

Violence Against LGBTIQ+ People at Universities: The Need to Uncover a Silent Reality

Abstract

Violence against LGBT community can manifest in different forms and exists in all spheres of society, including education. The main purpose of this article is to deepen the understanding of the state of the art about violence grounded in sexual orientation or gender identity in higher education in order to identify gaps for further research. The topic of this state-of-the-art literature review is the presence and magnitude of these forms of violence in the Spanish higher education system. For this reason, the inclusion criteria were empirical studies about the prevalence of violence against LGBTIQ+ individuals in the Spanish educational system. After analyzing the 25 articles that met the inclusion criteria, the main findings point that despite the existence of numerous international studies of the presence of violence against LGBTIQ+ people at colleges, little is known about this reality in Spain. The Spanish university system continues to remain hermetic, and violence against LGBTIQ+ people is silenced and hidden. Practice, policy and research implications of the findings are discussed in this article, highlighting the need of further research in this field. In this context, the research project XXXXXX (removed for peer review), addresses this social and educational problem to contribute to the creation of safer universities for the LGBTIQ+ community and people who support them.

Keywords: LGBTIQ+ violence, university, homophobia, transphobia

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Discrimination against LGBTIQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transexual, Intersexual, Queer and others) individuals is a persistent reality. For example, only eleven countries around the world include constitutional protection of LGBTIQ+ individuals, and 63 countries still criminalize homosexuality (ILGA - World, 2020). According to the largest survey of LGBT people involving 28 European countries, approximately 58% of the more than 140000 LGBT respondents were attacked or threatened with violence in the last five years because of their sexual orientation or gender identity (FRA, 2020).

The scope of this social problem is very broad, and it reaches all spheres of society. The educational system is not immune to this reality, and 85% of LGBT students experienced some type of violence while they were in educational institutions, and 45% of trans students dropped out due to the suffered violence (UNESCO, 2016). Although there is broad research on the prevalence of LGBTIQ+ bullying in schools and high schools, less is known about the prevalence of LGBTIQ+ bullying in universities (Lund & Ross, 2017; Nama et al., 2017).

The violence and discrimination suffered by members of the LGBTIQ + community throughout their educational career have negative consequences for their health, such as stress and anxiety; for their academic success, such as risk of dropout and failure; and for their social relationships, such as isolation and exclusion. In relation to mental health, several studies show that LGBT students are at greater risk of depression, stress and high levels of anxiety (Lapinski & Sexton, 2014; Alessi et al., 2017; Hood et al., 2019), a risk that is increased for gender-nonconforming individuals (Martin-Storey & August, 2016). A large proportion of LGBT students suffer from these consequences even if they have not experienced situations of discrimination and violence; witnessing or knowing about situations

of violence or harassment their LGBT peers promotes hostile campuses and increases levels of anxiety and stress among witnesses (Woodford et al., 2014; Goldberg, Smith, & Beemyn, 2020)

Regarding academic performance, homophobic violence results in lower academic results, which leads to a greater risk of school failure and reduced academic expectations (Woodford & Kulick, 2015; Kheswa, 2016). Finally, the prevailing fear and hostility at universities have a negative impact on the establishment of social relationships due to LGBT students' feelings of isolation and exclusion (Rothmann, 2016; Hong et al., 2016; Woodford & Kulick, 2015).

Safe Campuses for LGBTIQ+ People

Historical Perspectives on Homophobic and Transphobic Violence at Universities

Violence based on sexual orientation or gender identity and expression is not a recent problem in universities worldwide and has been studied for more than 30 years (Herek, 1986; D'Augelli, 1992; Waldo, Hesson-Mcinnis, & D'augelli, 1998). The LGBTIQ+ community has been seeking safe campuses for everyone and struggling against any form of homophobia and transphobia. One of the first examples of this historical mobilization took place at Yale University, a pioneer university in the visibility of violence against LGBTIQ+ people. As detailed in the report by Herek (1986), the Gay and Lesbian Association (GALA) of this university petitioned the administration to reform the University's Equal Opportunity Statement to include "sexual orientation" discrimination after they analyzed the presence of violence the basis of sexual orientation and gender diversity. Among the main findings, this report concluded that 65% of the respondents had been targets of verbal homophobic insults and that 25% had been threatened with physical violence. According to the report, these responses were highly different from the perceptions of the university because approximately 90% of victims admitted not having reported the incident because they feared negative

consequences. It has been decades since the report from Yale University, but violence against LGBTIQ+ people is still a reality at universities, and several studies have evidenced the prevalence of homophobia and transphobia (Schnitzer & Fang, 2015; Kortegast & van der Toorn, 2018; Soria et al., 2018; Dimberg et al., 2019).

Beyond the American context, LGBT students worldwide suffer homophobic and transphobic discrimination. According to a survey by the Equality Challenge Unit (2009), which included 2,704 LGBT students from universities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, nearly half of the LGBT students (49.5%) reported having been discriminated by other students due to their sexual orientation. Other studies have described homophobic attitudes among university students, such as the Portuguese research conducted with students of Educational Sciences (de Carvalho & Pinheiro, 2018) or the Swedish research with nursing students (Röndahl, Innala, & Carlsson, 2004).

The Struggle Against LGBTIQ+ Violence at Universities at the International Level

Universities at the international level are aware of the magnitude of this educational and social inequality and are working to guarantee high-quality education for all. Hence, several universities worldwide are successfully implementing diverse actions and strategies that contribute to overcoming discrimination due to sexual orientation or gender identity. One of the mechanisms is related to the inclusion of antidiscrimination guidelines that has explicit language regarding violence against LGBT people, which has proven to be successful in encouraging victims to report situations of harassment and violence (Stotzer, 2010; Pitcher, Camacho, Renn, & Woodford, 2018).

American universities are aware of discriminatory barriers that LGBT students face to succeed in college. For this reason, several initiatives are being implemented at the national level, such as the Campus Pride Index, an American online initiative whose purpose is to

assist universities in the implementation of actions and mechanisms to improve the life and well-being of the LGBTIQ+ community (Beemyn, Rankin, & Windmeyer, 2019). One of the priorities of Campus Pride Index and one of the most important challenges for all universities is ensuring campus safety (Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, & Frazer, 2010). Among the main strategies included, it is relevant the establishment of visible and effective procedures to report aggressions and harassment, support for the victims and prevention training.

According to the scientific literature, the most effective strategies are those that combine administration policies and community participation (Potter, Fountain, & Stapleton, 2012).

Because violence against LGBTIQ+ people affects universities in a broad sense, a community-based approach is essential to eradicate this discrimination and to enhance prevention policies. Bystander intervention programs are preventive programs that train bystanders to identify situations of homophobia and encourage their intervention when witnessing situations of violence (Banyard, Moynihan, & Plante, 2007). This intervention has been shown to produce a positive impact on bystander efficacy, intention to help others in a situation of violence and intervention when witnessing violence (Katz & Moore, 2013).

Despite the growing evidence at international level about the presence, magnitude and consequences of violence and discrimination against LGBTIQ+ individuals in higher education, there is scarce knowledge that addresses specifically in Spain. The present article seeks to provide new syntheses of existing scientific research about violence due to sexual orientation, gender identity and expression in Spain and to strengthen the work and research that is being implemented. Under the theoretical framework of social impact of research, which is referred to using scientific contributions to improve citizens' lives, this article analyzes existing literature about violence towards LGBTIQ+ people in the Spanish educational system and sheds light on the need and direction of further research in this topic in order to contribute to the eradication of violence against LGBTIQ+ individuals (Soler &

Gómez, 2020). Considering the 14 different approaches to literature reviews identified by Grant and Booth (2009), the authors decided to carry out a state-of-the-art review, which is characterized by contributing to the identification of gaps and new opportunities and priorities for further research. Finally, aligned with the theoretical framework that informed this research, the scientific advances must be with and for society, so the conclusions of the article include practice, policy and research implications to contribute to overcome violence against the LGBTIQ+community.

Materials and Methods

The proportion of hate crimes related to sexual orientation or gender identity in Spain has been increasing in the last years, representing nearly 1 out of 5 of the hate crimes (Ministerio de Interior, 2020). For this reason, the main objective that guided the present study was to identify scientific research about the prevalence of violence against LGBTIQ+ youth in Spain, specially focused on universities. Grant and Booth (2009) identified 14 types of literature review using the SALSA approach, which consisted of the analysis in terms of Search, Appraisal, Synthesis and Analysis. Among the identified approaches to literature review, the authors selected the state-of-the-art review for the present study. According to Grant and Booth (2009), a state-of-the-art review is characterized by addressing a current matter by contrasting existing, retrospective and current perspectives on the field and by pointing to gaps in the field that need further research. In this line, the state-of-the-art review includes a wide search of existing literature without a formal quality evaluation, a narrative synthesis of results and an analysis oriented to the identification of current knowledge as well as priorities for further research. Considering the increasing presence of homophobic and transphobic violence in Spain, this type of literature review was considered appropriate for this study, as the topic addressed is a current concern in Spain and there is a need to identify a

gap in scientific literature in order to orient future research. For the identification of the articles, authors carried out an exhaustive search about the prevalence of violence against LGBTIQ+ people in the Spanish educational system in Scopus database. The search included the following keywords: 1) LGBT violence, LGBT discrimination, LGBT bullying, homophobia, homophobic bullying, homophobic violence, homophobic discrimination AND 2) Education, school, high school, university, campus, college AND 3) Spain, Spanish

With the combination of these keywords and search terms, a total of 60 articles were obtained. In addition, authors included 12 more studies obtained after a review of grey literature. For this article, researchers targeted the Spanish educational system and especially universities because LGBTIQ+ violence at universities remains specially silenced and there is a need to uncover this reality. However, as there is an important gap in the scientific literature regarding violence against LGBTIQ+ youth in the Spanish educational system, all educational settings were included in the analysis. In addition, considering the existence of this gap in the scientific literature, the scope of the review included articles from 2005-2021. Authors screened the articles according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria detailed in table 1:

[Table 1]

The application of the above-mentioned criteria resulted on a final sample of 25 studies that are included in this state-of-the-art literature review. The whole process of identification, screening and selection of articles is illustrated in Figure 1.

[Figure 1]

After the identification and screening of the articles based on the abovementioned criteria, authors read and categorized the findings in two categories (see Figure 2): 1) Prevalence of violence against LGBTIQ+ youth in the educational system and 2) Spanish

legal framework. However, during the analysis a new category emerged, as it became necessary to divide the first category in 1.a) prevalence of LGBTIQ+ bullying in high schools and 1.b) Prevalence of LGBTIQ+ violence at universities.

[Figure 2]

Results: Violence against LGBTIQ+ in the Spanish Educational System

Following the abovementioned categories of analysis, this section presents the results obtained from this literature review, which shed light about homophobic and transphobic bullying throughout the Spanish educational system and describe the Spanish legal framework related to homophobic and transphobic violence in the educational system.

Homophobic and Transphobic Bullying

Homophobia and transphobia are deeply rooted in Spain. In 2020, the rate of hate crimes related to sexual orientation or gender identity increased by 19.8%, representing the highest proportion in the last 5 years (Ministerio de Interior, 2020). However, although there is evidence of homophobia and transphobia in youth environments, there is little evidence or research at educational institutions and even less in regard to universities (García-Orriols & Torredadella-Flix, 2019; Granero-Andújar & García-Gómez, 2019).

Recently, some research has analyzed the presence and impact of homophobic bullying and cyberbullying in high schools. According to Elipe, Muñoz and Del Rey (2018), almost half of teenagers from sexual minorities in the studied high schools reported having been victimized due to their sexual orientation or gender identity and more than 20% reported being cybervictimized. Furthermore, three out of four Spanish youth aged 15-29 witnessed homophobic harassment at their educational centers (INJUVE, 2011). According to these data, homophobia is a persistent reality at Spanish high schools that can take different forms,

including physical and verbal violence (Piedra, Ramírez-Macías, Ries, & Rodríguez-Sánchez, 2014; Piedra, Ramírez-Macías, Ries, Rodríguez-Sánchez, & Phipps, 2016), exclusion, fear and disgust (Moliner, Francisco, & Aguirre, 2018; Carrera, Lameiras, Rodríguez, & Vallejo, 2013; Generelo & Pichardo, 2005). Taking into account the reciprocal relation between homophobic attitudes and homophobic bullying, it is important to consider all forms of homophobia as possible influences and predictors of homophobic violence (Barbero, 2017; Domínguez-Martínez & Robles, 2019; Elipe & del Rey, 2017, Gallardo-Nieto, Espinosa-Spínola et al., 2021). An important point to consider is that although the proportion of non-homophobic people is far above the percentage of homophobic people (approximately 67%-33%), the overwhelming majority of silent bystanders contribute to creating a climate of fear and violence against LGBT people (Pichardo, Molinuevo, Martín, & Romero, 2007).

The consequences of this sustained homophobic bullying cannot be obliterated because they directly impact teenagers' health and well-being. For example, according to the research of the National Federation of Lesbians, Gays, Transsexuals and Bisexuals (FELGTB, 2013), nearly half (43%) of LGBT teenagers and youth who suffered homophobic or transphobic bullying had thought about committing suicide, and 17% had attempted it.

Although approximately half of the hate crimes involving victims 18-25 years old (university age) are due to sexual orientation or gender identity (Ministerio de interior, 2020), this social and educational problem has not yet been analyzed from a global perspective. The scarce knowledge about this specific topic is limited to specific studies about small groups of university students (Tosso & Sáinz, 2015). Therefore, it represents an important gap in the scientific literature that needs to be addressed.

Spanish Legal Framework

The International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) annually evaluates whether and to what extent national legislation protects LGBT rights in terms of equality and non-discrimination, family, hate crime and hate speech, legal gender recognition, civil society space and asylum. In 2021, Spain was rated at 65% overall and its legislation was placed 10th out of 49 countries (ILGA-Europe, 2022). Despite advances in legal gender recognition and homosexual civil unions, some issues need to be addressed, especially with regard to transgender and intersexual individuals (ILGA-Europe, 2018). The ILGA annual report also provides improvement guidelines with regard to equity and nondiscrimination, family, hate speech, legal gender recognition and asylum. For instance, the main recommendations focus on the constitutional recognition of sexual orientation, the diversity of gender identity and sex characteristics, trans parenthood recognition, trans depathologization and the removal of age restrictions for name change and medical intervention.

In the field of education, the Law on the Improvement of Quality of Education includes the prohibition of discrimination grounded in sexual orientation or gender identity and proposes the implementation of corrective measures in case of harassment (Gobierno de España, 2013). In addition, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport prioritizes the unification and coordination of efforts as an effective tool to improve school coexistence and led the creation of the Strategic Plan of School Coexistence (De La Cuadra, Sánchez, Ries, & Macías, 2013; Miguel, Sánchez, Greciet, Garvín, & Balcones, 2017). This plan was developed through a participatory process in which renowned experts as well as social organizations from diverse fields (such as the National Federation of Gays, Lesbians, Bisexuals and Transsexuals, the Spanish National Committee of People with Disabilities Representatives, the Spanish Observatory on Racism and Xenophobia and the Institute of Women, among others) worked collaboratively under the coordination of the Ministry of Education. The purpose of this plan is to prevent, identify and overcome bullying in schools.

Although the plan takes into consideration sexual minorities as a vulnerable community, its scope is primary and secondary education, and it does not involve higher education and universities. Thus, there is a gap in regard to universities that leaves the LGBT university community unprotected against the violence and discrimination that occur in higher education institutions or between university members.

The Situation at Universities

As described in this analysis, there is a gap in the Spanish legal framework that does not include discrimination grounded in sexual orientation or gender identity or expression within the university system. Nonetheless, the autonomous community of Catalonia has a pioneering legislation in the struggle against discrimination against the LGBTIQ+ community. In 2014, the Catalan Parliament approved Law 11/2014 to guarantee the rights of gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgendered and intersexual Individuals and to eradicate homophobia, biphobia and transphobia (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2014). One of the main advances of this law is the inclusion of chapters 12 and 13 related to education and universities, respectively.

According to the thirteenth article, the principles of nondiscrimination and respect for sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression must be applied at Catalan universities. To safeguard the fulfillment of this law at Catalan universities, the Department of Work, Social Issues and Families developed a guide that presents specific actions (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2018). Among these actions, the guide includes, for instance, visibility activities, inclusive language and image, recognition and mentoring for trans people, the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ issues in the curriculum, safe and inclusive spaces, the promotion of ethical and egalitarian research and mechanisms to report harassment and to provide victims with the support they need.

It has been five years since the approval of the Catalan law, and there are still some actions that remain unaddressed, especially in regard to the section on discrimination and harassment. Institutional efforts have been oriented toward the elimination of institutional barriers affecting trans students and toward the design of respectful and inclusive institutional forms. Currently, resources are being focused on the elaboration of protocols that ensure the provision of integral responses in the case of harassment. However, there is still a lack of evidence regarding LGBTIQ+ violence at Catalan universities. This gap in the research drives the need to develop research that examines whether and to what extent LGBTIQ+ violence exists at Catalan universities.

In addition to bureaucratic difficulties related to the recognition of gender identity, some studies have noted that bullying trajectories from previous educational stages as well as higher rates of absenteeism and school failure hinder access to universities (Pichardo & Cabezas, 2019; Pichardo, Molinuevo, & Riley, 2009). Although these studies have begun to investigate the barriers that LGBTIQ+ students must overcome to access college, the extent of this social and educational problem remains unaddressed.

Discussion and Further Research

As mentioned above, violence against LGBT people is especially silenced in Spanish higher education, and there is a gap in research related to this field. However, the following tables summarize the main findings of the study as well as implications for practice, policy and research.

[Table 3]

[Table 4]

Considering the existing gap research in this field is needed to address this problem and propose successful strategies to overcome it based on scientific evidence. In this context,

the research project Uni4Freedom - Violence due to sexual orientation and gender identity and expression (RecerCaixa 2017 ACUP00235) aims to improve the quality of life of the LGTBIQ university community and break the silence on violence against this group (Dueñas et al., 2021; Gallardo-Nieto, Gomez et al., 2021).

Further Research: The Need to Uncover a Silent Reality

The Uni4Freedom project follows the line established by other pioneering projects that broke the silence at Spanish universities, such as the national project on Gender-Based Violence at Spanish Universities (Vidu, Schubert, Muñoz & Duque, 2014; Valls, Puigvert, Melgar & Garcia-Yeste, 2016; Melgar et al., 2021). Drawing upon research lines on dialogic feminism (Puigvert, 2012) and preventive socialization of gender violence (Puigvert, 2014), this pioneering project went beyond the scientific impact and achieved political and social impacts as well. On the one hand, the political impact of the project is related to important contributions to Organic Laws “3/2007 for the Effective Equality of Women and Men” and “4/2007 for Universities”, which established Protocols of Gender-Based Violence and Equality Commissions in Spanish universities. The social impact of the project involved breaking the silence and is still present. After this project, for the first time in Spanish universities, a student who was suffering sexual harassment denounced her professor. This first case encouraged an increasing number of survivors to report, and they created the Solidarity Network of Victims of Gender Violence in Universities. This network has been recognized by the Spanish Bank of Good Practices for the prevention of gender violence and by the Spanish Ministry as a good practice in the struggle against Gender-Based Violence due to the support it provides to Second Order Sexual Harassment victims and its commitment to solidarity and mutual help relationships.

In this vein, Uni4Freedom specifically aims to continue the struggle against violence at universities to create safe universities for the LGBTIQ+ community and those who support them. In this line, since all universities in Catalonia are higher education institutions where 4-year degrees are taught, the project targets 6 universities (both public and private) from different geographic locations in Catalonia an autonomous community within Spain. The design of the Uni4Freedom research draws upon two premises: first, violence due to sexual orientation and gender identity or expression exists at universities, and second, successful measures are being implemented internationally to prevent and overcome this violence.

Uni4Freedom is designed on the paradigm of the Communicative Methodology of research (CM), a research methodology that has contributed to overcome social and educational inequalities (Flecha & Soler, 2014, Flecha, 2021). The aforementioned projects that have demonstrated a positive impact in the prevention and eradication of violence in universities were also designed following this methodology (Puigvert, Valls, Garcia-Yeste, Aguilar, & Merrill, 2017). Drawing upon the theories of Habermas, Vygotsky and Freire, among others, the CM perspective is based on the establishment of an egalitarian dialogue between researchers and beneficiaries throughout the process and counts on all the voices to design and develop the research. Scientific knowledge is created when scientific evidence from research is contrasted with life knowledge provided by the diversity of social agents. CM aims not only to describe a reality but also to identify the elements that promote and the barriers that hinder social transformation, with the final objective of overcoming social and educational inequalities. This way, CM has demonstrated to achieve not only scientific impact, but also political and social impact, by promoting spaces for the co-creation of knowledge with researchers and beneficiaries (Gómez et al., 2019).

In this framework of the CM, Uni4Freedom promotes the participation of a major variety of social agents, including students, professors, political representatives and

LGBTIQ+ associations. One of the main characteristics of the implementation of CM to include all voices is the creation of an Advisory Committee (AC) with representatives of the community (Gómez et al., 2019). In this case, the project team created an advisory committee including LGBTIQ+ entities from the territory and students belonging to the LGBTQ+ community. The role of this AC is to provide the voice of the community and ensure an inclusive approach and the fulfillment of the objectives. Specifically, the advisory committee participated in meetings with the research team and played a particularly remarkable role in the design of the fieldwork instruments. Their contributions were the cornerstone of the design process because they provided a unique perspective characterized by its inclusivity toward sexual and gender diversity. After participating in the development of the questionnaire, the AC validated the results obtained from the data collection and contributed to their analysis. In Uni4Freedom, the AC consists of LGBTIQ+ university students, members of the solidarity network of gender-based violence in universities and LGBT associations. Their role is essential to enhance both the quality and the ethical principles of the project and to ensure that project activities contribute to the main goal of reducing violence against the LGBTQI+ community in universities.

Considering the extreme sensitivity of the information collected throughout the project, ethics is given high priority. For this reason, to ensure that the research fulfills the requirements of the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (All European Academies, 2017), Uni4Freedom proposes two lines of action. First, Uni4Freedom guarantees the inclusion of the voices of the LGBT community by creating an advisory committee. The participation of LGBT students and social organizations in this committee engages them in egalitarian decision making. This approach not only ensures that the research follows the aims of the project but also contributes to developing a more respectful, inclusive and democratic design of the research. Second, the researchers have established mechanisms

to guarantee that the rights of the participants are respected and the collected information is treated correctly.

Uni4Freedom follows the perspective of the social impact of research, which has the objective of improving society according to citizens' own goals (Aiello et al., 2020; Besselaar, Flecha, & Radauer, 2018). Within this framework, the goal is to break the silence related to LGBTIQ+ violence at universities providing evidence of the prevalence of this violence in Catalan universities, increasing community awareness and identifying successful actions in the prevention of violence against LGBTIQ+ individuals, as a first step in the eradication of this social problem. Among the specific outcomes of this research, Uni4Freedom will contribute to the generation of resources aimed at creating violence-free universities for LGBTIQ+ people and those who support them. Because Uni4Freedom is designed on the basis of CM, its expected impacts go beyond the scientific sphere to reach the political and social spheres as well. In this regard, following the line established by the pioneering research on gender-based violence in Spanish universities, Uni4Freedom will contribute to placing violence against LGBTIQ+ people on the public agenda and engaging more universities and institutions in the implementation of effective practices. Furthermore, the fieldwork derived from the project will provide the roots and the reasons why violence against LGBTIQ+ is still present at universities despite the implemented actions.

Overall, the Uni4Freedom project is pioneering research that will achieve a social impact related to the defense of LGBTIQ+ rights in Catalan universities. Its unique contributions will represent significant advances in the struggle against violence due to sexual orientation or gender identity and expression, not only in the Catalan universities but in universities all over the world. As Ruth Milkman said in the 1st Conference on Second-Order Sexual Harassment held in Barcelona, 'If you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem'. Thus, Uni4Freedom will contribute to beginning to create this solution, and its

results will help to design evidence-based policies and interventions in higher education institutions in Catalonia.

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