

## **Bullying – An Epidemic**

High school and middle school bullying in the United States has become an epidemic. Bullying affects the entire student population, but members of the LGBTQ community take the brunt of the abuse. Among them, transsexual people are routinely victimized. Too often cases of serious bullying are not reported to the teachers and school administrators, and on top of that, there is a disturbing tendency among school administrators to not address these instances. So what is Transgender Bullying?

### **Transgender Bullying Statistics**

According to a study conducted by the National Center of Transgender Equality (2011):

- 82% of transgender youth report that they feel unsafe at school
- 44% of them had been abused physically (ex. punched, shoved, etc.)
- 67% of them had been bullied online
- 64% of them had their property stolen or destroyed

These numbers show that more than half of these students are being victimized on a regular basis. Although the treatment of LGBTQ children does vary across the country, that was a national study. Bullying is present all across the country, and it is almost guaranteed that no matter where they live, a transgendered child will encounter bullying at their school.

A troubling statistic is that two out of three kids are victims of cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is especially problematic, because it victimizes the children in their own home. They have no escape from that kind of abuse.

Aside from the immediate physical and emotional trauma that is incurred by the victims of bullying, there are other long term effects of abuse. Children who are frequently bullied may be intimidated to go to school, and they are less likely to enrich themselves academically. Bullying can push kids to engage in risky behaviors, such as drug or alcohol abuse.

### **The Effects of Bullying**

Nuttbrock and colleagues (2010) surveyed young transgender women in the New York City metropolitan area, and their findings indicated a *direct* connection with being victimized through bullying and serious depression. They also found a link between being bullied and feeling suicidal.

According to the United States Center for Disease Control (2014), compared to non-LGBT children, LGBT children who felt high levels of rejection were:

- About **six** times more likely to be seriously depressed
- More than **eight** times more likely to attempt suicide
- More than **three** times more likely to abuse illegal drugs

- More than **three** times more likely to engage in risky sexual behavior

Transgender youth also skip school to avoid encountering bullies. A recent study found that more than half of transgendered students skip school on a regular basis (Greytak, Kosciw, and Diaz 2009). These students are already at risk, and failing academically sets them up for a difficult adulthood. Schools should be safe places, and there is really no excuse for teachers and school administrators to be complacent when faced with these horrific statistics.

### **Testimonial from a Victim**

The following is a testimonial from a transsexual student.

These guys followed me saying that I was a gay male. I was with my friend, and they started chasing us around. They threw me in the trash. They started calling me names like homo and hit me. My friend, a guy, saved me. Well, it made me feel like, "Wow! If I have to go through this in order to live happy, I just didn't want to be alive." (Grossman et al. 2009).

The abuse this student has encountered is already pushing them toward suicide, and the tragedy is that these early years of one's life are vital for a person to build their own identity and sense of confidence. For this student their early years are filled with ridicule and victimization at the hands of bullies. This could have serious effects on them down the road.

### **Points to think about:**

1. Why do you think LGBTQ individuals are more likely to be bullied?
2. How you experienced any form of bullying? How did it make you feel?
3. Is there any justification in Islam for bullying others?
4. If you knew someone who was bullying a LGBTQ individual, what would you say to them?