

# SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY & EXPRESSION AND SEX CHARACTERISTICS (SOGIESC) & SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN (SEC)

## Gender

Gender refers to the **socially constructed** roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for women and men. It also includes the idea that only two genders exists.

These are **context/time-specific** and **changeable**.

## SOGIESC

An **inclusive term** that applies to everyone, whether they identify as LGBTQIA+ or not.

**Everyone** has a gender identity, a sexual orientation, a gender expression and sex characteristics whether we are aware of those dimensions or not.

## Sexual Orientation

The emotional, romantic, and/or **sexual attraction** someone feels towards the opposite sex (heterosexual), the same sex (homosexual), both (bisexual), or none (asexual and/or aromantic).

For some individuals sexual orientation is not fixed, rather it may change over the course of their lifetime.

## Gender Identity

The experience that an individual **feels very deeply** about internally related to their gender, which can be related or unrelated to their sex at birth and it is unrelated to their sexual orientation e.g. being transgender doesn't imply having gender affirming surgery.

## Gender Expression

An **external manifestation** of gender or gender neutrality, i.e. how an individual physically expresses themselves (through appearance) e.g. someone can have gender expression that is "feminine" while identifying as male or non-binary.

## Sex Characteristics

The physical features related to the **biological sex** (Female, male or intersex). They include: genitalia and other sexual and reproductive parts chromosomes, genes, hormones, and secondary physical features that emerge as a result of puberty.



## FOOD FOR THOUGHTS

Nowadays high heels are considered a "symbol" of "femininity" but for many centuries they were not: high heels originated in the Middle East and were worn only by men. Originally they were used by soldiers, then West European aristocracy copied the ones worn by the Persian cavalry around the 16th century.

Only worn by men to give them a more "masculine" or "macho" air as well as conveying social economic status. They were later adopted by women (and children) in an effort to masculinise their outfits.

This shows that what is attributed a gender is not fixed in time and is socially constructed.



A very famous French aristocrat of the time (Louis XIV) wearing high heels, a wig and make up to express his masculinity and high status.

## How SOGIESC and SEC are linked?

Girls, boys and LGBTQIA+ children face different risks and vulnerabilities to sexual exploitation as a result of the **gender norms applying to their group**. Sexism, homophobia, transphobia facilitate SEC and provide **barriers to identifying victims**.



**When real or perceived gender identity does not conform to social norms, vulnerabilities tend to increase.**

**Boys** are seen as to be strong, future leaders and future providers for the family. Being a victim of SEC can be perceived as a sign of weakness, and thus incompatible with the traditional gender roles of boys/men.

This message might shame the boy and **convinces him to not report sexual exploitation**, as as he will be afraid to be perceived as weak or "less of a man". Social services are less likely to identify boys as victims as well.



**Girls** are seen as weak and less valuable to society. They are also easily sexualised and blamed for it. Victim blaming beliefs include: being "too dramatic/emotional" or "promiscuous".

The **internalisation of shame and victim blaming** leads to underreporting, less access to health services & education.



**LGBTQIA+ children** face homophobia and transphobia as well as **myths/beliefs** around being LGBTQIA+ and abuse, (e.g.: sexual abuse turned the person LGBTQIA+, LGBTQIA+ adolescents are promiscuous, LGBTQIA+ are more likely to abuse). These gender norms turn into internalised negative feelings about their sexual orientation (think it might have caused it) and **not disclosing the abuse, lack of access to sexual and health services**, & might prevent a child and/or youth to come out.

Children who identify as transgender are vulnerable to sexual exploitation not only as children but also owing to the risk of social and family rejection, homelessness & treated as criminals.



## Tips for caring for children depending on their gender identity and sexual orientation

- Check your assumptions about gender:** be aware of how you internalised gender messages from society.
- Understand the different vulnerabilities and risks** - girls are more at risk; boys are less identified by professionals (they disclose later).
- Coming out\* should never be forced: **Respect the privacy and confidentiality of LGBTQIA+ children.**
  - Careful not to put a child in the situation of coming out even if the purpose is to help.
- Promote **inclusive spaces and messaging** for children independently of their gender identity and sexual orientation.

**\*Coming out is** the process in which a **person first acknowledges, accepts and appreciates their sexual orientation or gender identity** and begins to share it with others. Coming out as self-disclosure happens many times over the course of a lifetime e.g. coming out to a new friend, colleagues etc.

