



Gender-Affirming Care and Comprehensive Sexuality Education

Problem Statement

Every year, an estimated 246 million children are subject to some form of gender-based violence (GBV), including mistreatment, bullying, psychological abuse and sexual harassment (UNESCO, 2016). Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, two-spirit or questioning (LGBTQTQ+) youth have unique health, educational, and social needs. They are at heightened risk of experiencing violence including sexual assault (Day et al., 2017; Johns et al., 2019), emotional victimization (Day et al., 2017), intimate partner violence (Bermea et al., 2021), and entry into sex trafficking (Boswell et al., 2019). Additionally, research has demonstrated that those who identify as LGBTQTQ+ experience high rates of depression, substance abuse, anxiety and suicide, and that access to support and care has a positive impact (Marzetti, et al; Rosellini et al., 2021; Thorne et al., 2019; Tordoff et al., 2022; Treharne, 2020). LGBTQ+ youth have distinct challenges to hurdle when compared to their heteronormative and cisgender peers. These challenges contribute to the consequences discussed above, including discrimination, social stigma and emotional as well as physical victimization (Earnshaw et al., 2017). Fostering an atmosphere of support and acceptance can help alleviate many of these negative outcomes.

Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) is the formal and informal use of evidence-based curriculum that is developmentally appropriate, incremental and culturally relevant, based on gender equality and a human rights approach that helps young people form respectful and healthy relationships (UNESCO, 2016). Several crucial initiatives have been implemented to meet the complex health, educational, and social needs of LGBTQTQ+ youth. School-based inclusive sexuality education has been proven to foster acceptance and provide social support to this vulnerable group (Gegenfurtner & Gebhardt, 2017). Beyond the emotional need for acceptance and support, transgender youth have unique health care needs. Gender-affirming care, including rigorous medical practice guidelines have been developed to meet these complex needs (Salas-Humara, et al., 2019). Evidence-based gender-affirming treatment for transgender youth is an important part of healthcare that not only supports optimal health, but also reduces negative mental health effects (Deutsch, 2016; Rafferty, 2018; World Professional Association for Transgender Health, 2012). Access to both school-based inclusive sexuality education and gender-affirming care are currently threatened.



Position

The International Association of Forensic Nurses (IAFN) asserts that:

1. *LGBTQQ+ youth are at risk for negative physical and mental health outcomes.*
2. *LGBTQQ+ youth have unique mental and physical health care needs.*
3. *Gender non-conforming youth and their families must have access to trauma-informed, safe, supportive and gender-affirming healthcare.*
4. *Providing gender-affirming care does not constitute child abuse.*
5. *Parents and health care providers whose goal is to support the health and wellbeing of transgender youth and provide access to care must be able to do so without fear of being investigated for child abuse.*
6. *Denial of gender-affirming care to gender non-conforming youth is psychological abuse and medical neglect.*
7. *Negative attitudes towards sexual and gender minorities continue to exist in most cultures (Cochran et al., 2014).*
8. *LGBTQQ+ students are more likely than heterosexual or cisgender students to experience violence in a variety of ways: cyberbullying (Bouris et al., 2016); emotional abuse (Donahue et al., 2017), physical and sexual assault (Henderson, 2016; Donahue et al., 2017, and weapon assault (Otis et al., 2016).*
9. *School-based sexuality education must include LGBTQQ+ issues.*
10. *Educational curricula inclusive of LGBTQQ+ concerns help to foster inclusiveness and acceptance.*
11. *Learning about LGBTQQ+ issues in school will not change the sexual orientation or identity of students.*

Rationale

Nurses are expected to practice with compassion, respect and commitment to each patient through research, scholarly inquiry, professional standards and policy development in order to protect human rights and reduce health disparities (ANA, 2015). Promotion of health across the lifespan through advocacy, social justice, community engagement and access to equitable, quality care is foundational to nursing practice (ANA, 2021). Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) seeks to empower youth to develop empathetic, respectful social and sexual relationships in consideration of both their health and human rights (UNFPA, 2018). Numerous studies reinforce that evidence-based gender-affirming care results in improved mental and physical



health outcomes for transgender youth (Cohen-Kettenis et al., 2011; deVries, et al., 2011; Salas-Humara, et al., 2019; Steensma et al., 2013). The inclusion of LGBTQ+ issues in school-based sexual education results in greater understanding and acceptance of gender-nonconforming and non-heterosexual students with positive outcomes for these vulnerable youth (Gegenfurtner & Gebhardt, 2017).

The International Association of Forensic Nurses joins other healthcare professional organizations, including the American Medical Association (2021) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (Sulaski Wycoff, 2022; Velez, 2022) in supporting access to school-based sexually-inclusive education and gender-affirming care for all persons who seek it.

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