

VIOLENCE BASED ON SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY

While most instances of gender-based violence are committed against women and girls, they are not the only ones who can be targeted because of their gender. Men and boys may be targeted for not fitting into a dominant form of masculinity, and people of all genders may be targeted if those around them do not respect their gender expression.

“Gender-based violence is also related to the social construct of what it means to be either male or female. When a person deviates from what is considered ‘normal’ behaviour they are targeted for violence. This is particularly acute when combined with discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity.”

(UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, Statement to the 58th session of the Commission on Human Rights, 2002)

Young people who identify as, or are perceived to be, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex are more at risk for harassment and violence due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. The US-based Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network reports in its Safe Space Kit that:

- 84% of LGBTI-identified students in the US had been called names or threatened because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- 39% of lesbian, gay and bisexual students and 55% of transgender students reported having been physically attacked, shoved or pushed as a result of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Violence like this can be because of an assumption about someone’s sexual orientation based on their gender expression. Girls who are too “masculine”, or boys who are too “feminine”, are frequently assumed to be lesbian or gay, and harassed or discriminated against because of their perceived sexual orientation. The Institute of Development Studies reported in 2007 that in Bangladesh, boys who behave in more stereotypically “feminine” ways are more



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Above: Amnesty International Iceland launched a photo exhibition to promote the My Body My Rights campaign, June 2014.

Left: Amnesty International Denmark was the official partner of Copenhagen Pride, August 2012.

likely to leave school early due to harassment, damaging their educational and economic opportunities.

Violence motivated by the real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity of the victim is widespread, although the exact extent cannot be known. LGBTI people can face violence anywhere: on the street, in bars and clubs or other public places, even at home – sometimes from family members. An Italian NGO working with parents of LGBTI youth in Palermo told Amnesty International about cases where teenagers have been sexually abused by their relatives as well as cases where they have been confined to or banished from their homes or referred to as “sorcerers” supposedly to help them “fix” their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Pervasive discrimination and violence against individuals on the basis of their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression takes place at all levels of society, and can be condoned or even perpetrated by local or national laws and policies. According to findings of the ILGA in 2014, same-sex sexual conduct is a criminal act in 78 countries worldwide, in breach of these States' international obligations to protect all individuals without discrimination. Legally, the death penalty is possible for consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults in Afghanistan, Brunei Darussalam, Iran, Mauritania, some northern states of Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, the southern region of Somalia, Sudan and Yemen.

Even in countries where anti-homosexuality laws are not routinely implemented, the fact alone that the laws exist provides opportunities for abuse, including blackmail and extortion, by police and others. Furthermore, the existence of these laws sends a message to the broader population that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity is acceptable, and that human rights do not apply to LGBTI people. This creates an environment in which harassment, intimidation and violence against LGBTI people can flourish, and people can perpetrate such acts with impunity.

In many places where same-sex relationships are better accepted, people also face discrimination and violence due to their gender identity or expression. Hate crimes, assault and attacks on people who identify as transgender are common. Hate-motivated violence has a particular negative, long-term impact on victims. It also creates a broader climate of fear among LGBTI individuals, groups and communities and, especially when states fail to bring the perpetrators to justice, a pervasive mistrust of authorities.



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A young man in Yaoundé, Cameroon, who has been frequently beaten in his neighbourhood and evicted from his home because of his sexual orientation and gender identity, 2013.