



## EDUCATION

# US Study: School Is a Hostile Place for LGBTQ+ Students

October 17, 2020

This week, researchers released a report on LGBTQ+ students at schools in the United States. It found that almost all LGBTQ+ students who were questioned reported hearing offensive comments about their sexuality or **gender** identity.

The GLSEN 2019 National School Climate Survey noted that they reported hearing comments such as "that's so **gay**" on school playgrounds and in college dining halls.

GLSEN is a national education and support group for members of the LGBTQ+ community. Teachers set up the group to provide support to individuals facing a hostile climate in school.

LGBTQ+ is short for **lesbian**, gay, bisexual, transgender and **queer** or questioning.

The 2019 National School Climate Survey involved 16,700 students, all of them members of the LGBTQ+ community. They were questioned between April and August of last year. Just under 99 percent of those between 13 and 21 years of age reported hearing critical comments about their sexuality or gender identity. Almost 92 percent said the things they heard had made them feel "**distressed**."

Aiden Cloud attends a small, private school in Nashville, Tennessee. The 17-year-old student said that his teachers are not open to talking about LGBTQ+ issues.

"Even though there are a lot of queer students at my school - just as there are at any school - there's a very big lack of **visibility**. It feels very **isolating**," said Cloud.

Discussing LGBTQ+ issues in schools has led to fierce criticism in other countries. Last year, some parents in Britain protested the discussion of sexuality and gender identity in local schools.

The GLSEN report surveyed students in all 50 U.S. states as well as the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, American Samoa and Guam. The results show that **homophobia** was common within educational organizations.

More than 95 percent of those taking the survey said that they had heard hurtful comments about LGBTQ+ students at school. More than half the students reported hearing such comments, threats or experiencing name-calling because of their sexual identity.

Eleven percent reported physical attacks because of their sexuality, the report noted.

Eliza Byard is the executive director of GLSEN, a group formerly known as the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network. She said that the results show the need to continue to deal with the problem.

“This is a very **significant** wake-up call about how the progress we've won is directly under attack.”

However, Byard notes that the situation now is very different from the past.

"Where we are now is so different from where we were 20, 25 years ago in terms of how [much] better things are. On the other hand, where we are is clearly still unacceptable."

One action GLSEN plans is No Name-Calling Week, from January 18 to 22, 2021. The aim of the week is to end name-calling and abuse in schools. Its organizers want students to learn how to be kind to one another.

I'm Jill Robbins.

*Matthew Lavietes, Hugo Greenhalgh and Oscar Lopez reported on this story for Thompson Reuters. Jill Robbins adapted it for VOA Learning English. George Grow was the editor.*

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## Words in This Story

**gender** – *n.* the state of being male or female

**survey** – *n.* an activity in which many people are asked a question or a series of questions

**gay** – *adj.* of or relating to a sexual or love interest in members of one's same sex

**lesbian** – *n.* a woman who is sexually interested in other women

**queer** – *adj.* a word to describe individual who self-identifies as part of the LGBTQ+ community. It was once hurtful but is now used in a neutral or approving way especially by some homosexual and bisexual people.

**distress** – *v.* to subject to great pain or difficulties

**visibility** – *n.* the ability to see or be seen

**isolate** – *v.* to put or keep (someone or something) in a place or situation that is separate from others

**homophobia** – *n.* a person who hates or is afraid of homosexuals or treats them badly

**significant** – *adj.* large enough to be noticed or have an effect

*Are there organizations to help LGBTQ+ students where you live? We want to hear from you. Write to us in the Comments Section.*

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