



BEING TRANS STUDENTS AT SCHOOL IN MONGOLIA

Collective case study research report

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Trans* - We used trans and transgender interchangeably throughout the article and understand them as umbrella terms that encompass many gender identities of those who do not identify with their sex assigned at birth.

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EDUCATION OUTLOUD
advocacy & social accountability





Please listen to us and believe us. We are discriminated against and underserved. I think people should take our voices to heart and join us in making a change. It's very simple, but also very important. If we live true to ourselves, we can feel something other than sadness or fear... that's why education is crucial. In the future, I wish to see everyone achieve their dreams under an education system that is created to be inclusive and takes into account diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. It should aim to create awareness among students as well as teachers. If we instill in them the right information, people in our society will treat each other better.



Enkhjin GANZORIG, he/him
Trans student, trans rights activist

(Enkhjin is a youth representative for the Asia South Pacific Association For Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE), and UNESCO Bangkok's nominated youth for the 2nd International Conference on Equitable Education: Together Towards Equity, held in October 2022, where he inspired nearly 4,000 individuals globally with his dreams of a more inclusive and equitable education system for every learner.)

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Finally, we express our deepest and most sincere gratitude to the young people who participated in this research. Thank you so very much to each one of you for sharing your lived experience with us. We acknowledged that some of our questions provoked your emotions and some of you had to revisit your traumatic experiences. Your bravery and resilience in your daily life have encouraged us immensely and your contributions to research have helped us to tell a story about the systematic discrimination and societal challenges that need to be addressed and changed. Thank you.



GLOSSARY

LGBTQI+

An acronym for “lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex” with a “+” sign to recognize the limitless sexual orientations and gender identities used by members of our community.

Lesbian

A woman who is emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to other women.

Gay

A man who is emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to other men.

Bisexual

A person emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to more than one sex, gender and/or gender identity though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way, or to the same degree.

Transgender

An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from dominant cultural and social expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth.

Queer

An umbrella term to refer to people whose gender identity/expression and/or sexual orientation are excluded from dominant cultural and social norms.

Intersex

A term to describe people who are born with a variety of differences in their sex traits and reproductive anatomy. There is a wide variety of differences among intersex variations, including differences in genitalia, chromosomes, gonads, internal sex organs, hormone production, hormone response, and/or secondary sex traits.

Sex

Reproductive anatomy and traits that distinguish between males, females, and intersex persons.

Sex assigned at birth

The sex, male, female, or intersex, that a doctor or midwife uses to describe a child at birth based on their external reproductive anatomy.

Sexual orientation

An inherent or immutable enduring emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to other people. Note: one’s sexual orientation is independent of their gender identity/expression.

Gender

It refers to the characteristics of women, men, girls, and boys that are culturally and socially constructed. This includes norms, behaviours, and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl, or boy, as well as relationships with each other.

Gender identity

One’s innermost concept of self as male, female, a blend of both or neither – how ones perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One’s gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth.

Gender binary

A system in which gender is constructed into two strict categories of male or female. Gender identity is expected to align with the sex assigned at birth and gender expressions and roles fit cultural and social expectations.

Gender incongruence

Defined as a condition in which the gender identity of a person does not align with the gender assigned at birth and that incongruity causes them a significant mental and emotional distress.

Transition-related healthcare

Medically, mentally, socially necessary healthcare services for transgender people and are associated with reduced gender incongruence and improved mental health and quality of life.

Non-binary

An adjective describing a person who does not identify exclusively as a man or a woman. Non-binary people may identify as being both a man and a woman, somewhere in between, or as falling completely outside these categories. Non-binary can also be used as an umbrella term encompassing identities such as agender, bigender, genderqueer or gender-fluid.

Cisgender

A term used to describe a person whose gender identity aligns with the sex assigned at birth.

Coming out

The process in which a person first acknowledges, accepts, and appreciates their sexual orientation and/or gender identity and begins to share that with others.

SOGI

Sexual orientation and gender identity.



Our beloved friend and an esteemed LGBTQ rights activist, Anaraa Nyamdorj was one of the founding members of “All for Education!” National Civil Society Coalition, as he was playing a vital role in coordinating the LGBT Center.

For over a decade, he fearlessly fought on the frontline of the LGBTQ rights movement in Mongolia, tirelessly advocating for the most marginalized members of our community. It was never an easy commitment.

Anaraa's brilliance and unwavering integrity earned him the utmost respect from his fellow human rights activists. His leadership and courage left an indelible mark on all who had the privilege of working alongside him. He will be fondly remembered for his pivotal acts and profound ideas.

As fellow equality promoters at the National Education Coalition, we will continue his legacy of fighting for the rights of sexual and gender minority youth in Mongolia.

In solidarity,

**“All for Education!”
National Civil Society
Coalition**



CHAPTER 1:

Introduction

CULTURE & MEDIA

Prior to a seven decades long socialist regime, shamanism was the traditional and predominant culture in Mongolian society until the late 17th century (Nyamdorj, 2006). As a result of shamanic influence, the concept of transgender and gender diversity was widely acknowledged by civilians, as the gender roles of some shamans were often reversed in ways similar to the shamanism found in the First Nations of the Americas (Devereux, 1937). Due to political reasons, Buddhism emerged in Mongolia in the late 17th century, and the traditional acceptance of gender diversity was reinforced through the Buddhist doctrine of karma (Nyamdorj, 2006). However, a socialist regime took control of the state between 1921 and 1990. During this time, acceptance of transgender and gender diversity waned and sexual acts between two men were condemned by the state (Terbish, 2013), giving rise to extreme fear and silence among LGBTQI+ people and on LGBTQI+ issues even after the transition to democracy in the early 1990s (Nyamdorj, 2006). Therefore, despite the significant progress of the LGBTQI+ rights movement in modern history, trans and gender diversity remain misunderstood, and negative attitudes among the public are still persistent in contemporary Mongolia (Ganbaatar, 2021).

Trans and gender diverse people have historically lacked a visible presence in Mongolian culture and media. Despite the traditional acceptance due to shamanism until the late 17th century, there is extremely limited written history about gender diversity; even an accurate word to describe trans and gender diverse people did not come into use until recently. Since the democratic transition, freedom of the press and freedom of expression extended to mass media, exposing Mongolian society to the existence of LGBTQI+ people, including an interview with two people known as gay men at that time, Gan-Od¹ and Naraa². Even still, the persistent ignorance of mass media was reflective of the general population's ignorance regarding transgender people and also led to the sensationalization of transgender identity as un-Mongolian, further reinforcing the socialist rhetoric of immorality (Nyamdorj, 2006). Today, there are a number of transgender women visible in society and who are quite popular on social media (while transgender men's visibility continues to lag behind), yet trans and gender diverse people have mostly been misunderstood, portrayed as a joke in ways that perpetuate stereotypes. Mongolian gender equality and feminist movements are somewhat trans-exclusionary, and there have been constant attacks on the very concept of 'transgender'

- 1 Also known as Gambuush, one of the first out transgender women. She became the first person to appear in the media after gender reassignment surgery in Thailand. Later, she publicly came out as intersex.
- 2 One of the first out gay people in Mongolia to become well-known due to sensationalised media coverage of gay men along with Gan-Od after democratic transition.

from an extremely radical angle taken by powerful and vocal public figures including politicians, artists, influencers, and self-proclaimed human rights lawyers.

TRANS YOUTH IN MONGOLIA

The youth population in Mongolia is substantially under-researched in general (Davaasambuu et al, 2019). More specifically, trans and gender diverse young Mongolians suffer from consistent exclusion from research and public policy, making little evidence and accounts of their existence known (United Nations, 2014). Disaggregated data beyond gender is limited, however, local studies have shown high rates of suicidal planning and ideation among young people associated with feeling lonely and worried, bad habits including smoking and drinking, and fights at school (Davaasambuu et al, 2017). Moreover, stigma and discrimination based on gender identity could induce other serious problems, including bullying, isolation, and rejection among youths. The United Nations reports that youth who express same-sex attraction are up to 4 times more likely to commit suicide, while trans and gender diverse youth are 10 times more likely to have attempted suicide than the general youth population due to serious rejection from family members, lack of professional and community support, and/or negative reactions from society (United Nations, 2015).

While there is not much data on the experience of trans and gender diverse youth in Mongolian school environments, international data demonstrate high levels of psychological distress in this population due to the impact of peer bullying and the lack of inclusive policies and support from teachers and school administration (Grossman & D'augelli, 2006). Further, two-thirds of trans youth experience peer bullying at school forcing one in three youth to skip or drop out of school (United Nations, 2015). The LGBT Centre's (2016) data shows that 79% of Mongolian LGBTQI+ identified youths have experienced some type of bullying, discrimination, or ostracism, and 9.4% have experienced grave physical violence. The case study conducted by All-4-Education among LGBTQI+ students showed alarming attitudes of teachers towards LGBTQI+ students that are discriminatory and violent to some extent (Otgonbaatar, 2011). Moreover, trans youth who accessed mental healthcare services in 2015 and 2016 at church-based and national mental health institutions reported that they were told that transgender feelings are just a phase that will go away or can be treated, especially by Christian church-based social work and mental healthcare services (LGBT Centre, 2016). According to Ganbaatar et. al. (2021), LGBTQI+ youth expressed that their high school years were extremely stressful, under constant fear of emotional and physical abuse due to peer bullying. Teachers' attitudes in high school were perceived as prejudicial against LGBTQI+ students and promoted peer bullying instead of preventing it, providing a missed opportunity for community and social support. Furthermore, peer bullying including verbal and physical abuse is more common at schools in Mongolia among trans students who are the main target due to their trans and gender diverse identities (Ganbaatar et al, 2021).

SCHOOL CURRICULUM

In 1997, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Enlightenment (now the Ministry of Education, and Science), with the support of UNFPA, initiated a reform of sexual education curricula at the primary and secondary school levels (Unurzul, 2020). Ten themes of priority for health education were identified by the Government of Mongolia in partnership with the World Health Organisation. The health education curriculum that was taught in 9th grade covered a number of crucial topics including safe sex and condom usage, abstinence from sexual engagement, sexual orientation, sexual relationships and behaviours, and safe sex and alcohol consumption. The introduction of the health curriculum in 1998 that discusses sexual orientation was a significant effort to familiarise students with sexual diversity issues (Barcelona et al, 2002). Despite the successful inclusion of sexual orientation in the curriculum (gender identity was not included, however), the teachers did not always cover these topics, and when they did, the quality of teaching was questionable. Sometimes, teachers' attitudes have been reported as negative and homophobic by LGBTQI+ students according to the LGBT Centre (Nyamdorj & NHRCM, 2013). This health education curriculum was in force until the Government of Mongolia decided to remove the entire health curriculum from the National Basic Education Program at each school level in 2014. According to government officials, the concepts of the health education curriculum were integrated with different subjects such as Human & Social studies, Biology and Physical Education (Ulemj, 2018).

Later in 2018, in partnership with the UNFPA and UNICEF, the Government of Mongolia re-introduced health education into the school curriculum, resulting in much-needed development for the Mongolian education sector. In order to ensure the implementation of the newly developed curriculum, UNFPA Mongolia helped to build capacity through training 19 national master trainers and 90 sub-national trainers. Those trainers were tasked to build capacity among health education teachers nationwide and Health Education became a stand-alone subject in secondary education nationwide starting in September 2018 (UNICEF Mongolia, 2019). The re-introduced Health Education Curriculum covers the topics of SOGI in the 9th-grade Health Education class with the intention of normalising SOGI and fighting against discrimination as a result of significant advocacy effort of the LGBT Centre and All-4-Education (Ministry of Education and Science, 2019). However, there is limited evidence on the ways and methods that teachers in Mongolia actually have employed in teaching these topics, and very little has been done regarding monitoring and evaluation to ensure the quality of health education classes since its reintroduction. Further, there is no evidence of SOGI inclusion in any other subjects in the national Basic Education Program at school to this date.

LAW & POLICY

Mongolia adopted a historic new Criminal Code in 2015 that criminalises hate crimes that enumerate SOGI as protected grounds under Article 14 which was enforced in July 2017. Unfortunately, the implementation of this law is concerning, and capacity-building among law enforcement is demanding. As of 30 November 2021, according to the General Police Department, there have been merely 3 cases reported under Article 14

since its enforcement. All three cases were dismissed by the General Police Department (LGBT Centre, 2022). Moreover, Mongolia adopted an amendment to the Law on Civil Registration in 2008 that allows for a relatively simple procedure to change the gender marker for trans and intersex persons. The law was revised in November 2018. As a result of these changes, individuals are now required to provide evidence that they have gone through a ‘full’ gender transition – a more arduous requirement than the old law. In this respect, Mongolia has stepped backwards in its protection of transgender and intersex people’s human rights. Further, the absence of transition-related healthcare standards and services in the healthcare system made it impossible for trans and gender diverse people to access this law. To date, no one has been able to access this particular law, except one person who travelled abroad to obtain such a document (LGBT Centre, 2022). Also, in July 2021, Labour law was revised, and direct as well as indirect workplace discrimination based on SOGI status are prohibited (Labour Law, 2021). In December 2021, the new revision of the Law on Personal Data Protection (2021) has passed. The new law prohibited the collection, processing and usage of sensitive personal data, and the definition of sensitive information included SOGI.

Article 14.2 of the Constitution of Mongolia states that “any person shall not be discriminated against.” Article 16.7 declares the right to education. However, SOGI is not clearly stated in these articles, and the possibility of being protected by the Constitution in case of violation of the rights of sexual and gender minorities is currently limited. Moreover, Mongolia is a party to eight of the nine core UN human rights treaties, alongside other relevant human rights instruments. Under Article 10 of the Constitution (1992), the state is required to “adhere to universally recognized norms and principles of international law”, and “fulfil in good faith its obligations under international treaties to which it is a party”. International treaties ratified by the state, “shall become effective as national legislation upon the entry into force of the laws or on their ratification or accession”. Further, within the framework of international treaties and conventions, Article 26.1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stipulates that “Everyone has the right to education... Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit”, while Article 26.2 states that “Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms”. Further, the Yogyakarta Principles document contains international principles and state obligations relating to SOGI. Principle 16 states “everyone has the right to education, without discrimination on the basis of, and taking into account, their sexual orientation and gender identity”. However, there is no evidence of SOGI-inclusive laws and regulations in the state education system until recently. On December 22, 2022, Professional code of ethics for teachers and staff of pre-school and general education institutions was passed and the code of ethic prohibited direct and indirect discrimination based on SOGI status (Ministry of Education, 2022). This was a crucial step for the Ministry of Education to implement the recommendations obtained from the Committee on the Rights of the Child to the State of Mongolia during the fifth periodic report at its annual meeting, held on 2 June 2017, to take urgent action regarding the improvement of LGBTQI+ children with two specific recommendations (United Nations, 2017). The recommendations are as follows:

- 1. The Committee is seriously concerned about the growing and persistent inequality in the State party and reports of increasing instances of discrimination, with impunity, against children in marginalised and disadvantaged situations, such as children from low-income families, migrant and unregistered children, children from rural areas, children with disabilities, children from ethnic and linguistic minority groups and indigenous groups, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender children, particularly in schools and dormitories.*
- 2. Conduct programmes and awareness-raising activities to promote the meaningful and empowered participation of all children within the family, community, and schools, with particular attention to girls and to children in vulnerable situations, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender children and children with disabilities.*

CHAPTER 2:

Research design

- This case-study research collected data through one-on-one individual interviews.
- The Trans Advisory Group provided a community consultation.
- Experience at school and mental health and its contributing factors were investigated.

TRANS ADVISORY GROUP

The research team worked closely with other trans and gender diverse people (including youth) who work and advocate with these community members regarding research design, language usage, and interview questions. This consulting group played a vital role in this research ensuring that the research was inclusive, sensitive, and respectful towards the participants who are trans students.

TRANS ADVISORY GROUP MEMBERS:

Enkhmaa Enkhbold - Executive Director at The LGBT Centre

Enkhjin Ganzorig - Advisor to the transgender young men meeting group

Munkhnasan D - Executive Director at Sayana Well-Being Association for transgender women

Oulen Munkhbat - Youth Programme Coordinator at the LGBT Centre

RESEARCH METHODS

In this study, we used a collective case study approach in order to obtain an in-depth appreciation of trans and gender diverse students in their natural real-life context. We used one-on-one in-depth interview methods to investigate the real-life experience of trans and gender diverse youth in school settings as well as out of school.

Seven participants were interviewed, and each interview lasted for an hour at the location participants preferred. The LGBT Centre's volunteer room was offered for each participant as a safe space for interviews. Safe space was important for participants to share their experience without being interrupted by their parents/guardians and family members to whom they were not out about their SOGI. The LGBT Centre's volunteer room was available for flexible periods of time with some participants being interviewed after office hour.

PARTICIPANTS AND SAMPLING METHODS

The participants in this collective case-study research were young people aged 16-18 who self-identified as trans and/or other gender diverse identities. A total number of seven youth trans students participated and shared their lived experiences through in-depth one-on-one interviews.

We used a LGBTQI+ community network and snowball sampling method to identify and reach out to participants in this research. The trans community in Mongolia is one of the most marginalised groups and finding underage participants made it even more challenging for us to sample the population. Therefore, snowball sampling was an ideal technique to ask currently enrolled participants to help recruit other participants through their network.

RECRUITMENT

We used a broad approach for this research. Community Advisory Group's members used their community network to disseminate the research announcement and its importance. Social media, particularly Instagram and Facebook, were mainly used to recruit participants. The LGBT Centre produced a recruitment flyer and posted it on its Facebook and Instagram pages as well as other community-specific private groups on Facebook. This technique allowed for the participation of trans students from Ulaanbaatar city only if they had Internet access.

Researchers also employed the snowball sampling technique to recruit some of the participants. At least two participants were recruited through this technique. We asked the participants to introduce the research to their friends and direct the potential participants who were interested in an hour-long interview to the research team and/or the LGBT Centre.

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

The interviews were conducted by the researcher for an hour with each participant in the LGBT Centre's volunteer room. Participants preferred to come to the LGBT Centre for interviews instead of other locations. Plain language statements about the research and its purpose were handed out prior to the interview. Each participant was required to read and sign the informed consent form before the interview. The interview process was voluntary based and ongoing consent was applied, with participants reminded that they could withdraw at any stage of the research project.

The interview guide was distributed prior to the interview process, and it was designed to explore the trans students' experience at school and investigate whether they have any support from the school administration. The questions were also designed to explore the coping strategy and/or defence mechanism against the challenges and ostracism they face in and out of school environment. Further, the interview sought to draw out the participants' experience of, and feelings about, LGBTQI+ inclusion and activism, including

how they view the concepts of sex, sexuality, gender, gender identity, and gender expression.

DATA ANALYSIS

Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and then translated into English. A total of 7 hours and 40 minutes of recordings equal to 56 pages of transcribed data was gathered from the interviews. We used thematic analysis to interpret the patterns of meaning within the data set. Initial and axial coding led to the development of four main themes, each with its own sub-themes. Data sets were analysed manually, and participants were asked to choose their favourite names as pseudonyms to describe them in this report.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Previous qualitative research shows that trans youth in Mongolia experience severe bullying and discrimination at school and societal discrimination has negative impacts on their social, mental, and physical well-being (Ganbaatar et al, 2021). Therefore, it was important to include young people under the age of 18 to investigate the current school environment in Mongolia in relation to trans students. In order to protect the participants' identities from being exposed to their parents, we did not require the participants to ask for consent from their parents and guardians to participate in this research. Fully informed consent was applied on an ongoing basis, thus ensuring the negotiation between the researcher and participants at all stages and enabling the participants to withdraw anytime. We prioritised the confidentiality and privacy of the participants and no names were mentioned at any stage of this research process. We used pseudonyms in this report chosen by the participants themselves to keep their participation anonymous. Further, potential risks and harms were considered, and the participant's distress and adverse protocol documents were produced prior to the interview process. Additionally, two LGBTQI-friendly psychologists, trained by the LGBT Centre, were contacted, and prepared for further assistance should they have been needed.

LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

This collective case study recruited its participants from the capital city, mostly those who have access to stable internet and close to information. This convenience sample is therefore mostly representatives of trans youth who already have better connections with community members and are exposed to gender diverse cultures. There were no participants from the rural areas of the country or outer suburbs of the city who lacked access to information. The experience could vary for those youth in isolated areas and therefore more research is required within the trans community for those who hold more diverse and intersectional backgrounds in terms of location, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, and religion etc.

CHAPTER 3:

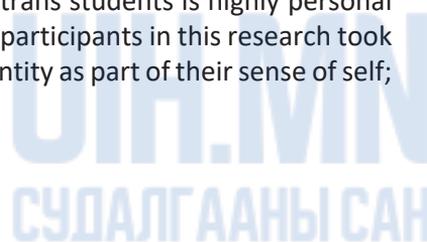
Participants

DEMOGRAPHICS

Name	Age	Gender identity	Pronoun	School
Jolie	17	transgender girl	she/her	Public
Khantushig	16	non-binary	all pronoun	Public
Iggy	17	transgender boy	he/him	Public
Cindy	16	transfeminine/non-binary	she/they	Private
Bayar	16	transgender boy	he/him	Public
Kas	16	transgender boy	he/him	Private
Shinee	18	Transgender girl	she/her	Public

Young trans students from Ulaanbaatar only participated in one-on-one in-depth interviews. They ranged in age from 16 to 18 years. Of the seven students, three used transmasculine identities (42%), three used transfeminine identities (42%) and two self-identified as non-binary (28%). All participants were full-time students; five studied in public school (72%) and two studied in private school (28%).

Young people’s resilience has been found to be increased when they are allowed to describe their own gender identities and expressions (Singh, Meng, & Hansen, 2014). Clearly, the understanding of their own gender among trans students is highly personal and isn’t necessarily attached to a fixed category. Many participants in this research took the time to describe the complexities of their gender identity as part of their sense of self; among them was Khantushig (non-binary, 16 yrs):





Khantushig

(non-binary, 16 yrs)

In the beginning, I thought I might be a trans man, and as time went by, I realised that in addition to doubting my identity, I also had insecurities like every teenager. As I got a little older, the part of me that didn't like my own body became less strong and I started feeling more comfortable being non-binary, like not specific to any gender. It's not important exactly what label I am using, I am just a human, a child, or a Khantushig.



ИИ.МН
СОН АЛГААНЫ САН

CHAPTER 4:

School

School is not supposed to be just a place for education, but also a safe, warm, and friendly environment for children (Horowitz & Hansen, 2008). A healthy school climate is for all students and incorporates equity, fairness, caring, sensitivity, peer relationships, and student-teacher relationships (Noddings, 2005). However, this is simply not the case for trans students in Mongolia. This is because the education system is entirely built on *cisnormativity*³. School is an affirmative climate for *cisgender*⁴ or non-trans students, but not for trans students. As Frohard-Dourlent (2016) asks, “What students did not have to advocate for themselves because schools are already set up to recognise them?”, and indeed, almost every piece of literature reminds us that a trans-affirmative school climate entirely relies on trans students themselves and requires them to declare their identity and fight alone against systematic discrimination and resistant culture.

The schools in Mongolia are neither safe nor friendly climates for trans students. All participants stressed deeply embedded gender segregation in each aspect, and non-existent support from peers, teachers, and school administration. We asked the same question from each participant, “What is most difficult about being a trans student at school?”, and the non-affirmative school climate featuring gender segregation, school facilities, curricula, and teachers’ attitudes were the most repeated hardships, which will be looked at further below.

GENDERED CULTURE

Culturally pervasive notions of cisnormativity and the gender binary are implicit in the state education system, a system which serves to reinforce ignorance about social diversity and reflects a lack of understanding of fundamental human rights, specifically towards trans people. Gender segregation is explicitly created through teaching practices at school, as separating students based on gender has become a resistant culture in every aspect of the state education system, from facility structures to daily teaching methods.

Kas (trans boy, 16 yrs):

One thing that is very difficult at school is the culture that divides students by gender. There are always male and female divisions in everything and that is very frustrating and difficult. My classmates know I am a boy, but the

3 A term used to describe a person whose gender identity aligns with the sex assigned at birth.

4 A term used to describe a person whose gender identity corresponds to their sex assigned at birth; not transgender.

teachers don't, so I don't really know exactly which side to go to... At school, while the teachers are running some kind of discussion or something, they make sudden decisions and separate kids by gender.

Cindy (trans girl, 16 yrs):

Sometimes it's just blatant sexism. What do you call it, just boys being allowed to fight in general? There are like 5 or 6 fights in two weeks and five minutes later they are ok with each other. Even if there is a teacher, I think they just wrap it off as boys being boys and some stupid thing... I don't know. Boys are allowed to curse and treat other boys as literal garbage and then turn around and be nice to girls.

Jolie (trans girl, 17 yrs):

First of all, not being able to be who I am at school is hard enough. On top of that, literally, everything at school is separated by gender and that makes my life super difficult. Technology class has two different cabinets for boys and girls, when we go on a school trip there has to be separate groups for boys and girls, bathrooms, uniforms, group photos, the list goes on and on and on. Even a daily registration of class attendance has to have separated counts by gender. Just everything.

TECHNOLOGY & PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Two most significantly gendered classes are Technology and Physical education, according to the trans students in this research. Gendered expectations are strong influences of school bullying in Mongolia for trans students (Ganbaatar, 2021), and gendered spaces like physical education classes perpetuate such bullying and abuse which is associated with poor mental health outcomes for trans youth (Symons et al, 2014).

A) TECHNOLOGY & DESIGN CLASS

This class is specifically designed to separate students by gender. Everything including teachers, teaching methods, curriculum, and classrooms are separately designed by gender. As Iggy (trans boy, 17 yrs) described, "... for a technology class, boys and girls must be separated in two different cabinets. Girls usually do things like sewing and cooking and boys work with tools, creating things and engineering-related stuff." This class explicitly promotes harmful gender stereotypes and pushes students to fit into traditional gender roles. Jolie (trans girl, 17) continued to explain how technology & design class perpetuates gender stereotypes and how the male teachers actively promote toxic masculinity, even using physical abuse in their teaching practices.

The boys' technology classes are taught by a very stereotypical Mongolian male teacher. That is why this class is filled with stereotypes, and the teachers always push the concept of traditional men and teach us how to be real Mongolian men. Starting in middle school, a male technology teacher hits boys on the back and other parts of their bodies. Even now, boys are hit by male teachers in the same way. The same old stereotypes always justify the action, which is that a man must be brave and should be able to take a few hits.

Due to the obvious gender segregation, most trans students find it hard to attend this class. Bayar (trans boy, 16 yrs) explained his struggle to enter the girls' cabinet this way, *"I always arrive late on purpose to get into that girls' cabinet. I come after making sure that no one is in the hall to see me entering the girls' cabinet. Otherwise, I can't do this during the break while everyone is in the hall watching me. Everyone looks at me with surprise when I do that. I feel it in my bones that everyone is surprised to see a boy go into the girls' cabinet."* He continued to describe how gendered classes discourage students from learning basic skills and limit their capacity. He explained, *"I like sewing and I want to become a fashion designer. Although I like technology class, I am very worried about going into the girls' cabinet. I wonder why the school doesn't support boys who like sewing and want to go into fashion design. I have male friends who are also into fashion and like sewing. Then it seems stupid to think that even their opportunities are blocked just because they are boys."*

B) PHYSICAL EDUCATION CLASS

The first struggle brought into light about physical education is the locker room. Students have to change prior to going to the gym, and some schools have gendered locker rooms. None of the students reported changing in the locker room due to discomfort and fear of getting ridiculed or misgendered by peers. Instead, some go to the bathroom or classroom to change or just wear gym clothes underneath their school uniforms.

Shinee (trans girl, 16yrs):

When it comes to changing, I hide it under the table or just wear my gym clothes underneath the uniform. Because of this, I don't like physical education. There are separate locker rooms for girls and boys, but I never use any of them. God, I can't imagine what could happen if I went in there. My classmates go in there and change but I don't go in there, I don't even know which room to go to. Therefore, I hardly go to physical education class.

Kas (trans boy, 16 yrs):

As for physical education, I ditch it all the time. I don't like going to gym class and the gym teacher is not cool. For the physical education tasks, I do less than cis boys, so it benefits me as a trans boy. Girls are given fewer physical

tasks than boys during exams. In terms of clothes, I just wear my gym clothes underneath the uniform. It feels strange to be in a female locker room and I find it hard and difficult to see naked girls.

Trans students in this research disliked physical education because of the gendered structure. The teachers' negative attitude, locker rooms, and gendered practice in sports become existing barriers for trans students to participate in sports. These challenges immensely impact trans students' self-confidence and discourage them from participating in physical activity.

Bayar (trans boy, 16 yrs)

I hate having to line up from tall to short in physical education class. Before, all the boys and girls were lined up together without gender separation. But in the last 2 years, physical education class stopped doing that and divided us by gender. I line up with the girls even though I want to line up with the boys because I am scared of my gym teacher. It is also really difficult for me to compete in sports. I like playing volleyball and basketball a lot but I can't join the boys' team, so I have no choice but to play on the girls' team if I wanna play. Last year, I wanted to join the basketball team, but I did not because I had to play with girls.

Jolie (trans girl, 17 yrs)

Physical education class is even more ridiculous. 15 push ups for girls and 35 for boys etc. I can't do push-ups. I can't exercise like boys and be like them. I am not allowed to wear shorts or what I want to gym class. If I wear shorts, everyone's gonna mock me "what are you wearing and why are you like a girl?" and they discriminate against my gender. Girls do nothing, just stand still while the boys' punishment is push-ups. Girls have to play volleyball and boys have to play basketball. I actually love playing volleyball, but I always have to go and play basketball because I am a boy to them. Always restricting students' will to play their favourite sports.

CLOTHING POLICY

Mongolian schools require students to follow a strongly gendered dress code, including hairstyle. This forced policy in school extensively impacts trans students, with trans boys forced to wear skirts and keep their hair longer, or vice versa (Ganbaatar, 2021). Public schools have more strict clothing policy than private schools in Mongolia. Participants reported that girls have to wear skirts everyday regardless of the weather, and there is a senior students' team to monitor students' dress and see whether students are wearing anything else over or under their uniforms. If a student commits more than two violations in one week, they are brought to a student council meeting at the end of the

month. However, private schools are much more relaxed when it comes to clothing. Girls are allowed to wear pants and boys can style their hair.

Iggy (trans boy, 17 yrs):

Girls have to wear skirts at all times. There is even a code for hair as well. For example, the rule includes things like boys cannot grow their hair, colour it, or get an untidy haircut, while girls can't have short hair and they have to tie it up all the time... I always want to wear pants. I wore pants for a while in middle school. At that time, my school considered it a serious violation of uniforms, so they punched a hole in students' ID cards, so I could not wear pants and had to wear skirts all the time... Seniors on school duty are responsible to record students' violations. The students who have two or more punches are brought to the meeting and given a promise not to commit any more violations. That is a kinda shameful moment for students, I'd say. The students must appear in front of many kids and give promises like "I will not commit any more violations."

Kas (trans boy, 16):

The uniform at my school [which is a private school] is just a blue vest and white shirt. Girls can wear pants or skirts, not sure if boys can wear skirts. It is pretty relaxed. I don't wear my uniform because I don't want to. I am graduating soon so they say nothing. Since we are in the last year of high school, we are not scolded much due to uniforms. It is alright as long as you wear a white shirt.

Trans students are constantly scolded by teachers for not wearing skirts or growing their hair and are punished for violation of school policy. Participants, particularly trans boys, described wearing a skirt as "hideous". It was reported by the participants that they were forced to wear skirts when they were younger in order to fit gender norms but start fighting back as they get older by wearing pants or short hair despite the daily scolding and school pressure.

Bayar (trans boy, 16 yrs)

Uniforms are hideous, starting from the shirt itself. The shirt is very tight, and I just want to take that off and throw it away. Wearing a skirt is mandatory and I struggled a lot to wear it. I always wear pants underneath, and if I had the slightest chance, I would immediately take the skirt off and throw it in my bag. Violation tickets are issued for incomplete uniforms and different hairstyles that don't fit traditional gender norms. Girls are scolded a lot for wearing pants. I was always scolded in the beginning, but I kept wearing

pants despite being scolded all the time. I guess they finally gave up and stopped caring about me wearing pants since last year.

School policy regarding uniforms and hair has immense impacts on trans students' mental health and self-confidence. On top of experiencing gender incongruence⁵ through clothing, persistent scolding and punishment from teachers and administrators add more extensive pressure on trans students. However, being able to express masculinity through wearing pants and cutting hair was reflected as a confidence boost for trans boys in this research. However, trans girls were bullied horrendously by peers and teachers if they tried to feminise their expression by wearing skirts or make-up.

Khantushig (non-binary, 16 yrs):

I think what to wear at school depends on the school administration. It's very difficult when the school policy says that girls must wear skirts. One of the upper-class girls at school used to wear pants. Taking inspiration from that, I started wearing pants myself. It felt amazing. Now, I bought a man's shirt and wear it.

Bayar, (trans boy, 16 yrs):

It was very difficult at first. I was a bit of a loser kid when I was in elementary school because I was different. As I got older, I was still a loser. But I cut my hair last year and that was a real glow-up... after that, people's attitudes became much better. My old hairstyle sucked and didn't look good on my face at all, and I realised that the attitude of others changes immediately after I got a better style with a new boy haircut that suits me.

Jolie (trans girl, 17 yrs)

I also want to wear a skirt and show off my figure in it but I can't. Then I have to live wearing the male uniform and pretend and act as a man. At school, once when I wore a short shirt and skirt, everyone looked at me in horror, and then they took my picture. I was verbally abused and insulted by everyone including teachers. I was mocked and someone asked me if this happened to me because I had a prostate examination.

⁵ Defined as a condition in which the gender identity of a person does not align with the gender assigned at birth and that incongruity causes them a significant mental and emotional distress.

BATHROOMS

The complexity of difficulties that trans students face is also brought to light by the discussion of bathroom use, as is the school administrators' limited knowledge of such concerns and their implications. At this point, there is not even a consideration or discussion around affirming the school environment for trans students in the state education system, and trans students' existence is still ignored and unrecognised by administrators, policies, and systems in Mongolia. Jolie (trans girl, 17 yrs) explained the difficulties faced due to the use of gendered bathrooms and found herself in a confusion about which bathroom is for her:

The bathroom problem is also the most pressing. I can't even go to the bathroom. I know I am a girl and I feel like a girl. When I go to the girls' bathroom, I am screamed in my face to get out. Then, when I go to the boys' bathroom, they laugh at me and mock me even more. So, I just don't know what to do. While I hope nowadays kids might know better, they just don't, and they talk stupid things all the time.

Like Jolie, many participants expressed difficulties in using gendered bathrooms, but the complexity of challenges varies among participants and the solutions they came up with responding to such challenges are expressed as follows.

Bayar (trans boy, 16 yrs):

Every floor has two bathrooms on each side, and males and females are separated. I will be dead if I go to the girls' bathroom, and if I go to the boys' bathroom I might be beaten up. Therefore, I started thinking maybe I should stop peeing... It is difficult for me to go to the boys' bathroom because every boy in the bathroom stares at me and says things like "get lost, what are you doing here? Aren't you a girl?". So, I usually lock myself in one of the stalls and wait for every boy to leave. I get late for class sometimes as I wait for everyone to leave the bathroom.

Shinee (trans girl, 16yrs):

Being a trans student is somewhat hard. The most obvious example is using the correct bathroom. Our classroom is on the sixth floor, we have a female bathroom on the sixth floor and a male bathroom on the fifth floor. I mostly use the bathroom when it is not break time so I can secretly go to the female toilet during class hours. I excuse myself by asking "can I go to the bathroom?" during classes that have less strict teachers.

Some schools have a gender-neutral bathroom for teachers but not for students. It shows that gender neutrality can be easily structured in the facility regarding bathroom use and it can be applied in students' practice too. Bayar (trans boy, 16 yrs) explained how gender-neutral bathrooms made bathroom use much easier for him:

Back when I used to look like a girl, I used the girls' bathroom. Of course, it was never a pleasant experience for me to use the girls' bathroom. Obviously. It is very awkward to be using the bathroom with other girls when they are putting their make-up on. Recently, there is a new bathroom for the teachers, right next to the library. Both men and women can go, and it is so much easier for me to go there. Now I don't use any of the bathrooms except the gender-neutral bathroom for teachers. I don't have to worry about someone calling me a girl or making fun of me. If the teacher's bathroom is closed, I go to the elementary school building.

Due to the complex challenges of bathroom use, most trans students tend to avoid using the bathroom while non-trans students use the bathroom for various reasons beyond its sole purpose, including smoking, putting makeup on, taking selfies, and gossiping or socialising. However, changing is another reason for trans students to use the bathroom despite the challenges they face. Since the locker room is another gendered facility structure that trans students are scared to use or never use, many of them choose the bathroom to change prior to physical education class. Therefore, bathroom use is one of the main stress factors that contribute to low mental health outcomes for trans students in addition to being spaces that make them vulnerable to verbal abuse and physical violence to some extent.

Bayar (trans boy, 16yrs):

I could never go to a boys' locker room. Even though I have a female body, when I walk into a women's locker room, everyone knows what I am, and I'm not comfortable being around girls as well. I used to change in the bathroom before, but now I always stay behind and change it in my classroom. Can you imagine me getting naked in the boys' locker room? They are all gonna die out of shock.

Iggy (trans boy, 17yrs):

It is very uncomfortable to change clothes around girls. I feel like I am doing something bad to them just by being there and not telling them I am a boy. I can't go without wearing a t-shirt under a white school shirt because I wear two sports bras. So, I have to hide it and go to the bathroom to change. When I go to the bathroom, it has to be the girls' bathroom again, and there are girls obviously, so it is a very difficult process for me to get changed before physical education.

CURRICULUM

Schools play a vital role in making sure students have the freedom to seek, receive, access, and share information. This must not exclude the ability of students to access information about LGBTQI+ issues, particularly transgender issues, as it relates to the focus of this research. Including gender identity-related topics in the relevant subjects can be a good start to providing students access to information. They can further strengthen access by making relevant information available in school libraries and partnering with community organisations that support gender diversity. School administrators acknowledging the multitude of students' identities and reflecting on students' reality in the curriculum can increase student engagement in learning and greater school success (Shields, 2004).

Health education is the only subject in the school curriculum that has included SOGI issues. This inclusion is a progressive step towards a trans-affirmative school climate. In this research, trans students explained that hearing about SOGI as part of class not only helped them understand their own identity but was also beneficial for them to advocate trans issues to other students which could potentially lead to an affirmative school climate for everyone. Bayar reflected on his experience with the curriculum and how it helped him to learn more about who he was while Khantushig explained how the health class textbook has helped other students to learn more about LGBTQI+ issues:

Bayar (trans boy, 16 yrs):

LGBT issues were taught in only one class, the health education class in 9th grade. In retrospect, that subject helped me define and understand what kind of person I am. It was an online class during the COVID pandemic. The teacher just shared the PPT of that subject for us to review in our own time. As I was reading through that PPT, there was a link attached to it that said you can read more information from there. I clicked that link and jumped into the LGBT Centre's website. I read every single thing written there with joy. There was information about sexual orientation, gender identity, their definitions, the correct terms to use and much more.

Khantushig (non-binary, 16 yrs):

There is an LGBT topic in the 9th-grade health education textbook... Sexual orientation is categorised as heterosexual, homosexual and bisexual. Students remember the text very well. When I say straight while I am talking, my classmates make sure by asking "Straight means heterosexual, right?" etc, and they learn the terms in accordance with the textbook. We all knew nothing and then learned it from textbooks. However, the health education class is not even taught by teachers, even though there is a class schedule, teachers use the class in their favour or talk whatever they wanna talk... An inclusive curriculum is important. Inclusion in the textbook is a guarantee

that the information is correct, and supported by the state and its education system, so I feel more confident to talk about my identity and not afraid of educating my friends.

Cindy (trans girl, 16 yrs):

Of course, it is very important to make the school curriculum LGBTQ-inclusive, knowing that there are only one or two people who are queer-friendly I guess, at school in my class that I know of. And others, it is really hard because there is embedded homophobia, not found. Kids don't know why they are homophobic. Maybe, hopefully educating them can open their minds... I know plenty of people who are good people, but they are just homophobic. Maybe like, queer6 inclusive class every once in a while, in relevant subjects like Health Education, Sociology, and Biology as well.

However, some private schools didn't follow the national school program in their curriculum. It was reported by some participants that they never learned anything regarding LGBTQI+ topics from the private school program.

Kas (trans boy, 16yrs):

There is nothing regarding LGBTQ in my school program. Zero. Nothing. Our school has taught us nothing about LGBTQ, there is not even a discussion about sex. My school only has a safety learning class, not health education. Safety learning class is more like what will happen if there is a fire, how you escape from this building and stuff. I have never heard anything regarding LGBTQ in classes.

Despite the successful SOGI inclusion in the re-introduction of the health education curriculum, the quality of teaching hasn't changed from what it was 20 years ago. This report from the trans students regarding the quality of SOGI topics is identical to the previous report of the 2013 survey that shows the teachers did not always cover the SOGI topics, and when they did, the quality was questionable, and sometimes teachers' attitude was very negative and homophobic or transphobic. Even though there is a complete curriculum of health education class, many teachers use this classroom hour for different topics such as social science, maths, or biology. Further, the teachers are not trained or qualified to teach health education, most of the time, they are biology, social science and gym teachers who are assigned to deliver the subject as a side class. Several participants' experiences show that it is still common for teachers to skip the SOGI topics, and when they cover the topics, they either pity LGBTQI+ people or blatantly oppose them. Since most teachers abandon the health education class and use the

6 "Queer" is the umbrella term to refer to people whose gender and/or sexuality are excluded from cultural norms (Shlasko 2005). Also, young people show strong support for its use to describe themselves and the community instead of LGBTQI+ acronym.

classroom hour for different purposes, the health education class lost its sole purpose and is considered the least important subject by both teachers and students.

Shinee (trans girl, 18yrs):

There is a subject called health education. It is supposed to be taught from the 6th grade until we graduate. However, I am in the 12th grade and about to graduate very soon and we need to give an entrance exam... It was supposed to be one hour each week, but they stopped teaching classes like health education and civil morals, and everyone gets good grades like 100% automatically at the end of the semester. Those subjects are not as important as maths and social sciences. Health education and civil moral education classes don't even have trained teachers and are always delivered by other teachers, and they stop teaching these side classes eventually. Instead, they started talking about something else like interior design, Mongolian tradition, Mongolian ger etc in health education class. For example, health class is always taught by biology or physical education teachers.

Iggy (trans boy, 17yrs):

First, I heard about LGBT topics was in the 8th or 9th-grade health education class. It was about gender identity and sexual orientation. At that time, the biology teacher, who was teaching the health education class, spoke relatively openly. Although the teacher did not say it was wrong, she explained it in a pitiful and condescending tone. It felt bad to me. She said that "these people are like this, miserable and cannot be changed, and since they are becoming the dregs of society, we should treat them well". I did not like the fact that she talked about us like we are inferior to her. Also, I hurt a little because my classmates did not take this class seriously and passed it off as a joke. Generally, the 40 minutes long class was not a very pleasant experience for me. It's just like that, the kids laugh at classes during sex education topics. That was the only 40 minutes class I have heard about LGBT issues. Since then, I don't remember anything regarding such topics or anything about sex education.

Iggy (trans boy, 17yrs):

There is a textbook for health education, but kids hardly ever use them. The school librarian gives books to children of the priority group. Since I am one of the three school children from my family, I am given books as a priority group. When I pick up the books, the health education textbook comes brand new with fresh pages that could cut my finger. The kids don't even bother to open the textbook and never read it because the teachers don't even bother to teach the health class. It's seen as a useless book.



Cindy

(trans girl, 16 yrs):

Teachers just openly being available to spread misinformation, what do you call it? Spend their world views on people who have no idea what queer as a topic is. Even in the textbook, I think it was the 8th-grade health class textbook, there were like some LGBTQ subjects. The teacher just openly lied about that. He said something stupid about how hard having gay friends is and how you gotta treat them differently or else they will get the "wrong idea". He said it as if you treat them as a regular if you are nice to them, they might get the quote-unquote wrong idea, might try to hit on or take advantage or something. The LGBTQ+ inclusive subject is important for sure, but the delivery of my teacher was really bad though, terrible.



TEACHERS' NEGATIVE ATTITUDE

One of the alarming results of this research is the negative attitude and abusive behaviour of teachers towards trans students. The attitude hasn't changed much from what it was 20 years ago when the health education curriculum was introduced in the school program. The trans students reported that the teachers' attitudes at school are prejudicial against trans students and the behaviours of teachers are more likely to promote peer bullying instead of eliminating it. Trans students in this research experienced many types of abusive behaviours from their teachers due to their trans identity and gender expressions which do not fit the cisnormative idea of man and woman. These abusive behaviours include verbal abuse, physical abuse to some extent, and even sexual abuse. It is not only peer bullying that young trans students have to deal with, but also discrimination and different types of abusive behaviour committed by teachers that make trans students feel alone and push them to further marginalisation.

Bayar (trans boy, 16yrs):

It is usually the teachers who put a lot of stress on me. Since last year, I have changed a lot and started expressing myself in a more masculine way. I was insulted a lot by my teachers in front of everyone. Aren't you a girl? Why



are you wearing a boy's clothes and acting like one? If you are a woman, be clean and helpful like other women. You are messy and do not be like that. etc. It hurts me a lot.

Jolie (trans girl, 17yrs):

The teachers judge me constantly and scold me all the time based on how I walk, how I behave, whether I am wearing eye make-up or not and just say be like a man... One time my biology teacher shared her experience with a trans woman during class. She goes like this "I saw a beautiful woman walking in front of me on the street. I walked faster and passed her to see the face. Then she was a man and looked very ugly. I was disgusted.". Then my classmates mentioned my name and laughed along saying, "Didn't you already meet Jolie's sister?" ... I also talked to one of my teachers once. She was a relatively young teacher, so I thought she may understand me. But when the class was over, she called out my name in front of the children and ordered me to find out which gender I am by tomorrow. Then I couldn't do anything but be surprised.

Kas (trans boy, 16 yrs):

Even though there is no subject about the LGBTQ community, sometimes teachers mention this topic while lecturing us about life. For example, my social science teacher loves to share his personal opinion on things. That teacher is homophobic and somehow loves to express his view on LGBTQ issues. Mmm.. it was not related to any of the subjects he coordinates. The teacher just slipped into the LGBTQ issue from another topic and said, "people nowadays talk crazy stuff like there is a third gender or something". It is a Russian school, and therefore, teachers are pretty religious and always mention God. They say God created man and woman so there must be only Adam and Eve. Otherwise, how are we going to reproduce and grow in number? Once during the class, the social science teacher asked us out of nowhere, "You like Romeo and Juliet, don't you? Isn't it disgusting if it became Romeo and Romeo?"

Khantushig (non-binary, 16 yrs)

A geography teacher once said that after the war, the number of men decreased, and when 60-70 % of people were women, wrong things like homosexuality started to appear. He said that mother nature herself takes care of the balance of the sexes when talking about population stats. Therefore, both men and women are destined to live happily ever after. The idea that LGBT people were created as a result of a distortion of balance was told by the teacher.

Teachers tend to spread misinformation about LGBTQI+ topics based on their personal beliefs which perpetuate stereotypes and pre-existing discrimination in society. Teachers' views on LGBTQI+ topics also impact whether the students enjoy the subject or not. The negative attitudes of teachers are associated with decreased engagement in learning among trans students. Cindy (trans girl, 16) explained that *"My sociology teacher kept on spewing about how queer people are "social freaks" and so on. On top of describing social freaks, they also use the words such as homosexuals, homo, lesbo, criminals etc. Sociology was my favourite class until the teacher turned out to be that way."* Further, Khantushig (non-binary, 16 yrs) explained why they like social sciences and English this way, *"I like social sciences class because my social sciences teacher has a great sense of human rights, and she doesn't cause or tolerate any sort of discrimination or inequality in her class. My English teacher is also very cool and open-minded, so I first came out to my English teacher. I think people who learn a foreign language and get information from different sources seem to be more open and understanding"*.

It was also reported that the negative attitudes from teachers lead the trans student to distrust school professionals entirely. Many trans students in this research expressed that they will never tell their problems or never seek support from teachers or anyone who works at school including social workers and psychologists. As Bayar (trans boy, 16 yrs)

explained the only support he had at school this way, I feel like the biggest support the school offered me was that they got tired of scolding me for wearing pants and stopped caring.

Iggy (trans boy 16 yrs):

...no such thing as support at school, and I haven't even looked out for support because I am afraid to talk about myself at school regarding my trans identity. When the teacher was delivering LGBT topics in health class, it did not feel like I could trust them. The teacher was pitying LGBT people as if straight and cis people are superior to LGBT people. I don't trust anyone at school, and even if I tell anyone at school, I am sure they will tell my parents immediately.

Only one student shared a positive experience with the teacher. A positive attitude from the teacher helped Khantushig (non-binary, 16 yrs) to feel good and increase their faith in teachers and the state education system to become trans-affirmative.



Khantushig

(non-binary, 16 yrs):

When we had a class photo taken, my class teacher included my photo in both the male and female sections. She was so cute. My class teacher is the only female teacher in the teachers' room. Then I heard that my teacher got defensive and angry when the male teachers in their room were talking about me not knowing whether I was male or female. It felt great to hear that. Even though my teacher is old, she showed me that LGBTQ issues are not only understood by young people, but if there is a will, no matter what age you are, you can understand it. It made me believe that there is a chance to make people understand in the future, so let's just keep spreading the knowledge.

ДҮР ЭСГЭЖ
АМЬДАРМААРГҮЙ
БАЙНА



CHAPTER 5:

Abuse & harassment

It has been well documented that trans students are at greater risk of abuse, harassment, and discrimination as a result of not fitting into traditional norms and binary gender concepts (Ganbaatar, 2021; Stotzer, 2009). Mongolian schools are not affirmative and are unsafe spaces for trans students. The previous chapter described how the gendered culture embedded in each aspect of the state education system serves to reinforce ignorance and misconceptions about the transgender community, and peer bullying and teachers' negative attitudes toward trans students were significantly common.

VERBAL ABUSE

Verbal abuse was reported as the most common experience among trans students both in and outside of school. Each trans student in this research gave us clear examples of verbal abuse that they have had directed at them due to their trans identity, while some expressed that it was very traumatic for them to revisit the experience.

Shinee (trans girl, 18 yrs):

I grew up with people mocking me or insulting me all the time. It is still the same. People are always like “are you male or female”. Sometimes they just keep shouting gomo⁷. Even the teachers call me someone unidentifiable whether male or female, so I don't like them at all. Psychological and emotional abuse is the most difficult. Different kinds of teasing, mocking, making jokes, etc. When there is a subject on LGBT issues in a health education class, it was very difficult for me because everyone mentioned my name and laughed with each other. Since elementary school, my name was gomo, and then in middle school, it became manin⁸. Actually, I am just a kid. I don't want to be called different names for being a trans girl. I even heard some parents telling their kids not to play with me because I am unidentifiable whether male or female. My parents' co-workers also ask if I am a boy or a girl. Even my own father scolds me terribly, telling me not to act like a sissy.

7 Shortened version of the Russian word *гомосексуал* meaning homosexual, commonly used among Mongolians to describe gay people and it is derogatory term.

8 Means intersex but became a derogatory term to insult LGBTQI+ people that don't fit traditional gender norms.

Verbal abuse was reflected as a direct result of peer bullying at school. Further, it is not only peers but also teachers, parents, and adults who verbally abuse trans kids at school, at home, and in other public spaces.

Cindy (trans girl, 16 yrs):

As I have said before, kids were homophobic, especially young people who usually don't know why they are. It is basically embedded in them. It is from their teachers, parents, and grandparents.

Jolie (trans girl, 17 yrs):

Well, it is common to be verbally insulted when walking down the street. One time that I remember clearly was when an older sister saw me walking and she shouted, "Pisda9, what the fuck am I looking at, are you a girl or a boy?" and she spat. Recently, I went to the park and there was a group of young male soldiers. They looked at me and one of them asked, "Are you bored of being a man and trying to become a woman with make-up now?" and they all laughed.

Iggy (trans boy, 17 yrs):

Getting scolded by teachers for wearing pants is painful. One incident that I can't forget is that my teacher called me manin for wearing pants. It hurts me so much.

PHYSICAL ABUSE

Some participants reported that they had been physically abused due to their gender expression. The most common space to experience physical abuse was school, followed by public spaces. One student (Khantushig, non-binary, 16 yrs) explained their experience of "girls' physical examination" also known as "virginity test" at school which was reported by the local human rights organisations as a serious human rights violation among young girls (Beautiful Hearts, 2019). Another student (Jolie, trans girl 17 yrs) told us about her experience of "corrective" rituals done by religious practitioners. Other physical abuse included being punched, pushed, hit, spat on, and kicked.

Khantushig (non-binary, 16 yrs):

Girls' examination was terrifying. Dark memories, I'd say. The girls were told to take off their tights and go into the examining room wearing skirts. When we went into the room, there were only two curtains, and two doctors were examining. No name, no information about the doctors. I felt terrible during

9 The most common swear word in Mongolia, borrowed from Russia due to the socialist regime, meaning pussy or cunt.

the entire process. I felt ashamed of wearing skirts and passing by the other students and teachers on the way was hard. I did not want to do that, but the teacher ordered us to do that, lined us up and sent us in one by one. Our parents were not informed at all prior to this exam. Hence, it was forced, and we all went into that room for the examination because it was mandatory.

Jolie (trans girl, 17 yrs):

My family had a lot of different rituals done on me by religious people like monks and shamans. Those rituals include sprinkling rice, spitting milk across my face, hitting me with books and whips. They said they wanted to correct me and make me a real Mongolian man by removing the evil spirit or something from my body. If being trans is something that can be easily fixed, I would happily let them throw rice and I will bathe in that milk they used on me to purify.

Cindy (trans girl, 16 yrs):

I think it was mostly just... there were one or two times physical but mostly it was just verbal harassment. It was mostly just punching. Guts, mostly my torso, and arms. Mostly in class during break. They say nothing, they just... I cannot remember that well because it was a couple of years ago and I think they were just shouting slurs.

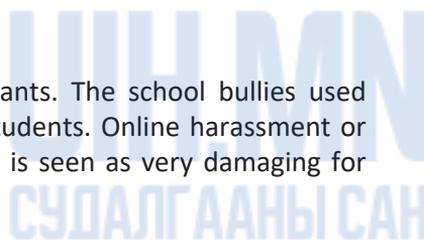
Shinee (trans girl, 18 yrs):

It was like hell in middle school. Physical abuse was more common like hitting without any reason. There were many incidences of hitting, kicking, pushing, or grabbing while sitting still or going in and out of the class during break. There was a time when I was being spat on my head while going down the stairs. I was bullied at every step of my life. I can't even look at myself in the mirror without a random girl mocking me.

Online harassment was also reported by some participants. The school bullies used social media and opened a hate group targeting trans students. Online harassment or cyberbullying among youth needs more attention and it is seen as very damaging for youth who are targeted.

Jolie (trans girl, 17 yrs):

There is a Facebook group, named School homophobes. My picture was posted there, and they also posted a video of them burning a rainbow flag that I placed in the school psychologist's office... The most hurtful chat I received was someone texting me "Gomo cunt, kill yourself. You prostitute". I am scared to open it when I receive messages. What if someone is calling me names and threatening me again?



SEXUAL ABUSE

Stereotypes about trans people in society draw a strong connection between trans identity and sexual behaviour. Trans students, particularly trans girls reflected on their experience with verbal abuse which addressed them as “*prostitutes*”. One student (Jolie, trans girl, 17 yrs) explained her experience and how her classmates made fun of her sexually. She stated ... *there were many incidents of physical abuse. The most disgusting thing for me was when I accidentally dropped something in the classroom or sometimes, they just push me down, and the boys take their belts off in front of me and laugh together.*

Another noticeable sexual abuse committed by a teacher was reported by a student (Bayar, trans boy, 16 yrs). Teachers, particularly male teachers hit boys and justify their physical abuse with the traditional idea of men and a real man must be brave and be able to take a few hits. The teacher touched the trans boy’s chest and told him that “*man can touch another man’s body and you have to accept it if you are truly a man.*”

Last year, when I started wearing pants, my class teacher asked to meet me alone. He asked me how I identify myself. He also said if I could explain to him why I am wearing pants, he would accept it and let me do this. When I explained, he said, “Well, you’re saying you are a man, right?” and the situation turned into something strange. It seemed like a form of sexual harassment. Then my teacher goes like “If you are a man, it is okay for me to touch you, right?” and asked if I have a breast. I was embarrassed but he kept asking me that. “Haven’t you said you are a man?” He was probably around 35 or 40 years old and then he touched my chest. He saw I was very uncomfortable and said, “you know, we men always are like this gunduugui¹⁰, but you are like a girl, aren’t you?”. He touched my chest with the palm of his hand. He started off as someone who understands and then touched my body and chest. I don’t think I would have told anyone if that relation had continued. If I tell anyone about this, I thought he would be like “Haven’t you said that you are a man?”, and I would lose his acceptance.

¹⁰ Gunduugui is a commonly used word to describe an ideal and stereotypical Mongolian man as simple-minded, quiet, calm and patient.





CHAPTER 6:

Mental health

Trans and gender diverse people are more likely to experience poor mental health outcomes than the general population (Russon et al, 2022; Lenning & Buist, 2013), and further, the health disparities between trans and non-trans young people are becoming more significant, especially regarding mental health (Miranda-Mendizábal et al, 2017). In spite of high levels of depression, trans people tend to avoid seeking mental health support and assistance (McNeil et al, 2012).

IMPACT OF ABUSE AND DISCRIMINATION

There is a strong correlation between abuse and mental health explored throughout this case study research, and it is crucial to emphasise that the trans students who had experienced physical, verbal and/or sexual abuse had a higher risk of suicidal thoughts, attempts and forms of self-harm due to the discrimination and harassment they faced. Moreover, some trans students described that they hide their trans identity and pretend to fit into stereotypical gender roles in order to avoid abuse.

At school, young people, they don't know homophobia is just engraved in them. I don't think they see us as normal, and they have full capacity to change it, but they just refuse to do that because there is no proper information out there. I think I hide my transness pretty well, so everyone thinks I am cisgender and straight. In Mongolia, I feel like it is pretty important to hide or pass¹¹. A lot of harassment could happen. That phrase, эр эм нь мэдэгдэхгүй¹², phrases like that existing just proves that non-passing trans people are so physically damaging.

Another direct impact of discrimination at school is exclusion. Excluding trans students from school activities or teamwork has been reflected by some participants due to their gender identity. Exclusion can cause a lot of negative emotions such as loneliness, decreased self-confidence and self-esteem, and disengagement in learning.

11 Passing refers to when someone is perceived as a gender or sex other than the sex they were assigned at birth. In other words, when a trans person is perceived as cisgender.

12 A common phrase to insult people who are outside of traditional gender norms, meaning that it is unidentifiable whether they are male or female.

Shinee (trans girl, 18 yrs):

At school, I don't have a friend circle that can support me. I am still sitting alone at my desk in class while everyone sits in pairs.

Jolie (trans girl, 17 yrs):

During group work in class where I am left alone because no one wants to take me in their groups. In some classes, I have to do what the team has to do alone because again, no one wants to take me in their team. Well, if I argue back with them, they shut me up by saying "if you have rights, then we also have the right to freely express our opinion, and we have the right to hate you."

MENTAL HEALTH OUTCOMES

High school climate was described by most trans students in this research as highly stressful. The term stress refers to mental or emotional strain caused by particular circumstances such as bullying, exclusion, and minority status. In addition, gender incongruence caused more stress and discomfort in their own body making them feel less confident. In response to these mental health challenges, three main outcomes were identified, a) isolation, b) bad habits/self-harm and c) suicide ideation and attempts.

A) SELF-ISOLATION

The most common pattern across the interview with trans students regarding mental health outcomes was self-isolation. Almost everyone in this research explained that they would isolate themselves and stay alone without telling anyone when there is a problem. They choose not to tell anyone or seek support due to fear of judgement and abuse, as well as distrust of teachers and other professionals at school. Instead, they choose to suppress their emotions. Jolie (trans girl, 17 yrs) said, *no matter what happens, I don't turn to anyone. I get through everything alone, there is no other way.* However, some said they would reach out to their other queer friends but only after isolating themselves cannot help.

Iggy (trans boy, 17 yrs):

I really wanna say it is my friends who I reach out to first if something difficult happens to me, but I don't. If there is a problem, I would not tell my parents, I wouldn't tell my teachers, and I would never tell anyone at school. Mostly, I just shut myself down and sit quietly without expressing any of my feelings and concerns to anyone.

Bayar (trans boy, 16 yrs):

First, I hide if I have a problem as much as I can. If that really doesn't work, I might tell my friends. To be honest, I never told anyone about my problems including bathroom issues. If people insult me, I might tell my friends, I guess. The first place I look for help or information is the Internet.

Further, the internet was named as a space to seek support, comfort, and community. Most trans students go online instead of talking to someone at school or home.

Cindy (trans girl, 16 yrs):

When I experience difficulties, I am mostly alone... I don't think I do much. Then it branches out to friends. I am out to my queer friends. As for friends, I have homophobic friends and queer friends. It is like two social circles. We have a group chat of like three people. It is my classmate and my former classmate who are queer. I just rant there. Sometimes they respond and sometimes don't. It just feels good to rant about it.

B) BAD HABITS/SELF-HARM

Another outcome reported by some trans students was bad habits, including drinking and smoking from a young age. However, the behaviour that was even more concerning was self-harm. Isolation was the first negative coping mechanism among trans students, and it branched out to different concerning behaviours, among them was self-harm. Lack of available support and negative experience with educators might have contributed to developing these damaging behaviours.

Cindy (trans girl, 16 yrs):

I had no other hobbies other than gaming, so I just kinda keep doing it. There was an epidemic where people were sniffing gas, I think but it was not for me. But I do self-harm, sometimes. I used to cut my legs with box cutters. Injuries usually lasted for about a month, and I stopped this habit half a year ago.

Shinee (trans girl, 18 yrs):

I like to be alone just not to think about anything. I even think of being alone in an environment where no one will see me or talk to me when I have a problem. Sometimes, it's easy to start eating too much sugar or drinking alcohol until I pass out and forget everything. I shouldn't be drinking at my age, but I have been drinking little by little since I was 13. I have adult friends, so drinking is a way of forgetting my problems.

SUICIDE IDEATION & ATTEMPTS

Suicide ideation was commonly reflected among trans participants due to abuse and lack of available support at school, home, and wider society. There are several factors that may explain why trans students are more vulnerable to suicide than their non-trans peers. Suicidal behaviour has been correlated to minority stressors both internal (gender incongruence, internalized transphobia) and external (peer bullying, abuse, and discrimination) (Grossman et al, 2016). In this research, mostly external stressors have been explored, and internal stressors such as gender incongruence or internalised transphobia are not. External stressors, such as gender segregation, teachers' negative attitude, peer bullying, and abuse and harassment, are playing a vital role in suicidality among trans students in Mongolia.

Bayar (trans boy, 16 yrs):

I was a very sad kid. Children usually think about dying when they are teenagers. But I wanted to die when I was even younger back in primary school because I knew I was like this and wanted a sex change, but I was afraid people would hate me for that. Then I did not want to be hated and left alone, and then I thought it is just better to kill myself. I suffered alone for many years thinking that I was the only one like this in the world.

Bayar (trans boy, 16 yrs) continued that finding information on the internet about other LGBTQI+ people's existence made a difference in his suicidal thoughts. Once my teacher sent that PowerPoint Presentation in health class, I realised that there are other people like me, and when I found the LGBT Centre's page, I thought that I am not the only one who is such a weirdo, we are so many. It was a very beautiful moment for me. To be frank, before I read that information, I always thought of killing myself. But being informed actually helped me to understand myself more and to open myself up to others.

Jolie

(trans girl, 17 yrs):

I tried to commit suicide several times in the past because I found myself in very difficult situations. I acted as if everything would be better without me. Sometimes when I see a knife while standing there and washing dishes, it feels easy to stab myself with it and end my life, but I stop because I am afraid of the pain. One time, I pulled a knife across my neck to kill myself, but the knife was not sharp, and it didn't get cut. I did it when I was angry, but it was difficult to think after I calmed down.



CHAPTER 7:

Life outside of school

FAMILY

Trans children benefit greatly from the support of their parents and families (Lindner, 2014). Young people who experience family rejection are more likely to commit suicide and suffer from poor mental outcomes (Grossman et al, 2005). In previous research, Mongolian young LGBTQI+ people's negative experience with family members impacted their overall outlook on life immensely (Ganbaatar et al, 2021). In this research, most trans students had not declared their identity at home because they did not feel supported by their families. Some participants had experienced verbal abuse from immediate family members.

Bayar (trans boy, 16 yrs):

2 years ago, my mother was looking at her phone, and said that Xi Jinping has banned LGBT people from appearing on TV in China, and then my father said that it is right, and the two of them continued to insult LGBT people together. That moment made me think that they would never understand me.

Jolie (trans girl, 17 yrs):

My parents are divorced. I don't have any courage to tell any of my parents. My father is a man who believes that a real Mongolian man should be a certain way. If he finds out, he could kill me even though I am his child. Mom is relatively calm, but by nature, she would never understand. Every time I meet my father, he scolds me for not being a man enough or talking like a girl. Sometimes I wonder if I have a real family. I think my New Year's wish and dream is to have a family. Of course, Santa is not real for sure (laughs).

Cindy (trans girl, 16 yrs):

No, I am not out to my family. Definitely not. I think my dad is just a straight-up fascist. He can keep on ranting about how higher positions in government are all Chinese people and how they immigrated to Mongolia or something. I think he probably is pro-war. I worked for his factory for two months. He

kept on ranting about how disappointing my generation is to him. Doesn't hurt me that much because I am not really connected with my dad. But when my mom says like homophobic, queerphobic remarks, it just stings a little. I have an older brother who is 20 years older than me, so we barely talk. He is doing his thing. My family's attitude towards queer people is very, very bad. Just misinformation about how HIV is only a gay disease, monkeypox etc. How they are not natural quote unquote. How trans people are just mentally ill and want to ruin their god-given body or something.

Fortunately, some sort of familial support was reported by the participants. Familial support was a clear protective factor for the trans students in this research. Those who had familial support were less likely to talk about suicidal thoughts and damaging behaviours. Instead, they were more positive and encouraged to pursue a brighter future.

Khantushig (non-binary, 16 yrs):

My parents asked about Lana13 during the Voice broadcast. They were like "what a masculine-voiced girl" and I explained to them that she was an LGBT person. Then they seemed ok. Also, my mother's best friend from high school is gay and lives abroad. So, I have faith in her. Also, my mom does my hair herself now. At first, she was surprised when I cut my hair, but now she is fine.

Khantushig (trans girl, 16 yrs) then continued to describe how they have imagined their life in the future. I want to get married to a girl and have two children. Mom asked me how many children I would have, I said two, and she was very happy to hear that. I think she thought I was straight.

Kas (trans boy, 16 yrs):

I didn't tell my parents that I was trans. I told my mother that I was bisexual. Mother then told father; they are both supportive, I guess. Regarding my bisexuality, mom is like be with whoever you want as long as you are happy... Anyway, they both knew and the way they treat me hasn't changed at all. I don't know about my dad, but my mom used to be very homophobic. Then after she learned that I was bisexual, she started to accept it.

13 Young transgender woman, a public figure, who rose to popularity after becoming a finalist in the singing contest, the Voice.



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ACTIVISM, MOVEMENT

Another aspect that trans students have shown us was the importance of community and as well as the positive role of activism in their life. The local LGBTQI+ rights movement actively promoted visibility which was utilised to promote the mental health and general wellbeing of young trans people in Mongolia (Ganbaatar et al, 2021). The sense of belonging fostered by community organisations helped participants generate positive emotions of acceptance, pride, and hope by making them feel like they weren't alone. Having positive emotions has been shown to contribute to mental well-being, as well as those related to physical, emotional, and social well-being (Fredrickson et al, 2008).

Khantushig (non-binary, 16 yrs) explained the way they benefit from the local movement and how visibility fosters love, confidence, and resilience in them. They said:

Having a local movement, the LGBT Centre has a lot of benefits for us. I get almost all my information from Mongolian Queer Podcasts. Just hearing the queer couple's story makes my heart melt. I put on my headphones next to my parents, so they probably don't notice much. But inside I feel so much joy and happiness. The things I heard from the podcast episodes helped me later to defend myself when someone badmouthed me and insulted me. It seems like people's experiences and the way they talk really helped me grow confidence. I use the ideas and some key points later and that helps me express my opinion clearly. It also allows you to get to know other proud LGBT people. It allows us to see people who are open and proud.

Then, Khantushig continued to explain that the visibility created by the local human rights movement has fostered a strong sense of belonging to the community. It also helped Khantushig to elevate their self-confidence and encouraged them to believe in a brighter future.

What really matters is the fact that out & proud people are doing well in life. Under their social media posts, their friends write nice and funny stuff, and they laugh together. Knowing that there is a community makes me happy. Seeing out and proud people makes me believe in myself and think that I will become like them in the future to walk and live with pride. Also, we are more stylish than straight people. Mongolian Queer Podcast used to broadcast a new episode every Friday. Waiting for Friday's new episode made me love life and have a purpose.

The local Pride celebration, Equality & Pride Days, was appreciated by some participants. It has made them question existing inequality in society and provoked them to reflect on their own sense of justice.

Bayar (trans boy, 16 yrs):

I know that Equality & Pride Days in Mongolia is organised every fall. In recent years, this celebration has been quite strong and attracted a lot of negative attention from the public. I think it is important for us to make our existence known in Mongolia. LGBT people themselves will not understand anything if we remain silent as if there are no LGBT people in Mongolia. If other communities and groups are marching for their rights, why can't we, right?

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

As we mentioned in the earlier chapters, every student has the freedom to seek, receive, access, and share information. Nowadays, social media has become an integral part of daily life among the youth population and plays a main role for trans students in this research to access relevant information regarding their identity and other information. Further, improved access to information using social media helped young LGBTQI+ people become more positive and made life much easier compared to those of the older trans people in Mongolia (Ganbaatar et al, 2021). In addition, social media allows young trans people to be more open and visible, to access accurate information in their mother tongue, and find the community they belong to. Finding a community they belong to helps youth feel good about themselves and leads to increased self-acceptance (Ganbaatar et al, 2021). However, fake news and cyberbullying are also rising in popularity, existing side by side with the benefits of online space for young trans people.

Khantushig (non-binary, 16 yrs):

I found other people like me on Instagram. I found my best friend on Insta. I storied a poster of queer theatre on my Insta, and she texted me and we became best friends since then. When I finally started to be open about my identity, I almost felt like I was attracting анги¹⁴ people. For example, almost 30% of people that I met are queer. And then they start to come out and that is very cool.

Jolie (trans girl, 16 yrs):

I started searching for information in Mongolian on YouTube and Facebook soon after I became aware of my identity. A search on Facebook turned up to be very ugly and negative. I found too many negative articles and news regarding transgender people on Facebook.

¹⁴ Angi means classmate. In the LGBTQI+ community in Mongolia, they use this word to describe other community members.

Another important factor to access information among trans students is language, particularly English. Sexuality and gender concepts are mostly discussed in English and the most progressive terms are developed in English. Therefore, knowing English becomes an advantage for some trans students to access more information regarding gender concepts and trans gender identity. Those who go to private schools speak English very well and their access to information is greater than those who go to public schools and don't speak English. Further, self-acceptance and self-confidence were more noticeable among those who speak English.

Cindy (trans girl, 16 yrs):

I access information mostly in English. I feel like google is a home, the search engine, so many English and American cultures lately have been mostly queer-friendly. There is a lot of information about queer people, the proof that is not just a mental illness, it is just so much more than that. So, as I have said before, I think that is what leads to a lot of allies, I guess, knowing English. Without my English privilege, I think I would be screwed. I am not sure how they access information when they don't know English.



Iggy

(trans boy, 17 yrs):

I started learning English in 3rd grade, and then, I got a Tumblr account. There are many different communities on Tumblr, where I read and hear about the experience of people who are similar to me. Information is usually in English. Of course, it is Tumblr, and I don't expect to receive a lot of scientific facts about sexual and gender diversity, it's just that I find comfort in seeing what people like me are going through.

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CHAPTER 8:

Conclusions & recommendations

CONCLUSION

These qualitative research findings collectively highlight a significant lack of critical reflection and outright resistance to challenging narratives that maintain teachers and schools as prejudicial. It is then left to trans students to challenge the uninterrupted cisnormativity of the state education system. Gender segregation is explicitly applied within teaching practice at school and separating students based on gender becomes a resistant culture in every aspect of the state education system from its facility structures to the daily teaching practices. The findings suggest that there is a significant lack of support for trans students in the school and there has not been much positive improvement in teachers' attitudes towards LGBTQI+ students over two decades of teaching SOGI. Even though SOGI topics were included in the 9th-grade health education curriculum, the teachers were more likely to skip the class, and even when they cover it, the quality of the delivery was negative and discriminatory to some extent. Further, too many had experienced verbal and physical as well as sexual abuse from their peers, teachers, family members, and strangers that were closely associated with poor mental health outcomes including depression, isolation, self-harm, and suicide risk. Having such vulnerabilities at play, lack of mental health support, negative experiences, as well as distrust of educators and psychologists, were unfortunate occurrences resulting in most trans students avoiding seeking support. Parental support was not strongly reported by the participants in this research, on the contrary, family members' attitudes towards the transgender community were reflected mostly negatively which was viewed as a contributing factor to poor mental health outcomes. Finding community members online and developing a sense of being part of a collective were protective factors for their well-being, as was being involved with even the simplest forms of activism.

RECOMMENDATIONS

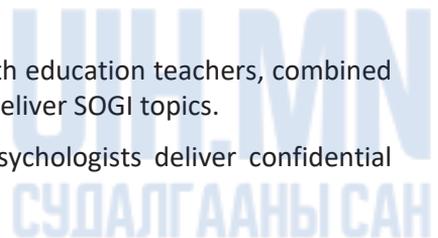
These recommendations arose from the experience of those who were part of this collective case study. They intended to support and foster resilience and mental as well as the general wellbeing of trans students by creating safe and inclusive environments, also known as trans-affirmative school climates.

STATE AND GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

- To apply the Gender Equality law across the sectors, particularly the education system.
- To create National Healthcare standards for trans people with adequate training for healthcare professionals with a specific focus on mental health providers.
- To implement proper monitoring and evaluation for the quality of SOGI inclusive health education curriculum.
- To eliminate harmful gendered school policies and provide consistent policy and guidance for schools across all sectors to support trans and gender diverse students.
- To change and re-introduce the outdated gendered structure of relevant classes, particularly the subject of Technology & Design.
- To introduce anti-bullying policy and guidance for schools with a specific focus on sexual and gender diversity
- To provide comprehensive training for teachers, social workers, psychologists and other school staff regarding peer bullying, social diversity, and the transgender community.

SCHOOL & EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS

- To provide training for teachers and school administrators, through adequately funded programs.
- To take meaningful action within the power to create a safe and friendly school climate for trans students by responding sensitively to trans students' need for appropriate gender-neutral toilet facilities.
- To change and re-introduce school uniform policies that allow trans students to appropriately express their gender identity.
- To create a full-time position for trained health education teachers, combined with appropriate training for current staff to deliver SOGI topics.
- To ensure that social workers and school psychologists deliver confidential support for trans students.



MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

- To develop a training module and conduct training for both pre-service and in-service mental health professionals in gender diversity and transgender issues.
- To apply the International Classification of Disease 11 (ICD-11) in the mental healthcare practice.
- To create mental health professionals' network for transgender mental health care in order to make it easier for school psychologists to make appropriate referrals when issues are beyond their capacities.
- To address complaints about inappropriate behaviour towards transgender and gender diverse individuals in an appropriate and timely manner.
- To provide parents of gender diverse and transgender children with information regarding sources of information, peer support, and local community organisations.

FURTHER RESEARCH

- To explore further the experiences of trans students living in outer suburbs of the city and rural areas.
- To investigate the particular health needs of, and protective factors for, trans youth in Mongolia.
- To identify trans and gender-diverse youth's experiences with other health and welfare professionals such as social workers and human resources regarding the development of nuanced models of care.
- To explore further the experiences of trans students regarding domestic violence and peer bullying.

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