Australia** and **New Zealand** enable individuals to choose male, female or indeterminate (including intersex) gender markers.^{81,82} In **India**, the Supreme Court recently affirmed that *hijra*, or transgender, people were entitled to a third gender status as a means to equal treatment under the law, including legal recognition.⁸³ Similar decisions have been made in **Nepal**; however reports suggest that this has not yet been fully implemented.⁸⁴

Other countries recognise changes in gender, such as **China** including **Hong Kong SAR, Fiji, Indonesia, Japan, Mongolia, Republic of Korea**, and **Singapore**; however, pathologisation and/or gender affirmation surgery is generally required.³¹ The **Taiwan province of China** removed this requirement in 2014. Requiring applicants to undergo diagnosis or other procedures such as forced sterilization, surgery or other medical procedures is not supported by medical professionals, and is a violation of international human rights standards.^{21,79}

Legal recognition of self-defined gender identity for intersex persons is limited in the region. In **Australia** and **New Zealand** transgender and intersex people who are not comfortable being categorised as male or female may opt for another descriptor, such as 'X' on their identification documents, although in Australia this requires a letter from a medical practitioner for the amendment to be made.^{81,85} Changes to gender on official documents are also reportedly possible for intersex children who undergo surgery in other countries, including **Viet Nam**, in which case the parents can select the gender.⁸⁶

The Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Committee on Torture, intersex advocates and groups in **Australia, Hong Kong SAR, Thailand** and others have called for an end to medically unnecessary surgery and treatments on intersex children, which are violations of the human right to bodily autonomy and self-determination.^{21,32,79,87,88} Malta is the only country globally found to prohibit sex assignment surgery or treatment on intersex minors without their informed consent.

Laws should recognise self-defined gender identity with no medical preconditions or exclusions based on age, marital or family status or other grounds. These laws should also include more than the binary sex or gender options for those who identify outside of male and female.⁷⁸

Interviewer: Have you ever regretted getting the surgery?

Respondent: I have, a lot. Regret is something you feel over your own decisions. This, [on the other hand,] is resentment. I can't help but resent my parents...Why didn't they treat [the situation] like it was their own lives and think twice?

PP, intersex person aged 41, Republic of Korea⁸⁹

Legal recognition of LGBT relationships is important to prevent discrimination in a range of areas including financial issues, such as benefits, property and inheritance, parenting, and health care. However, in most states of Asia-Pacific there is no legal recognition of same-sex relationships (see Figure 9). **New Zealand** was the first country in Asia-Pacific to recognise the marriage of two people, regardless of their sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity and to ensure the full rights that come with married status in 2013.⁹⁰

For the majority of countries in the region, revising legal definitions of marriage has proved too controversial resulting in a range of alternative options for legal recognition of relationships. Some states and territories in **Australia** recognise civil unions between same-sex couples, thereby ensuring access to most relationship entitlements.⁹¹ In 2015, **Japan's** Shibuya district reportedly passed an ordinance allowing for 'partnership certificates' for same-sex couples,⁹² with several local governments announcing their intention to follow this decision.⁹³ This is not recognised, however, in Japan's Constitution and therefore by the Japanese government overall.⁹⁴ In **Thailand**, the Civil Partnership Registration Bill is currently under review, and – if enacted – extends some rights; however the text under review at the time of publication increases the minimum legal age of marriage from 17 to 20 for same-sex couples and precludes adoption rights.⁹⁵ In **Cambodia**, while same-sex marriages are not officially recognised, they are also not legally prohibited, and

there are reports of same-sex couples registering as 'husband' and 'wife' with resulting legal protections.⁹⁶ Government statements supporting same-sex relationships has also raised speculation that formal recognition may be forthcoming in **Cambodia**,⁹⁷ **Thailand** and **Viet Nam**.⁹⁸

Fiji was the first country in the region to include protection from SOGIE-based discrimination in its national constitution and recently **Nepal's** new constitution has also included protection for 'sexual and gender minorities' from discrimination by the state or judiciary.^{99,100}

Laws and policies that protect LGBTI people from discrimination and abuse exist in **Australia**, **Hong Kong SAR**, **New Zealand** and **Thailand**. **Pakistan** provides protection on the basis of gender identity, but not on sexual orientation as same-sex relations are illegal.^{66,67,74} The **India** Supreme Court decision, cited above, also directed the Government to take affirmative action in education and government employment, and enhance access to social welfare schemes for transgender persons.⁸³ **Thailand's** Gender Equality Act prevents discrimination on the basis of gender and is inclusive of LGBT people.¹⁰¹

Some states in the region have legislation prohibits discrimination against on the basis of sexual orientation in employment, as is the case in the **Cook Islands**, the **Taiwan province of China** and in some local government units of the **Philippines**.^{35,66,75}

Australia is the only country in Asia-Pacific that expressly prohibits discrimination against intersex persons.^{21,102}

Finally, in the international sphere, some Asia-Pacific countries have also expressed or denied support for resolutions regarding equality regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity in the UN General Assembly or at the UN Human Rights Council. Eighteen (18) of the 96 UN Member States supporting UN resolutions on this issue are in Asia-Pacific, namely: **Australia**, **Federated States of Micronesia**, **Fiji**, **Japan**, **Marshall Islands**, **Mongolia**, **Nauru**, **Nepal**, **New Zealand**, **Palau**, **Philippines**, **Republic of Korea**, **Samoa**, **Thailand**, **Timor-Leste**, **Tuvalu**, **Vanuatu** and **Viet Nam**. Those opposing include: **Afghanistan**, **Bangladesh**, **Brunei Darussalam**, **Democratic People's Republic of Korea**, **Indonesia**, **Malaysia**, **Maldives**, **Pakistan** and the **Solomon Islands**. **China** and **India** have abstained in previous votes.¹⁰³ **Brunei Darussalam** and **Malaysia** have also been unsupportive of integrating LGBTI issues into regional frameworks, including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Intergovernmental Commission of Human Rights' recent ASEAN Human Rights Declaration.³⁵

2.3 Religious and cultural context

In many cultures in the region the concepts of social order, family honour, and sexual purity provide a longstanding foundation for what is considered to be acceptable behaviour. Cultural taboos often restrict discussion of sexuality and there are societal expectations of heterosexual marriage, and the importance of having children to ensure care of elders and the family lineage. This is documented in many Confucian cultures, including **China**, **Japan**, **the Republic of Korea** and **Viet Nam** in East Asia as well as in many **South Asian** societies.¹⁰⁴⁻¹⁰⁹ In some societies, tolerance of sexual diversity is believed to exist as long as it is not visible, and men demonstrate masculinity through heterosexual marriage and fathering children.^{49,57,64,84,110,111} Marriages of convenience to alleviate societal and family pressure are also reportedly not uncommon in **Indonesia** and **Mongolia**.^{34,112} In some instances gay men and lesbians undergo 'cooperation marriages,' as reported in **China**.⁴⁹ Oppressive family dynamics to remain gender-normative push some transgender youth to the streets to avoid violence, shame and anguish, as documented in **Myanmar**.¹¹³

In the region, and globally, personal religious beliefs and affiliation are typically seen as powerful predictors of attitudes about sex, sexuality and gender diversity. However, cross-national differences in cultural orientations suggest that the role religion has in explaining public opinion may depend on a nation's cultural context.¹¹⁴ For example, in a recent public opinion survey, 73% of persons in the **Philippines** said 'homosexuality' should be accepted in society, despite also ranking as a highly religious setting.¹¹⁵

There is significant religious diversity in the Asia-Pacific region. In a recent study, Hindus were the largest religious group in the Asia-Pacific, comprising around 25% of the total population, followed by Muslims (24%), and people unaffiliated with any religion (21%).¹¹⁶ There is also significant diversity within countries, and particularly in **China**, including **Taiwan province** and **Hong Kong SAR**, **Republic of Korea**, **Singapore** and **Viet Nam**.

The predominant religions vary greatly in their attitude towards sexual and gender diversity, although even within a faith the approach is often not uniform and can change based on interpretations of religious texts or between religious leaders. In some countries, a resurgence of conservative interpretation of religion has been associated recently with a rise in violence and intolerance of LGBTI people.^{35,117,118} Homophobic sentiments are believed to be especially high in countries that are more religious and/or theocratic, with correlation also found between homophobia and gender inequality.^{119,120}



Photo: Sirisak Chaiyasook

Gender and sexually diverse people take on special roles during some Hindu ceremonies, and people of diverse gender and sexual identities are acknowledged in many Hindu and Buddhist texts, as indicated earlier.¹²¹⁻¹²³ Some texts suggest that Buddhism, while regarded as mostly tolerant towards sexual and gender diversity, interprets 'homosexuality' as a result of bad karma – LGBT people are believed to have committed sins in past lives, and therefore are regarded as deserving stigmatisation and discrimination imposed upon them.³²⁴

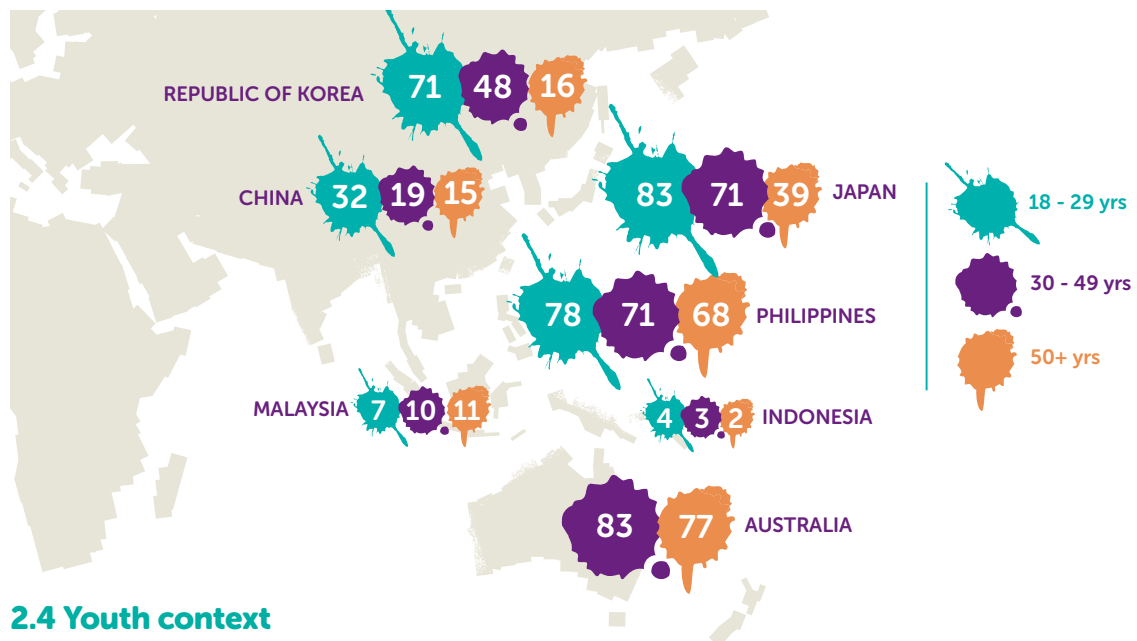
Islamic sects vary in their interpretation of sexual and gender diversity. In certain areas of the region, sexual and gender diverse people take roles during ceremonies,^{58,124,125} while more conservative Muslim states ban 'imitating the opposite sex' under *Sharia* law.^{66,76} While some minor doctrines such as Zahirism or Rafida affirm that 'homosexuals' should not be punished, the majority of the Islamic sects in the region are generally opposed to sexual and gender diversity.^{34,57,65,67,126} This is particularly so for those more conservative Muslim states applying *Sharia* law which condemns same-sex sexual acts, particularly between men, with punishments including imprisonment, lashing and even death.^{65,67,127} There are limited examples in Asia-Pacific of progressive clerics and Islamic organisations offering greater acceptance for people of diverse sexual and gender identities. In **Indonesia**, some scholars propose a humanist interpretation of Islam inclusive of LGBT people, students and faculty at some Islamic studies universities are exploring diverse genders and sexualities in the course of their studies.^{34,35}

Although only seven percent (7%) of the population in the region are Christian,¹¹⁸ Christianity remains influential in the region, particularly in forms of Christian values and penal codes introduced to the region by missionaries during the colonial periods. Historical texts suggest that Christian missionaries were opposed to the sexual and gender diversity in many cultures of the region, and the influence of Christianity in the colonial periods has already been discussed. This opposition is still in place in some settings as demonstrated by the active campaigning against LGBTI rights by evangelical Catholic groups in **Hong Kong SAR, Republic of Korea and Singapore**.^{35,128,129,130}

In other countries, recent discourse and practice has been more embracing of sexual diversity,¹³¹ and may be further influenced by statements by the Catholic Pope Francis supporting greater integration of persons with diverse sexualities.¹³² Examples of Christian communities run by, and for, LGBTI people, while not large, exist in **Australia, Hong Kong SAR, New Zealand, the Philippines, and the Republic of Korea**.³⁵

Research among 'same-sex attracted and gender questioning' (SSAGQ) young Christians in **Australia** has found changes across time. In recent years, the religious sub-group had higher expectations of how they should be treated, and reported fewer contradictions between their faith and their sexuality.¹³³ The study calls for further research on the influence of media statements on religious SSAGQ young people. This is an area, generally, that merits further research.

Figure 1. Proportion of people who say that “homosexuality should be accepted, by age (%)”¹¹⁶



2.4 Youth context

The Asia-Pacific region is home to the largest number of young people aged 10-24 globally, and the largest cohort of young people in the history of the world.¹³⁴ This stage in human development, here and elsewhere, is characterised by significant biological, physical and psychosocial changes that accompany the complex social passage from childhood to adulthood.¹³⁵

Adolescence is also a period when gender roles and gender norms become more established, with important implications on behaviours, opportunities, and relationships.¹³⁶ This is certainly true in Asia-Pacific, where social norms and traditions impact adolescents in gendered ways and can include reduced mobility and access to education for older girls, child marriage and early childbearing in some settings.¹³⁷ Young people's decision-making power and agency is restricted in many settings, and the role of parents, husbands, mothers-in-law in decisions related to relationships and sexual health practices is well-documented.^{67,138,139}

Public opinion polls suggest that young people today may think about sexual orientation and gender identity in a way that is different from previous generations. For example, in public opinion surveys about 'homosexuality' conducted in the region, younger respondents are typically more likely than older ones to call for societal acceptance. Age differences are particularly evident in **Japan** and the **Republic of Korea**, where those younger than 30 are more accepting than those aged 30-49 who, in turn, are more accepting than those aged 50 and older (see *Figure 1*).^{118,116}

Recent research has also suggested that expanded access to information and communication technologies, increased mobility, and expanded access to the media, including a growing number of sexual and gender diverse role models in popular media and public life, is likely to also influence acceptance of diversity.¹⁴⁰⁻¹⁴⁴

For some young people in the region, gender is not considered to be binary (male or female), but rather a continuum of possibilities. Social media sites also appear to be recognising this diversity, with Facebook recently being reported to have more than 50 options for gender.¹⁴⁵

These complex understandings of sexual and gender diversity can be seen in **Thailand**, where in a recent study, all of the 574 young people (aged 15-18 years) identified the existence of more than three genders, with the majority indicating between four and seven gender identities.¹⁴⁶ In Thailand, gender and sexuality do not exist as distinct categories, and local terms typically have meanings that combine aspects of both sexual orientation and gender identity or gender expression.^{147,148}

The understanding of attraction, sexuality and identity can be very sophisticated and complex in some countries.¹⁴⁹ For example, in **Australia**, a 2014 survey of 189 gender diverse and transgender young people found that 61% of the young people identified with sexual identities that were non-traditional. They were most likely to identify as queer (27%) followed by pansexual (23%) and were least likely to identify with terms which relied on binary concepts of sex or gender (homosexual 2%, gay 5%, or heterosexual 5%).⁴⁸

This is not to say that all young people in the region subscribe to these concepts of gender and sexual fluidity and expression. As this report shows, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, intersex prejudice, heteronormativity and intolerance characterise peer interactions among many young people in schools of Asia-Pacific. This report explores the manifestations of this, as well as other forms of institutional discrimination among LGBTI youth in the region.

3.0 Violence in schools in Asia-Pacific

Research on violence against children has gained momentum since the publication of the 2006 *United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children*.⁶ However, data remain limited and inconsistent in the region and in other settings, particularly in low- and mid-income countries.^{9,150-152} Some surveys that have been implemented widely in the region with relevant questions include the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), and the Global School-based Student Health Surveys (GSHS). These, and other studies in the region^{153,154} provide important information not only on the prevalence and manifestations of violence, but also on when violence is considered to be normal or acceptable.

The GSHS has been implemented in more than 20 countries in the region,¹⁵⁵ and provides an important measure of physical violence and bullying occurring in schools among adolescents. The GSHS core expanded questionnaire also includes questions on perception of safety at school and physical violence by teachers. It does not collect data on sexuality or gender identity (beyond asking students to select male or female), nor does it inquire about other forms of gender-based violence.

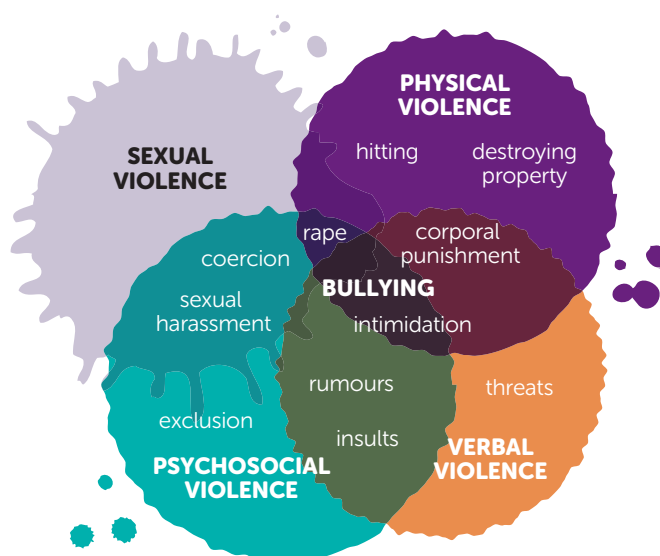
In other cases, such as in **New Zealand**, national research on health and well-being of adolescents has included measures of violence and bullying in schools, and includes discrete analyses for same-sex attracted or questioning young people.¹⁵⁶ In **Australia**, multi-year research among same-sex attracted and gender questioning young people has also been able to generate trends, including on experience of school violence.^{149,239,240} However, as seen below, such data collection is not widespread in the region.

Much of the research on school violence has neglected to explore the role of gender. Most forms of school violence are deeply rooted in unequal gender relations, gendered social norms and discriminatory attitudes and practices.¹⁵⁷⁻¹⁵⁹ Without attention to gender norms and relationships, we are not getting a full picture of its prevalence or impact, let alone the drivers and risk factors in the region. This section provides a picture of what we do know, recognizing that an urgent first step is to improve data to inform country responses.

3.1 What do we know about school-related gender-based violence in Asia-Pacific?

School-related gender based violence (SRGBV) is defined as acts or threats of sexual, physical, psychosocial or verbal violence occurring in and around schools, perpetrated as a result of gender norms and stereotypes and enforced by unequal power dynamics.¹⁵⁸ Different forms overlap and reinforce each other, as shown in *Figure 2*.

Figure 2. Forms of violence



A recent review has attempted to pull together the evidence base on SRGBV in Asia and the Pacific.⁷ It finds that the research is highly fragmented, the methodologies and approaches highly variable, and the quality uneven. Social taboos make researching the issue of sexual violence and abuse, coercion and harassment difficult in many settings. As such, these forms of SRGBV are not well-known or understood, and are likely to be under-reported. Differing methodologies, definitions and approaches make cross-country comparisons problematic.

Recent attempts to collect cross-country SRGBV data in the region include a 5-country (**Cambodia, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan and Viet Nam**, in select cities) study by Plan International and the International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW).¹⁶⁰ In this study, girls and boys were both targets and perpetrators of SRGBV, but the forms and prevalence differed. In all of the study sites, a higher proportion of boys reported facing physical violence in school than girls. This is confirmed in other studies in the region, and globally.⁹ The study also found evidence of gender stereotyping in schools, and inequitable gender attitudes among students to be a driver of SRGBV. Research findings point to the need for focusing on gender equality in education and the need for a holistic and multi-level approach addressing barriers at the individual, community, school and policy levels.

One of the most widely documented types of SRGBV in schools in the Asia-Pacific region is bullying. Students are bullied when they are repeatedly exposed to aggressive behaviour from their peers that intentionally inflicts injury or discomfort.¹⁶¹⁻¹⁶³ Bullying involves an imbalance of power and can include teasing, taunting, use of hurtful nicknames, physical violence and social exclusion. While there are different definitions used for bullying, three distinct elements are key:^{164, 165}

- **Bullying** is deliberately harmful or aggressive behaviour
- **Bullying** is a behaviour that is repeated over time, and
- **Bullying** involves a power imbalance between those who bully and those being bullied.

It is widely accepted that there are different types of bullying. These fall into four main groups:

- **verbal bullying**, including repeated mocking, name-calling and unwanted teasing
- **physical bullying**, including repeated hitting or kicking, taking or threatening to take possessions
- **social or relational bullying**, including repeated exclusion, spreading rumours or gossiping, withholding friendship
- **cyberbullying**, including repeated threats, criticism or unkind comments or images sent by text, email or posted on social networking sites.

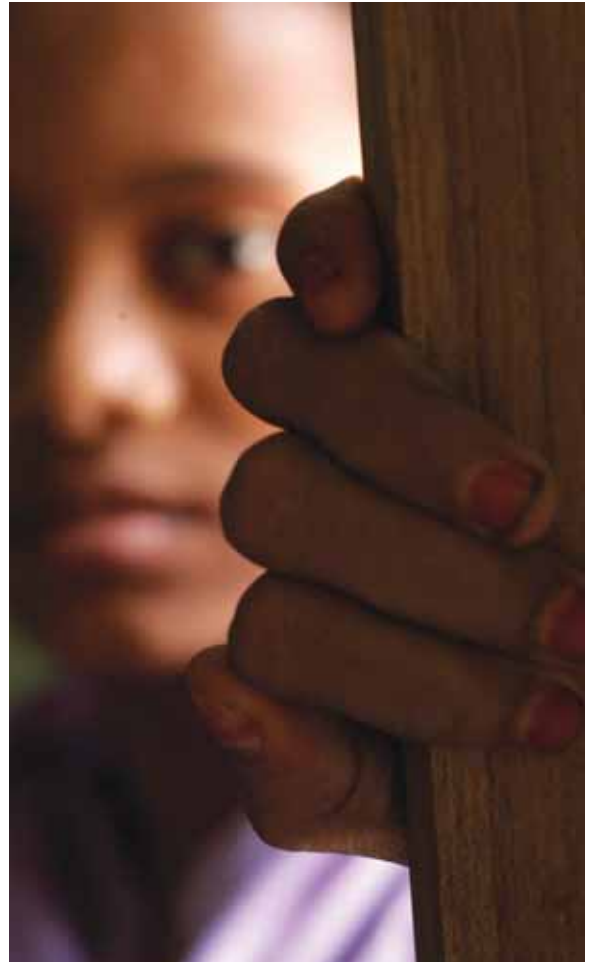
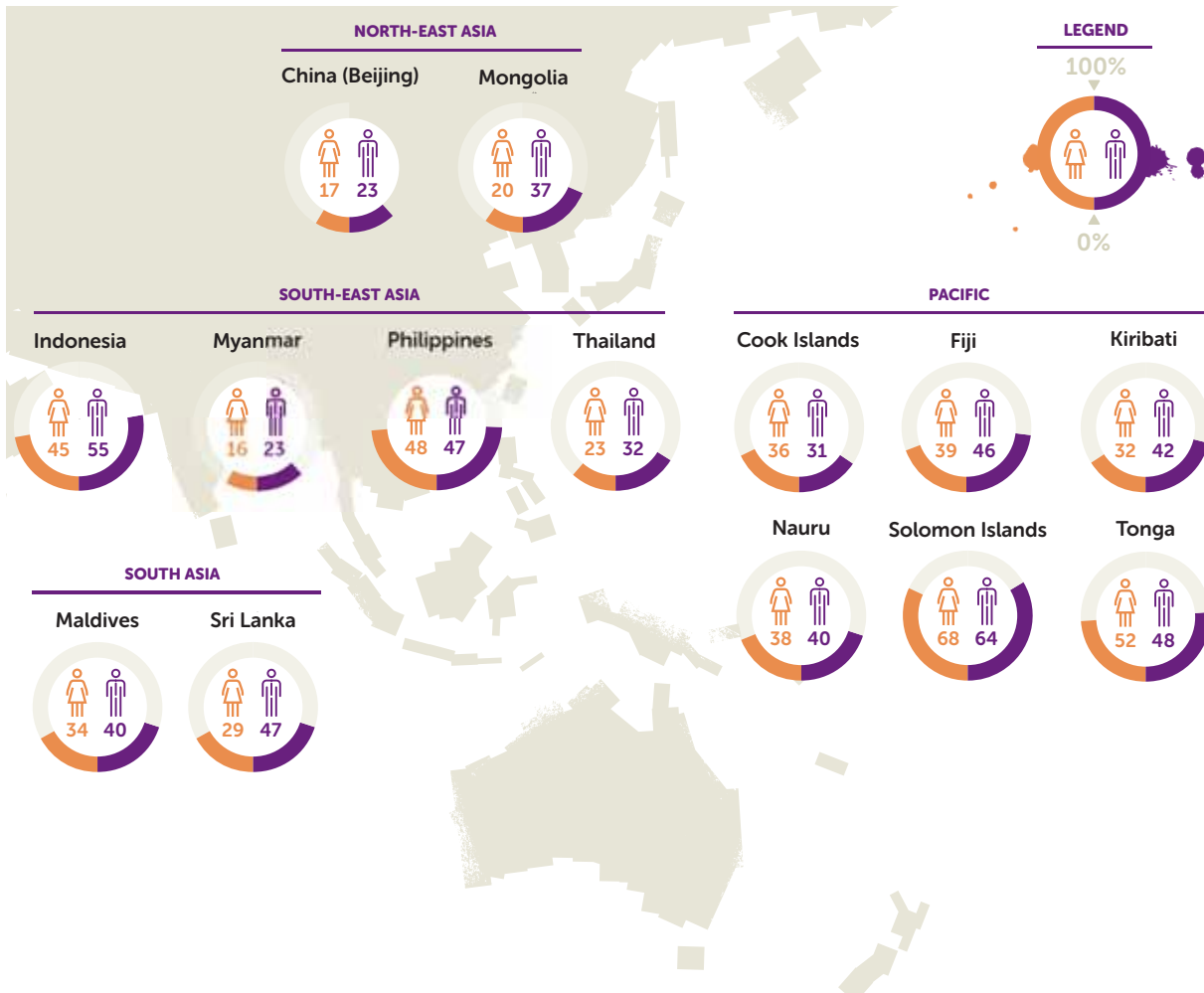


Photo: UNESCO

Estimates of bullying and bullying victimization rates vary depending on the measurements used.^{166,167} The GSHS enables cross-country comparison of bullying using a standard definition.¹⁶⁸ As seen in Figure 3, and as is typical of research from other settings,^{169,170} bullying appears to be a relatively common phenomenon in many countries, and boys are more likely to report being bullied. Some research suggests that boys may also be more likely to bully others than girls, in particular through physical forms of violence.¹⁷¹⁻¹⁷³

Figure 3. Bullying in schools in Asia-Pacific (%) ¹⁷⁴



Bullying may occur on the playground, in toilets, changing rooms, and classrooms, or on the way to and from schools. It may also extend to virtual spaces through cyberbullying, which is of increasing concern given widespread access by youth to the Internet and in particular to mobile phones in Asia.¹⁷⁵ In a recent worldwide study on cyberbullying with 7,644 youth aged eight to 17 years in 25 countries (representing approximately 300 respondents per country), cyberbullying was widely reported by students. Of the 25 countries surveyed, the three countries in which participants reported the highest rates of online bullying were in Asia: **China** (70%), **Singapore** (58%), and **India** (53%). Other Asian countries in the study reported lower levels, as follows: **Malaysia** (33%), **Japan** (17%) and **Pakistan** (26%).¹⁷⁶ **China** and **Singapore** were also the only countries to report a higher rate of online compared to face-to-face, offline, victimization. This was confirmed again in a separate study in mainland

China in 2013.¹⁷⁷ Sexual cyberbullying, which can also include the distribution of sexually suggestive or explicit photos, videos or other images, is also of concern in the region and globally.¹⁷⁸

There is increasing evidence indicating that online and offline harassment are closely interlinked. This means that perpetrating online harassment is often associated with perpetrating offline violence, and being a victim online is likewise associated with being a victim offline. While research is limited in Asia-Pacific, this has been confirmed in studies in **Australia**¹⁷⁹ and **Thailand**.¹⁸⁰ This suggests that violence and bullying prevention programmes should tackle both as interconnected problems.

Photo: UNESCO



3.2 What do we know about SOGIE-based bullying, violence and discrimination in Asia-Pacific schools?

Bullying research has traditionally ignored how the intersections of power, heteronormativity, gender hierarchies and peer aggression impact on the experience of discrimination and violence in schools.^{181,182} However, the evidence base is growing in the region on bullying and other violence against LGBT and, to a lesser extent, intersex learners in schools. Analyses of curriculum, policies and school practice are also informing our knowledge of other forms of institutional discrimination in many settings.

Considering the limitations of data on violence against children more broadly, it is perhaps unsurprising that no comprehensive picture can be provided of SOGIE-based bullying, violence and discrimination in Asia-Pacific schools.

The research that is available is generally collected by universities, research institutions and NGOs through targeted studies as opposed to through regular systematic data collection by governments and schools. Very little data are collected in schools themselves, and there are little data on young adolescents (aged 10-14 years) despite recent longitudinal research from other settings that suggests that peer victimisation of lesbian, gay and bisexual youth begins at an early age.¹⁸³

The studies in the region represent a mixture of qualitative and quantitative research, and the age ranges vary, with some surveys collecting information from adult populations for whom the experience occurred years or even decades prior. Many reports present the findings for 'LGBT' populations together in the analysis, although each of these populations has unique challenges and concerns.

Research examining the experience of transgender youth is also more limited in the region, as well as globally. As transgender youth are believed to be particularly likely to experience mistreatment globally with particularly severe impacts,¹⁸⁴⁻¹⁸⁸ it is important that this knowledge gap be urgently addressed.

Additionally, the degree to which intersex young people experience bullying and exclusion in school settings is not well documented globally as well as in the region, and also requires further exploration. Intersex people face the same issues around discrimination and recognition as LGBT people; however, their needs and rights have been almost completely ignored.³⁵ In community consultations in **China**, intersex people were reported to remain the most misunderstood and marginalised sexual and gender minority.⁴⁹ Research underway in **Australia** among intersex people will provide guidance to education and other sectors, and has the potential to inform data collection and responses in other countries (see *Box 1*).

Few countries have undertaken surveys over multiple time frames, making a trend analysis of changes in prevalence or forms of bullying impossible in most settings. The sampling methods used in many countries also make it difficult to generalise results to the broader population. Additionally, as seen in this section, much of the research that has been generated so far has aimed to identify the prevalence or the scope of the problem, without sufficient attention to the causes of drivers of this manifestation of violence in schools.¹⁸⁹

Finally, while there is some research documenting the protective factors or assets that LGBTI learners have in their life that may promote well-being and resilience, this could also be an area of further exploration in the region.^{190,191}

Despite these limitations, the research reveals a number of common themes (see Figures 4-6, and detailed sub-regional analyses):

- The majority of LGBT students report having experienced some form of bullying or violence;
- LGBT report higher rates of peer victimisation than their non-LGBT peers, and victimisation appears to have an even more profound negative impact. This is consistent with research from other regions.¹⁸⁴⁻¹⁹²
- Verbal bullying is the most commonly reported form in many studies. This type of bullying also appears to be widespread globally, and may be linked to other forms of bullying.¹⁹³
- Social bullying such as exclusion also appear to be prevalent; followed by physical bullying and sexual harassment.
- The forms reported are also highly gendered. Young gay, bisexual and gender non-conforming men, and transgender students (both male-to-female and female-to-male) report a higher level of victimization for almost every type of bullying and especially physical bullying. Lesbian and bisexual women reported more social and verbal bullying compared to other forms.
- Transgender students appear to be more commonly targeted for discrimination and bullying; however, this draws on a limited number of studies.
- Some studies suggest that lesbian, bisexual and transgender women and girls may face further normalisation or minimisation of violence due to gender discrimination and the lower status accorded to women and girls in some settings.^{77,105} Sexism and misogyny intersect with homophobia, biphobia and transphobia to make LBT women and girls vulnerable to bullying, harassment and violence in schools, families and communities.^{194,195}
- Institutional level discrimination and exclusion also exists, including lack of representation, or misrepresentation in textbooks and curricula, and an absence of gender-appropriate regulations and facilities.
- While bullying is usually reported to be perpetrated largely by other learners, in some cases teachers or other staff are responsible for verbal and sometimes other forms of violence.
- Discrimination, bullying and violence do not only affect those who self-identify as being same-sex attracted or gender diverse, or who have obvious intersex characteristics. It is the perception of difference which often determines who is likely to be affected.
- There is limited help-seeking, and a perception of insufficient support mechanisms or response systems in many countries.
- The findings document, overall, the toxic impact school bullying, violence and discrimination have on same-sex attracted, gender diverse and intersex learners including impacts on educational participation, performance and completion; physical and mental health; employment and economic prospects; and broader societal level impacts.

Figure 4. Levels of school bullying and violence reported by LGBT learners in studies across Asia-Pacific (%)

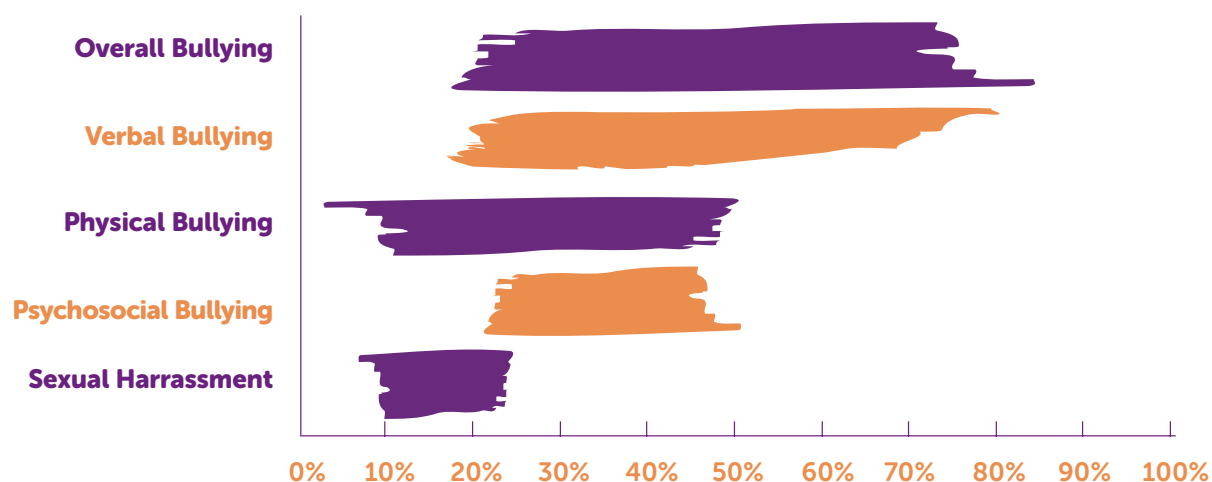


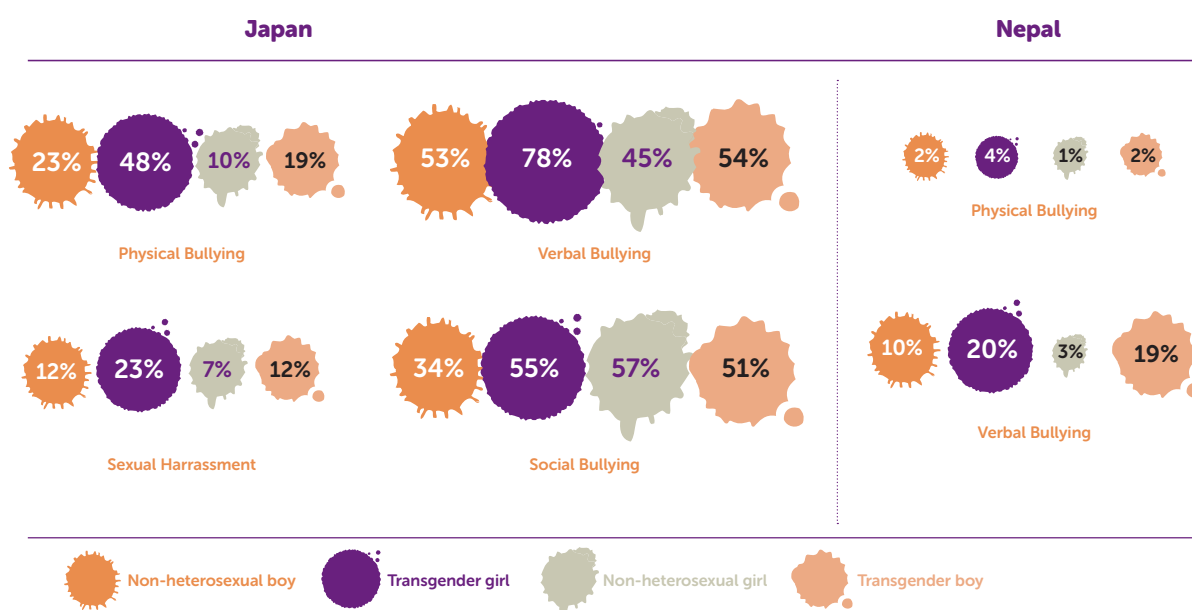
Figure 5. Levels of school bullying and violence reported by LGBT learners, in select countries (%)

	Australia	China	Hong Kong SAR	Japan	Rep. of Korea	Thailand	Viet Nam
Overall Bullying	69%	77%		68%	80%	56%	46%
Verbal Bullying	61%	44%	42%	53%	29%	29%	70%
Physical Bullying	18%	10%	14%	20%	5%	31%	19%
Psychosocial Bullying	39%	21%	40%	49%	31%	36%	18%
Sexual Harrassment		8%	14%	11%	7%	24%	18%

Sources: 149, 229, 198, 201, 202, 222, 227, 436

Note: The above graphs are compiled from a variety of data sources with varying survey designs and sample populations, including age ranges. These figures are not designed to be comparative but to provide an indication of the magnitude of the problem and demonstrate that it occurs in many countries in the region. Lack of inclusion of a country does not mean that bullying does not exist there but rather indicates limitations in data availability.

Figure 6. Levels of school bullying by LGBT learners, by population, in select countries (%) ^{201, 218}



Note: The study populations categorized in this graph as transgender were defined differently in the Japan and the Nepal studies. In Japan, the data "boys with gender identity disorder" and "girls with gender identity disorder" have been presented as transgender woman and transgender man, respectively. In the Nepal study, transgender woman and transgender man were defined as "third gender assigned male at birth" and "third gender assigned female at birth", respectively. See Section 3.2 for more information.

The next sections report on evidence that was identified in different sub-regions in more detail:

- East Asia: China, Japan, Mongolia and the Republic of Korea;
- South Asia: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka;
- South East Asia: Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam; and
- Pacific: Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Island

Nations including the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tokelau, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

Each section first presents the evidence on bullying and violence among LGBTI learners and then other evidence on institutional discrimination in school settings.

“I tried to apply for high school... The school said to me that they could not accept me after seeing my gender listed as a woman on the health insurance card because they didn’t have any precedent of having a transgender student and didn’t want any trouble [*sic*] to happen to me.”

Hiroto, a transgender man in Japan¹⁰⁵

3.2.1 East Asia

Data were found for all of the countries of East Asia (China, including mainland China and Hong Kong SAR, Japan, Mongolia and the Republic of Korea). Online surveys were used in all, except Mongolia, to collect data on the experience of bullying and violence, while textbook reviews and policy and curricular interventions were also found in two countries.

A 2009 online survey of ‘homosexual, bisexual and questioning’ youth in secondary schools in Hong Kong SAR provides some of the earliest data in East Asia.¹⁹⁶ Among 392 lesbian, bisexual and gay students, 42% reported verbal bullying and name-calling; 40% reported social isolation; and 13.5% reported physical harm and sexual harassment. Young gay and bisexual men reported higher (in most cases between two and three times) rates of violence than young lesbian and bisexual women. Only 11.5% of respondents reportedly were willing to seek help from teachers. A 2015 qualitative study of secondary students collected additional data on digital forms of bullying, and also found institutional harassment and discrimination in some settings including non-inclusive school cultures, facilities, rules and regulations, and curriculum.¹⁹⁷

Two other online surveys, in 2012 and 2014, provide additional data on mainland China. In the first, of 421 same-sex attracted and gender diverse students, 77% of respondents reported being victim to at least one of type of bullying based on their sexual orientation and gender identity, with verbal abuse reportedly most prevalent.¹⁹⁸ In the second study in 2014, with 751 respondents aged 16-28 (median age 20.7), 41% reported hearing negative comments made about them, 35% were verbally threatened, 22% had felt isolated by their peers, and 6% were physically threatened.¹⁹⁹

In Japan, cultural homogeneity and collectivism are valued in society and there is often pressure on children to conform.^{106, 200} Bullying or *ijime* is reported to occur when a student does not conform to societal norms. In a 2014 online survey of 609 LGBT people aged

“In middle school, I always suffered verbal and physical abuse. They not only called me queer, but also sneered at me, made fun of me and bullied me ceaselessly, and even forced me to undress myself to humiliate me. I tried to endure, but the bullying seemed endless. Some schoolboys asked me to pay a protection fee, saying that if I paid, they would leave me alone; otherwise, they would beat or isolate me. That lasted for half a year”.

19 year old gay male student at a technical college, China¹⁹⁸

10-35, 68% of respondents reported experiencing bullying in elementary, junior high or high school. Of these, 53% were verbally abused, 49% were ignored or excluded from groups, 20% faced physically bullying and 11% suffered sexual abuse.²⁰¹ Most bullies were reportedly classmates, but 12% indicated teachers were responsible. Approximately half (52%) said they did not report the bullying, and 45% of those who did report indicated that the situation didn’t change even after seeking help.

In the Japan study, half (50%) of men diagnosed with ‘gender identity disorder’ responded that they started identifying themselves as female before they graduated from elementary school. The length of abuse was particularly long for these youth; 43% saying they’d been bullied for over five years. More than a third (38%) of the ‘non-heterosexual men’ reported that they had to join their peers in mocking LGBT people in order not to be bullied themselves. Pressure on sexually diverse and gender non-conforming students and teachers to dress, talk and behave in a way that is consistent with their sex assigned at birth has been confirmed in other qualitative studies.¹⁰⁵

“[When I was in school] it was common for school children to be called, ‘Hey, girl. Hey gay.’ It is nothing unless they caught me and punched in my stomach [sic]. When a teacher says, ‘So girly, my classmates laughed. I wondered whether the teacher knew she caused embarrassment to me and caused an uncomfortable situation for me in class. I missed classes because of these insults by others. There were many cases of other gay boys who left school.”

Anonymous gay man, Mongolia²⁰⁴

Gender identity disorder is a diagnosis used in Japan and some other countries although gender dysphoria is now more commonly used, for people who identify with a gender different from their sex assigned at birth (see *Glossary*). Persons with this diagnosis can have their gender marker changed on official documents; those who do not may be vulnerable to discrimination and exclusion in education.¹⁰⁵ The need for such a diagnosis has been criticised by human rights bodies, transgender advocacy organizations and the medical community.⁷⁹

In the **Republic of Korea** bullying or *wang-ta* also takes the form of peer rejection due to non-conformity and is reported to be often ignored by teachers. According to a 2012 online survey of 255 ‘sexual minority’ students, 54% respondents experienced ‘serious or very serious’ discrimination in school based on their sexual orientation or gender identity/expression, and only 4% reported never experiencing discrimination or bullying. Eighty-four percent (84%) indicated they had experienced discrimination from fellow students, and 41% from teachers. Degrading language and bias from fellow students were the most common forms of bullying (80%), followed by social exclusion (31%), and verbal aggression and threatening behaviour (29%).

A third of respondents reported ‘being outed’ that is having had their sexual orientation or gender identity disclosed without consent by their peers and teachers. Of those who experienced discrimination from teachers, approximately half (52%) indicated that this included degrading language. Almost two-thirds of respondents (63%) reported that their schools did not provide appropriate counselling services for ‘sexual minority’ students. Of those students who attended schools with counselling facilities (37%), 86% said they would not seek help from the counsellor.²⁰² In another study among LGBT and intersex people, “*creation of educational programmes providing correct information on LGBTI people*” was considered to be one of the most important policy issues by 39% of respondents, ranking third after anti-discrimination legislation and recognition of same-sex marriage.²⁰³

Less information is available for **Mongolia**, but in a 2013 survey a quarter of LGBT respondents indicated they had experienced discrimination in school and 6.7% said they had been physically assaulted because of their perceived sexual orientation or gender identity.²⁰⁴ As seen in the quote above, some LGBT students report feeling excluded in school by peers or teachers.



Photo: Gay and Lesbian Campus Association of China (GLCAC)

Other efforts have been undertaken in East Asia to address the representation of sexually and gender diverse persons in curriculum and textbooks. This includes a recent review of university textbooks in mainland **China**, which examined more than 100 textbooks in fields such as psychology, medicine, mental health and sex education. Only 20% of all textbooks were found to contain clear, logical and correct content regarding LGBT persons.²⁰⁵ Nearly nine in ten (88%) referred to homosexuality as a mental disorder, including 40% of those published since the removal of homosexuality from China's official list of mental disorders in 2001. Half (50%) recommended conversion therapy for homosexuality. Media reports have cited similar references to conversion therapy in textbooks in **Hong Kong SAR**.²⁰⁶ Conversion therapy has been rejected by mainstream medical and mental health organizations due to lack of evidence of effectiveness, and the serious risk it poses for psychological harm.²⁰⁷⁻²⁰⁹

The findings of the curriculum review in mainland **China** have been taken in up in advocacy efforts by student activists,²¹⁰ while Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) China, the Beijing Gender Health Education Institute, the Beijing LGBT Center and more than a dozen other agencies also jointly signed "An open letter to the educational publishing houses, universities and educators" calling for textbook revision to prevent the spread of discrimination and incorrect information.²⁰⁶ A college student in Guangdong province has also reportedly submitted a lawsuit against the Ministry of Education for stigmatising textbooks.²¹¹ Community mobilization and empowerment, and the engagement of a wide range of stakeholders is required to remove inaccurate and stigmatising content in curriculum.²¹²

"In China... although the government has claimed its strategy on homosexuality as 'not to oppose, not to encourage', it still considers homosexuality as immorality not in conformity with the national policy of 'the socialist construction of spiritual cultivation'. As a result, homosexuality, not to mention the LGBTI issue, is still perceived as a sensitive topic in education. No courses titled LGBTI rights are allowed into the curriculum and no student associations on LGBTI are allowed to register legally in schools..."

Lesbian woman, China²¹³

There have been media reports recently on the issuance of sex education guidelines in the **Republic of Korea** in March 2015 that are feared to further exclude LGBT youth and encourage bullying.²¹⁴ The guidelines reportedly state that "sex education is not intended to be an opportunity for teachers to share their views on sexuality" and "teaching about homosexuality is not permitted."²¹⁵ In addition, pressure from anti-LGBTI groups is believed to have resulted in the modification of middle school and high school textbook content by the Ministry of Education. In 2013, one textbook publisher reportedly removed supportive passages such as "it is not right to treat LGBTI people as people who are immoral, mentally problematic, or likely to cause diseases." Other content was reportedly added, such as "sexual orientation is not inborn" and "sexual minorities can transmit contagious diseases and corrupt sexual culture."²¹⁶

“Going to school was an ordeal. I was treated as if I were an object with no feelings. I did not think education was worth all the taunts, jeers and threats I had to face on a daily basis.”

Khurram, gay man, Rawalpindi, Pakistan²¹⁷

3.2.2 South Asia

Very little data could be identified for South Asia, including several countries (**Afghanistan, Bhutan, Maldives, Pakistan** and **Sri Lanka**) for which no data could be found. However there are a few studies which provide additional data not seen in other sub-regions where LGBT students report being denied access to education, as well as being removed from educational institutions.

The most robust study identified was from **Nepal** (2013) which included 1,178 sexually and gender diverse respondents across 32 of Nepal’s 75 districts. In this study, only 17% of respondents reported verbal harassment and 3% reporting physical harassment at school.²¹⁸ Third gender respondents (both those assigned male as well as those assigned female at birth) in the study were more likely to report having experienced verbal harassment (roughly 20% for both) than gay/bisexual men (10%) or lesbian women (3%). Third gender respondents were more likely to report being denied access to education (6-8%) compared to gay, bisexual and lesbian young people (2-3%) in the study.¹⁷⁸ These relatively low levels may be linked to longstanding advocacy work by the Blue Diamond Society which has had considerable success impacting policy and curriculum in **Nepal** (see *Section 4.3*), as well as what appears to be a generally favourable policy environment.

A recent report from **India** also found that students who do not conform to gender norms were more likely to suffer from violence in educational settings than other ‘sexual minorities’.¹¹⁰ In this study, among 943 respondents aged 18-64, 8% of *hijra* reported having been unfairly removed from education settings, as compared to 3% of MSM. This study found that *hijra* assigned female at birth complained of discrimination and exclusion by classmates, and felt a lack of recognition of their gender by teachers. However, unlike *hijra* assigned male at birth, they reported rarely being removed from educational institutions and

their educational outcomes were significantly better than those of other ‘sexual minorities’. A much earlier (2005) study in **Bangladesh** and **India** found that half of MSM respondents had experienced harassment and violence by teachers and classmates, and that treatment reduced their ability to continue with their education.⁶⁴

Other, smaller studies from the sub-region confirm that school can be a particularly hostile place for transgender youth and that they are more likely to be isolated and abused by both students and staff. *Hijra* students from Bangladesh have reported “teachers abused them, shouting for change in their feminine behaviours”, accusing them of violating school and societal ‘decorum’. For most, the hostile school environment resulted in early termination of education.¹¹¹ Another study of lesbian women in **Bangladesh, India** and **Nepal** sheds light on the interplay between strict gender norms and homophobia, with a Nepali respondent saying “In our society, to be born as a female is almost like a curse, and to be born a lesbian is worse.”²¹⁹

Finally, other recent studies in **India** have begun to examine the assets and resilience strategies employed by ‘lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, queer, intersex and asexual students’ to protect themselves from discrimination and to promote acceptance, as well as the economic costs of discrimination in education and other settings.^{83,220} The latter study is part of global research by the World Bank which finds that the exclusion, harassment and discrimination in education of LGBT people not only has a human cost, but can have an economic cost for governments by eroding social and human capital and limiting employment possibilities. In India, the economic cost of homophobia was estimated to be 0.1-1.7% of India’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP, see also *Section 3.3.4*).¹⁴

“My childhood was all sunk in desperation day after day. Each school day went terribly to me [sic] because I was teased by class and schoolmates. Wherever I was, I suffered finger points, bullying, stone or slippers throwing from them [sic]. They laughed at me by yelling ‘hey pe-de!’”

Transgender young person, Viet Nam²²¹

3.2.3 Southeast Asia

Our review was able to identify relevant studies in **Cambodia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam**. No studies from **Brunei Darussalam, Lao PDR, Myanmar or Singapore** were found.

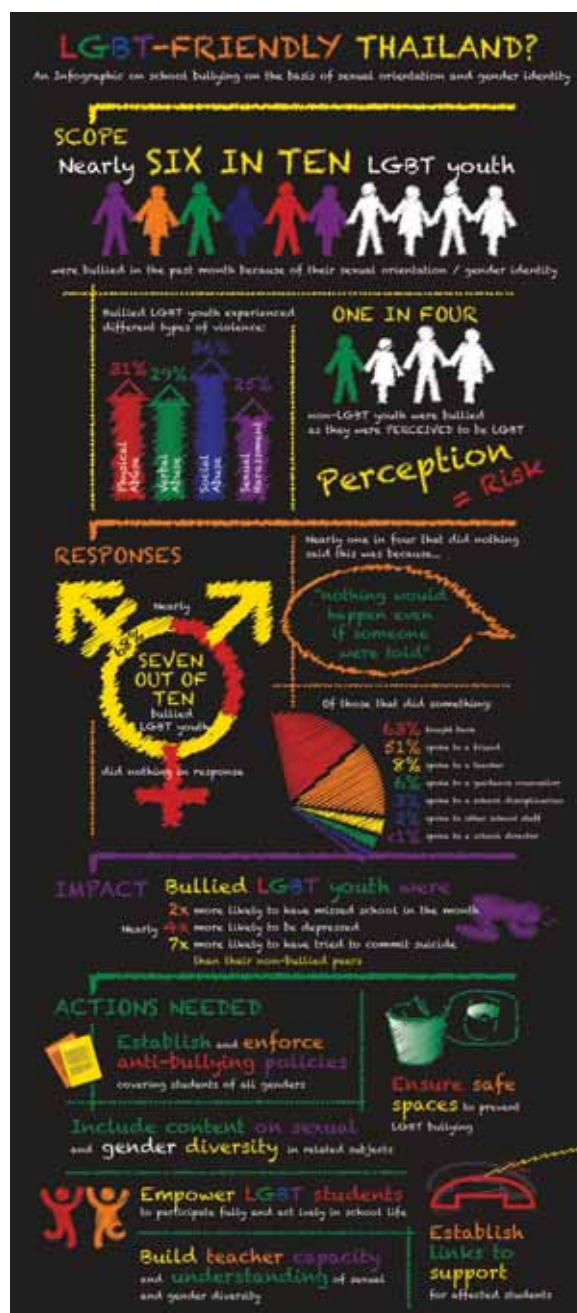
In **Thailand** the first systematic study of bullying targeting secondary students who are or are perceived to be transgender or same-sex attracted was undertaken in 2013.²²² The study collected quantitative and qualitative data from students (aged 13–20), administrators and teachers in five provinces in four regions of Thailand. Over half (56%) of LGBT youth in the study reported having been bullied within the past month; nearly a third experienced physical abuse (31%) and verbal abuse (29%); and almost one quarter (24%) reported that they had been victims of sexual harassment (see *Figure 7*).

Among students that *did not identify* as LGBT, 25% reported being bullied because they were perceived to be transgender or same-sex attracted. This confirms research suggesting that it is the mere *perception* of same-sex attraction or gender non-conformity that puts people at risk.²²³

In the Thailand study, lesbian and bisexual female students, reported being targeted by teachers for clothing and hairstyles that breached school policies and male students were also reported to often use physical violence against lesbian and bisexual female students, including kicking and punching.²²⁴

The study also found limited help-seeking among affected students. Around two-thirds (68%) of victims of anti-LGBT bullying said they did not report these incidents or even talk about them with anyone. Nearly one quarter (23%) of those that did nothing said that this was because “*nothing would happen even if someone were told.*”²²² This is consistent with findings from other countries, which is often compounded by fear that reporting could somehow make the situation worse.²²⁵

Figure 7. Infographic on Thailand bullying study²²²



Another study in **Thailand** found that discrimination, violence and exclusion in education often followed many young LGBT persons into the workforce (see *section 3.3.3*).³³

In **Viet Nam**, online studies have been undertaken in recent years among LGBT people that have included questions about their experience in school. The most recent, in 2014, included more than 3,200 LGBT participants aged 16 and above, with an average age of 23. Nearly half (44%) rated stigma at school as serious. Common forms reported including: teasing by friends, being insulted by teachers or school staff, and having school papers and exams rated unfairly by teachers.²²⁶ Another study, in 2012, of 581 LGBTI students aged 14 to 22 years, found that 44% of respondents had experienced stigma, discrimination and violence as a result of divergence from established gender norms. Transgender and lesbian/gay students reported higher rates of victimisation, 55% and 47% respectively. The majority of respondents (75%) indicated that the perpetrators were male classmates, however 14% reported being victimised by school staff. Verbal bullying was the most common form of violence reported and often related to being called nicknames (75%).²²⁷

The **Viet Nam** Institute of Educational Sciences is currently undertaking the largest study on this issue in Viet Nam to-date, drawing on the lessons learned from the Thailand study. The study has collected qualitative and quantitative data in secondary schools of 6 cities and provinces of Viet Nam on SOGIE-based bullying as part of a larger study on SRGBV. More than 2,600 students, over 600 teachers and administrators and 215 parents from 24 participating schools participated in the study. The findings will be published end-2015 under the leadership of the Ministry of Education and Training of Viet Nam, and will provide a robust platform on which to take action.²²⁸

A few other reports were found that provided some insight into SOGIE-based bullying, violence and discrimination but had a limited scope, including:

- In **Cambodia**, discrimination in schools was reported by 52% of the 149 lesbian, gay and male-to-female transgender respondents in a 2012 study. Many also reported that their family was unsupportive, and also stopped them from school and work.²²⁹
- In the **Philippines**, studies suggest that verbal bullying, including name-calling, against transgender students is common but limited data could be found to substantiate this. One small qualitative study of five bakla youth, defined as “homosexual men belonging from the lower middle class to the lower class of society” aged 18-21, found examples of teasing, biased attitudes of the teachers and bullying.^{230,231}
- In **Malaysia**, while there has been no explicit study on this issue, violence in educational settings against lesbian and bisexual women and transgender people has been documented in qualitative studies among older populations, and included verbal humiliation, sexual abuse and school expulsion.^{65,76,104,232} There have also been reports of university inquiries about ‘gender confused’ students, conversion camps for school boys with ‘effeminate tendencies’, and a federal policy, published in a student handbook that categorises homosexuality and ‘gender confusion’ as serious offenses.^{106,233,234}

Two countries (**Philippines** and **Thailand**) have conducted research on the representation of sexually and gender diverse people in curriculum resources and/or school policies. These studies generally seek to identify inappropriate references or regulations that may discriminate against or stigmatise these populations.

“I was told that the rules of the university require us to cut our hair, conceal our breasts and dress as males during the graduation ceremony. We complained about the discriminatory rules for wearing male attire. The university replied that people who have already completed their sex change operation can wear female dress, but otherwise we must wear male clothes.”

Transgender woman, Thailand³³

A curriculum review is underway of Health and Physical textbooks for grades 7, 8 and 9 (lower secondary school) in **Thailand**. Preliminary findings demonstrate that current textbooks: are based on ‘a two-sex model’ (male/female) as natural and normal, and gender is assumed to follow automatically from assigned sex at birth; present heterosexuality as the sole normal type of sexuality; list same-sex attraction and gender expressions not aligned with assigned sex at birth (transgenderism) as forms of “sexual deviance”, along with exhibitionism and sadomasochism while illustrations for this section almost universally feature transgender people, or occasionally gay men and lesbians.²³⁵

An analysis of three Grade 4 elementary textbooks from various subjects in the **Philippines** found gender stereotypes, heteronormative discourse and general invisibility of gender and sexually diverse persons,²³⁶ while another report indicated that gendered school uniforms and gender-specific appearance requirements were problematic for gender diverse learners including transgender students.²³⁷

A 2014 report in **Thailand** cited earlier also found a strict requirement for primary and secondary level students to wear the uniform of their assigned sex at birth. Transgender students were reportedly informally allowed by some universities and most technical/vocational schools (upper secondary school equivalent and above) to wear uniforms different from their assigned sex. Some transgender students reported purposefully applying to schools or universities with flexible dress codes or violating the school policy, leading to point deductions at secondary and tertiary levels. These flexibilities were reported not to apply during examination periods or at graduation ceremonies, as the example above demonstrates.³³

Similar restrictions on gender expression were also reported in the **Philippines**. Here, during community consultations, some reported that schools can include mandatory haircuts or masculinity tests whilst others refuse enrolment of transgender people or require LGBT people to sign contracts committing them to not express their sexual orientation or gender identity.⁶⁹

In another study in **Viet Nam** among 32 LGBT street children in Ho Chi Minh City, two children in the study reported leaving school due to restrictions on their gender expression. The majority of all children preferred vocational training programmes to formal schooling. Some participants reported experiences of discrimination during their application: “*The school manager told me they’d only take male or female candidates. As I appeared to be ‘in-between’ he was afraid that I would have problems getting along with other students.*”²³⁸



Photo: UNESCO



“Though the school promotes strength and intelligence in women, we are told to be ‘lady-like’ [and] our sex ed was appalling—abstinence was encourage [and] stds [sic] were discussed briefly and no mention of same sex issues, our bodies are shamed.”

18 year old gender questioning young person in an all-girls school in Australia⁴⁸

3.2.4 Pacific

Data regarding school-related violence and bullying in the Pacific are also very mixed, with comprehensive research available from two countries (**Australia** and **New Zealand**) and virtually no information from **Papua New Guinea** or **Pacific Island** nations. The studies undertaken in **Australia** and **New Zealand** are not only the most comprehensive for the Pacific; they are the most comprehensive in all of Asia-Pacific. They are the only countries found to undertake large-scale, systematic surveys at regular time intervals. In both countries, the issue has been integrated into other surveys as opposed to stand-alone surveys of bullying itself. The **New Zealand** study below is the first nationally representative survey on the health and well-being of transgender students, while an ongoing study in **Australia** will provide the first nationally representative study on intersex persons.

In **Australia**, questions on school experience have been included in a national survey of ‘same sex attracted and gender questioning’ youth aged 14-21 years since 1998 at six-year intervals. In 2010, 61% of the 3,134 respondents reported verbal abuse, 18% reported physical abuse and 69% indicated having been subjected to other forms of homophobia, including exclusion and rumours. Of those who reported physical or verbal abuse, 80% reported suffering this at school.¹⁴⁹ Young men (70%) and gender questioning youth (66%) reported more verbal abuse than young women (53%). Many of the students reported feeling unsafe at school and approximately a third (27%) described their school as ‘homophobic’. These rates were higher than those observed in 1998²³⁹ and 2004,²⁴⁰ but the researchers believe this difference is due to “fewer young people being prepared to be in hiding” rather than increased experiences of violence.¹⁴⁹

Another recent (2014) study of gender diverse and transgender young people (aged 14-25) in **Australia** found very similar rates of bullying to those described above (66% reported verbal abuse and 21% physical abuse overall), although lower reported abuse in school settings (38%).⁴⁸ This research also provides critical inputs on protective factors and those that promote resiliency.²⁴¹ Respect for students’ privacy regarding gender issues, appropriate use of language including gender pronouns by teachers, and supportive classmates were found to be protective.²⁴²

New Zealand undertakes a regular survey of the health and wellbeing of secondary school students which includes questions regarding bullying, sexual attraction and in 2012 whether students identified as transgender. The 2012 study is the first nationally representative survey on transgender students. Nationally-representative surveys of secondary school students have been undertaken in 2001, 2007, 2012; over 27,000 young people have participated over 11 years. The most recently published survey of 8,500 students found that almost one in five same/both-sex attracted students and transgender students²⁴³ had experienced bullying at school on a weekly or more frequent basis. Same/both-sex attracted young people and transgender students were approximately three times and five times more likely to report being bullied weekly than were their opposite-sex-attracted or non-transgender peers, respectively. Other reports suggest that school climates are largely perceived as ‘hard’ and ‘bullying/mockings’ for sexually and gender diverse students, even in those schools which have taken measures to provide education on sexual and gender diversity.²⁴⁴

“The hardest part was when people would use words like ‘gay’ and ‘homo’ to mean bad... I found this even harder to deal with than outright homophobia because while such usage is not a personal attack, it implies that it is bad to be gay.”

Dan, 18 years, New Zealand²⁴⁵

Studies in **Australia** and **New Zealand** also found that school physical education (PE) classes may be particularly homophobic, biphobic and transphobic environments. In **Australia**, a 2014 study found school PE classes to be the most hostile of all school environments. Among students who identified as LGB and gender diverse, one-quarter had experienced physical abuse or pushing, and almost one-third had experienced verbal abuse including threats and name-calling in PE lessons while 80% reported casual homophobic language.²⁴⁶ These findings have been confirmed in other studies, including a multi-country study which found that PE classes were reported to be the second most likely homophobic sporting environment in both **Australia** and **New Zealand**.²⁴⁷

Both countries have rich analyses of the situation of sexual and gender diverse youth, including the detailed and discrete analyses of the experience of bisexual²⁴⁸ and transgender youth,²⁴⁹ with new data also to soon be available on intersex persons in **Australia**, a first globally (see *Box 1*).

No other studies on this issue could be accessed from **Pacific Island nations**, despite other research suggesting that intimate partner and gender-based violence is significant, including among young people.^{153,251}

There is little research in Asia and the Pacific which considers the school environment from the perspective of LGBTI teachers apart from one study in **Australia**.²⁵² This study found that even in a country with national policy protection for ‘gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex or questioning (GLBTIQ)’ teachers many schools do not reflect this in their institutional policies or climate. Over a third of respondents worked in schools where they were unable to name their partner on forms or use their preferred gender, and over half indicated they were not supported to ‘be out’. Six percent (6%) worked in schools that actively banned employment of GLBTIQ people. The majority of teachers (79%) indicated their sexual orientation or gender identity made them feel uncomfortable at work and they harboured fears of homophobia and job loss. The study highlighted the importance of staff diversity policies and training and noted that discriminatory policies do not prevent employment of GLBTIQ teachers but result in more sick days and/or more staff disengagement.

Australia also has a national employer support programme on LGBTI workplace inclusion called *Pride in Diversity*. It provides training and consultancy services, and also a national ranking of employers on workplace equality, including universities.²⁵³

Box 1. Australia undertakes the first nationwide survey of intersex persons²⁵⁰

In 2015, the “Australians born with Congenital Variations in Sex Characteristics (Intersex/DSD/ hormonal, chromosomal or other biological variations/ conditions)” anonymous survey was conducted online, gathering data on 272 people with intersex variations. Participants ranged in age from 16-85+, from all states of Australia in proportion to the broader population, and a fifth lived internationally.

Only a quarter of participants rated their overall experience at school positively. The overwhelming majority of participants (92%) did not attend a school with inclusive puberty/sex education. Overall, 18% of people with intersex variations had only had a primary school education – a larger portion than the general Australian population (2%). Many participants (66%) had experienced discrimination ranging from indirect to direct verbal, physical

or other discriminatory abuse. Wellbeing risks were high, as documented in the next section.

A key finding of this study was that most people with intersex variations had not told school staff about their variation, whilst just over half had told their classmates. Principals were the least likely people in a student’s life to be told about their intersex variation overall; further they were the most likely to be unsupportive.

“...One of my former classmates fabricated a lot of rumors... That experience was horrific torture for me and every day my thoughts were only on how to kill myself. Once I attempted to jump off a building to commit suicide but was stopped by others. I was greatly depressed and began cutting my fingers with a knife. I felt that the whole world has turned against me and nobody was willing to help.”
Lesbian woman, 24 years old, China¹⁹⁸

3.3 What are the impacts?

School bullying, violence and discrimination impact not only the targets or victims, but also those who witness or perpetrate these acts.^{254,255} These behaviours also impact schools by contributing to a hostile or unsafe school climate.^{256, 257} There is a growing body of literature, including from Asia-Pacific, that school bullying, violence and discrimination affect national economies as well.^{14,83}

Most of the data reported here on the impacts draw on the literature shared in the previous section. As such, they are limited and have the same methodological weaknesses discussed earlier. Additionally, as most of the studies in the region are cross-sectional (as opposed to longitudinal), it is not possible to draw causal inferences (e.g. that the negative outcomes are caused by bullying) but rather that there are important associations between these outcomes and the experience of bullying. What is found, however, is consistent with research in other settings and is an important call to action for all countries in the region.



Photo: UNESCO

3.3.1 Health impacts

LGBT adolescents and young people clearly face stresses that can put them at increased risk of both physical and mental health problems and substance use.^{10-13,258,259} Community-based research in four countries (**Indonesia, Mongolia, Philippines and Viet Nam**) found high levels of self-stigma among young transgender people and men who have sex with men, and subsequent links to risk behaviours that impact on HIV transmission.²⁶⁰ In these studies, low self-esteem and poor self-acceptance, combined with discrimination was also linked to destructive coping behaviours such as substance use or unprotected sex due to anxiety, isolation and depression.

There is research globally that suggests that depression and anxiety,²⁶¹ suicidal ideation and behaviour,²⁶² and substance use²⁶³ may be higher among LGBT youth than among their non-LGBT peers. For example, In **New Zealand**, 'same- or both-sex attracted students' had significantly higher rates of depressive symptoms than 'opposite-sex attracted' students (21.2% and 32.3% compared to 9.5%).²⁶⁴ These rates are believed to have risen in the last decade.²⁶⁵ Approximately 40% of transgender students in this study had significant depressive symptoms and nearly half had self-harmed in the previous 12 months.²⁴³ In **Australia**, gender diverse respondents in a recent study had higher rates of anxiety and depression than young people overall. For example, 47% of study respondents reported having been diagnosed with depression, compared to 6-7% for the average Australian young person.⁴⁸



“When I was in [co-ed] high school, a girl in my class and another girl in the class in front of ours dated each other...in the end, both dropped out. Both the way the school dealt with the case and we were very violent. At the time, I pointed the finger at them too. ‘Right now, in such a situation, I mustn’t be found out, and I must protect myself all the more,’ I thought.”

Anonymous same-sex attracted male, Republic of Korea²⁰³

Negative school experiences are likely to contribute to these differences. Studies in the region find that the experience of bullying is directly implicated in poor health outcomes. In **Australia**, homophobic abuse has been associated with depression, anxiety, loss of self-esteem and confidence, withdrawal, social isolation, guilt and sleep disturbances.¹⁴⁹ In **China**, almost two-thirds (63%) of the LGBT young people surveyed reported negative impacts on psychological health including symptoms of depression, loneliness, helplessness, panic and anxiety.¹⁹⁹ In a **Japanese** survey of same-sex attracted and bisexual men, including men questioning their sexual orientation, 71% of participants reported high levels of anxiety and 13% indicated high levels of depression.²⁶⁶ In **Thailand**, being bullied due to perceived LGBT status was associated with a higher risk of depression, unauthorised absence from school, unprotected sex and attempted suicide.²²² In both the **China** and **Thailand** studies, students indicated living in fear of other students and experiencing anger and the desire for revenge. One participant in the Thai study recognized that “*physical revenge is out of the question*” due to having “*less power than the perpetrators*.”²²²

LGBT young people and those who are believed to be sexually and/or gender diverse are at increased risk of self-inflicted forms of violence including suicide, often as a consequence of the harassment and exclusion experienced in schools and in other settings. In the study in **Thailand** cited above, 7% of students who were bullied, due to actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity, attempted suicide in the past year. In a 2014 survey in the **Republic of Korea**, nearly half (46%) of LGBTI respondents under the age of 18 reported having attempted suicide.²⁰³ In **Japan**, approximately half of those bullied said they had no one to talk to, while 32% had considered suicide, and 22% had self-harmed.¹⁵⁷ In **New Zealand** ‘same-, or both-sex,

attracted students’ were approximately five times more likely to have made a suicide attempt in the last 12 months than their ‘opposite-sex attracted’ peers.²⁶⁸ In one study in **Indonesia**, LGBT persons who had been bullied in school reported reduced ability to learn, school drop-out, and suicide ideation and attempts. In this study, 17% of respondents (all ages) had attempted suicide.²⁶⁷ In **Australia**, 70% of gender diverse young people who had experienced abuse, harassment or discrimination due to their gender expression reported self-harming themselves, 81% thought of suicide, and 37% had attempted suicide.⁴⁸ Links between bullying and violence and suicidal ideation and attempts is confirmed in other studies outside of the Asia-Pacific region, and is believed to be particularly of concern among transgender youth.²⁶⁸⁻²⁷³

The only study found to examine the impacts of discrimination and violence in schools amongst intersex learners is the aforementioned study in Australia (see *Box 1*). In this study, 42% of participants had thought about self-harm and 26% had engaged in it; 60% had thought about suicide and 19% had attempted it – specifically on the basis of issues related to having a congenital sex variation. The group mostly attributed their wellbeing risks to negative social responses from others.²⁵⁰

Other studies have found that young people may change their gender expression to conform to the social expectations of femininity and masculinity in order to avoid discrimination and violence.²⁷⁴ This coping strategy was found, including in one study in **Japan**, to exacerbate a sense of self-loathing and self-stigma, acute discomfort, and even physical pain among learners.¹⁰⁵ In another study in **Australia**, many reported keeping their sexual diversity or ‘transgender status’ a secret to avoid problems,¹⁴⁹ as is also the case in the example from the **Republic of Korea** above.

“I can’t really focus on my classes. I normally worry about trivialities... it’s like ‘Huh, why do they have to blame me, do something like this to me?’ I get stressed and like, I feel I don’t understand anything in class. It’s psychological pressure. It affects my mind.”

Tom²⁷⁵ secondary school student, Thailand²²²

3.3.2 Educational impacts

There is also evidence that this form of violence impacts educational performance and achievement.²⁷⁶ In the 2014 **Thailand** study cited above, young people that had been bullied because they were, or were seen to be LGBT, had lower grade point averages (GPAs) and were also more likely to have an unauthorised absence in the past month than those that had not been victimised for these reasons.²²² In this study, students victimized with anti-LGBT motivations also had significantly lower GPAs than students who reported being victimised for other reasons (such as their skin colour, ethnicity or other personal characteristics.)

In **China**, 59% of LGBT respondents in an online survey reported that bullying had negatively affected their academic performance, with 10% reporting having skipped class and 3% dropping out of school while a subsequent online study found that nearly 24% lost interest in study.¹⁹⁸ In a recent survey in **Australia** of students experiencing homophobia and/or transphobia in school, one-third (33%) of respondents said they could not concentrate in class, 20% missed classes, 21% skipped days, and 24% acknowledged drops in marks. Fifteen (15%) percent reported not being able to use the changing room at school, and 9% said they could not use the toilets.¹⁴⁹

In **New Zealand**, same- or both-sex attracted students were four times more likely to have stayed away from school (within the previous month) because they were afraid that someone would hurt or bother them than their opposite-sex attracted peers.²⁴⁵ In **Malaysia**, transgender students forced to dress in clothes that did not match their gender identity and lesbians whose sexual attractions were discovered reported falling behind in their studies because they could not focus and dropping out of school at an early age.¹⁰⁴

Students may also avoid places within school where violence and exclusion are most frequently occurring, or limit their participation in school events. In **Australian** research, 18% of the same-sex attracted and gender questioning young people surveyed reported hiding at recess and lunch, 16% did not use the changing rooms, 13% dropped out of sport and other activities and 9% did not use the toilets.¹⁴⁹ Similarly, 7% of same- or both-sex attracted students in a **New Zealand** study indicated that they had not participated in sports because they were worried what other people would think.²⁴⁵ In **Thailand**, participation in certain extra-curricular activities (e.g. dancing, stage performance, flower arrangement) was not always proactively initiated by transgender students, but was sometimes due to teachers’ beliefs that transgender students had ‘special skills’ in cultural activities. Some transgender students reported this compromised their academic performance as these tasks occurred during class or sometimes even during examination hours. Teachers encouraging a limited range of acceptable activities for transgender students limits their autonomy and condemns them to stereotypical roles.³³

There is also evidence that inequitable learning environments may push LGBTI youth to cut short their education or affect their choices of study. For example, in **Australia** 8% of same-sex attracted and gender questioning young people reported leaving school completely.¹⁴⁹ In **Viet Nam**, two of 32 participants in a study of LGBT street children in Ho Chi Minh City had left school related to restrictions on their gender expression.²²⁸ In a **New Zealand** study, ‘coming out early as LGB’ was associated with lower levels of educational attainment and an early “penalty” in education.²⁷⁷ In **Thailand**, an intersex person reported dropping out of university partly because of the dress code and the social pressure on her ‘ambiguous’ gender identity.^{33,278} Studies in South Asia cited earlier also reported the same among hijra youth, with one study finding that for many kothi adolescents and youth in **India**, “dropping out of school was as inevitable as separation from their biological families and the communities they grew up” due to violence also in the home for not having met family expectations.²⁷⁹

While the research is limited, educational impacts from bullying and discrimination appear to particularly be an issue for transgender youth. In **Australia**, transgender people are believed to be twice as likely to cut short their schooling due to unsupportive environments than their non-transgender peers.²⁸⁰ In **India**, one study found that *hijra* were more vulnerable to discrimination and abuse and exclusion from education than same-sex attracted students with mistreatment escalating after puberty, making the higher grades of secondary school and higher education particularly hostile environments.¹¹⁰ In a study in **Thailand**, teachers reportedly encouraged transgender students to choose study fields believed to be “appropriate” for them, including discouraging the teaching profession because “*teachers must be ‘good role models’ for students*”. Some referred to cases of transgender students in medical schools being discouraged from being surgeons “*because this requires a ‘normal mental state’*”, and others being discouraged from studying psychology “*as they are deemed ‘psychologically abnormal’*.”³³

3.3.3 Employment impacts

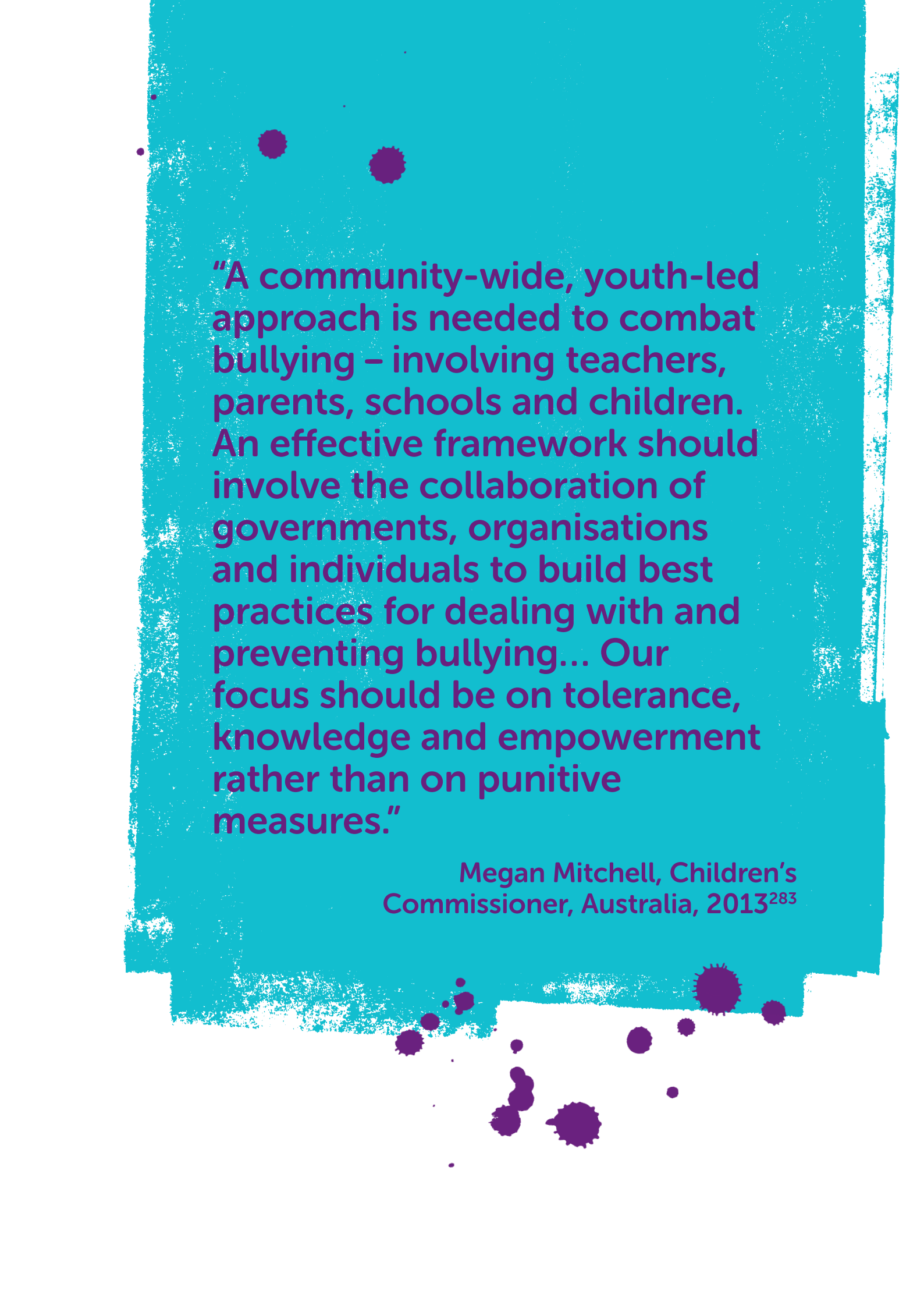
Exclusion and stigma in education can also have life-long impacts on employment options, economic earning potential, and access to benefits and social protection.²⁸¹ Family resources for investment in education and training may be diminished for gender non-conforming children if it is believed that there will be little return on investment in the labour market.^{83,283} For example, one study in **Thailand** found that families often don’t support the education of transgender youth, or discouraged them from studying certain subjects such as medicine, law or engineering, with the expectation that they will not succeed in getting jobs in these fields.³³ In a recent study in **Cambodia**, 24% of male-to-female transgender, 14% of lesbian, and 7% of gay male, respondents reported that their family had stopped them from schooling or work.²²⁹

In another study in **Japan, Malaysia** and the **Philippines**, the combination of family violence in the home and in the school contributed to early drop out, lost employment opportunities and difficulty gaining financial independence among transgender people.¹⁰⁴ Early rejection and violence by family members becomes, in many countries, a foundation for violence and discrimination in other settings.

3.3.4 Economic impacts

There are economic benefits that extend beyond reducing the healthcare costs associated with school bullying, violence and discrimination. Students who complete their education are more likely to be productive members of society who achieve their economic potential.²⁸² Research has found a clear positive correlation between per capita gross domestic product and legal rights and protection for LGBT people across countries.²⁸²

There are efforts underway to measure the economic cost of homophobia more broadly by the World Bank. One study in **India** found that the economic cost of homophobia was estimated to be 0.1-1.7% of India’s Gross Domestic Product or at least US\$1.9 billion.⁸³ This study identified these impacts to largely be due to lower productivity because of discrimination employment, along with lost output due to health disparities related to exclusion. UNDP and partners in the Being LGBTI in Asia initiative are undertaking similar economic analyses in the region. These studies on the impact on economic development are important to stimulate action in the region and in other settings.



“A community-wide, youth-led approach is needed to combat bullying – involving teachers, parents, schools and children. An effective framework should involve the collaboration of governments, organisations and individuals to build best practices for dealing with and preventing bullying... Our focus should be on tolerance, knowledge and empowerment rather than on punitive measures.”

**Megan Mitchell, Children’s
Commissioner, Australia, 2013²⁸³**

4.0 Education sector response

The education sector has a responsibility to ensure safe and secure learning environments that respect and value equality and create healthy and productive citizens. Ensuring that all students are able to learn and thrive, needs to be a priority to achieve the education and other SDGs and targets in the region and globally.

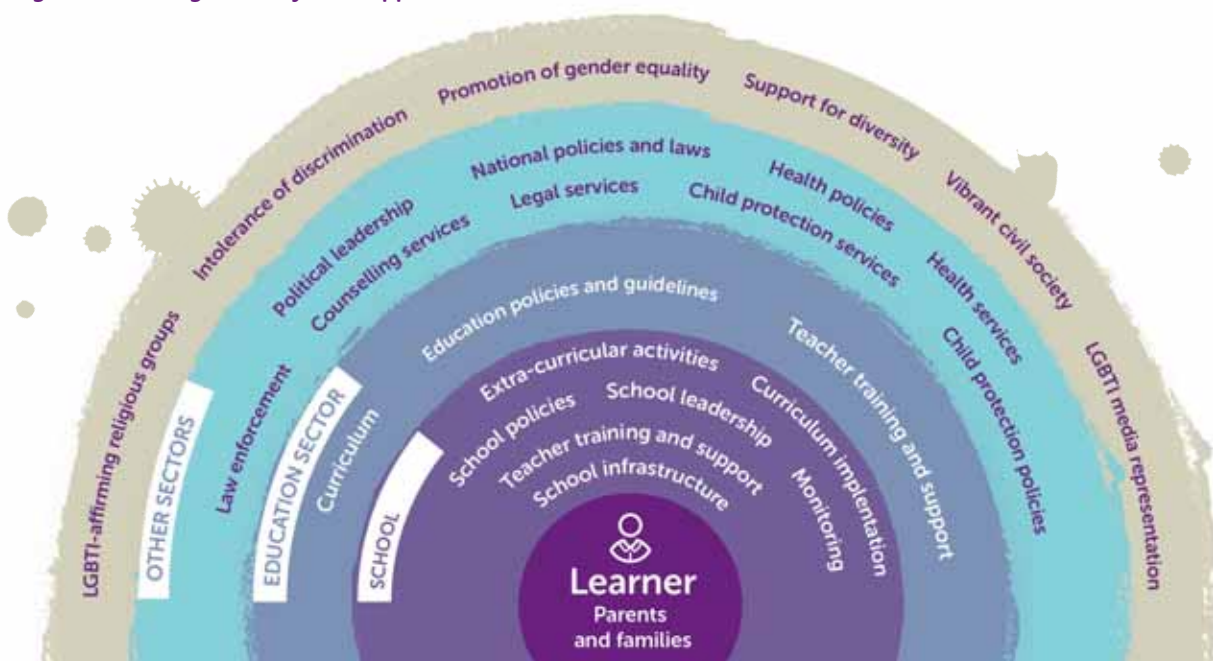
Schools have the ability to raise awareness, build knowledge, and teach skills that enable young people to interact in positive and prosocial ways.²⁸⁴ Research has demonstrated that non-discrimination and anti-bullying policies, inclusive curricula, supportive teachers and peer support programmes in school can create a positive school climate, and minimise school-based discrimination, bullying and violence against gender and sexually diverse learners.^{264,285-293} Multiple complementary strategies are recommended to yield positive outcomes, as is the case more broadly for reducing bullying and creating more supportive school cultures.²⁹⁴ More research is needed to understand effective responses for intersex learners.

This section reviews the steps education sectors in the region have taken to prevent violence and create multi-layered support for learners (see *Figure 8 below*). It focuses on system-wide measures such as education policies and guidelines; curriculum and learning materials; teacher training and support, as well as the application of these in schools. It also considers links to counselling and other services typically outside of school settings in Asia-Pacific, along with broader school-based efforts to engagement through awareness-raising and peer support programmes.

This framework recognises that the education sector cannot do this alone. Many other sectors, including the health, social and child protection, and justice sectors play a role in addressing societal factors and social norms that perpetuate violence and inequity. National laws and policies impact on the ability of LGBTI youth to claim their right to education and other rights, as punitive legal and policy environments make it challenging for all people to speak out and seek help. This is particularly true for adolescents and young people who typically have lower knowledge, skills, resources and/or opportunities to do so than adults.²⁹⁵

In general, this review finds that the education sector response in countries in the Asia-Pacific region draws on different entry points and is progressing at different rates. A few of countries, such as **Australia**, have institutionalised whole school approaches to promote inclusive environments that are based on systematic research in this area. Some countries, such as **India, Japan** and the **Philippines**, have made recent policy commitments that could provide a platform for school and university-level improvements. Others, such as **Nepal**, are advancing on curriculum and teacher training. In many countries, including **Thailand** and **Viet Nam**, school practice appears to be advancing before policy or sector changes, often with support by LGBTI organizations. For many countries, there is still little known about responses which suggests that there may be little in place to prevent or address SOGIE-based bullying, violence and discrimination.

Figure 8. Creating multi-layered support for learners



4.1 National laws and policies to protect children in schools

A supportive policy and legislative environment is critical to the elimination of violence in schools. This includes not only the establishment of relevant legislation and regulations, but also mechanisms for monitoring and enforcement.

Child protection laws vary greatly across Asia-Pacific, and range in their scope and detail as well as in the implementation mechanisms that accompany them. Most countries have specific education policies, laws and/or guidelines that uphold the rights and dignity of children in the educational environment, which include the legal prohibition of violence (see Figure 9). There are a number of States in the region for which no specific prohibitions regarding violence against children and young people in schools could be found in this review, including **Afghanistan, Bhutan, Brunei Darussalam, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal** and many of the **Pacific Island Nations**. In most instances, these countries do have legislation or policies to ensure the protection of the physical and mental health of minors, but these do not specifically mandate against violence.

Despite the overwhelming problem that bullying poses to the educational institutions of Asia-Pacific, less than a third of States were found to have specific laws or policies that directly address the issue. Those which include some laws or policies that explicitly address bullying include **Australia**, parts of **China, Fiji, India, Japan, PNG, Philippines, Singapore, the Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka** and **Viet Nam** (see Figure 9). These policies and laws vary considerably in their nature, jurisdiction, and the way in which they address gender-based bullying including that based on of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. Some countries, such as **Viet Nam**, have established national plans on child protection or violence against children.²⁹⁶ A very recent (2015) revision of **Fiji's** Child Protection Policy by the Ministry of Education has included clauses requiring schools to respect children's "rights, wishes, sexual orientation and feelings" and to take action against bullying including "*homophobic remarks, name calling, threats*".²⁹⁷

In some countries, such as **Australia** and **China**, the law varies across the country. In **China**, bullying was found to be specifically mentioned in policies of **Hong Kong SAR** and the **Taiwan province of China**, but not in those of **mainland China**.^{49,298-300} In **Australia**, all states and territories have policies which specify expectations regarding learner wellbeing and behaviour; however consideration of bullying has

"In Fiji there is a behaviour management policy for schools but it needs to be strengthened to include all forms of homophobic bullying. Enforcement and policing of the anti-bullying policy is very weak. There should be policies requiring all complaints to be taken seriously and investigated by school authorities ('no drop' policies). Disciplinary penalties for perpetrators should be harsh enough to deter recurrence of bullying behaviour. Counselling and peer support should be offered to victims. Students should be able to access the formal justice system if the school response fails."

Gay man, Fiji²⁶

historically been more comprehensive in some states compared to others.³⁰¹⁻³⁰³ A new national programme was recently launched to provide services to schools to support LGBT and intersex people across **Australia**, drawing on the successful Victorian state model, and is likely to more systematically address the issue (see Section 4.6).

The **Philippines** was the only country identified in our review that included specific reference to bullying on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity in a national law,³⁰⁴ and is also believed to be one of the first pieces of legislation to have addressed cyberbullying (see Box 2).³⁰⁵ The Act instructs all public and private schools (pre-primary, elementary and secondary) to adopt policies to address the existence of bullying in their respective institutions.

Box 2. The Philippines Anti-Bullying Act of 2013³⁰⁴

The Philippines Implementing Rules and Regulations of Republic Act No. 10627, otherwise known as the Anti-Bullying Act of 2013, requires all schools, both public and private, to adopt policies to prevent and address all acts of bullying in their institutions.

The Act explicitly defines the nature of bullying behaviour including prohibited acts; the required prevention and intervention programmes, including mechanisms and procedures for handling bullying incidents; the duties and responsibilities of stakeholders; necessary training and development; the

requirement for monitoring; and sanctions for non-compliance.

It is believed to be first in the region to address cyberbullying, and also refers to 'gender-based bullying' which refers to any "act that humiliates or excludes a person on the basis of perceived or actual sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI)." Child Protection Committees, established in 2012, and comprised of school head and teacher, student, parent and community representatives, have also been assigned to handle bullying cases.

The Government of the Philippines has faced a number of challenges during the implementation of the Act with only 38% of schools submitting their child protection or anti-bullying policies in the 2013 school year. The low rate of submission has been attributed to a low level of awareness of requirements of the Act and weak monitoring of compliance. In response, the government issued a further memorandum to clarify the need for data submission and is working to build the capacity of stakeholders to improve policy implementation. The Anti-Bullying Act will be integrated into the teachers' education curriculum and Child Protection Specialists will be developed nationwide.³⁰⁶

The Department of Education and Training in the State of Victoria in **Australia** has established policy guidance to ensure schools support students' gender identity, including those with intersex status, in line with both the *Victorian Equal Opportunity Act 2010* and the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* (see Box 3).³⁰⁷ No other country in the region was found to have addressed intersex status and gender identity through federal or national education policy measures.³⁰⁸

Box 3. Australia School Policy Guide on Gender Identity³⁰⁷

The policy stipulates that:

- Schools must support and respect a student's choice to identify as their desired gender when this does not align with their designated sex at birth.
- Principals must respect privacy and confidentiality in relation to gender identity and intersex status.
- The young person and a family representative/caregiver must be invited to be part of the formulation of a school management plan.
- A letter from a gender identity specialist may be requested by the school to support them in developing the plan. This letter is not a conditional requirement for the school, but it is believed to help ensure that schools can adequately provide care by planning appropriately.

The policy provides details on the preparation of school management plans, and leaves arrangements on facilities (toilets, showers and change rooms) at the discretion of the schools. It applies a "mature minor principle" around parental consent for minors, advising principals to consider whether the student is of sufficient maturity, understanding and intelligence to make, and understand the consequences of, related decisions.

Professional codes of conduct in the education sector are also widespread in the region, and typically form a set of ethical standards to which education professionals (primarily teachers) are expected to adhere. Their application for regulating teachers' own behaviours towards learners or for promoting safer and more equitable learning environments has not been well explored in the region. In our review, teachers' codes of conduct were identified for **Australia, Bangladesh, China** including mainland **China** and **Hong Kong SAR, India, Indonesia, New Zealand, Malaysia, Nepal, the Philippines, Thailand, Timor-Leste** and **Viet Nam** as well as the **South Pacific region**.³⁰⁹⁻³¹⁶

There are a number of themes commonly included in teachers' codes of conduct which are relevant for the prevention of discrimination, violence and bullying in schools. These include values of respect and equity, relationships with students, and gender.³¹⁷ Most codes direct teachers to respect the dignity of students, keep them safe and act in the best interests of their welfare. Some, such as those for **China**, the **Philippines** and **Viet Nam**, specifically prohibit discrimination while others, such as that for the **South Pacific** mandate inclusive and equitable treatment. A number of these codes specifically communicate the importance of inclusion or impartiality regardless of caste, race, creed, religion, sex, economic status, disability, language and place of birth, with the code of ethics for the South Pacific also including gender. None of the codes reviewed, however, were found to include reference to sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, or intersex characteristics or status.

More research is needed on the role of codes of conduct in preventing bullying, violence and discrimination of LGBTI learners. Other reviews have found that codes of conduct are often not widely disseminated, or accompanied by complaint mechanisms for violations, and appropriate sanctions. Clearly, their effectiveness will only be as good as their application.

Finally, another piece of legislation that can impact on the education sector is anti-discrimination legislation. In the **Taiwan province of China**, the Gender Equity Education Act (2003) has also been used to call for redress of sexual and gender discrimination; however it has been suggested that implementation measures are inadequate to effectively prevent and address discrimination.³¹⁸ In **Australia**, the 2013 SDA Amendment Act (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Intersex Status) consolidated five pieces of federal anti-discrimination legislation into one act and provided the first legal protection from

“Treat all students with care, respect the dignity of the students, and treat students equally and fairly. Protect the safety of the students, care for the well-being of the students, and uphold the rights of the students. Do not mock, disparage or discriminate against students... Use appropriate language.”

China Code of Ethics for Primary and Middle School Teachers (2008)³¹⁷

discrimination for intersex persons in Australia. The Act, however, includes exemptions for religious schools in relation to gender identity which means that they are not systematically applied in private schools in the region.³¹⁹ In the **Republic of Korea**, in 2011, city education authorities introduced the *Seoul Student Rights Ordinance* which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity in that city, despite reported opposition from Christian groups and a Supreme Court challenge.³²⁰

This type of legislation, and other policies and laws that could impact on the education sector response, is profiled in Figure 9 on the next page. Overall, it appears that the policy environment is relatively favourable across the region to address school violence, with most countries having some legislation on violence and/or bullying in schools. This includes constitutional anti-discrimination protections for LGBT persons in **Fiji** and **Nepal**^{99,100} as well as anti-discrimination legislation in many settings. See *Figure 10* also for more on specific examples in the region.

There are significant sub-regional differences in the legal environment in the region, with some sub-regions having what appear to be punitive legal environments for LGBTI people. This review also found a dearth of data and programmatic experience in most of these countries, suggesting the need for evidence reviews and further consideration of entry points and opportunities in what may be challenging contexts.

Figure 9. Relevant policies and laws for education sector responses^{34, 49, 66, 67, 69, 75, 84, 100, 101, 104, 109, 112, 160, 297, 301, 304, 305, 321-356}

Legal/policy frameworks are in place that address:			Legal/policy frameworks are in place that:		
SOGIE-based bullying	School bullying	School violence	Legalise same-sex conduct	Protect from SOGIE-based discrimination	Recognise self-defined gender identity
EAST ASIA					
					P
				L	P
					P
				E	P
					P
SOUTH-EAST ASIA					
		C	Brunei Darussalam	M	
			Cambodia		
			Indonesia	E	P
			Lao PDR		
			Malaysia	M	
		C	Myanmar	M	
			Philippines	E	EL
			Singapore	M	P
			Thailand		
			Timor-Leste		
			Viet Nam		

Notes:
 C - No explicit mention of school violence but some legislation offers protection of the health of minors.
 E - Except in some states/territories.
 L - Limited protection legislation exists, in some circumstances.
 M - Same-sex conduct is specifically prohibited between men, no specific reference is made to sex between women.
 N - No explicit legislation but inclusion in guidelines from government ministries.
 P - May require sexual reassignment surgery and/or pathologisation for recognition.
 D - Third gender option is available for some identification/documentation.

Legal/policy frameworks are in place that address:

Legal/policy frameworks are in place that:

SOGIE-based bullying	School bullying	School violence		Legalise same-sex conduct	Protect from SOGIE-based discrimination	Recognise self-defined gender identity
SOUTH ASIA						
		C	Afghanistan			
			Bangladesh			D
		C	Bhutan			
			India	M		D
		C	Maldives			
		C	Nepal			D
			Pakistan			D
			Sri Lanka			
PACIFIC						
E	E		Australia			P
	N		New Zealand			
		C	Cook Islands	M		
		C	Micronesia			
			Fiji			P
		C	Nauru	M		
		C	Palau			
			Papua New Guinea	M		
		C	Samoa	M		
		C	Solomon Islands			
		L	Tonga	M		
		C	Tuvalu	M		
		C	Vanuatu			

Figure 10. Examples of SOGIE-inclusive policies, regulations and guidance in Asia-Pacific ^{33, 297, 300, 304, 307, 318, 333, 374, 380}



4.2 School policies

School policies and procedures, including codes of conduct, are needed to address the institutional context in which violence occurs in schools and to encourage more gender-equitable norms that are accepting of diversity. School-level policies also provide more immediate and/or direct protection for students than district or national laws or policies.³⁵⁸⁻³⁶⁰ Such policies can be put in place from pre-primary through higher education levels, as well as in non-formal educational contexts.

In **Australia**, research suggests that the mere perception of school policy protection can have important benefits on feelings of safety at school.³⁶¹ In one study, LGBTIQ students who were aware of policies protecting against homophobia at school (compared to those had no policy or who did not know):

- Were less likely to think about, or to, self-harm, to have suicidal ideation or to have attempted suicide; and
- Had increased feelings of safety at school.

This study also found that schools with known policy protection feature less verbal, physical and other types of 'homophobic abuse'. This lessened abuse likely also decreases negative impacts, including intention to self-harm.

Media reports have highlighted the lack of bullying policies in **New Zealand** schools, specifically when compared to **Australia**.³⁶² While resources have been developed for schools to address sexual diversity in the school community,²⁴⁴ there do not appear to be similar regulations requiring school policies that protect students.

“(Our research regarding) LGBTI students’ experiences of education showed that schools with protective policies in place directly naming homophobic bullying significantly reduced violence and halved their risk of suicide. I would like to see more policy protection in Asia-Pacific schools.”

Dr Tiffany Jones, Senior Lecturer, University of New England and La Trobe Universities, Australia²⁷

Box 4 provides examples of different entry points for mainstreaming sex, sexual and gender diversity into school policies, including anti-bullying, privacy or other policies. Research has found, however, that policies need to include protections based on sex, sexual orientation or gender identity and expression to be effective for LGBTI learners.²⁸⁸

While a systematic review of school policies was beyond the scope of this analysis, some examples are provided from select locations in the region to demonstrate relevant policy interventions in schools. These include attempts by schools to address what may be seen as less obvious restrictions, including rules relating to gender-specific school uniforms or gender-segregated sanitary facilities and student accommodation in residential schools.³⁶³

Box 4. Policy entry points for school bullying, violence and discrimination on SOGIE³⁶³

- 1. Equal opportunity policies** that include specific attention to discrimination on the basis of sex, sexual orientation and gender identity or expression.
- 2. Inclusive anti-bullying policies** that specifically mention sex, sexual orientation, gender identity. Policies should include reporting mechanisms, sanctions for bullies and support mechanisms for those who are bullied.
- 3. Gender identity policies** which include attention to: language, including pronouns and name changes; facilities, such as bathrooms, changing or locker rooms; dress

codes and uniforms; and other areas of gender segregation such as sports teams and sleeping arrangements on school trips.

- 4. Privacy policies** which respect a student's privacy and confidentiality regarding their sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics.

- 5. Responsible electronic technology usage policies** to address cyber-bullying and other misuse of ICTs in school settings.

These policies should be integrated with other policy frameworks including health, behaviour management and safety policies and interventions.

In April 2015, the education ministry in **Japan** issued a landmark notice urging local education boards to ensure that schools do more to cater to children 'who believe they were born the wrong gender'. Measures include allowing students to select the uniform, bathrooms and locker rooms in line with their perceived gender identity.³⁶⁵ Previously some schools did so,³⁶⁶ but this notice encourages all schools, from elementary level to high school, to put in place such measures. The notice also called for greater accommodations to be made for same-sex attracted students, who had been left out of earlier documents issued by the Ministry targeting gender diverse learners.³⁶⁷

While the approach used in Japan to identify persons as having 'gender identity disorder' (GID), is critiqued by human rights bodies, transgender advocacy organizations and some in the medical community (see *Section 3.2.1*), others have recognised it has facilitated support for some children and young people in Japan to live as their felt gender identity. A 2014 survey conducted by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in Japan of 13.7 million students enrolled in national, public, private, and special educational institutions found 606 students with GID. Of these, 62% were recognised by schools as receiving some level of support including concessions for clothes, hairstyle, bathroom use and physical education classes.³⁶⁷

Flexible uniform rules, unisex or 'rainbow toilets', and other policy measures that enable transgender youth to express themselves as their preferred gender and to feel safe do not appear to be widespread. When implemented, these actions also do not necessarily reflect the development of school policies that better recognise and support transgender students. As indicated earlier, in **Thailand** some vocational or technical secondary schools may allow transgender to wear uniforms of their choice but this appears to be more of a flexible application of the uniform policy than a policy change itself. Two schools in Thailand are also reported to have unisex toilets in place (Srithana Technology and Commerce College in northern Thailand and Kampang Secondary School, in the rural north-east of Thailand).^{368,369}

In 2015, Bangkok University, introduced a new uniform policy that allows students to dress according to their identity, with guidelines for appropriate dress under the four categories, boy, girl 'tomboy' and 'ladyboy' (see *above*).^{370,371} **Australia's** Safe School Coalition Victoria and the transgender and gender diverse youth advocacy organisation Ygender launched a similar campaign in 2014, called Gender is Not Uniform, aimed at supporting gender diversity in schools through inclusive uniforms and challenging transphobia.³⁷²

Policies in higher education have also been implemented recently to redress barriers to education among transgender learners. In a recent May 2015 policy decision, the University Grants Commission of India wrote to all universities calling for them to recognise transgender students and include a transgender category on all application forms, academic testimonials and other relevant documents.³⁷³ This follows the move by Delhi University in 2014 to officially accept transgender men and women for their postgraduate programmes and include space for third gender in its application forms (see *Box 5 on next page*).^{374, 375}

In other countries there are examples of welfare policies or budgets established to assist transgender students to access education. For example, in **Bangladesh**, student stipends and rehabilitation programmes have been put in place for *hijra* communities in 14 districts, and in the Tamil Nadu State of **India**, the state government has established the Aravani Welfare Board to provide social protection including income assistance and education to *hijra* communities known as *aravanis*.³⁵ The Board in Tamil Nadu was established six years before the Indian Supreme Court officially recognised the legal rights of third gender communities, in recognition of the discrimination that third gender citizens were facing.³⁷⁷

Box 5. Education policy promotes affirmative action for transgender learners in India³⁷⁶

Following the Supreme Court judgement recognising third gender status for hijra in 2014, and the call for the establishment of special measures to be taken in education and employment, the Ministry of Human Resources Development has issued guidance for State Education Secretaries. This includes taking appropriate action for the inclusion of third gender children and youth in admission to education institutions, including at university level.

The University Grants Commission has called on Vice Chancellors to *"ensure that affirmative actions...are initiated in your university so that human rights of TG [transgender] students are safeguarded and their mainstreaming is fast-tracked within university and society at large."*

Measures recommended include the addition of a transgender category in admission forms, and in various scholarship

and fellowship schemes; establishment of infrastructure that is *"friendly"*, including washrooms and restrooms; and undertaking *"socially relevant research, in the interest of academia as well as (an) egalitarian society."*

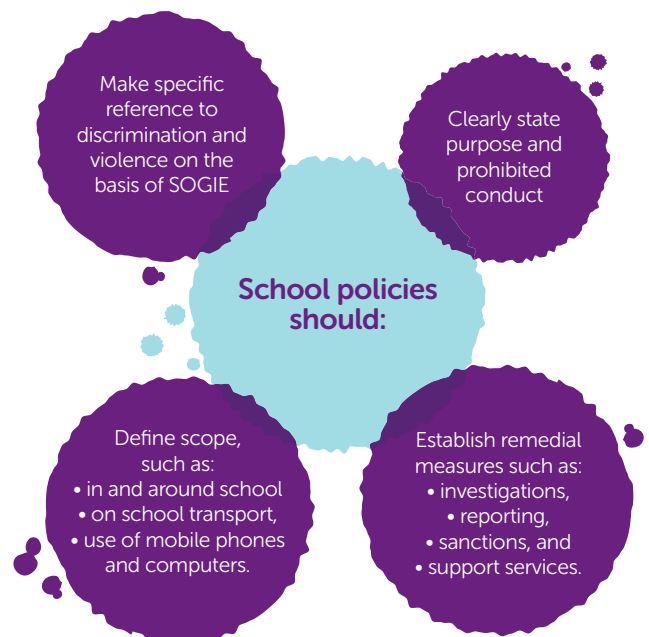
These recent developments suggest a step forward in education policy in India for transgender people. Further details on benefits and regulations are anticipated for schools and universities as this moves forward.

Drawing on the literature and programme experience, successful school-level anti-discrimination or anti-bullying policies need to:

- Explicitly make reference to discrimination or violence on the basis of sex, sexual orientation and gender identity or expression (using understood terminologies);
- Recognise the right of learners to freedom of gender expression while in the school environment by establishing flexible uniform policies; providing access to appropriate bathroom and other facilities; supporting students' right to privacy, dignity and respect during the transition process and enabling their name, sex or gender may be amended on school records;
- Be clear about the purpose of the policy, prohibited conduct (e.g. forms of bullying) and consequences of bullying/violence;
- Refer to scope (e.g. in, around school environments, on school transport and computers);
- Refer to preventive (e.g. curriculum) and remedial (e.g. investigations, reporting and sanctions) measures as well as channels of support (e.g. counselling, health or other services)
- Have clear mechanisms for implementation, to move from paper to practice in schools.

Other policies to remove barriers to education, including affirmative action, flexible uniform policies, or the implementation of gender-neutral toilets are also effective in removing institutional discrimination in education. More research is needed on the implementation and impact of school policy in the region.

Figure 11. Recommended elements of school policies



“The perception of LGBTI people is pathologized. We are seen as people with a mental illness as is still reflected in textbooks, or as immoral....Problems about education include outdated learning materials, and very conservative and homophobic educators. I urge the government to reform the learning materials and provide compulsory workshops on SOGI issues for all educators in all fields.”

Lesbian woman, China²⁶

4.3 Curricula and learning materials

There are many different entry points within formal school curricula to build knowledge, skills and values that promote healthy and peaceful relationships, respect for human rights and dignity, tolerance and positive attitudes to diversity.³⁷⁸ This includes, for example, the integration of relevant themes in life skills education; health, sexuality or HIV prevention education; human rights, civics or citizenship education; and social studies.²⁴

For education to be inclusive, and help young people develop respect for the dignity and rights of others, curricula should include attention to socio-cultural diversity. Whether this diversity be related to race, class, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, nationality, ability or learning styles, schools provide a social setting in which students can build a greater understanding of other people in their community.³⁷⁹

Unfortunately in many countries, as highlighted earlier, curricula and teaching and learning materials still largely ignore issues related to sexual and gender diversity, and some textbooks perpetuate negative stereotypes and include inaccurate, stigmatising and discriminatory information. Even in settings where sexual and gender diversity are sensitive topics, these must be urgently removed and replaced by accurate content that promotes gender equitable norms, nonviolence and respect among students and educators.

In Asia-Pacific only a few countries, such as **Australia, Mongolia, Nepal, the Taiwan province of China, and New Zealand**, were identified in our review as having taken steps to include issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity in the national curricula. In other countries, including **China, India, Indonesia, New Zealand, Thailand and Viet Nam**, some schools are reportedly incorporating these topics into lessons, often with the assistance of NGOs. Most curriculum appears to be introduced at the secondary school or tertiary levels of education. **Australia and New Zealand**

were the only countries found to introduce relevant concepts at primary level,^{380,381} apart from smaller projects at sub-national levels, for example, in **China**.³⁸² The review was not able to assess coverage in terms of curriculum implementation, and only one country (**Australia**) had information on implementation outcomes.

In **Australia**, national and state based resources have been developed with a clear focus on teaching about sexual diversity and gender in an inclusive and affirming way.³⁸¹ In **New Zealand**, the Ministry of Education released in 2015 updated sexuality education guidelines which support and acknowledge diversity among students.³⁸⁰ The guidelines address not only curricular issues, but also measures schools can take to create a “*whole-school culture where diversity is valued and students feel supported, visible, and safe, regardless of their sexual and gender identity.*” This includes guidance on school uniforms, toilet facilities, sports procedures and policies, extra-curricular activities and school events and other measures. It was the most detailed and inclusive guide identified in this review. A new government-sponsored, video-based teaching resource called Inside Out will also assist in meeting the objectives of the health curriculum aiming to challenge norms, reduce homophobia, transphobia and bullying, and support positive social behaviour.³⁸³

“There are opportunities within school programmes and the wider school environment to acknowledge the sexual diversity of New Zealand communities and recognise the rights of those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and other sexual and gender identities.”

2015 New Zealand sexuality education guidelines³⁸⁰

Photo: Blue Diamond Society



Nepal has the most advanced curriculum content regarding sexual orientation and gender identity. The curriculum is taught to all students and includes attention to the health and well-being of sexually and gender diverse learners, with a particular focus on *hijra* populations. The topic appears in health and physical education from grades 6 to 9, and is also integrated into other areas. Textbooks and teacher materials are also being developed, including a school toolkit, which provide basic information about sexuality and gender issues.³⁸⁴ Teacher training has been supported by the NGO Blue Diamond Society, building a pool of trainers equipped with the skills needed to implement the curriculum (see *photo above and Box 7*). As Nepal has a single education board which is followed by schools across the country, these curriculum changes are expected to reach a significant number of children.

Across the region, information relating to sexual and gender diversity appears to be most commonly within health curriculum under sexual and reproductive health or personal development. This is an important entry point, as the right to education includes the right to receive comprehensive, accurate, age-appropriate information to prepare young people to lead healthy lives, to make informed decisions and protect themselves from health risks.^{15,385}

Globally, many countries with sexuality education programmes are believed to employ a heteronormative approach as opposed to addressing a broad spectrum of identities.³⁸⁶ Sexuality education in most countries in the region is not compulsory, and is believed to, when implemented, focus largely on puberty, human reproduction, sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy.³⁸⁷⁻³⁹⁰

There is a growing body of evidence that comprehensive sexuality education programmes that address gender and power are more effective,³⁹¹ and that young people want more inclusive content that address same-sex attraction and diversity.^{291,392-395} The Special Rapporteur on the right to education has noted that “*in order to be comprehensive, sexual education must pay special attention to diversity, since everyone has the right to deal with his or her own sexuality.*”³⁹⁶

Mongolia is believed to be the first country in Asia-Pacific to include sexual orientation in the school curriculum in 1999.^{112,397} The sexual and reproductive health education curriculum for grades 6-9 reportedly includes discussion of sexual behaviour and sexual diversity, with inclusion of same-sex attracted people as examples in the textbook. Its introduction may have had a positive effect on attitudes towards LGBT people as only 1.7% of students who had received such lessons agreed with negative statements about LGBT people in one study; however, implementation is believed not to have been widespread. Only 10% of LGBT students in one study reported discussions of sexual orientation and gender identity having occurred in class.²⁰⁴ Education reform has stopped the implementation of the curriculum, and it is unclear how much focus there will be on sexual and gender diversity in any further curriculum revision.³⁹⁷

In the **Taiwan province of China**, gender equality-related courses have been taught in senior high school since 2004. The Ministry of Education has also reportedly indicated that the programme will be expanded into elementary and junior high schools, with the aim of teaching children and teenagers to understand and respect diversity in sexual orientation from a younger age.^{399,400} In **mainland China**, the Beijing Normal University has been implementing a programme of school-based sexuality education for migrant children which integrates diversity issues into the curriculum (beginning at year five) and addresses SOGIE-based bullying.⁴⁰¹

In the **Philippines**, sexuality education is mandated under the Reproductive Health Law of 2013. Presently, NGOs are working with experts and Department of Education officials to establish minimum standards on sexuality education that include anti-bullying standards addressing both gender-based violence and other bullying and violence on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression. Upon completion, these will undergo review in the main regions of the country before presentation and adoption, and may provide an important entry point to advance the Anti-Bullying Act and its application for LGBTI learners.⁴⁰²

Other interventions were identified at tertiary and advanced degrees across different programmes (e.g. gender and feminist studies, or medical training) in **Australia, China, Mongolia, Nepal, Thailand and New Zealand** and there are likely many more in the region. For example, recently in Thailand, Thammasat University has introduced a mandatory Social Life Skills class for freshmen which includes a lecture on gender identity issues led by a transgender man. It is expected to reach 8,000 students per year.⁴⁰³ While these are important to build theoretical knowledge, technical capacity, and practical approaches to mainstream gender and sexuality diversity issues, this review focused on earlier curricular interventions that promote social and emotional learning and the development of prosocial and inclusive skills.

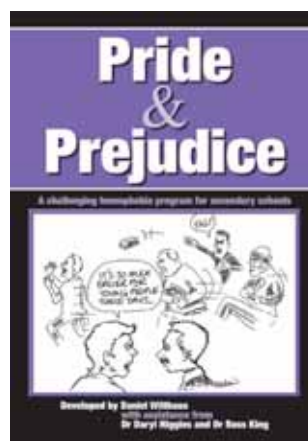
A number of examples of curriculum packages or resource guides were identified in our review. This list is not comprehensive, but it provides illustrative examples of different materials, largely developed by NGOs for use in schools and in non-formal education programmes, available in different settings:

- In **Indonesia**, the NGO Arus Pelangi have produced a manual for training on sexual orientation and gender identity, called *Seksualitas Rasa Rainbow Cake*. The NGO also supports training of trainers to use the manual which includes content on diversity, human rights safety and security. These trainers then deliver education sessions to students in schools.⁴⁰⁴

- In **China**, UNESCO has developed a curriculum resource to address gender-based violence in Chinese secondary schools through classroom teaching and student club activities. The resource seeks to teach the values of equality and diversity and respect for all. It may be introduced in the context of discussions of gender, violence and diversity and includes content regarding same-sex relationships, transgender people and gender diversity. It will be available free online and launched with training support for teaching staff in 2015.⁴⁰⁵

Several programmes and resources were identified in **Australia**, including:

- *The Pride & Prejudice: Challenging Homophobia Program for Everyday Classrooms* package, produced by Deakin University and implemented by Daniel Witthaus and the Beyond 'That's so gay' project (see below). This six week school-based programme is designed to address homophobia and includes a teacher manual, video and classroom sessions that educators can use to challenge homophobia and affirm sexual diversity in classrooms. Evaluation has revealed significantly shifted student attitudes towards gay men and lesbians, and reduced student homo-aggressive behaviour following the programme.⁴⁰⁶⁻⁴⁰⁸
- The *Same Difference* programme, developed by Family Planning New South Wales. This programme delivers interactive education sessions exploring issues relating to discrimination, homophobia and developing a safe and supportive environment for same-sex attracted young people. Same-sex attracted speakers are provided with training so that they may share their stories and provide peer education to their peers.⁴⁰⁹



Cover of the *Pride & Prejudice* resource which may be used to address homophobia in secondary schools

Photo: ICS – Viet Nam



- And in Western Australia, Uniting Care West implements the *True Colours Safer Schools Project* works collaboratively with high schools to develop and implement effective strategies for challenging homophobia and bullying within the school environment and supporting same-sex attracted and gender questioning students.⁴¹⁰

Finally, there are many programmes operating throughout the region within which relevant curricular content and interventions could be integrated. This includes large-scale gender and gender-based violence programmes in the region, health promotion programmes, and child rights and safety programmes. These are explored in more detail at the end of this chapter.



RainbowYOUTH provides sexuality and gender sensitivity workshops which include volunteer storytellers from the LGBT community

In **New Zealand** RainbowYOUTH provides sexuality and gender diversity workshops provided for students include volunteer storytellers from the LGBT community (see above). An evaluation of RainbowYOUTH's education sessions has found a statistically significant self-reported improvement in understanding and valuing of sexuality and gender diverse individuals. Furthermore, 91-94% of students would recommend the workshops to other young people; and 76-80% of students believed the workshops would help reduce bullying in schools.⁴¹¹

Drawing on the literature and programme experience, integration of relevant themes is considered to be more effective than standalone curriculum. Sexuality, life skills, civics and health education are common entry points. Successful curriculum and learning materials need to:

- be informed by research on effective teaching about gender, violence prevention and life skills;
- address taboos surrounding adolescent sexuality, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and provide access to accurate information about diversity in sex, sexual orientation and gender identity;
- provide knowledge and foster critical-thinking; enhance prosocial attitudes (equality, respect, rights), develop skills, and motivate action;
- be age-appropriate and begin early! Values and attitudes form in early childhood, and bullying, discrimination and intolerance can occur in primary education;
- begin with a review of existing materials to identify entry points, and possible inaccurate or stigmatising content negative stereotypes, myths or incorrect information;
- draw on good practice on what works in other settings, and adapt to the cultural and school context.

4.4 Teacher training and support

Teachers are, in most places, a trusted source of information and support. They do more than simply deliver curriculum, in many schools in the region they are also guidance counsellors, mentors, school monitors and sometimes also school principals. Evidence, discussed previously, highlighted that teachers, too, can be sources of language and behaviours that students may find disrespectful or in violation of their rights to safety, non-discrimination and health.

Teacher confidence, competing curriculum priorities, perceived and real opposition to sexual and gender diversity, as well as limited training and resources all present barriers to effective teaching about gender, sexuality and violence in schools in the region and globally.⁴¹³⁻⁴¹⁸

There is evidence that support from teachers can have a particularly positive impact on LGBT and intersex students, improving their self-esteem and contributing to less absenteeism, greater feelings of safety and belonging and better academic achievement.^{225,361}

Teachers, however, need support themselves to be inclusive and to teach inclusively.⁴¹⁹ Professional development can improve personal confidence, knowledge and willingness to teach relevant curricular content and improve teaching practice.⁴²⁰ Through pre- and in-service teacher training, teacher need:

- opportunities to clarify their own attitudes and behaviours about gender, sexuality and adolescence;²²⁵
- practice, through teacher education programmes, to test different pedagogical approaches and strategies and to become prepared with new content;⁴²⁰
- access to resources such as inclusive curricula and teaching and learning materials to influence classroom practice.^{421,422}

Training and support is also important for other staff including school counsellors, nurses, and also the wider school community, although examples of these were found to be more limited in the region and are addressed in the next section.

Pre-service teacher training can prepare teachers to work with diverse populations and address issues of social inequities within their schools and classrooms.⁴²³ It takes different forms in a range of institutional settings, public and private, including teacher training colleges, universities, through specialised institutions and other training providers. The period of training differs widely, as does the length and modalities used for instruction. Notwithstanding these variations, training provides a key opportunity equip the future workforce with the

“Thinking back, (the principal’s) behaviour was inappropriate as an educator and misaligned with the (school’s) ethos... She failed to understand that teenagers will inevitably be struggling with growing up issues such as sexual orientation and should have handled this issue with greater sensitivity and tact. Coming from a position of power and leadership, strong homophobic messages will have a very detrimental effect on the mental health of LGBT students; impairing self-worth, confidence and trust with the school.”

Gay man, 25 years, Singapore⁴¹²

knowledge, skills and attitudes they need to provide inclusive and supportive learning environments for all learners, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, or any other characteristic. Unfortunately, our review found it to be an untapped potential to address sexual and gender diversity.

Australia was found to have the most comprehensive pre-service teacher education programmes in the region. Most of the other programmes identified in this review were through continuing professional development programmes (in-service), with many being provided also by NGOs. Some of these were profiled in the previous section, as curricular approaches and teacher training typically go hand-in-hand.

Institutions in Australia use different approaches and entry points. A great deal of this work occurs in preparing teachers to deliver sexuality education through Australia’s Health and Physical Education programme. Pre-service teacher training include compulsory studies drawing on research, policy and inclusive approaches and a strong focus on student well-being.⁴²⁴ In another pre-service teacher programme in a different State, a Society and Education Unit has integrated ‘GLBTIQ issues’ within a broad sociology of education approach. In this compulsory course, participants consider theories on sex, gender

and sexuality and their practical application in classroom practice. Results of the course demonstrate that even in relatively conservative rural contexts, and through online training sessions, teachers can be trained to not only accept “*professional duties of care to GLBTIQ students, but to embrace and enjoy complex approaches for their inclusion across various curricula.*”⁴²⁵

Limited information was identified on teachers’ interest in further instruction on sexual and gender diversity, apart from a recent study found in **Japan** (see *Box 6 below*). In this study, 57% of schoolteachers said that they would have liked to have received trainings on LGBT issues, had this been available during pre-service training. Many teachers in this report felt a need to address these issues in schools, but inadequately supported to do so.⁴²⁶

In **Nepal**, the *Blue Diamond Society (BDS)* NGO has been delivering training to teachers and school administrators to increase knowledge on SOGIE issues

and facilitate the implementation of Nepal’s new SOGIE curriculum.⁴²⁷ BDS has developed a number of resources including a training manual and toolkit to facilitate further instruction of teachers, along with a frequently asked questions booklet. The toolkit was developed in consultation with a wide range of experts including lawyers and teachers, and includes tools for principals, teachers, students and parents. The toolkit has been used to train teachers in the central, eastern and western regions of Nepal, with support from the World Bank. Those participating in the training have committed to assisting the placement and involvement of LGBTI students; ensuring there is a flexible dress code and appropriate restrooms are available; including the designation of “other” as a gender option on forms; and ensuring the school environment is friendly and respectful towards LGBTI students. The trained teachers have developed the Chetana teacher trainer pool (see *Box 7 below*).^{84,428} The NGO-government partnership appeared to be an exception in the region, and is providing a strong platform for a more inclusive education system in Nepal.

Box 6. Broad interest among Japanese teachers in training on LGBT issues⁴²⁶

In 2014, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare undertook a survey of 5,979 schoolteachers from pre-primary through high school level to determine their awareness about LGBT issues.

- 8% reported having lesbian, gay or bisexual students, and 12% reported having transgender students, in their schools.
- 62% said that they feel the need to teach about LGB issues in schools; 73% responded they feel the need to teach about transgender issues.
- 14% of had taught lessons with content on LGBT issues in the classroom. Among those who hadn’t, 19% indicated that this was because textbooks don’t include these issues, and 15% responded that they lacked guidelines to teach on these issues.
- 8% had learned about LGBT (including trans-specific) issues in teacher training institutions, and 31% had learned about bullying.
- 57% said they would have liked to have received trainings on LGBT issues, had this been available during their pre-service training.

Box 7. Chetana teacher trainers pool – Nepal⁴²⁷⁻⁴³¹

In 2014 the Nepali NGO Blue Diamond Society, with support from World Bank, piloted a programme to develop a pool of teachers to train other teachers and school administrators “how to make schools safer for LGBTI students”. The initial pool of 176 trained teachers went on to register themselves as the NGO Chetana (‘awareness’). They offer training regarding gender, sexuality and gender identity with the aim of integrating topics on LGBT issues in curricula and school policies, and developing a friendlier educational environment for all learners. To-date, over 600 teachers have been trained.

“I know it would be a challenge for teachers and schools initially to teach children with proper knowledge and confidence. However, we have already started helping them out, and this year we would need to expand our efforts much more. While schools are understandably nervous, they are happy that these issues are being covered.”

Sunil Pant, Founder of the Blue Diamond Society, a former legislator, prominent LGBT rights advocate and Nobel Peace Prize nominee⁴³¹

In **Hong Kong SAR**, the Education Bureau has organized workshops, seminars and sharing sessions on anti-bullying and sex education which has included building empathy, handling conflict, sex education (including gender awareness, sexual orientation, and understanding and paying attention to the concerns of 'homosexual' students), cyberbullying, and how to launch anti-bullying campaigns in schools.⁴³³

There were many other in-service teacher training workshops being delivered by NGOs that were identified in this review. It was difficult, for many of these, to determine the evidence base drawn on to develop the training curriculum, the scale and scope of the training programmes, the impact these were having, and their sustainability. It appears, in many countries, that NGOs are 'filling the gap' where systematic sector responses are lacking, with these organisations being engaged to address topics that the education sector still feels may be too sensitive or controversial to address.

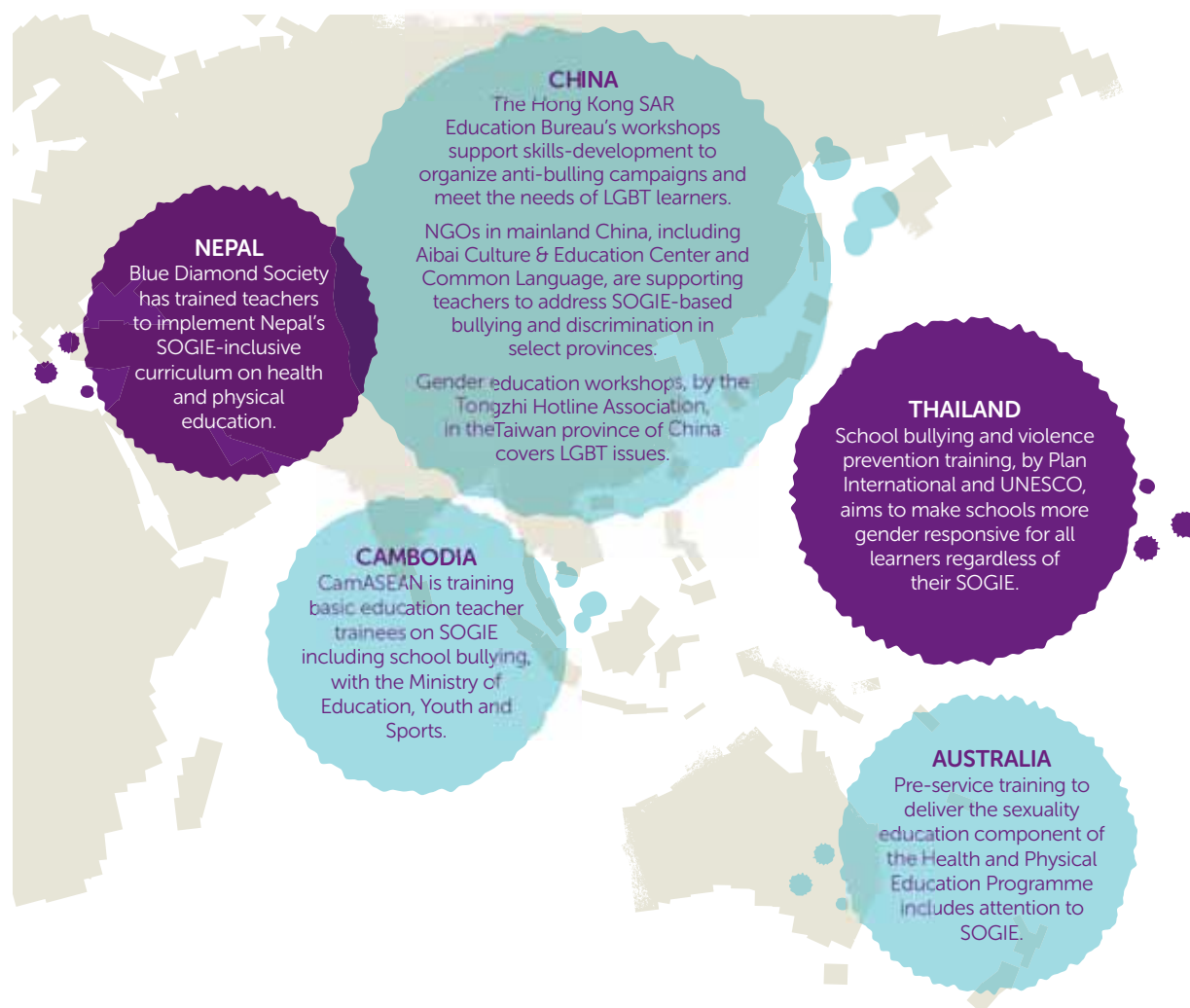
Many NGOs include teacher education as part of a broader package of school support which often includes awareness-raising, links to counselling or other services, and broader peer support for LGBTI youth. Several examples were found across the region, including in **China**. For example:

- Aibai Culture & Education Center has been providing sexuality training incorporating issues of discrimination and bullying to health teachers, school leaders, education bureau officials and doctors as well as undergraduate and postgraduate students in Heilongjiang province;⁴³⁴ and to mental health teachers (at primary, secondary and tertiary levels) in Beijing and Harbin.⁴³⁵ More than 80% of teachers who attended indicated that they would like to assist in reducing bullying in their schools. As a follow-up, Aibai intends to develop a guidebook for teachers on SOGI bullying and discrimination, and how to support sexual and gender diverse learners.

- Common Language has also been promoting SOGIE-related education in Chinese universities by supporting teachers and student clubs to bring these issues into the classroom. They are currently working with 10 universities in Beijing and three in other provinces and have supported over 30 local groups nationwide (mainly campus-based student clubs/associations) to organise SOGI-related awareness-raising and education activities. In the last two years they have started to target middle schools and have so far organized a gender diversity workshop for middle school teachers, which they hope to continue and expand in the future.^{382,401}
- In **Hong Kong SAR** Project Touch by The Boys' and Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong provides professional training for teachers and social workers regarding LGBT issues.⁴³⁶ The organisation also provides crisis management support which includes assisting schools in handling cases of bullying and developing guidelines for managing such incidents in the future.
- In the **Taiwan Province of China**, the Tongzhi Hotline Association has been providing gender education workshops for teachers which include coverage of LGBT issues.⁴³⁷ These workshops aim to eliminate discrimination, misconceptions and bias, and provide a space for conversations about respecting and valuing diversity and working toward equality for all.
- In **Cambodia**, in a government-NGO partnership, the NGO CamASEAN will soon train 4,000 life skills education teachers on SOGIE issues.⁴³⁸

Other programmes, including those in the section on *Whole School Approaches*, also provide support for teacher education. Many resources and tools for teachers and schools can be drawn on to advance understanding and practice. For example, in **Australia**, the Safe Schools Coalition Australia programme, has developed online staff audit surveys to elicit information on perceptions, knowledge and experience.³⁷² These, and many other tools, are supporting schools to develop targeted and evidence-based approaches to address homophobia, biphobia, transphobia and intersex prejudice (see *Section 4.6 and the Appendix for tools and more on whole school approaches*).

Figure 12. Examples of SOGIE-inclusive teacher training and support in Asia-Pacific 299, 380, 424, 425, 427, 428, 434, 435, 437, 438, 503



While NGOs are important partners in advancing the human rights agenda and invaluable providers of capacity-strengthening and support services, it is critical that the education sector advance the professional capacities of its workers to support learners through pre- and in-service education programmes. More sustainable mechanisms are also required to connect teachers to continuing professional development opportunities, including certification options and other incentives. Networks of support, through teacher unions or through networks (such as those that exist in some countries in the region for sexuality education teachers) at country level could also be drawn on.

Drawing on the literature and programme experience, our review finds that:

- Pre- and in-service trainings are needed for teachers to address their own perceptions, values and attitudes as well as to ensure effective delivery of relevant curriculum;
- NGOs are important partners, and are sometimes also involved in the implementation of classroom activities, but should not be a replacement for efforts to advance teachers' practice and their implementation of inclusive curriculum for sustainability and coverage;
- Teachers need guidance on what to do if they witness, suspect or are informed incidents of bullying, violence and discrimination and their own duty to protect all learners;
- Teachers need school management and broader support, and inclusive school policies.

“If educational institutions can create a supportive study environment then this will motivate transgender people to complete their higher education, so they can hold professional positions in society”.

Transgender young woman, Thailand²⁶

4.5 Support for learners

Learners can play a critical role creating a supportive school climates themselves, and obviously benefit from interventions that support them to build attitudes and skills including empathy and respect. Interventions targeting learners can be delivered within the school space (such as the curricular and co-curricular programmes already discussed), outside of schools, or a blend of approaches. They can also engage parents and other community members as part of broad sensitisation and awareness-raising. Importantly, interventions within schools must not only build the knowledge and skills learners need to prevent bullying, violence and intolerance, but also provide support and links to referrals and services for persons in need of assistance (including not only the target of bullying, but also for perpetrators or witnesses to bullying).

Fostering an inclusive, safe and caring school climate through which prosocial behaviours are promoted and students are offered opportunities to build their social competence benefits all members of the school community.⁴³⁹ Recent research in **Australia** highlights what an important difference a supportive environment can make on gender diverse students' participation and educational outcomes. Gender diverse young people in this study⁴⁸ who had:

- teachers who they felt used appropriate pronouns and names were nearly four times less likely to have left school than those who did not (6% compared to 22%).
- supportive classmates were nearly four times less likely to move schools than those who did not (7% compared to 27%).
- supportive classmates were nearly twice less likely to drop out of extracurricular activities than those who did not (14% compared to 27%).

Our review examined the availability of support programmes for learners including school-based and school-linked programmes that addressed bullying, violence and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. This included: peer support programmes, counselling and other services, awareness-raising activities and those that engaged families and communities more broadly. These

categories are not discrete. For example, some of the counselling activities are being delivered through peer support programmes, and awareness-raising activities can also include families and be linked to peer support. These linkages are important, and help to create the multi-tiered layers of support for learners in Figure 8.

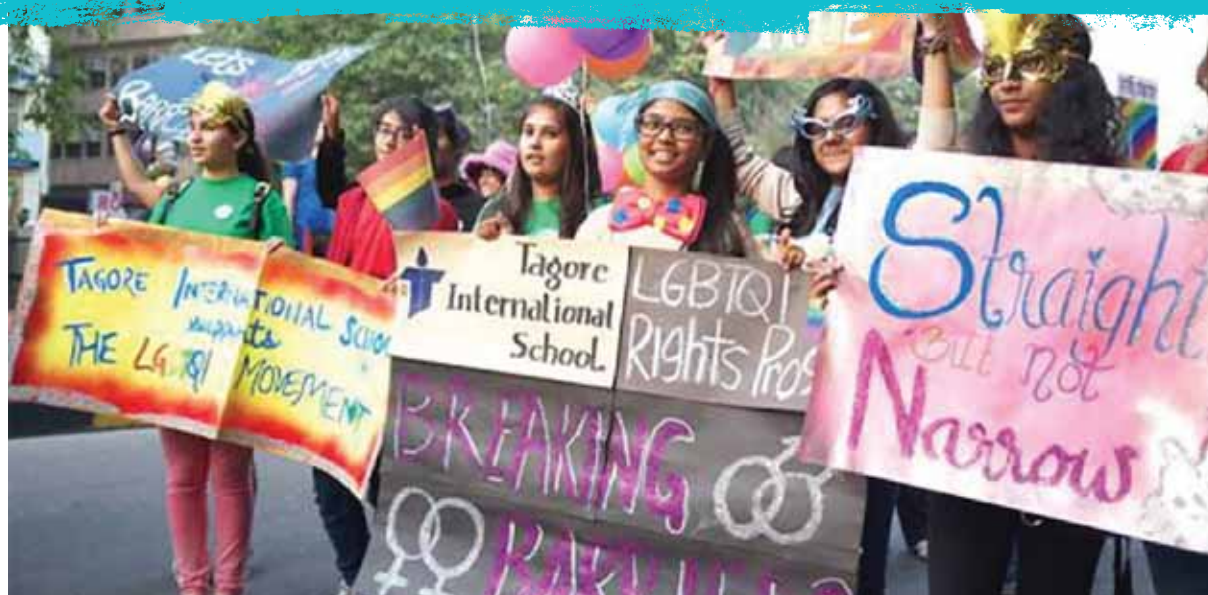
Many interventions linking to schools were identified throughout the region. Many activities appear to be one-off events organized on international days or for particular campaigns (e.g. poster design or other competitions.) No programmes were identified for primary learners, with the remaining interventions across secondary and tertiary levels.

Most appear to be primarily for awareness-raising of sexual and gender diversity, designed to generate supportive attitudes and behaviours. Some had a particular focus on bullying. There were limited programmes identified on intersex issues. In many cases, NGOs appear to be stimulating these actions, and likely also funding them.

There is a growing body of online resources and learning sites as well, which is a welcome development given the widespread Internet use by young people across the region. It was not possible to determine the quality of the materials and sources of support available online through this review. It is important that online sites maintain privacy and confidentiality, and don't subject learners to further abuse in virtual spaces.

There was limited information, overall, on the effectiveness and coverage of many of the programmes profiled here. It is important to strengthen the evidence based on what works, what doesn't, and why.

Photo: Shivane Sen



“Finding the confidence to transition and be myself was so important. Having support is too. [Other students looking for support should] try joining some sexuality and gender diversity groups in your area or online and establish a good support base if possible, like staff at school, friends or family. It’s scary, but for me it was totally worth it. I’m living how I wanted to live for my whole life.”

High school student transitioning in Western Australia⁴⁴⁰

4.5.1. Peer support

School-based and school-linked programmes providing peer support engage students in rejecting bullying, violence and other forms of discrimination. These can include student associations, youth groups, peer mentoring systems, extra-curricular or club-based activities as well as other pairing or peer networks within schools.^{441,442} These programmes can help to create feelings of connectedness, and respectful and supportive relationships that develop empathy, responsibility and concern for others. They can also build confidence, leadership behaviours and social skills.

Peer mediation or peer counselling schemes can also be established in schools, where students are trained to assist other students in mediating peer conflict or assisting students who may be distressed. These programmes are more likely to be effective when students have been trained in simple counselling skills, and school staff are committed to the long-term maintenance of the programme.^{443,444} These do not appear to be widespread in the region.

Diversity groups, such as Gay Straight or Queer Straight Alliances (GSAs or QSAs, respectively), are widespread in many countries globally, and were found also in many universities in Asia-Pacific. These student-led groups can help to build alliances, decrease stigma, and provide important sources of mutual learning and peer support for LGBTI learners.^{445,446}

Our review was not able to identify many such groups in secondary schools in the region, apart from in **Australia** and **New Zealand**, and a handful in international schools in **China**, **India** and **Thailand**. They may be available in other settings, but not widely publicised for privacy/confidentiality reasons or due to the language restrictions in our review.

In **India**, Breaking Barriers, shown above and profiled in Box 8, recently won the Khemeka Foundation national youth leader award for socially conscious leadership.^{447,448} The high school student group (members aged 14-17 years), with guidance from a young teacher, aims to reduce stigma and discrimination and create empathy, understanding and acceptance of gender and sexually diverse learners in school environments. The group undergoes around 30 hours of leadership training, and uses assignment-based curriculum and active role-playing to learn about queer issues and activism and qualify as peer educators. These trainees have then gone on to lead LGBTQI inclusion and awareness workshops for faculty and students. The group has delivered presentations at other high schools, universities and advocacy organisations, and aims to implement these workshops at other schools across India. Other activities include developing films and posters, recording episodes for the radio channel QRadio, and a social media presence on YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. The group also aim to launch their own Breaking Barriers website and blog later this year.⁴⁴⁹

Box 8. Breaking Barriers in India⁴⁴⁹



Photo: Shivane Sen

Interview with Shivane Sen, Project Mentor:

What are your specific goals for the group?

"We aim to create an environment that is informed about, sensitive towards, and inclusive of, LGBTQI individuals in India. To do this, we aim to conduct workshops in as many schools in India as possible, partner with college LGBTQI support groups, and be active on social media. To reach a wider audience, we are currently in the process of recording episodes for our own radio show on the internet-based Indian QRadio channel. Lastly, our Film Team is creating short, interesting and informative videos that contain the content of our workshops, which we will upload to our YouTube channel. We would also like to create partnerships with GSAs abroad and international advocacy organizations in order to create a global youth advocacy network..."

What challenges have you faced in establishing Breaking Barriers?

"Many students were not allowed to join the campaign team as their parents were uncomfortable with the topic. Teaching the students about the sociology of LGBTQI issues was an incredibly tough task - it was an entire language they had never encountered before. Training them to conduct workshops also took very long. Even now, they struggle with adequately explaining some of the more complicated topics - a trainer always needs to be in the room to supplement their teachings. We have really struggled with other schools allowing us to conduct workshops for their students. Many Principals feel that it is a taboo topic and that parents will raise a

furor. Further, now that the Supreme Court has re-criminalized homosexual activity, it is even harder; schools refuse to 'promote' something that is illegal. For Phase 2 of the campaign, 50 new students have joined the team. I am currently struggling with creating the right amount of structure for them to function efficiently".

What has been the reaction of parents, other students, faculty and the wider community?

"The reaction has been overwhelmingly positive. Of course, some parents, teachers and students have expressed disapproval, but those numbers are minuscule compared with the outpouring of support. When we conduct presentations in other schools, after all the questions have been answered, most people thank us for making the effort. Further, the press and other NGOs have been extremely vocal about their joy in seeing a campaign like ours in India".

How do you address bullying on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity?

"We indirectly focus on bullying by creating empathy and imparting information. Also, there is a zero-tolerance policy in our school for gender and sexuality based bullying, though we have faced no occasion so far to take action. As a personal observation, it is no longer politically correct in our school to make insulting gender and sexuality based jokes, which goes a long way. Also, open conversations about sexuality are more frequent in senior classrooms, which reduce ignorance-based bullying".

What would you consider your greatest achievements?

1. "Training our Peer Educators to be confident enough to talk about sex to Indian adults without being embarrassed.
2. We invited... 'hijras' to interact with our campaign members, which is completely unprecedented.
3. We won a national NGO Youth Leader Award, which boosted our team's commitment.
4. Making our voice heard at the protest at the Supreme Court's judgment re-criminalizing homosexual activity, which, apart from adding another demographic to the advocacy effort, also catapulted our campaign into national newspapers.
5. Creating enough enthusiasm for the cause within our school that we are now the biggest service project and activity for high school students, with a combined membership of 70 students."

Box 9. University alliances in China support sexual health promotion, equity and diversity⁴⁵⁰

In 2014, five students at Harbin Medical University in China created a social media 'We Chat' platform, named Together Association (TA) to build awareness of sexual health, understanding of LGBT issues, and create alliances in local universities.

TA became an LGBT-Straight Student Association guided by, although not formally affiliated with, the Center for Sexual Health and Education at Harbin Medical University. Currently, the association has 42 core members from three universities including 17 lesbian, 6 gay, 3 transgender and 16 heterosexual students.

The association has conducted advocacy, training and research activities and continues to support the TA platform where educational information and peer support is provided, and further links to counselling services are planned. While still in its nascent phase, the alliance has demonstrated its ability and commitment to deliver peer education and counselling services that address sexual health, while also promoting that inclusiveness, equity and diversity.

Other student-led groups identified were primarily for college level students, such as:

- In **East Asia**, *Rein Beau*, a student-led college group in **Hong Kong SAR**, and *Together Association* in **China** (see Box 9).⁴⁵⁰
- In **South Asia**, *Saathi*, at the **Indian** Institute of Technology Bombay.⁴⁵¹
- In the **Pacific**, the University of the South Pacific, in **Fiji**, has the student support group *Drodrolagi Movement for pinapinaaine, fa'afafine, fakaleiti and other LGBT students*⁴⁵² and *Ally Networks* exist in many **Australian** universities for students and staff.⁴⁵³ UniQ, **New Zealand's** 'Queer Students group' at universities, polytechnic universities and colleges of education.⁴⁵⁴
- In **Southeast Asia**, the University of the **Philippines** (UP) has UP Babylan,⁴⁵⁵ founded in 1992 with national and international links, while other networks also exist in polytechnic and other universities.²³¹

Peer support also does not need to be provided through separate school networks of associations, but by ensuring that all learners are able to engage and participate in school life and activities more broadly. This includes participation in sports programmes, which have positive effects on self-esteem, inclusion, and physical and mental health. In **New Zealand**, research by the New Zealand Human Rights Commission demonstrated that transgender youth are seldom able to play on teams based on their gender identity or wear a uniform that matches their gender expression. The Commission has produced resources for schools about supporting transgender students in sports, and in school life more broadly.⁴⁵⁷

Photo: Warren Field



Photo: Lewis Keane

“I had decided not to approach any school counsellors because I did not trust the school’s administration on their ability to maintain an impartial stance and professionalism towards homosexuality... I urge the Ministry of Education to investigate, isolate school counsellors from the school administration and provide professional training on sexuality...”

Gay male, 25 years, Singapore⁴¹²

4.5.2 Counselling and other services

Some learners dealing with bullying, violence or discrimination will require links to counselling, health or other services including child protection or legal support. Many schools will not have these services available on-site or have adequate capacity, and will need to refer students to external services. Referral to health professionals is particularly important if the young person is suffering from depression or believed to be suicidal. Teachers and other education sector staff may need additional training so that they are able to identify warning signs.

Interventions for students whose behaviour identifies them as being more likely to engage in antisocial or bullying behaviour are also important. Most reviews of primary prevention have stressed that reaching these children when they are very young are most likely to be effective.^{458,459} This can include referrals to counselling and support to enable them to develop prosocial attitudes and values, empathy, and emotional literacy skills that can help them to manage aggression or other strong feelings.

Our review of school-based and school-linked counselling services in the region suggests that schools are often inadequately prepared to link LGBTI learners to relevant sources of support. As indicated in the first section on evidence, many youth do not approach school staff when bullying, discrimination or other violent incidents occur and the reason for this is far too often because they don’t think schools will do anything if they do.

In some countries, professional associations for counsellors provide guidelines and resources that address sexual orientation and gender diversity. For example, the Psychological Association of the **Philippines** has a recognized LGBT psychology special interest group that issues statements to raise awareness, and organizes seminars on teaching LGBT studies and courses which includes content on LGBT counselling.^{402,460} In **Australia**, plans are underway to develop a curricular module on sexual orientation and gender identity and expression for students studying School Psychology.⁴⁶¹

Many LGBTI support groups around the region offer hotline services which assist with issues of discrimination and violence, but our review was unable to determine how well schools link to, or promote, these services. For example, in **China** the Gay and Lesbian Campus Association of China and the Tongzhi Hotline Association in the **Taiwan province of China** provide information and support about gender and LGBTI issues.^{437,462} In addition, the Tongzhi Hotline Association also has support groups for LGBTI families and relatives, a ‘To come out, or not to come out’ discussion group as well as gender education classes for students. In **Japan**, a hotline for LGBT people was established by the Ministry of Health and Labour in 2012 and the services of a national suicide network were extended to LGBT youth.¹⁰⁵ Many services were identified in **Australia** including Minus18, the largest youth-led network for LGBT teens, which provides mental health and peer support through online chat facilities, and organizes workshops and social events for youth.⁴⁶³ Amongst the many resources available is a particularly insightful booklet developed for transgender young people which discusses issues such as coming out, school uniforms and legal rights.⁴⁶⁴

Drop-in centers and other social services are also providing counselling and other sources of support for intersex, sexual and gender diverse youth and their families. For example:

- Project Touch, the boys’ and girls’ club association of **Hong Kong SAR** (BGCA) (see *Box 10*) provides such services, and accepts case referrals from schools for follow-up.
- In **Viet Nam**, ICS provides counselling and legal advice to LGBT people and their families through direct face-to-face support, hotline, email and Facebook, and through a web chat support platform. This includes providing information and support to LGBT people and their families so that they can understand about diversity, accept themselves and their relatives who may be gender or sexually diverse.⁴⁶⁵

- In the **Republic of Korea**, an LGBTQ Youth Crisis Support Center DdingDong opened on in December 2014. DdingDong is the first such center in the country providing LGBTI youth in crisis with services including counselling, as well as a safe space where they can rest and get food. Together with the mobile youth center EXIT, DdingDong also engages in street outreach activities in Seoul weekly.⁴⁶⁶
- In **Australia** there are a number of organisations offering support services for young people and their communities, some established or funded by the Government such as headspace, Freedom Centre, 2Qt and QSpace; others being NGOs such as beyond blue and Open Doors Youth Service.⁴⁶⁷ These organisations generally provide drop-in centres and/or implement counselling, courses, forums, resources and peer support.

Whilst it could not be confirmed in our review, schools may also be linking affected to learners to hotlines or helplines that provide children with a first point of contact with child protection services.⁴⁶⁹ The first helpline in the region, called Youthline, was established in New Zealand in 1970. One review of the use of child helplines in the region found that more than 865,000 contacts were made on abuse and violence over the last ten years. Of these, one in five was on bullying (22%), with important sub-regional differences. For example, in South Pacific, nearly half of the cases were about bullying (49%).⁹ With helplines being institutionalised in other countries in the region, it may be timely to review these as a potential source

of support and guidance for sex, sexual and gender diverse youth. This may require further support and training on sexual and gender diversity to ensure that LGBTI youth accessing these services don't find themselves subject to further stigma and intolerance.

Young people are often very comfortable seeking information and support in an online environment. Online counselling services are available through many of the programmes above, additional examples identified in our review include:

- In **Thailand**, Sai Sabai Jai (mainly for men who have sex with men) and TLBZ Sexperts! (mainly for transgender women)⁴⁷⁰
- BE, a regional website and web-based app, available in English and five Asian languages, provides online chat, peer support forum, and maps linking users to service providers in capitals of **Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand**.⁴⁷¹

Online counselling can be a source of information and support for persons who do not wish to, or are unable, to present themselves to site-based counselling services. It can bypass geographic, social, and parental consent barriers that can impede access to services, and provide private and confidential support. It was not clear from our review, however, how widespread knowledge is among children and youth of such services and few appear to have linkages to schools. Further research is needed to understand effective sources of counselling and other support services for LGBTI youth in the region.

Box 10. Project Touch reaches LGBT youth and their families in Hong Kong SAR⁴⁶⁸

Project Touch, launched by the Boys' and Girls' Clubs Association (BGCA) of Hong Kong in 2007, was the first social service in **Hong Kong SAR** for LGBT youth and their families. Its services include: counselling, support groups, school workshops and professional training, mass media and research.

Since its inception, workshops have reached 30,000 students and 2,000 school professionals (including teachers, school social workers), with more than 80% of participants demonstrating higher awareness of the social needs of LGBT youth.

Counselling services include 'coming out groups' supporting LGB teens and a long-running parent support group that helps parents accept their same-sex attracted and gender diverse children. Its counselling programmes have served over 1,200 LGBT youth, and reached 250 parents. Evaluations reveal: 83% report improved emotional health; 80% reported improved relationships with children. Project Touch also accepts case referrals from schools to support families for follow-up.

Evaluation results suggest that a multi-tier, comprehensive service approach that includes individual counselling, support groups and public education can be particularly effective.

“We appeal and encourage principals at various universities to play a positive role in gender equality education, to face up [to] the basic demands of sexual-minority students including gays, bisexuals and transgenders....When gay students are facing bullies, please guarantee their rights and offer them psychological support. When the university’s regulations violate the rights of gay students, please be brave [and] make changes.”

Excerpts of a petition from Chinese student activists⁴⁷²

4.5.3 Awareness-raising

This review identified a variety of activities in secondary schools and higher education institutions in Asia-Pacific to raise awareness of SOGIE-based bullying, violence and discrimination. These included school-based and school-linked competitions, campaigns, celebrations and public events. Some drew on international or national days to draw attention to an issue, and some went beyond awareness-raising to also link people to information and services. Many are youth-initiated and youth-led. A growing number are linked to social media for broader community mobilisation and impact.

Such activities are best delivered with commitment and support from school management and through the creation of safe spaces where all members of the school community have an opportunity to engage. Many of the awareness-raising activities identified through our review were done in partnership with NGOs. These community organisations often bring expertise and experience from outside the education sector that can be invaluable in endeavours to address stigma, discrimination and violence. Working with these organisations can provide opportunities to raise awareness of the issues; help develop support from school staff and families; and mobilise wider school and community action.²⁷

None of the campaigns identified in this review had made any evaluations available on the public domain, so it is difficult to determine the impacts of these initiatives. It does seem that many have contributed to an improved understanding of LGBTI young people and their issues, opened up a door for further discussions in schools, and provided young people with an opportunity to engage in advocacy efforts.

Some examples of different types of awareness-raising activities identified in our review included:

- A letter writing campaign in **Republic of Korea**, where LGBT students and graduates sent letters to their high schools providing examples of bullying and discrimination and calling for school action. In this campaign, guidance for teachers on dealing with issues relating to sexual minority students, and stickers stating ‘*I support sexual minority students*’ were also provided.⁴⁷³
- Media campaigns and forums for LGBT teachers and students in **Cambodia** organized by the Women and Choices programme to share experiences, provide support, and develop recommendations to address bullying.⁴⁷⁴
- An arts competition entitled *Violence is not in our culture: The SOGI project* in **Malaysia**, organized by KRYSS (Knowledge and Rights with Young People through Safer Spaces).¹⁰⁴
- The *I am Me* video project to generate awareness about bullying of school students because of their sexual orientation and gender identity in **Hong Kong SAR**, organized by the Pink Alliance, along with support to LGBT young people via its Facebook page.⁴⁷⁵

Pride Marches for the LGBT community have been organised also in universities in the region, including at the University of the **Philippines**. This University has taken several other steps to build awareness and be attending to LGBTI learners needs. For example, the University’s Center for Women’s Studies has an LGBT collection including children’s books. It also built the first gender neutral bathroom in the Philippines and is advocating for further expansion of such facilities.⁴⁰²

Photo: UNESCO-UNAIDS



A handful of schools were found to have undertaken awareness-raising on the impact of regulations on gender expression. In 2014, a high school in **Japan** challenged gender norms and promoted acceptance by encouraging their students to swap uniforms with the opposite sex for a day. The event was very successful, with support from 92% of the student body, and may become an annual event.⁴⁷⁶ In a similar event, male students at the National **Taiwan** University coordinated Men's Skirt Month in a bid to break gender stereotypes and foster a gender-friendly campus.⁴⁷⁷ The initiative provides an opportunity to experience the institutional discrimination facing intersex, transgender and gender variant people and to establish more inclusive regulations.

Other countries have drawn on international days for awareness-raising activities:

- In **Thailand** the *International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia* (IDAHOT Day, 17th May) has been a critical platform for partners to come together to address stigma and discrimination faced by young people. In 2014, a School Rainbow campaign promoted the drawing of rainbows, symbolising diversity, in schools in Bangkok to bring attention to the importance of sexual diversity, respect and the right to education.⁴⁸¹ The chalking was accompanied by lessons by principals and teachers to highlight the importance of the day to stimulate sustained action to advance human rights (see photo above).
- The Pioneer for Sexual Rights Alliance (P4SR) in **Viet Nam** has collected evidence of homophobia and of current violence prevention and safety policies in schools. The group have also developed a sexuality education curricula, including sexual orientation, for secondary and tertiary learners; organised a workshop on counselling services for young LGBT people and their parents; and raised awareness of LGBT rights among teachers and the wider community with exhibitions, performance art and other public events.²⁷

- In **New Zealand**, as in many other countries around the world, there are two recognised days annually which provide an opportunity for young people in schools to show support for their LGBT peers. The annual *Pink Shirt Day*, 22nd May, provides resources and support for schools, and encourages people to talk about bullying and take action against it, asking them to "Speak up - Stand together - Stop bullying".⁴⁷⁸ On the *Day of Silence*, June 12th, students across the country vow to be silent to call attention to apathy regarding homophobic bullying, name-calling and harassment in schools. Participants are encouraged to take 'selfies' (photographs of themselves) and post them on social media to show support.^{479,480}



Poster from the Day of Silence event in New Zealand



Box 11. PurpleMySchool

The #PurpleMySchool campaign, run by UNESCO, UNDP and 'Being LGBTI in Asia' seeks to raise awareness of school bullying of LGBTI people based on their sexuality or gender identity.

Launched in June 2015, the campaign invites participants to show LGBTI youth that they can feel safe in their classrooms and schools by wearing, drawing or making something purple and then submitting their photos.

A website in Bahasa Indonesia, Mandarin Chinese, English, Hindi, Thai and Vietnamese supports the campaign.

The campaign runs until Human Rights Day, 10 December 2015, after which the best photos will be selected for inclusion in a publication to be released at an International Ministerial Meeting on Homophobic and Transphobic Violence hosted by UNESCO in Paris on 17-18 May, 2016.



Photo: Ben Xue

“We parents should be a little bit more tolerant and open-minded. When we cannot change it, we should accept it. Acceptance will help us see other things to sympathise with, things that encourage empathy between parents and their children, and then parents would be able to provide the children with advice on how to lead a better and more useful life of their own.”

Mother of a gay young person, Viet Nam⁴⁸²

4.5.4 Family involvement

Parents and families can be involved in school-based programmes through awareness-raising campaigns, extension activities and other homework assignments that encourage dialogue, and also through their own initiatives to make schools safer and more inclusive environments. Parenting education programmes can also be effective for addressing antisocial childhood behaviours that may lead to later violence perpetration.⁴⁸³

In some countries, organizations or networks have been created such as the Parents and Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) groups in **Australia, China, India, New Zealand, Myanmar, Philippines and Viet Nam.** ^{35,484-486} These networks often offer awareness-raising and advocacy activities, education and peer support for parents so that they may in turn better support their children. For example, Viet Nam's PFLAG group travelled throughout Viet Nam in 2014-2015 to promote love and acceptance of LGBT children to parents and family members.³⁵

Other parent support groups from the region include HOO (Holding our Own) in **New Zealand**, SAFE (Supporting, Affirming and Empowering out LGBTQ, friends and family) in **Singapore** and Loving Parents in the **Taiwan province of China.** ^{400,487,488} SAFE has lobbied the ministers of education and public health to address SOGIE-based bullying and Loving Parents has advocated for the inclusion of sexual diversity in the school curriculum. Some whole-school programmes include resources designed specifically for parents who are concerned about bullying, such as those provided by Safe Schools Australia and RainbowYOUTH New Zealand.^{372,489}

Photo: Warren Field



Mother and son speak at UNDP Regional Dialogue on LGBTI Human Rights and Health in Asia and the Pacific

In some instances, a young person may suffer discrimination or bullying at school because of the sexual orientation, gender identity/expression or intersex characteristics of their parent/s or other family members.^{490,491} Some parents have reported that discussions with the school can better allow teachers to address issues that may cause problems such as Mother's or Father's day.⁴⁹² In some countries peer support for LGBT parents can be found in groups such as Rainbow Families in **Hong Kong SAR**, the **Taiwan** LGBT Family Rights Advocacy and Gay Dads **Australia**, while their children may benefit from the support of a gay-straight alliance.^{493,494}

Drawing on literature and research from the region, our review finds that there are several steps that countries can take to create multi-layered support for learners:

- Links between schools and external services are vital for affected learners including to counselling, peer support, and appropriately trained medical professionals.
- Students can also be sources of support, and student-led associations and networks can build alliances to support non-discrimination and safe and respectful schools.
- There are many ways schools can raise awareness about bullying, violence and discrimination and to promote acceptance of diversity. These can include periodic events and campaigns, as well as more long-term measures that mainstream diversity in school materials.
- Families can also be engaged through homework or extension activities, as well as through broader engagement in awareness-raising campaigns and the school life more generally.

“In a safe and supportive school, the risk from all types of harm is minimised, diversity is valued and all members of the school community feel respected and included and can be confident that they will receive support in the face of any threats to their safety or wellbeing.”

National Safe Schools Framework, Australia³⁷²

4.6 Whole school programmes

Evidence suggests that school bullying, violence and discrimination are best addressed through multifaceted or holistic whole-school approaches that strengthen the interconnected layers of a school system.⁴⁹⁵⁻⁴⁹⁷ This includes establishing a supportive and inclusive school ethos and environment, strengthening curriculum delivery and teaching practice, and creating connections with parents, communities and other stakeholders to improve social and emotional wellbeing at school. The rationale is that change is more likely to occur when the whole school community has a shared vision and commitment for inclusive environments.⁴⁹⁸⁻⁵⁰⁰

A whole school approach recognises that bullying, violence and discrimination are multifaceted problems that require multifaceted solutions. In practice, these programmes will require more planning and (human and financial) resources, but they are more likely to be effective and to be sustainable. The experience of **Australia** suggests it may be easier to start at a local level and grow a programme gradually, with regular review of evidence and programme experience, and through robust monitoring and evaluation of programme outcomes. As Sally Richardson, the Director of the Safe Schools Coalition in Australia recently shared, with community engagement, evidence-based programme design, and regular monitoring and evaluation to inform programming, *“from little things grow great things.”*²⁷

The following section explores whole school programmes that explicitly address sex, sexual orientation and gender diversity, followed by other whole school programmes that could be adapted to include these issues.

4.6.1 Whole school programmes that address sex, sexuality and gender diversity

Australia was the only countries identified in our review as having a national whole school programme that addresses school bullying, violence and discrimination based on SOGIE or intersex characteristics. The Safe Schools Coalition programme was launched in 2014 and is based upon a successful initiative from the state of Victoria. It was added to the existing National Safe Schools Framework which encourages the active participation of all school community members in developing and maintaining a safe school where diversity is valued and young people are actively supported to develop understanding and skills to keep themselves and others safe.⁵⁰¹ It is dedicated to reducing bullying and helping schools become safer and more inclusive spaces for same-sex attracted, intersex and gender diverse students, school staff and families.³⁷²

Safe Schools Coalition Australia provides a range of services and resources for programme implementation. The initiative actively supports the establishment of Gay Straight Alliances, and other youth-led awareness-raising and peer support initiatives. It provides professional development for teachers and other school staff which can be tailored to the needs of the school. This can include all-staff presentations, and specialised training modules and workshops at introductory to in-depth levels. It has developed guidelines, including on antidiscrimination, bullying and diversity policies and a broad set of resources including books and videos. This includes a ground-breaking new educational resource called *All of Us*. This resource includes a set of short videos illustrating the experiences of young lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex Australians and is accompanied by lessons plans to be used in year 7 and 8 classrooms (for learners aged 11 to 13).

The lesson plans are linked to the Australian Health and Physical Education programme and enable any school, regardless of location, funding or previous experience, to introduce relevant topics. It was the only resource identified in our review to address intersex issues and the lived experience of intersex youth comprehensively.⁵⁰²



Poster from the Safe Schools Coalition Victoria, Australia

In **Thailand**, UNESCO and Plan International are working with Path2Health and MPlus to implement a pilot programme in two cities, Bangkok and Chiang Mai, to prevent school bullying and other forms of violence, and to make schools more gender-responsive environments for all learners regardless of their sexual orientation and gender identity. The programme was developed to address the findings of a 2014 study on the issue,²²² and is designed to test whole school approaches with the aim of embedding policies and practices into the curriculum and daily life of the participating schools.⁵⁰³

4.6.2 Other whole school programmes

Many countries are also implementing other whole school programmes within which SOGIE-based bullying, violence and discrimination could easily be addressed. These include:

1. Health programmes:

The *Health Promoting Schools* programme has been implemented in a number of countries of the **Western Pacific**, including **New Zealand**. This model includes content regarding relationships, human rights and coping with bullies. With its focus on supportive environments, it can provide an excellent framework for addressing issues of social justice, discrimination, and sex, sexual and gender diversity within the school community.^{504,505}

2. Gender and gender-based violence programmes:

The *Gender Equity Movement in Schools* (GEMS) programme in **India**, and its adaptation in **Viet Nam** (*The Love Journey*), promotes gender equality and skills to prevent gender-based violence. Further attention to the creation of mutually respectful and responsible relationships and sexual diversity would still fit well within the vision of the programme.^{506,507}

3. Child rights and safety programmes

The *Child Friendly School* (CFS) Programme was developed as a means of translating the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) into school management and classroom practice. Implemented in **Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Myanmar, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vanuatu** and **Viet Nam**, CFS promotes the assessment of school policies, curriculum including life skills education, behaviour management and can include a survey of bullying.⁵⁰⁸

The *Learn Without Fear* campaign, developed by Plan International, encourages the development of laws against school violence, reporting and referral mechanisms, the establishment of data collection and research, and child-centred partnerships to tackle violence in schools. While there is no present focus on homophobic bullying within the campaign, Plan International's recent guidance on LGBTIQ adolescents and its integration of bullying issues in the Thailand country programme suggests opportunities for further integration of these issues within the campaign platform.^{8,509}

5.0 Data, reporting and monitoring and evaluation

Research on SOGIE-based bullying, violence and discrimination in schools is growing in the Asia-Pacific region; however, there is a need for more research at the school level to better understand its manifestations and impacts, and the factors that increase risk and those that are protective and promote resiliency. Further research is also needed to understand the elements of an education sector response that can contribute to reduced vulnerability and more inclusive school communities.

As discussed previously, currently the data is very mixed. For many countries, no systematic information is being collected. The most comprehensive research to date being undertaken in **Australia**. This research, while extremely valuable, is done using periodic large scale surveys on the sexual health and wellbeing of same-sex attracted and gender questioning young people and requires significant resources which may not be feasible in many settings. A more sustainable option for many countries will involve incorporating measures of school-related discrimination, violence and bullying into existing tools used on a national basis. In order to capture and cross-tabulate data to LGBT and intersex students, these instruments must also gather demographic information which includes sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics in ways that are age-appropriate and culturally informed.^{510,511}

In countries where a national reporting system exists for incidents of violence and bullying in schools this may be adapted to capture specific data regarding sex, sexuality and gender diversity. For example, such an initiative could be implemented in the **Philippines** where the Anti-Bullying Law of 2013 has mandated compulsory reporting of all instances of bullying and violence against children.³⁰⁵ Alternatively this reporting could be facilitated by independent

school inspectors, such as those reportedly in place to capture reports of violence and bullying in **Papua New Guinea**.³²⁹ However, a common finding throughout the region is that students who are, or who are perceived to be, LGBTI often don't report these incidents to school staff. So while school reporting mechanisms are important, they may also underestimate the magnitude of the problem.

Ideally, it would be useful to utilise an instrument which is incorporated into the education management information systems across the region, and the world, so that cross-country comparisons may be made, progress in addressing the problem measured, and interventions evaluated. One survey tool commonly used in the Asia-Pacific region that could be adapted to include questions related to sexual orientation and gender identity as well as a more comprehensive assessment of bullying is the Global School-based Student Health Survey (GSHS).

Some countries are looking at how online platforms and applications could be used also to collect data on incidents and to act as a warning system for schools. The application of such software has been used in HIV community-based monitoring systems in countries in the region, but its application in the education sector has not yet been explored. In **Singapore**, a youth-led initiative, Calling it Out!, encourages students to use an online platform to report their experiences of bullying and discrimination on the basis of sex, sexual and gender diversity. The accounts are published on different social media sites and combined for distribution to the Ministry of Education.⁵¹² While such platforms are unlikely give a complete picture of the situation, they provide young people a voice that they may feel that they don't yet have in schools and a confidential mechanism to call for action.



Advertisement for the Calling it Out! initiative started by students in Singapore

Photo: UNESCO



In circumstances where it remains difficult or impossible to include any questions related to sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics in national monitoring systems, specific research may be required. Online surveys, such as those profiled in this review may be a good option. Such research will not necessarily require education sector assistance to implement, ensures the confidentiality of participants, and provides a 'snapshot' of student experiences. Questionnaire design may include both forced-choice (quantitative) and open-ended (qualitative) questions and may also investigate the impact of support on outcomes, as is done in the Australian research. Many of the studies in this review have used this method, and can be consulted for adaptation in other countries in the region.

Drawing on the literature and research from the region, our review finds that:

- Literature reviews should be undertaken prior to any data collection to ensure that data instruments are socially, culturally and contextually appropriate.
- Collaboration between organizations including government, research institutions and NGOs can be effective models. LGBTI organizations and LGBTI persons should be part of any research design and data collection, to ensure the instruments are sensitive and that the terminology is appropriate. These partnerships can also be useful in promoting surveys and recruiting participants.
- Expert guidance and the piloting of data collection tools is also important to test their validity and reliability, and to address any issues.
- Mixed methods, both quantitative and qualitative, are valuable to provide comprehensive data.
- Research must have clearly defined ethical protocols and avoid further stigmatisation or exposure to harm.
- Online surveys can also be useful to collect information on hard-to-reach populations, including LGBTI youth who may not be public about their sexual attractions, gender identities or intersex traits, characteristics or status.
- There is a need for more research on protective/risk factors and resilience and on effective interventions, as well as more and better data on intersex and bisexual youth. All analyses, where possible, should present the findings by discrete populations as opposed to as "LGBTI" or 'same-sex attracted' and 'gender diverse' as there can be important differences.
- There are a number of instruments already being used in the region to collect data on school bullying and violence. These should be reviewed for potential adaptation to better understand the experience of LGBTI youth in the region.
- Comprehensive analyses and promotion of the results are pivotal to garnering support from stakeholders, particularly from governments, and from moving evidence to action.

6.0 Conclusions and recommendations

In many Asia-Pacific countries, there are significant gaps in knowledge regarding SOGIE-based bullying, violence and discrimination in educational institutions. Available research suggests, however, that it is pervasive, and has toxic and long-lasting impacts on learners as well as school communities in many settings throughout the region.

Further research is needed as a starting point to better understand the nature, scope and impact of the problem. Where possible, the adaptation of existing national data collection systems used by education or other government authorities is encouraged. In settings where this is not possible, or in restrictive social or legal environments where government leadership on the issue is not advanced, online surveys, adapted to the country in question, clearly offer an alternative. Data can also be collected by universities and other academic and research institutions, as has been done in many places in Asia-Pacific.

Waiting until a sufficient evidence base exists, however, is simply not possible. The education sector needs to act, and important foundations exist on which these actions can be taken.

This review finds that there are common critical elements of a comprehensive education sector response which include: enabling policy environments that translate into prosocial and inclusive school policy and procedures, inclusive curriculum and learning materials, professional development programmes for teachers and other school staff, and enhanced access for learners to social and peer support, counselling and other services and an overall school climate that understands and appreciates diversity.

Many countries in Asia-Pacific have legislation to protect children which includes attention to school-related violence. This framework can still be strengthened, and a more positive legal and policy framework established that protects the human rights of all persons, regardless of their sexual or gender identity or expression, and their sex characteristics. Steps must be taken to further tackle discriminatory policies in schools that stigmatise or exclude LGBT and intersex students. Systems are required to monitor the implementation of these policies, report incidents and assess progress in tackling bullying and discrimination.

The current education sector response is woefully inadequate, and far from the SDG principle to leave no one behind. Comprehensive programmes are rare, and while there are many initiatives underway, they are generally being implemented in a fragmented manner and with insufficient documentation and

evaluation. NGOs and universities are taking the lead on interventions in many settings, often without government sponsorship. Few education ministries have put in place professional development for teachers, incorporated topics into curricula or developed supporting resources. Prohibitive legal and social environments still provide a significant barrier to action in many settings; however there is increasing media attention, social mobilization and youth engagement on this issue which can provide impetus to the education sector to further address the issue.

There is good practice in the region and many examples and resources identified in this review can stimulate further efforts within the region and beyond. Platforms to share programme and policy experience should be promoted, along with technical support to adapt and test new models and to evaluate and share results in the region.

The Asia-Pacific region needs comprehensive programmes to address violence, bullying and discrimination in schools, including that based on sex, sexual orientation and gender identity. These programmes should be evidence-based, and supported by policy. The education sector needs to leverage support and expertise from the community and partner with NGOs to implement programmes. It is through such policies, programmes and partnerships that the rights of LGBT and intersex young people will be recognised, including their rights to education, non-discrimination, and health.

This report calls for actions to strengthen the education sector response in the region:

1. Analyse the situation

The data gaps found in this report need to be urgently addressed. Studies should be undertaken to understand the nature, scope and impact of bullying and other forms of discrimination and violence in educational institutions. These should include indicators to determine discriminatory practices based on sexual orientation and gender identity or expression, and intersex traits, characteristics or status. Adaptation of existing instruments, including school case reports and periodic surveys such as MICS and GSHS could be cost-effective. Online surveys can be undertaken where school-based collection is not feasible. Partnerships between government, academic and NGOs, including LGBTI organizations, can ensure high-quality and relevant research. Assessments should form part of regular school evaluations and surveys, and data used to inform interventions.

2. Develop a policy framework that supports inclusion

Education authorities should mandate protection of all learners from violence, bullying and discrimination in schools including clear references to harassment and violence directed at learners and staff because of their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and intersex traits or status. This includes national or federal policy and regulatory measures as well as school-level policies that are effectively communicated and reinforced. This will require specific budget allocation for implementation and response mechanisms, and monitoring of the impact of existing legislation on children. SOGIE-based bullying, violence and discrimination should also be integrated into national action plans on school violence, and broader 'safe schools' initiatives. The unacceptability of homophobia, biphobia and transphobia and intolerance of diversity should be included in codes of conduct of schools and other educational institutions. Other policies to remove barriers to education, including affirmative action, gender-neutral uniform options, and the establishment of gender-neutral toilets and sleeping quarters for school camps/excursions should be encouraged. More research is needed on the implementation and impact of school policy in the region.

3. Mainstream diversity and inclusion in curricula and learning materials

Inaccurate and stigmatising images and text against LGBTI persons in existing curriculum and textbooks should be removed as a priority. Curriculum reform should update textbooks with evidence-based age-appropriate educational content that promotes gender equality, acceptance of diversity and non-violence. Entry points to integrate relevant content should be identified. In particular, recognition of diversity in sex, sexuality and genders should be included in sexuality education and other curriculum on health and human development, and encourage learners to question gender stereotypes and assumptions about sexuality. Students should learn in the early years of schooling (early childhood and primary) that discrimination and prejudice in any form is unacceptable, and be equipped with skills that enable them to interact in positive and prosocial ways. This includes education about online safety, and the negative consequences of cyberbullying.

4. Support teachers to deliver inclusive education and effective responses to bullying, violence and discrimination

Teachers should be supported by school authorities and senior leadership to build their capabilities to foster respectful relationships and inclusive practices, as well as to detect and prevent abuse. This includes through

pre- and in-service training programmes and/or access to information to increase understanding of the issues facing LGBTI students and strategies to address these issues. Teachers and school staff should be made aware of institutional codes of conduct, as well as how to respond to students who are experiencing or witnessing bullying and other violence. Teachers and other school staff must model inclusive language and behaviour, and address any prejudices, stereotypes and derogatory language that may arise during the teaching practice. Teachers also need guidance and skills on what to do if they witness, suspect or informed about incidents of social stigmatisation and SOGIE-based bullying. Agreed procedures for responding to incidents must be followed, including referrals to school nurses, counsellors or administrators.

5. Promote safe and inclusive school cultures and environments

School leaders, including principals, teachers and management, must foster a culture of diversity, inclusion and respect in school environments. Students should be able to express an appearance that corresponds to the gender with which they identify, and have their preferences for name and gender pronouns respected. Processes should be established to safeguard the privacy of students who transition while in school, and the confidentiality of students' intersex status, if preferred. Leadership, extracurricular, sports and other activities must be available to all members of the school community, and peer support networks and alliances encouraged. School 'hot spots' for bullying should be identified and monitored, and particular attention made to ensure all students have access to safe toilets and bathroom facilities. Those involved in incidents of bullying, violence or discrimination should be linked to counselling, health, or other support services, when required, and services made available in ways that respect students' right to privacy and confidentiality. Opportunities to engage parents and caregivers in creating inclusive school cultures and environments should be created, as they are often key to changes in social norms and the creation of the web of support required for learners to thrive.

6. Build a stronger evidence base on what works

More robust evaluations of interventions are needed to inform and scale up good practice in the region. Education sectors should develop a better understanding of factors that contribute to more inclusive school communities and the benefits that are achieved by doing so at the individual, system and societal levels. More research on how social inclusion leads to better education and development outcomes is likely to also increase further sustained action in the region and beyond.

Appendix: Links to additional resources

Resources which address discrimination and violence in schools

UNESCO

[Stopping Violence in Schools: A Guide for Teachers](#)

This guide examines various forms of violence that take place in schools, and offers practical suggestions as to what teachers can do to prevent them. Ten action areas are proposed, each with specific examples that teachers can adapt to address and prevent violence. Excerpts from relevant international normative instruments as well as a list of links to online resources for stopping violence in schools are annexed at the end of the book.

UNESCO

[Teaching Respect for All](#)

A programme to address discrimination in and through education, Teaching Respect for All aims to provide a curricular framework to fight racism and promote tolerance. The [Teaching Respect for All Implementation Guide](#) can be adapted by countries to meet their respective contexts and needs. Educational materials include an implementation guide with key principles for policy makers, head teachers and NGO managers as well as a guide for educators and support materials for engaging with children and youth.

“The Love Journey”

A school-based approach for primary prevention of gender violence and promotion of gender equity in Danang Viet Nam

The Love Journey is a gender synchronised school-based approach to the prevention of gender violence through curriculum and campaign activities. The [report](#) focuses on individual, community and social risk factors for experiences and perpetration of gender violence, specifically gender inequitable attitudes and perceptions, social acceptance of violence, and masculinities associated with toughness and dominance over women. The Love Journey [curriculum resource](#) (only available in Vietnamese) is an adaption of the Gender Equity in Schools Movement of the International Center for Research on Women. A number of other resources (also in Vietnamese) were developed to complement the learning programme including a [music video](#), [video blogs](#) and a web-based role-playing [video game](#) to raise awareness about risk behaviours that can lead to violence in intimate partner relationships and challenge inequitable gender norms.

University Grants Commission (Sri Lanka)
[Preventing Sexual and Gender-Based Violence \(SGBV\): Strategies for Universities](#)

This report developed in Sri Lanka by the University Grants Commission, Federation of University Teachers' Association and CARE International provides strategies for universities to work towards the prevention of SGBV by prioritizing policy implementation, establishing workable institutional mechanisms and administrative practices, as well as conducting inclusive programs and developing innovative curricula.

Resources which address SOGIE-based bullying, violence and discrimination in education settings

UNGEI & UNESCO

[Homophobic Bullying](#)

This site provides further information on UNESCO's work to address homophobic and transphobic bullying including the following resources:

[Education Sector Responses to Homophobic Bullying](#). This booklet will be replaced in 2016 by a updated global analysis of good policy and practice as well as research findings, innovative interventions and lessons learned.

GALE

(The Global Alliance for LGBT Education)

[Advocacy Guide for Sexual Diversity Education](#) offers guidelines on how to assess countries' efforts to implement the right to education for people with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. It provides a 15-point checklist which allows for this assessment, and actions that can be taken to strengthen advocacy efforts. GALE supports the delivery of workshops using this checklist.

[The GALE Quick Scan Survey](#) is a short survey regarding the Right to Education Applied to Sexual Diversity Minorities. The survey scans strategies, interventions for education about LGBT/sexual diversity issues and their contexts.

[The GALE Toolkit Working with Schools](#) contains 12 tools to support school consultants, principals, teachers, students and parents to integrate adequate attention of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender topics in curricula and school policies. It is called 1.0 because GALE intends to continuously update it with improvements and new tools.

GLSEN

The Gay, Lesbian Straight Education Network (United States)

GLSEN provide a range of resources, free of charge, including access to their School-Climate Survey, [model policies](#) to address bullying on the basis of SOGI, [educator guides](#) and [lesson plans](#), and guides for starting [Gay-Straight Alliances](#). [Ready, Set, Respect!](#) provides a set of tools for elementary educators to assist students in feeling safe and respected and to develop respectful attitudes and behaviours. Lesson plans focus on name-calling, bullying and bias, LGBT-inclusive family diversity as well as gender roles and diversity. They can be used as either standalone lessons or as part of a school-wide anti-bias or bullying prevention program. GLSEN is committed making schools safer and more inclusive of LGBT students worldwide, by providing technical support to organizations in other countries.

UNESCO

Lesson Plans for teaching about sexual and gender diversity

These lesson plans are designed to help educators address the issue of bullying against LGBT youth. Produced for IDAHOT (the International Day against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia), the lessons can be used at any time as part of efforts to: develop a supportive, respectful and caring environment in schools for all learners; to stop to stigma and discrimination, and promote acceptance and acknowledgment of diversity in all of its forms. The lesson plan is available in [English](#), [Chinese](#) and [Thai](#).

The Rainbow Project

[The Education Equality Curriculum Guide](#)

These lessons are designed for use among students aged 11-14 years but they can be adapted and used to suit different year groups and abilities. The guide offers a number of practical suggestions for addressing sexual orientation and homophobia through subject-based lessons (e.g. history, geography, religious education, music, art, drama, learning for life and work), assemblies and school events. The same activities can also be adapted and applied to other areas such as sectarianism or racism.

IGLYO

International LGBTQ Youth and Student Organisation

The International LGBTQ Youth and Student Organisation (IGLYO) has a number of [resources](#) available to assist in making education more inclusive of LGBTI youth including a Teacher's Guide to Inclusive Education, Inclusive Education Guidelines, Intersectionality Toolkit, Minimum Standards to Combat Homophobic and Transphobic Bullying and a report on the Impact of Homophobic and Transphobic Bullying on Education and Employment.

Save the Children (Ireland)

[Leave it out: Developing anti-homophobic bullying practices in schools](#)

This resource was developed by a collaboration between Save the Children, The Rainbow Project and Youthnet to help schools address homophobia. It encourages Boards of Governors, principals, teachers, support staff and pupils to take collective responsibility for changes in attitudes and behaviours within the school. The resource includes guidance and information on the policy context, practical information on how to respond to the challenge of homophobic bullying; activities which can be used to introduce an ethos of anti-homophobic bullying practice to teaching and non-teaching school staff; specific information and guidance on developing a strategic response to homophobic bullying; and activities to support teachers' and students' discussion of the issue.

Stonewall

(United Kingdom)

Produce a wide range of resources for schools and students regarding bullying on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity including [Education Guide: Supporting lesbian, gay and bisexual young people](#) a guide which covers how adults can demonstrate support to lesbian, gay or bisexual youth, including how to respond if a young person comes out and how to support them once they have come out. It also provides top ten tips and features good practice examples.

[Gay! Get Over It! A Pupils' Guide](#) a pocket-sized guide developed designed to help young people challenge their peers' use of homophobic language. In 10 easy steps it tells young people what they can say to stop homophobic language, why they should be doing it and where they can go for further support.

[Tackling homophobic language](#) a guide which provides teachers and school leaders with straightforward, practical ways to prevent and tackle homophobic language.

Safe Schools Coalition Australia

Provides a extensive range of resources to assist in reducing homophobia, transphobia and intersex prejudice in schools including:

[All of Us](#) – a ground-breaking educational resource with gender diversity, sexual diversity and intersex topics.

[Guide to kick-starting your safe school](#) – which includes eight practical ideas for schools to take a stand against homophobia and transphobia.

[Safe schools do better: supporting sexual diversity and gender diversity in schools](#) – a guide to the Safe Schools Australia Programme.

Resources for students including [OMG My Friend's Queer](#), [OMG I'm Queer](#) and [Stand Out](#) a young persons guide to leading change in their school.

A series of resources for intersex people such as [What it's like to be intersex](#), [Intersex for Allies](#) and the documentary [Intersexion](#).

Resources that address families including [Who's in Your Family](#) and [Families Like Mine](#), which portray all the different ways people can create a family and are inclusive of families where there are two mums and two dads.

Also available are posters, videos, personal stories and supporting research.

**Rainbow Youth
New Zealand**

Have a range of resources for LGBTI youth including:

[I'm Local](#) - a project that aims to help rural queer and transgender youth feel valued, recognised and supported by their local communities. Resources include posters and a booklet.

[Starting your Diversity Group](#) – a guide to developing a diversity group for high school students.

Examples of resources related to general bullying behaviour

Bullying No Way
(Australia)

Provides information about bullying in general including the safe schools framework, whole school strategies, resources for the classroom and for supporting students.

Bully Stoppers
(Australia)

Resources related to bullying for students, teachers and parents including surveys.

Peel Health Bullying Initiative (Canada)

Classroom lesson plans to address bullying.

Welcoming Schools
(United States)

A project of the Human Rights Campaign Foundation, hosts anti-bullying resources including surveys for assessing the school climate, gender stereotyping, and bullying.

Endnotes

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