KDI SCHOOL · HUMAN RIGHTS CENTER

SUFFERING IN SILENCE

Why Students Don't Report Discrimination and What We Can Do About It

Every voice deserves to be heard.

THE REALITY

Discrimination can occur in academic settings in many forms. Yet many students who experience it never say a word.

70%

of students who face discrimination never formally report it

Source: Kessler et al. (2020), Journal of Higher Education

3×

more likely to drop out if discrimination goes unaddressed

Source: Hurtado & Carter (1997), Sociology of Education

1 in 2

international students feel isolated after a discrimination incident

Source: UNESCO (2021), International Student Wellbeing Report

WHY STUDENTS STAY SILENT

Six barriers that keep real experiences hidden

Fear of Retaliation

Worried about grade penalties or losing scholarships

Language Barriers

Hard to explain discrimination in a second language

Unsure If It Counts

"Was that actually discrimination or just a bad day?"

Distrust in the System

Doubting whether reporting will make any difference

Shame & Self-Blame

Feeling embarrassed or thinking it was their fault

Fear of Being Watched

Afraid of being labelled a 'troublemaker' on campus

THE COST OF SILENCE

Staying silent doesn't make the pain disappear, it grows.

1. **Academic Performance**

   Lack of focus, fear of class participation, declining grades

2. **Mental Health**

   Anxiety, depression, and a constant sense of not belonging

3. **Social Isolation**

   Withdrawing from friendships, campus activities, and communities

4. **Lost Potential**

   Talented students silently disengage and never reach their goals

Silence is not safety — it's a barrier to justice.

REAL STUDENT VOICES

Illustrative experiences drawn from international student research — these reflect common patterns reported across diverse academic settings worldwide.

> *"I didn't report it because I thought no one would believe me. I just kept going to class and pretended it was fine."*
>
> **— International student, Year 1**

> *"My English isn't perfect so I wasn't sure I could explain what happened correctly. I was afraid they'd misunderstand me."*
>
> **— Graduate student, Southeast Asia**

> *"I thought maybe I was being too sensitive. Maybe it wasn't really discrimination. So I said nothing."*
>
> **— Student, Africa**

HOW TO BREAK THE SILENCE

Practical steps for you and for those around you

01

IF YOU EXPERIENCE IT

- → Document what happened, date, time, place, what was said
- → Contact the Human Rights Center at **S311 or humanrights@kdis.ac.kr,** it's strictly confidential

02

IF YOU WITNESS IT

- → Check in with the affected person: 'Are you okay?'
- → Offer to support them if they want to report
- → You can report anonymously on their behalf

WHAT CHANGES WHEN YOU SPEAK UP

Reporting is not just for you — it protects everyone who comes after you.

You Are Protected

Retaliation against someone who reports is strictly prohibited by KDI policy.

You Help Others

Your report may prevent the same discrimination from happening to other students.

The Campus Improves

Each report helps the institution identify patterns and take meaningful action.

You Heal Faster

Studies on discrimination and mental health show that speaking up reduces emotional burden and supports recovery (Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009, Psychological Bulletin).

YOU DON'T HAVE TO FACE IT ALONE.

The Human Rights Center at KDI School is your safe, confidential space.
We listen. We support. We act.

📍 **Visit us:** Room S311 ✉ **Email:** humanrights@kdis.ac.kr

All conversations are strictly confidential.