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To cite this article: Zoe Apostolidou (2019): Homophobic and transphobic bullying within the school community in Cyprus: a thematic analysis of school professionals’, parents’ and children’s experiences, Sex Education, DOI: 10.1080/14681811.2019.1612347

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2019.1612347

Published online: 09 May 2019.

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Homophobic and transphobic bullying within the school community in Cyprus: a thematic analysis of school professionals’, parents’ and children’s experiences

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ABSTRACT
This study presents findings from qualitative research conducted as part of the European Commission supported HOMBAT (Combating HOMophobic And Transphobic bullying in schools) project in Cyprus. Thematic analysis was used to analyse extracts of interviews from three focus groups: two groups with professionals who work in primary and secondary education as teachers, school psychologists and school counsellors; and one group with parents and children attending primary and secondary education in Cyprus. Findings from the study reveal how homophobic and transphobic bullying is becoming more visible in schools and both school staff and children frequently witness incidents of bullying on the basis of differing sexual and gender identity/self-expression. Professionals report having a sense of powerlessness to combat homophobic and transphobic bullying within the school community. Implications for practice that link to school professionals’ needs are explored and discussed.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 10 February 2019
Accepted 24 April 2019

KEYWORDS
Cyprus; homophobia; transphobia; bullying; schools

Introduction
Research shows that homophobic and transphobic bullying in schools constitutes a worldwide problem with severe immediate and long-term repercussions on students’ well-being (Orue and Calvete 2018; UNESCO, 2016; Antonio and Moleiro 2015; Thomas, Connor, and Scott 2015; Bradlow et al. 2017). More specifically, the Out In The Open report published by UNESCO1 in 2016, which among other elements analysed data on school-related violence from 94 countries and territories, revealed that children who are subjected to homophobic and transphobic bullying at school are at higher risk of experiencing mental health difficulties such as anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, lack of confidence, self-harm and suicidal behaviour. Additionally, they are more likely to miss classes or drop out, have lower academic performance and hence have fewer employment prospects. (UNESCO, 2016). An earlier study conducted by the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Youth and Student Organisation (IGLYO) (Formby 2013) which examined the impact of homophobic and transphobic bullying on education and employment in five European countries showed that students who have
been subjected to bullying of this nature may suffer isolation and lack of motivation which can potentially lead to poor academic attainment.

Students often become a target of homophobic and transphobic bullying as the result of their appearance, sexual orientation or gender identity/expression that challenges traditional notions of binary gender roles and assumptions (Orue and Calvete 2018; Toomey and Russell, 2016). In terms of how bullying manifests itself, one of the most common forms is through the use of homophobic language, name calling and being ‘outed’ as LGBT. Other forms of bullying include spreading rumours, threats and intimidation and, physical assault such as hitting and kicking (Formby 2013; Swearer et al. 2008; Antonio and Moleiro 2015). Research by Bradlow et al. (2017) which investigated the experiences of young gay people in the UK showed that 45% of LGBT pupils including 64% of trans pupils are bullied for being LGBT at school. Moreover, only 29% of those who had been bullied reported that teachers intervened when witnessing the bullying. These findings highlight the importance of establishing measures to protect LGBT individuals from homophobic and transphobic bullying within the school environment. Several studies have demonstrated that one of these measures concerns training for teachers and educators that focus on enabling them to identify, address and handle cases of bullying more effectively (Pennell 2017; UNESCO, 2016; Formby 2013; Mitchell et al. 2014).

Over the past eight years, Cyprus has made important steps towards ensuring LGBT rights on a number of different levels. More specifically, in order to reduce homophobia and transphobia in schools, the government has introduced specific measures. In 2011, topics related to sexual orientation and gender identity were introduced into pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education, and in 2012, Cyprus implemented an anti-bullying plan in schools in order to promote a more supportive environment for LGBT children. Within the same context, in 2013, the Cypriot Parliament amended the penal code to criminalise public incitement to violence or hatred against people on the grounds of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Under the law, perpetrators face up to three years imprisonment or a fine of up to 5,000 euros or both (ECRI, 2016). Finally, another positive change took place in 2015 when the House of Parliament passed the law on civil partnerships conferring the right on “two heterosexual or homosexual persons” to conclude a "written agreement", known as the civil partnership agreement. While acknowledging that the legal recognition of same-sex couples was an important move in the direction of LGBTI equality in Cyprus, the fact remains that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity is a major issue that is currently not adequately dealt with and which has not been investigated so far. Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression is an issue that takes place across all sectors and settings of social life including the work and school environment (ECRI, 2016; Soshilou and Vasiliou 2016; Kapsou and Mantis 2012; Kapsou, Christophi, and Épaminonda 2011). Nevertheless, the school environment appears to be a context that is particularly vulnerable to homophobic and transphobic discrimination, violence and bullying. Homophobic attitudes and practices in the school environment constitute a reflection of the homophobic attitudes that exist within wider Greek Cypriot society; attitudes that are deeply imbedded in a rigid heterosexual conceptualisation of the family that revolves around notions of heteronormativity.
Social context and research findings on LGBT issues in Cyprus

According to the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) Report on Cyprus published in 2016, approximately 85,000 people identify as LGBT. Lack of official data on the size of LGBT population in Cyprus, as well as the very limited research on LGBT issues appears to be linked to the fact that Cyprus is still a conservative and patriarchal society permeated by homophobic attitudes and attitudes of intolerance against LGBT people (ECRI, 2016; Soshilou and Vasiliou 2016; Kapsou, Christophi, and Epaminonda 2011; Eurobarometer 2009). In relation to this, the European LGBT Survey published by European Union Agency for Fundamental Human Rights FRA\(^2\), (2014) revealed that 61% of Cypriot participants reported that discrimination of the basis of sexual orientation is ‘very widespread’ in Cyprus. This percentage needs to be understood against the EU average of 31%; a finding that brings into the fore the extent of intolerance and discrimination against LGBT people in Cyprus. The same survey showed that the vast majority of LGBT people in Cyprus (9 out of 10 participants) report that they do not disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity to others as a way of protecting themselves. Around 8 in 10 respondents in Cyprus think that it is very rare for public figures in politics, business and sports to be open about being LGBT. Overall, the survey placed Cyprus 4th among the 27 EU Member States and Croatia in terms of discrimination and harassment on the grounds of sexual orientation. This finding is in line with findings from the study conducted by Kapsou, Christophi, and Epaminonda (2011) which documented that LGB people in Cyprus experienced discrimination and moderate to low levels of acceptance. Participants reported that trans individuals receive minimum social acceptance and overall, are ‘not at all accepted’ (ibid., 2011 p.114). The experience of discrimination was reported to take place in a variety of different settings including participants’ work environment, school, the army and other settings. In the same study (Kapsou, Christophi, and Epaminonda 2011), the percentage of LGBT people who reported having been harassed or discriminated against in Cyprus well exceeds the EU average which was reported to be 47% (FRA, 2014).

The dominant discourse of homophobia and transphobia that has a detrimental negative impact on how LGBT people experience themselves within their social context is often constructed through the media. The significant role of media in Cyprus was brought into the foreground by the study of Kapsou, Christophi, and Epaminonda (2011) which demonstrated how the media promote a culture which for the most part portrays gay men with exaggerated and stereotypical attributes, rarely presents lesbians, and conspicuously ignores the presence of trans and intersex individuals. The local media therefore not only ignores and denies LGBT peoples’ varied identities but constructs these as ‘abnormal’ and ‘unnatural’. Finally, the Orthodox Church in Greek Cypriot society is central to promoting, perpetuating and establishing the negative attitudes and stereotypes against the LGBT community in Cyprus. The Archbishop of the Greek Cypriot Church has declared on public television and on a number of other occasions that homosexuality is a sin and a perversion; a view that was also shared in a Church press release before the first Cyprus gay parade (Soshilou and Vasiliou 2016). Likewise, in 2014 the Head of the Greek Cypriot Church declared his opposition against civil partnership and marriage rights by employing an aggressive and malevolent discourse about homosexuality and by openly asking people to condemn and stand against it.
All the above factors point to the importance of conducting a systematic investigation of discrimination against the LGBT community in Cyprus. In response to this, Accept LBGT Cyprus\(^3\) and CARDET\(^4\) partnered in the European HOMBAT — Combating HOMophobic And Transphobic bullying in schools project. The project aimed to design and create a framework for the prevention and combatting of homophobic and transphobic bullying in schools in Greece, Cyprus and Lithuania. The Greek organisation KMOP\(^5\) was the coordinator of the project. One of the project’s activities was to conduct research on bullying on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity in primary and secondary schools. This paper presents the qualitative research findings that emerged from three focus groups conducted among members of the Greek Cypriot community in Cyprus: a group with school psychologists and school counsellors, a group with teachers, and a group with parents and students.

**Methodology**

The philosophical foundations of the research are located in social constructionism (Burr 2003); a perspective that places importance on the interaction between people and everyday social practices. Social constructionism holds that people give meanings to social experience through language and views language as a form of social action that has practical implications for people’s lives (Burr 2003, 1995). More explicitly, language conveys attitudes and positions which invite or restrict particular behaviours and opportunities for action (Gillies and Willig 1997; Van Langenhove and Harré 1994). A methodological framework of this nature assumes that the experience of social reality can be examined and understood through the study of individual narratives (Willig 2013). Given that the current research was interested in unravelling the attitudes, views and positions of people employed in primary and secondary education, as well as parents and students, a social constructionist perspective was considered appropriate.

**Research design, recruitment and participants**

The study was advertised through a project website and local newspapers and news about it was circulated to teachers employed both in primary and secondary education, school counsellors, school psychologists, other professionals who work directly with children, parents and, students. The inclusion criteria for the professionals’ groups were their experience of working in primary or secondary education. It should be mentioned that given the sensitivity of the research subject and the level of stigmatisation that is frequently attached to different forms of self-expression, the people who eventually agreed to participate were diversity aware and sensitive, as well as mindful of the phenomenon of homophobic and transphobic bullying in schools. Thus, the profile of the research participants is likely not typical of the majority of professionals working in schools in Cyprus but reflects a smaller group of professionals who support and promote LGBT issues and equality.

The decision to conduct focus groups was based on the idea that such an approach would allow participants to express their views and beliefs about homophobic and transphobic bullying in schools in a safe and non-threatening environment. The use of focus groups was intended to provide a space for participants to share their experiences with their
fellow participants and support each other. The fact that both groups consisted of just four people ensured that all participants were given adequate time to express their views and share their experiences. More particularly, focus groups were designed to a) explore professionals’ experiences regarding homophobic and transphobic bullying in schools, b) investigate their views in relation to how these issues are being addressed by the school community and, c) examine professionals’ views concerning the aspects they consider important for combating homophobic and transphobic bullying in school. The parents and student group was formed by parents and students who were willing to talk about their experiences and views on homophobic and transphobic bullying in schools. The rationale behind including parents and children in the same group was based on the idea the parents’ willingness and openness to talk about the phenomenon under investigation might encourage children to feel safe to share their own experiences more freely.

With regards to focus groups participants, the first focus group consisted of four teachers, three women and one man. Three of the participants worked in secondary education and one in primary education. The second focus group consisted of two school psychologists, one school counsellor and one primary school teacher/clinical psychologist trainee; three women and one man. It should be noted that the relatively small sample of participants in these two groups, as well as the fact that these professionals constitute a minority group could be considered a limitation of this study as it raises the issue of representativeness and whether the findings of this study are typical of other professionals working in primary and secondary education in Cyprus. Nevertheless, the data presented here provide the basis for an initial mapping of the phenomenon of homophobic and transphobic bullying in schools. Finally, the third focus group consisted of four parents, three women and one man, and four school children of primary and secondary school. Three of the children (two boys and one girl) went to primary school and one girl was in year one of secondary school. The focus groups were conducted over a period of two weeks. The discussion in each focus group was led by the interview protocol that was followed in the larger study and lasted on average 75 minutes. Discussion was voice recorded and informed consent was obtained by all participants. A specific consent form was completed by children’s parents.

**Data collection and analysis**

For data collection, researchers constructed a semi-structured group interview schedule comprising of open-ended questions on the areas mentioned above. Each focus group lasted between 1.5 and 2 hours. Focus groups were conducted over a period of two weeks. Data were analysed thematically using the technique advocated for by Braun and Clarke (2008, 2013). Transcribed interviews were read several times and each interview was coded line by line. Following this, initial codes were allocated to different themes and sub-themes. All the themes were named and selected data extracts that reflected the essence of participants’ experience of homophobic and transphobic attitudes and bullying were identified.

**Findings**

The main themes that emerged from the data concerned manifestations of homophobic and transphobic bullying within the school community; barriers to combating homophobic
and transphobic bullying within the school community; and support for combating homophobic and transphobic bullying at school. Even though the number of participants was small, all the emergent themes were prevalent amongst those interviewed.

Verbatim quotations are used to illustrate each theme. All extracts were translated from Greek to English. Hard brackets [...] are used to indicate an omission and soft brackets to indicate a pause. Group 1 refers to teachers, group 2 refers to school psychologists and counsellors, and group 3 to parents and children.

**Manifestations of homophobic and transphobic bullying within the school community**

The majority of professionals (teachers, psychologists and counsellors) reported that even though homophobic and transphobic bullying is prevalent in schools it is not addressed adequately but swept under the carpet. The perpetrators of homophobic and transphobic bullying include both school teachers and students.

Teachers may also bully children who present differently, stricter teachers might say ‘don’t do this’, ‘go and play with the children that are like you’, ‘Why do you behave like this? like a girl?’ These comments exist (Group 1).

We have a child that is going through the process of gender transition… the problem is that in the staff meetings at the beginning of the year and I was shocked… the child is registered with a male name but wants to be called with a female name and everyone refused to call them by the name they wanted. ‘No! this is the name that is used in the register, they would call them by that’ (Group 1).

Professionals’ discourses with regards to how school teachers relate to children who differ from heteronormative expectations bring into the fore the fact that teachers’ stance is based on a set of prejudices regarding gender and sexuality. These prejudices revolve around a rigid notion of male and female, the binary distinction between them, as well as assumptions that accompany both genders. This finding aligns with those of other relevant research studies (Soshilou and Vasiliou 2016; Kapsou, Christophi, and Epaminonda 2011), which show that Cypriot society is a traditional patriarchal society that reacts badly to gender non-conformity. Any deviation in terms of sexuality, gender identity and self-expression challenges teachers’ views about normality and can result in homophobic and transphobic bullying; a finding reported elsewhere in the relevant literature (Orue and Calvete 2018; Toomey and Russell, 2016). Bullying of this nature also manifests itself in the use of statements that frame as ‘inappropriate’ ways of being that do not conform to the gender binary norm. As one of the students explained:

She (the teacher) told us that it is inappropriate for two men or two women to adopt a child (Group 3).

This kind of statement not only rejects a different to the dominant notion of the family but produces a discourse which stigmatises and attacks any form of non-traditional family structure. Such a discourse advances the notion of heteronormativity and legitimates discrimination against different ways of being with respect to the family. As one of the professionals noted, homophobia and transphobia are prevalent among teachers,
revealing how the school as a social institution itself reflects the dominant culture by producing discourses of homophobia and transphobia. This is illustrated in the quote below:

I find that there is more homophobia and transphobia among colleagues compared to [the] children (Group 2).

Participants also shared their experiences of bullying between students. The majority of participants, both professionals and students, explained that terminology describing non-normative forms of gender and sexuality is used with the intention of offending and insulting children. Such practices may occur even in the presence of a teacher.

I mostly remember instances in which the word ‘gay’ is used as a swear word [...] even in cases when the person who uses the word does not even know what it means, it is a word that is used as a swear word [...] Teachers will say ‘stop swearing’ something that reinforces this view (Group 1).

They might say ‘you are lesbian’ and this is considered a swear word (Child, Group 3).

As these two passages illustrate, the pejorative use of language derives from a discourse of homophobia that constructs deviant forms of sexual orientation as negative and inferior. Upon deconstructing this discourse, it becomes clear that these positions promote negative attitudes, prejudice, hatred, as well as hostile behaviour against LGBT people. Furthermore, as participants noted, such homophobic behaviours take place in front of teachers who adopt a stance that consolidates and perpetuates the negative meanings that is attached to the pejorative use of terms such as ‘λεσβία’ (lesbian) and ‘γκέι’ (gay). This finding is in accordance with similar studies conducted in the UK (Bradlow et al. 2017; Guasp 2012) which demonstrate that a large percentage of students who experiences homophobic bullying reported that the teachers who witnessed it did not intervene. One of the children shared their personal experience:

I wear earrings and they tell me that I am a girl (Child, Group 3).

Any form of self-expression that digresses from the expected notion of heteronormativity is stigmatised, attacked and bullied through behaviours that are indicative of the dominant homophobic and transphobic culture that exists in Cyprus (ECRI, 2016; Demetriou 2014; Kapsou and Mantis 2012), as well as elsewhere (Orue and Calvete 2018; Toomey and Russell, 2016).

**Barriers to combating homophobic and transphobic bullying within the school community**

When teachers and other professionals were asked to share their experiences concerning the barriers they faced in dealing with incidents of homophobic and transphobic bullying, some of the replies given are presented below:

I want to help but I am not allowed to do more staff, I might be exposed and then I will have problems with my superiors (Group 1).

I taught about diversity at school and I showed a video that is about racism [...] and they filed a case against me because at some point it shows two homosexual couples [...] and
these issues should not be presented to children […] My experience with the system forces me to assimilate. I am so sensitised (on these issues), and I am discouraged […] ok we do not talk about this […] It’s a fight I will give by myself and I am really willing to do so but I don’t know what the outcome will be. […] change needs to happen on many levels (Group 2).

When I went to talk about healthy relationships […] I had colleagues who said to me you can talk to them about whatever you want but do not tell them that being homosexual is normal […] This was the position of the Assistant Principals (Group 2).

These passages explicitly show that a discourse of homophobia penetrates professionals’ narratives to the extent that it results in a feeling of powerlessness and inability to help. As professionals describe, diversity of self-expression with respect to sexuality and gender is issues that should not be talked about in class and in the event that this happens, they place the individual concerned at risk of being exposed and marginalised within the school community.

From a social constructionist viewpoint, such passages reveal the power of heteronormativity and its reproduction within the social matrix of the school community. All three passages show professionals finding themselves in a disadvantageous position as the result of their choice to talk about issues that deviate from mainstream discourse on sexuality, gender and self-expression. They reveal the importance of establishing measures within the school community that will empower and enable professionals to deal with the phenomenon of bullying more effectively (Pennell 2017; Formby 2013).

Finally, and in the same vein, one of the parents of the focus group explained that the biggest barrier that exists to combat homophobic and transphobic bullying is teachers’ dominant mentality, personal views and the stereotypes to which students are exposed.

The biggest problem is the educators/teachers who bring into the class their own strong ideologies and their own stereotypes […] talking about homosexuality or homophobic bullying is not restricted to the life education class, it is everywhere […] therefore the struggle to […] is change (their) mentality (Parent, Group 3).

**Support for combating homophobic and transphobic bullying at school**

Participants were asked to identify the kind of support they would consider valuable in combating homophobic and transphobic bullying. The vast majority replied that school staff need to be sensitised, trained and educated on issues of diversity of any kind and particularly, on diversity of self-expression with respect to sexuality and gender. Such training should be compulsory for school staff and should take place before professionals start working in schools. Almost all professionals (seven out of eight) reported having participated in training that was designed to help them identify and combat discrimination. When professionals were explicitly asked to share their experience in relation to what they found useful, they gave the following answers:

Scientific knowledge, […] theories, sexuality models, terminology. Defining the topic in a scientific manner helped me feel more comfortable. The other thing that helped me enormously was knowing the Ministry’s policies (Group 1).
Right terminology, it is very important to know how to use the right terminology, […] for example it is not sexual choice it is sexual orientation, so you learn the terminology and then you learn skills, these two things are very important (Group 2).

Being able to handle situations with children but with colleagues as well (Group1).

The aspect of how you handle one incident in the classroom, ‘you are gay because of doing this’ How can handle this? […] how to manage everyday incidents because these are part of everyday life, students say things (Group 2)

A key feature that stands out in professionals’ narratives is the power of knowledge. Knowledge was seen as providing a context which on the one hand, legitimises different forms of self-expression with respect to sexuality and gender, whilst on the other hand, it counterbalances the power of the discourse of heteronormativity. In other words, the discourse of scientific knowledge empowers professionals to combat stereotypes and prejudices by constructing a socially legitimate space that allows room for diversity in terms of sexuality and gender.

A second feature, which was mentioned in the first extract is the significance of the government ministry policies. Governmental policies are part of a powerful corpus of political knowledge that defines what is acceptable within society, and hence, within the school community. In principle, this body of knowledge provides professionals with the legal tools to combat homophobic and transphobic bullying. It should be noted, however, that during the focus groups it was repeatedly mentioned that even though there was a directive from the Ministry of Education and Culture (2016) against bullying with very clear guidelines with regards to how cases of bullying should be handled, most of the professionals working in the school community are either not aware of it or do not take it into account. The reason why these legal frameworks and tools are not taken into account is definitely an issue that needs to be further investigated.

A third feature identified as important by professionals is acquiring the practical skills that will enable them to handle incidents of bullying of this nature. A school professional needs to be confident in addressing, unpacking and educating students, parents and colleagues on issues of homophobic and transphobic bullying. Confidence in doing so can be established through training and acquiring scientific knowledge on these issues; a position that is supported by other research (Pennell 2017; UNESCO, 2016; Mitchell et al. 2014).

When children and parents were asked to share their views on the changes they would like to see in schools, their answers included the following:

What I would like in class, instead of only covering the material we do, Maths, Greek language, to read a book that is concerned with these issues because everyday life is more important, I mean life is more important than knowledge (Child, Group 3).

I believe that we have to be taught respect and accepting others as they are (Child, Group 3).

Training teachers is the first and most important thing that needs to be done and training should be compulsory, and they should be assessed, and the assessment should be done in a fair manner (Parent, Group 3).
Overall, participants stressed the importance of educating staff within the school community who in turn, can educate children appropriately and can allow them to identify cases of bullying. Beyond this there are issues of respect, stressing how gender and sexual diversity needs to be approached with respect and understanding. As all participants explained, Cypriot society, and particularly members the school community, are highly conservative; their actions often marginalise and exclude and people who express themselves in ways that deviate from the sexual and gender norms that mainstream Cypriot society promotes.

Discussion and conclusion

This paper has presented findings from two focus groups with professionals working in primary and secondary education either as teachers, school psychologists or school counsellors and one focus group conducted with parents and children who go to primary and secondary education in Cyprus. Evidence from the study suggests that homophobic and transphobic bullying is becoming more visible in schools and both school staff and children often witness incidents of bullying on the basis of different forms of self-expression, perceived sexual orientation and gender identity.

Given the dominant culture of heteronormativity and the homophobic and transphobic attitudes that permeate society and school community, professionals report experiencing a sense of isolation, powerlessness and inability to combat bullying of this nature. This finding stresses the importance of establishing a framework that helps professionals identify, address and handle incidents of homophobic and transphobic bullying in schools. It also demonstrates the need for specialised training courses for all professionals who work within the school community. This training needs to focus on helping professionals gain scientific knowledge about relevant topics, including pertinent policies and directives, and develop skills on how to address and handle cases of bullying. Finally, training should focus on changing professionals’ perceptions and attitudes on issues of diversity in general.

The fact that the school environment appears to be a context in which homophobic and transphobic discrimination, violence and bullying are prevalent points to the importance of establishing a public discourse that not only will move away from any form of homophobic and transphobic behaviour and attitudes but will allow, legitimise and encourage different forms of self-expression with respect to sexuality and gender identity. Overall, the findings of the study highlight that even though, over the past decade, Cyprus has made significant steps towards ensuring LGBT rights, there is a long way to go before it becomes an inclusive society that embraces all forms of diversity in self-expression and ways of being. The negative rhetoric that permeates public discourse and manifests within the school environment parallels that in other post-colonial countries where religious influence remains dominant. As (Jones 2019) recent study in South Africa reveals, despite the progress that manifests itself in the legislative framework around LGBT rights, public discourse on LGBT issues in post-colonial countries is slower to change, being characterised by morally conservative attitudes that derive from a patriarchal regime that promotes and perpetuates the discourse of hetenormativity.
Limitations and future research

This study was conducted with a small sample of participants which could be considered one of its major limitations. Further research with a larger and more representative sample of participants could potentially shed light on other aspects of homophobic and transphobic bullying in schools. Given the findings that emerged from the study, additional research to examine the views and attitudes of the wider population would be helpful. This will provide insight into how to address homophobic and transphobic bullying on a larger scale within Greek Cypriot society. Likewise, research should be conducted on the extent and nature of discrimination against LGBT people in Cyprus, both generally and within the school community. Research of this nature will provide insight into the issues that need to be taken into account when designing specialised educational programmes for children, parents and professionals working within the school community.

Programmatic implications

A plan to combat homophobia and transphobia in all areas of everyday life needs to be designed and implemented by the national government. The plan needs to take into consideration ECRI’s (2016) recommendations, IGLYO’s (2018) Teachers’ Guide on Inclusive Education and be in line with the Recommendation CM/Rec (2010)5 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on measures to combat discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity (2016).

As part of a more encompassing programme of work, educational programmes on LGBT rights and discrimination against LGBT people need to be designed and implemented for employers and for professionals across all settings and areas of responsibility within government. With regards to the school community, specialist courses on LGBT rights and concerns should be made an integral component of teaching training in both public and private universities across the country. Likewise, additional educational training and workshops to address and target educators’ homophobic and transphobic attitudes need to be developed by specialist professionals. School authorities and parents should also be encouraged to participate in training of this nature.

Finally, discussion on LGBT rights and issues, on gender and sexual diversity, and on different ways of ‘being’ should given a more central position within the school curriculum and in health education/sex education/life education classes in particular.

Notes

1. UNESCO is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.
2. FRA is the European Union Agency for Fundamental Human Rights.
3. Accept LGBT Cyprus is an organisation that fights for LGBT rights and the elimination of all discrimination against the LGBT community in Cyprus. http://www.acceptcy.org/en
4. CARDET is the Centre for the Advancement of Research and Development in Educational Technology which is based in Cyprus. https://www.cardet.org/
5. KMOP - Social Action and Innovation Centre is a Greek non-profit organisation. http://www.kmop.gr/index.php/el/
Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author. The contents of this publication are sole responsibility of the author, and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union.

Funding

HOMBAT project has been funded with support from the European Commission [Project No. 764746].

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