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**Title: Rights through alliances; Findings from a European project tackling homophobic and transphobic bullying in schools through the engagement of families and young people**

(Authors' final submitted version):

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**Abstract:**

This paper draws on findings from a European project 'Rights through alliances: Innovating and networking both within homes and schools' (RAINBOW-HAS) conducted 2013-2015. It built collaboration between six European Union countries to analyse and improve the rights of children and youth regarding sexual orientation and gender identity in educational settings. The main focus of discussion derives from a secondary discourse analysis following thematic analyses of the qualitative interviews undertaken with a range of different families, schools and community associations across these European countries, which provide a snapshot of contemporary practice. We discuss the relative silence of social work in challenging homophobic and transphobic bullying, given their potential in promoting family and young people's engagement.

**Keywords:**

Discourse analysis, education, Europe, family intervention, homophobic bullying, LGBT parenting, schools.

## **Introduction**

Discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation is prohibited both by article 13 of the Treaty of the European Union (2012) and European Charter of Fundamental Rights (2000) alongside equality legislation and national constitutions established by Europe's individual member states. Two reports published by the Council of Europe (ILGA-Europe, 2015) and internationally (Amnesty International, 2014), have sought to raise the profile of challenges for persons belonging to the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community. The idea that Europe enshrines fundamental values crucial to LGBT rights bears witness to the success of its many social movements so that the LGBT agenda in the EU is no longer a marginalised issue. However, a significant gap remains between the legislation and institutions in the EU member states and the actual conditions and circumstances of LGBT individuals and their communities on the ground (ILGA-Europe, 2015) with a lack of robust, comparable data on the respect, protection and fulfilment of the fundamental rights of LGBT persons in relation to discrimination and hate crime. This paper discusses outcomes of the European project 'Rights through Alliances: Innovating and Networking Both Within Homes And Schools', (thereafter referred to as 'RAINBOW-HAS'), conducted between 2013-2015. RAINBOW-HAS was co-funded by the Fundamental Rights and Citizenship Programme of the EU. Collaboration between participating institutions specifically: Ararteko (ES) (*Project co-ordinator*): Akademia Pedagogiki Specjalnej Marii Grzegorzewskiej (PL), Associació de Famílies Lesbianes i Gais de Catalunya (ES), Comune di Milano (IT), ECIP Foundation (BG), Farapi (ES),

Jekino Educatie vzw (BE), Middlesex University Higher Education Corporation (UK), Synergia (IT) (*Project partners*): COC Amsterdam (NL), Gemeente Amsterdam (NL), LSVD (DE), Centro di Iniziativa Gay Onlus (IT), University of East Anglia (UK) (*Project associates*) were located across six European Union countries, (Bulgaria, Belgium, Italy, Poland, Spain and the UK) investigated homophobic bullying across schools in five of these countries (not Belgium) and examined sexual orientation and gender identity in educational settings.

Research indicates that homophobic, transphobic and heteronormative bullying within education has severe consequences for children and young people's safety and wellbeing (Smith et al, 2014; Tippett et al, 2010).

Education, and schools in particular, are known to make a difference (Birkett et al., 2009). There is however a relative silence from social work on this issue (Cocker and Hafford-Letchfield, 2010; Mishna et al, 2009) despite the potential role it plays in the provision of proper, safe and supportive spaces for children, young people and their families and carers (Guasp, 2010). Freedom from discrimination and harm is essential to be able to learn, develop and flourish (Rivers, 2001; Adams et al, 2004; DePalma and Atkinson, 2009; Monk, 2009). Schools are also potentially influential institutions in combating humiliating stereotypes or the perpetuation of prejudice fostering social exclusion, discrimination, or the denial of human dignity (Adam et al, 2014). Whilst anti-bullying intervention programmes have been implemented in the last three decades on a large scale in Europe (Farrington and Ttofi, 2010) and internationally (UNESCO, 2012), little cross national learning has occurred. Non-targeted anti-bullying interventions in schools for LGBT children and youth may also be hampered by deficits in a nation's broader context for homophobia, heterosexism and heteronormativity (Walton, 2006) and impacts on all children, not just those experiencing it. There is more to learn from

research into the multifaceted nature of bullying in the education environment, for example, the roles played by teachers, parents and carers, social workers and other children and how different types of bullying are conceptualised and acted on.

RAINBOW-HAS looked at how its participating countries responded to these diverse issues and provided opportunities for cross-fertilisation of ideas within a context where there are different legislation and policies, institutions, cultures as well as socio-economic and political differences. Whilst each participating country had a different starting point, there were many commonalities. Good practice was not just associated with advanced development but in finding ways to tackle issues within countries that are geographically and culturally varied. Alongside building a transnational community, RAINBOW-HAS brought important concepts from Europe into the individual domestic contexts through its direct engagement with young people and their families.

This paper firstly outlines the range of diverse activities within the overall project, before reporting on the broader context in which lesbian and gay parents in particular, discussed their children's experiences of bullying. We focus on how their accounts dealt with a heteronormative and gender neutral social/political context. Given that homophobic and transphobic bullying has become a legitimate object of social concern within civil society RAINBOW-HAS asked critical questions about bullying from young people and their carers own perspectives. These are important for social workers not generally situated in educational environments, but working with those affected. By placing bullying that takes place at school within a broader political and cultural context, these perspectives help to conceptualise bullying within education

primarily as a discourse as opposed to simply harm (see Monk, 2009). The main focus of discussion emerges from a discursive analysis of the themes from qualitative interviews undertaken with a range of different families, schools and community associations in order to provide a snapshot of contemporary practice across the European context. Through this approach, we identified discourses used to address homophobia. We conclude by reflecting on what social work can learn from these discourses, given the relative silence of the profession about the effects of homophobia in public sector services and its own role in countenancing this.

### **European Context**

The EU for Fundamental Rights (ILGA-2015) survey data on hate crime and discrimination against LGBT persons in all EU Member States and Croatia, with 93,000 respondents, is the largest and most comprehensive survey of its kind to date. It demonstrated a recurrent high incidence of homophobic and transphobic violence (6%) across the region and reflects a European-wide ongoing trend. Under-reporting of these issues, together with impunity for perpetrators, remains a chronic impediment to effective prevention of homophobia and transphobia. LGBT people were asked about experience of discrimination, violence, verbal abuse or hate speech on the grounds of their sexual orientation or gender identity. 19 % of respondents experienced harassment believed to be partly or entirely based on LGBT identities with Trans people experiencing an average of 37% discrimination (ILGA-Europe, 2015).

For LGBT young people completing the survey, respondents (18-24yrs) were most likely to identify widespread discrimination based on sexual orientation in their country of residence and were less likely to be 'out' to 'most' or 'all' in

their personal and professional lives. In the previous EU survey (EU-FRA, 2014, p36); secondary schools were the least tolerant environments, with 67 % of all respondents disguising being LGBT during their schooling before the age of 18. Boys especially opted for complete secrecy. Almost 72% of gay men and 73% of bisexual men reported being never out to anyone at school. The youngest respondents were most likely to avoid being out at home for fear of being assaulted, threatened or harassed and to suffer from discrimination and violence. Eighteen to 24-year olds were twice as likely as those aged 40 to 54, and three times as likely as those 55+, to have experienced violence in the year before the survey.

Simultaneously, the number of European countries with LGBT marriage equality is increasing (11 countries in 2015). In most of these countries, parenting rights enjoyed by heterosexual families, such as maternity and paternity leave and pay, now include lesbian and gay families. However, some countries in Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia, possibly influenced by Russia's homophobic policies, have introduced more restrictive measures in their national constitutions and legislation. Croatia, Hungary, Slovakia, Poland, and Macedonia have all passed laws restricting marriage as the union solely between woman and man, making marriage equality very unlikely in the near future (glaad.org).

With regards to bullying, in 2015, the UN General Assembly's Third Committee adopted its first ever resolution (UN, 2015). Although explicit references to homo- transphobia were stripped out during negotiations, it makes reference to bullying related to discrimination and stereotyping, and highlights greater risk for vulnerable groups. A significant 'UN Special Representative on Violence against Children' report on the causes and effects of bullying reports was

commissioned in 2016 and at the time of writing is yet to report (See: [srsg.violenceagainstchildren.org](http://srsg.violenceagainstchildren.org)).

Most of the literature and theorists on sexuality politics, particularly within social work come from reformist traditions (Brown and Cocker, 2011). Homophobia and transphobia remain marginalised areas within social work research, education and professional practice (Dunk-West et al, 2009; Cocker and Hafford-Letchfield, 2010). Discourses on sexualities and gender politics in families have attracted a level of academic debate and theorising of lesbian, gay and queer parenting which is not yet mainstream (Hicks, 2011; Weeks, 2001). These have asserted changing family forms as relationship ‘innovators’ but often in a hostile environment. Coming from a social constructionist position, Weeks (2001) concept of identity, familial and social relationships (‘families of choice’) contributed significantly to debates internationally. Hicks’s (2011) research engages with narratives and practices concerning lesbian and gay parenting within everyday contexts and theorised how concepts and social categories are produced and put to use, e.g., kinship, family, race, gender, sexuality, lesbian, gay. Those arguing *against* assimilative positions have critiqued the emulation of heterosexuality and mainstream ways of living which buy into the ideology of the family as the organizing logic of intimate and social life (see Bell and Binnie, 2000). Similarly, significant studies of lesbian and gay parenting (Patterson 2005; Golombok 2007) including adoption and fostering over the last two decades (Skeates and Jabri 1988; Hicks, 2011; Brown 2011; Cocker 2011; Mellish et al., 2013) have drawn attention to the outcomes for children growing up in different families and



how this has made a significant difference to European culture and society in conceptualising families.

Within compulsory education, there are substantial issues regarding LGBT invisibility, McDermott (2010) captured evidence on the disadvantages experienced by young people in particular, homophobic bullying, mental health issues, rejection from family and friends and increased risk of homelessness. The extent and impact of this disadvantage constitutes a major evidence gap in being able to identify the role of sexual and gender identities as predictors of health, social and economic outcomes for children and young people and in targeting health or education interventions and equipping social workers for such roles. McDermott (2010) highlighted links between homophobic and transphobic bullying in schools since bullying is sparked by expressing behaviours seen as breaking gender norms as well as sexual orientation and by addressing homophobic bullying in schools, he suggests, may help in challenging transphobic bullying.

### **Study Design**

The RAINBOW-HAS project was commissioned as a result of initiatives promoted by the UN Human Rights Committee Yogyakarta Principles (see Amnesty International resolutions 17/19 (2011) and 27/32 (2014)) and the United Nations international consultation to address homophobic bullying in educational institutions (UNESCO, 2012). A qualitative design facilitated an in-depth understanding of the research topics. In the initial stages a detailed biblio-sitography was produced documenting each participating country's specific legislative; policy and political context. Each biblio-sitography facilitated a cross comparison of benchmarked themes emerging from specific research studies and thematic synthesis of their findings alongside any surveys

already undertaken. The biblio-sitography highlighted sources of current guidance and support issued by key organisations proactive in the sector.

The methodology for the subsequent empirical work (see Arateko, 2015 for the full report) involved qualitative in-depth semi structured interviews with families including lesbian, gay, bisexual, heterosexual parents and carers. We explored their perspectives of homo-transphobic bullying and experiences of engagement in school communities; undertook case studies of children and young people who had experienced homophobic or transphobic bullying gathered from interviews with key informants; reviewed relevant family associations and networks involved in countering LGBT bullying; and conducted focus groups with stakeholders (teachers, principals, educational psychologists, social workers and advocacy organisations) to discuss and respond to the findings from the in-depth interviews with parents and children as described above.

Ethical approval was granted in each participating country via the lead partner's own governance structure. The interviews of families and the gathering of case studies followed loosely structured interviews using a template developed by the steering group of Principal Investigators in each country. Research questions were based on guidance notes provided by this European-wide steering group. In particular, we were interested in:

- The nature of problems experienced by families within schools and the strategies they had devised to overcome these problems.
- The presence and impact of family/school alliances on finding solutions.
- The feasibility of developing, piloting and evaluating family based interventions together with schools and their communities in combating homo-transphobic bullying.

There were challenges in terms of using country specific terminology. This led to discussion about definitions and use of terms at regular partner meetings between the participating research teams, including how and when particular terms were used by each country during the research and to ensure that this did not compromise the integrity of data. An example was the use of the term 'homosexual' in some East European countries which has since been rejected in the UK. This reflects how language is a living thing with changing usage over time and with progress (ILGA, 2016). Snowball sampling was used to access interviewees and case studies through personal contacts, parents' associations in schools, associations of relatives of LGBT young people, and lesbian and gay community associations. Purposive sampling helped achieve cultural and geographical variability. No team in any of the participating countries were successful in accessing any transgender families or children. The 'T' was kept in our report of findings rather than excluding it as whilst some of the issues for the trans community will be different and merit separate investigation, some conclusions were drawn from the research overall that remain applicable to the trans community. Bullying on the basis of perceived sexual orientation or gender identity is a specific type of bullying and is often defined as homophobic bullying. However it is not only LGBT youth who experience homophobic and transphobic bullying, but also learners who are perceived as not conforming to existing gender norms and stereotypes even if they do not identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. As such homophobic and transphobic bullying both constitute a form of gender-based violence and should be considered together.

Table 1 provides an overview of the overall sample achieved.

***Table 1: Characteristics of sample for RAINBOW-HAS qualitative data***

<b>Country</b>	<b>Qualitative interviews with LGB parents/carers</b>	<b>Qualitative interviews with heterosexual parents/carers</b>	<b>Case studies of children and young people who experienced bullying</b>	<b>Focus Groups</b>	<b>Interviews with relevant organisations and associations</b>
<b>Bulgaria</b>	3	7	4	3 (n=40)	3
<b>Italy</b>	4	11	6	1 (n=17)	3
<b>Poland</b>	8	2	5	1 (n=14)	2
<b>Spain</b>	5	5	5	3 (n=28)	3
<b>UK</b>	7	7	5	2 (n=75)	4
<b>Totals</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>10 (n=174)</b>	<b>15</b>

Data was subject to thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2004) and the detailed findings for each country were reported separately (see Arateko, 2015).

### **Discourse Analysis**

The remainder of this paper reports on a discourse analysis drawing on a synthesis of these themes and findings which, whilst providing only a snapshot of contemporary practice across the European context, generated some interesting cross comparative and discursive analysis. Drawing on Fairclough's work (1989), the intersecting and combination of categories within the thematic data enabled the identification of patterns of everyday talk and practices that legitimize power and serve to reinforce or challenge views across those 'speaking' about family and school life in relation to LGBT issues. Given the amount of data generated and the complexity of narratives present within and between each country's samples, analysis of the data across all these sources presented challenges. For example, identifying themes, the absence of information about the historical and political context of each country limited the comparability of experience between countries. Discourse analysis has enabled us to transcend these divisions, providing an opportunity to explore similarities in experiences regardless of inter and intra country variations.

The three key discourses that emerged from the data were based on binary categories: firstly the notion of the 'insider/outsider' in school communities', including whose voices are dominant or subverted in this environment; secondly, narratives about blame and survival in relation to bullying behaviour and experiences; and thirdly, the 'problematization vs ordinariness of LGBT families' in a heteronormative world.

### **Insider/outsider discourses in school communities**

Many of the factors which contributed to how homo-transphobic bullying was conceptualised, understood and responded to were based on relational dynamics between school personnel and the families in their local communities. This was determined by social, religious and cultural influences

on the perceived role of these two institutions; the family and school. These determined who was responsible for related issues such as sex and relationship education; what they expected from each other ('the rules') and the flexibility and mode of communication between them. For example in Bulgaria and Poland, strong taboos regarding sexual orientation, homosexuality, and sexuality caused difficulties for parents and teachers to even speak about such issues, enveloped by the historical, political and social taboos on communication around sexuality and differences. In Bulgaria, heterosexual adults and children felt unprepared and uncomfortable in discussing what they thought were sensitive issues resulting in silences or heavy disguise when referring to issues of sexual or gender identities. Both parents and teachers identified a lack of personal experience and practical tools to bring the topic of sexuality out into the open. This was reinforced by mass culture and a lack of community support, given that NGO and LGBTI associations tend to organise informally and establish small, closed communities, not easily accessible. The Polish heterosexual parents interviewed spoke firmly against compulsory sex education in schools. They wanted control over timing and content and were anxious about introducing the issue of 'homosexuality' which they feared might impact on their child's 'choices' later on around sexual identity.

In Spain, families exerted a strong utilitarian view of formal education where curricular is geared towards career orientated learning. Same-sex parents however looked to schools for wider socialisation regarding values for living and working together and to enhance mutual respect. Whilst sex and relationship education is delegated to schools, it does not routinely involve sexual diversity and LGB families sought to influence this. Spanish family-school relationships tended to be individualised and focused on sharing

information on children's academic results. Here too, the sexuality taboo permeates relationships between families and schools, where participants referred to avoidance on both sides in making any explicit references to sexuality or sexual orientation, including a reluctance to intervene where bullying occurs. This individualised approach mitigated against any development of active parent-teacher associations, thus preventing parental engagement and involvement. Again, culturally a lack of involvement stems from the fact that affective-sexual diversity and gender identity are considered private and personal topics not directly related to the concerns of most 'normal' families. LGB families then tended to isolate themselves or try to fit in and adhere to heteronormative expectations. The clear distinction between private and public life in Spain contributed to this insider/outsider approach, with the exception of Trans issues, which are more visible thus forcing families to explain and tackle it publically.

Discourses on homosexuality in Italy have also remained particularly difficult despite progress on other forms of discrimination such as race and disability. Parents believed that there was more justification for a public dialogue in these areas. In general, families interviewed felt that sexuality and relationship topics were still taboo, but unlike Bulgaria and Spain, they delegated these conversations to the school. Lesbian and gay parents however talked about the need to broach the topic earlier to pre-empt inevitable questions that may arise from their own children's comparisons of their situations with other children at school.

In the UK, all the lesbian and gay families interviewed had thought a lot about issues for their child(ren) in relation to school integration. All had significant social capital (they owned their own homes and were in working households)

which influenced where their child went to school. This social capital was also present in the LGB samples from other countries which perhaps reflect the limitations of the snowball sampling method used. However, even so, all UK lesbian and gay families spoke of at least one issue within the school environment that made the family's composite difference more noticeable. Their experiences were one of having to constantly 'come out' to a class teacher, to other children and their parents and they developed their own strategies to ensure that their children's educational experiences were as good as possible. This included: explaining to the teacher about their families as early as possible; making a conscious decision to be active in the school (in parent teacher organisations; as school Governors; and being present in the playground before and after school). For children in secondary school, protective factors such as different types of alliances formed between themselves and other young people. Having structures in place, being confident about a school's legislative responsibilities regarding equality and being able to assert their rights whilst relying on good dialogue with people in the community, were all seen as critical.

It appeared that parents viewed their role as managing the integration of their children into their community, including the school community. LGB families face different expectations in this role, with questions always being asked about their family structure, form and creation, unlike heterosexual families. These different discourses for LGB parents in this study meant they had to manage this, most often from the position as an 'outsider'. Silence about sexuality issues within the school community appeared to be consciously used as a way of avoiding conflict or dealing directly with issues of discrimination. Capitalising on the rich experience that LGB families have in dealing with adversity however gave some indication of the resilience of these families, as



all LGB families in all countries included in our sample whilst describing experiences of adversity, minimised these. In a bid to move from 'outsider' to 'insider', some LGB parents had become involved in the school's management in order to make changes to accommodate a wider range of diversity from families within the school community.

### **Blame and survival narratives**

Lesbian and gay families in particular have occupied a number of positions within public discourses over the past forty years. The historical narrative is one of 'blame', where they were blamed for 'immoral behaviour', which somehow subverted children (Richardson 1981). In the 1980s, at the point where researchers began investigating the effect on children of having two mothers, the narrative was one of 'survival' – being 'as good as', and not damaging children's development. A number of themes emerged from the data around responsibility, accountability and tensions that showed how homo-transphobic bullying was conceptualised and responded to across the countries involved.

LGB families in Poland for example were highly critical of Polish teachers, seen as too conventional, traditional and unconscientious about issues to do with sexuality. They explicitly did not want teachers to be responsible for instruction in this area as they felt teachers lacked credibility and sensitivity. Given the religious context, they were generally afraid of 'coming out' in terms of the potential 'burden' on their child. They perceived that teachers were not really interested, and as one parent put it: "why tell someone who doesn't care"? There were significant differences between the experiences of LGB parents and families living in cities and rural areas in Poland. Homophobic verbal abuse was commonplace and children with LGB parents tended to hide

their situation. Parents and students reported that teachers were helpless when witnessing homophobia, and did not know how to react or have the language to respond and in some instances, they were afraid of the bully themselves. Training was seen as an essential tool for teachers, particularly as they tended to convey their own personal views and opinions on LGBT issues freely. The Polish field work team found that whilst on the one hand homophobia was not common, when it did occur, staff were not at all equipped to deal with it leading to high risk situations for young people. High levels of homophobia were perceived as associated with 'teachers' incompetence'.

In Spain, teachers lacked information on how to handle situations with children from LGBT families and agreed that they needed training but were also seen by LGBT parents not to use resources that were available. Sex and relationship education programmes in Spanish schools do not generally address diverse relationships and families but are more focused on reproduction. The general feeling from LGBT parents was that outside of the child's academic performance gave no cause to interfere. LGBT parents looked to teachers to legitimise diverse sexual orientations because of their authority and daily closeness to children, thus expected to include these discussions in their everyday teaching. LGBT parents felt that their differences were dealt with passively and again they were active in ensuring tolerance of their presence by engaging with the school community. Like UK parents, they had to constantly 'come out', talk to teachers and explain their situation. LGBT parents described themselves as 'the drivers' within education by providing talks, books and posters and also as active educators, not only to their own children but also towards other children, parents and teachers on sexual diversity issues.

Homo-transphobic bullying was mostly perceived as an issue which involved verbally offensive expressions. Italian interviewees felt that proactive actions and responses were the responsibility of individual teachers or head teachers, given that there were no protocols or ministerial directives to follow. Similarly, teachers' reactions to homo-transphobic bullying were seen as involving denial or indifference and sometimes delegated to a third external party such as a support service. Some examples were given where teachers joined in the mockery, rather than taking a stand against the bullying.

Those families interviewed in Bulgaria noted increasing violence within schools. Teachers blamed the parents for this behaviour. Examples of name calling, mocking and isolation from peer groups were not recognized as forms of bullying – but seen as natural part of growing up, and that 'real' bullying involved physical violence. The Bulgarian research team surmised that the reasons for this increase in violence was complex and related to the ex-Soviet culture that underpins their society, going beyond homophobia/transphobia. Both parents and teachers in Bulgaria and Spain did not attribute responsibility to children for using offensive words, which they could not understand or mean, thus making this too difficult to explain or educate against. In summary, there was much blame but little shared responsibility between schools and families and often the aggressor rather than the victim of bullying received most attention.

In Spain, situations of abuse were described as being a normal part of growing up and a natural rejection of difference. Culturally, the family in Spain is a deeply conservative institution rooted in heteronormative gender patterns; this was seen as both a hostile environment for LGBT persons as well as supportive. Some families interviewed, whose children had experienced

homophobic bullying, also expected their child to stand up to conflict and make more effort at integration. Physical or emotional weakness was identified as a factor that could bring about bullying. Likewise being different can be reinforced by strong social pressure to maintain gender roles and heteronormative patterns which underestimates the risk of homophobic bullying that children might experience when not conforming to gender or hetero norms. LGB parents were more attuned to this, being aware of potential rejection or discrimination against their children.

In the UK, less blame narratives were discovered within the interviews, as both parents and teachers were more aware of their rights and responsibilities. However, policies were recognised as limited and most of the emphasis was on the school culture and its response to all forms of bullying. A multi-agency response was seen essential for vulnerable children. Parents expected staff to respond to any bullying reported to them and assessed the impact of teachers own values and prejudices on the quality of response. Similarly staff were all expected to have basic skills in responding appropriately to children experiencing bullying behaviour and this included being child focussed rather than procedurally oriented.

### **Problematism vs. ordinariness of LGBT families**

With the recent landmark legislative changes in a number of the European countries included in this study, the previous discourse of 'blame/survival' has now changed from 'problematism' to one of being 'ordinary', where LGB families can move beyond reductionist narratives and be recognised for their strengths and their contributions to their local communities, including schools. These bely many challenges ahead. For too long LGB's negotiation and use of public community spaces, such as schools, hospitals and working environments,

have not been discrimination free. This history has meant that they have developed skills in marrying the public and private aspects of their lives. We were interested in examining how this took place in the everyday lives of the families that took part in the study. We also wanted to explore the external factors that influenced the way in which LGB families were integrated into their communities.

This discourse contained the most inter-country variance, and differences in terms of where countries were positioned on a continuum of either problematizing or accepting LGBT citizens as equal members of communities. These differences centred on whether or not individual countries had a legal framework that acknowledged the rights of LGBT individuals and families as identical to heterosexual individuals and families. Polish heterosexual families indicated their general support for LGBT families and were keen to support legal rights including adoption. UK parents thought that education services needed to develop more complexity in their thinking and management of equalities issues and difficulties, which included LGBT issues. A number of LGB parents interviewed said that their sexuality was not the most important thing with regards to their children or schooling and it was important that the school's culture was one which demonstrated confidence in dealing with all kinds of diversity, not just LGBT. This was a better marker of how the culture of the school fostered a sense of 'belonging' within their community, which consciously welcomed conversations about equality rather than closing them down. For those schools who had successfully negotiated a broader equality position within their communities (and some of these journeys were not without conflict for staff and families), there was a wider benefit to other areas of school life, including for other families positioned outside of a non-nuclear structure. In these schools, this broader equalities position also benefitted how

different types of bullying were conceptualised and acted on, including an appreciation of the multifaceted nature of bullying in the education environment, which placed homo-transphobic bullying into a broader political and social context. These schools and teachers understood that homophobic bullying wasn't about necessarily being gay or lesbian; schools reported that homophobic bullying was not solely targeted at LGBT students. Some of the case studies examined as part of this study concerned students who did not identify as lesbian or gay. This is not to minimise the effects of such bullying practices on LGBT students, rather to position homophobic bullying within a wider context that then becomes the concern of all educators because it can potentially affect any student.

For those countries with equalities legislation that included protections for LGBT citizens, intervention is routinized or normalised because LGBT families are considered on the same basis as everyone else. There are challenges; however, as legislation does not stop discrimination occurring, as can be seen in UK history through the example of its equality legislation (Cocker and Hafford-Letchfield, 2010). In summary, the findings from this study highlighted that anti-discriminatory legislation per se represents a significant stepping stone with wide ranging difference where it is not underpinning hate crimes.

## **Discussion**

Given the discourses identified and discussed here, Europe provides a 'practice' (Foucault, 1980) for putting key concepts about homophobic and transphobic bullying in motion. We looked at how these issues in Europe are discursively practiced in relation to their different national settings. As well as building a transnational community, RAINBOW-HAS brought important concepts from Europe about the wider issues facing LGBT families into the domestic contexts.

Rupp, (2014) talks about the dynamic of 'practicing' Europe on the ground, from above, from inside and outside institutional settings and in both reformist and radical forms of organising in relation to LGBT activism. Placing bullying in a broader political and cultural context assists thinking about it primarily as a discourse as opposed to simply a harm (see Monk, 2009). Enquiring into the speakability or acceptability of focusing solely on homophobic and transphobic bullying within a broader bullying agenda makes discourse a key plank for challenging bullying in schools. Looking at the transnational and national sphere is useful to conceptualise a new institutionalized dimension; that of the openness to sexual diversity as a quintessential feature of Western Societies.

There are challenges in studying homophobic and transphobic bullying including the dangers of homogenising LGBT families and their issues to a single social category (Valentine et al, 2010). The RAINBOW-HAS research team faced methodological and ethical dilemmas, such as accessing potential interviewees or gaining consent, which can become more complex and significant when the research involves work with a 'vulnerable' group of children or youth or in a unsupported context. We recognised that working with self-identified lesbian and gay young people is particularly sensitive because of the specific laws which frame (or until recently have framed) homosexuality and because of the way in which children are popularly constructed as asexual or innocent. The complexity of this topic and its reliance on transnational grassroots solidarities as well as conceptualising meaning, practice and identity within the context of the research area highlights an understudied movement and its ties to European integration. One of the undervalued outcomes of the study was in its support of solidarity and Europeanisation of LGBT combatting of homophobic bullying across the

nine organisations involved and the families and institutions that they worked with.

Another downside was the study's potential to reinforce an 'East', 'West' European dichotomy, and binary thinking structures which frame differences as being due to more liberal, democratic or modern thinking in the West. This was evident in the distinct differences between the UK and other participating countries given its advances in LGBT legislation and policies and as a more secular society. It has been argued that the EU lacks specific mechanisms to enforce human rights norms, let alone bring about reforms, and as new countries join, they will continue to lag behind in providing the full spectrum of human rights to LGBT people (Csaky, 2016). As seen in the narratives, there is also a conservative-religious component as well as economic hardship experienced by many of the region's citizens which feeds antigay rhetoric. Symbolic matters often come to the fore when populist politicians need scapegoats, and emotionally charged topics, such as the rights of LGBT people, which can be used to distract attention from official mismanagement and difficult structural reforms.

Bullying is a serious problem for young LGBT people; however, when it comes to children in LGB households the issue is not so clear cut. There is a need to consider the broader context in which LGB parents discuss their children's experiences of bullying. Their accounts were found to be discursively and rhetorically designed to deal with a heterosexist social/political context. LGB parents face a dilemma of stake and accountability: reports of 'no bullying' risk being heard as implausible given the prevalence of the bullying theme; at the same time, reports of bullying are equally if not more risky, raising the possibility of charges of bad parenting as it is used to undermine LGB parenting.



Clarke et al (2004) explore the detail of the parents' accounts of bullying to illustrate how they are designed to negotiate this web of accountability, and argue for the importance for critical social psychology of analysing the talk of socially/politically marginalized groups.

Enquiring into the speakability of homophobic bullying raises the question as to what happens and what is enabled when this discourse becomes the key plank for challenging homophobia in schools (Monk 2009). Monk also suggests the reading of contemporary debates about homophobic bullying as a 'history of the present', and this perspective can be applied here. Indeed, homophobic bullying is a particularly rich site for this form of political meaning-making, located as it is at the intersection of discourses of education and childhood. Monk and Hendrick (2003) remind us that education can be perceived as a key tool for unlocking individual potential and for creating a fairer society and features within debates from liberal and progressive political paradigms.

### **Conclusion and implications for social work**

RAINBOW-HAS sought to analyse and improve the situation surrounding the rights of children and young people with regard to sexual orientation and gender identity in the educational community in the broadest sense. The project focused on educational institutions, teaching staff and family associations of all types in an effort to create an educational environment open to sexual diversity from childhood, an environment that protects against any form of discrimination or harassment on the grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity, i.e., homophobic or transphobic behaviours.

The project facilitated an international meeting of Ministers of Education at UNESCO to catalyse responses by Member States to homophobic and

transphobic bullying in educational institutions to stimulate a policy statement and to launch the report on the status of homophobic and transphobic violence in education. The report produced reviewed the evidence gathered by the project on the scale and nature of the problem and took stock of progress made in the response. It confirmed within its limited parameters that discrimination and concealment of sexual orientation are prevalent throughout every age, gender and geographical category. Twenty-two good practices were identified by the RAINBOW-HAS project (see Arateko, 2015), five of which involved a formal evaluation of a piloted intervention which was led by young people and families in partnership with school to combat bullying, particularly homophobic and transphobic bullying.

This paper focused on a discourse analysis across RAINBOW-HAS findings and suggests that besides legal and institutional change, there is a need for much closer collaboration, communication and engagement across those working with situations involving homophobic/transphobic bullying. There is an urgent need to actively create meaningful networks which engage families and their children from all backgrounds to share the responsibility of protecting rights, taking on commitments, handling bullying, promoting support programmes and generating positive cultures and conditions and reliable mechanisms for children and families at risk.

At the time of writing, social work has yet to tangibly enter these debates with significance. Social work has an intimate relationship with 'the family' since many aspects of practice are concerned with family life and problems and exerts powerful claims about its interventions (Hicks, 2011). Social work has much less to do with mainstream education even though research evidence suggests that bullying involving homophobic and transphobic abuse is itself

mainstream (Mishna et al, 2009). Combined with social work's relative silence on LGBT issues within its equality, diversity and human rights concerns (Cocker and Hafford-Letchfield, 2010) we suggest that there are implications for social work to respond in new and different ways, particularly given its role in service integration and systemic approaches to promoting children's wellbeing.

Strategies to address bullying require interventions at various levels within the system. This includes the need for deconstruction of traditional or dominant accounts of family life, which supports the increased visibility of sexuality within all institutions and acknowledges the complexity of managing identities. It also requires a transfer of power from professionals to service users and their communities so they can take more control and exercise choice in the way services support them to live their lives and an appreciation of the values, connections and desires that bind LGBT social networks together so that there are parallel supports in legal, policy and service developments. Starting with looking at our own professional education, we need to move away from fixed identities towards engaging with the more complex, multiple and fluid identities of LGBT people, reflecting their individuality and their social and economic context.

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