

CREATING BETTER LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS FOR LGBT+ STUDENTS IN SRI LANKA

Article 27(2)(h) of the Sri Lankan Constitution places an obligation on the state to provide the right to universal and equal access to education at all levels to all persons. However, many LGBT+ students face hardships as a result of harassment, mistreatment and discrimination in educational settings. Gender stereotyping and the rigid understanding of gender leads to bullying, preventing LGBT+ students from feeling safe in their own school environments.

There is also a culture of silence and ignorance around the sexual and emotional health of the LGBT+ community, which is evident in existing curricula and response mechanisms used in schools.

Analysis has revealed the urgent need to re-evaluate existing policies on admission, harassment, teacher training as well as the availability of reproductive health education for LGBT+ students.

The following recommendations outline key interventions into national planning and teacher training within Sri Lanka's educational institutions that will ensure that LGBT+ students are given the same access to education, respect, resources and support systems afforded to all students in Sri Lanka.

LGBT+ STUDENTS HAVE UNEQUAL ACCESS TO EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Even though Sri Lanka's constitution provides assurance that all persons will receive equal access to education, social stigma, identification barriers, outdated processes and stringent admission requirements in the education system can prevent LGBT+ students from accessing education.

Ensure that there is no discrimination in public and private admission policies within primary, secondary, higher and vocational education institutions.

Eliminate admission criteria that can discriminate against LGBT+ students.

Address and accommodate documentational challenges faced by transgender applicants in order to prevent unfair discrimination/rejection during the university application process.

RESPONSIBILITY:
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

RESPONSIBILITY:
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

RESPONSIBILITY:
UNIVERSITY GRANTS COMMISSION

TEACHERS LACK THE EXPERIENCE AND TRAINING TO SUPPORT LGBT+ STUDENTS

Trainings designed for teacher development focus on mainstream subjects and do not include modules or resources to practice sensitivity towards LGBT+ students, and barely discuss topics such as gender and gender roles. This means that educators are not equipped to provide support to students or direct them towards the right resources.

Ensure that teacher trainings include discussions on gender and gender roles and ensure that gender sensitive trainings include input from parents.

Ensure that the national training strategy identifies subjects such as health and physical education as part of the school curriculum.

Set exhaustive and inclusive training goals for stakeholders in the education sector to address Sexual and Gender Based Violence faced by LGBT+ students.

RESPONSIBILITY:
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

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ISSUE

RECOMMENDATIONS

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LGBT+ STUDENTS DON'T HAVE ACCESS TO ACCURATE INFORMATION

Existing sexual and reproductive health curriculums in Sri Lanka exclude LGBT+ people, and male-female relationships are considered as 'default'. Further, the lack of information, particularly on consent, safety, pleasure and hygiene makes LGBT+ students vulnerable towards sexually transmitted diseases and sexual violence. LGBT+ students are also excluded from national policy frameworks for adolescent and youth health.

Review and rewrite curricula and policy frameworks to ensure LGBT+ youth have access to information and resources on sexual and reproductive health.

RESPONSIBILITY:
MINISTRY OF HEALTH, MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Ensure health and physical education teachers are trained to address the sexual and reproductive health of LGBT+ students.

RESPONSIBILITY:
MINISTRY OF HEALTH

Re-evaluate and restructure existing vocational training on sexual and reproductive health to include LGBT+ concerns.

RESPONSIBILITY:
MINISTRY OF HEALTH

LGBT+ STUDENTS EXPERIENCE BULLYING AND HARASSMENT IN SCHOOLS

While the current education system has processes and response mechanisms to address bullying and harassment, they do not specifically address the bullying of LGBT+ students. It is also unclear if those who are put in charge of responding to incidents of bullying and harassment have received the necessary sensitivity training.

Revise the Penal Code, Ragging Act and other material to capture the possibility of students being bullied based on their gender identity and sexual orientation.

RESPONSIBILITY:
PARLIAMENT, NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

Provide sensitivity training for individuals who are responsible for addressing ragging and harassment in higher education institutions.

RESPONSIBILITY:
UNIVERSITY GRANTS COMMISSION

Help schools to develop policies that address bullying and harassment against LGBT+ students, while systematically monitoring the prevalence of such violence.

RESPONSIBILITY:
PUBLIC HEALTH INSPECTORS, MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

LGBT+ STUDENTS LACK PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

While systems exist in the Sri Lankan education system to provide psychosocial support to students, its implementation tends to be weak. Within these systems, there are gaps in how support is made available to LGBT+ students. Meanwhile, local organisations outside the school system that do offer support to LGBT+ students are not captured in the guides and frameworks that address the mental health concerns of youth.

Ensure that all existing mental health policies pertaining to youth and educational institutions include services that are available for LGBT+ students.

RESPONSIBILITY:
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Conduct comprehensive trainings for relevant stakeholders on delivering information on mental health concerns, including concerns faced by LGBT+ students.

RESPONSIBILITY:
MINISTRY OF HEALTH

Ensure that trainings for career guidance teachers and counsellors include material on how to respond to issues faced by LGBT+ students.

RESPONSIBILITY:
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, MINISTRY OF HEALTH