

EIS Member briefing: Conversion Practices

Introduction

‘Conversion practices’: refers to any treatment, practice or effort that aims to change, suppress and/or eliminate a person’s sexual orientation, gender identity and/or gender expression.

The EIS is adding the Union’s voice to the call to end conversion practices in Scotland and join the campaigns calling for a ban on such practices that fall under the EIS’s adopted definitions.

The UK Government’s National LGBT Survey in 2017 found that 5% of respondents said they had been offered conversion or reparative ‘therapy’ ‘in an attempt to cure them of being LGBT’, and a further 2% said they had undergone this practice. Young people aged 16 and 17 years old also responded and reported that they had experienced or were offered conversion practices, which suggests that conversion practice is a ‘live’ and not a historical issue.¹

At the 2023 EIS AGM, the EIS voted to adopt a definition of conversion practices, and to join the campaign to ban conversion practices in Scotland.

This briefing provides background to conversion practices and an overview of EIS policy to date.

This briefing will be updated as required.

¹UK Government, “Consultation: Banning conversion therapy” (9th December 2021) <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/banning-conversion-therapy/banning-conversion-therapy>

Background

“The National LGBT Survey identified that, in Scotland, 7% of ‘LGBT’ respondents had either undergone or been offered ‘conversion therapy’. Transgender people were targeted the most with 10% of transgender respondents in Scotland having either undergone or been offered conversion therapy.”²

It is important that whilst proven to not have any effect on ‘converting’ individuals who undergo these practices, conversion practices are also well understood to pose serious harm. In 2020 Victor Madrigal-Borloz, an independent expert on sexual orientation and gender identity for the United Nations said that conversion practices are: “inherently discriminatory, that they are cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, and that depending on the severity or physical or mental pain and suffering inflicted on the victim, they may amount to torture.”³

A study conducted in the United States in 2020 found that people who had undergone conversion practices were:

- twice as likely to have suicidal thoughts
- 75% more likely to plan to attempt suicide
- 88% more likely to attempt suicide resulting in minor injury
- 67% more likely to attempt suicide resulting in moderate or severe injury.⁴

There is also recent evidence that gender identity change efforts are associated with similar negative health outcomes. A large US-based study with 27,715 respondents found that exposure to gender identity conversion efforts by secular professionals or religious advisors is significantly linked with increased odds of reporting severe psychological distress and suicide attempts, compared with transgender adults who had discussed gender identity with a professional but who were not exposed to conversion practices.⁵

Reported harmful outcomes include:

- “depression and feeling suicidal”
- “decreased self-esteem and increased self-hatred”
- “self-blame for treatment failure”
- “feelings of guilt and shame”
- “social isolation and loss of social support”
- “deteriorated family relationships”
- “a loss of faith”

²Scottish Government, “Ending conversion practices in Scotland: consultation” (9th January 2024) <https://www.gov.scot/publications/ending-conversion-practices-scotland-scottish-government-consultation/pages/4/>

³ibid.

⁴Pub Med John R Blosnich et. al., “Sexual Orientation Change Efforts, Adverse Childhood Experiences, and Suicide Ideation and Attempt Among Sexual Minority Adults, United States, 2016-2018” (21st May 2020) *Am J Public Health*.;110(7):e1-e7. doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2020.305637. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32437277/>

⁵UK Government, “Conversion therapy: an evidence assessment and qualitative study” (29th October 2021) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/conversion-therapy-an-evidence-assessment-and-qualitative-study/conversion-therapy-an-evidence-assessment-and-qualitative-study#what-are-the-outcomes-of-conversion-therapy-1>

As part of their work in schools, colleges and universities, members may come across learners who are exposed to conversion practices. Members may also themselves have had experience of conversion practices which could have had a significant impact on their lives.

If members are concerned that a young person may be subject to conversion practices, they should follow their school's child protection procedure.

EIS policy

The EIS has a commitment to high standards of education rooted in equality and inclusivity. The EIS's overarching position is the principle that young people have the right to learn, and teachers and lecturers have the right to work, in an educational environment that is free from discrimination, where the rights of all are equally upheld.

In 2023, the EIS Annual General Meeting adopted the following definitions of conversion practices:

- I. 'Conversion practices': refers to any treatment, practice or effort that aims to change, suppress and/or eliminate a person's sexual orientation, gender identity and/or gender expression.
- II. 'Gender expression' and 'expression of sexual orientation': refers to each person's manifestations of their gender identity and/or sexual orientation, and/or the one that is perceived by others.
- III. 'Gender identity': refers to each person's internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with their sex assigned at birth, including their personal sense of the body (which may involve, if freely chosen, modification of bodily appearance and/or functions by medical, surgical or other means) and other expressions of gender, including name, dress, speech and mannerisms.
- IV. 'Sexual orientation': refers to a person's emotional, affectional and sexual attraction to persons of a different gender, the same gender or more than one gender and includes the lack of such attraction or relations.
- V. 'To change': refers to practices which seek to alter or modify a person's sexual orientation or gender identity, expression of sexual orientation and/or gender expression.
- VI. 'To suppress': refers to practices which seek to put an end to, restrain and/or prevent the development or the manifestation of another person's sexual orientation, gender identity, expression of sexual orientation and/or gender expression."

The Union recognises that experiences of conversion practices can have a significant and long lasting negative mental health impact.

Members may contact LGBT Helpline Scotland for support:

You may also contact LGBT Helpline Scotland for support and advice:

LGBT Helpline Scotland

Phone: 0800 464 7000

Email: helpline@lgbthealth.org.uk

Livechat on this website during opening hours

