



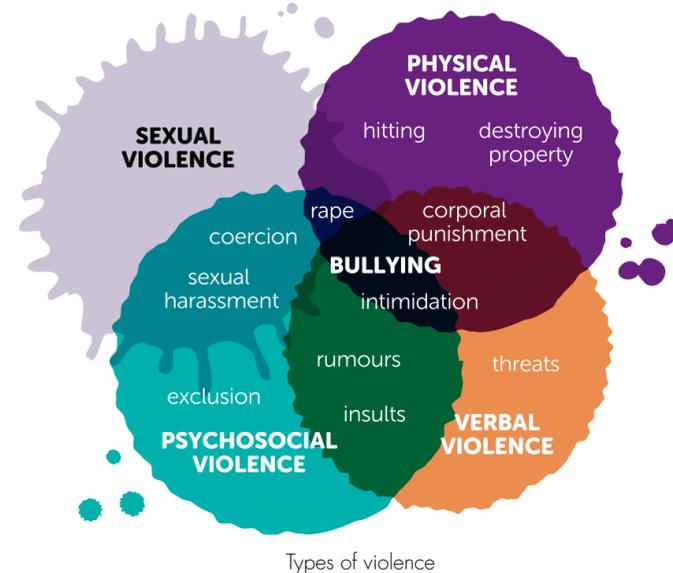
Photo: UNESCO

Asia-Pacific governments have made commitments to safeguard the right of every child to a quality education, without discrimination or exclusion. Despite this, learning environments are not always safe and inclusive places but instead can be sites of physical, verbal, psychological and sexual violence. For children and young people who do not conform to societal norms, schools can often be alienating and marginalizing places.

This is true for some lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) learners who face discrimination, bullying and violence from their peers and adults whilst in school. These young people also often face institutional discrimination through non-inclusive school cultures, facilities, rules and curricula. Such experiences do not stop at the school gates but can occur on the way to and from school and in virtual spaces, through cyberbullying.

Much of the research on school violence has neglected to explore the role of gender and sexuality. However, most forms of violence in schools are deeply rooted in unequal gender relations, gendered social norms and discriminatory attitudes and practices. For these reasons this violence is often referred to as school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV).

Bullying is one of the most widely documented types of SRGBV in the Asia-Pacific region. Students are bullied when they are repeatedly exposed to aggressive behaviour which intentionally inflicts injury or discomfort. Bullying involves an imbalance of power and can be verbal, such as teasing and taunting; physical as in hitting, kicking or stealing possessions; or psychosocial, such as gossiping and exclusion.



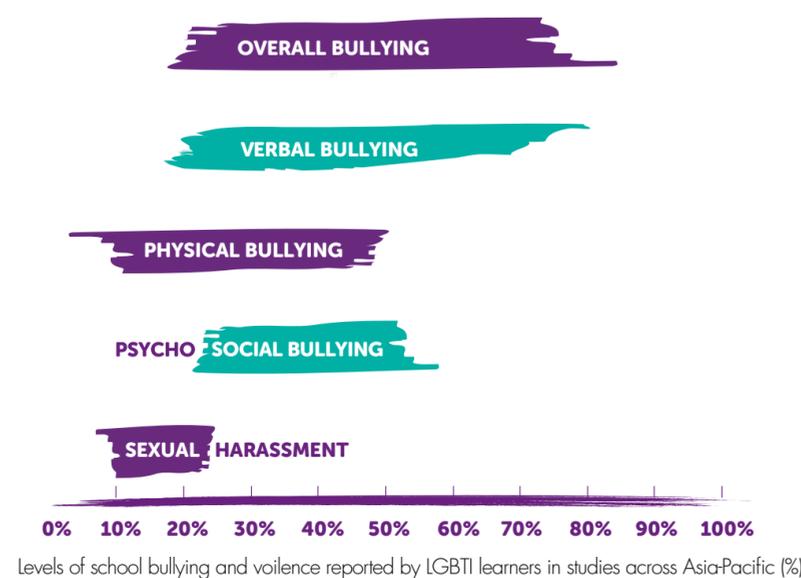
School-related gender-based violence includes acts or threats of sexual, physical, psychosocial or verbal violence occurring in and around schools, perpetrated as a result of gender norms and stereotypes and enforced by unequal power dynamics.

Research on school bullying, violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression (SOGIE) varies greatly across Asia-Pacific. While further steps are needed to strengthen the evidence base, common themes emerge from available research:

- Gender discrimination and the lower status accorded to women and girls can intersect with homophobia, biphobia and transphobia in some settings to make lesbian, bisexual and transgender girls and young women particularly vulnerable.
- Not only self-identified LGBTI students are subject to SOGIE-based bullying, violence and discrimination, but also those who do not conform to gender norms of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’.
- Perpetrators are largely other students; however, teachers and other education staff are also reportedly responsible for violence and discrimination.
- Institutional level discrimination and exclusion are common including misrepresentation 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 majority of LGBTI students report having experienced some form of bullying, violence or discrimination. Limited data are available on intersex learners, although emerging data from Australia show them to be highly affected.
- Rates of peer victimization among LGBTI students are higher than among their non-LGBTI peers, and victimization appears to have a more profound effect.
- Verbal bullying is the most common form reported; however psychosocial bullying is also prevalent, followed by the physical bullying and sexual harassment.
- Though data are limited, transgender students appear to be more commonly targeted for discrimination and bullying.

“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, Pakistan



The **impacts** of this bullying, violence and discrimination are far-reaching. They contribute to a hostile or unsafe school climate, affecting not only those who are targeted but also those who witness or perpetrate these acts.

Those who face violence are at greater risk of physical and mental health problems including depression and anxiety, suicidal ideation and behavior, and substance abuse. For example, in New Zealand, same- or both-sex attracted students were found to be two to three times more likely to suffer from symptoms of depression than opposite-sex attracted students. In the Republic of Korea, nearly half (46%) of LGBTI respondents under the age of 18 reported having attempted suicide, while in Japan, approximately half of those bullied said they had no one to talk to, 32% had considered suicide, and 22% had self-harmed.

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. In China, nearly 6 in 10 (59%) LGBTI participants in an online survey reported that bullying affected their academic performance, with nearly ¼ (24%) reporting losing interest in studying.

Other analyses find homophobia to have a significant impact on economic development. In India, for example, the economic cost of homophobia was estimated to be 0.1-1.7% of the country's Gross Domestic Product or at least US\$1.9 billion.

“One of my former classmates... fabricated a lot of rumors... That experience was horrific torture for me and everyday my thoughts were only on how to kill myself... I felt that the whole world has turned against me and nobody was willing to help.”

- 24 year-old lesbian woman, China



Photo: ICS Viet Nam

The **education sector response** to prevent or address SOGIE-based bullying, violence 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 organizations, in particular, often playing a pivotal role. There are many good practice examples from around the region, but these are not typically undertaken within whole-school approaches or holistic programmes.

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. However, the Philippines was the only country found to include specific reference to bullying on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity in a national law. In a number of countries throughout the region, prohibitive legal and social environments are still

a significant barrier to addressing violence and discrimination against LGBTI people of any age. Few education ministries have institutionalized professional development for teachers that enables values clarification and skills-building on gender, sexuality and non-violence. 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 teachers' ability to implement a new SOGIE-inclusive curriculum.

Throughout the region, there are many examples of programmes for learners that address SOGIE-related bullying, violence and discrimination. This includes peer support, links to counselling services and awareness-raising activities, as well as community-based programmes. For example, Project Touch in Hong Kong SAR provides a particularly comprehensive range of services, including counselling and support groups. However, there is limited information on the coverage and effectiveness of these programmes, and many LGBTI students are not seeking services due to fear of further discrimination or inaction.

