

# The Role of School Psychologists in addressing Challenges Facing Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Students

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## Abstract

LGBT students encounter boundless school-related problems including depression, suicidal tendencies, and drug abuse, among others. LGBT youth in school are subjected to constant bullying and discrimination from students, teachers, and the school's administration who often fail to defend them against this. Often, LGBT students drop-out of school. Therefore, the LGBT community is socially disadvantaged within our society. With this background, this study identified established laws to safeguard LGBT rights. Furthermore, the study examined the role of School Psychologists in reducing challenges faced by LGBT students in the schools based on analysis of the 10 NASP (The National Association of School Psychologists) domains, and made vital recommendations to reduce challenges faced by LGBT students with a view to lessen cases of LGBT stigmatization. The recommendations stipulated include; development of laws prohibiting discrimination and abusive language against LGBT, and the development a curriculum that suits LGBT needs. It is imperative to train teachers to aide LGBT groups attain equal universal access to core learning facilities acts.

**Keywords:** LGBT, discrimination, depression, psychologists, schools

## 1. Introduction

Access to inclusive and equitable education for every individual is listed among the former millennium development goals and the current sustainable development goals. While there has been an increase in mobilization and awareness regarding LGBT in society and the need for equal rights for children, LGBT students continue to be vulnerable and marginalized population in the society. Despite the formulation of this vital goal, Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender LGBT students in many learning institutions continue to encounter a myriad of formidable challenges (Barbeauld, 2014). Notably, these challenges preclude the overall benefits of education accrued by other students. There is an increased global need to recognize and integrate LGBT individuals into the society through formal learning institutions. The role of school psychologists in contributing to tackling core concerns related to LGBT education has increasingly become of great importance. Psychologists can help ascertain the importance of creating an equal learning environment for every individual. The cardinal aim of this research study was to investigate the role of psychologists in reducing challenges faced by LGBT students in various organizations by critically reviewing the 10 NASP (The National Association of School Psychologists) domains. with a view to offer key recommendations for policy formulation to aide in providing equal access to education regardless of sexual orientation.

## Background Information

Research shows that there has been a global increase in provocation, intimidation and other forms of aggravation towards lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender persons (herein thereafter denoted as LGBTs), in many schools (Sutter and Perrin, 2016). According to Barbeauld (2014), LGBTs are at an increased risk of psychological torture. The society, who perceives this group as illegal, continues to scorn the rights of LGBTs. Although countries like Canada and the United States have enacted many laws that to salvage this situation, the problem continues to persist. LGBTs discrimination is therefore prevalent in learning institutions (Everitt and Camp, 2014).

Because LGBTs are from diverse cultural background, they routinely intermingle with other people who profess distinct gender sensitivity and marriage notions. Despite LGBTs being legally recognized in some countries; societies do not fully acknowledge their existence. Various cultures still consider LGBTs to contravene their norms; a potential cause of LGBTs discrimination and harassment (Rosario, Schrimshaw and Hunter, 2009). Learning institutions are therefore caught at crossroads between their fundamental role in society versus their role in ensuring that this group is protected and their interests are safeguarded. In such instances, most learning institutions do not formulate effective strategies to

address this issue (Renn, 2010).

Consequently, this has raised major concerns about the sustainability of existing school's policies and systems in safeguarding LGBTs' interests. Therefore, it is necessary to incorporate psychologists' expertise to help design schools' curriculum to incorporate LGBT groups the system (Klein, 2017). This will sensitize communities on the need to respect the autonomy of individual decisions as regards sexual orientation and gender identity by applying psychological approaches to mobilize acceptance of the LGBT in school systems (Blackburn and Smith, 2010). This will help shift people's minds from the status quo to rethink their position towards LGBTs.

### **Problem Statement**

The LGBT group is growing in numbers globally. Day by day, they receive thousands of new members whose sole aim is a quest for recognition by the society (Friedman and Morgan, 2009). Nonetheless, their efforts seem to be futile. The group remains belittled since the majority are disregarded and sent to silent. Studies conducted by Birkett, Espelage and Koenig (2009) posit that there has been an increase in LGBT segregation in school systems. Additionally, the fear of intimidation by the public hinders this group from seeking justice (Makadon, 2008). Therefore, it is very difficult to mobilize an adequate number of persons to fight for the rights of LGBTs, especially in Turkish schools.

Griffin (2012) illustrates that LGBT groups in learning environments encounter discernment mostly in sports settings and further designates measures seeking to create inclusive sports environs for LGBTs in schools. Once students claim allegiance to the LGBT movement, fellow students begin to mock and humiliate them as they participate in various sports. Griffin (2012) indicates that many schools and other learning institutions are yet to come up with approaches to ameliorate the situation. For instance, Mohr and Sarno (2016), have shown that more than half (55% ) of LGBT individuals report felt insecure at school due to their sexual orientation and 38 percent felt insecure due to their gender identity.

Some schools have not yet reorganized a robust system to suit LGBT groups while other schools are unperturbed by this. In support of this, limited research has been conducted on the involvement of psychologists in addressing issues of concern to LGBT groups within schools. This research therefore examines the role of psychologists in creating a suitable learning environment for LGBTs in schools.

Richmond (2012) states that it is high time learning institutions begin to accommodate LGBT to groups. Ideally, all relevant stakeholders ought to articulate plans to decrease bullying and inappropriate judgment towards LGBTs. This research therefore assesses efforts directed towards training school officials to respect the autonomy of LGBT community within the school setting; it also assesses existing laws directed towards the protection of this vulnerable group (Mohr and Sarno, 2016).

### **The Concept of LGBT**

The term LGBT has frequently been used to denote and identify the diversity of gender identity with reference to cultures (Wynn and West-Olatunji, 2009). Occasionally, the term refers to an individual who is non-cisgender and is not confined to a person who is lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (Sutter and Perrin, 2016). This term excluded a salient minority who emerged and questioned the definition of LGBT and thus the introduction of letter Q to LGBT to form LGBTQ to account for queer groups. Commonly, the willingness of individuals to identify themselves as LGBT depends on many factors which include their security, fear of rejection, intimidation, or even victimization and possibly family repudiation (Toomey, Ryan, Diaz, Card and Russell, 2010). Prior to the massive 1960 sexual revolution, there existed no derogatory for non-heterosexuality. In the US where non-heterosexuality was widely denoted as homosexuality. In the 1970s, a group of lesbians emerged and changed the definition of homosexuals (Mohr and Sarno, 2016). Bisexual and transgender individuals later emerged and joined the movement and their inclusion led to the development of the term LGBT. Henceforth, each group that coined the definition of LGBT has been fighting for their rights within society.

### **Summary of Literature: Challenges Facing LGBT and their Effects**

Axiomatically, LGBT individuals have increasingly been subjected to torment growing up in societies and learning institutions where heterosexuality is questionable and essentially regarded as deviant morally unacceptable. Moreover, the group continues to face estrangement in other and even teachers are listed among person who question their sexual orientation. Routinely, LGBT groups have been subjected to discrimination in schools to the extent of being denied equitable access to learning facilities; this contravenes universal laws governing equal access to education.

Ideally, schools and other educational settings ought to represent a safe environment that is free of violence and threats. However, there is worrisome trend of increasing violence and outbreak of threats in schools. According to Blumenfeld (2010), the majority of LGBTs faced rejection in activities that necessitate inclusion. Approximately, 33% of the student missed classes due to victimization from other students in the month preceding the study which made them feel insecure (Blumenfeld, 2010). Periodically, LGBT students are subject to continuous homophobic and transphobic violence. The vast majority of the homophobic assaults are planned and enacted by male aggressors secondary to belligerent heterosexual male machismo.

Within learning institutions, LGBT students face social marginalization and social exclusion. Macgillivray and Jennings (2008) illustrate that LGBTs are confronted with different forms of devaluation including racism, social exclusion and sexism, and homophobia which deleteriously affect their social life and psychological well-being (Mustanski, Garofalo and Emerson, 2010). LGBT marginalization has negative impacts on their lives, it deprives them of their core contribution to social learning within learning systems. A study conducted by Espelage (2016) showed that appropriately 30% of LGBT student population reports ever being socially ostracized and excluded from attending equivalent educational opportunities to gender-conforming children. Regardless of whether LGBT rejection is imminent or hypothetical, it causes dejection and loneliness among LGBT students.

Moreover, Gidley, Hampson, Wheeler and Bereded-Samuel (2010) established that more than 40% of LGBT students faced psychological problems that affected their learning. Despite the fact that the LGBT movement has been legalized in some European countries, some societies are yet to come up with strategies to address challenges faced by LGBTs. Kosciw, Palmer, Kull and Greytak (2013) showed that LGBTs are suicidal due to an increase in stress and depression among the LGBT members. The harsh school environment that LGBT students face contributes to these suicidal tendencies (Ballenger, 2012). Additionally, LGBTs are involved in drug abuse due to segregation (Grant, Koskovich, Frazer and Bjerk, 2010). This is attributed to loneliness, rejection, and lack of love from their families. Other challenges include mental difficulties and psychological problems, school dropouts, poor performance among others.

## 2. Analysis

### **Appraisal and the Implications of the 10 NASP (The National Association of School Psychologists) Domains as Applied to the Practice of School Psychologists**

**Domain 1: Data-Based Decision.** School psychologists are usually trained to on key skills in data collection and the assessment of models that can help establish robust service delivery methods (Russell, Ryan, Toomey, Diaz and Sanchez, 2011). Psychologists are tasked with collecting information from different sources in a systematic manner and analyzing it to solve problems. Data analysis provides findings that are used to recommend the best way to offer services to LGBT e.g. customized teaching. School psychologists can use data-based decision to reduce suicide among LGBT students (Lee, 2014). This encompasses collecting and presenting data on past cases of attempted suicide. Consequently, LGBT students can be advised to reduce suicidal ideation based on experiences of LGBT who had attempted suicide in the past (Young and Mckibban, 2014). Additionally, school psychologists ought to employ decision-making models to help schools identify ideal school-based interventions to integrate LGBT into school systems. Psychologists can also use this domain to recommend to schools' administration, suitable treatment strategies for challenges faced by LGBT groups like stress, depression, and suicide (Sutter and Perrin, 2016).

Psychologists assess all risks that hinder uninterrupted learning in schools and the coexistence of LGBT with other students with a view to formulate policies to address these risks (Snapp, Hoenig, Fields and Russell, 2015). Grungras, Levitan and Slotek (2009) indicate that such strategies will lessen victimization by rebuking discernment based on gender identity and sexual orientation.

**Domain 2: Consultation and Collaboration.** School psychologists have a wide understanding of and skills in striking productive collaborations with all parties related to LGBT students who they can easily consult with directly, or indirectly to ensure strategies to address challenges faced by LGBTs are formulated (Young and Mckibban, 2014). Moreover, psychologists can coordinate interactions between instructors and LGBT students to support the academic achievements of LGBTs. Psychologists have the ability to ensure changes in individual behavior towards LGBTs is proposed (Murphy, 2015). The psychologist is vital in guaranteeing that schools attain the prevailing legal requirements of the equality among all children in schools (Balsam, Molina, Beadnell, Simoni and Walters, 2011). Once this is achieved, there will be robust guidelines to protect the LGBTs. Legal policies prohibit discrimination in schools and therefore LGBTs are protected by law. In fact, when it comes to conflict and abuse, courts have stipulated that Federal Constitution forbids school from harassment and other forms of bullying. Therefore, schools are in no legal position to treat LGBT different from other students. Inarguably, this domain can reduce the level of discrimination of LGBT groups.

The school psychologist can apply this domain to lobby for LGBTs acceptance among students and families. Psychologists can do this by making them aware that LGBTs should not be marginalized in the society, but should be integrated into all aspects of society including education. Since Psychologists are trained to have better consultation and collaborative skills, if these skills are fully utilized victimization, and discrimination of the LGBT group within schools will be a forgotten past (Balsam et al., 2011).

**Domain 3: Direct and Indirect Services for Children, Families, and Schools.** All institution's psychologists have the ability to propose changes in the school curriculum that incorporate LGBT students' needs. This can be done in collaboration and consultation with the school administration (Young and Mckibban, 2014). Additionally, School Psychologists can also work with LGBT students to ensure that appropriate interventions are developed to enhance

LGBTs interactions with other students. School psychologists work with interact with relevant stakeholders to ensure justice and fairness for all students LGBT inclusive (Gattis, 2012). Studies have shown that drug abuse among LGBT group can decline considerably when LGBT are actively engaged and the skills of relevant stakeholders enhanced through a psychological approach,

**Domain 4: Interventions and Mental Health Services to Develop Social and Life Skills.** Learning institutions psychoanalysts are usually required to propose a range of perceptual, mental and behavioral health services. These encompass LGBT counseling; enforcing positive thinking and behavioral support. Furthermore, psychoanalysts promote parental education on LGBT's mental health (Johnson, 2012) and ensure that LGBTs mental support is integrated into learning systems. School psychologists are knowledgeable in nurturing skills. Psychiatrists can help in the enhancement of LGBT skills to promote their self-regulation in order to cope with any obstacles (Johnson, Mimiaga and Bradford, 2008). LGBT's social-emotional functions can be boosted by the introduction of services that encourage socialization (Irvine, 2010); for instance, psychologists can introduce conferences to assist LGBT to be more open with their experiences. They can also advice both students and instructors on biological and other psychological factors that influence sexual orientation and desires (Kelley, Chou, Dibble and Robertson 2008).

**Domain 5: School-Wide Practices to Promote Learning.** Key stakeholders in the education sector play a crucial role in creating school-wide practices to promote learning among the LGBT students (Eliason, Dibble and DeJoseph, 2010). Psychologists can help in constructing a beneficial learning setting that promotes a positive mindset among students with distinct differences in sexual orientation, enabling them to co-exist. Psychologists ought to be adequately acquainted with technological resources and evidence-based school practices that promote behavioral and mental health. Such evidence-based school practices ought to be grounded on observations of students' interactions in learning institutions. Nevertheless, psychologists cannot achieve successful results without partnering with others within the school setting. Cooperation with other stakeholders is vital in creating and maintaining a multi-tier continuum of services to the support social, emotional, and educational goals for LGBT students.

Ideally, psychologists incorporate knowledge of universal screening programs that identifies LGBT students in need of behavioral and instructional support; a crucial move in promoting and enhancing the lives of LGBT students in learning environments (Kusalanka and Goldberg, 2009). Furthermore, psychologists can educate all the students on the need to respect each other's' ideologies and this promotes positive schools' environment (Ryan, Huebner, Diaz and Sanchez, 2009).

**Domain 6: Preventive and Responsive Services.** Preventive and responsive services offer a framework that provides evidence-based strategies to effectively respond in the event of crisis. Psychologists utilize skills promoting activities to enhance physical well-being and safety of LGBT students (McNair and Hegarty, 2010). These encompass the application of knowledge on protective and risk factors in addressing glitches such as truancy, bullying, and violence faced by LGBT (Kosciw, Greytak and Diaz, 2009). Other practice include the development of active school crisis prevention and response teams to address challenges and negative behavior towards LGBT student to promote safe and violence-free school settings that empower LGBT students to study.

**Domain 7: Family-School Collaboration Services.** These represent system-level services that are fundamental in addressing challenges faced by LGBT. Family-School collaboration Services work by incorporating interactions and partnership skills, which improve the academic and social-behavioral performance outcomes for students (Barbeauld, 2014). In this instance, psychologists employ professional practices such as engaging with parents in decision-making as regards students' needs (Young and Mckibban, 2014). Consequently, such decisions are vital in promoting insightful strategies in nurturing and creating favorable learning environments. Moreover, psychologists can help create links between the schools' administration, students' families and the students themselves.

**Domain 8: Diversity in Development and Learning.** Diversity in development and learning is one of the most important aspects in the foundation of psychological service delivery. School-based psychoanalysts use their knowledge and skills on students' individual differences and abilities, to address the challenges experienced by LGBT (Higa, Hoppe, Lindhorst, Mincer, Beadnell, Morrison and Mountz, 2014). Irrefutably, psychologists play a crucial role in influencing social justice for LGBT groups within schools (Holsinger and Hodge, 2016) and can use this domain to reduce discrimination and truancy in schools (Barker, Richards, Jones, Bowes-Catton, Plowman, Yockney and Morgan, 2012). By stipulating understandable historical facts in school, LGBT persons will not be faced with stressful encounters. Consequently, it will quickly overlook and cope up with the situation without affecting their lives (Carabez, Pellegrini, Mankovitz, Eliason, Ciano and Scott, 2015). Psychologists can help school society to reduce the use of negative language and signs that frustrate and discriminate LGBT which could potentially segregate them (Heck, Flentje and Cochran, 2011). However, psychologists take a professional approach to tackling diversity and cultural aspects by applying evidence-based examination.

**Domain 9: Research and Program Evaluation.** Research is the most vital aspect in every facet of psychology.

Psychologists out to be knowledgeable in research design, measures, statistics, data collection and data analysis techniques in order to conduct effective program evaluation that can help in understanding and interpreting crucial factors in a school setting such as inclusion (Blackburn and Smith, 2010). Research findings can then be used as the foundation for delivering effective services (Renn, 2010). Furthermore, research and program evaluation can help psychologists apply evidence-based interventions in evaluating the effectiveness of school-based intervention plans to eradicate challenges faced by LGBT.

**Domain 10: Legal, Ethical, and Professional Practices.** Legal and ethical frameworks are important in guiding psychologists on the best way to tackle the challenges faced by LGBT students in school. Identifying legal and ethical resolutions for LGBTs necessitates the application of responsive professional decision-making (Murphy, 2015). Psychologists ought to be knowledgeable of legal regulations and to uphold professional and ethical standards stipulated by the American Psychological Association (Lefkowitz, 2017) and assist schools' administration to understand regulations addressing challenges facing LGBTs in school. Psychologists should engage LGBT in discussions to enable them to appreciate and value their sexual orientation.

### **Conclusion, Research Gaps and Recommendations**

The Lesbians, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered (LGBT) individuals are victims of discrimination within schools' system. Numerous factors issues have hampered their learning and caused them trauma and in extreme cases pushing them to commit suicide. This research study purposed to evaluate the role of the primary psychological domains in reducing challenges faced by LGBT groups. The study recommends that the most vital aspect is the need to support marginalized LGBT groups is assisting those who come from destitute families to access equal educational opportunities concomitant to other children within society (Sutter and Perrin, 2016). Moreover, there is a need to promote an environment within learning institutions that has the capacity to enforce mutual respect among all students (LGBT inclusive) with the sole aim of reducing victimization and stigmatization of LGBTs in schools.

Policies should be enacted to encourage learning institutions and staff to come up with and publicize programs to support mutual cohesion and diversity among all students regardless of differences in gender and sexual orientation in order to create a supportive environment within schools. Furthermore, the use of abusive language in schools should be brought to an end through various policies.

After reviewing the extant literature concerning LGBT, gaps that future studies could investigate were identified. Firstly, the social ecology to LGBT bullying; future studies could investigate the effects of social ecology in preventing bullying as school programs seem to have failed in preventing the bullying of LGBT students. Secondly, further studies could focus on filling the mental health gap among LGBT group. Detailed research needs to be conducted to assess the effects of mental health on LGBTs lives and interventions used to address them e.g. therapies. Thirdly, further studies should focus on diminishing financial support for this group and how this can be addressed. Lastly, future studies should focus on LGBT health issues e.g. the limited insurance cover offered to LGBTs and propose solutions to counter this.

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