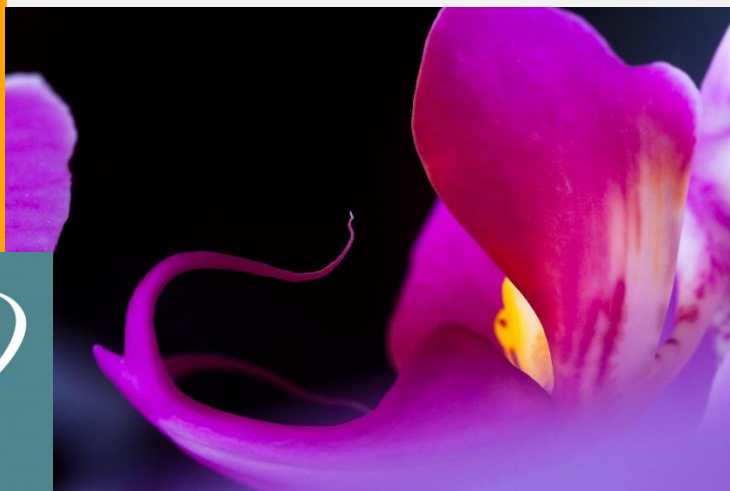




Intersex Traits and Variations of Sex Characteristics in Education: A Finnish Context

Axel Keating and Jukka Lehtonen



Ollscoil Chathair
Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City University

Intersex Traits and Variations of Sex Characteristics in Education: A Finnish Context

Authors: Axel Keating and Jukka Lehtonen

This report is published by Intersex: New Innovative Approaches (INIA), Dublin City
University

ISBN:

© INIA, Intersex New Interdisciplinary Approaches, DCU, 2022

Contents

Introduction	5
Intersex Traits and Variations of Sex Characteristics: A Finnish Context	7
Finnish Education and Intersex Traits and Variations of Sex Characteristics	12
Legislation and School Curricula Planning	12
Teachers	18
Teacher Education	18
Teachers' Attitudes	20
Teacher Experiences	23
Teaching and School Textbooks.....	24
Students	29
Student Culture and School Violence	29
Gender-Segregated Spaces and Activities	34
Impact of Forced and Coerced Non-Essential Surgeries and Medical Interventions on Educational and Career Paths.....	37
The Effects of COVID-19 Pandemic.....	40
Non-Governmental Organisations: Outreach Work in Schools.....	41
Research Methods and Data Collection in Education and School Contexts	45
Recommendations	49

Introduction

The aim of this brief is to provide relevant information about the state of education on intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics in Finland in order to assist in informing policy and curriculum development and in supporting intersex students and students with variations of sex characteristics. There is limited literature on the experiences of intersex students and students with variations of sex characteristics — including resources for intersex students and students with variations of sex characteristics — and on intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics in education policy and curricula, especially in teacher education. This is the case internationally but also true for Finland. The inaccuracies about or complete exclusion of intersex traits and variation of sex characteristics in education can severely impact intersex students and students with variations of sex characteristics' self-esteem and their academic performance as well as the knowledge about and perception of intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics at large.¹ This brief is intended for politicians, policymakers, the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Finnish National Agency for Education, authorities working in equality and anti-discrimination, educational professionals, and those in non-governmental organisations working with students and schools or on intersex rights.

This brief was written together by Axel Keating and Jukka Lehtonen in connection to the *Intersex – New Interdisciplinary Approaches* research network. Intersex – New Interdisciplinary Approaches (INIA) is an international research training network which encompasses innovative research projects that inform policy making and practices across a range of key sectors to support the wellbeing and rights of intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics. The INIA Innovative Training Network is supported by a grant from the European Commission's Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions program under project number 859869.²

Axel Keating is a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions Early Stage Researcher with the INIA research network and a doctoral student at Dublin City University. His current research focuses on education on intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics in Irish and Swedish schools. As a part of his research training with INIA, Axel Keating completed a secondment at the University of Helsinki in November 2021. The secondment was held remotely with discussions held via Zoom. Jukka Lehtonen is a Senior Researcher — with the title of Docent in Sociology of Education — in Gender Studies at the University of Helsinki. His research focus is on gender and sexuality diversity in education and work environments. He is a member of the INIA

¹ Ghattas, D. C. (2015). *Standing up for the human rights of intersex people*. Brussels: ILGA Europe & OII Europe. Retrieved from https://www.ilga-europe.org/sites/default/files/how_to_be_a_great_intersex_ally_a_toolkit_for_ngos_and_decision_makers_december_2015_updated.pdf

² For more information about INIA, please visit <https://www.intersexnew.co.uk/>.

advisory board and hosted the secondment.

This brief has been developed through a review of current scholarly research and policy documents about the education on intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics and the experiences of intersex students and students with variations of sex characteristics — both globally and in Finland. There are only a few publications that directly raise up topics regarding intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics in relation to education in Finland. Due to this gap in knowledge, research on sex and gender diversity³ in education is also used here. While being transgender and being intersex or having a variation of sex characteristics are different — with the former referring to one’s experience of gender and the latter of one’s congenital sex traits — research on the experiences of transgender and non-binary youth might be relevant for some children and youth with intersex traits or variations of sex characteristics. This research also includes scholarly critiques of cis- and gender-normativity⁴ which contain relevant subject matter from the perspective of understanding topics relating to intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics and the reproduction of norms concerning sex traits and bodies in education.

This brief was also developed through consultation and feedback from Finnish intersex individuals, those in non-governmental organisations, and those with an expertise in topics regarding intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics, including Kaisli Syrjänen, chairperson of Intersukupuolisten ihmisoikeudet (ISIO ry),⁵ Marita Karvinen, an expert in education at Seta,⁶ and Jaana Pirskanen, the former coordinator of the Support for Intersex, Means for Professionals (TIKA) project at Seta,⁷ to ensure accuracy and relevance to the local context. Experts within the fields of education and equality were also consulted for

³ The Finnish word *sukupuoli* encompasses both sex and gender. While *sukupuolivähemmistöt* is commonly translated to *gender minorities* and intersex traits refer to variations of sex characteristics rather than gender, the word encompasses both transgender individuals and individuals with intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics. Legislation such as the Act on Equality between Women and Men (the ‘Equality Act’) – which purpose is to prevent gender-based discrimination and promote equality – also covers intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics. *Intersex* is translated to *intersukupuolinen* in Finnish.

⁴ *Cisnormativity* refers to the assumption that being cisgender is the norm — or that all people are cisgender — and privileges this over other experiences of gender. *Cisgender* refers to people who identify with the gender stereotypically associated with their sex assigned at birth. *Gender normativity* refers to the reinforcement of a strict male/female binary and norms around gender and gender expression. Critiques of cis- and gender normativity can be used to analyse and challenge the biological determinism of sex and gender and the conflation of body traits — including sex traits — and gender, gender expression, and experiences of gender.

⁵ Intersukupuolisten ihmisoikeudet (ISIO ry) is an association of intersex people as well as experts and parties interested in intersex rights working together towards human rights and ensuring equality. For more information about ISIO ry, please visit <https://intersukupuolisuus.fi/isio/>.

⁶ Seta – LGBTI Rights in Finland aims for an equal society and individual welfare that includes everyone, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression by changing legislation and attitudes through education and information and by working with authorities and political decision-makers. For more information about Seta, please visit <https://seta.fi/>.

⁷ Seta’s three-year (2018-2020) Support for Intersex, Means for Professionals (TIKA) project promoted the visibility and human rights of intersex people throughout Finland. The TIKa project produced educational materials, animations for children and their families, and guides for young people and families with children, as well as organised seminars and assembled a national and international network of experts. Materials and interviews produced by the TIKa project can be accessed at <https://seta.fi/tika-hanke/>.

this brief.⁸ This brief includes a few citations from intersex people on their experiences in education from various research projects. Most of these are from published studies; however, in the case of a few citations, permission was granted by research participants and researcher Tikli Oikarinen to Jukka Lehtonen, who has translated and edited the citations to ensure the anonymity and readability of them.^{9,10}

This brief will provide a contextualisation of intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics, updates on legislation and policy regarding intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics in Finland, and information about school curricula and teaching, teachers and teacher training, school climate and student culture, school space, and effects of the current situation for intersex students and students with variations of sex characteristics on their educational and career paths. It will provide information about non-governmental organisations working on topics related to education and intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics, the effects of COVID-19 crises, and on conducting research and collecting data on intersex students and students with variations of sex characteristics in education and school contexts. Finally, it will provide recommendations for future progress in the field.

Intersex Traits and Variations of Sex Characteristics: A Finnish Context

Intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics are born with sex-linked traits — including external and internal anatomy, hormones, and chromosome patterns — that do not conform to normative binary notions of bodies assigned male or female. Intersex is an “umbrella term used to describe a wide range of congenital bodily variations in sex characteristics.”¹¹ This includes people who may use other language such as bodily diversity, variations of sex development, disorders of sex

⁸ We thank **Kaisli Syrjänen**, chairperson of Intersukupuolisten ihmisoikeudet (ISIO ry), **Marita Karvinen**, expert in education at Seta, and **Jaana Pirskanen**, former coordinator of the Support for Intersex, Means for Professionals (TIKA) project at Seta, for their consultation and review of this brief. We also thank **Tikli Oikarinen**, project manager at the Rainbow Families Association and author of the report *No information or options: Study on the rights and experiences of intersex people in Finland* (2020), **Satu Honkala**, Counsellor of Education at the Finnish National Agency for Education, **Sonja Vahtera**, lawyer at the Office of the Ombudsman for Children, and **Marjo Rantala**, Senior Office at the Office of Ombudsman for Equality, for their review of or comments on this brief.

⁹ Lehtonen, J. (2017). Hankala kysymys. Intersukupuolisuus suomalaisissa koulu- ja työelämätkimyksissä [A difficult question. Intersex in Finnish school and working life studies]. *Finnish Journal of Gender Studies*, 30 (1), 71-75.

¹⁰ Oikarinen, T. (2019). *No information or options: Study on the rights and experiences of intersex persons*. Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Retrieved from https://um.fi/documents/35732/0/IP1709011_STUDY_ON_THE_RIGHTS_AND_EXPERIENCES_sahkoinen_5.pdf/2e3c62c4-da72-7846-98e9-731aecfabce2?t=1585920363798

¹¹ United Nations Free & Equal Campaign (2017). *Factsheet: Intersex*. United Nations. Page 1. Retrieved from <https://www.unfe.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/UNFE-Intersex.pdf>

development, differences of sex development, or specific medical diagnoses.

Intersex traits are variations of sex characteristics that are often noticeable or significant enough that they can cause stigma or violence in a person's life for breaking anatomical expectations of what bodies assigned male or female are stereotypically expected to look like. Therefore, being intersex is the “lived experience of the socio-cultural consequences of being born with a body that does not fit the normative social constructions of male and female.”¹² Intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics may face multiple forms of human rights violations and discrimination including forced and coerced medically non-essential surgeries and other medical interventions with the intention to conform their traits to binary assumptions of what their sex characteristics are stereotypically expected to look like, often performed on children and adolescents too young to provide consent for these procedures.¹³

It is estimated that 0.05-1.7% of people are intersex or have a variation of sex characteristics.¹⁴ Estimations differ due to different definitions of intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics.¹⁵ In Finland, there is no formal data collected about the number of intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics; however, “depending on the chosen definition, the estimate for the number of Finnish intersex people may vary from about 1,200 to 93,000 individuals. Based on the 0.5% prevalence estimate, it is possible to put the number of intersex people in Finland somewhere between 20,000 and 30,000 individuals.”¹⁶

There is no one experience of being intersex or having a variation of sex characteristics. Depending on the definition of intersex or variations of sex characteristics, there are at least 40 different variations in addition to a large range of individuals without a specific variation.¹⁷ Some intersex traits are visible at birth while others are recognised during puberty or in attempts to reproduce. Some variations – such as some chromosomal variations – may not be physically apparent and not

¹² van der Have, M. (2017). *Intersex intervention during the public consultation convened by the UN independent expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity*. Presentation. Retrieved from <https://oii-europe.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Intersex-intervention-Public-Consultation-UN-IE-SOGI-25thJanuary-2017.pdf>

¹³ United Nations Free & Equal Campaign (2017). *Factsheet: Intersex*. United Nations. Retrieved from <https://www.unfe.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/UNFE-Intersex.pdf>

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Oikarinen, T. (2019). *No information or options: Study on the rights and experiences of intersex persons*. Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Retrieved from https://um.fi/documents/35732/0/IP1709011_STUDY_ON_THE_RIGHTS_AND_EXPERIENCES_sahkoinen_5.pdf/2e3c62c4-da72-7846-98e9-731aefabce2?t=1585920363798

¹⁶ Ibid. Page 17.

¹⁷ Carpenter, M. (2012). *Researching intersex populations*. Intersex Human Rights Australia. Retrieved from <https://ihra.org.au/research/>

readily identifiable to the individual.¹⁸ Intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics may have a wide range of medical experiences, connection to a larger community, involvement in activism and peer support networks, and use of language and understanding of oneself regarding their intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics. Relaying their own experience, one participant of the Well-Being of Rainbow Youth (*Hyvinvoiva sateenkaarinuori*) survey shared:

“My intersex [status], which was [identified] when I was three months old, was hidden also from my parents behind undefined medical terms, which were not explained and discussions about them were silenced. I only found out me being intersex when I was 21 years old.”¹⁹

In addition, intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics come from all backgrounds, identities, and experiences, intersecting in numerous ways across geographic location, national origin, immigration, migrant, asylum, or refugee status, socioeconomic status and social class, race and ethnicity, religion and spirituality, age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, educational attainment, professions and workplaces, and all other facets of life. As a note, while some intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ+), being intersex or having a variation of sex characteristics refers to bodily sex characteristics rather than sexual orientation or gender.

There is “little documented information on the existence of clinical practice” regarding forced and coerced medically non-essential surgeries and other medical interventions with the intention to conform sex traits to binary assumptions of what sex characteristics are stereotypically expected to look like, often performed on children and adolescents too young to provide consent for these procedures.²⁰ In Finland, there are “no official clinical practice guidelines.”²¹ The negative effects of these surgeries and other medical interventions are numerous — including various types of physical pain and scarring; issues arising due to the resulting potential necessity of hormone therapy (including body dysmorphic and gender dysphoria); emotional and psychological harm (including self-injury and self-harm, depression,

¹⁸ United Nations Free & Equal Campaign (2017). *Factsheet: Intersex*. United Nations. Retrieved from <https://www.unfe.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/UNFE-Intersex.pdf>

¹⁹ Participant of Well-Being of Rainbow Youth survey (2013), published originally in Lehtonen, J. (2017). Hankala kysymys. Intersukupuolisuus suomalaisissa koulu- ja työelämä tutkimuksissa [A difficult question. Intersex in Finnish school and working life studies]. *Finnish Journal of Gender Studies*, 30 (1), 71-75. Translated by Jukka Lehtonen.

²⁰ Oikarinen, T. (2019). *No information or options: Study on the rights and experiences of intersex persons*. Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Page 98. Retrieved from https://um.fi/documents/35732/0/IP1709011_STUDY_ON_THE_RIGHTS_AND_EXPERIENCES_sahkoinen_5.pdf/2e3c62c4-da72-7846-98e9-731aefabce2?t=1585920363798

²¹ Ibid. Page 98.

anxiety, panic disorders, dissociative disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorder); stigmatisation; and feelings of embarrassment, shame, and secrecy, further isolating the individual.²² These are all relevant issues when considering the wellbeing of children and youth with intersex traits or variations of sex characteristics in education.

There has been a rise in public and political discussions on the banning of non-consensual medically non-essential surgeries and other medical interventions on children and youth with intersex traits or variations of sex characteristics.²³ The current Center-Left government, in the programme of Prime Minister Sanna Marin's administration, states that "intersex children's right to self-determination will be strengthened, and cosmetic, non-medical surgeries on young children's genitals will no longer be performed."²⁴ It also promises to enact an act on the legal recognition of gender that respects people's right to self-determination and as part of the reform of personal identity codes, sex assigned at birth will no longer be specified in the personal identity code.²⁵ The *Government Action Plan for Gender Equality for 2020–2023* "specifies concrete objectives for the promotion of gender equality and elimination of gender-based discrimination and determines measures for gender mainstreaming in all administrative sectors."²⁶ This includes measures to "strengthen the right of self-determination of intersex children and discontinue cosmetic and medically non-essential genital surgical procedures on small children" and to promote equality in early childhood education and school education.²⁷

Many authorities and non-governmental organisations have taken stances against these non-consensual medically non-essential surgeries and medical interventions. The Ombudsman for Equality and Ombudsman for Children have published

²² Ibid. Page 3.

²³ Rantala, M. H. (2016). Sukupuoleen sopeutetut: Intersukupuolisten ja transsukupuolisten henkilöiden oikeusasema Suomessa [Adjusted to sex – legal status of intersex and transgender persons in Finland]. *Oikeus*, 45(1), 8-28.

²⁴ Finnish Government (2019). *Programme of Prime Minister Sanna Marin's Government: Inclusive and competent Finland – A socially, economically and ecologically sustainable society (Publications of the Finnish Government 2019:33)*. Page 95. Retrieved from https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/161935/VN_2019_33.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (2021). *Gender equality policy*. Retrieved from <https://thl.fi/en/web/gender-equality/promoting-gender-equality/gender-equality-policy>

²⁷ Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (2021). *Making Finland a global leader in gender equality: Government action plan for gender equality 2020-2023* (Publications of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2021:10). Page 46. Retrieved from https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/162844/STM_2021_10_J.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

statements in 2016,²⁸ 2017,²⁹ and 2018³⁰ and the latter organised an important round-table discussion on intersex rights and children in 2016, which marked the change in policy development in this area.³¹ The National Advisory Board on Social Welfare and Health Care Ethics ETENE has also taken a stance against these interventions³² and many human rights organisations — including ISIO ry,³³ Seta,³⁴ and Amnesty Finland³⁵ — have worked to end these interventions. ETENE, in its position statement, also more specifically referred to education on intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics:

“General knowledge about the gender as a human characteristic must be increased to make the people – in health care, day-care centres, schools, sports associations, parishes, non-governmental organisations and other associations involved with children – aware of the gender diversity and to make them able to give support to intersex children in their growth and development into equal citizens with full rights.”³⁶

Addressing the educational experiences of children with intersex traits or variations of sex characteristics, ETENE stated:

“Health care nurses and professionals in early childhood education, especially, need to get information about the whole spectrum of gender development to safeguard the growth of intersex children and their

²⁸ Ombudsman for Children (2016). *Intersukupuolisten lasten oikeuksia vahvistettava* [The rights of intersex children need to be strengthened]. Retrieved from <https://lapsiasia.fi/-/lapsiasiaivaltuutettu-intersukupuolisten-lasten-oikeuksia-vahvistettava>

²⁹ Ombudsman for Equality and Ombudsman for Children (2017). *Intersukupuolisilla on oikeus omaan kehoonsa* [Intersex people have the right to their own body]. Retrieved from <https://tasa-arvo.fi/-/tasa-arvovaltuutettu-ja-lapsiasiaivaltuutettu-intersukupuolisilla-lapsilla-on-oikeus-omaan-kehoonsa>

³⁰ Ombudsman for Equality (2018). *Ombudsman for Equality's report to Parliament 2018*. Retrieved from [https://tasa-arvo.fi/documents/25249985/49416869/Ombudsman+for+Equality's+Report+to+Parliament+2018+\(PDF\).pdf/63a9737d-c5a3-1e00-cc4c-5118b5780c1c/Ombudsman+for+Equality's+Report+to+Parliament+2018+\(PDF\).pdf?t=1614706096211](https://tasa-arvo.fi/documents/25249985/49416869/Ombudsman+for+Equality's+Report+to+Parliament+2018+(PDF).pdf/63a9737d-c5a3-1e00-cc4c-5118b5780c1c/Ombudsman+for+Equality's+Report+to+Parliament+2018+(PDF).pdf?t=1614706096211)

³¹ Ombudsman for Children (2016). *Intersukupuoliset lapset ja hoitokäytännöt* [Intersex children and clinical practices]. Round-table discussion.

³² National Advisory Board on Social Welfare and Health Care Ethics ETENE (2016). *Care and treatment of intersex children* (STM105:00/2014). Retrieved from <https://etene.fi/documents/1429646/1561478/2016+POSITION+STATEMENT+intersex/77dc4b30-2a6d-4811-aa99-c30032f400b0>

³³ Intersukupuolisten ihmisoikeudet (n.d.). *Objectives*. Retrieved from https://intersukupuolisuus.fi/?page_id=803

³⁴ Seta and OII Europe (2019). *Finnish government should take action to ensure intersex people's physical integrity and self-determination*. Retrieved from <https://seta.fi/2019/05/10/seta-and-oi-europe-finnish-government-should-take-action-to-ensure-intersex-peoples-physical-integrity-and-self-determination/>

³⁵ Amnesty International (2021). *Amnesty International's statement to the United Nations Human Rights Committee on the occasion of the review of Finland*. Retrieved from <https://www.amnesty.fi/amnesty-internationals-statement-to-the-united-nations-human-rights-committee-on-the-occasion-of-the-review-of-finland/>

³⁶ National Advisory Board on Social Welfare and Health Care Ethics ETENE (2016). *Care and treatment of intersex children* (STM105:00/2014). Page 5. Retrieved from <https://etene.fi/documents/1429646/1561478/2016+POSITION+STATEMENT+intersex/77dc4b30-2a6d-4811-aa99-c30032f400b0>

development to their proper selves.”³⁷

If the Finnish government, following the lead of intersex organisations and other non-governmental organisations and experts committed to intersex human rights, follow through on their promises to protect the bodily autonomy and self-determination of intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics, including supporting intersex students and students with variations of sex characteristics and advancing education on intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics in early childhood education and school education, the protection of the human rights of intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics will greatly advance.³⁸

Finnish Education and Intersex Traits and Variations of Sex Characteristics

Legislation and School Curricula Planning

The Finnish school system has been praised internationally for its high-quality and inclusive education.³⁹ One reason behind the success in the Finnish education system lies in the research-based Master-level teacher education which is highly applauded as academically rigorous and robust.⁴⁰ Furthermore, Finland, with a population of 5.6 million people, is a Nordic welfare state with free and public education – with a governmental commitment to equality.⁴¹ Compulsory education in Finland includes comprehensive schooling from 1st to 9th grade – traditionally from ages seven to fifteen – and a choice between upper secondary school or vocational school for the last three years of compulsory education.⁴² In addition, the majority of children are in preschool by the age of six. Currently, there are plans to organise a two-year pre-education free for all children.⁴³ The vast majority of students attend

³⁷ Ibid. Page 5.

³⁸ Pihlajamaa, M. (2021). *Kohti sateenkaariystävällisempää Suomea. Tilannearvio seksuaali- ja sukupuolivähemmistöjen perus- ja ihmisoikeuksien toteutumisesta Suomessa 2021* [Towards a more inclusive Finland for LGBTIQ people. Situational assessment of the fundamental and human rights of sexual and gender minorities in Finland 2021] (Oikeusministeriön julkaisuja, Selvityksiä ja ohjeita 2021:26). Ministry of Justice. Pages 85-90. Retrieved from <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-259-939-1>

³⁹ Eurydice (2021). *Finland overview*. European Commission. Retrieved from https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/finland_en

⁴⁰ National Center on Education and the Economy (2017). *Combining research and practice: An inside look at Finland's teacher training schools*. Retrieved from <https://ncee.org/quick-read/combining-research-and-practice-an-inside-look-at-finlands-teacher-training-schools/>

⁴¹ Finnish Government (2015). *Act on Equality between Women and Men* (609/1986; amendments up to 915/2016). Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. Retrieved from https://finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/1986/en19860609_20160915.pdf

⁴² National Center on Education and the Economy (n.d.). *Top performing countries: Finland*. Retrieved from <https://ncee.org/country/finland/>

⁴³ Ministry of Education and Culture (2018). *Viisivuotiaiden maksuttoman varhaiskasvatuksen kokeilu laajenee – ministeriö avasi uuden haun kunnille* [The experiment of free early childhood education for five-year-olds is expanding - the Ministry opened a

public schools.⁴⁴ There are few private schools, the majority of them religious; however, they are similarly granted government funding and are "required to use the same admission standards and provide the same services as public schools."⁴⁵ Students receive an education following national curriculum guidelines although teachers are given autonomy in the delivery of the curricula.⁴⁶

The revised *Act on Equality between Women and Men* (609/1986 with amendments up to 915/2016; the 'Equality Act') that entered into force in 2015 extended protection against discrimination to intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics — including students and employees in schools and educational settings.⁴⁷ In addition, following the reform of the Equality Act, "information on the diversity of human sexes and genders has also been included in materials on gender equality produced for various public authorities, educational institutions and providers of compulsory basic education, staff employed in health clinics, etc."^{48,49} There is no formal data about discrimination experienced by intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics. Based on recent conversations with the Finnish National Agency for Education, Office of the Ombudsman for Children, and Office of the Ombudsman for Equality, there have been no reports related to discrimination cases on these grounds from the students, their parents, teachers, or schools.⁵⁰ These authorities have though given advice to schools on how to avoid discrimination in education or school practices including equality planning.⁵¹

The Equality Act requires all schools and educational institutions to develop and enact gender equality planning — except currently in early childhood education; however, the government has declared a measure to "enact mandatory gender

new application for municipalities]. Retrieved from <https://okm.fi/-/viisivuotiaiden-maksuttoman-varhaiskasvatuksen-kokeilu-laajenee-ministerio-avasi-uuden-haun-kunnille>

⁴⁴ National Center on Education and the Economy (n.d.). *Top performing countries: Finland*. Retrieved from <https://ncee.org/country/finland/>

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Oikarinen, T. (2019). *No information or options: Study on the rights and experiences of intersex persons*. Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Retrieved from https://um.fi/documents/35732/0/IP1709011_STUDY_ON_THE_RIGHTS_AND_EXPERIENCES_sahkoinen_5.pdf/2e3c62c4-da72-7846-98e9-731aefabce2?t=1585920363798

⁴⁸ Ibid. Page 24.

⁴⁹ Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (2015). *Tasa-arvolaki, oppilaitokset ja sukupuolen moninaisuus* [The Equality Act, educational institutions and gender diversity]. Retrieved from https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/74464/Oppilaitokset_netti.pdf

⁵⁰ Email correspondence in December 2021 with the Finnish National Agency for Education, Office of the Ombudsman for Children, and Office of the Ombudsman for Equality.

⁵¹ See Equinet (2020). *Equality bodies working on the rights and discriminations faced by trans and intersex persons*. Retrieved from https://equineteurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/equinet_brief-trans-intersex_A4_04_web.pdf

equality plans for early childhood education."⁵² The Equality Act specifies that it is the duty of "authorities, education providers and other bodies providing education and training [to] ensure...equal opportunities [in] education, training and professional development, and that teaching, research and instructional material support the attainment of the objectives of this Act."⁵³ The Equality Act specifies that the "gender equality plan must include: 1) an assessment of the gender equality situation within the institution; 2) the necessary measures to promote gender equality; 3) a review of the extent to which measures previously included in it have been implemented and of the results achieved."⁵⁴ Gender equality planning is meant to be developed in coordination with teachers, other educational employees, and students to tackle various equality problems and to advance gender equality.⁵⁵ Specifically, the Equality Act stipulates that it is the "education providers [that] are responsible for ensuring that each educational institution prepares a gender equality plan annually in cooperation with staff and pupils or students."⁵⁶ The aims of these measures are to advance the wellbeing and safety of children and youth, particularly considering that gender minority children and youth are reported to experience higher levels of bullying and harassment and that there is a gap in data on the experiences of children and youth with intersex traits or variations of sex characteristics.

In addition to gender equality planning, there is also mandatory anti-discrimination planning which must assess and promote equality in regards to "origin, age, disability, sexual orientation, religion and other grounds of discrimination prohibited by the Equality Act," often done in tandem with gender equality planning.⁵⁷ Under the Non-Discrimination Act, "education providers and employers must assess and promote equality in their activities."⁵⁸ It is important to consider the discrimination that intersex students and students with variations of sex characteristics may face particularly at the intersections of other marginalised identities and experiences. Educational institutions or organisers of education, such as municipalities, also have the duty to engage in equality planning for their employees; however, there is no information about how well topics relating to intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics — and the protections for educational professionals with intersex

⁵² Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (2021). *Making Finland a global leader in gender equality: Government action plan for gender equality 2020-2023*. Page 63. Retrieved from https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/162844/STM_2021_10_J.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

⁵³ Finnish Government (2015). *Act on Equality between Women and Men* (609/1986; amendments up to 915/2016). Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. Page 4. Retrieved from https://finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/1986/en19860609_20160915.pdf

⁵⁴ Ibid. Page 3.

⁵⁵ Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (2015). *Tasa-arvolaki, oppilaitokset ja sukupuolen moninaisuus* [The Equality Act, educational institutions and gender diversity]. Page 12. Retrieved from https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/74464/Oppilaitokset_netti.pdf

⁵⁶ Finnish Government (2015). *Act on Equality between Women and Men* (609/1986; amendments up to 915/2016). Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. Page 3. Retrieved from https://finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/1986/en19860609_20160915.pdf

⁵⁷ Ministry of Justice (n.d.). *Yhdenvertaisuussuunnittelu on yhdenvertaisuuden edistämisen työkalu* [Equality planning is a tool for promoting equality]. Retrieved from <https://yhdenvertaisuus.fi/yhdenvertaisuussuunnittelu>

⁵⁸ Non-discrimination Ombusman (n.d.). *Equality planning*. Retrieved from <https://syrjinta.fi/en/equality-planning>

traits and variations of sex characteristics — are covered in these plans.

The Equality Act provides a caveat that "instead of an annual review, the plan may be prepared no less than once every three years."⁵⁹ However, despite this and the clearly stated laws on equality and anti-discrimination planning, many schools and educational institutions are not in compliance and have not changed the relevant policies.⁶⁰ Furthermore, schools and educational institutions are neither systematically monitored nor held accountable by the government.⁶¹ Even educational institutions with a plan do not necessarily implement it satisfactorily, that is, by having all partners — including teachers, staff members, and students — involved in the formation of the policy.⁶²

In a recent survey of 1003 comprehensive schools, it was found that not all of the schools involved were properly following the legislation and guidelines for equality and non-discrimination planning, and sex and gender diversity issues were often not properly discussed in these plans.⁶³ The study found that only 60% of schools discussed gender diversity in their equality and/or anti-discrimination plans.⁶⁴ Furthermore, only 48% discussed gender identity and 36% discussed gender expression in their equality and/or anti-discrimination plans.⁶⁵ Questions about intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics were not specifically asked but it could be inferred — due to their absence — that they are considered even less often than other diversity issues related to sex and gender.

In 2015, the Finnish National Agency for Education published a guidebook to inform

⁵⁹ Finnish Government (2015). *Act on Equality between Women and Men* (609/1986; amendments up to 915/2016). Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. Page 3. Retrieved from https://finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/1986/en19860609_20160915.pdf

⁶⁰ Mikkola, A. (2020). *Tasa-arvosuunnitelmien seuranta 2019. Perusopetuksen oppilaitosten tasa-arvo- ja yhdenvertaisuussuunnittelu* [Monitoring of equality plans 2019. Equality and non-discrimination planning in basic education institutions]. Finnish National Agency for Education. Retrieved from https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/tasa_arvosuunnitelmien_seuranta_2019.pdf

⁶¹ Kjaran, J. I. & Lehtonen, J. (2017) Windows of opportunities: Nordic perspectives on sexual diversity in education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 22(10), 1035-1047. DOI: [10.1080/13603116.2017.1414319](https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2017.1414319)

⁶² Ikävalko, E. (2016) *Vaikenemisiä ja vastarintaa. Valtasuhteet ja toiminnan mahdollisuudet oppilaitosten tasa-arvosuunnittelussa* [Silences and resistance. Power relations and possibilities of agency in gender equality planning in educational institutions]. Helsinki: Käyttätymistieteiden laitos.

⁶³ Mikkola, A. (2020). *Tasa-arvosuunnitelmien seuranta 2019. Perusopetuksen oppilaitosten tasa-arvo- ja yhdenvertaisuussuunnittelu* [Monitoring of equality plans 2019. Equality and non-discrimination planning in basic education institutions]. Finnish National Agency for Education. Retrieved from https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/tasa_arvosuunnitelmien_seuranta_2019.pdf

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

schools on how to take sex and gender diversity⁶⁶ into account within education.⁶⁷
The guide states:

“Everyone has the right to define, what kind of girl or woman, boy or man they are, or if they experience themselves to be non-binary,⁶⁸ or something outside womanhood or manhood, or in between genders/sexes. Experience of one’s gender can change and vary from different stages of life. A person’s gender/sex is always a diverse combination and spectrum of features. Others have to respect an individual’s experience and understand that everyone is their own best expert. Gender aware teachers can support students in different stages of the process of self-determination of gender.”⁶⁹

It continues by stating that “narrow conceptions [of sex/gender] lead to serious problems such as bullying and exclusion, loneliness, dropping out of education, marginalisation and suicidality, even suicide.”⁷⁰ It declares that “basic education advances the knowledge on sex and gender diversity. Equality and anti-discrimination are key principals in development of basic education working culture. Teaching should be gender aware. Each school subject advances gender equality in their own ways.”⁷¹ Based on a survey of comprehensive schools, 71% of schools that have used this guidebook have found it somewhat or very useful.⁷²

In the more recent guide on equality and anti-discrimination planning at the upper secondary level, the Finnish National Agency for Education refers to gender equality legislation and states that it is the obligation of educational institutions to take sex and gender diversity into account — including that some people are intersex or have a variation of sex characteristics, and later in the guide the term *intersex* is defined.⁷³ It also states that gender-binary based thinking and practices can be problematic.⁷⁴

⁶⁶ The word *sukupuolen moninaisuus* is usually translated as *gender diversity*, but as the Finnish word *sukupuoli* translates to both gender and sex, it is translated here as *sex and gender diversity*.

⁶⁷ Jääskeläinen, L., Hautakorpi, J., Onwen-Huma, H., Niittymäki, H., Pirttijärvi, A., Lempinen, M., & Kajander, V. (2015). *Tasa-arvo on taitolaji – Opas sukupuolen tasa-arvon edistämiseen perusopetuksessa* [Equality Needs Skills – Guide for Advancing Gender Equality in Basic Education]. Finnish National Agency for Education. Retrieved from https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/173318_tasa_arvotyö_on_taitolaji_0.pdf

⁶⁸ The Finnish word *muunsukupuolinen* [othergendered] can be translated to *non-binary*.

⁶⁹ Ibid. Page 13. Translation by Jukka Lehtonen.

⁷⁰ Ibid. Page 13. Translation by Jukka Lehtonen.

⁷¹ Ibid. Page 17. Translation by Jukka Lehtonen.

⁷² Mikkola, A. (2020). *Tasa-arvosuunnitelmien seuranta 2019. Perusopetuksen oppilaitosten tasa-arvo- ja yhdenvertaisuussuunnittelu* [Monitoring of equality plans 2019. Equality and non-discrimination planning in basic education institutions]. Finnish National Agency for Education. Page 24. Retrieved from https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/tasa_arvosuunnitelmien_seuranta_2019.pdf

⁷³ Ibid. Pages 10, 62.

⁷⁴ Honkala, S., Lempinen, M., Nousiainen, K., Onwen-Huma, H., Salo, A. & Vacker, R. (2019). *Mukana! Tasa-arvo- ja yhdenvertaisuustyö toisella asteella* [Together! Equality and anti-discrimination work at the upper secondary level]. Finnish

The guide gives several recommendations on how to take sex and gender diversity in account and while it does not specifically mention intersex students or students with variations of sex characteristics in its recommendations, it advocates for making school environments safe for all genders, using terminology accepted by sex and gender minorities, using the names that students want to use for themselves, and developing ways of handling sex and gender diversity within teaching and instruction material, making sure that there are also gender-neutral spaces available for use (toilets/dressing rooms) and making sure there is enough information in students' health and counselling services on sex and gender diversity.⁷⁵

The national core curriculum document for basic education was renewed in 2014 and came into practice in schools in the subsequent years.⁷⁶ The document refers to the necessity of considering equality and anti-discrimination laws when planning education in schools.⁷⁷ Equality, justice, safety, human rights, inclusion of minorities, equity, and non-discrimination are also discussed as core values or aims of education.⁷⁸ Sex and gender diversity is mentioned specifically, with the document stating that "basic education...adds knowledge and understanding on sex and gender diversity."⁷⁹ It also mentions that during compulsory education, students' understanding of their gender identity and sexuality develops, and along with its values and practices, the learning community advances gender equality and supports students in constructing their identities.⁸⁰ The new core curriculum for general upper secondary education does not mention sex and gender diversity in its introduction.⁸¹ However, it does refer to gender equality and anti-discrimination legislation and mentions the need to plan for equality and anti-discrimination in schools as well as the need to advance equality and anti-discrimination in teaching and counselling.⁸²

It is vital to state that even if curricula documents or guidebooks published by the Finnish National Agency for Education do not mention intersex traits or variations of

National Agency for Education. Retrieved from https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/mukana_tasa-arvo_ia_yhdenvertaisuustyö_toisella_asteella.pdf

⁷⁵ Ibid. Page 12.

⁷⁶ Finnish National Agency for Education (n.d.). *National core curriculum for basic education*. Retrieved from <https://www.oph.fi/en/education-and-qualifications/national-core-curriculum-basic-education>

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Finnish National Agency for Education (2014). *Perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2014* [National core curriculum for basic education 2014]. Retrieved from https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/perusopetuksen_opetussuunnitelman_perusteet_2014.pdf

⁷⁹ Ibid. Page 18.

⁸⁰ Ibid. Page 28.

⁸¹ Finnish National Agency for Education (2019). *Lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2019* [National core curriculum for general upper secondary education 2019]. Retrieved from https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/lukion_opetussuunnitelman_perusteet_2019.pdf

⁸² Kjaran, J. I. & Lehtonen, J. (2017). Windows of opportunities: Nordic perspectives on sexual diversity in education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 22 (10), 1035-1047. DOI: [10.1080/13603116.2017.1414319](https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2017.1414319)

sex characteristics specifically, the terms *sukupuolen moninaisuus* (sex/gender diversity) and *sukupuoli* (sex/gender) includes intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics, and that the Equality Act does specifically mentions term *intersukupuolinen* (intersex).⁸³

Teachers

Teacher Education

Teacher education is seen as an important factor to explain why Finnish schools have been successful in international evaluations, particularly with the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), an international evaluation of educational systems measured by 15-year-old students' academic performance in reading, mathematics, and science.⁸⁴ Finland is "one of the few countries that requires all teachers to obtain a master's degree for licensure [and] it is not the just the length of study, but also the intellectual rigor and clinical preparation that make[s] Finland a world leader in teacher pre-service and preparation."⁸⁵ Teacher education is "clinically robust, research-based teacher preparation" and there is a "commitment to professionalizing teaching as an occupation" to produce "high-quality teachers and teaching."⁸⁶

There is, however, an on-going problem with teacher education when analysing it from the perspective of gender awareness and knowledge of variations of sex traits. Most teacher education institutions do not provide Gender Studies courses or material that draws on knowledge gained through equality projects and initiatives.⁸⁷ Often if there are gender awareness courses, they are elective and dependant on the few specialists in the department. There is even a further lack of education of intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics — if discussed at all. Although there are committed teacher educators, they often faced indifference — or even

⁸³ Finnish Government (2015). *Act on Equality between Women and Men* (609/1986; amendments up to 915/2016). Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. Retrieved from https://finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/1986/en19860609_20160915.pdf

⁸⁴ National Center on Education and the Economy (2017). *Combining research and practice: An inside look at Finland's teacher training schools*. Retrieved from <https://ncee.org/quick-read/combining-research-and-practice-an-inside-look-at-finlands-teacher-training-schools/>

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Kreitz-Sandberg, S. & Lahelma, E. (2021). Global demands – local practices: Working towards Including gender equality in teacher education in Finland and Sweden. *Nordic Journal of Comparative and International Education* 5(1), 50-68. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.7577/nicie.4052>

hostility — from certain colleagues and heads of departments.⁸⁸

Gender equality and awareness are though not adequately addressed in most of the teacher education programmes in universities — and knowledge about intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics even less so. One of the reasons for this is the lack of relevant research literature on sex and gender diversity and variations of sex traits in teacher education. Furthermore, on a practical level, research training on sex and gender diversity is not found in teacher education units, sex and gender diversity and variations of sex characteristics are not significant themes in pedagogy or content at even a preparatory level in their education and research programmes, and competent guidance, research literature, or research groups and networks are not available.⁸⁹ And if there are problems in including sex and gender diversity into teacher education content and pedagogies, there certainly are problems in the inclusion of intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics. This becomes a cyclical issue as then students in teacher education programmes are then often not prepared, encouraged, or supported in conducting research and adding to the limited body of literature on sex and gender diversity and variations of sex traits. And, for example, while there are efforts to increase the research and scholarship in Intersex Studies, there is still a large gap in knowledge generally but especially in teacher education and teaching.

Furthermore, recent research has also problematised concepts around gender and gender equality. Feminist, queer, anti-racist, and postcolonial scholars critique the “myth of gender equality.”⁹⁰ Additionally, gender equality policies have been more concerned with equality between men and women rather than with the multiple dimensions – or intersections – of gender and intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics — or of other identities. Often the attempts to address these issues have been through short-term projects instead of on-going systematic development with the adequate and on-going resources to do so. And even these short-term projects often encounter reluctance or indifference on the part of the institutional administrations at the universities. These issues are cast aside, disregarded with the belief that ‘we are already gender equal,’ creating an obstacle to the necessary long-term, structural work.⁹¹

Discussions around sex and gender diversity as well as intersex traits and variations

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹ Lehtonen, J. (2012). Gender awareness in research on teacher education in Finland. In Tolonen, T., Palmu, T., Lappalainen, S. & Kurki, T. (Eds.), *Cultural practices and transitions in education* (pp. 226-239). London: The Tufnell Press.

⁹⁰ Kreitz-Sandberg, S. & Lahelma, E. (2021). Global demands – local practices: Working towards Including gender equality in teacher education in Finland and Sweden. *Nordic Journal of Comparative and International Education* 5(1), 50-68. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.7577/njcie.4052>

⁹¹ Ibid.

of sex characteristics can be difficult and sensitive topics for teachers to discuss in schools. Studies in Finland suggest that while it seems there is more openness and less hostility towards LGBTQI+ issues, some teacher educators do not want to talk about them because they are afraid of doing it 'wrong' and that it will provoke emotions.⁹² However, discussions on using a gender mainstreaming approach — or the aim to “ensure that gender perspectives are included in all areas of decision-making” — have become commonplace.⁹³ National education curricula and policy developments have demanded more focus on gender awareness. To facilitate this, the Finnish National Agency for Education has published guides for teachers on gender equality.^{94,95} It has also trained teachers on equality and anti-discrimination issues; these trainings have mostly received positive feedback from teachers and schools — although critical responses are not uncommon.⁹⁶ Typically negative attitudes towards sex and gender diversity issues in education and teaching have been raised by politicians, teachers or other individuals with religious backgrounds, or teachers who argue that the topic is not important or that there are no students belonging to gender minority groups in their school.

There are also setbacks as the approaches and resources in teacher education are still often rooted in a dichotomous understanding of sex and gender. Norm-critical approaches that examine sex and gender diversity and variations of sex characteristics with intersectional understandings of multiple marginalisation that are utilised by some researchers have not necessarily been implemented in gender mainstreaming approaches in teacher education and higher education.⁹⁷

Teachers' Attitudes

The attitudes of teachers and other school employees towards topics regarding intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics are not often researched — and if they are, it is often at the peripheries of the main focus of the research. However, in Finland, teachers' attitudes regarding sexual minority rights and the acceptance of transgender teachers accessing gender affirmation care and procedures have been

⁹² Kjaran, J. I. & Lehtonen, J. (2018) Windows of opportunities: Nordic perspectives on sexual diversity in education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 22(10), 1035-1047. DOI: [10.1080/13603116.2017.1414319](https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2017.1414319)

⁹³ Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (n.d.) .*Mainstreaming*. Retrieved from <https://stm.fi/en/gender-equality/mainstreaming>

⁹⁴ Jääskeläinen, L., Hautakorpi, J., Onwen-Huma, H., Niittymäki, H., Pirttijärvi, A., Lempiinen, M., & Kajander, V. (2015). *Tasa-arvo on taitolaji – Opas sukupuolen tasa-arvon edistämiseen perusopetuksessa* [Equality Needs Skills – Guide for Advancing Gender Equality in Basic Education]. Finnish National Agency for Education. Retrieved from https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/173318_tasa_arvotyö_on_taitolaji_0.pdf

⁹⁵ Honkala, S., Lempiinen, M., Nousiainen, K., Onwen-Huma, H., Salo, A. & Vacker, R. (2019). *Mukana! Tasa-arvo- ja yhdenvertaisuustyö toisella asteella* [Together and involved! Equality and anti-discrimination work at the upper secondary level]. (Oppaat ja käsikirjat 2019: 4a). Finnish National Agency for Education. Retrieved from https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/mukana_tasa-arvo_ja_yhdenvertaisuustyö_toisella_asteella.pdf

⁹⁶ Email correspondence with Satu Honkala, Counsellor of Education at the Finnish National Agency for Education.

⁹⁷ Kreitz-Sandberg, S. & Lahelma, E. (2021). Global demands – local practices: Working towards Including gender equality in teacher education in Finland and Sweden. *Nordic Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 5(1), 50-68. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.7577/nicie.4052>

surveyed in the teacher trade union magazine *Opettaja*.^{98,99} While this survey did not ask about teachers' perception of or knowledge about intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics — or about the perception of teachers or other school employees who are intersex or have a variation of sex characteristics — this data may provide some context about heteronormative, cisnormative, and bodily normative beliefs that may inform attitudes regarding the diversity of sex traits.

In this survey, attitudes of teachers towards sexual and gender minorities and their rights at first appear positive.¹⁰⁰ Of the 1002 respondents, about 70% indicated that they were supportive of same-gender marriage and of granting them adoption rights. 80% were supportive of transgender teachers having access to gender affirmation care and procedures. Teacher respondents who belong to sexual minorities were notably more sensitive towards topics relating to sexual orientation. Of all respondents, 84% indicated they did not require more information about matters related to sexual orientation. However, of the non-heterosexual teachers, 64% responded that they did not need addition information about matters relating to sexual orientation. Considering the majority of respondents' view that schools are unsafe places for LGBTQI+ youth, these numbers are quite high and seem to push the responsibility of addressing structural issues in schools and providing adequate support and resources for LGBTQI+ students to other places. However, due to potentially being more willing to learn about topics relating to sexual orientation and possibly other topics relating to sex and gender diversity and variations of sex characteristics — as well as serving as greater visibility and representation for students — having teachers and other school employees who are a part of LGBTQI+ communities could potentially be extremely beneficial. However, they are often expected to hide their identities — which makes it difficult for them to reach out to other colleagues and students.

Again, while this survey did not ask about topics relating to intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics, it may provide insights about individual and structural challenges in addressing normative beliefs about sex traits and bodies. While there generally is an acceptance of LGBT+ people, teachers may feel that it is too demanding to challenge or change cis- and gender normative practices. With that understanding, teachers may also find it too difficult to address the needs of the intersex students and students with variations of sex characteristics in their schools

⁹⁸ Lehtonen, J. (2012) Opettajien käsityksiä seksuaalisuuden kirjosta [Teachers' Perceptions on Sexual Diversity]. *Finnish Journal of Youth Studies*, 30(2), 19–30.

⁹⁹ Lehtonen, J., Palmu, T., & Lahelma, E. (2014). Negotiating sexualities, constructing possibilities: Teachers and diversity. In Moreau, M. -P. (Ed.) *Inequalities in the teaching profession. A global perspective* (pp. 118–135). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

due to a lack of education in their training and knowledge in order to do so.

In Finland, school nurses, counsellors, and other professionals also often have a gap in knowledge relating to sex and gender diversity as well as difficulties in applying them to their work.^{101,102} This lack of information is particularly troubling, as, for example, school nurses in particular may play a significant role in the experiences of students going through puberty.^{103,104} School health centres can be sites of tension and harm for intersex students and students with variations of sex characteristics, particularly around gender-specific language about bodily traits and puberty. A lack of information about intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics may lead to assumptions around health needs — potentially leading to denying some students from necessary items like menstrual products or, conversely, providing unnecessary items that may potentially trigger students due normative beliefs about the puberty they 'should' be experiencing or the bodily traits they are 'supposed' to have.

Similar findings were reported in literature about school-based academic career counselling for intersex students and students with variations of sex characteristics. A study on effective academic and career counselling for intersex people identified "(a) coping as intersex, (b) range of feelings [such as feelings of difference, presented as anger, fear, or terror], (c) gender identity development, (d) bullying at school and work, and (e) body problems [such as not receiving their full medical history or experiencing puberty differently from what is stereotypically assumed for their sex assigned at birth]" as themes of particular importance.¹⁰⁵ School "counsellors are in a unique position to serve as a resource for intersex students and their academic, career, and socioemotional needs;" however, "some counsellors may still not feel confident enough to effectively work with intersex students or self-reflect about their own intersex advocacy competence."¹⁰⁶ In order to best support students, school counsellors "must become more knowledgeable of these areas in their efforts to provide effective advocacy-based counselling services."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰¹ Hästbacka, N. & Sirén, I (2017). "Ehkä ne on senkin takia ollu hiljaa". *Ammattilaisten valmiudet kohdata sateenkaarinuoria ja huomioida moninaisuutta päihde- ja mielenterveystyössä* ["Perhaps that's another reason why they kept quiet." Professionals' ability to relate to young LGBTIQ people and take diversity into account in substance abuse and mental health services]. Finnish Youth Research Society. Retrieved from http://www.nuorisotutkimusseura.fi/images/sateenkaarinuoret_raportti_verkko.pdf

¹⁰² Junttanan, P., Länsisalmi, S., & Stevens, J. (2004). *Nuorten intersukupuolisten kokemuksia seksuaaliterveyspalveluiden asiakkauudesta* [Experiences of intersex youth on being client in sexual health services]. Master's thesis. Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences.

¹⁰³ Laiti, M., Parisod, H., Pakarinen, A., Sariola, S., Hayter, M., & Salanterä, S. (2021). LGBTQ+ students' experiences of junior high school nursing in Finland: A qualitative study. *The Journal of School Nursing*, 37(6). DOI: doi.org/10.1177/1059840520910796

¹⁰⁴ Laiti, M., Pakarinen, A., Parisod, H., Salanterä, S., & Sariola, S. (2018). Encountering sexual and gender minority youth in healthcare: An integrative review. *Primary Health Care Research & Development* 20(e30), 1–13. DOI: [10.1017/S146342361900001X](https://doi.org/10.1017/S146342361900001X)

¹⁰⁵ Simons, J. D., Gonzalez, J. -M., Ramdas, M. (2020). Supporting intersex people: Effective academic and career counseling. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*, 14(3), 191-209. DOI: [10.1080/15538605.2020.1790465](https://doi.org/10.1080/15538605.2020.1790465)

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

Teacher Experiences

There is no information specifically on the employment of teachers or other school employees who are intersex or have a variation of sex characteristics available in Finland. However, finding employment for intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics may be more difficult as their “educational histories may be patchier...at the same time, intersex-related medical interventions may also result in functional problems, which in turn reduce employment opportunities.”¹⁰⁸ The effects of the lack of education on intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics and the experiences of intersex students and students with variations of sex characteristics — as discussed later in this brief — could further affect intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics in other aspects of their lives, including both in their opportunities for employment and the experiences in those workplaces.

In addition, there is no information specifically on the experiences of teachers or other school employees who are intersex or have a variation of sex characteristics available in Finland. Therefore, there is a lack of knowledge about the discrimination they may face — creating a lack of pressure to address potential issues. The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights found that in its survey on the experiences of LGBTI people in the European Union — including experiences of discrimination in the workplace — 32% of intersex respondents and respondents with variations of sex characteristics had faced discrimination at work.¹⁰⁹ In Finland, while there is not much research on the discrimination of intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics in the workplace, a recent survey of the experiences of gender minorities in the workplace found that intersex respondents and respondents with variations of sex characteristics who were also transgender faced difficulties in their work environment.¹¹⁰

While there is no data on the employment and experiences in the workplace of intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics in education specifically, it could be inferred that it may be similar to other fields of work — but potentially with more difficult choices regarding disclosure or openness with students

¹⁰⁸ Oikarinen, T. (2019). *No information or options: Study on the rights and experiences of intersex persons*. Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Page 94. Retrieved from https://um.fi/documents/35732/0/IP1709011_STUDY_ON_THE_RIGHTS_AND_EXPERIENCES_sahkoinen_5.pdf/2e3c62c4-da72-7846-98e9-731aefabce2?t=1585920363798

¹⁰⁹ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2020). *A long way to go for LGBTI equality*. Retrieved from https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2020-lgbti-equality-1_en.pdf

¹¹⁰ Saloheimo, A. (2021). *Sukupuolivähemmistöjen kohtaaminen työelämässä 2015-2020. Kyselytutkimuksen raportti*. Dreamwear Club DwC ry, Isio ry Transfeminiinit ry, Translasten ja nuorten perheet ry, Trans ry, Trasek ry, Setan sukupuolen moninaisuuden toimikunta. Retrieved from https://07e281e0-6f83-4c90-8251-7d7054ba5bc3.filesusr.com/ugd/ee66a1_9cba7ebb571045d6b1e768c2e16a7a89.pdf

and in teaching about intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics. There is limited information about intersex teachers and other educational professionals' openness about their intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics in the workplace. While some people may not want to or feel no need to disclose that they are intersex or have variations of sex characteristics, it could also be possible that many are not out due to fear, stigma, or shame — negatively affecting their experiences at work and in their lives. Disclosure about one's intersex traits is not a one-time event; instead, intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics are "forced to make this decision again and again. Some...felt that it was easier to keep the issue secret because they found it hard to have to keep educating other people on the topic or feared negative reactions. For others, however, sharing had been a positive experience."¹¹¹ Furthermore, openness or disclosure could also potentially impact one's employment, as "some have reported difficulties finding and keeping a job in situations where they have shared being intersex at work."¹¹²

However, intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics in education could help intersex students and students with variations of sex characteristics by serving as a 'possibility model'¹¹³ as students may never have met another intersex person or person with a variation of sex characteristics before — or more specifically, an intersex person or person with a variation of sex characteristics in a positive light, allowing young people to see the different future possibilities for their life.

Teaching and School Textbooks

Intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics are not often "constructively included in any educational curriculum. Most often, they do not appear at all. If [intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics] are mentioned, they find themselves treated as an imaginative product of mythology (hermaphrodite), as an example of abnormality, or viewed in a pathological way (in biology texts, medical handbooks or encyclopaedias)."¹¹⁴ In addition, "sexual health

¹¹¹ Oikarinen, T. (2019). *No information or options: Study on the rights and experiences of intersex persons*. Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Page 112. Retrieved from https://um.fi/documents/35732/0/IP1709011_STUDY_ON_THE_RIGHTS_AND_EXPERIENCES_sahkoinen_5.pdf/2e3c62c4-da72-7846-98e9-731aefabce2?t=1585920363798

¹¹² Ibid. Page 94.

¹¹³ *Possibility model*, a term Laverne Cox, a transgender actress and advocate, has spoken extensively about, expands the idea of 'role model' to having representation of people with similar identities and experiences to oneself, but also allowing for one's own ambitions and unique paths instead of relying solely on the achievements of another. See Pearce, R. (2021). *Trans Visibility, Modelling Possibility*. Retrieved from ruthpearce.net/2021/03/31/trans-visibility-modelling-possibility

¹¹⁴ Ghattas, D. C. (2015). *Standing up for the human rights of intersex people*. Brussels: ILGA Europe & OII Europe. Page 11. Retrieved from https://www.ilga-europe.org/sites/default/files/how_to_be_a_great_intersex_ally_a_toolkit_for_ngos_and_decision_makers_december_2015_up_dated.pdf

education does not refer to their existence or their bodily experience. Instead, it tends to perpetuate the notion that only two sexes exist. These experiences increase the feeling of shame, secrecy, not existing at all or being a fraud at a vulnerable age.”¹¹⁵ The lack of inclusion of or inaccuracies about intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics — including a lack of positive representation — as well as the inaccuracies or pathologisation of intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics — such as reinforcement of norms around sex traits and bodies — represented in formal and hidden curricula can severely impact intersex students and students with variations of sex characteristics, leading to silence, shame, and stigma about their bodies and lives.^{116,117}

Finnish research suggests that the information about the diversity of sex traits provided for children and youth at school may have a narrow scope.¹¹⁸ While textbooks may cover topics regarding sex traits, gender, and sexuality diversity, they are typically only marginally included, relegated to individual sections on “minorities” or “diversity” while the other sections typically reinforce normative beliefs around bodies and sex traits — as well as heteronormativity, gender-normativity, and cisnormativity.^{119,120} Recent research on textbooks revealed that these topics are often inadequately dealt with in most books; the majority of the time, they are covered in biology and health education textbooks in sections on human development and sex education.¹²¹ While sex education may seem to be obvious subject to include information on intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics, this strategy marginalises intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics, relating them only to sexual behaviour and health or sickness. This does not question bodily norms around sex traits, as well as heteronormativity, gender-normativity, and cisnormativity, in subjects such as languages, history, science, and others — nor does it showcase the important contributions of intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics within these domains. Furthermore, whole-school approaches and subject integration provide holistic understandings. Textbooks still guide teachers in their choices in teaching, even if they have a right to include any relevant material for their teaching; transforming instructional material to both

¹¹⁵ Ibid. Page 11.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Rissanen, J. (2012). *Intersukupuolisten tiedontarpeet ja tiedonhankinta* [Information needs and search of intersex people]. Master's thesis. University of Tampere. Retrieved from <https://trepo.tuni.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/83539/gradu05888.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

¹¹⁸ Oikarinen, T. (2019). *No information or options: Study on the rights and experiences of intersex persons*. Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Retrieved from https://um.fi/documents/35732/0/IP1709011_STUDY_ON_THE_RIGHTS_AND_EXPERIENCES_sahkoinen_5.pdf/2e3c62c4-da72-7846-98e9-731aefabce2?t=1585920363798

¹¹⁹ Lehtonen, J. (2016). Sukupuolen ja seksuaalisuuden moninaisuus osana laaja-alaista seksuaalikasvatusta ja heteronormatiivisuuden purkamista [Gender and sexual diversity as part of sex education and questioning of heteronormativity]. In Bildjuschkin, K. (Ed.) *Seksuaalikasvatuksen tueksi* [For the support of sex education] (pp. 104—115). Helsinki: THL.

¹²⁰ Lehtonen, J. (2019). Sexuality and sexualization in youth (Finland). In Kauko, J. & Tilleczek, K. (Eds.), *Bloomsbury education and childhood studies* (Finland). New York: Bloomsbury Publishing. DOI: [10.5040/9781350996311.0016](https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350996311.0016)

¹²¹ Ibid.

question bodily norms around sex traits as well as heteronormativity, gender-normativity, and cisnormativity and include more relevant material from the perspective of sex traits, gender, and sexuality diversity is a vitally needed change.

Respondents in the Finnish study on the rights and experiences of intersex people highlighted the fact that it is possible to choose whether education reinforces the conception of intersex as ‘anomalies’ and ‘disorders’ or presents them as part of natural variations in sex characteristics.¹²² Respondents also stated that it is important to increase information on and awareness of the natural variations of sex characteristics and of the diversity of human sexes.¹²³ In particular, they highlighted the importance that biology education should cover the broad spectrum of sex traits and bodily development rather than simplifying it into “46,XX = girl and 46,XY = boy.”¹²⁴ Even simply in regards to chromosomes, there are a plentiful number of ways in which sex-linked chromosomes are arranged. Teaching about intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics provides a more accurate and comprehensive education.

In addition to beginning lessons on sex development with the foundation that there is a wide range of sex characteristics and ways to develop, schools can also address the diversity of human sexual activity (including no sexual activity) and cover different reproductive options and choices — including not having children. This is especially important as forced and coerced medically non-essential surgeries and other interventions may have underlying intentions to ensure that the child grows up to be straight and cisgender — to the point where some have compared these surgeries and other interventions to conversion therapy.¹²⁵ Additionally, some intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics are sterilized as a result of these interventions.¹²⁶ Intersex students and students with variations of sex characteristics deserve to receive education — including health and sex education — that is relevant and beneficial to their lives. As part of providing comprehensive information about biological sex development, teachers also have an opportunity to create circumstances where people are able to be open about being intersex or having a variation of sex characteristics — without being forced to. This may assist in

¹²² Oikarinen, T. (2019). *No information or options: Study on the rights and experiences of intersex persons*. Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Pages 94-95. Retrieved from https://um.fi/documents/35732/0/IP1709011_STUDY_ON_THE_RIGHTS_AND_EXPERIENCES_sahkoinen_5.pdf/2e3c62c4-da72-7846-98e9-731aefabce2?t=1585920363798

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ interACT Advocates for Intersex Youth (2019). *Submission to the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity at the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights: Non-consensual surgical and hormonal interventions on intersex children constitute a form of conversion therapy*. Retrieved from https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/SexualOrientation/IESOGI/CSOsAJ/interACTadvocates_SOGL_CT_report.docx

¹²⁶ Human Rights Watch & interACT Advocates for Intersex Youth (2017). *"I want to be like nature made me": Medically unnecessary surgeries on intersex children in the US*. Retrieved from https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/lgbtintersex0717_web_0.pdf

combating shame, secrecy and invisibility.¹²⁷

Youth with intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics and gender minority youth have demanded for research about better sexuality education and education which questions sex and gender binaries and normative thinking.^{128,129} In Finnish research, intersex participants have given tips on how to include topics related to intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics in teaching and curricula:

“Day-care centres often have like these slips of paper on their walls, saying that there are people who come from different cultures. They could easily include some that would say that there are girls, boys and intersex people. And these could also cover other groups that are often left invisible. They could also include some sort of commitment to values. Something like, ‘at this day-care centre, we treat everyone equally and challenge the prevailing gender roles’.”¹³⁰

In the same study, a number of respondents stressed that anyone working with children should receive information on intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics and the diversity of human sexes and genders. Rather than singling intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics out, they should recognise intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics as they are – as people.

Respondents encouraged educational professionals to treat students with intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics “as just as who they are.”¹³¹ They further pointed out that intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics are not a monolith and “should not be lumped together in a single box.”¹³² As previously noted, there are many different types of intersex variations, and intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics may have a wide range of personal and

¹²⁷ Oikarinen, T. (2019). *No information or options: Study on the rights and experiences of intersex persons*. Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Page 94. Retrieved from https://um.fi/documents/35732/0/IP1709011_STUDY_ON_THE_RIGHTS_AND_EXPERIENCES_sahkoinen_5.pdf/2e3c62c4-da72-7846-98e9-731aefabce2?t=1585920363798

¹²⁸ Alanko, K. (2013). *Hur määr HBTIQ-unga i Finland?* [How well are LGBTIQ young people doing in Finland?]. Helsinki: Finnish Youth Research Society and Seta.

¹²⁹ Taavetti, R. (2015). “*Olis siistiä, jos ei tarttis määritellä...*” *Kuriton ja tavallinen sateenkaarinuoruus* [“It would be cool not to have to define yourself.” Undisciplined and ordinary rainbow youth]. Helsinki: Finnish Youth Research Society and Seta.

¹³⁰ Oikarinen, T. (2019). *No information or options: Study on the rights and experiences of intersex persons*. Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Page 92. Retrieved from https://um.fi/documents/35732/0/IP1709011_STUDY_ON_THE_RIGHTS_AND_EXPERIENCES_sahkoinen_5.pdf/2e3c62c4-da72-7846-98e9-731aefabce2?t=1585920363798

¹³¹ Ibid. Page 93.

¹³² Ibid. Page 93.

medical experiences. Intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics are individuals that have diverse backgrounds, identities, and experiences — as all people do. As one participant noted:

“I think that [intersex people] should be treated in no special ways! They are ordinary people the way they want to be. There should be more education and much more information, so that people would have more knowledge and tools to handle the topic, at the time when there are openly intersex people in their environments whether in schools, workplaces or hobbies.”¹³³

However, respondents also highlighted the importance of recognising intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics. As one respondent stated, it is important to “understand that there are intersex people. They are invisible because intersex people are thought to be ashamed of themselves.”¹³⁴ Teachers need to balance both recognising intersex people and people with variations without objectifying them and their experiences. Instead, the misconception that biologically there are only two binary sexes in which all sex traits neatly fit into one of these constructed binary categories should be broken:

“Something ought to be actively done about this nonsense that people are still banging on about, that sex is just about the male/female dichotomy. Now that there’s information available, after all, that this doesn’t hold true at all. It would also help many other people besides just intersex people. Doing away with this binary dichotomy would benefit each and everyone. But of course it would also help us intersex people because all this business with interfering with people’s bodies and ‘fixing them up’ rests on this binary thinking and these ideals about the male and female body.”¹³⁵

Additionally, in Finland, the general public and parents of students have usually been receptive towards sex education in schools, and there is not much resistance towards teaching about sex and gender diversity issues.¹³⁶ The Eurobarometer on discrimination in the European Union (2019) revealed that 84% of Finnish respondents were in favour of teaching about being intersex in school compared to

¹³³ Participant in Tikli Oikarinen’s study (2019), published for the first time in this brief, translated by Jukka Lehtonen.

¹³⁴ Participant in Tikli Oikarinen’s study (2019), published for the first time in this brief, translated by Jukka Lehtonen.

¹³⁵ Oikarinen, T. (2019). Page 93.

¹³⁶ Lehtonen, J. (2019). Sexuality and sexualization in youth (Finland). In Kauko, J. & Tilleczek, K. (Eds.), *Bloomsbury education and childhood studies*. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing. DOI: [10.5040/9781350996311.0016](https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350996311.0016)

the European Union in general where the figure was significantly lower (65%).^{137,138}

Compulsory education plays an important role in promoting equality and increasing factual information on intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics. The obligation to promote equality also applies to all forms of education and training provision. An essential part of this is increasing awareness about the diversity of sex traits. Dismantling norms around bodies and sex trait should be included as a key aspiration of equality promotion efforts in education.

Students

Student Culture and School Violence

Student culture and school climate is sexed and gendered in various ways. Children and young people often see each other as members of gendered school cultures with expected roles and normative starting points. At the same time, there are variations between schools, classes and students; children and youth are active agents in constructing their school's culture and climate, and their agency is an important aspect to focus on when analysing how school cultures are reproduced and changed.¹³⁹ Most children and young people do not have a comprehensive understanding of intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics due to lacking information and knowledge both in education and in the larger culture and society, including media. However, some young people may have more of an interest in and information on topics relating to intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics, sometimes even more than their teachers. As most children and youth with intersex traits or variations with sex characteristics study in schools, where most of the people around them have very little knowledge on topics related to intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics, they are similarly entrenched in this normative thinking and practices around sex traits.

The Finnish language itself is largely not sexed or gendered in comparison to many other languages. *Hän*, the singular third-person pronoun, is gender neutral and used for people of all genders and with all types of sex traits. However, Swedish, the other official language of Finland, is gendered. In a study on experiences of respondents

¹³⁷ European Union (2019). *Discrimination in the European Union*. Retrieved from <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2251>

¹³⁸ Ministry of Justice (2021). *Tutkimustietoa seksuaali- ja sukupuolivähemmistöjen tilanteesta Suomessa* [Research data on the situation of sexual and gender minorities in Finland] (Policy Brief 5, Syrjintä Suomessa). Retrieved from https://yhdenvertaisuus.fi/documents/5232670/5376058/OM_policy_brief_5_web.pdf/aced140e-d940-b37b-a4ce-ad59cf92be1b/OM_policy_brief_5_web.pdf?t=1618904629224

¹³⁹ Lehtonen, J. (2003). *Seksuaalisuus ja sukupuoli koulussa. Näkökulmana heteronormatiivisuus ja ei-heteroseksuaalisten nuorten kertomukset*. [Sexuality and gender at school. The perspective of heteronormativity and the stories of non-heterosexual youth]. Helsinki: Yliopistopaino & Nuorisotutkimusverkosto.

with intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics, a Swedish-speaking respondent advocated that people should ask “which pronoun an intersex person want to be used for themselves. Not to strengthen gender norms.”¹⁴⁰ While some intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics use the pronoun stereotypically associated with their sex assigned at birth, other intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics may use other pronouns, multiple sets of pronouns, or instead ask to be referred to simply by name. As with all other people, you can’t assume what pronouns someone may use based on their appearance or your assumptions about their sex trait or gender.

In addition to being academic institutions, schools are social places. Children and youth generally want to be part of their peer group and to find friends. They also might be afraid of not finding friends, not fitting into a group, or being excluded. For children and youth with intersex traits or variations of sex characteristics, there may be challenges or concerns about whether to be open about or disclose their intersex traits or variations of sex characteristic, their medical history, or other personal experiences. Intersex students and students with variations of sex characteristics — and often their parents — must navigate decisions around potentially sharing this information. One respondent noted:

“While I am intersex, people usually do not know anything about it. I have to always think carefully in which situations I can take the issue up, and when I can ask them to treat me the way I want to be treated. This means that all the situations, when my gender is at stake, are some kind of compromise between how I want people to treat me and how they treat me.”^{141,142}

They must also negotiate with whom and to what degree they may be open about or disclose their intersex traits or variations of sex characteristics, for example: with teachers including physical education teachers, other school employees such as school nurses, and fellow students including close friends, acquaintances, and teammates on sports teams. For one respondent, “only [their] class teacher knew about [their] intersex [traits] and later [they] told [their] best friends about [their] diagnosis in high school.”¹⁴³

For intersex students and students with variations of sex characteristics, decisions

¹⁴⁰ Participant in Tikli Oikarinen’s study (2019), published for the first time in this brief, translated by Jukka Lehtonen.

¹⁴¹ Participant in working life study survey (2002), published in English for the first time in this brief and in Finnish in Lehtonen, J. (2017). Hankala kysymys. Intersukupuolisuus suomalaisissa koulu- ja työelämätkimyksissä [A difficult question. Intersex in Finnish school and working life studies]. *Finnish Journal of Gender Studies*, 30(1), 71-75.

¹⁴² See Lehtonen, J. & Mustola, K. (Eds.). (2004) *“Straight People Don’t Tell, Do They?” Negotiating the Boundaries of Sexuality and Gender at Work*. Helsinki: Ministry of Labour.

¹⁴³ Participant in Tikli Oikarinen’s study (2019), published for the first time in this brief, translated by Jukka Lehtonen.

around openness or disclosure are often not taken lightly and can, unfortunately, have dramatic repercussions. Even if someone would like to be open, they may not be able to. One respondent shared that they “would like to be more open about [their] intersex [traits] and [their] trans background, but the societal hate speech atmosphere and [their] traumatic background do not fit well with [them] being open.”¹⁴⁴ Another shared that they “envy those people, who want to talk about their story in public. These ordinary people, who want to tell their story to strengthen others. But [they did] not believe that [they] could handle it, at least at this moment.”¹⁴⁵ Despite wanting to be open, there were dangers that prevented them from doing so. Recognising this, one respondent “recounted that hiding being intersex had also protected them from discrimination and bullying, although it was not a good solution in other respects.”¹⁴⁶ The participant stated that they “do think that openness would be a good idea.” However, openness or disclosure without protection has the potential to put intersex students and students with variations of sex characteristics in danger; in order for students to feel comfortable with the option of being open or disclosing — or even seeing that as an option — they need to know that they are safe and protected.

The parents of children with intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics also must navigate disclosing information about their child. One parent respondent recounted that they “contemplat[ed] disclosing their child being intersex at the day-care centre but had eventually decided not to say anything.”¹⁴⁷ The respondent noted that while they would have liked to, they “[didn’t] have the energy” as “it feels like you should always be ready to educate people about the subject and that you ought to have a comprehensive set of educational materials ready in your head.”¹⁴⁸ A similar sentiment might be felt by young people, as they may be expected to educate their teachers and peers — being asked to potentially disclose personal information and be asked invasive questions while navigating their own identity and understanding of themselves, especially if they also lack information about intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics or haven’t been provided with their complete medical history.

For many the reason for not disclosing their being intersex was due to the fear of being excluded or experiencing discrimination. There is no research on school violence towards children and youth with intersex traits or variations of sex

¹⁴⁴ Participant in Tikli Oikarinen’s study (2019), published for the first time in this brief, translated by Jukka Lehtonen.

¹⁴⁵ Participant in Tikli Oikarinen’s study (2019), published for the first time in this brief, translated by Jukka Lehtonen.

¹⁴⁶ Oikarinen, T. (2019). *No information or options: Study on the rights and experiences of intersex persons*. Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Page 91. Retrieved from https://um.fi/documents/35732/0/IP1709011_STUDY_ON_THE_RIGHTS_AND_EXPERIENCES_sahkoinen_5.pdf/2e3c62c4-da72-7846-98e9-731aefcabce2?t=1585920363798

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. Page 92.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. Page 92.

characteristics. Based on survey results from the Finnish school health promotion study, gender minority youth¹⁴⁹ — which, due to language, may include youth with intersex traits or variations of sex characteristics — faced many challenges compared to cisgender¹⁵⁰ youth and youth without intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics.¹⁵¹ They felt much less a part of their school community or other communities, and, for example, experiences of loneliness during recess were more common among gender minority youth than among others. More than half of gender minority youth had problems with their learning skills, and absences and school fatigue were more common than among other young people. In addition, they also felt that the school environment was inadequate and unsafe more often than other young people.¹⁵²

Based on these results, experiences of violence were significantly common for gender minority youth. 11% of gender minority respondents experienced school bullying once a week compared to 7% of sexual minority respondents and 3% of cisgender heterosexual respondents.¹⁵³ During the school year, 27% of gender minority respondents experienced threats of physical violence compared to 20% of sexual minority respondents and 14% of cisgender respondents. A high number of gender minority students, along with sexual minority students, experienced sexual harassment during a year — 33% of gender minority respondents and 38% sexual minority respondents — compared to 20% of cisgender respondents.¹⁵⁴

In other Finnish research, school violence experienced by children and youth with intersex traits or variations of sex characteristics was specifically addressed.¹⁵⁵ One

¹⁴⁹ This study made use of the School Health Promotion Study material collected by the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare in 2019. The survey received 85,707 responses from 8th and 9th grade pupils in basic education (coverage of 72%), 44,447 responses from 1st and 2nd year students in general upper secondary school (coverage estimated at 69%) and 22,989 responses from 1st and 2nd year students in vocational institutions (coverage cannot be reliably assessed). According to the young people's responses, gender minorities accounted for 4,720 (3%) respondents and sexual minorities accounted for 12,947 (9%) respondents.

¹⁵⁰ The category of *cisgender* — or only having a *transgender-cisgender* binary option — can be complicated for intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics. Some intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics who identify with their sex assigned at birth may identify as cisgender. Some intersex people and people with variations who do not identify with their sex assigned at birth may identify as transgender, while others may not as they instead understand themselves as having been medically —including surgically — assigned the wrong sex at birth. Some intersex people and people with variations who are non-binary may identify as transgender, while others may not — seeing their gender as aligning with their intersex traits or variations of sex characteristics. Some intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics may not see themselves fitting into one or the other. Additionally, some intersex people and people with variations with sex characteristics may be straight while others might identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, asexual, aromantic, or any number of other sexual and romantic orientations.

¹⁵¹ Jokela, S., Luopa, P., Hyvärinen, A., Ruuska, T., Martelin, T., & Klemetti, R. (2020). *The wellbeing of young people belonging to sexual and gender minorities. Results of the School Health Promotion Study 2019*. National Institute for Health and Welfare (THL). Discussion Paper.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Oikarinen, T. (2019). *No information or options: Study on the rights and experiences of intersex persons*. Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Page 92. Retrieved from

study respondent shared:

“When I went to school it was traumatizing because I looked five to six years older than my peers. This led to school bullying and feelings of being an outsider. And feelings about my body being totally wrong. At this stage I should have been offered support and help and information. School and studying were nice. But everything else: I was from a small place and I always felt like an outsider. Nobody tried to prevent bullying in the first six years. In the lower secondary level the situation was became a bit easier.”¹⁵⁶

Another respondent shared similar experiences based on differences in puberty and development from their peers:

“Others took a leap with body development and I had a serious mental breakdown – secondary level was really difficult due to mental health issues. There were many issues affecting me at the same time, and I was in a hospital several times and I received help there. I was quite a lot away from school, but I managed lower secondary school fairly well and got a place in the upper secondary general school I wanted to go to.”¹⁵⁷

While there is not one singular experience regarding puberty and development for intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics, many lack of information about their own bodies, and in conjunction with normative education about puberty and development that does not include their own experiences or adequate prepare them, it may be distressing to not know why you are developing differently from your peers. In addition, their peers, based on these normative beliefs about bodies and sex traits presented both in education and the larger society, may bully or be violent towards them due to what they see as traits breaking anatomical expectations of what bodies assigned male or female are stereotypically expected to look like.

It's important to note that being intersex or having variations of sex characteristics is not the problem but rather the lack of information, stigma, and discrimination. Framing the issue as 'violence or discrimination due to intolerance to the diversity of sex traits' rather than 'someone was bullied because they are intersex or have variations of sex characteristics' puts the emphasis on the problem of normative

https://um.fi/documents/35732/0/IP1709011_STUDY_ON_THE_RIGHTS_AND_EXPERIENCES_sahkoinen_5.pdf/2e3c62c4-da72-7846-98e9-731aefabce2?t=1585920363798

¹⁵⁶ Participant in Tikli Oikarinen's study (2019), published for the first time in this brief, translated by Jukka Lehtonen.

¹⁵⁷ Participant in Tikli Oikarinen's study (2019), published for the first time in this brief, translated by Jukka Lehtonen.

beliefs about bodies and sex traits rather than seeing intersex traits or variations of sex characteristics as the problem. Furthermore, discrimination and violence may not specifically be related to their intersex traits or variations of sex characteristics, but rather due to visible bodily differences as victims/survivors or perpetrators of violence may not always be aware of the individual's intersex traits or variations of sex characteristics.¹⁵⁸

Schools should have anti-violence plans and actively prevent all kinds of violence and harassment in their schools — including the bullying reported by intersex people which range from occasional rude questions to regularly experiencing psychological or physical violence.¹⁵⁹ While experiences of school violence have thankfully lessened in the last few decades, some of which is due to the success of anti-violence programs, these anti-violence programs often do not effectively cover sex, gender and sexuality, meaning that some parts of gendered violence and violence due to sex traits are not recognised and prevented.¹⁶⁰ Active measures are needed to collect information on and take into account the experiences of intersex students and students with variations of sex characteristics in order to take steps to effectively combat normative beliefs about bodily sex traits and stop experiences of school violence and harassment. One possibility for this is for the Finnish National Agency for Education to consult intersex people and include the experiences of intersex students and students with variations of sex characteristics when developing the anti-violence website for schools planned for 2022 or 2023.

Gender-Segregated Spaces and Activities

School spaces, and the lessons and activities within those spaces, are very often sexed and gendered. During the first few weeks in a new school, young people learn — explicitly and implicitly — how they are supposed to look and behave. They learn time- and space-paths, figuring out where and when they have to be in a certain place and when they cannot be in those places.¹⁶¹ While it may take time and effort to learn and understand the spatial praxis of a school — such as navigating complex social interactions within school corridors and during school breaks — following these time- and space-paths often become routine and unconscious actions for

¹⁵⁸ Lehtonen, J. (2021) Heteronormative violence in schools: Focus on homophobia, transphobia and the experiences of trans and non-heterosexual youth in Finland. In Odenbring, Y. & Johansson, T. (Eds.) *Violence, victimisation and young people. Education and safe learning environments* (pp. 155 - 171). Switzerland: Springer.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Gordon, T., Holland, J., & Lahelma, E. (2000) *Making Spaces. Citizenship and Difference in Schools*. New York & London: St.Martin's Press & MacMillan Press. Page 148.

students.^{162,163} Both in the classroom as well as other school spaces such as the school cafeteria, the creation of student grouping includes similar social mechanisms: the construction of gender differences, building of hierarchies, and overall social stratification.

The Finnish school health promotion study revealed that gender minority respondents — who, due to language, include intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics — felt unsafe in some school spaces more than other students. During school breaks between lessons, 13% of gender minority respondents felt more frightened compared to 3% of cisgender respondents.¹⁶⁴ Additionally, 17% of gender minority respondents felt lonely during the breaks compared to 5% of cisgender respondents. Furthermore, the school health promotion study found that gender minority youth were more likely to experience some of the gendered spaces in schools as more awkward to use than their cisgender peers. Almost one-fourth of gender minority respondents found using the toilets, dressing rooms, and rooms for showering in school buildings to be disturbing, compared to one-fifth of sexual minority respondents and 16% of cisgender heterosexuals.¹⁶⁵

One key aspect of education that is largely sexed and gendered is physical education. While physical education in Finland is not required to separate by sex or gender, it often is. By in large, physical education is divided in gendered groups based on presumed sex of the students. During physical education, the lessons and activities can be seen as gendered based on the different types of sports that are taught, generally with a teacher who has the same gender as their students — as in teacher education, women are trained to teach girls and men to teach boys.¹⁶⁶ While there is a possibility of joint classes and education, typically male teachers teach boys to play football and other stereotypically ‘masculine’ sports and female teachers teach girls more stereotypically ‘feminine’ sports.¹⁶⁷

In Eeva-Stiina Jaakonsaari’s master’s thesis on the experiences of intersex children

¹⁶² Lehtonen, J.(2003). *Seksuaalisuus ja sukupuoli koulussa. Näkökulmana heteronormatiivisuus ja ei-heteroseksuaalisten nuorten kertomukset*. Helsinki: Yliopistopaino & Nuorisotutkimusverkosto.

¹⁶³Lehtonen, J. (2003). Heteronormativity in school space in Finland. *Lambda Nordica*, 9(1-2), 94-103. Retrieved from <https://www.lambdanordica.org/index.php/lambdanordica/article/view/171>

¹⁶⁴ Jokela, S., Luopa, P., Hyvärinen, A., Ruuska, T., Martelin, T., & Klemetti, R. (2020). *The wellbeing of young people belonging to sexual and gender minorities. Results of the School Health Promotion Study 2019*. National Institute for Health and Welfare (THL). Discussion Paper.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. Pages 22-23.

¹⁶⁶ Berg, P. & Lahelma, E. (2010). Gendering processes in the field of physical education, *Gender and Education*, 22(1), 31-46, DOI: [10.1080/09540250902748184](https://doi.org/10.1080/09540250902748184)

¹⁶⁷ Berg, P. & Kokkonen, M. (2021). Heteronormativity meets queering in physical education: The views of PE teachers and LGBTIQ+ students, *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, DOI: [10.1080/17408989.2021.1891213](https://doi.org/10.1080/17408989.2021.1891213)

in early childhood education and basic education, respondents recounted their experiences of physical education classes.¹⁶⁸ One respondent stated that they “never went to wash [themselves] after physical education lessons, so nobody would notice their intersex traits.”¹⁶⁹ Another tried to avoid their peers during these times, either by “avoid[ing] going to the shower, or if [they] had to, [they] lurked into the shower room after others.”¹⁷⁰ For a participant who did shower, “if [they] had to be naked in the shower, [they] washed quickly and tried to turn away so that [their] chest area and genitals would remain invisible. [They] just wanted to be like the others.”¹⁷¹ Finally, one student shared that they did not participate in certain lessons in physical education all together:

“In school I did not take part in swimming, especially in upper grades of basic education...my mother supported me and she wrote a note of abstaining from swimming lessons.”¹⁷²

These sexed and gendered activities and spaces are one key factor why some children and youth with intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics avoid attending or participating in physical education lessons and drop out of education. Physical education lessons is one of the reasons by LGBTQI+ — particularly intersex students and students with variations of sex characteristics as well as transgender students — have abstained or dropped out.¹⁷³ Based on the school health promotion survey, gender minority youth in general were more likely to drop out of classes of education.¹⁷⁴ Additionally, gender minority respondents often had more absences during a single month from school than cisgender respondents: both those related to sick leaves (1/3 of gender minority respondents vs. 1/5 of cisgender respondents) and those without permission (18-20% gender minority respondents vs. 14 cisgender respondents).¹⁷⁵

In these cases, and many others, children and young people are expected to use space and engage in activities according to their assumed gender — often

¹⁶⁸ Jaakonsaari, E. -S. (2017). *Intersukupuolisten lasten huomioiminen varhaiskasvatuksessa ja perusopetuksessa - Intersukupuolisten ja heidän vanhempiensa kokemuksia ja näkemyksiä* [Consideration of intersex children in early childhood education and basic education - Intersex and their parents' experiences and views]. Master's thesis. Retrieved from https://www.theseus.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/139645/Jaakonsaari_Eeva-Stiina.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. Page 49. Translated by Jukka Lehtonen.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. Page 49. Translated by Jukka Lehtonen.

¹⁷¹ Ibid. Page 49. Translated by Jukka Lehtonen.

¹⁷² Ibid. Page 49. Translated by Jukka Lehtonen.

¹⁷³ Lehtonen, J. (2014) Sukupuolittuneita valintoja? Ei-heteroseksuaaliset ja transnuoret koulutuksessa Sukupuolentutkimus, 27(4), 67-71.

¹⁷⁴ Jokela, S., Luopa, P., Hyvärinen, A., Ruuska, T., Martelin, T., & Klemetti, R. (2020). *The wellbeing of young people belonging to sexual and gender minorities. Results of the School Health Promotion Study 2019*. National Institute for Health and Welfare (THL). Discussion Paper. Page 23.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. Page 23.

conditioning students to see these divisions as normal and natural.¹⁷⁶ For some intersex youth and youth with variations of sex characteristics, these divisions may present a painful reminder of binary sex categories — that they may or may not identify within — as well as potentially worry students about being discriminated against based on their intersex traits or variations of sex characteristics or that others might find out about their intersex traits or variations of sex characteristics. This may severely impact their academic potential and future educational and career paths.

Impact of Forced and Coerced Non-Essential Surgeries and Medical Interventions on Educational and Career Paths

Forced and coerced non-essentials surgeries and other medical interventions on intersex children and children with variations of sex characteristics can greatly impact students' schooling and future career paths. These surgeries and medical interventions often lead to several follow-up operations over the years. These are often performed during the school holidays, at the expense of the child's need to relax and have fun. Some children drop out of school as a result of this long-term recovery process."¹⁷⁷

In an Australian study on the needs of intersex students, just over a third of the respondents reported negative experiences in schools, such as bullying.¹⁷⁸ Difficulties in schools led to a significantly higher proportion of intersex people (18%), compared to the general population (2%), to drop out of school before or at the end of primary school, not going on to complete secondary school. For those who dropped out of school early, the period they had (12 – 15 years of age) coincides with the time typically associated with beginning puberty and potentially hormone therapy interventions. Again, this Australian study on the needs of students with intersex variations reported that

“unwanted hormonal treatment, in childhood or puberty, with the aim of altering the body towards the assigned sex has also been reported to coincide with a decrease in school grades. This physical and psychological strain often prevents intersex people from developing their full potential and leads to under-achievement at school. As a result, these children and young adults face significant difficulties in obtaining a higher education degree and are at

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ghattas, D. C. (2015). *Standing up for the human rights of intersex people*. Brussels: ILGA Europe & OII Europe. Page 11. Retrieved from https://www.ilga-europe.org/sites/default/files/how_to_be_a_great_intersex_ally_a_toolkit_for_ngos_and_decision_makers_december_2015_updated.pdf

¹⁷⁸ Jones, T. (2016). The needs of students with intersex variations. *Sex Education*, 16(6), 602-618, DOI: [10.1080/14681811.2016.1149808](https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2016.1149808)

risk of poverty when growing older.”¹⁷⁹

Similar experiences were relayed in Finnish studies, stating that “intersex or intersex-related medical interventions had also affected some respondents’ schooling and studies (e.g. absences, bullying, poor psychological wellbeing), as well as their working lives (career choices, gaps in educational history).”¹⁸⁰ Several respondents shared negative experiences on the impact of forced and coerced non-essential surgeries and other medical interventions on their schooling — particularly for respondents whose intersex traits or variations of sex characteristics were identified in childhood.¹⁸¹

One respondent reported that they missed “long periods of school due to surgeries and other intersex-related medical interventions. They had also needed to repeat a full year of schooling.”¹⁸² Another respondent similarly shared that their higher education was interrupted due to medical interventions:

“I was forced to drop out of my university studies while I went through an operation...Now I study for the medical profession and hope to do research on intersexuality in the future.”¹⁸³

In a different study, respondent shared the impact of receiving their medical history:

“I got information about my intersex [variation] when I started to study.

I read old patient files, of which I received the information. Dealing with the issue was such a big process for me that I was forced to drop out of education. Luckily, I managed to get a study place later in another place.”¹⁸⁴

Highlighting the impact of these surgeries on mental health, one respondent “recounted that being intersex and the related interventions had negatively impacted

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Oikarinen, T. (2019). *No information or options: Study on the rights and experiences of intersex persons*. Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Page 4. Retrieved from https://um.fi/documents/35732/0/IP1709011_STUDY_ON_THE_RIGHTS_AND_EXPERIENCES_sahkoinen_5.pdf/2e3c62c4-da72-7846-98e9-731aefabce2?t=1585920363798

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid. Page 90.

¹⁸³ Participant in Tikli Oikarinen’s study (2019), published for the first time in this brief, translated by Jukka Lehtonen.

¹⁸⁴ Participant of Well-Being of Rainbow Youth survey (2013), published originally in Lehtonen, J. (2017). *Hankala kysymys. Intersukupuolisuus suomalaisissa koulu- ja työelämätkimyksissä [A difficult question. Intersex in Finnish school and working life studies]*. *Finnish Journal of Gender Studies*, 30 (1), 71-75. Translated by Jukka Lehtonen.

on their schooling,” stating that they “started to dissociate from a very young age. [They] made a complete hash of [their] comprehensive schooling because [they] didn’t know who [they were].” A third respondent relayed that these interventions left them traumatised.¹⁸⁵ The respondent shared that they experienced panic attacks and had anxiety and depression — leading to them being treated at a psychiatric ward and outpatient unit. As a result, the respondent shared that this led to a “patchy school attendance.”¹⁸⁶ Surgeries and medical interventions may also impact future academic success; one respondent shared that they “had to drop out of university because they suffered from fatigue and lack of motivation for a long time after undergoing a gonadectomy as a young adult.”¹⁸⁷

And while surgeries and other medical interventions may not always have a direct impact on the school attendance or graduation of intersex students and students with variations of sex characteristics, one respondent shared that the “surgeries performed on them in childhood had been deliberately scheduled for summer or other holidays, ‘so as not to risk anyone finding out even by accident.’”¹⁸⁸ This highlights that even during the time that children and youth are meant to enjoy time away and be relieved from some of the stresses and pressure associated with school — such as heavy homework loads, peer pressure, bullying, school violence, and a lack of time to pursue personal interests and activities — children and youth with intersex traits or variations of sex characteristics who experience forced or coerced non-essential surgeries and other medical interventions may not have that reprieve and instead may face various types of physical, emotional, psychological harm and trauma.

However, there were also respondents that shared that they had enjoyed school and succeeded academically — highlighting protective factors and examples of supporting intersex students and students with variations of sex characteristics. For example, one participant shared that “being intersex [had] not [have] any negative impact on their school.”¹⁸⁹ Other respondents shared similar sentiments, stating that “they had liked school and studying and that they had done well in these.”¹⁹⁰ Several respondents reported that while they had “negative childhood experiences at school,” they were also “able to subsequently move on to further studies and find pleasure in studying,” with one respondent noting that they even excelled in their

¹⁸⁵ Oikarinen, T. (2019). *No information or options: Study on the rights and experiences of intersex persons*. Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Retrieved from https://um.fi/documents/35732/0/IP1709011_STUDY_ON_THE_RIGHTS_AND_EXPERIENCES_sahkoinen_5.pdf/2e3c62c4-da72-7846-98e9-731aecfabce2?t=1585920363798

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. Page 47.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid. Page 48.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid. Page 90.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid. Page 92.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. Page 92.

studies.¹⁹¹ While these are positive stories and further research into the protective factors that can help account for them, all intersex students and students with variations deserve the opportunity to have positive experiences at school and academically achieve their goals.

The Effects of COVID-19 Pandemic

In Finland, like everywhere else, the COVID-19 crisis has drastically affected people, including people with intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics in education.^{192,193,194,195} In a research study on the effects of the COVID-19 crisis on LGBTI people (N=325) and organisations (N=23), over 90 percent of LGBTI student respondents reported that the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on their studies.¹⁹⁶ The most common impact was the shift to remote learning, when schools were closed and students were required to study at home or in other locations. For some LGBTI students this created difficulties while for others it provided safety. One-fifth of the respondents said that remote learning had decreased experiences of discrimination, bullying, and unjust behaviour towards them. A third said that the COVID-19 pandemic had made it less likely that they were treated badly based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. On the other hand, some respondents reported difficulties including problems in concentrating on their studies (65%), increased loneliness (59%), and the fear of getting infected by the virus that causes COVID-19 (33%). Respondents reported that the crisis led to strained relationships with people at home and for some, motivated them to drop out of school.¹⁹⁷

Out of the 325 respondents of this survey, there were only four intersex respondents.¹⁹⁸ One of these respondents was a student and reported that the COVID-19 pandemic had had a greatly influence on their education. During the remote learning period, experiences of bullying had decreased. However, this respondent also reported difficulties in focusing on their studies and fears of getting infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 at school.

During interviews with LGBTI human rights organisation activists and employees (N=23) as a part of this study, it was reported that much of the educational outreach

¹⁹¹ Ibid. Page 92.

¹⁹² Ghattas, D. C. (2020). *COVID-19. A report on the situation of intersex people in Europe and Central Asia. OII Europe*. Retrieved from https://oiieurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/covid-19-survey-report-OII_Europe.pdf

¹⁹³ Lehtonen, J. (2020). *Yhdenvertainen virus? HLBTI-ihmiset koronakriisissä*. [Equal virus? LGBTI people in COVID-19 crises] Poliitikasta. Retrieved from <https://politiikasta.fi/yhdenvertainen-virus-hlbt-ihmiset-koronakriisissa/>

¹⁹⁴ Lehtonen, J. (2020) *Viisi sateenkaarinäkökulma koulutukseen* [Five rainbow perspectives to education]. WeAllFinland. Retrieved from <http://weallfinland.fi/viisi-sateenkaarinakokulmaa-koulutukseen/>

¹⁹⁵ Lehtonen, J. (2021). *Pääkaupunkiseudun sateenkaariväki koronakriisissä* [Rainbow people in COVID-19 crises in the capitol region]. Kvartti. Retrieved from <https://www.kvartti.fi/fi/artikkelit/paakaupunkiseudun-sateenkaarivaki-koronakriisissa>

¹⁹⁶ From research conducted by Jukka Lehtonen on the effects of the COVID-19 crisis on LGBTI people and organisations. CoWeAll research project was funded by Academy of Finland Strategic Research Funding. Some of these results in this section are published in the publications mentioned in the above footnotes, and reported in various conferences, including TIKKA project final conference in 2020 in which the results were reported from the intersex people's point of view.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

work done with schools, peer support work with young people, and client meetings with young people had to be cancelled, stopped, or were adapted to be remote. Several issues arose from this: this type of work was often not easily organised from home, client or peer support activities did not always adapt well to a remote format for children and young people, and cancelling educational outreach visits to schools led to a reduction of information on LGBTI issues being provided in education. While remote work had created new possibilities to reach new audiences and led to easier communication with new clients and youth groups online, particularly for people living outside bigger towns, one interviewee stated that “if education and development work is reduced due to this crisis, the number of people attending these workshops and the visibility about and discussion of intersex [traits] and body diversity will diminish.”¹⁹⁹ Another respondent also noted that “people who have bodies with intersex traits are more likely to have mental health issues due to stigma and the interventions performed on their bodies that did respect their self-determination, and this crisis will increase these challenges.”^{200,201}

Non-Governmental Organisations: Outreach Work in Schools

In order to break the silence around sexuality, gender diversity, and variations of sex characteristics and provide education on these topics, many lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI+) organisations in Finland provide educational outreach work in schools and other educational settings.²⁰² The aim of this work is to advance knowledge on sexuality, gender diversity, and variations of sex characteristics, helping students, teachers, and other professionals’ understanding and inclusion of them into their education and work. This is critically needed as educational institutions and professionals often lack the information and tools to address topics about sexuality, gender diversity, and variations of sex characteristics.²⁰³ However, there is a debate about whether the educational institutions themselves should organise this kind of work — taking full responsibility in challenging the structural practices of heteronormativity, cisnormativity, and bodily norms around sex traits in their institutions within their local contexts.²⁰⁴ Nevertheless, non-governmental organisations play an important role in filling these gaps in national curriculum and pushing for change in

¹⁹⁹ Published for the first time in this brief, translated by Jukka Lehtonen.

²⁰⁰ Lehtonen, J. (2020). *Intersukupuolisuus koulutuksessa ja työelämässä* [Intersex in education and working life]. [Keynote presentation]. TIKA Project final conference. Lehtonen, J. (2020) *Intersukupuolisuus koulutuksessa ja työelämässä* [Intersex in education and working life]. [Keynote presentation]. TIKA Project final conference.

²⁰¹ Published for the first time in this brief, translated by Jukka Lehtonen.

²⁰² Kjaran, J. I. & Lehtonen, J. (2020). Queer outreach work in Nordic countries: Challenges, tensions and contradictions in queering schools and teaching about sexual and gender diversity. In Francis, D., Kjaran, J. I., & Lehtonen, J. (Eds.), *Queer social movements and outreach work in schools: A global perspective* (pp. 15-37). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

²⁰³ Lehtonen, J. (2017), Troubling normativities? Constructing sexual and gender diversity in the educational work of Finnish LGBTI human rights association Seta. In Vaahtera, T., Niemi, A. -M., Lappalainen, S. & Beach, D. (Eds.), *Troubling educational cultures in the Nordic countries* (pp. 117-139). London: The Tufnell Press.

²⁰⁴ Kjaran, J. I. & Lehtonen, J. (2020). Queer outreach work in Nordic countries: Challenges, tensions and contradictions in queering schools and teaching about sexual and gender diversity. In Francis, D., Kjaran, J. I., & Lehtonen, J. (Eds.) *Queer social movements and outreach work in schools: A global perspective* (pp. 15-37). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

education policy.²⁰⁵

Educational outreach work in Finland often aims to serve the dual purpose of helping people to learn about and accept LGBTQI+ people as well as engaging in criticising heteronormativity, cisnormativity, and bodily norms around sex traits, challenging principle ways of understanding sexuality, gender, and sex traits.²⁰⁶ This can create tensions within organisations and cause contradictions between frameworks of tolerance and acceptance of LGBTQI+ people and of norm-critical understandings of sexuality, gender diversity, and sex traits. LGBTQI+ organisations doing educational outreach work are still balancing efforts towards general societal acceptance and tolerance of LGBTQI+ identities and of the critical questioning of heteronormativity, cisnormativity, and bodily norms around sex traits.²⁰⁷

In Finland, legislation and national curriculum standards have now incorporated sex and gender diversity to a certain extent and affirm that LGBTI+ people should not be discriminated against. However, these aims do not disturb or dismantle hetero-, cis-, and bodily normative practices and understandings.²⁰⁸ Furthermore, there is often a lack of inclusion of intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics in education as well as a lack of critique of bodily norms around sex traits. While intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics may be mentioned during lessons or educational workshops, due to time limits, discussions may often only be limited to a definition without larger conversations.²⁰⁹

Seta — a national LGBTI umbrella organisation of 34 member organisations from Lapland to Åland Islands engaging in both national and local work — trains voluntary educational activists of local member organisations, who are responsible for organising educational outreach work in local schools and other educational institutions.²¹⁰ Trainings for both students and education professionals aim to teach people about basic terminology and concepts regarding gender and sexual orientation and how to incorporate them into their education, teaching, and work, to understand the main principles of gender- and norm-consciousness, and how to

²⁰⁵ See also Enzendorfer, M. & Haller, P. (2020) Intersex and education: What can schools and queer school projects learn from current discourses on intersex in Austria? In Francis, D., Kjaran, J. I., & Lehtonen, J. (Eds.) *Queer social movements and outreach work in schools: A global perspective* (pp. 261-284). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Lehtonen, J. (2017). Hankala kysymys. Intersukupuolisuus suomalaisissa koulu- ja työelämä tutkimuksissa [A difficult question. Intersex in Finnish school and working life studies]. *Finnish Journal of Gender Studies*, 30(1), 71-75.

²⁰⁹ Kjaran, J. I. & Lehtonen, J. (2020). Queer outreach work in Nordic countries: Challenges, tensions and contradictions in queering schools and teaching about sexual and gender diversity. In Francis, D., Kjaran, J. I., & Lehtonen, J. (Eds.), *Queer social movements and outreach work in schools: A global perspective* (pp. 15-37). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

²¹⁰ Seta (n.d.). Asiantuntija- ja koulutuspalvelut. Retrieved from <https://seta.fi/palvelut/asiantuntija-ja-koulutuspalvelut/>

support LGBTQI+ students.^{211,212}

There are an estimated 200 active volunteer educational activists working with Seta and its member organisations, providing 150-250 educational outreach visits at schools and other educational settings yearly.²¹³ This means that thousands of people hear from an activist or employee of Seta about LGBTQI+ topics each year. 90% of these school visits are facilitated by young voluntary educational activists, and most of these voluntary activists are LGBT. In general, it's recommended that these school visits are facilitated by two educators with different sexual orientations and/or gender identities to provide a greater diversity of experiences. In every age cohort in Finland, there are roughly 60,000 young people, meaning that Seta trains 5-10 % of each age cohort. However, this differs based on geographic areas; larger cities and towns have a larger number of active volunteers, resulting in more trainings and a larger number of students and educational professionals trained, while towns in rural areas have a lower number of active volunteers, leading to less trainings and a smaller number of people trained. Most of the visits are done in schools – in basic education or upper secondary educational institutions – and in youth centres or camps, and the recipients of the training are mostly young people.²¹⁴ There are also professional trainings organised mostly for young people, such as students in universities of applied sciences, specifically youth, social and health care workers, and in universities, for example, teacher trainees.²¹⁵

Seta has produced various guidebooks on gender and sex diversity in education for teachers and schools — including resources on intersex traits and variations of

²¹¹ Seta (n.d.). *Kasvatus ja varhaiskasvatus* [Education and early childhood education]. Retrieved from <https://seta.fi/palvelut/asiantuntija-ja-koulutuspalvelut/kasvatus-ja-varhaiskasvatus/>

²¹² Seta (n.d.). *Nuorisoolan koulutus* [Youth education]. Retrieved from <https://seta.fi/palvelut/asiantuntija-ja-koulutuspalvelut/nuorisoolan-koulutus/>

²¹³ Kjaran, J. I. & Lehtonen, J. (2020). Queer outreach work in Nordic countries: Challenges, tensions and contradictions in queering schools and teaching about sexual and gender diversity. In Francis, D., Kjaran, J. I., & Lehtonen, J. (Eds.) *Queer social movements and outreach work in schools: A global perspective* (pp. 15-37). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

sex characteristics from the TIKA project.^{216,217,218,219,220,221} Seta's expert in education Marita Karvinen has also written chapters on gender and sexual diversity in schools in different compilation works.^{222,223}

ISIO ry is a national intersex non-governmental organisation working to ensure the human rights and equality of intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics.²²⁴ While ISIO ry is a human rights organisation that focuses on ending forced and coerced non-medically necessary surgeries and other medical interventions on intersex children and protecting the right of intersex children to bodily integrity rather than education outreach, awareness raising functions as an important form of informal education on intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics.²²⁵

However, while these organisations such as Seta and ISIO ry are doing important work and fill gaps in education and legislative policy, they have limited capacities and resources. In addition, education is not the sole focus of these organisations; there aren't dedicated organisations specifically focused on this work and they are often isolated to individual projects within a specified time frame and scope — especially for topics related to education on intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics and on intersex students and students with variations of sex characteristics. Furthermore, as structural problems, these issues need to be taken up on a structural level in education.

With already limited capacity and resources, there are also concerns about the future funding of these non-governmental organisations. In 2019, the Finnish state-owned

²¹⁶ Kalliokoski, T. H. & Karvinen, M. (2019). *Sukupuolen moninaisuus ja lapset. Opas varhaiskasvatuksessa työskenteleville ja varhaiskasvatuksen ammattilaisille moninaisten lasten ja heidän perheidensä kohtaamisesta*. Seta ry. Retrieved from https://www.dropbox.com/s/pina1x952cjbamu/Opas_varhaiskasvattaille2019.pdf?dl=0

²¹⁷ Karvinen, M. (2016). *Opas opettajille. Seksuaalisen suuntautumisen ja sukupuolen moninaisuus – Opitaan yhdessä!* Seta ry. Retrieved from https://www.dropbox.com/s/iffkzu8f0ft73wx/Opas_kouluille_2016_NETTI.pdf?dl=0

²¹⁸ Pirskanen, J. & Kilpiä, J. (2019). *Opas intersukupuolisille nuorille* [Guide for intersex youth]. Seta ry. Retrieved from <https://www.dropbox.com/s/i7of7sx3hs9ifqg/ISnuoret2019.pdf?dl=0>

²¹⁹ Taivaloja, N. (2016). *Opas oppilashuollolle – sateenkaarevan oppilaan tukeminen koulun oppilashuollossa*. Seta ry. Retrieved from https://www.dropbox.com/s/qny5tl81asiqj5f/Opas_oppilashuollolle_2016.pdf?dl=0

²²⁰ For materials from the TIKA Project, see <https://sukupuolenosaamiskeskus.fi/sukupuoli/materiaali/intersukupuolisuus-materiaalit/>

²²¹ For a video on working life issues, see Seta. (2020, February 20). *Puheenvuoroja intersukupuolisuudesta: Jukka Lehtonen* [Video]. YouTube. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ps-pkKP23lc>

²²² Karvinen, M. (2008). Koulu. [School]. In Jämsä, J. (Ed.), *Sateenkaariperheet ja hyvinvointi. Käsikirja lasten ja perheiden kanssa työskenteleville*. (pp. 222—241). Jyväskylä: PS-kustannus.

²²³ Karvinen, M. (2010). Sateenkaaren värit koulussa – suvaitsevaisuudesta yhdenvertaisuuteen [The colors of the rainbow at school - from tolerance to equality]. In Suortamo, M., Tainio, L., Ikävalko, E., Palmu, T., & Tani, S. (Eds.), *Sukupuoli ja tasa-arvo koulussa* [Gender and equity in schools]. (pp.111-132). Jyväskylä: PS-kustannus.

²²⁴ ISIO ry (n.d.) *Tervetuloa ISIO ry:n sivuille!* [Welcome to the website of ISIO ry!] Retrieved from <https://intersukupuolisuus.fi>

²²⁵ ISIO ry (n.d.) *Intersex People's Human Rights – ISIO Finland*. Retrieved from https://intersukupuolisuus.fi/?page_id=1206

gambling authority *Veikkaus* announced plans to cut thousands of slot machines from public spaces due to public backlash over problematic gambling and marketing practices.²²⁶ However, many non-governmental organisations working in the social and health care field receive funding from *Veikkaus*; this puts non-governmental organisations at the whims of the gambling industry and funding based on harmful problem gambling and marketing tactics. Due to these cuts, non-governmental organisations, such as LGBTQI+ organisations and organisations that do educational outreach work, are at risk of facing a significant loss of funding and potential financial and capacity issues in the near future. However, the government is considering budget negotiations to cover this decrease in funding — including solutions ranging from a one-off solution to a comprehensive overhaul.²²⁷

Research Methods and Data Collection in Education and School Contexts

In current educational research, sex and gender diversity is hardly ever a main focus, and even then topics relating to intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics are often inadequately covered.^{228,229,230} While the reasons for this are numerous, they can range from the erasure of intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics, bodily normative understanding of sex traits, and methodological considerations. It can be difficult to reach participants for both qualitative and quantitative studies, and the number of intersex respondents and respondents with variations of sex characteristics may be too small for statistical analysis. They may also be faults in the research instrument, such as the questions used in surveys, which do not acknowledge intersex respondents and respondents with variations of sex characteristics or that the answers from respondents with intersex traits or variations of sex characteristics are not analysed or reported. This also creates ethical problem and can create tensions and research fatigue for

²²⁶ YLE News (2020). *Government likely to cover shortfall in Veikkaus funding for NGOs*. Retrieved from <https://yle.fi/news/3-11545462>

²²⁷ Finnish Government (2021). *Working group: Placing gambling proceeds within the budget and beneficiaries under the spending limits procedure*. Retrieved from <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/-/1410845/working-group-placing-gambling-proceeds-within-the-budget-and-beneficiaries-under-the-spending-limits-procedure>

²²⁸ Lehtonen, J. (2017). *Hankala kysymys. Intersukupuolisuus suomalaisissa koulu- ja työelämä tutkimuksissa* [A difficult question: intersex in Finnish school and working life surveys]. *Sukupuolentutkimus* 30(1), 71-75.

²²⁹ Lehtonen, J. (2014). *Sukupuolivähemmistöt koulussa – moninaisia tarinoita ja haastavia tutkimusvalintoja?* [Gender minorities at school – diverse stories and challenging research choices?] *Suomen Queer-tutkimuksen seuran lehti*, 7(1-2), 42-49.

²³⁰ Lehtonen, J. (2019). *Kun kaksijakoinen sukupuoli ajattelu murtuu - sukupuolen ja seksuaalisuuden moninaisuus Tasa-arvobarometrissa* [When gender binary thinking breaks - Gender and sexuality in the Equality Barometer]. In Teräsaho, M. & Närvi, J. (Eds), *Näkökulmia sukupuolten tasa-arvoon – analyseja tasa-arvobarometrasta 2017* [Perspectives on Gender Equality: Analyses from the 2017 Gender Equality Barometer] (pp. 136-157). Helsinki: Terveyden ja hyvinvoinnin laitos. Retrieved from https://www.julkari.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/137765/URN_ISBN_978-952-343-314-4.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

participants with intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics.

In Finland, research findings related to intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics in education are covered mainly within the few research publications specifically focus on intersex variations.^{231,232,233} In other studies on LGBTQI+ youth or sexual and gender diversity in education, intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics are rarely constructively included. The Wellbeing of Rainbow Youth survey (2012–2015), produced by Seta and the Finnish Youth Research Society in 2012 – and funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture – is a poignant example of this.^{234,235} While the survey was developed to "fill the need for more knowledge on the position of young LGBTI people...many groups such as intersex, [transgender] and genderless youth were too small for separate statistical analysis, and this easily makes them invisible in the research."

The Finnish School Health Promotion survey monitors the wellbeing, health and school work of Finnish students in order to strengthen the planning and evaluation of health promotion activities at school.²³⁶ The survey actively gathering data from gender and sexual minority youth and is seen as a leading example of inclusion of diversity issues within publicly funded and longitudinal school research; however, it does not actively include questions about intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics.²³⁷ This lack of inclusion ignores the realities of intersex students and students with sex characteristics— potentially missing important data needed for planning and evaluation. However, as intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics make up an estimated 1.7% of the population — and considering that many children and youth may not know about their intersex traits or variations of sex characteristics — this may not be a representative or statistically significant

²³¹ Lehtonen, J. (2017). Hankala kysymys. Intersukupuolisuus suomalaisissa koulu- ja työelämä tutkimuksissa [A difficult question. Intersex in Finnish school and working life studies]. *Finnish Journal of Gender Studies*, 30(1), 71-75.

²³² Oikarinen, T. (2019). *No information or options: Study on the rights and experiences of intersex persons*. Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Retrieved from https://um.fi/documents/35732/0/IP1709011_STUDY_ON_THE_RIGHTS_AND_EXPERIENCES_sahkoinen_5.pdf/2e3c62c4-da72-7846-98e9-731aecfabce2?t=1585920363798

²³³ Jaakonsaari, E. -S., (2017). *Intersukupuolisten lasten huomioiminen varhaiskasvatuksessa ja perusopetuksessa - Intersukupuolisten ja heidän vanhempiensa kokemuksia ja näkemyksiä* [Encountering intersex children in early childhood education and in primary school – The experiences and thoughts of intersex people and their parents]. Laurea ammattikorkeakoulu.

Retrieved from https://www.theseus.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/139645/Jaakonsaari_Eeva-Stiina.pdf?sequence=1

²³⁴ Alanko, K. (2013). *Hur mår HBTIQ-unga i Finland?* [How well are LGBTIQ young people doing in Finland?]. Helsinki: Finnish Youth Research Society and Seta.

²³⁵ Taavetti, R. 2015. "Olis siistiä, jos ei tarttis määritellä..." *Kuriton ja tavallinen sateenkaarinuoruus* ["It would be cool not to have to define yourself". Undisciplined and ordinary rainbow youth]. Helsinki: Finnish Youth Research Society and Seta.

²³⁶ Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (2021). School Health Promotion study. Retrieved from <https://thl.fi/en/web/thlfi-en/research-and-development/research-and-projects/school-health-promotion-study>

²³⁷ Jokela, S., Luopa, P., Hyvärinen, A., Ruuska, T., Martelin, T., & Klemetti, R. (2020). *The wellbeing of young people belonging to sexual and gender minorities. Results of the School Health Promotion Study 2019*. National Institute for Health and Welfare (THL). Discussion Paper.

number. In addition, including this demographic characteristic with one or two others (such as age, gender, grade level, or location) could potentially identify an individual.²³⁸ Therefore an alternative could be to include thematic questions about education on intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics, such as student knowledge and attitudes — showcasing the need for qualitative research in education on intersex traits and variation of sex characteristics.

Internationally, there have been developments in the guidance of how to do research with intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics and to address the experiences and needs of intersex students and students with variations of sex characteristics. As a foundation, the research should "respect the human rights of people with innate variations of sex characteristics, use neutral language, and enable respondents to freely express their own views."²³⁹

To do so, questions about intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics and research on intersex students and students with variations of sex characteristics should be informed and done in consultation with intersex people and organisations. While the formation of surveys and forms depends on the type of research being conducted, a separate question about intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics should be utilised.²⁴⁰ Questions about intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics should not be inserted into questions about sex assigned at birth or gender. In Finland, as with most other countries in the world, people are assigned as either male or female at birth.²⁴¹ As intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics refer to sex characteristics rather than gender, questions about gender should likewise not include intersex as a response but rather allow people to self-determine their own gender. This helps ensure people are not misgendered as well as assist in ensuring that intersex variations are not confused for having a non-binary gender.²⁴²

In addition, as people use different language around intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics – such as that some people say that they “*are* intersex, while other people might [say that they] *have* an intersex variation or prefer any of an array of other terms.” An example of a standard descriptive definition included in a survey question may resemble:

²³⁸ Carpenter, M. (2012). *Researching intersex populations*. Intersex Human Rights Australia. Retrieved from <https://ihra.org.au/research/>

²³⁹ Carpenter, M. (2012). *Researching intersex populations*. Intersex Human Rights Australia. Retrieved from <https://ihra.org.au/research/>

²⁴⁰ Intersex Human Rights Australia (2012). *Forms and data collection*. IHRA. Retrieved from <https://ihra.org.au/forms/>

²⁴¹ Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (2021). *Gender*. Retrieved from <https://thl.fi/en/web/gender-equality/gender>

²⁴² Intersex Human Rights Australia (2012). *Forms and data collection*. IHRA. Retrieved from <https://ihra.org.au/forms/>

Intersex is a term for people born with variations of physical sex characteristics. There are many different intersex traits or variations. Do you have an intersex variation or innate variation of sex characteristic?

A more inclusive and expansive definition — such as for LGBTQI+ research — may read:²⁴³

Intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics are born with sex traits — including external and internal anatomy, hormones, and chromosome patterns — that do not conform to stereotypical binary notions of bodies assigned male or female. Intersex is an umbrella term used to describe a wide range of innate bodily variations in sex characteristics. This includes people who may use other language such as variations of sex development, disorders of sex development, differences of sex development, or specific medical diagnoses such as Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia (CAH) or Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome (AIS). There are many different intersex variations. According to the above definition, do you have an intersex variation or variation of sex characteristics?

It's important to include language relaying that intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics are congenital; therefore, wording such as 'born with' or 'innate' should be used.²⁴⁴ This helps with clarity as people may have “acquired variations in sex characteristics, for example, through medical gender transition, female genital mutilation or other trauma, or other health issues” that would not be considered intersex traits or innate variations of sex characteristics.²⁴⁵

These practices will help limiting misclassifying or missing people with intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics – helping to prevent false negatives or false positives.²⁴⁶ This also helps show an understanding of intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics – and the larger community – potentially resulting in greater completion rates and allowing for this information to be treated as sensitive data.²⁴⁷ Within LGBTQI+ research, it is important that data is able to be disaggregated by population and that data about intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics is able to be analysed. Specifically, in order to have data that provides useful information about intersex people and people with variations of sex

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

characteristics, intersex status should not be combined with data about gender (such as combining data about non-binary genders and intersex status). Doing so also perpetuates the misconception that intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics refer to gender. However, again, if data does not have a representative or statistically significant number of intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics, and especially if this data is not analysed and reported, this kind of research is more accurately described as LGBT or trans research.²⁴⁸

It is important to realise that in the field of education, it would be also possible to do research on how intersex issues are covered in school text books, teaching, equality planning and in teacher training as well as to analyse attitudes, opinions and knowledge base of teachers and students concerning intersex issues. Some of these aspects could also be included into surveys which are not directed to intersex respondents specifically.²⁴⁹ All in all, more research is need in Finland on intersex issues in education and other sectors of society and life.²⁵⁰

Recommendations

Based on the information shared in this brief and drawing on the Yogyakarta Principles plus 10,²⁵¹ Darlington Statement,²⁵² Third International Intersex Forum

²⁴⁸ Carpenter, M. (2012). *Researching intersex populations*. Intersex Human Rights Australia. Retrieved from <https://ihra.org.au/research/>

²⁴⁹ Lehtonen, J. (2019). Kun kaksijakoinen sukupuolijajattelu murtuu - sukupuolen ja seksuaalisuuden moninaisuus Tasa-arvobarometrissa [When gender binary thinking breaks - Gender and sexuality in the Equality Barometer]. In Teräsaho, M. & Närvi, J. (Eds), *Näkökulmia sukupuolten tasa-arvoon – analyseja tasa-arvobarometrasta 2017* [Perspectives on Gender Equality: Analyses from the 2017 Gender Equality Barometer] (pp. 136-157). Helsinki: Terveystieteiden tutkimuskeskus ja hyvinvoinnin laitos. Retrieved from https://www.julkari.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/137765/URN_ISBN_978-952-343-314-4.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

²⁵⁰ Pihlajamaa, M. (2021) Kohti sateenkaariystävällisempää Suomea. Tilannearvio seksuaali- ja sukupuolivähemmistöjen perus- ja ihmisoikeuksien toteutumisesta Suomessa 2021. [Towards a more inclusive Finland for LGBTIQ people. Situational assessment of the fundamental and human rights of sexual and gender minorities in Finland 2021]. Oikeusministeriön julkaisuja, Selvityksiä ja ohjeita 2021:26. Helsinki: Ministry of Justice. Page 36. Retrieved from <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-259-939-1>

²⁵¹ International Commission of Jurists. (2017). *Yogyakarta Principles: Additiofnal principles on the application of international human rights law in relation to sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics to complement the Yogyakarta Principles*. Retrieved from yogyakartaprinciples.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/A5_yogyakartaWEB-2.pdf

²⁵² Androgen Insensitivity Support Syndrome Support Group Australia, Intersex Trust Aotearoa New Zealand, Intersex Human Rights Australia, Black, E., Bond, K., Briffa, T., Carpenter, M., Cody, C., David, A., Driver, B., Hannaford, C., Harlow, E., Hart, B., Hart, P., Leckey, D., Lum, S., Mitchell, M. B., Nyhuis, E., O'Callaghan, B. ... Yovanovic, G.. (2017). *Darlington Statement*. Retrieved from <https://darlington.org.au/statement>

Malta Declaration,²⁵³ objectives of ISIO ry,^{254,255} and recommendations from the United Nations,²⁵⁶ European Parliament,²⁵⁷ Council of Europe,²⁵⁸ and intersex-led organisations,²⁵⁹ the implementation of the following recommendations would dramatically advance the human rights and wellbeing of children and youth with intersex traits or variations of sex characteristics in education:

On legislative and policy changes:

- 1) The Finnish government should follow through on their promises to protecting the bodily autonomy and self-determination of intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics and ask parliament to ban forced and coerced medically non-essential surgeries and other medical interventions performed on children and adolescents too young to provide consent for these procedures. This means that any non-vital surgeries or other interventions performed to 'normalise' the sex characteristics of minors without the informed consent of the individual involved would be prohibited.
- 2) Healthcare for intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics should be affirming, patient-centred, and patient-driven. Patients with intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics and their families should be treated with respect and professionalism by all staff involved in their healthcare.
 - a) Medical providers, including hospitals, should have a patient non-discrimination policies and bill of rights that includes sex characteristics that is clearly visible and communicated to patients and employees.
 - b) Multidisciplinary teams should include professionals in psychological and psychosocial support, experts in ethical and human rights issues, and representatives with intersex traits and variations of sex

²⁵³ Third International Intersex Forum (2013). *Malta declaration*. Retrieved from <https://ihra.org.au/24241/public-statement-by-the-third-international-intersex-forum/>

²⁵⁴ ISIO ry (n.d.). *Tavoitteet* [Objectives]. Retrieved from https://intersukupuolisuus.fi/?page_id=803

²⁵⁵ ISIO ry (n.d.). *Lausunto sosiaali- ja terveysministeriölle translaainsäädännön uudistukseen liittyen* [ISIO Statement to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health on renewal of trans legislation]. Retrieved from https://intersukupuolisuus.fi/?page_id=1248

²⁵⁶ United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (2016). *End violence and harmful medical practices on intersex children and adults, UN and regional experts urge*. United Nations. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=20739&LangID=E>

²⁵⁷ European Parliament (2019). *The rights of intersex people: European Parliament resolution of 14 February 2019 on the rights of intersex people (2018/2878(RSP))*. Retrieved from https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2019-0128_EN.html

²⁵⁸ Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (2017). *Promoting the human rights of and eliminating discrimination against intersex people*. Council of Europe. Retrieved from <https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-EN.asp?fileid=24232&lang=en>

²⁵⁹ interACT Advocates for Intersex Youth & Lambda Legal (2018). *Intersex-affirming hospital policy guide: Providing ethical and compassionate health care to intersex patients*. Retrieved from <https://securereservercdn.net/198.71.233.216/7np.6b9.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/interACT-Lambda-Legal-intersex-hospital-policies.pdf>

characteristics, such as patient advocates, and these teams should facilitate conversations with the patient about the health and wellbeing.

- c) Healthcare should be outlined in clinical practice guidelines, including providing comprehensive information and resources — including peer support groups — to parents and children when intersex traits or variation of sex characteristics are identified. Clinical practice guidelines should be focused on the patient's best interests, bodily autonomy, and right to participate in the decision-making process concerning their health in accordance with their age and maturity, in keeping with the obligations of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and other human rights treaties and legislation. Clinical practices should ensure that patients are not pressured into medical decision, subject to unnecessary examinations or procedures, or asked inappropriate or invasive questions.
 - d) People with intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics and their families must also be guaranteed access to appropriate information regarding variations of sex characteristics — including the ability to ask question — and all options and possibilities available for the healthcare, including access to psychosocial support and peer support. Patients should also have access to their full medical history.
 - e) Patients should be addressed and referred to by the name and pronouns as indicated by the patient, regardless of the patient's legal name, sex assigned at birth, appearance, or medical history, and the names, gender, and pronouns listed in medical records should be updated if prompted to do so by the patient.
- 3) As part of its reform, sex assigned at birth should no longer be specified in the personal identity code. In addition, sex/gender markers or classifications should not be a legal category on birth certificates or identity documents.
 - 4) As any child — intersex or not — may grow up to identify with a different gender from their sex assigned at birth, the Finnish government should ensure that people of all ages are able to legally correct sex/gender classifications and markers through a simple administrative process with no medical documentation required at the request of the individual concern.
 - 5) Official sex/gender markers or classifications, if needed at all, could include female/woman (F), male/man (M), alternative gender markers (such as X), or multiple options. These options should be open to all people. However, children with intersex traits and variations at sex characteristics should not be automatically assigned or classified as a third sex/gender when births are initially registered — as this may put children with intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics at higher risks of harm including forced or coerced medically non-essential surgeries and other medical interventions.
 - 6) The self-determination of intersex individuals and individuals with variations of

sex characteristics should be respected and protected. The gender — as well as other identities — of individuals with intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics should be affirmed. There should also be a ban for aversion therapies which attempt to change a person's gender identity or sexuality.

- 7) Equality and anti-discrimination law should be strengthened so that the relevant authorities are able to ensure comprehensive equality and anti-discrimination planning and hold schools and educational institutions that are not following the legislation accountable. Information campaigns and educational materials, as well as research on equality and anti-discrimination planning, should include intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics more than they are at the moment as they typically go without notice.
- 8) In future legislative changes, intersex people and intersex-led community organisations should meaningfully participate and be consulted regarding all issues and policies that affect them.

On changes in education policies and practices:

- 9) Curriculum, including textbooks, in early childhood education, compulsory education, and higher education should provide comprehensive, affirming, and accurate information on bodily diversity, including intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics, and the human rights of intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics. At the same time, they should support students in learning critical approach towards sex/gender binary thinking and resisting cis-, gender- and heteronormativity.
- 10) Curriculum should showcase the important contributions of intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics, particularly through whole-school approaches and subject integration. It should also ensure that students are presented with the history and consequences of discrimination and violence based on the grounds of sex characteristics, including intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics.
- 11) Schools and education institutions should develop content in collaboration with intersex-led organisations and promote its delivery by intersex people such as through special theme days or trainings. These organisations and individuals are also well positioned to assist in gender equality and anti-discrimination planning to ensure they adequately address the needs of students with intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics. Intersex-led organisations, Organisations advancing intersex human rights and individuals should be adequately funded into order to do this work.
- 12) Teacher education in universities should provide comprehensive, affirmative and accurate education on bodily diversity, including intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics — and instruction in how to teach it. This information should systematically address how to combat stigmatisation and

pathologisation and resist normative thinking and practices around sex traits and variations of sex characteristics in schools. In addition, teacher education should provide resources on how to meet the needs of children and youth with intersex traits or variations of sex characteristics. In doing so, obligatory courses should include specific information on intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics and provide training in practical methods on addressing the needs of children and youth with intersex traits or variations of sex characteristics.

- 13) Teaching pedagogy should challenge normative thinking around sex traits and the medicalisation and pathologisation of intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics. Additionally, teachers should have more information on the needs of children and youth with intersex traits or variations of sex characteristics; more professional education is needed to address the lack of knowledge in the field. The Finnish National Agency for Education and related municipalities should organise trainings for teachers to ensure the quality of teaching and give tools for teachers to address the needs of children and youth with intersex traits or variations of sex characteristics.
- 14) In compliance with the Equality Act, school guidelines, in particular gender equality and anti-discrimination planning, should specifically include information on intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics and protect intersex people and people with variations of sex characteristics.
- 15) Schools and educational institutions should develop affirmative policies and practices to support and protect employees with intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics.
- 16) Schools and educational institutions should recognise and support the reasonable accommodation and accessibility needs that some intersex students and students with variations of sex characteristics may require — such as medical leave.
- 17) School health and counselling services should have comprehensive knowledge and tools to help and support children and youth with intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics. School health and counselling services should have information available on help and support services — such as peer support groups — for students to ensure that they know where they can find services if and when they may need help and support.
- 18) The educational and career paths of youth with intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics can be impacted due to discrimination, violence and difficulties related to the interventions they have faced. It's vital to develop practices in career counselling and support systems — as well as in general classroom practices — that are understanding and responsive to the needs of students with intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics, including when addressing retention, disciplinary actions, and graduation rates.
- 19) Working together, students, their parents, teachers, and other educational employees need to ensure that the student culture and school climate is

inclusive of intersex students and students with variations of sex characteristics and that individuals are knowledgeable about sex, gender, and body diversity, including intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics.

- 20) School violence should be combatted more efficiently. It is vital that both equality planning and anti-violence programmes include considerations regarding sex, gender, sexuality and body diversity, including intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics. Together with students, schools should plan and implement better measures to prevent bullying, discrimination, and physical and emotional violence towards intersex students and students with variations of sex characteristics. It is also important to educate and train professionals in and out of schools to be able to properly address and combat this violence.

- 21) School spaces and activities should be transformed so that sex and gender binary divisions are not the only option — or an option at all — in schools. For physical school spaces, this includes but is not limited to school toilets, dressing rooms, and rooms for showering. For activities such as in physical education lessons, practices should be transformed to be safe, inclusive and respectful of each student's needs and privacy.

- 22) Research in the field of education on topics regarding intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics is greatly needed. Within the field of education, research topics could include how intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics are covered in school textbooks, teaching, teacher training, and equality planning as well as on the attitudes, opinions, and knowledge base of teachers and students concerning intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics. This research should be funded, conducted, and distributed much more readily than it currently is. Research also needs to recognise and respond to the needs of the community. Ethical issues should be taken into account, and intersex people and activist working with intersex issues should be involved and engaged with through the research project.



Intersex – New Interdisciplinary Approaches (INIA)
Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions
Innovative Training Network
Project No. 859869



To cite this brief: Keating, A. & Lehtonen, J. Intersex traits and variations of sex characteristics in education: A Finnish context. INIA: Intersex New Interdisciplinary Approaches, DCU, 2022.