

The Impact of Adolescent Sex Education on LGBT Identity

Xinlin Lv^{1, †}, Zaixin Tian^{2, †} and Zifei Zhou^{3, †, *}

¹ Harrow Beijing, Beijing, China

² Fayschool, Wellsley, MA, USA

³ School of YK Pao, Shanghai, China

*Corresponding author: s22316@ykpaoschool.cn

† These authors contributed equally.

Abstract. LGBT inequalities and discrimination were observed in more and more middle schools, and as research continues through scientific studies, the rate of them happening has been surprisingly increasing over the past few years. This phenomenon has to be stopped. In a long turn wrong, the students who had been discriminated against would have serious mental health problems, as well as increasing self-pity. The purpose of this research is to make aware of the violation's importance and provoke schools to realize the importance of the LGBT curriculum. This study is completed by surveying people in the communities and researching the percentage of LGBT+ discrimination over the past few years. Through the research, data had clearly shown a miraculous difference between schools that took care of this situation and those that did not.

Keywords: LGBT, discrimination, sex education, violation.

1. Introduction

For centuries LGBT discrimination had been a huge problem all over the globe. In China, being the most populated country in the world also meant this country included the biggest LGBT population. Even if it was removed from the mental disorder categories many doctors today still believe that gays and lesbians are a type of mental disease that needs to be cured [1]. In 2018, an app widely used in China called Weibo declared that it is having a big clean-up and erase any inappropriate content including violence, erotic products, and LGBT content. From here it can be inferred that even with the biggest LGBT population in the world China clearly does not want to accept LGBT groups as righteous members of the country, discrimination still lasts till today.

Of course, the statement above is not suggesting that China is the only country that discriminates against the LGBT population. Other countries including the USA, the United Kingdom all have data revealing the unfair treatment of LGBT populations. Therefore, from the perspective of middle school students, this paper believes that there can be an alternative to solve these major problems and eliminate LGBT discrimination for good. That is, to implant LGBT sex education for children at an early age. That is, to have these courses during primary and middle school. In this way, as kids learn about the diversity of the people around them they will understand that it is fine to be different from other people, and people should respect each other for their differences.

2. The Current Middle School Sexual Education for Adolescents

2.1 Different Courses are Taken in School

The first important fact that is needed to be acknowledged is the severe lack of sex education regarding the LGBT group among middle school students. For instance, in the UK only 13% of the total population of UK adolescents have received sex education about LGBT in a correct point of view that helps them to accept these minority groups [2]. This meant that the rest 87% lacked an understanding of the LGBT which might cause them to feel uncomfortable or even fear the LGBT peers around them. Because of this, another survey collecting data from 291 LGBT students from 42 universities across the UK ended up with a shocking conclusion. That is, despite the increase of

anticipation to fight for equal rights for the LGBT group in the UK, the students still do not view their universities as safe heaven away from homophobia on campus. The students still struggle to admit their identities as part of the LGBT group to their fellow classmates for fear of being singled out. [3] For this issue, the UK had come up with a solution that includes setting sexual education regarding the LGT group as a must-study course for elementary school and middle school. However, the details of these courses remained unknown to the public.

Some of the approaches that schools take to let students learn more about LGBT is to have students read books that are related to LGBT, as an example, in Midwestern universities teachers are working with a group of middle school to secondary school students, giving them literature that is related to LGBT groups in order for them to accept homosexuality and other differences starting at a young age. Although some students might have some doubts in the first place about how exactly this will work, the results all came out pretty positive as they slowly began to understand the diversity in their society [4].

2.2 The Teacher's Dilemma in Sex Education

These are severe problems to consider when examining the current situation with middle school sex education. If teachers are not getting well paid and are restricted to teach correct content to the students. With middle school students exposed to less positive education about how to accept the differences from people around them, it would be hard for them to view LGBT people correctly in the future after they have grown up and picked their careers. With some of these students having the possibility to become government officials, it is hard not to worry about the policies these officials might make regarding LGBT people with them being biased in the first place.

A survey conducted by a Montana high school examining 237 young students, in which half of them identify themselves as part of the LGBT group and 64 teachers who are a part of the sexual education program revealed the following results. Although 90% agreed that these sexual education courses are fairly important for adolescents, the current biggest problem is the lack of professional training from teachers to teach this course, mostly because of the deficiency in salaries [5]. Teachers are not getting enough payment for them to continue these courses.

The teachers also face problems with the restraints from the government. Even in America, with its acceptance of individuality famous to the world, there are still prejudices lurking in the educational system for middle school students in some states. In Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Texas, teachers are prohibited from saying LGBT people in a positive light in health or sex education courses. Because of the many restrictions made by the government some teachers might be fired when they accidentally failed to cooperate with the requests. And that may be one of the reasons why so few teachers wanted to teach this class.

2.3 How Society Views Sex Education in Middle Schools

When it comes to the LGBT group and sexual education, it is important to discuss some of the societal impacts and how they view this education in the first place.

There are great examples to show how parents support these sides of LGBT education for their children. As an example, one of the researchers found it reveals that a group of parents is actively joining a program helping teachers and caregivers to implant LGBT theme education in one of the elementary schools in America. This revealed many parents' hope in giving better education about the diversity in their country and learning to accept these differences [6].

However, the views are very diverse in different countries. In Muslim society, a woman is viewed as below men, and the LGBT group is counted as a disgrace to society. A study conducted to examine how Muslim adults view sex education has given the results that the current educational system and how adults view how these educations should be are all very distorted and biased. These problems are mostly due to the religious beliefs written in the Quran, which the Muslims have to obey.

3. The Positive Effects of Middle School Sexual Education on LGBT Identity

3.1 Fostering Acceptance and Respect for LGBT among Adolescents

Some LGBT youths may experience a supportive, welcoming, inclusive school community. Others may struggle to embrace the idea that they are LGBT in an unsupportive, unwelcoming, exclusive school. As research said, middle school students, acknowledge that LGBT students pressurize more often than non-LGBT groups. Gender discrimination, victimization, and bullies will lead them to lower self-esteem, higher absenteeism, and even drop out of school. “90 percent of the 8,584 LGBT students surveyed reported being verbally harassed for some personal characteristic during the 2010–11 school year, 80 percent reported being the target of mean rumors or lies, and close to 70 percent reported being targets of sexual harassment in school” [7], according to acsd.org. Fortunately, anti-bullying adults had come up with the idea of an “LGBT curriculum” and clubs like “Gay-Straight Alliances” in schools, where students get educated in involving special groups.

The teaching of the LGBT curriculum benefits all students by promoting acceptance, and respect, and teaching them about the diverse people and families in the world. The age in middle school is where students experience their adolescents, and that is when their idea of morals and values form. According to research, these curriculums have suggested a difference for LGBT students, but it’s really not that simple. Not that the only curriculum has created a tremendous effect, but also the idea of trying to fit into other people’s shoes. If they are non-LGBT students, it is normal that they don’t feel that they are being offensive when they are towards LGBT people. For example, students make fun of other people as a joke by using the word “gay,” but when that goes into the other student’s ear, it becomes something that lowers another level of their confidence. It is understandable that not all students feel offended when people say that to them, but LGBT students do. When non-LGBT people discriminate against them, they might think that “they deserve it anyways because they are different.” But, have they ever thought about what they will feel like if a norm of people surrounding them every day scoffed them off? In the long-term run, their self-esteem, and self-confidence will all be devastated, and they will suffer just like them. In addition, is being different always bad? Obviously not. Everybody identifies themselves differently, and more importantly, that is what makes every one of us unique.

3.2 Help LGBT Students Feel more Inclusive

While the LGBT curriculum helps LGBT students feel more inclusive by bringing acceptance and respect to students through education, the syllabus does that by identifying those who are LGBT students. People might think that pointing out who is LGBT is not a helpful thing at all, but in reality, it will help them feel inclusive. In the US, there is an average of 17-21% of LGBT groups in schools, meaning that there won’t be only one student who is identified as LGBT in a grade [8]. Therefore, having the ability to point out who is LGBT will just help them find people that are like them. Finding someone that is the same as the other is always better than thinking that all people are different from them. Think that they are gay but you are always afraid of telling people because you just automatically think that they are all straight.

3.3 Contribute to Society's LGBT Identity

Furthermore, the sex education curriculum also helps every student to practice practical skills or show sympathy and respect to others. Allowing and including people that are different from students can advance their collaboration as a team, and connect people. This is because the schools are still predominantly non-LGBT, and has a little percentage of them, so accepting them sometimes needs nerves to do so for some children. But, accepting unique people is just what makes all of us more advanced, and mature. Whenever people see work, it’s always working in teams (unless on other special occasions), and when working as a team, students have to have the ability to discuss and understand people to proceed, and so that skill will have an impact on every human’s future. Now, talking about understanding, in other words, it is about being emphatic. This means showing

understanding toward others with different situations or experiences, good or bad, focusing on their individual being. In schools, the teacher has always been talking about “Inclusion, Equity, and Justice” as a whole, and that is because just the way it is. And only does the LGBT curriculum emphasize that, it is literally what this curriculum is about. Inclusion, equity, and justice.

4. What are Some Improvements that could be Made in LGBT Education in Middle School?

Middle school has made a lot of progress in educating students in the LGBT group, such as through lessons, recourses, and posters. There are also many ways that middle schools could improve their teaching of the LGBT groups, such as real-life interviews, making mind maps, and creating a class file.

4.1 Adding LGBT-related Content to Sex Education Classes

For middle school students that have reported “having sex education classes in middle school- 10-15%” [9], adding LGBT-related content could help the students understand racism in both sexual differences and isolation in the LGBT group. This makes the students in the middle school exceed other middle schools who only have lessons on sex and don’t have education on the LGBT group. Since schools provide sex education mainly because they want the student could be more experienced in society and not believe in racism. Therefore, there shouldn’t be a problem to add LGBT education as well.

Schools should add information to this topic. To make it interesting for the students to learn, teachers could invite an LGBT group member into the classroom, an escape from the usual pens, paper and text will make the students feel relaxed and will eventually like this subject. Schools should also make students constantly make posters, if they did the posters very well, they get to hang the posters on the wall. This is a great encouragement to students to work harder on this subject. Students should write a reflection whenever people needed to, they read a book or part of it. This would make learning more effective, when the student is reviewing for exams, they would be able to see the notes clearly and be able to get high grades, instead of flipping through every page of your book trying to find out key information this is a real waste of time.

Middle schools should combine sex classes with LGBT classes (if there are separate classes), this would mean less stress for the students since they have to study at a whole new level in depth. Teaching them together would also make teachers free most of the time, this means when a student has a question the teacher should have time to answer them and teach them about it.

4.2 Optimizing Teachers for LGBT Education

Education is extremely important when it comes to studying, no matter in which study. Especially if you are telling people to believe that the LGBT group is part of our community, which is correct, but other people might have a different perspective than you. So, for a teacher to tell a whole class that, their persuasive skills are extremely important.

Many teachers move on too quickly, and some students in the class learn slowly, if a teacher moves on too quickly, it would result in the student lacking behind and don’t get the topic. If many students are lacking behind the students won’t learn anything, and if they don’t speak up, the teacher would assume that they all understood, and then move on. This is a serious issue and it means that students would not understand, all about this topic is to learn and understand it, so you go on the right line. If you don’t get the information the teacher explains in class, you might make the mistake of isolating an LGBT member. So, choosing the right teacher is very important, especially when you are teaching new students about the LGBT group, so they have the correct understanding of the LGBT group in their first class.

4.3 Create a Campus Environment that Respects the LGBT Community.

Creating a good campus environment is very important, it makes people members of the LGBT group feel safe and feel that they belong here, not feeling stressed and isolated. “55% of students think they are unsafe in school” [10]. Students could also learn why to keep them safe and respect them. Classes have been taught. “Language alone has a huge impact, with 74 percent of LGBT students saying they’ve been verbally harassed (called names or threatened) for their sexual orientation, and 55 percent have been verbally harassed for their gender expression” [11]. The students should now learn how to create a safe environment for LGBT groups.

Schools could have no bully signs in the hallway displayed as posters. This would make bullies, if there are any, feel alert, and the LGBT group feel safer. Schools should also have a safeguarding lesson, in this lesson. This will make the bullies see the consequences if they ever got caught bullying. If the LGBT group is still not feeling safe, schools could make a full-time teacher that roams around the school and see if there are bullies, this would make the LGBT group feel more comfortable. Teachers also could have an office with advisors so that if an LGBT member feels uncomfortable and seek any changes, the advisors would be available. To top it over, schools could arrange an assembly every few weeks to remind everyone about bullying.

These are the main point and most effective ones that could be used, this way bullying of any kind would never be seen in the corridors or lessons of the school, and the building would be safe.

5. Conclusion

There are three problems that need to be identified: one is a significant lack of sex education for adolescents all over the globe, and two is the lack of training and salary given to the teachers in order to teach this course. A side note is even if these teachers have enough salary and training, to begin with, there are also problems from political pressure to deal with. Some governments do not want children to learn about LGBT groups, afraid that this might bring bad influences on them. The last problem is societal pressure, many religious groups do not recognize LGBT groups as normal sexuality and instead see it as some sort of illness.

The sex education curriculum also helps every student to practice practical skills or show sympathy and respect to others, LGBT curriculum helps LGBT students feel more inclusive by bringing acceptance and respect to students through education. In the US, there is an average of 17-21% of LGBT groups in schools, meaning that there won’t be only one student who is identified as LGBT in a grade. Finding someone that is the same as the other is always better than thinking that all people are different from them. Think that they are gay, but you are always afraid of telling people because you just automatically think that they are all straight.

Creating a good campus environment is very important, it makes people members of the LGBT group feel safe and feel that they belong here, not feeling stressed and isolated. Many teachers move on too quickly, and some students in the class learn slowly, so teachers could slow their proceeding speed down. In order to make it interesting for the students to learn, teachers could invite an LGBT group member into the classroom, an escape from the usual pens, paper and text will make the students feel relaxed and will eventually like this subject.

References

- [1] Wang, Y., Hu, Z., Peng, K., Xin, Y., Yang, Y., Drescher, J., & Chen, R.. Discrimination against LGBT populations in China. *The Lancet Public Health*, 2019, 4(9), e440-e441.
- [2] Unknow author. UK sex education curriculum faces first major overhaul in nearly 20 years: LGBT knowledge will be taught to teenagers, 2017.
- [3] Ellis, S. J. Diversity and inclusivity at university: A survey of the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) students in the UK. *Higher Education*, 2009, 57(6), 723-739.

- [4] Flores, G.. Teachers work cooperatively with parents and caregivers when implementing LGBT themes in the elementary classroom. *American Journal of Sexuality Education*, 2014, 9(1), 114-120.
- [5] Sondag, K. A., Johnson, A. G., & Parrish, M. E.. School sex education: Teachers' and young adults' perceptions of relevance for LGBT students. *Journal of LGBT Youth*, 2022, 19(3), 247-267.
- [6] Smerecnik, C., Schaalma, H., Gerjo, K., Meijer, S., & Poelman, J. An exploratory study of Muslim adolescents' views on sexuality: Implications for sex education and prevention. *BMC public health*, 2010, 10(1), 1-10.
- [7] Kosciw, J. G., Greytak, E. A., Bartkiewicz, M. J., Boesen, M. J., & Palmer, N. A. The 2011 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth in our nation's schools. New York: GLSEN, 2012.
- [8] Conron, K.J. LGBT Youth Population in the United States. The Williams Institute, UCLA, Los Angeles, CA, September 2020.
- [9] Zack Ford. Over Half Of LGBT, Students Feel Unsafe At School, Report Shows, Thinkprogress, OCT 22, 2014, <https://archive.thinkprogress.org/over-half-of-lgbt-students-feel-unsafe-at-school-report-shows-22d6fdc52b98/>
- [10] Helen Vlasova. The State of Sex Education, Admissionsly, November 21, 2020, <https://admissionsly.com/sex-education-statistics/>
- [11] Caitlin O'Connor. (2022). We Have the Power and Responsibility to Be Affirming Educators: Standing with LGBTQIA+ Youth and Their Families, NCTE, <https://ncte.org/blog/2022/04/we-have-the-power-and-responsibility-to-be-affirming-educators-standing-with-lgbtqia-youth-and-their-families/>