



## The Psychological Society of South Africa's position on sexual and gender diversity<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This statement was compiled by Chris/tine McLachlan on behalf of PsySSA's Sexuality and Gender Division (SGD)

*PsySSA is the professional body representing psychology professionals in South Africa. PsySSA has, since its inception, been dedicated to making a significant contribution to solving the pressing human development problems in South Africa. PsySSA is committed to the transformation and development of South African Psychology to serve the needs and interests of all South Africa's people. PsySSA advances psychology as a science, profession and as a means of promoting human well-being (<https://www.psyssa.com>).*

## Statement

The Psychological Society of South Africa's Sexuality and Gender Division<sup>2</sup> (SGD) has become aware of concerns raised regarding a type of corrective/reparative therapy advocated for as treatment for trans and gender diverse youth. Purportedly, a mental healthcare practitioner has authoritatively suggested that trans and gender diverse<sup>3</sup> youth should be guided to embrace their sex assigned at birth.

We are very concerned to hear that people are still calling for interventions to change young people's gender identity and/or sexual orientation. Research does not support these practices and many research studies have found that they can be to the detriment of the person and cause immense psychological damage.

The PsySSA SGD wishes to make its related position unequivocally clear. Discrimination on the basis of a person's gender and gender identity is against the Constitution (Republic of South Africa, 1996). PsySSA subscribes to the notion that access to healthcare as enshrined within the South African Constitution is a basic human right to which everyone is entitled.

Importantly, PsySSA is a signatory of the International Psychology Network for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender & Intersex issues (IPsyNet's)<sup>4</sup> Statement and Commitment. This document has been endorsed by two regional and 37 national organisations. The following should be noted:

"We acknowledge, as subscribers to the principle that human rights are universal, that all human beings are worthy of dignity and respect, including respect for diversity on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression, or differences in sex development. We believe that discrimination and psychological maltreatment are not consistent with international human rights aspirations (Universal Declaration of Ethical Principles for Psychologists, 2008). We actively support the development of and support for LGBTIQ+<sup>5</sup> affirmative and inclusive treatment as well as service provision.

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<sup>2</sup> The mission of the SGD is to promote a psychological understanding of the fields of sexuality and gender. The SGD addresses this mission through the advancement of scientific research, clinical practice, continuing professional development and being responsive to related national, continental and international issues and concerns.

<sup>3</sup> Trans and gender diversity is a term for people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from their sex assigned at birth. Trans and gender diversity is seen as one of the gender identities and forms part of the diversity found in people.

<sup>4</sup> IPsyNet is comprised of various psychological organisations around the world promoting the human rights, dignity, respect, understanding and well-being of sexually and gender-diverse people, as well as people with DSD (PsySSA, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer and more sexuality and gender diversities

We concur that psychology as a science and a profession has expertise based on decades of research demonstrating that LGBTIQ+ identities and expressions are normal and healthy variations of human functioning and relationships. For example, as set out in the ICD-10 (World Health Organization, 1990, p. 11), homosexuality is not a diagnosable mental disorder. We actively challenge claims made by political, scientific, religious, or other groups that claim or profess that LGBTIQ+ identities, expressions, and sex characteristics are abnormal or unhealthy. As LGBTIQ+ identities and orientations are normative variations of human experience and are not diagnosable mental disorders per se, they do not require therapeutic interventions to change them. Given that conversion therapies actively stigmatize same-sex orientations and transgender identities, as well as have the potential for harm, we support affirmative approaches to therapy for LGBTQ+ people and reject therapies that aim to cause harm to LGBTIQ+ people.

Transgender and gender nonconforming individuals have the right to live according to their gender identity and to access medical, psychotherapeutic, and social support as needed. This support should be offered irrespective of whether the person has a binary or nonbinary gender identity and whether they seek access to social or medical transition or one, several, or all treatments available. We furthermore support the full autonomy of transgender and gender nonconforming individuals in affirming their gender identities. Affirmative psychological support may be beneficial to their identity development and decision-making regarding social and medical transition (Coleman et al., 2012). We strongly oppose regulations forcing transgender and gender nonconforming individuals to undergo sterilization, divorce, or other procedures that might have stigmatizing or mentally, physically, or socially harmful effects in order to access desired transition supports. We affirm that transgender and gender nonconforming individuals have the right to define their identities as well as to decide on and access affirmative and transition-related health care as desired (Yogyakarta Principles, 2007)."

**<https://www.apa.org/ipsynet/advocacy/policy/statement-english.pdf>**

**<https://www.apa.org/ipsynet/advocacy/policy/statement-isizulu.pdf>**

**<https://www.apa.org/ipsynet/advocacy/policy/statement-afrikaans.pdf>**

In addition, PsySSA's position statement on sexual and gender diversity states the following:

"Psychology professionals

Acknowledge and understand sexual and gender diversity and fluidity, including biological variance; Are aware of the challenges faced by sexually and gender diverse

people in negotiating heteronormative, homonormative, cisgender and other potentially harmful contexts;

Recognise the multiple and fluid sexual and gender developmental pathways of all people from infancy, childhood and adolescence into adulthood and advanced age;

Adhere to an affirmative stance towards sexual and gender diversity in policy development and planning, research and publication, training and education (including curriculum development, assessment and evaluation of assessment tools), and intervention design and implementation (including psychotherapeutic interventions); Support best practice care in relation to sexually and gender diverse clients by;

- a) Using relevant international practice guidelines in the absence of South African-specific guidelines;
- b) Cautioning against interventions aimed at changing a person's sexual orientation or gender expression, such as "reparative" or conversion therapy;
- c) Opposing the withholding of best practice gender-affirming surgery and treatment and best practice transgender healthcare as outlined by the World Professional Association for Transgender Health"

[https://www.psyssa.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/PsySSA\\_position\\_statement\\_sexual\\_gender.pdf#:~:text=The%20aim%20of%20this%20document%20is%20to%20provide%2Cgender%20diversity%2C%20including%20LGBTI%2C%20queer%20and%20asexual%20concerns.](https://www.psyssa.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/PsySSA_position_statement_sexual_gender.pdf#:~:text=The%20aim%20of%20this%20document%20is%20to%20provide%2Cgender%20diversity%2C%20including%20LGBTI%2C%20queer%20and%20asexual%20concerns.)

From the aforementioned, it should be abundantly clear that PsySSA does not support any form of conversion and/or reparative therapy. The SGD is against any form of treatment and/or therapy where attempts are made to change a person's gender identity. We support affirmative therapy where a trans and gender diverse person is supported to live their true self.



**Prof Peace Kiguwa (PhD)**

**Chair: Sexuality and Gender Division**

On behalf of:

Psychological Society of South Africa, SGD