

Does Gender and Sexual Diversity Lead to Greater Violence in Schools?



The share of LGBT students in a classroom is not significantly linked to the prevalence of violence in school



There are gendered effects of increased contact with gender and sexually diverse students: a larger share of LGBT students increases violence against LGBT girls in the classroom.



Results are aligned with the nature of bullying in schools, which tends to be sexual or gender-based.

CONTEXT

We focus on gender and sexual diversity in the secondary school setting due to the important role that education systems play in reducing social distance between individuals. Adolescence is also a crucial stage in which individuals construct their identities, develop their personalities, and have a tendency to experiment. Moreover, adolescence is a stage in which the levels of bullying and cyberbullying dramatically increase relative to infancy or puberty. LGBT students are particularly prone to being victimized in schools, yet there has been little work analyzing whether a larger presence of LGBT students in a classroom leads to more generalized violence.

PROJECT

Using survey data from 95 middle and high schools, 365 classrooms, and 5,995 students in Uruguay, we estimate the impact of the share of LGBT students on the prevalence of psychological, physical, and sexual violence in schools. The survey was self-administered and anonymous due to the sensitive nature of the questions.

We exploit plausibly exogenous variation in the share of LGBT students across classes to study whether greater contact with LGBT students is linked to the individual experience of violence. Our paper is the first to exploit quasi-random variation in sustained exposure to LGBT students in a real-life setting.

RESULTS

Our results do not support the contact hypothesis. Increased representation of LGBT students in the classroom, on average, does not have a significant impact on individual experience of violence in the school.

We next analyze whether levels of vulnerability of women and LGBT students—traditionally marginalized groups—is heightened by a higher presence of LGBT students in the classroom. We find a large overall effect on girls: when the share of LGBT students increases, they experience an increase in the likelihood of experiencing some type of violence relative to men.

We further disentangle this result for females and discover that it is driven by greater victimization of female LGBT students: as the share of LGBT students increases, so does the likelihood that LGBT women in the class will experience more psychological or physical violence. This result highlights the heightened vulnerability of the intersection of two already vulnerable groups.

Key Concept



CONTACT HYPOTHESIS

Under appropriate conditions, interactions between majority and minority group members can bring opportunities to get to know each other and reduce prejudice and discrimination between them.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Victimization during childhood and adolescence can have long-term impacts on economic and social outcomes. Our results show that violence against girls is exacerbated whenever classrooms become more gender and sexually diverse. The role of schools in creating more inclusive societies and reducing conflict becomes crucial as they can serve as a platform to introduce diversity and inclusion programs, sexual education, and gender curricula. As gender and sexual diversity increases among younger generations, it becomes urgent that traditional formal institutions adapt, become more tolerant and inclusive, and guarantee equal rights to all.

IDB RESEARCH ON GENDER VIOLENCE

This study resulted from a collaborative effort with Ann-Marie Urban (SCL/GDI), who led the project in Uruguay. RES provided technical support to GDI during the instrument development stage and in the analysis of data. All data used in this study come from the survey collected by the IDB in coordination with the National Administration of Public Education (ANEP) in 2019.

Key Concept



LGBT

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender population.

Figure 1. The Impact of Gender and Sexual Diversity on School Violence



FULL STUDY

[Frisancho, Verónica, Alejandro Herrera, and Eduardo Nakasone. 2022. "Does Gender and Sexual Diversity Lead to Greater Conflict in the School?"](#)

DEPARTMENT OF RESEARCH AND CHIEF ECONOMIST

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