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Study on “Gender and Sexual-Orientation Harassment and Discrimination Experiences of LGBTQ Students in Secondary Schools”

Photos of the event are available on HKIEd's website:
<http://www.ied.edu.hk/web/news.php?glang=en>

According to a survey recently conducted by the Department of Special Education and Counselling (SEC) at The Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIEd), most pre-service teachers are likely to have no experience of sexuality education and harbour some prejudice against sexual minorities.

Funded by the Equal Opportunities Commission, the survey was conducted between May 2014 and April 2015, interviewing 332 pre-service teachers from local tertiary institutions to understand their attitudes towards sexual minorities and how cultural and personal factors influence them. Among the participants, 83.4 per cent had never received any sexuality education covering sexual and gender diversity knowledge. Almost half of them (49 per cent) had a medium level of sexual prejudice, and 16 per cent expressed extremely negative attitudes about sexual minorities. The major factors associated with the sexual prejudice of pre-service teachers included contact (with/without LGBTQ¹ friends), professional training in sexual and gender diversity, and religion (with/without religion).

The research team also conducted in-depth interviews with 42 LGBTQ youth, 13 parents with sexual minority children and 7 community service workers with extensive experience in working with sexual minority youth, with the aim of understanding the harassment and discrimination experiences of LGBTQ youth in secondary schools. The results revealed that LGBTQ students face harassment and discrimination at both the individual and institutional levels. Individual-level harassment and discrimination experiences include verbal, physical, relational and digital forms. Institution-level harassment and discrimination experiences are embedded in unfriendly and non-inclusive school culture, facilities, rules/regulations and the sexuality education curriculum.

The interview results indicate that these harassment and discrimination experiences have adverse impacts on the mental health and learning motivation of LGBTQ students, especially transgender youth, who have come out openly at school. Transgender students, community workers and their parents revealed that trans-students go through extremely difficult and traumatic moments in their schools, encountering prejudice from peers, educators and those whom they turn to seeking professional advice, such as social workers, psychologists and physicians, whose hetero-normative assumptions prevail with the gender identities self-defined by students always denied.



Dr Diana Kwok, the principal investigator of this study and Assistant Professor at the Department of Special Education and Counselling (SEC) at HKIEd, highlighted the importance of enhancing the professional competence of school educators through compulsory professional training in sexual and gender diversity for all school teachers. “Educational policies to tackle discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity should be initiated and formulated by the Education Bureau, which can offer relevant pre- and in-service training programmes for teaching and support staff. Additionally, relevant guidelines should be included in the code of ethics and position paper for professional bodies in handling complaints”, she said.

Dr Kwok emphasised that the study would help to ensure that the voices and needs of this invisible and silenced group would be heard by the public, and that the results would inform policy change and contribute to the call for discrimination-free school environments for LGBTQ students in Hong Kong. She added that schools should promote a culture of inclusiveness, and the sexuality education curriculum should nurture students with values of equality and respect towards each other. Anti-discrimination laws based on sexual orientation and gender identity should be legislated by the Hong Kong SAR Government, Dr Kwok concluded.

Note 1: LGBTQ is the acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning/Queer.

~ The End ~

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