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Empowering Teacher Intention to Intervene: The Role of Self-Efficacy in Addressing Homophobic Bullying

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Abstract

Teacher interventions play a crucial role in fostering a more inclusive school climate amidst homophobic bullying incidents. However, the strategies employed by teachers and the influencing factors are understudied. This study explored individual and contextual factors associated with teachers' intentions to intervene in situations of homophobic bullying. It emphasized the role of self-efficacy and how its impact may be influenced by school efforts to combat homophobic bullying. A sample of 465 teachers (76.34% women, Age: $M = 49.58$, SD $= 10.25$) from nine primary and secondary schools in central Italy completed a scale assessing different types of behaviors they would employ in response to homophobic bullying episodes, including non-intervention, disciplinary sanctions, peer mediation, victim support, and classroom discussion. The study also examined teachers' perceived school effort to address homophobic bullying and self-efficacy in handling educational tasks and homophobic bullying situations. Age, gender, grade, training on bullying, perceived prevalence of homophobic bullying incidents, and witnessing such incidents were considered as covariates.

Linear regression showed that self-efficacy (general and homophobic bullying-related) was positively associated with intentions to use all intervention types and negatively non-intervention. Non-intervention was more common among teachers who reported more homophobic bullying incidents among students, while witnessing incidents was associated with less victim support and classroom discussion. The interaction of general self-efficacy and school effort was significant for disciplinary sanctions and victim support, indicating that in schools with low effort to address bullying, low teacher efficacy was associated with fewer intentions to intervene.

The findings emphasize the importance of a twofold approach: fostering a strong school effort to address homophobic bullying and offering comprehensive teacher training to enhance self-efficacy in addressing these incidents.

Keywords Homophobic bullying · Teacher intentions to intervene · Teacher self-efficacy · School climate · Bullying intervention

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Introduction

Across the world, one in six youth report being the victims of bullying: A recent national study of U.S. youth reports that 15% of high school students are bullied on school property (Clayton et al., 2023), and in a study of 13 European and Asian adolescents, 17.7% reported being bullied (Chudal et al., 2021). Among those who report any form of bullying, over one-third experience bullying victimization based on perceived or actual sexual orientation, defined as homophobic bullying (Russell et al., 2012). A U.S. study found that 7.3% of all students report homophobic bullying, while among lesbian, gay, and bisexual students, the rates range from 37 to 60% (Bucchianeri et al., 2016); similarly, a cross-national study of 30 European countries reported that among lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex youth, 31.4% reported bullying based on sexual orientation and gender identity (Ioverno, 2023).

The detrimental effects of homophobic bullying on victims encompass a range of severe negative outcomes, including mental and physical health issues, school absenteeism, lower academic achievement, and a perceived lack of safety at school (Baiocco et al., 2015; Bishop et al., 2021; Pistella et al., 2019, 2020; Russell et al., 2012). In response to the prevalence and impact of homophobic bullying, extensive research has been conducted to develop school strategies and practices aimed at reducing health and educational disparities among LGBT youth (Russell et al., 2021). These strategies have increasingly recognized the crucial role of educators in fostering positive school environments (Ioverno, 2023).

Teacher Anti-Bullying Intervention Actions

Peer victimization at school is often reported to occur between classes, on the playground, or during class, indicating that school staff have an important role to play in preventing and intervening during instances of bullying (Turner et al., 2011). However, teachers often tend to underestimate the frequency and seriousness of bullying instances (Bradshaw et al., 2007). Thus, an effective approach to reducing both general bullying and homophobic bullying in schools is to promote teacher intervention. Teachers help set expectations for classroom behavior and contribute to the overall school climate (Rudasill et al., 2018). One study showed that students who observe teachers intervening during episodes of homophobic name-calling were more likely to intervene against homophobic name-calling and to observe other classmates intervene as well (Ioverno, Nappa et al., 2022). Moreover, when LGBT students observe their teachers responding appropriately

and effectively to instances of homophobic bullying, they report feeling safer and more accepted at school (Dessel et al., 2017), underlining the importance of teachers' intervention actions for student wellbeing.

Overall, research finds that teachers may respond to bullying incidents by ignoring, dismissing, and not responding (i.e., not intervening), or by active strategies. Specifically, the active or positive teacher responses include non-confrontational and confrontational approaches (Campaert et al., 2017; Nappa et al., 2021). The first category refers to individual strategies with the victim or the bully (i.e., victim support and disciplinary methods). The second category refers to strategies that involve a confrontation between victims and perpetrators facilitated by the teachers or a whole class discussion (i.e., mediation and group discussion). There have been few studies on the efficacy of these interventions, and results vary, likely due to the diversity of the samples involved and the research designs (e.g., Burger et al., 2022; Campaert et al., 2017; Wachs et al., 2019). Yet according to students' perspective, teachers' failure to intervene during bullying incidents appears to be the most harmful response (Demol et al., 2021), as it establishes a classroom standard in which perpetrators have implicit consent to enact bullying behaviors (Wachs et al., 2016), and even bystander students are less likely to intervene in bullying incidents (Yoon & Bauman, 2014).

Unfortunately, non-intervention appears to be a common occurrence in response to homophobic bullying. A study involving a sample of Spanish public high school teachers found that half of the teachers witnessing episodes of homophobic bullying did not consistently intervene to stop them (Aguirre et al., 2021); another survey conducted in the United States found that among LGBTQ students who reported harassment and assault by peers, 60 percent reported that school personnel did not intervene (Kosciw et al., 2020). Descriptive results from a recent study conducted in Italy among public high school students showed that, on average, participants reported that teachers rarely intervene to stop episodes of homophobic name-calling (Ioverno, Nappa, et al., 2022). On the other hand, when teachers intervene, LGBTQ students perceived disciplinary sanctions as the most effective intervention for responding to this kind of bullying, followed by educating the perpetrator, contacting parents, and providing emotional support to victims (Kosciw et al., 2020).

The strategies that teachers use to prevent and stop bullying can vary widely (Campaert et al., 2017; van Gils et al., 2023). However, evidence suggests that teachers often struggle to identify and respond to homophobic bullying (Aguirre et al., 2021; Ioverno, Nappa, et al., 2022; Nappa et al., 2018). Nonetheless, few studies examine factors that predict types of teacher reactions when faced with homophobic bullying. There is a clear need to explore these factors in order to

better understand the likelihood of intervention, as different intervention approaches can yield varying levels of effectiveness. Such research is crucial for researchers and practitioners alike, as it enables them to gain insights into the most effective ways to support successful intervention efforts and create a safe and inclusive environment for all students.

Personal Characteristics that Predict Teacher Intervention

Generally, the likelihood of teacher intervention during an instance of bullying depends, in part, upon teachers' belief in own their ability to effectively act (Fischer et al., 2021). Self-efficacy, defined as the "belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations" (Bandura, 1995, p. 2), is an important predictor of behavior. Thus, bolstering teacher's intervention self-efficacy is likely to help stimulate actual interventions. Further, teachers' perceived self-efficacy in general educational tasks has been specifically linked to prevention and intervention regarding homophobic bullying. For example, Collier et al. (2015) found that self-efficacy was associated with teacher intentions to intervene during verbal and physical homophobic bullying scenarios. Teachers' self-efficacy regarding their ability to successfully intervene in homophobic bullying incidents also predicts reactions to such incidents. Greytak and Kosciw (2014) found that teachers with greater comfort for intervening upon hearing homophobic remarks were more likely to report actually intervening in such incidents. Nappa and colleagues' (2018) study examined both general self-efficacy and self-efficacy in dealing with homophobic bullying as predictors of teacher intervention. Results showed that general self-efficacy was associated with the ability to understand the needs, emotional state and thoughts of homophobic bullying victims and to support them, whereas homophobic bullying-related self-efficacy was associated with a lower sense of helplessness in supporting victims. These results suggest general self-efficacy as a teacher and homophobic bullying-related self-efficacy are distinct and independently contribute to teachers' interventions in bullying incidents.

Efforts to increase teacher self-efficacy regarding homophobic bullying, such as teacher training focused on skill-building or modeling behaviors, might increase the odds of teacher intervention in bullying instances. Indeed, when schools offer teachers training specifically focused on homophobic bullying and implement such trainings for longer periods, students report less victimization (Ioverno et al., 2022a, 2022b). In schools that offer teachers 'professional development trainings, LGBTQ students report several benefits such as high levels of teacher intervention and advocacy for more inclusive school policies. (Kosciw et al., 2020). On the contrary, Aguirre et al. (2021), in a study focused on public high school teachers' perspective, found that those who do not intervene in homophobic bullying often lack the training or do not know how to act.

Some demographic information should be accounted for when examining the odds of teacher interventions during homophobic bullying incidents. For example, teacher gender has been shown to have somewhat mixed results regarding general bullying intervention. With respect to general bullying, women are less likely to ignore bullying incidents, and more likely to work with the perpetrator, relative to men (Burger et al., 2015), who are instead more likely to involve adults in their bullying intervention efforts (Yoon et al., 2016). There are fewer studies that have investigated teacher gender regarding homophobic bullying. However, one study suggests that men may be less likely to intervene in homophobic bullying. Poteat et al. (2019) found that among a sample of Norwegian teachers, women reported intervening in homophobic bullying instances more consistently than men.

The age of teachers may be another important factor. As regards general bullying, teachers with more years of experience stated that are more likely to respond to bullying incidents by working with the perpetrator and the victim, compared to teachers with fewer years of experience (Burger et al., 2015). However, teachers' perceptions of and reactions to homophobic bullying incidents may be influenced also by cohort differences in population attitudes toward homophobia with older generations having on average more homophobic attitudes than younger generations (Dierckx et al., 2017). In one study focused on teachers' perspective, it emerged that teachers with less teaching experience had higher odds of perceiving homophobic bullying as a problem (Russell et al., 2016). As homophobic attitudes may influence the likelihood of teacher interventions (Nappa et al., 2018), it is theoretically sound that older teachers may intervene less in situations of homophobic bullying. However, the role of teachers' age on teachers' intervention toward homophobic bullying has been understudied.

School Characteristics that Predict Intervention

The school environment is another critical aspect to consider in order to understand teacher intervention in bullying. Regarding general bullying, the frequency of teacher intervention may differ based on class grade level, the perception of bullying at school, and efforts by school administrators to prevent homophobic bullying. In one study of actual and intentional behaviors toward general bullying among school staff (Waasdorp et al., 2021), middle school personnel were more likely to report observing instances of bullying compared to their counterparts in high school and elementary school. Moreover, elementary school staff were more inclined to directly intervene in bullying incidents, whereas

high school staff were less likely to do so when compared to middle school staff. These findings imply that, despite variations in the occurrence of bullying across grade levels, teachers become less proactive in intervening as students' progress from elementary school to high school.

The frequency of bullying incidents in schools and the way bullying is embedded in school culture have been shown to influence the types of teacher interventions. Yoon et al. (2016) found that teachers who perceived their school climate as hostile in terms of frequency of disrespectful and intolerant interactions among students were more likely to discipline general bullying perpetrators directly but to feel less supported and less willing to reach out to other adults to address bullying.

Regarding homophobic bullying, teachers' inclination to intervene and the nature of their interventions can be influenced by multiple factors, including the characteristics of their schools and the professional practices promoted within those schools. As reported in a cross-national study focused on European students' perspective, school-level norms and practices concerning homophobic bullying may play a role in shaping teachers' responses to bullying incidents (Ioverno, 2023). Collier et al. (2015) found that teachers' perceptions of injunctive norms (how they believed their principal, fellow teachers, parents of students, and students themselves would expect them to intervene) were positively associated with their intention to intervene in a verbal homophobic bullying scenario. Similarly, teachers who witness their colleagues responding to this kind of bullying, either by intervening or condoning the bullying, are more likely to adopt similar approaches (Zotti et al., 2019). Previous research on teachers' perspectives has also established that those in schools with policies addressing sexual orientation and gender identity are more inclined to engage in supportive behaviors toward LGBTQ students (Swanson & Gettinger, 2016).

Considering that research indicates a positive correlation between individual self-efficacy and the likelihood of intervening in bullying situations, it is crucial to explore the circumstances in which this association exists and whether inclusive school policies can enhance teachers' confidence in intervening during episodes of homophobic bullying. However, the implementation of school policies outlining protective measures for students based on their sexual orientation and gender identity remains infrequent in Italian schools, and data on the adoption of such policies are not available. Moreover, the existence and caliber of initiatives aimed at supporting LGBTQ students vary across educational institutions (Ioverno, Nappa, et al., 2022). Thus, investigating the moderating impact of these policies and practices in the Italian context is challenging. Nonetheless, an alternative approach entails evaluating the extent to which schools are perceived as advocates for initiatives combating homophobic bullying. One study employed a comparable approach

to investigate the potential effects of school administrator support for educator training on students' sexual and gender identity, specifically examining its influence on students' experiences of victimization and their perceptions of the school climate (Ioverno et al., 2022a, 2022b). This perspective offers valuable insights into how educational institutions may contribute to fostering teachers' responses against homophobic bullying. Throughout this paper, we operationalize the effort of schools to combat homophobic bullying as the perception among teachers of school administrations actively engaging in efforts to combat homophobic bullying.

Current Study

In light of the high incidence of homophobic bullying in schools reported by teachers and students, it is crucial that researchers and practitioners understand the factors that predict effective teacher intervention. Such information could be utilized to inform effective prevention and intervention efforts and ultimately support student wellbeing in schools. The current study, adopting the teachers' perspective, explores personal and school characteristics that predict different types of teacher intervention in homophobic bullying. A small number of studies have investigated factors related to teacher interventions toward this kind of bullying (Greytak & Kosciw, 2014; Nappa et al., 2018) but have not explored factors that may predict of different types of intervention, some of which have been found to be more effective than others for curbing traditional bullying (Burger et al., 2022). The current study is unique in exploring the approaches that teachers might utilize to intervene in instances of homophobic bullying, while concurrently considering the distinct contributions of teachers' general self-efficacy as well as self-efficacy in the context of homophobic bullying. By considering these interrelated factors, the research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how teachers' beliefs in their capabilities influence their intention to intervene, including types of interventions, in homophobic bullying incidents.

The study examined two primary research questions: (1) which personal characteristics, school characteristics, and school practices are associated with intentions to intervene in situations of homophobic bullying? (2) How do school efforts to reduce homophobic bullying condition the associations between general and homophobic bullying specific self-efficacy on the type of intervention teachers intend to use to stop episodes of homophobic bullying?

We predict that men (Poteat et al., 2019), older teachers (Russell et al., 2016), and teachers with lower general and homophobic bullying-specific self-efficacy (Nappa et al., 2018) will be less likely to intervene in homophobic bullying incidents. Regarding school characteristics, it is predicted that high and middle school teachers (compared to

primary school teachers) (Waasdorp et al., 2021), teachers at schools without bullying intervention training (Ioverno et al., 2022a, 2022b), with low frequency and witness of homophobic bullying (Yoon et al., 2016), and with low effort to prevent homophobic bullying (Ioverno, 2023; Swanson & Gettinger, 2016) will report less likelihood of intervening in response to homophobic bullying. The current study explores multiple types of intervention that teachers may use. Beyond intervention versus non-intervention efforts, hypotheses were not developed for specific intervention types, as these questions were considered exploratory.

Material and Methods

Participants and Procedure

Our sample included 465 primary and secondary school teachers from central Italy (76.34% women, Mage = 49.58, SDage = 10.25). Of these, 81.29% taught in high schools and middle schools, and 18.71% taught in primary schools. Data were collected from January 2021 to June 2021 from 9 schools. Across the schools, the mean number of participating teachers was 51 (SD = 21.7; range 29–105). School administrators were contacted and invited to disseminate an anonymous online survey among schoolteachers. All teacher participants gave informed consent in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki before completing the questionnaire. The protocol was approved by the Ethics Committee of [blinded for review]. Participation was voluntary and unpaid. The completion of the survey took 20–25 min.

Measures

Teachers' Perceptions and Witnessing of Homophobic Bullying at School

Teachers' perception of the frequency of homophobic bullying incidents at their own school was measured through the question "How widespread is the phenomenon of homophobic bullying in your school?". Response options were on a 5-point scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*). In addition, teachers were asked if they had ever witnessed episodes of homophobic bullying ("Referring to the last few months of school, have you ever witnessed homophobic bullying episodes?"). Response options were on a 5-point scale from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*several time a week*). Teachers were classified into two groups based on whether or not they had witnessed homophobic bullying incidents (0 = never; 1 = at least once).

Teachers' Intentions to Intervene Against Homophobic Bullying

To evaluate teachers' intention to intervene in homophobic bullying incidents, we adapted a measure from Campaert et al. (2017). The original version, validated in Italian by Campaert and colleagues (2017), evaluated students' perceptions of their teachers' interventions in bullying and victimization incidents. In this study, the measure was adapted to evaluate teachers' intentions to intervene using teachers' perspectives. Specifically, after presenting a definition of homophobic bullying, teachers were asked what they would more likely do when faced with homophobic bullying incidents, rating on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (never) to 5 (always) a series of 13 items that assessed different possible reactions. To ensure the validity of the adaptation, a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted. The analysis confirmed a five-dimensional model with an adequate fit to the data, χ^2(55, $N = 465$) = 194.324, $p < 0.001$, SRMR = 0.039, TLI = 0.938, CFI = 0.956, RMSEA = 0.074. The five dimensions were (a) non-intervention (3 items; *Cronbach's* $\alpha = 0.70$; item example: "I let the students fend for themselves"), (b) disciplinary sanctions (3 items; *Cronbach's* $\alpha = 0.80$; example item: "I take action toward the bully"), (c) mediation (2 items; *Cronbach's* $\alpha = 0.83$; item example: "I help the students involved find a solution to the problem"), (d) victim support (2 items; *Cronbach's* $\alpha = 0.75$; item example: "I try to comfort the victim"), and (e) group discussion (3 items; *Cronbach's* $\alpha = 0.81$; item example: "I discuss the episode with the whole class").

School Efforts to Prevent Homophobic Bullying

Teachers' perceptions of school administration's effort to prevent homophobic bullying was measured through the question "How much do you think your school tackles homophobic bullying?" The response options were on a 5-point scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*).

Teachers' General Self-Efficacy

Teachers' self-efficacy beliefs to handle various educational tasks were evaluated using five items from the Self-Efficacy Beliefs scale (Caprara et al., 2006), a measure for which psychometric properties have been ascertained in previous research (e.g., Caprara et al., 2003). The items assess teachers' perceived ability to deal with instructional tasks, handle disciplinary problems in the classroom, and gain the trust and appreciation of colleagues, families, and students. Participants rated each item on a 5-point Likert scale from

1 (*completely disagree*) to 5 (*completely agree*). Cronbach's alpha in the current sample was high (*Cronbach's α* = 0.91).

Teachers' Homophobic Bullying-Related Self-Efficacy

Teachers' perceived ability to handle homophobic bullying situations was measured through the question "How capable do you feel you are as a teacher to handle situations of homophobic bullying?". The response options were on a 5-point scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*).

Background Information

A brief questionnaire included self-reports by teachers of their age, gender, and school type (i.e., primary, middle, or high school). In addition, teachers were asked whether they had ever received specific training on bullying during their teaching experience. The response options ranged from 1 (not at all) to 4 (a lot).

Plan of Analysis

Pearson and point-biserial correlations were performed to examine the associations among the key variables. One-way repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to compare the frequency of the different types of reactions in situations of homophobic bullying (i.e., nonintervention, disciplinary sanctions, mediation, victim support, and group discussion). Then, five hierarchical regression analyses were used in order to investigate which individual characteristics and teachers' experiences were associated with the five types of teacher reactions in situations of homophobic bullying episodes. In the first step of each regression, gender, age, teaching level, and training experiences on bullying were included as covariates. In the second step, the criterion was regressed on general perceptions of homophobic bullying incidents at school, direct witnessing of homophobic bullying incidents, school efforts to prevent homophobic bullying, general teacher self-efficacy, and self-efficacy in dealing with homophobic bullying. Finally, we tested whether school efforts to prevent homophobic bullying moderated the associations of general teacher self-efficacy, and homophobic bullying-related self-efficacy with the different teachers' reactions. Specifically, two interaction terms were entered (i.e., general self-efficacy X school efforts to prevent homophobic bullying, and homophobic bullying-related self-efficacy X school efforts to prevent homophobic bullying). Simple slope analyses were conducted to decompose the significant interaction effect. Analyses were performed in Stata version 17. There were no missing data on the variables of interest.

Results

Descriptives

Descriptive statistics of key variables are provided in Table 1. On average, teachers had little or no training on bullying and believed that homophobic bullying was infrequent or fairly frequent in school. Only a small percentage of teachers had witnessed homophobic bullying. On average, teachers reported that their school administration put forth sufficient or substantial efforts to address and prevent homophobic bullying among students. Regarding self-efficacy, teachers felt moderately or very effective in handling both general educational tasks and incidents of homophobic bullying. Finally, the average of teachers' intentional nonintervention in homophobic bullying situations was low, whereas teachers often or always responded with the intention to adopt disciplinary sanctions, mediation, victim support and group discussions in these situations.

Results of one-way repeated measures ANOVA showed that there were statistically significant differences in the types of teacher interventions, $F(4, 1,856) = 1403.19$, $p < 0.001$. Bonferroni's post hoc comparisons showed that

Table 1 Descriptive statistics

	N (%)	*M* (SD)	Range
Gender			
Woman	355 (76.34%)		
Man	110 (23.66%)		
Age		49.58 (10.25)	23–66
Grade level of teaching			
Primary school	87 (18.71%)		
Middle school	61 (13.12%)		
High school	317 (68.17%)		
Bullying training		2.17 (0.77)	1–4
Frequency of HB		1.74 (0.89)	1–5
Witnessing HB			
Witnessing	38 (8.17%)		
Non-witnessing	427 (91.83%)		
School effort to address HB		3.41 (1.14)	1–5
General self-efficacy		3.63 (0.61)	1–5
HB-focused self-efficacy		2.92 (0.86)	1–5
Teacher interventions			
Non-intervention		1.77 (0.84)	1–5
Disciplinary sanctions		4.40 (0.79)	1–5
Mediation		4.37 (0.86)	1–5
Victim support		4.36 (0.83)	1–5
Group discussion		4.51 (0.71)	1–5

HB indicates homophobic bullying

No teachers reported a non-binary gender identity

all types of teacher interventions were reported significantly more often than the intention not to intervene. In addition, group discussion was reported significantly more often than mediation and victim support. No significant differences were found among the other comparisons.

Table 2 shows the zero-order correlations among the variables included in the study. Strong positive correlations were found between the different types of teacher interventions (i.e., disciplinary sanctions, mediation, victim support, and group discussion), with small and significant negative correlations between teacher intention not to intervene and the other four types of teacher interventions. Correlations with teacher non-intervention suggested that older teachers, those in middle and high school, and those who perceived a high incidence of homophobic bullying at school were less likely to intervene in situations of homophobic bullying. However, teacher non-intervention was also negatively correlated with school efforts to prevent homophobic bullying and the two types of self-efficacy. Additionally, correlations indicated that men, as well as middle and high school teachers, exhibited a lower likelihood of adopting the four teacher intervention strategies in comparison with women counterparts and teachers at the primary school level. In addition, the perceived high incidence of homophobic bullying at school was negatively correlated with disciplinary sanctions, mediation, and group discussions, whereas having witnessed homophobic bullying incidents was negatively correlated with disciplinary sanctions, victim support, and group discussions. In contrast, school efforts to prevent homophobic bullying and the two types of self-efficacy were positively correlated with the four types of teacher interventions. Teacher training experiences on bullying were not significantly associated with teacher propensity for non-intervention and none of the teacher interventions.

Predicting Teacher Intentions to Intervene Against Homophobic Bullying

In Step 1 of the hierarchical regression analyses, which included gender, age, teaching level, and training experiences on bullying, a significant amount of variance was explained, ranging from 3 to 5 percent (see Step 1 in Table 3 and Table 4). Initial results showed that men had lower intention to use the four types of interventions to stop homophobic bullying than women, but no gender differences were found for non-intervention. A significant association was found between age and non-intervention, suggesting that older teachers were less likely to intervene than younger teachers. Middle and high school teachers were less likely to intervene and use disciplinary sanctions and group discussion than primary school teachers. In addition, compared with primary school teachers, high school teachers were less likely to support victims of homophobic bullying. No

differences between grade levels were found on the intention to use mediation as a response to homophobic bullying. Finally, teacher training on bullying was not significantly associated with teachers' intentions to use any of the types of responses.

Step 2 included general perceptions of homophobic bullying incidents at school, direct witnessing of homophobic bullying incidents, school effort to address homophobic bullying, general teacher self-efficacy, and self-efficacy in dealing with homophobic bullying. The variables in Step 2 contributed to a significant increase in the variance explained in the different models, ranging from 6 to 11 percent (see Step 2 in Table 3 and Table 4). Overall, teacher's general self-efficacy and homophobic bullying-related self-efficacy were both positively associated with intentions to use all types of teacher interventions and negatively with teacher intention not to intervene. In addition, perceived high frequency of homophobic bullying incidents at school was positively associated with teacher propensity to adopt non-intervention, whereas having directly witnessed homophobic bullying incidents was significantly associated with lower intention to use victim support and group discussion.

Finally, the interaction terms were introduced in Step 3. No significant interactions were found between school effort to address homophobic bullying and homophobic bullying-related self-efficacy. However, the interaction between general self-efficacy and school effort to address homophobic bullying was significant for models for disciplinary sanctions (Fig. 1) and victim support (Fig. 2), but not in the non-intervention, mediation, and group discussion models. Simple slope tests revealed positive and significant associations of general self-efficacy with disciplinary sanctions and victim support at one standard deviation below the mean of school efforts, respectively $b = 0.29$, $p = 0.002$ and $b = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$), but not at one standard deviation above the mean (respectively $b = 0.05$, $p = 0.517$ and $b = 0.13$, $p = 0.138$). In both disciplinary sanctions and victim support models, the interaction terms accounted for a significant amount of variance (respectively, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.09$, $F = 5.28$, $p < 0.001$ and Adjusted $R^2 = 0.11$, $F = 6.11$, $p < 0.001$).

Discussion

Our research contributes to understanding individual and school characteristics associated with teachers' intentions to intervene in response to homophobic bullying. First, the findings indicate teachers' intentional intervention in homophobic bullying situations is influenced by their self-efficacy as educators. Second, the school environment plays a crucial role in shaping the strategies that teachers with low self-efficacy may employ to address this issue: The willingness to implement disciplinary

Table 2 Correlations between key variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. Non-intervention	1.00														
2. Disciplinary sanctions	−.26***	1.00													
3. Mediation	−.26***	.57***	1.00												
4. Victim support	−.25***	.63***	.70***	1.00											
5. Group discussion	−.25***	.70***	.76***	.70***	1.00										
6. Man (ref. woman)	−.02	−.11*	−.14**	−.11*	−.12*	1.00									
7. Age	.10*	−.01	.03	.01	.07	−.01	1.00								
8. Middle school (ref. primary)[a]	.22***	−0.22***	−0.10	−.15***	−0.21***	0.14*	−0.13*	1.00							
9. High school (ref. primary)[a]	.19**	−0.18**	−0.11*	−0.22***	−0.17**	0.25***	−0.01	/	1.00						
10. Bullying training	.06	−.06	.04	−.05	.04	−.01	.12**	0.22***	0.25***	1.00					
11. Frequency of HB	.24***	−.14**	−.14**	−.09	−.14**	.02	−.08	0.09	0.15**	0.14**	1.00				
12. Witnessing HB bullying	.08	−.11*	−.08	−.11*	−.14**	−.02	−.05	0.12*	0.17**	0.09	0.28***	1.00			
13. School effort to address HB	−.10*	.11*	.13**	.13**	.12**	.01	.03	−0.18**	−0.08	−0.02	−0.02	0.02	1.00		
14. General self-efficacy	−.24***	.21***	.30***	.25***	.27***	−.01	.00	−0.19**	−0.13*	0.13**	−0.18***	−0.00	0.21***	1.00	
15. HB-focused self-efficacy	−.18***	.16***	.22***	.18***	.24***	.10*	−.06	0.02	0.10	0.18***	−0.03	0.04	0.27***	0.45***	1.00

n=465

HB indicates homophobic bullying

* $p<0.05$

** $p<0.01$

*** $p<0.001$

[a]Class grade level was dummy coded as 0=Primary school, 1=Middle school, 2=high school

Linear and logistic regression analyses were employed to examine the associations between class grade level and the other variables, using primary school as the reference category

Table 3 Hierarchical multiple regression analyses for teacher non-intervention, disciplinary sanctions, and mediation

	Non-Intervention			Disciplinary sanctions			Mediation		
	B (95% CI)	B (95% CI)	B (95% CI)	B (95% CI)	B (95% CI)	B (95% CI)	B (95% CI)	B (95% CI)	B (95% CI)
Man (ref. woman)	−.05 (−.15, .04)	−.04 (−.13, .05)	−.04 (−.13, .05)	−.09 (−.18, .00)	−.11* (−.2, −.02)	−.10* (−.19, −.01)	−.12** (−.22, −.03)	−.14** (−.23, −.06)	−.14** (−.23, −.05)
Age	.12* (.03, .21)	.13** (.04, .21)	.13** (.04, .22)	−.02 (−.11, .07)	−.02 (−.11, .07)	−.02 (−.11, .07)	.02 (−.07, .11)	.03 (−.06, .11)	.03 (−.06, .12)
Middle school (ref. primary)	.24*** (.13, .35)	.19** (.08, .3)	.19** (.08, .30)	−.20*** (−.32, −.09)	−.15** (−.27, −.04)	−.15** (−.26, −.04)	−.09 (−.20, .03)	−.01 (−.12, .10)	−.01 (−.12, .10)
High school (ref. primary)	.20*** (.09, .32)	.16** (.05, .27)	.16** (.05, .27)	−.16** (−.27, −.04)	−.12* (−.23, 0)	−.11 (−.23, .00)	−.09 (−.21, .02)	−.04 (−.15, .08)	−.03 (−.15, .08)
Bullying training	.00 (−.09, .09)	.01 (−.08, .11)	.01 (−.08, .10)	−.02 (−.12, .07)	−.05 (−.15, .04)	−.05 (−.15, .04)	.05 (−.04, .14)	0.00 (−.09, .10)	0.00 (−.09, .09)
Frequency of HB		.20*** (.11, .29)	.20*** (.11, .30)		−.07 (−.16, .03)	−.06 (−.16, .03)		−.07 (−.16, .02)	−.07 (−.16, .03)
Witnessing HB bullying		−.01 (−.10, .08)	−.01 (−.10, .08)		.08 (−.01, .17)	.08 (−.01, .17)		.06 (−.03, .15)	.06 (−.03, .15)
School effort to address HB		−.02 (−.11, .07)	−.01 (−.10, .08)		.03 (−.06, .12)	.04 (−.05, .13)		.05 (−.04, .14)	.05 (−.04, .14)
General self-efficacy		−.13** (−.23, −.03)	−.12* (−.22, −.02)		.12* (.02, .22)	.13* (.03, .23)		.22*** (.11, .32)	.22*** (.12, .33)
HB-focused self-efficacy		−.10* (−.20, −.01)	−.10 (−.20, .00)		.12* (.02, .22)	.13* (.02, .23)		.13* (.03, .23)	.13* (.03, .23)
School eff. X Gen. self-eff			.03 (−.06, .12)			.03 (−.06, .12)			.02 (−.06, .11)
School eff. X HB self-eff			−.09 (−.18, .00)			−.11* (−.20, −.01)			−.08 (−.18, .01)
Adjusted R^2	.04***	.13***	.13***	.03***	.08***	.09*	.02*	.12***	.12***
ΔR^2		.09***	0.00		.05***	.01*		.10***	.00

HB indicates homophobic bullying

*$p < .05$

**$p < .01$

***$p < .001$

sanctions or provide support to victims is contingent on the school environment—specifically, the school commitment to homophobic bullying prevention. Third, teachers' perceived skills in handling homophobic bullying may be pivotal for understanding the strategies they could employ to address this complex issue, regardless of the school context.

How and How Often Teachers are Willing to Intervene

The prevailing trend among teachers reveals a commitment to address incidents of homophobic bullying, as evidenced by their low reported scores on the non-intervention subscale and high scores across the remaining intervention subscales

Table 4 Hierarchical multiple regression analyses for teacher victim support and group discussion

	Victim support			Group discussion		
	B (95% CI)	B (95% CI)	B (95% CI)	B (95% CI)	B (95% CI)	B (95% CI)
Man (ref. woman)	−.07 (−.17, .02)	−.09* (−.18, .00)	−.09* (−.18, .00)	−.09 (−.18, .00)	−.12* (−.20, −.03)	−.12* (−.2, −.03)
Age	.00 (−.09, .09)	.01 (−.08, .10)	.02 (−.07, .11)	.04 (−.05, .13)	.05 (−.04, .13)	.05 (−.04, .14)
Middle school (ref. primary)	−.14* (−.25, −.03)	−.07 (−.19, .04)	−.07 (−.18, .04)	−.21*** (−.32, −.10)	−.15** (−.26, −.04)	−.14* (−.25, −.03)
High school (ref. primary)	−.19** (−.31, −.08)	−.14* (−.26, −.03)	−.14* (−.25, −.03)	−.17** (−.28, −.05)	−.12* (−.23, −.01)	−.11* (−.23, .00)
Bullying training	−.01 (−.1, .08)	−.06 (−.15, .04)	−.06 (−.16, .03)	.08 (−.02, .17)	.03 (−.06, .12)	.03 (−.06, .12)
Frequency of HB		.00 (−.09, .09)	.00 (−.09, .10)		−.07 (−.16, .03)	−.06 (−.16, .03)
Witnessing HB bullying		.10* (.00, .19)	.10* (.01, .19)		.11* (.02, .20)	.11* (.02, .20)
School effort to address HB		.06 (−.04, .15)	.06 (−.03, .16)		.02 (−.07, .11)	.03 (−.06, .12)
General self-efficacy		.18** (.08, .28)	.20*** (.09, .30)		.15** (.05, .25)	.16** (.06, .26)
HB-focused self-efficacy		.12* (.02, .22)	.12* (.02, .23)		.18** (.08, .28)	.18*** (.08, .28)
School eff. X Gen. self-eff			−.01 (−.10, .08)			.00 (−.09, .08)
School eff. X HB self-eff			−.10* (−.19, −.01)			−.05 (−.15, .04)
Adjusted R^2	.03**	.10***	.11***	.04***	.13***	.13***
ΔR^2		.07***	.01*		.09***	.00

HB indicates homophobic bullying

*$p < .05$

**$p < .01$

***$p < .001$

Fig. 1 Predictive margins for teacher disciplinary sanction interventions against homophobic bullying based on the interaction between general self-efficacy and school effort to address homophobic bullying
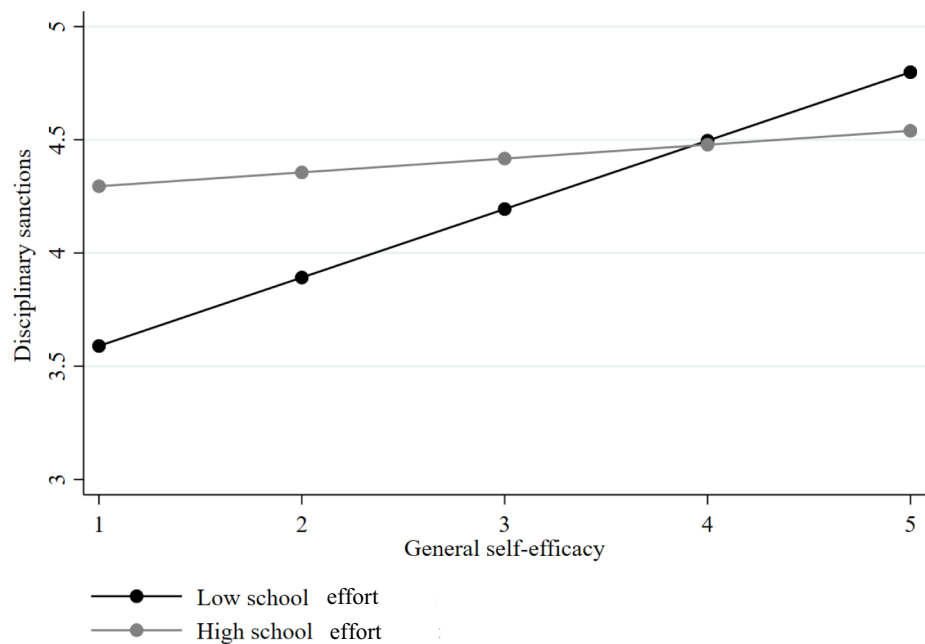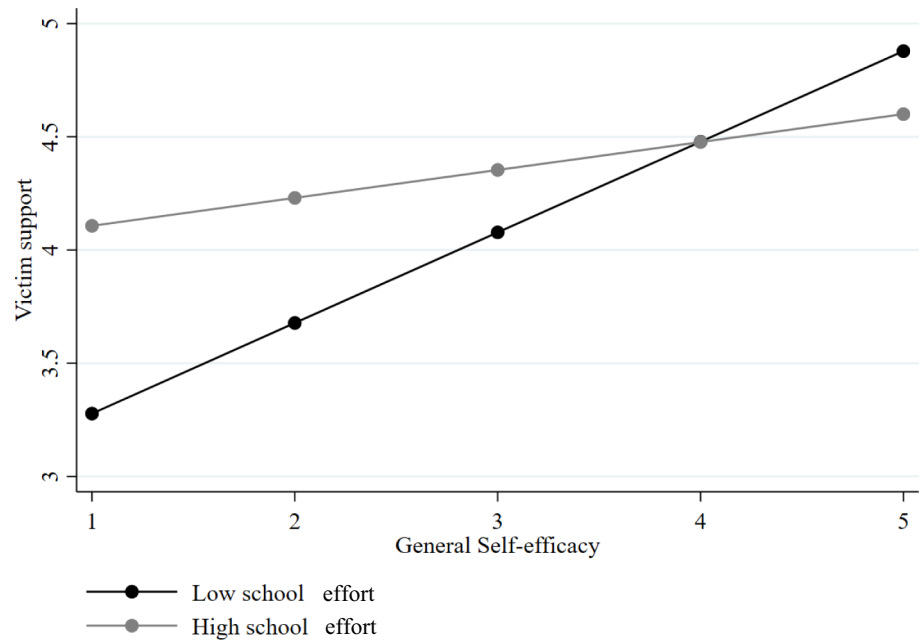
Fig. 2 Predictive margins for victim support interventions in situations by teachers homophobic bullying situations based on the interaction between general self-efficacy and school effort to address homophobic bullying

(i.e., disciplinary sanctions, mediation, victim support, and group discussions). Factors such as social desirability (Bradshaw et al., 2007) and a general sense of obligation among teachers (Latta & Kim, 2009) may have influenced their responses. However, these findings align with previous research indicating that teachers often overestimate the frequency of their effective interventions in bullying situations (Bradshaw et al., 2007). Furthermore, correlational analyses revealed a robust association among the four types of teacher interventions, suggesting that teachers who report using one strategy are also likely to employ the others. Interestingly, there is only a weak negative correlation between the four strategies and non-intervention. In other words, while less probable, intentions of non-intervention are still observed among teachers who would use the four strategies to address homophobic bullying.

Among the various strategies investigated, group discussion emerged as the predominant approach that teachers would prefer to use for intervention, surpassing both mediation and victim support. These findings align with analogous studies examining educators' reactions to general bullying incidents (Campaert et al., 2017; van Gils et al., 2022). The prominence of this strategy may signify a prevailing inclination for discussing rules (Yoon & Kerber, 2003) or adopting collaborative and constructive methods before resorting to individualized approach (Wachs et al., 2019). This proclivity appears to extend to situations of homophobic bullying as well. However, despite the positive outcomes associated with group discussion, its preference over other strategies could be attributed to the reduced level of teacher engagement it requires compared to alternative approaches. Indeed, teachers' inclination toward group discussion may be linked to the challenges teachers face in addressing LGBTQ+issues, as they may feel a lack of formal legitimacy in condemning the actions of the bully or experience difficulties in empathizing with victims of homophobic violence (Meyer, 2008; Perez et al., 2013).

Factors Associated with Teachers' Intention to Intervene

Regression analyses showed no gender difference in teacher non-intervention. This was surprising as several studies on general bullying (Burger et al., 2015; Yoon et al., 2016) have suggested that male teachers are more likely to disregard instances of bullying, while women are more inclined to intervene. However, results showed that women are likely to adopt all four strategies more often than men. These findings are consistent with other studies on general bullying, which have shown that women are more inclined to intervene and discipline the bully (Bauman et al., 2008; Burger et al., 2015) and to support the victims (van Gils et al., 2023) compared to men. Taken together, the lack of a gender difference in non-intervention and the observed significant gender differences in the four intentional intervention strategies suggest that men are not more likely to ignore incidents of homophobic bullying. Further, they might be inclined to adopt alternative strategies that were not investigated in the current study. Previous research by Yoon et al. (2016) supports this notion, as it indicates that men are more likely than

women to involve other adults when responding to general bullying episodes. In addressing homophobic bullying, the influence of traditional gender norms may contribute to the differences in strategies used by men and women (Poteat et al., 2019). In general, men are more likely than women to experience concerns about appearing biased or less competent when addressing incidents of homophobic bullying and to endorse discriminatory beliefs about LGBTQ individuals (Poteat et al., 2019). As a result, they may be inclined to adopt alternative and indirect strategies to address homophobic bullying, such as seeking assistance from colleagues, the school administration, or parents (Bauman et al., 2008; Wachs et al., 2019). To gain a deeper understanding of the prevailing strategies among men for addressing homophobic bullying, future research should incorporate additional forms of teacher intervention.

Older teachers reported lower rates of intentions to intervene with active strategies compared to their younger counterparts. Although some exceptions exist (Gregory et al., 2010), most prior research indicates that older teachers, leveraging their extensive professional expertise, possess heightened abilities to recognize and differentiate various forms of bullying (Burger et al., 2022; Rigby, 2018) and are more likely to employ effective anti-bullying interventions (Burger et al., 2015) than their less experienced counterparts. However, our study showed a different pattern for teachers' intention to intervene against homophobic bullying. These findings suggest older teachers may hold more conservative perspectives on social matters, including those pertaining to the LGBTQ + community (Page, 2017; Russell et al., 2016). Younger teachers generally exhibit greater comfort and familiarity with LGBTQ + issues (Page, 2017), thereby fostering their greater perception of homophobic bullying as problematic, and the likelihood to address it (Russell et al., 2016). Thus, the interplay of generational and cultural shifts may contribute to the heightened sensitivity of younger teachers toward homophobic bullying.

Teachers in middle and high schools exhibited lower intention to intervene and were less willing to adopt strategies such as disciplinary sanctions and group discussions, compared to their counterparts in primary schools. These findings align with previous research that indicates less teacher proactivity as students' progress from elementary school to high school (Waasdorp et al., 2021). The observed trend may be related to the fact that middle and high school students often possess more deeply ingrained beliefs and attitudes, including prejudice and bias (Ioverno et al., 2021), which pose significant challenges for effectively addressing incidents of homophobic bullying. Moreover, students in these settings frequently engage in subtle forms of bullying, such as the use of derogatory language or social exclusion (Birkett et al., 2009; Poteat & Rivers, 2010), further complicating intervention, particularly

when teachers lack the requisite knowledge and skills to address homophobic bullying effectively (Greytak & Kosciw, 2010; Greytak et al., 2013). Results also showed that high school teachers exhibit a lower likelihood of indicating victim support as an intervention they would use compared to primary school teachers. This finding suggests that older students may be less receptive to seeking assistance from teachers, potentially stemming from apprehensions regarding potential discrimination by school staff members or a belief that such support may not yield meaningful improvements and could even exacerbate the situation (Kosciw et al., 2020).

The absence of a significant association between receiving bullying training and subsequent intention to intervene with active strategies may be attributed to the small number of teachers reporting such training. This finding should be approached with caution due to the unique features of the national anti-bullying training program for teachers delivered by the Italian Ministry of Education, University, and Research (MIUR). The training primarily occurs online and is limited to a small number of teachers per school, tasked with transmitting the acquired knowledge and tools to their peers. Consequently, the efficacy of this training may heavily depend on the abilities and attributes of the participating teachers to effectively transmit anti-bullying concepts to their colleagues. Furthermore, there is a lack of empirical studies validating the effectiveness of this training. An alternative explanation could be that interventions for homophobic bullying require specialized skills and knowledge from teachers that can only be acquired through targeted training (Ioverno et al., 2022a, 2022b). Consequently, the unpreparedness of many teachers in responding to homophobic bullying incidents (Bradshaw et al., 2013; Meyer, 2008) underscores the importance of offering training that focuses on sexual orientation and gender identity issues in schools.

A significant association was observed between teachers' perception of a high frequency of homophobic bullying incidents and their intentions not to intervene. This finding is consistent with previous research (Yoon et al., 2016) indicating that teachers who perceived their school climate as hostile due to frequent disrespectful and intolerant interactions among students were less likely to feel supported. This association can be further understood through the lens of the diffusion of responsibility phenomenon, as originally proposed by Darley and Latane (1968): In an educational environment characterized by frequent bullying incidents, there is greater probability of the phenomenon becoming normalized (Hatzenbuehler, 2016; Hunt et al., 2016; Ioverno & Russell, 2020). As a result, teachers may feel less personal responsibility to offer assistance and have greater inclination to abstain from intervention or exhibit delayed responses. Consequently, these factors may contribute to an elevated likelihood of recurring incidents.

Teachers who witnessed episodes of homophobic bullying were less willing to use victim support and group discussion as intervention strategies. When confronted with an episode of homophobic bullying, teachers may be more inclined to employ immediate strategies involving the bullies themselves to halt the incident, such as disciplinary sanctions or mediation. The readiness of teachers to work with victims, however, may be comparatively lower than their willingness to address the perpetrators (Burger et al., 2015). Moreover, actively observing instances of homophobic bullying could lead to a sense of powerlessness (Nappa et al., 2018) and contribute to the documented disparity between intentions to intervene and actual intervention efforts (Ioverno, Nappa, et al., 2022). Overall, the lower intention to intervene with victim support and group discussion strategies by teachers who witnessed episodes of homophobic bullying may also indicate a lack of confidence in effectively managing such situations, particularly when employing strategies that require specific knowledge and understanding of biases inherent in such incidents (Bradshaw et al., 2013; Meyer, 2008).

The Interplay of Self-efficacy and School Efforts to Address Homophobic Bullying

Our findings emphasize the critical role of self-efficacy in teachers' intentions to intervene when confronted with instances of homophobic bullying. Self-efficacy is recognized as a potent determinant of behavior (Bandura, 1995), and empirical evidence substantiates the notion that teachers' self-perceived competence in managing a situation can significantly shape their responses. Indeed, in the present study, both general self-efficacy, which pertains to overall competence in educational tasks, and self-efficacy specifically related to homophobic bullying, displayed positive associations with intentions to use various forms of interventions. These findings align with prior research that establishes a link between teachers' self-efficacy and their inclination to intervene during instances of general bullying (Fischer et al., 2021) and homophobic bullying (Nappa et al., 2018). Overall, results suggest that teachers with higher self-efficacy beliefs exhibited a greater propensity to employ a diverse range of strategies. Consequently, teachers with higher self-efficacy beliefs are likely to demonstrate greater efficacy in their interventions against bullying (Fischer et al., 2021).

Contrary to our initial expectations, the perceived effort exerted by the school to address homophobic bullying did not demonstrate a significant association with any of the outcomes under investigation. This unexpected finding is surprising, given that previous research suggests that school-level norms and practices regarding homophobic bullying may influence teachers' intentional and actual responses

to instances of bullying (Collier et al., 2015; Swanson & Gettinger, 2016; Zotti et al., 2019). It is plausible that the mere presence of inclusive policies and practices aimed at addressing homophobic episodes may not be sufficient to produce a substantial impact on teachers' behavioral intentions. However, these policies and practices may serve as a fundamental basis upon which teachers can cultivate and develop inclusive practices (Russell et al., 2021), an observation is consistent with the results of our moderation analyses. Specifically, in schools with a low effort to address homophobic bullying, teachers with low levels of general self-efficacy were less inclined to indicate disciplinary sanctions and victim support as possible strategies to address instances of homophobic bullying victimization. In contrast, in schools with a high effort to combat homophobic bullying, teachers with both high and low levels of self-efficacy were equally likely to indicate these possible intervention strategies.

These results hold significance, particularly in light of the effectiveness of disciplinary sanctions as an intervention strategy in directly addressing bullying victimization (Burger et al., 2022). Additionally, the provision of victim support can play a crucial role in alleviating the feelings of isolation experienced by victims, bolstering their resilience against bullying, and potentially mitigating some of the adverse health effects resulting from victimization (Gaffney et al., 2021; Yeung & Leadbeater, 2010). However, it is worth noting that these strategies, although highly effective, can also be the most challenging to implement, as they require individual confrontations between teachers and the perpetrators and victims of bullying. In the context of homophobic bullying, teachers may require distinct resources and skills to effectively address both the perpetrators and victims of discriminatory practices (Ioverno et al., 2022a, 2022b). Consequently, teachers with lower self-efficacy may rely on the presence of inclusive school policies and practices as a means to confront and address episodes of homophobic bullying with more direct strategies.

Taken together, this study proposes the need to differentiate between the general construct of teacher self-efficacy and the task-specific construct of teacher self-efficacy within the context of homophobic bullying. A similar differentiation between these constructs has been previously established in the literature on teacher intervention in bullying situations in general (De Luca et al., 2019). In terms of teacher intervention toward incidents of homophobic bullying, our findings indicate that teachers' confidence in addressing general behavioral problems among their students can have an impact, particularly in schools that lack inclusivity. This confidence can influence the propensity to implement disciplinary measures or supportive practices. Conversely, the lack of significant interactions between self-efficacy related to homophobic bullying and the school's efforts to

prevent such bullying, as observed in our models, suggests that teachers who feel confident in handling hypothetical homophobic bullying situations are more likely to intervene and utilize a diverse range of strategies, irrespective of the school context. These findings provide additional support for the notion that teacher training focused on sexual orientation and gender identity issues is crucial for equipping teachers to effectively address incidents of homophobic bullying (Ioverno et al., 2022a, 2022b).

Limitations

Several limitations should be considered. First, the data were cross-sectional, thereby limiting our ability to establish causal relationships. To ascertain the directionality of the observed associations, a longitudinal research design would be necessary. Second, the findings relied on self-reported survey data, and participation in the study was voluntary. Consequently, teachers who participated may have had a specific interest in the study topic, potentially leading to a social desirability bias that could have influenced their responses. Furthermore, the extensive literature on bullying reveals notable differences between the perceptions of teachers and students (Fekkes et al., 2005). While self-reports can offer valuable insights into individual beliefs and behavioral intentions (Schroder et al., 2003), future investigations could incorporate diverse data sources, such as surveys administered to students, to account for varying perspectives. Third, the measure of homophobic bullying-focused self-efficacy relied on a single item. Although this approach has been utilized in other studies (e.g., Greytak & Kosciw, 2014), future research could employ more robust measures. Fourth, this study examined four specific strategies of teacher intervention, following the model established by others (Campaert et al., 2017). However, other strategies aimed at reducing incidents of homophobic bullying might be examined in future studies. For instance, investigating the efficacy of seeking assistance from colleagues, the school administration, or parents, as well as working directly with students who engage in bullying behavior, such as fostering empathy and providing them with insight into the detrimental effects of their actions on the victimized student, could yield valuable insights into the development of comprehensive intervention approaches. Fifth, the survey did not assess the sexual orientation of teachers. Future studies should consider giving attention to teachers' sexual orientation and gender identity because LGBT teachers may be particularly attuned to instances of homophobic bullying and thus more inclined to intervene (Llewellyn, 2023). Sixth, the regressions accounted for between 8 and 13% of the variance suggesting there are other variables not included in this study that could potentially explain a greater variance. For

instance, teacher intentional and actual interventions may be shaped by various factors such as concerns about potential backlash from parents or adverse reactions from the community, personal beliefs (e.g., the perception that addressing LGBT topics is unnecessary), or practical constraints (such as time limitations and insufficient familiarity with LGBT issues) (Russell et al., 2021). Furthermore, these factors could be further influenced by other contextual factors during the survey administration period (e.g., the aftermath of the pandemic and ongoing political discourse surrounding proposed legislation addressing hate crimes against LGBTQ + individuals). According to the latest Annual Review of the Human Rights Situation of LGB + people in Europe and Central Asia, Italy continues to be a society where discrimination and inequality against sexual and gender minorities are prevalent (ILGA, 2024). Thus, broader socio-cultural context likely shaped both the frequency of teacher interventions and the range of strategies employed to address instances of homophobic bullying. Seventh, only 38 teachers reported witnessing bullying behavior. This limited experience may have influenced the findings on teachers' intentions to intervene in bullying episodes.

Conclusions

This study represents a novel attempt to analyze the factors associated with multiple strategies employed by teachers when confronted with hypothetical scenarios of homophobic bullying. Teacher interventions during incidents of homophobic bullying have been identified as crucial in combating this phenomenon and fostering a more inclusive school environment (Russell et al., 2021).

This study showed that teachers frequently expressed their intention to employ disciplinary sanctions, mediation, victim support, and group discussions when addressing instances of homophobic bullying. This finding is encouraging as it signifies a willingness among teachers to adopt a diverse range of strategies. By embracing a wider repertoire of strategies, teachers gain enhanced adaptability, empowering them to respond more adeptly to the intricate nuances and challenges inherent in individual bullying situations (Fischer et al., 2021). Group discussion emerged as the predominant approach. Its prevalence as the preferred approach also holds promise based on previous evidence suggesting its effectiveness in increasing students' likelihood to intervene and defend victims of bullying (Burger et al., 2022).

Comparing our findings with the limited available literature, several factors may differentially influence teacher interventions in homophobic bullying compared to general bullying, with some exceptions (e.g., school type). For instance, our study found no gender difference in non-intervention and significant gender differences in the use

of the four intervention strategies. This contrasts with the literature on general bullying, which indicates that men are typically less likely to intervene (Burger et al., 2015; Yoon et al., 2016). Additionally, older teachers were less likely to intervene in homophobic bullying situations in this study, whereas they were more likely to intervene in cases of general bullying in other studies (Burger et al., 2022; Rigby, 2018). Lastly, teacher training on bullying was not significantly associated with intentions to intervene during episodes of homophobic bullying in this study, whereas a significant association between such training and intervention in general bullying has been documented elsewhere (Bradshaw et al., 2007, 2013).

Our findings indicate that both general self-efficacy and homophobic bullying-focused self-efficacy are positively associated with intentions to use various types of interventions, including disciplinary sanctions, mediation, victim support, and group discussion. Collectively, these results indicate that low levels of self-efficacy can hinder teachers' interventions in instances of homophobic bullying. Therefore, to promote teacher interventions in instances of homophobic bullying, it is essential for teacher training programs to target the development of both general and domain-specific forms of self-efficacy. Enhancing teachers' overall confidence in their role serves as a crucial basis upon which strategies can be built to effectively address a range of challenging situations involving students. Simultaneously, teachers would greatly benefit from targeted training programs designed to enhance their aptitude to first identify and then manage incidents of homophobic bullying (Ioverno et al., 2022a, 2022b).

In fact, homophobic bullying, like other forms of bullying, often goes unnoticed by teachers. Studies have suggested that teachers frequently miss instances of homophobic bullying due to their covert nature and because students may not always report these incidents (Ioverno, Nappa, et al., 2022). If research aims to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of teachers in handling homophobic bullying and to inform policy on teacher training, it must account for the potential biases in self-reporting. This includes focusing not just on how teachers respond when they notice bullying, but also on improving their ability to recognize such incidents in the first place. By enhancing both detection and intervention, schools can create a safer and more inclusive environment for all students (Earnshaw et al., 2018).

A comprehensive training approach, addressing both general and domain-specific self-efficacy, holds promise, especially in schools where there is a lack of formal commitment to prevent homophobic bullying. This is particularly true in Italian schools, where policies that protect students based on sexual orientation and gender identity are rare, and when such policies exist, they strongly rely on teacher discretion (IGLYO, 2018). Indeed, our findings demonstrate that teachers who possessed a sense of preparedness to address homophobic bullying were more inclined to employ a variety of intervention strategies, irrespective of the prevailing school context. Furthermore, teachers who exhibited a higher degree of confidence in their professional roles were more inclined to utilize disciplinary sanctions and provide victim support, even within school environments characterized by low inclusivity, when compared to their less confident counterparts.

Finally, our findings showed that teachers with low levels of self-efficacy are more inclined to intervene in instances of homophobic bullying when they perceive proactive efforts taken by their schools to address such issues. This finding suggests that the interplay between teacher training initiatives designed to foster self-efficacy and the presence of school efforts aimed at combating homophobic bullying (e.g., implementing enumerated school policies) may significantly improve teachers' responses to such incidents.

Notably, within schools characterized by lower levels of inclusivity, our study revealed that teachers with lower self-efficacy were less likely to intervene with disciplinary sanctions and provide victim support. This observation is important as previous research consistently highlights the favorable effects of these interventions (Burger et al., 2022). Disciplinary sanctions are widely acknowledged as an integral component of anti-bullying interventions, effectively reducing the likelihood of victimization or perpetration over time (Burger et al., 2022; De Luca et al., 2019). Furthermore, teachers' provision of victim support can effectively alleviate the adverse consequences associated with homophobic victimization (Greytak et al., 2013). Communicating school efforts to combat homophobic bullying and support for LGBT-inclusive practices can serve as a catalyst for gradual transformation in the values upheld by the school system, ultimately granting school personnel the freedom to adopt and implement such practices (Ioverno et al., 2022a, 2022b). Such a visible commitment holds the potential to bring about a positive shift in the overall school climate, fostering an inclusive and supportive environment for LGBT and all students (Ioverno, 2023; Ioverno & Russell, 2021).

Declarations

Conflict of interest None.

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