



## **NISO PROJECT**

***“Fighting homophobia through active citizenship and media education”***

No. JUST/2009/FRAC/AG/1179 – 30 – CE –  
0377095/00/44

# **WS1: Analysing homophobic attitudes and stereotypes**

## **D1.4: National report on homophobic attitudes and stereotypes among young people Belgium**



**European Commission**  
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## 1 Methodology and presentation of samples

In order to be able to gain a clear picture of the most common homophobic attitudes and stereotypes towards LGBT people, it has been decided to make two surveys in parallel: one within the LGBT community, and one in the schools. The two surveys aim at obtaining information on the point of view of these two different actors and to confront the experience of LGBT people and the attitudes and vision of the youth in Belgium.

The objective of the research questions were agreed together with the project partners from Italy, Estonia and The Netherlands. As agreed all the countries had to use the same questions in order to make research results comparable between the countries. The delivery of the questionnaires was left to the project partners themselves. No accordance related to the sample was made.

In Belgium, the questionnaire targeted to LGBT community was an online tool. The link to the questionnaire was spread by several LGBT media: websites of LGBT groups and umbrella organisations, websites of LGBT commercial initiatives, facebook, digital newsletters of LGBT groups and finally through email distribution lists.

The survey targeted to students was distributed differently: The questionnaire was poured into an online tool. The survey could be filled in anonymous. Two schools participated. In one school, the survey was filled in by students who had a free period during the first three weeks of october. They were send to the computer room and filled in the questionnaire. In the other school, students filled in the questionnaire during the lessons of religious education.

### 1.1 Questionnaire to LGBT's

In total 259 respondents filled in the questionnaire.

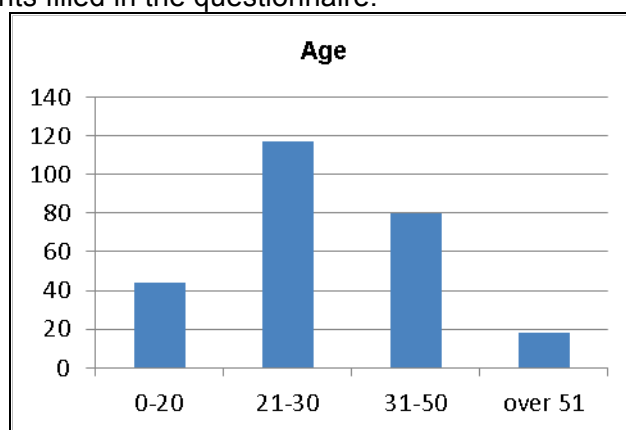


Table 1: age of LGBT respondents in Belgium

Table 1 shows that 17% of respondents were under 20 years old. 45 % is between 21 and 30 years old. 31% is between 31 and 50 years old. Only 7% is over 50. The group of respondents is rather young: 60% is under 30.

	Number	% on total
Born Male	114	44%
Born Female	145	56%
Intersexual	0	0%
Total	259	

Table 2: biological gender of LGBT respondents in Belgium

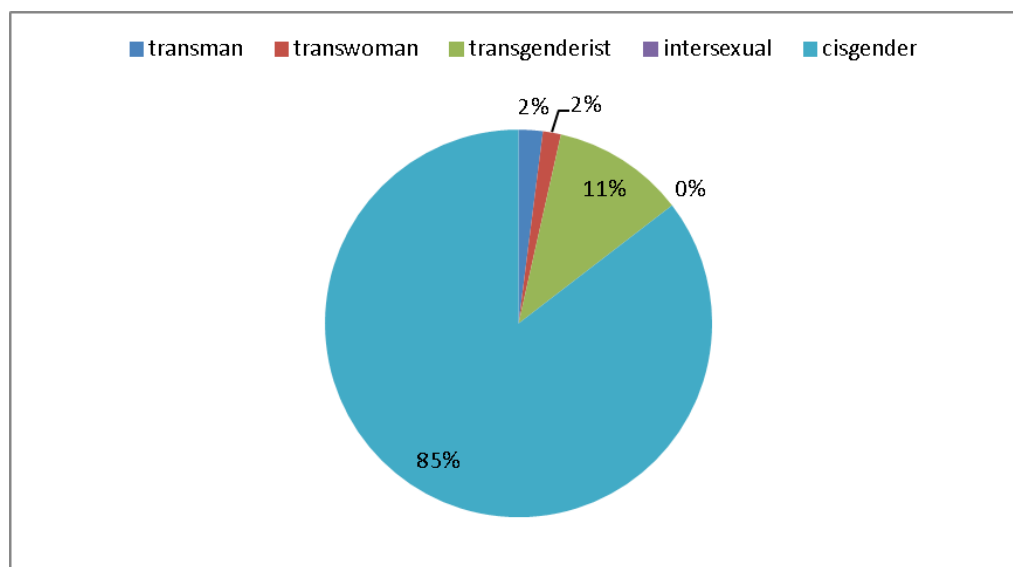


Table 3: genderidentity of LGBT respondents in Belgium

Concerning biological gender, 44% was born male and 56% was born female (table 2). No respondent defines as being intersexual. 4% of respondents are transsexuals: where the psychological gender is in total conflict with the biological gender. 11% are transgenderists: where persons feel themselves as not total male or female or undefined. So in total 38 people are transgender (transgender is here used as an umbrella term for transgenderists and transsexuals). 85 % of respondents are cisgender (where the biological gender is the same as the genderidentity) (table 3).

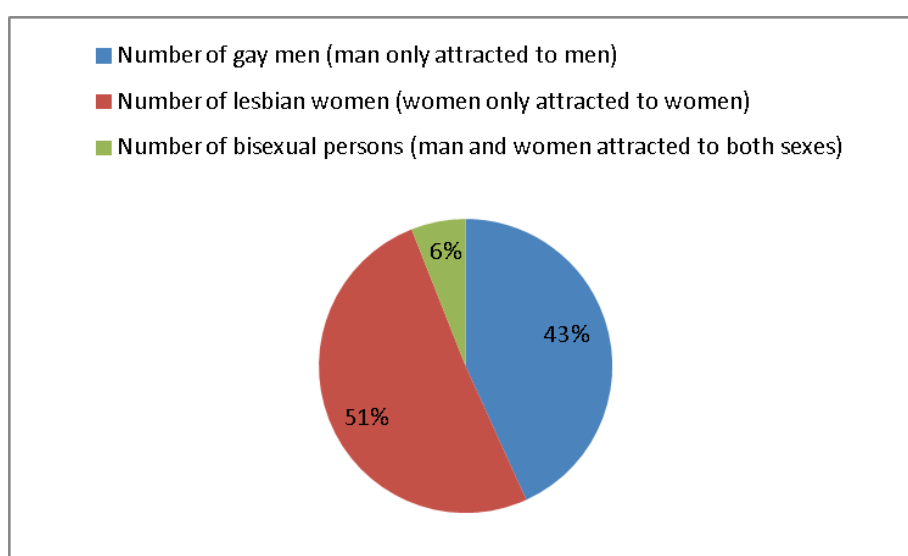


Table 4: sexual orientation of LGBT respondents in Belgium

Number of gay men:	108
Number of lesbian women:	125
Number of bisexual persons:	15

Men attracted to women, define themselves as women, so can be seen as lesbian	2
Women feeling as women attracted to men, so these are straight women	2

Attracted to											
Born as	Only man		Only woman		Mostly man		Mostly woman		I don't know		Both
Male	91	81%	2	2%	17	15%	2	2%	0	0%	1
Female	2	1%	72	50%	3	2%	53	37%		0%	14

Table 5: sexual orientation of LGBT respondents by gender

Table 4 and table 5 show that 51% of respondents are lesbian women. This includes two respondents who are transwomen (born male) who are only attracted to women. 43% of respondents are gay men. 6% are bisexual. There is only 1 male bisexual and 14 female bisexuals.

In table 6 below you can read that 28% of respondents are students. This confirms the overall young age of our respondents. 27% work as an employee doing office work. 11 % are working in educational or research sector.

	Number	% on total
Commerce (sales personnel, hairdressers, restaurants and bars, etc.)	5	2%
Employee (office work)	54	27%
Industry worker (blue collars)	11	5%
Self-employed-professional (lawyer, architects, doctors, etc.)	17	8%
Care worker (nurse, babysitter, elderly carers, etc.)	13	6%
Education / research	22	11%
Arts, culture, sport	7	3%
Executive, manager	6	3%
Student	56	28%
Unemployed	9	4%
Other	3	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>203</b>	

Table 6: job typology of LGBT respondents

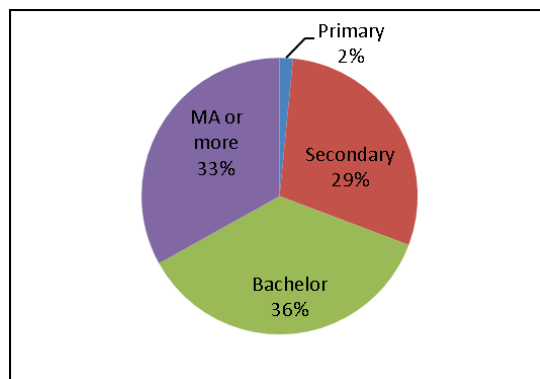


Table 7: school degree of LGBT respondents

More than half of the respondents are higher educated (table 7).

252 respondents (out of 259) have Dutch as their mother language. This represents 97% of the respondents.

Table 8 is a good reflection of Belgian society. 59% of respondents claim not to have a religion. Many people are baptised (which have become more a tradition than a conviction in Belgium) so 24% are Roman Catholic. However, 24% are none practicing. 17% of respondents have a religion: 3% is practicing Roman Catholic, 2% is Protestant, 12% have another religion.

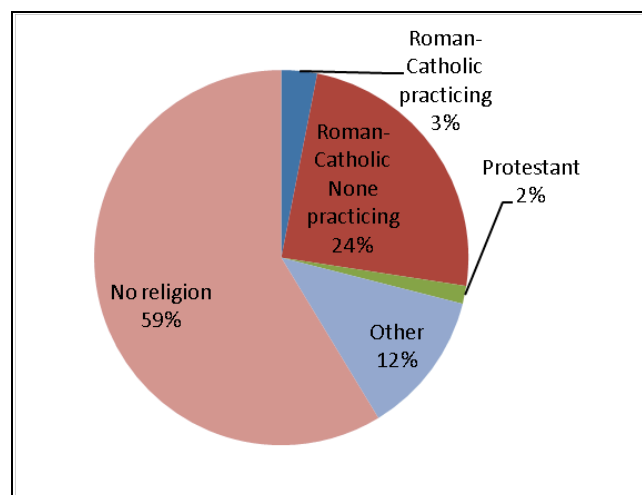


Table 8: religious communities LGBT respondents belong to

The representation of the respondents in this survey is overall not multicultural. In general it are white, young middleclass respondents.

## 1.2 Questionnaire to students

In total 249 students between 12 and 18 years old filled in the questionnaire.

Most respondents are between 14 and 16 years old. 1/3 of respondents is 14 years', 1/3 is 15 years' and 1/3 is 16 years old (see table 9).

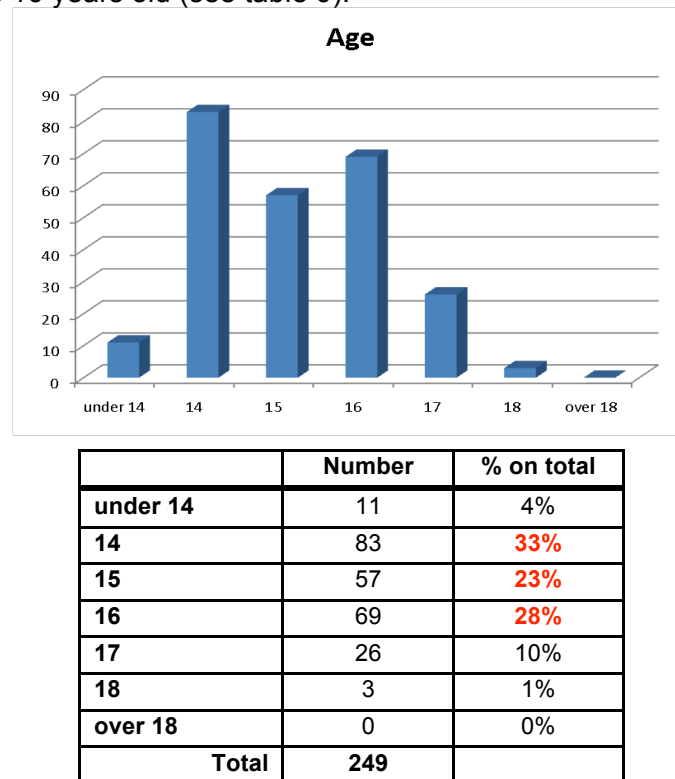


Table 9: age of school respondents

There are almost equally as many boys and girls: 54% girls, 45% boys.

All respondents follow the same level of education: general secondary school. Because the questionnaire was filled in by students of two schools who only provide these levels of education. Therefore we can not make any conclusions for students of technical and vocational training. This is something to take into consideration!

One of the schools is a large school of over 1000 students (school 1). The other school (school 2) has over 500 students. In school 1 144 students filled in the survey. this is 58% of total respondents. 42% of respondents came from school 2.

Table 10 and table 11 below show that the parents of the respondents are mostly higher educated. 58% of the fathers have a master degree. Only 7% of fathers have a primary or secondary degree. 53% of the mothers have a master degree. Only 5% of the respondents' mothers have a primary or secondary degree. This is not representative of the whole belgian society! The two schools where these respondents come from are located in 'middle to higher class' environments, mostly unicultural.



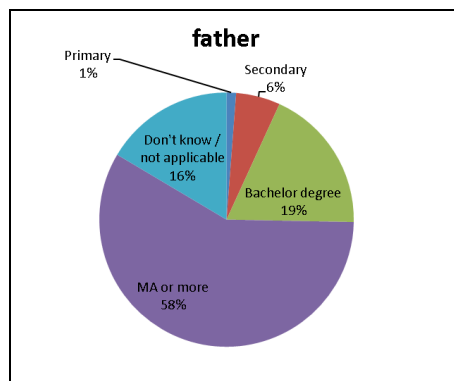


Table 10: parents education of the fathers of school respondents

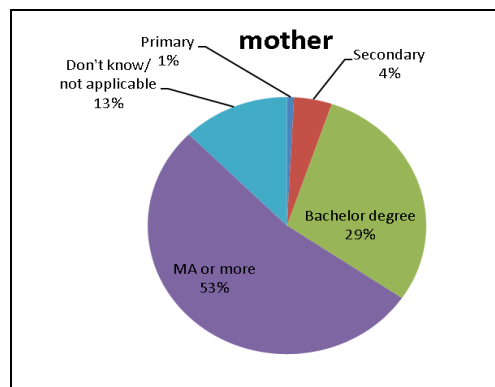


Table 11: parents education of the mother of school respondents

90% of the respondents have Dutch as their native language (see table 12). 6% speaks French at home. Since this is the second national language in Belgium this is not so rare. Only 1% speaks Maroccan and 7 respondents (3%) speak other languages. But as set out previously, these respondents come from 2 unicultural schools.

	Number	% on total
<b>Native language: Dutch</b>	224	<b>90%</b>
<b>French</b>	15	6%
<b>Maroccan</b>	2	1%
<b>Turkish</b>	1	0%
<b>other / empty</b>	7	3%
<b>Total</b>	249	

Table 12: Language spoken at home of school respondents in Belgium

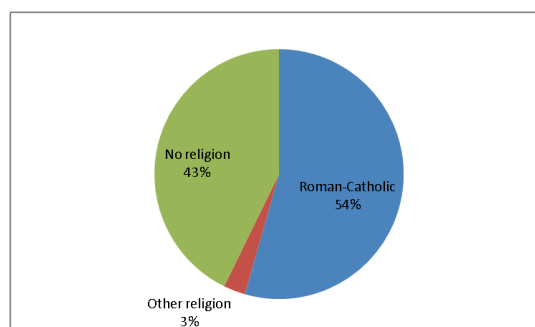


Table 13: religion of school respondents

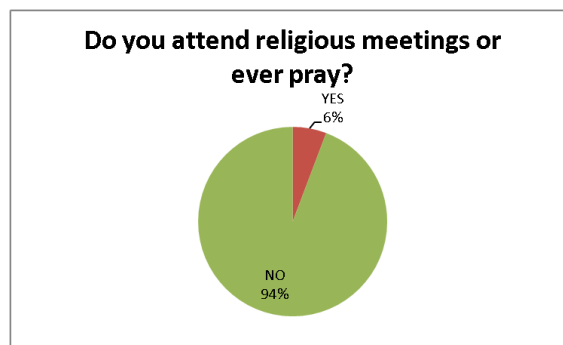


Table 14: school respondents practicing religion

43 % of the respondents have no religion. More than half the respondents are Roman Catholic: 54%. In Belgium more than half of people are Roman Catholic, but most are non practitioners. Therefore this question was added: "Do you attend religious meetings or do you ever pray." 94% of respondents do not attend religious meetings or do not pray. So most of the roman catholic respondents are non practicing! There is 1 orthodox respondent, 1 jewish respondent, 5 respondents who have another religion. There are no protestant and no muslim respondents. (see table 13 and 14).

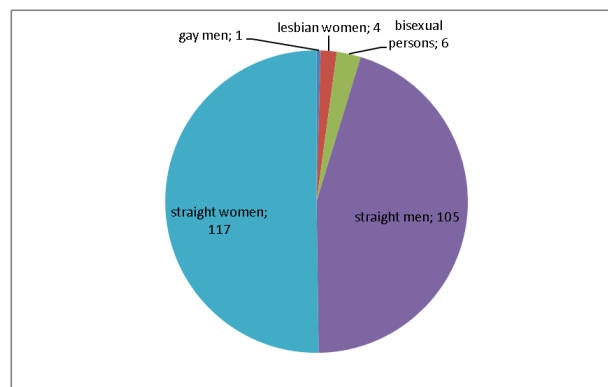


Table 15: sexual orientation of school respondents

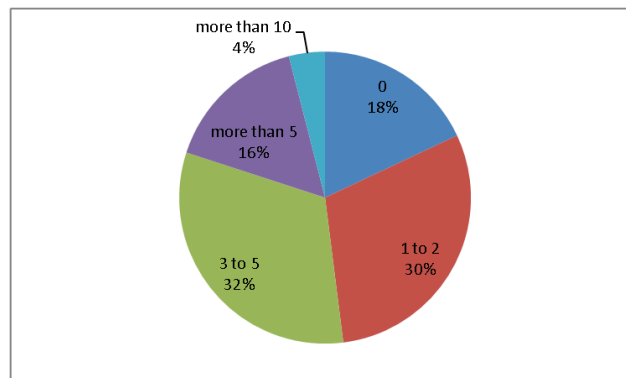
Number of gay men:		1	
Number of lesbian women:		4	
Number of bisexual persons:		6	

Born as	Attracted to												
	Only boys		Only girls		Mostly boys		Mostly girls		I don't know / empty		both		
	Male	1	1%	102	90%	0	0%	3	3%	5	4%	2	2%
	Female	110	81%	4	3%	7	5%	0	0%	10	7%	4	3%

Table 16: school respondents sexual orientation by gender

Table 15 and 16 give information about the sexual orientation of the school respondents. Of the male respondents 1% is gay (attracted to only or mostly boys), 2% is bisexual (attracted to both), and 4% doesn't know. 90% of the boys are attracted only to girls. 3% are attracted mostly to girls. So 93% of the male respondents can be considered as straight. Of the female respondents 3% are attracted only or mostly to girls, 3% are bisexual, 7% don't know, 81% are attracted only to boys and 5% are attracted mostly to boys. So 86% of the female respondents can be considered as straight. In Belgium we assume that 8% of population define themselves as being lesbian, gay or bisexual (considering research). We

do not have a representation of LGB's in our survey. However, considering the age of respondents, it is not surprising we do not reach this 8%. Many youngsters in puberty are still exploring their sexual identity.



*Table 17: how many LGBT's school respondents know*

When asking how many people the respondents know who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender: 62% of respondents know 1 to 5 LGBT's. 16% knows more than 5 LGBT's. 4% know more than 10 LGBT's. 18% knows no one who is LGBT (see table 17).

33% of the respondents know schoolmates who are LGBT. 23% know LGBT persons as acquaintances. 17% as teachers or trainer, 12% know LGBT persons who are friends of their parents, 7% have family members who are LGBT and 4% have a close friend who is LGBT.

66% of respondents know LGBT's between 16-30 years old. 32% of respondents know LGBT's between 30 and 60 years old. Only 6 respondents know LGBT's older than 60.

## **2 Stereotypes attached to gender and to LGBT's**

In this chapter, both points of view are taken into consideration: the opinion of the students and the main stereotypes perceived by the LGBT people and how these affected them.

### **2.1 Stereotypes on gender**

In order to gather information on the students' reactions to gender stereotypes, we selected about 20 provocative sentences that report some traditional ideas about the main characteristics of men and women, or boys and girls, and their role in society. For each sentence, the students were asked to indicate whether or not they agree with these statements. Some of these sentences have been used in the past in wider surveys carried out at international level on the same topic.

Table 18 below regards the stereotypes traditionally attached to men and women and boys and girls (how they should act and appear, the main differences between them, etc.). The students were asked whether they agree or not with some of these stereotypes. While most of the students disagreed with the majority of the stereotypes presented, a significant number of students agreed with some of the statements, regarding in particular the relationship of the girls with their appearance, some characteristics linked to men (the love of danger, the independence). We can conclude that the respondents in this survey think in stereotypical gender structures.

Regarding the statements on the behaviours and characteristics of boys and men, 16% of the students think that a boy who reads, talks about art and cannot play football looks strange, 23% think that boys who like ballet are weird, 34% declare that it bothers them when a boy acts as a girl and 34% that a real man doesn't get pushed over, but fights back when he is threatened, with physical violence if necessary. The percentage of students who agreed with the suggestions regarding men's love of danger is 66%, and 25% for the one on men's independence.

Regarding the traditional expectations on women and girls, 9% of the students believe that girls have less necessity to do physical activities than boys, 21% agree that girls who talk dirty are not normal and 10% think that it is better if a woman works at home when she has children.

The students agreed even more with the statements regarding the relationship of girls with their appearance: 25% would doubt the femininity of a woman bricklayer or truck driver, 19% agreed that it is normal that girls use their outward appearance to get boys to do something, and 47% think that it is normal that girls pay more attention than boys to their appearance. Besides, 44% of the students agreed that there are professions that only men can do properly.

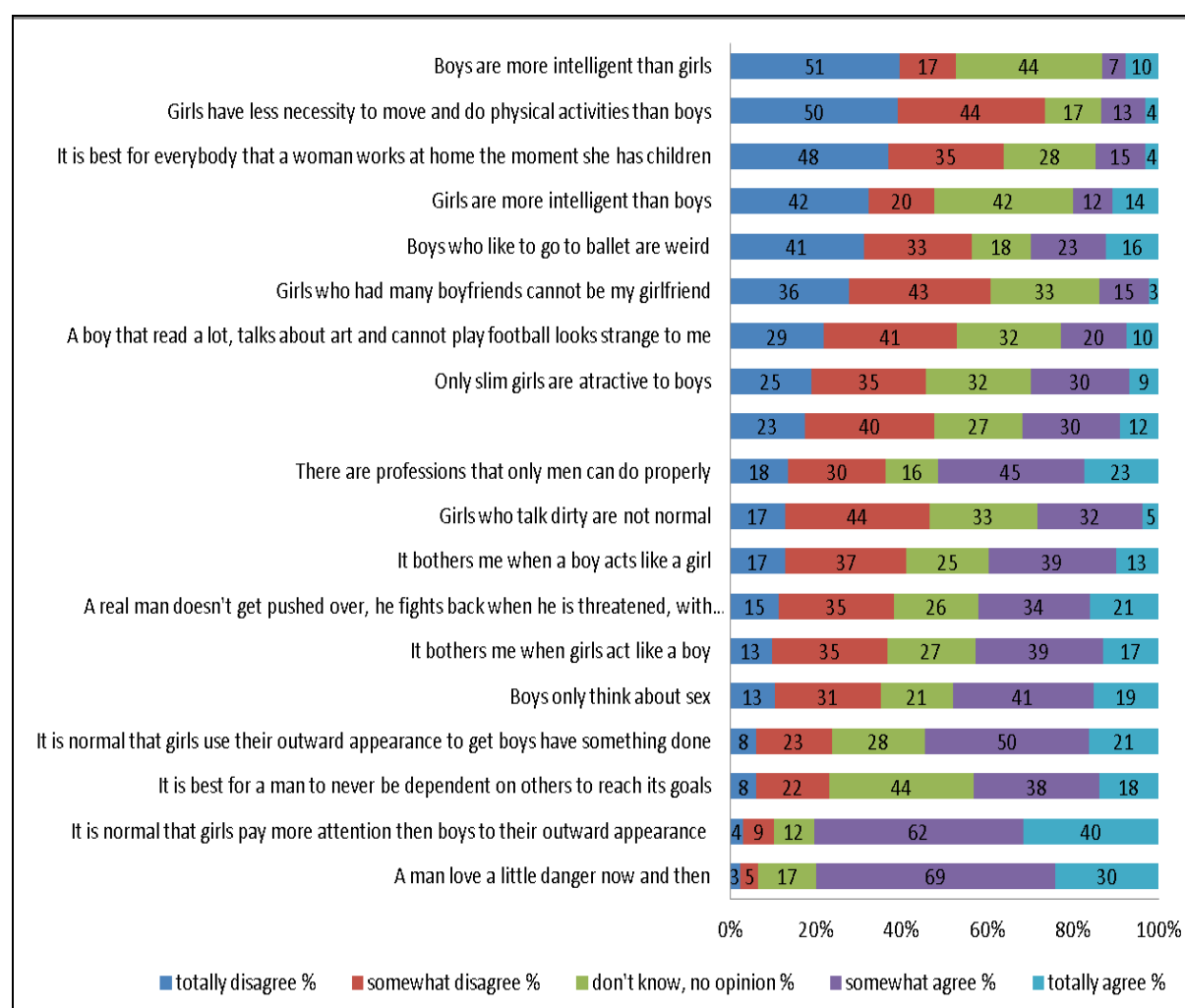


Table 18: stereotypes on gender by school respondents

When we look at the answers of the students it is interesting to see the difference between the male and female respondents. Girls disagreed in general more to stereotypes than boys (see table 19). Almost 70% of girls disagree with being bothered when a boy acts more feminin. But more than half of the boys agree with this. Regarding the characteristics of men (liking danger, thinking of sex, being independent) boys and girls think alike. Except when it comes to violence: half of the boys agree that a 'real man uses violence if necessary', when only 1/4 of girls think that way.

	somewhat to totally disagree		don't know / no opinion		somewhat to totally agree	
	boys	girls	boys	girls	boys	girls
It bothers me when a boy acts like a girl	29%	67%	18%	18%	53%	16%
Boys who like to go to ballet are weird	47%	74%	16%	8%	28%	17%
It bothers me when girls act like a boy	32%	57%	19%	21%	49%	23%
It is best for everybody that a woman works at home the moment she has children	62%	82%	22%	13%	16%	5%
It is best for a man to never be dependent on others to reach its goals	25%	30%	31%	42%	44%	27%
It is normal that girls pay more attention than boys to their outward appearance	10%	14%	10%	12%	80%	64%
A real man doesn't get pushed over, he fights back when he is threatened, with physical violence if necessary	36%	56%	17%	21%	47%	23%
There are professions that only men can do properly	33%	54%	10%	13%	58%	23%
Boys are more intelligent than girls	39%	82%	43%	16%	18%	2%
Girls are more intelligent than boys	59%	56%	37%	21%	4%	23%
Girls have less necessity to move and do physical activities than boys	73%	87%	13%	7%	14%	6%
Girls who talk dirty are not normal	51%	62%	19%	25%	30%	14%
A man love a little danger now and then	8%	6%	12%	20%	81%	74%
Only slim girls are attractive to boys	31%	75%	31%	14%	37%	11%
Girls who had many boyfriends cannot be my girlfriend	62%	77%	25%	16%	14%	7%
When I hear that a woman is a bricklayer or a truck driver, I would doubt whether she is feminine	43%	68%	20%	16%	37%	16%
It is normal that girls use their outward appearance to get boys have something done	19%	39%	24%	21%	57%	39%
Boys only think about sex	47%	36%	17%	29%	35%	34%
A boy that read a lot, talks about art and cannot play football looks strange to me	57%	67%	25%	17%	18%	16%

Table 19: school respondents stereotypes on gender by gender

Another variable that has an impact on the gender stereotypes among the students is the number of LGBT's they know. It appears that the students who know a higher number of LGBT people agreed with a lower number of statements than the students who know no or few LGBT's. In fact, 70% of the students who know more than 5 LGBT's disagreed with almost all the statements, while 15% of them agreed with some. On the contrary, 1/3 of the respondents who doesn't know any LGBT's disagreed with almost all the statements. There is no difference between the students who know more than 5 and the respondents who know more than 10 LGBT's

This result indicates that knowing directly a transgender person, or LGB persons that offer a less stereotyped interpretation of gender differences, help the young people to question the characteristics traditionally associated with women and men.

## 2.2 Commonplaces about homosexuality and LGBT's

After analysing the opinion of the students on some diffused gender stereotypes, this paragraph presents their vision of homosexuality and LGBT's, comparing it with the perception that LGBT community members have of the stereotypes attached to them.

### 2.2.1 Definition of homosexuality according to the students

The students have been asked to indicate what, in their opinion, is homosexuality, choosing among 11 suggested answers. They could give more than one answer. The students consider homosexuality for 40% as a choice. For 20% as a natural orientation and for 20% as a lifestyle. 11% define homosexuality as a disorder or perversion. (table 20)

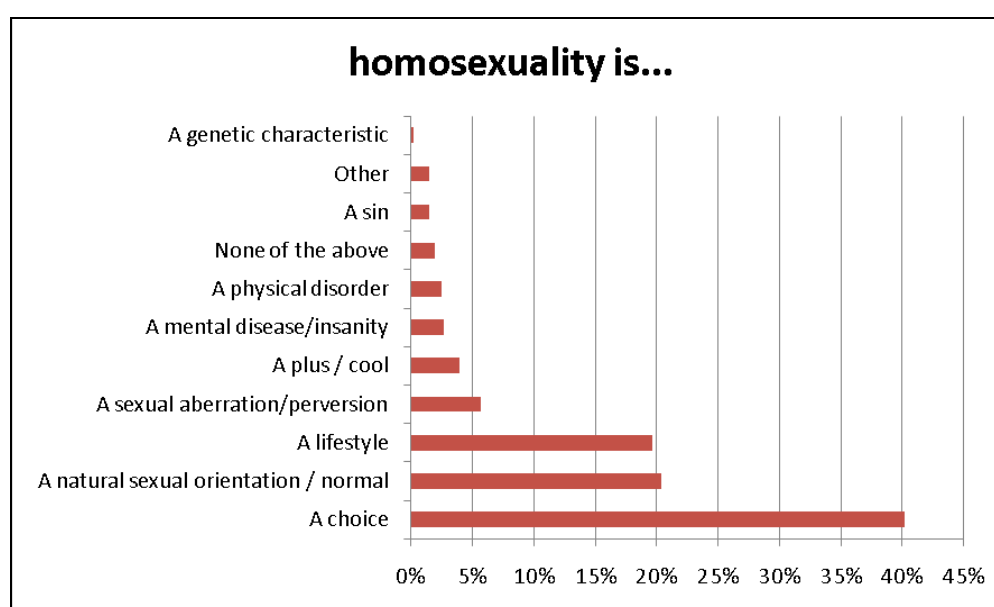


Table 20: definition of homosexuality by school respondents

But when talking to students and teachers we had the impression many students did not know the meaning of the word 'perversion'. This is being confirmed when we look at the multiple answers some students have given. 41% of the students have made a combination of answers which seem contradictory: they have defined it as: 'a choice and genetic', 'a perversion and normal', 'genetic and a lifestyle and a choice', 'cool and a perversion', 'a choice and natural / normal', 'a choice and genetic'. Many students don't know the impact or the correct meaning of these words. Or they are undecided about the definition.

	Do gay men have particular characteristics?	Do Lesbian women have particular characteristics?
Yes	71%	43%
No	29%	57%

Table 21: characteristics LGB's according school respondents

71% of students think that gay and bisexual men have particular characteristics. 43% think lesbian and bisexual women have particular characteristics. (table 21). The students seem to make a difference between gay men and lesbian women when it comes to outwards appearance.

The students who think that gay and lesbian persons have specific characteristics were asked to precise which ones, and their answers can be compared with the main stereotypes attached to gay and lesbian people according to LGBT community members.

<b>Characteristics gay men</b>		<b>Characteristics lesbian women</b>	
<b>more feminine behaviour</b>	<b>13%</b>	more masculine	<b>26%</b>
<b>more feminine</b>	<b>12%</b>	masculine behaviour	<b>7%</b>
<b>sensitive</b>	<b>10%</b>	show off	0%
<b>cares about looks / vain</b>	<b>10%</b>	masculine clothes	6%
<b>fashion conscious</b>	7%	in a couple one is more masculine	4%
<b>friends with girls</b>	5%	other clothes	3%
<b>special / high voice</b>	5%	wears no skirts	3%
<b>friendly</b>	4%	loves women	3%
<b>wears different clothes</b>	4%	friends with boys	3%
<b>nice / sweet</b>	2%	short hair	3%

Table 22: which characteristics LGB's have by students

For both gay men and lesbian women, some of the stereotypes identified by the students and LGBT people are similar, in particular masculine behaviour for women, or more feminine behaviour for men. Appearance and character seems to be more linked to gay men (table 22).

Regarding the variable of gender, 40% of respondents who say that there have particular characteristics are boys. And 60% are girls! This is the same for the question regarding gay men and lesbian women. This seems to be in contradiction with the above conclusion that girls are thinking less in stereotypes (table 19). However, when looking at the kind of characteristics girls give to gay men, it are the more 'soft' or 'positive' characteristics ( friends with girls, are friendly, nice, etc.). The number of LGBT persons they know does not appear to have an important impact on the answers of the students.

### 2.2.2 The main characteristics of LGBT people: comparison between the results of the two surveys

To the students who consider that lesbian and gay persons do have specific characteristics, the questionnaire asked to specify which ones. In parallel, the questionnaire to LGBT people asked them to indicate the 5 most common stereotypes attached to gay men and lesbian women according to them.

Some of the stereotypes reported by LGBT people on the one hand and the specific characteristics mentioned by the students on the other are similar. But while students tend to have a more "positive", or politically correct, vision of LGBT's, these believe that the population has in general a strong negative image of them. You can compare the characteristics of gay men in table 23 and 24 and the characteristics of lesbian women in table 25 and 26. LGBT people indicated a high number of negative stereotypes that according to them are associated to gay men (anal sex, infidelity, oversexed, sissy, etc.) The school respondents do not make these associations. In the same way, the lesbian characteristics stated by LGBT respondents are more negative (butch, hate men, cannot find husbands, etc.). The school respondents do not make these associations.





Table 23: tag cloud of main characteristics of gay men by schools respondents

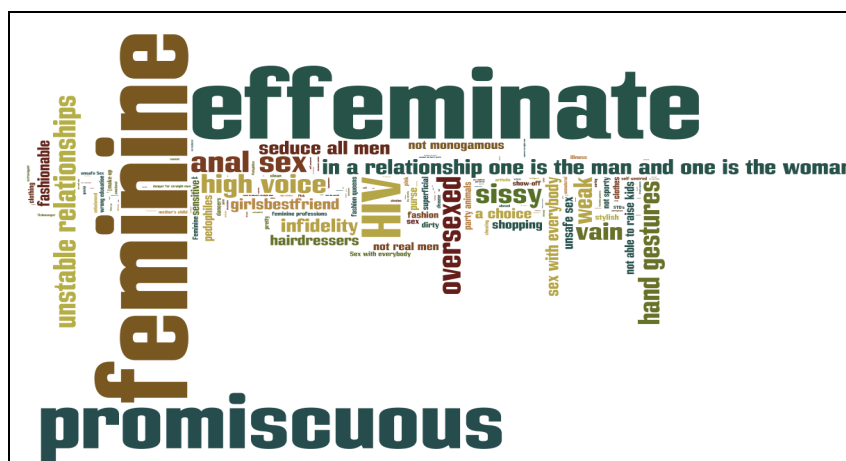


Table 24: tag cloud of main characteristics of gay men by LGBT respondents



BOYS	totally disagree	disagree	don't know	agree	totally agree
I would make it clear he/she should keep his/her hand off me	6%	7%	18%	37%	32%
I would feel at ease becoming friends with him/her	4%	7%	20%	49%	20%
I would feel at ease making homework with him/her	13%	14%	29%	28%	16%
I would rather sit next to someone else during the break	8%	33%	25%	19%	15%
I would find it annoying to share a room with him/her on a school excursion/project week	6%	13%	18%	34%	29%

GIRLS	totally disagree	disagree	don't know	agree	totally agree
I would make it clear he/she should keep his/her hand off me	13%	22%	29%	29%	7%
I would feel at ease becoming friends with him/her	2%	4%	16%	44%	34%
I would feel at ease making homework with him/her	4%	7%	14%	43%	31%
I would rather sit next to someone else during the break	23%	40%	17%	16%	4%
I would find it annoying to share a room with him/her on a school excursion/project week	14%	21%	26%	28%	11%

Table 27: students reaction to an LGBT schoolmate by gender

## 2.4 The effect of stereotypes on LGBT's

The last aspect analysed in this chapter regarding the stereotypes attached to gay and lesbian people are the effects that these stereotypes have on their life. For half of the respondents they did not have any effect. If the stereotypes did have an effect, it was a negative influence on self esteem, self-image and acceptance, and fear of coming out. See tabel 28A and 28B below.

Didn't recognize myself in stereotypes => doubts about myself, my sexual orientation, my gender identity and expression	16%
Need to counter the stereotypes: behaving very masculine (for men) or very feminine (for women)	16%
Dealing with questions, remarks, reactions, 'jokes' from other people (f.e. about sex, gender roles,...)	16%
Waiting to come out, fear of coming-out, coming-out at a later age	13%
Dealing with the fact that people don't believe that you are gay or lesbian, defending yourself (because you don't look gay/lesbian)	13%
Negative social experiences (keeping low profile, watching your words, avoiding social contact, discrimination)	11%
Difficulties with self-acceptance	5%
Impact on mental wellbeing (feeling depressed, angry, stressed, tired)	5%
Behaving according to the stereotypes	3%
Fear of meeting other lgb's	2%

Table 28a: effect of stereotypes on lgbt respondents

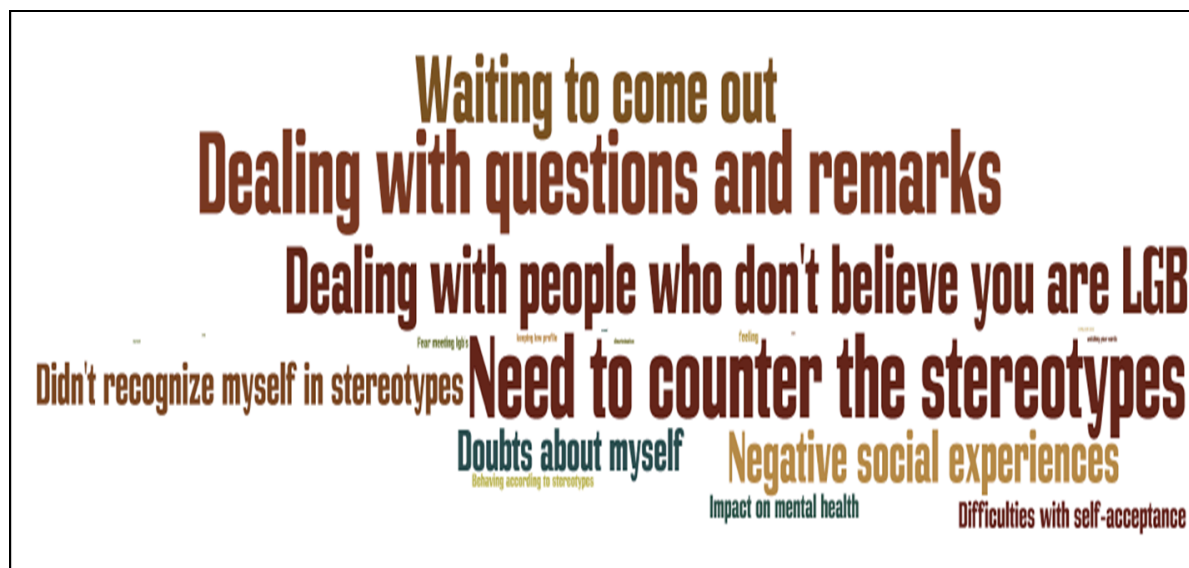


Table 28b: tag cloud effect of stereotypes on LGBT respondents

As we have seen above, the perception that LGBT people have of the stereotypes attached to them is rather negative, and these stereotypes have for some a negative impact on their life. This negative perception can be in part explained by the experience of episodes of discrimination and prejudice they have suffered directly and indirectly in their life. The second chapter of the report analyses more in detail the perception of homophobia and discrimination by the LGBT community and by the students in the Belgian society.

### 3 Social inclusion of LGBT's in the Belgian society

In order to have a wide vision of the homophobic phenomenon in the Belgian society, this chapter analyses and compares the perception that first LGBT's and then the students have of it.

#### 3.1 Experiences of prejudice or discrimination suffered by the LGBT respondents

84 % of the LGBT respondents declared to have experienced discrimination or prejudice in their life. See table 29.

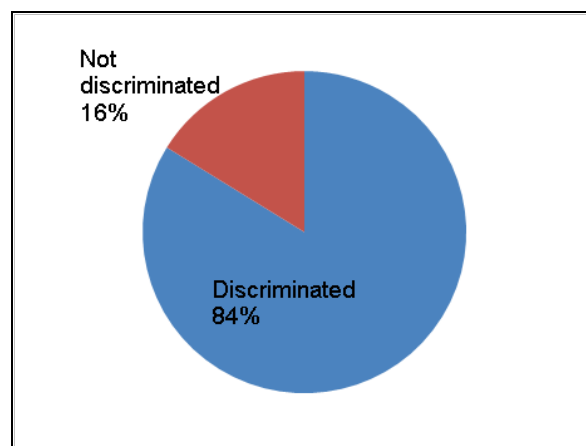


Table 29: LGBT respondents experienced at least one form of discrimination

The contexts in which such discriminations were suffered are various (table 30). The three contexts of discrimination most often indicated are school, media and family.

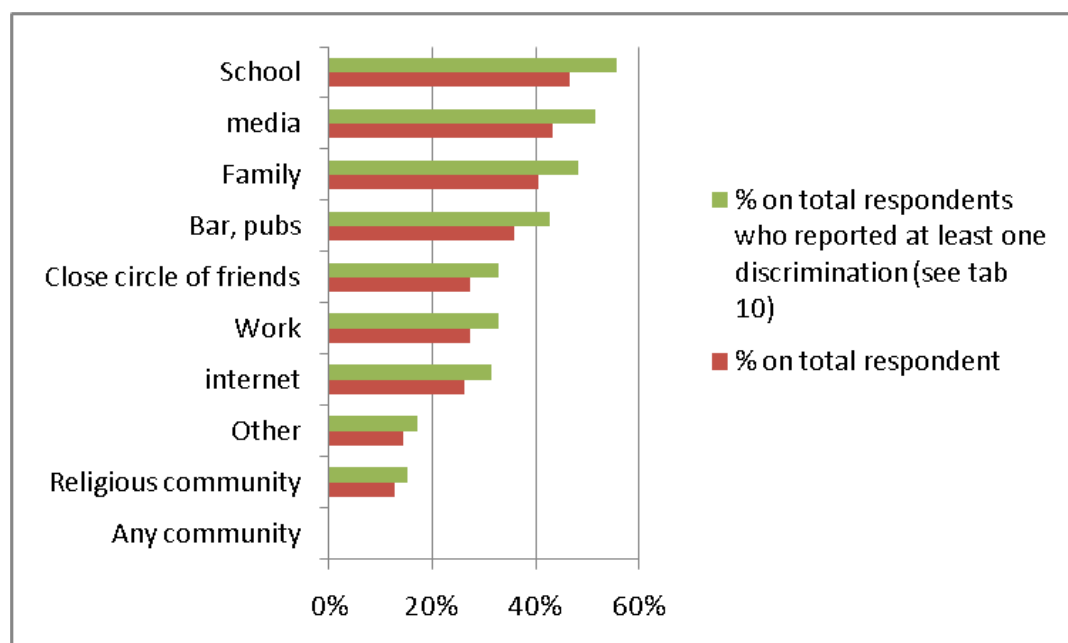


Table 30: Contexts in which the respondents to the LGBT questionnaire have experienced discrimination or prejudice

More than half of the respondents who have been victims of prejudice or discrimination declare to have experienced it at school (56%). The other contexts of

discrimination often indicated are: media (52%), family (48%), bar or pubs (43%), internet, friends and work (33%) and religious communities or other (15%).

Today, no official data is available at European level on the main contexts of discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation and gender identity. The European Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) is currently running a survey at European level on the lived experience of LGBT's throughout Europe to get a clearer picture of the discrimination they face. However, in the small scale of this survey, the results we obtained are very interesting.

First, they confirm that the school cannot be considered as a safe environment for LGBT young people as it is the first context in which LGBT people experience prejudice and discrimination. Considering the importance of the school years in the construction of the young people's identity and the role of the school in general in the society, a specific attention should be given by policy makers to ensure the safety of LGBT people in school. The last chapter of this analysis regards more in particular the situation inside the schools.

On the other hand, the second and third most important context of discrimination, the family and media presents more complex difficulties. Family is a private setting. Media is a very public setting.

The contexts in which the respondents have been discriminated changes according to their gender identity and to their sexual orientation. The percentage data presented in table 31 present the number of person for each category who experienced discrimination in each context (for example how many among all the gay men interviewed experienced discrimination in family).

	Fam- ily	Work	Friends	religion	Organi sations	School	Bar, pubs	media www	other
<b>Gay men</b>	13%	10%	11%	5%	8%	20%	13%	15%	5%
<b>Lesbian women</b>	19%	11%	9%	5%	7%	17%	16%	17%	0%
<b>Bisexual men</b>	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	50%	0%	50%
<b>Bisexual women</b>	23%	13%	15%	3%	10%	10%	10%	18%	0%
<b>transgender born male</b>	13%	13%	13%	5%	5%	20%	18%	13%	5%
<b>Transgender born female</b>	18%	13%	11%	3%	7%	12%	12%	15%	8%

*Table 31: Contexts in which the respondents to the LGBT questionnaire have experienced discrimination or prejudice by category of respondents*

Bisexual men appear to experience discrimination in bars and pubs. Bisexual women experienced discrimination in the family. But due to the small number of bisexual respondents, it is difficult to generalise these numbers. Gay men appear to be more often discriminated in school (20%), by media (15%) and in family (13%) and bars and pubs (13%), and by friends (11%) and at their workplace (10%). Lesbian women on the other hand have been victims of prejudice particularly in their family (19%) on the first place, in the media or in school on the second place (each 17%). Transwomen (born male) are more discriminated in school while transmen (born female) are more discriminated in their family (18%). In general, transgender persons report more experiences of discrimination and prejudice than lesbian and gay persons. Gay men and lesbian women report discrimination equally as much.

Looking at the variable 'age', the respondents under 20 years old have experienced more prejudice in school (25%). The older respondents, over 50 years old, indicate media as main field of discrimination. The adult groups (21 - 30 and 31 - 50 years old) have the same experience: media and family as main areas of discrimination.

About a quarter of respondents who belong to a religious community pointed out to have experienced discrimination in their community.

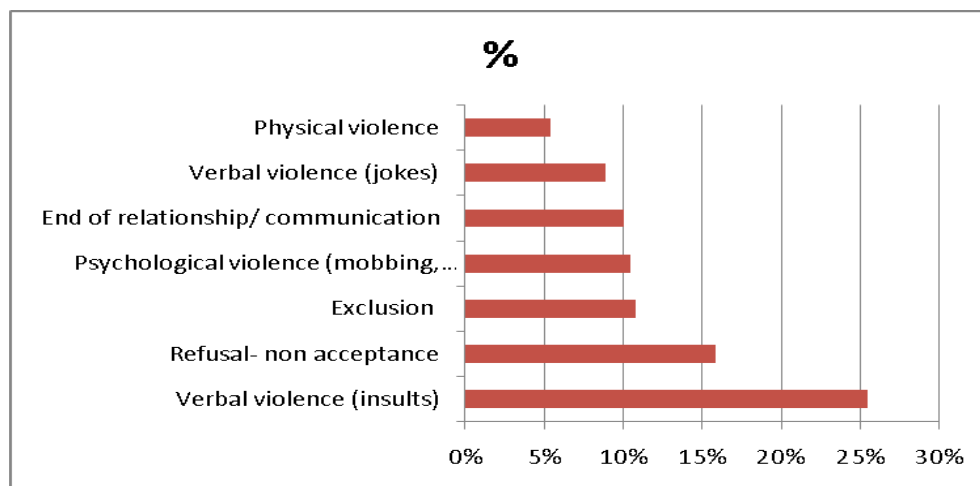


Table 32: types of prejudice experienced by LGBT respondents

Looking at the types of prejudice, about one quarter of respondents (25%) indicated the type of discrimination as forms of verbal violence and insults. 16% reported refusal and non acceptance. 11% of respondents was somehow excluded, 10% experienced end of communication and 10% went through psychological violence. 9% of respondents report jokes and 5% physical violence (table 32).

### 3.2 The social inclusion of LGBT's and the importance of homophobia in Belgian society according to the students

After analysing the experience of discrimination by the LGBT's, it is interesting to have a look at the perception of these discriminations by the students involved in the survey. The students were first asked to evaluate how much gay and lesbian friendly the different environments in which they live are.

In general, a quarter, or less, of the students think their environment is not LGBT friendly. About 1/4 state that their environment is neutral. More than half of the students state their environment as LGBT's being welcome (see table 33). The neighbourhood is considered most LGBT friendly (60%). 25% of students say that LGBT persons are not welcome in their home. It seems that students are getting the impression that their parents are more homonegative than public areas such as the internet or bars and pubs.

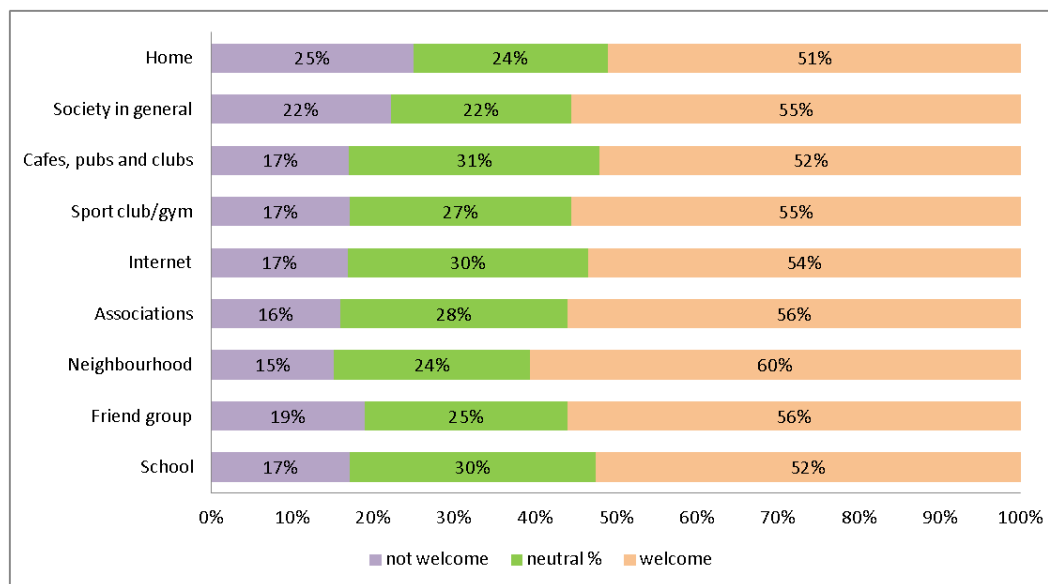


Table 33: Evaluation of how much gay/lesbian friendly their environments are by students

These answers are in contradiction with the ones of the LGBT's. The LGBT respondents experience discrimination more often than school respondents think.

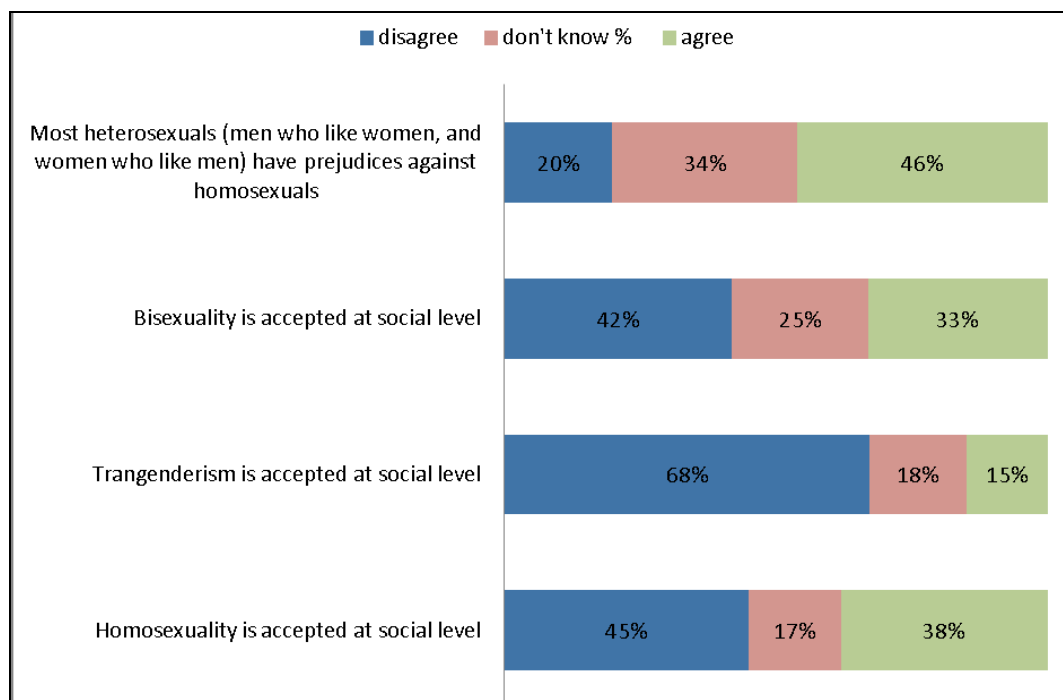


Table 34: Students' perception of the attitudes towards LGBT's in the Belgian society

In order to analyse the students' perception of the attitudes towards LGBT's in the Belgian society, they had to indicate whether or not they agree if it is accepted at social level (table 34). 68% of the students believe that transgenderism is not accepted at social level.

Almost half of the respondents think that homosexuality (45%) and bisexuality (42%) are not accepted at social level. 46% of students think that most heterosexuals have prejudices against LGB people. These data show that the students are in majority aware of the negative attitude towards LGBT people. The students are aware of a

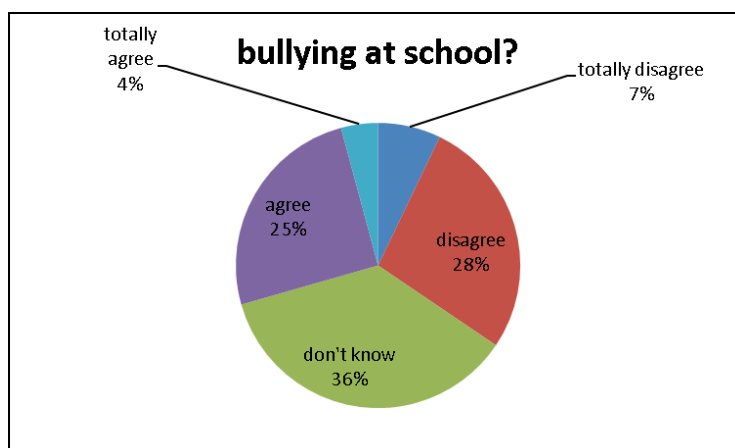


lack of tolerance in general. But they believe that LGBT's are more or less welcome everywhere (table 33)

These figures are about the same as the European average as, according to the Eurobarometer, 47% of the European citizens consider that discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation and gender identity is widely diffused<sup>1</sup>.

When looking at the nearby environment of the students, school, 57% of the respondents know between 1 and 5 schoolmates that are out at school. A quarter of the students know not one LGBT out at school. 11% know between 5 and 10 LGBT schoolmates. 8 % know less than 20 LGBT persons at their school. When asked how many LGBT's do they think there are at their school 5% believes that there are none. So even the students who know no openly LGBT's at their school, do believe that there are. A quarter of the respondents say there are more than 50 LGBT's at school. Half of the respondents believe there are between 5 and 20 LGBT students.

28% of the students think that open homosexuals would be taunted or bullied in their school (table 35) while 17% of the students considered that school is not a gay/friendly environment (table 33).

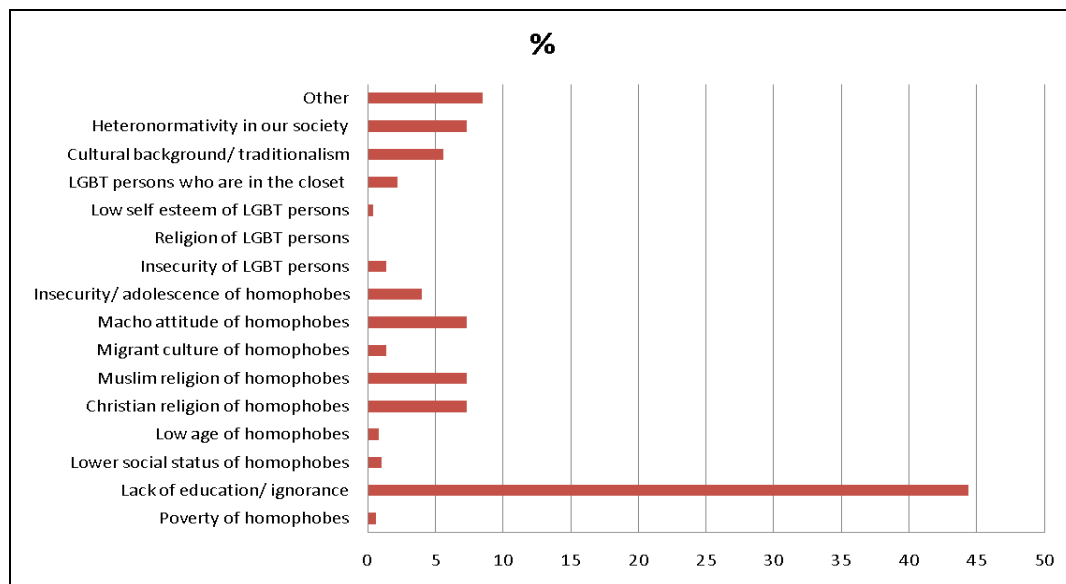


*Table 35: question to school respondents: would LGBT's out at school be bullied?*

### **3.3 Causes of homophobia and ways to combat it according to the LGBT respondents**

The survey on LGBT people aimed at analysing not only their personal experience of discrimination and prejudice, but also their opinion on how to fight against this phenomenon. In particular, the respondents were asked what they consider as the main causes of the social exclusion of LGBT people and the best ways to combat homophobia.

<sup>1</sup> Special Eurobarometer survey on discrimination in the EU of November 2009.



**Table 36: Most important causes of social exclusion of LGBT's in Belgium according to them**

Regarding the most important causes of social exclusion of LGBT's, the respondents were asked to choose a maximum of three factors among a suggested list (table 36). 44% of the respondents consider the lack of education and knowledge as the most important cause of social exclusion of LGBT's. The second most important causes indicated by the respondents is religion, both Christian (7%) and Muslim (7%). Followed macho attitudes of homophobes (7%) and heteronormativity (7%). The actions suggested by the LGBT respondents to combat homophobia are connected to what they consider that are the causes (Table 37).

1	<b>Raise awareness in schools (from primary to secondary school)</b>	79	19%
2	LGBT issues and LGBT people in the media: on television (news + soaps + movies), in magazines, advertizements,...	69	16%
3	Raising awareness + campaigning in general	36	8%
4	Stressing our communalities with straight people, stressing that we are 'normal' and not that different	27	6%
5	Depicting a more diverse (and less stereotypical) image of LGBT people in the media	22	5%
6	More LGBT Rolemodels	20	5%
7	Be yourself as an LGBT: be open and sincere	18	4%
8	Strong antidiscrimination policies - Criminalization of homophobic crimes	16	4%
9	Raising visibility of LGBT issues and persons, 'more pink in the street'	15	4%
10	Raise awareness with parents, within parenting	12	3%

**Table 37: Effective ways to combat homophobia according to LGBT respondents**

Raising awareness in schools (19%) and making LGBT issues more visible in the media (16%) are considered as the most effective ways to combat homophobia. Also campaigning in general, depicting a more diverse image of LGBT people in the media, more LGBT role models, coming out of the closet, more pink, are chosen strategies. In general there is a call for more visibility! There are no answers in the sense of law, political strategies, etc. This can be explained because in Belgium the law is quite LGBT friendly.

Finally, in the logic of the transnational approach of the NISO project, the respondents were asked if they knew any positive developments regarding the fair treatment of young LGBT people in their country that could serve as a positive example for other countries (Table 38).

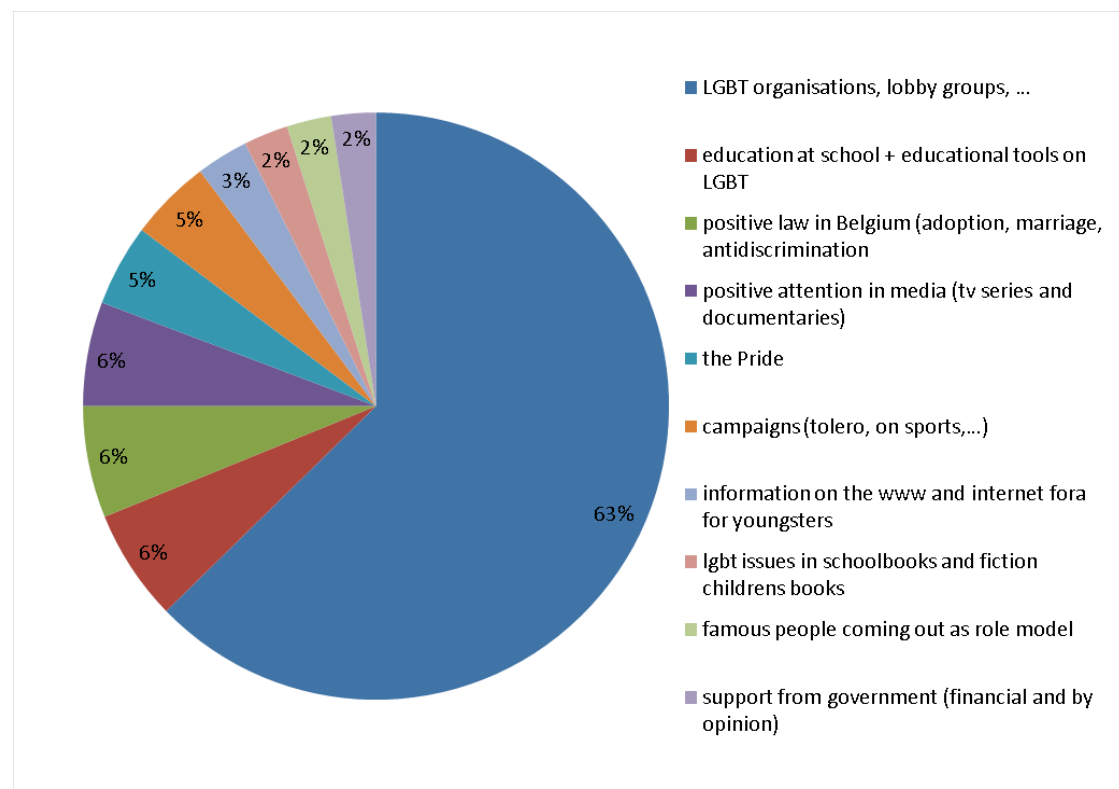


Table 38: Best practices in Belgium regarding the fair treatment of LGBT people

The main best practice given by the respondents is the existence of LGBT organisations and lobby groups (63%). This survey was being spread by the LGBT organisations, so mostly filled in by their members or sympathizers. So this answer makes sense. Many LGBT's in Belgium participate in a group for a period of time, for getting information, for meeting other LGBT persons etc. But not all stay as a member. These groups mean a lot to many LGBT people, especially in their stage of exploring their identity or coming out. We have in Flanders over 130 groups each with their own focus (for sports, for youngsters, for Muslim, etc.)

Other examples of good practices are: education at school and the educational tools (In Belgium there are LGBT groups who give lectures and workshops), positive laws, positive attention in the media, the Belgian Pride, campaigns (such as poster campaigns, radio adds, charters, etc.). Were also mentioned: web information and forums for youngsters ([www.weljongniethetero.be](http://www.weljongniethetero.be) hosts the biggest forum for young LGBT's), the existing of LGBT fiction books for children or LGBT issues addressed in

school books, role models, support from government.

### 3.4 The opinion of Belgian students regarding LGBT rights

In order to collect useful information for the other activities of the NISO project, in particular the activities organised in the schools for the promotion of fundamental rights, a part of the students' survey was dedicated to their opinion on LGBT rights.

Table 39: The Belgian students appear in general open to LGBT rights. Almost 90% think lesbian, gay and bisexual persons should live their life as they wish. Towards transgender persons the respondents are less tolerant: 76% agrees that transgenders should live their life as they wish.

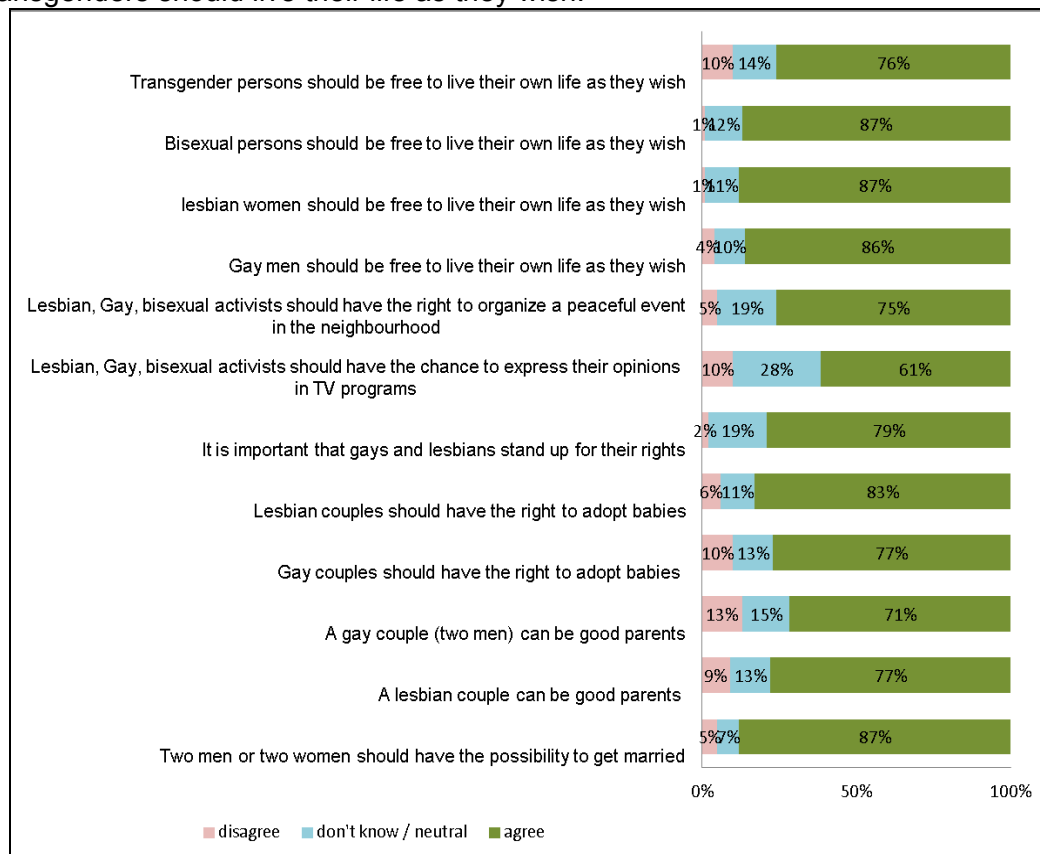


Table 39: Opinion of Belgian students regarding LGBT rights

Only 5% are not in favour of same-sex marriage. 87% agree with the right of marriage. 7 % remain neutral (in Belgium, the law regarding same sex couple getting married is in force since 2003). 6% do not agree and 83% agree with the right of adoption by lesbian couples. 10 % disagree and 77% agree with the right of adoption by gay couples, (in Belgium, the law of adoption is in force since 2006). 77% of the respondents think a lesbian couple can be good parents, 71% think the same for a gay couple. This points out that male parenting is still more taboo. Gender stereotypes play their role here.

Girls and respondents who know a higher number of LGBT's appear to be the ones more in favour of LGBT rights.

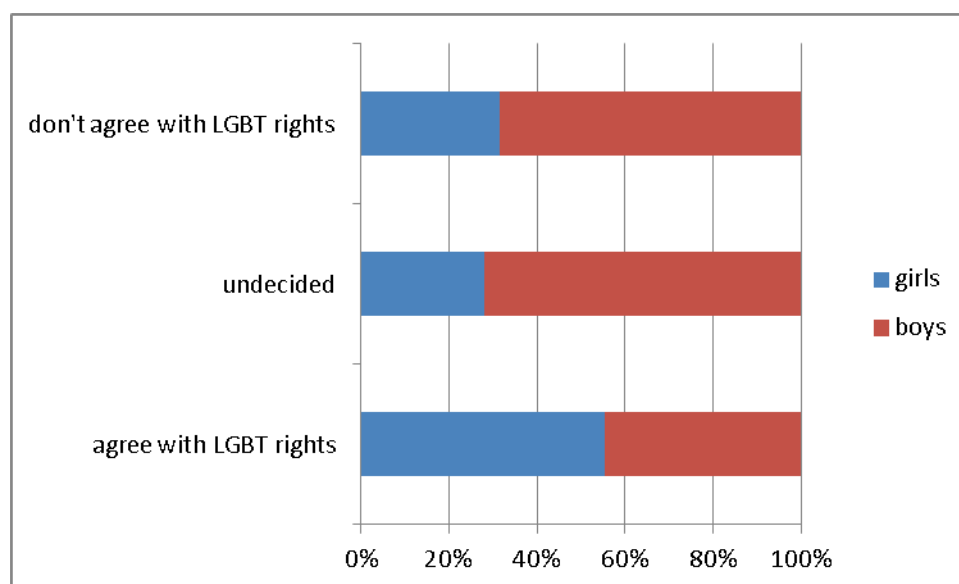
A very large majority of the students consider that LGBT people should be free to live their own life as they wish, even if the percentage is higher for gay, lesbian and bisexual persons (86%) than for transgender persons (76%). 4% of the students do

not agree with this fact regarding gay men, 1% regarding lesbian women and bisexuals. This figure rises to 10% for transgender persons.

Regarding LGBT political and civil rights, 79% of the respondents consider that it is important that gay and lesbian persons stand up for their rights. 75% agree with the fact that they should have the right to organise a peaceful event in the neighbourhood and 61% that they should have the right to express their opinions in TV programs. On these questions more students remained undecided: about 20%. These results show that a majority of the students are in favour of LGBT rights.

The opinion of the students on LGBT rights differed with their sex and the number of LGBT persons known. In order to make a comparative analysis, the sum of all the responses obtained for each statement has been made, and regrouped in three categories of students, going from those who don't agree with LGBT rights, those who are undecided and to those respondents who agree with LGBT rights.

Girls appear more liberal than boys (table 40). While 87% of the girls agreed with all or most of the sentences regarding LGBT rights, 70% of the boys did. Boys especially seemed more undecided or neutral (respectively 18% and 7%) This result confirms the fact that the boys appear to be less comfortable than girls with gays and lesbians and homosexuality in general.



*Table 40: Opinion of Belgian girls and boys regarding LGBT rights*

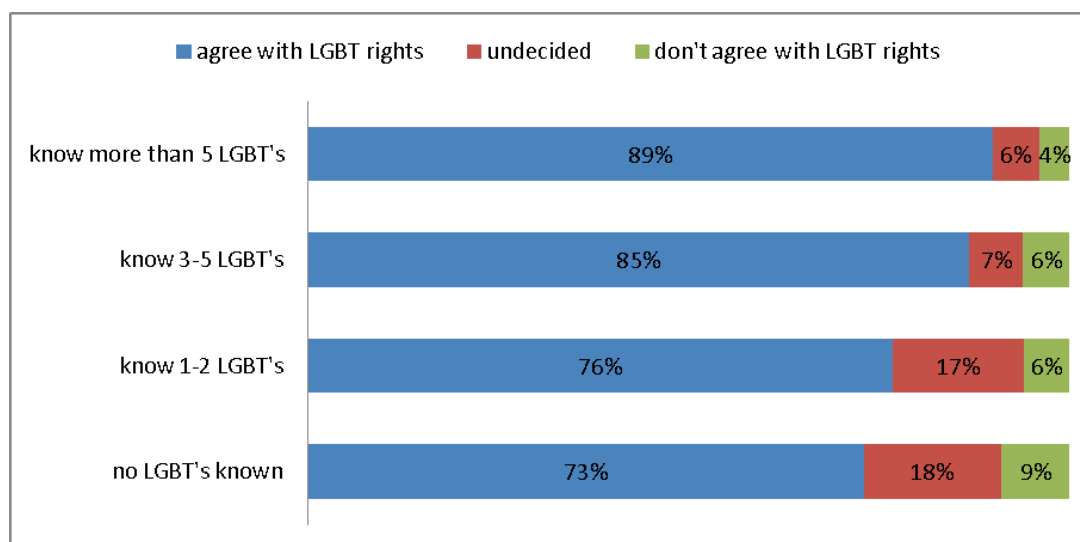


Table 41: Opinion of Belgian students regarding LGBT rights according to the number of LGBT's that they know

Finally, the variable that has the stronger impact on the opinion of students on LGBT rights is the number of LGBT persons they know (table 41). The more LGBT persons the students know, the more in favour of LGBT rights they are, and the less neutral they are. For example, among the students who do not know any LGBT person, 9% don't agree with statements regarding LGBT rights, and 73% agree to all or most of them. These percentages become 5% against and 89% pro LGBT rights in the case of students who know more than 5 LGBT persons.

Students who know many LGBT persons are usually more aware of the importance of the strengthening of LGBT rights because they see concretely which are the consequences and the difficulties for LGBT people linked to their lack of rights. Moreover, maybe a personal acquaintance with a LGBT person lessens the fears and the doubts regarding the recognition of marriage and adoption for homosexual couples.

After analysing the main stereotypes against LGBT's and their experiences of discrimination and prejudice in general, the report focuses in the last chapter more specifically on the situation inside the schools, which is the context of intervention of the NISO project.

## 4 Homophobia and discrimination at school

In order to obtain information useful for the activities of the NISO project, a specific chapter is dedicated to the personal experience of the LGBT respondents at school.

### 4.1 Discrimination against LGBT's at school

In chapter three you could read that school is one of the context of discrimination indicated by LGBT respondents, and 1/4 respondents under 20 years old has experienced discrimination or prejudice there. Transwomen and gay men appear to have been more discriminated than lesbian women and transmen in this context. Students also have a critical vision of their school and 1/4 of the students think LGBT students who are out at school will be bullied at school. However 52% state that LGBT persons are welcome at their school. These numbers confirm that school cannot be considered as a total secure environment for LGBT young persons.

### 4.2 The coming out of LGBT's at school

One of the consequences of the fact that young LGBT persons do not feel secure at school is that a relatively low number of respondents declare to have made their coming out at school. 23% of the respondents made a complete coming out at school, and 21% informed only a limited number of persons of their sexual orientation at school. 55% didn't come out at all (table 42).

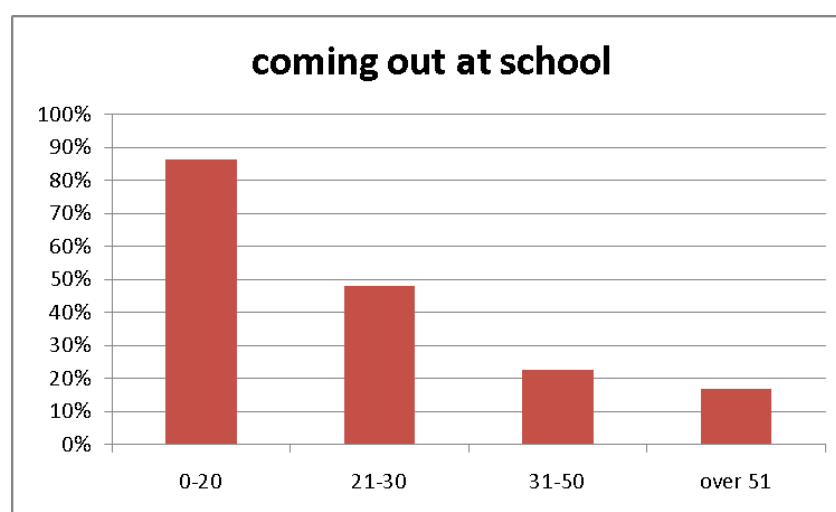


Table 42: Percentage of LGBT respondents who came out (or told few) while at school for each age category

We can see in table 42 that the respondents of the younger generations made more often their coming out while at school than older ones: 86% of the respondents under 20 years old came out, 48% of the respondents 21-30 years old came out, 23% of respondents between 31-50 years old came out and only 17% of the respondents over 50 years old came out at school. This can be explained by the time changing: people of 50 now have experienced a different school culture than a 20 years old person now. This result can be explained by the fact that society accepts more LGBT people now than 30-40 years ago, even if not completely. At that time, homosexuality, and in part sexuality in general, were considered taboo and were not easily discussed, including at school. Moreover, nowadays the development of sexual identity happens earlier for young people, and therefore they tend to be aware of their sexual orientation more early.

Regarding the variable of sexual orientation and genderidentity (table 43), 51% of transgenders did not come out at school. 41% of women and 39% of gay men came out at school. Bisexuals in this survey seem to be less open (but small number is represented in this survey!): all bisexual men came out and 7% of bisexual women came out.

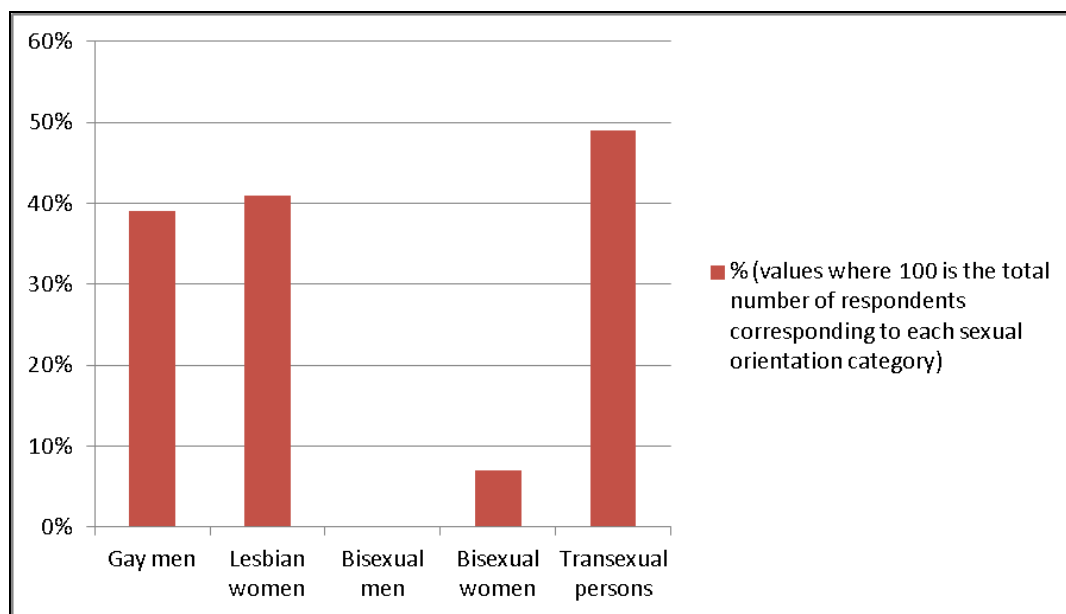


Table 43: number of respondents coming out at school according to gender

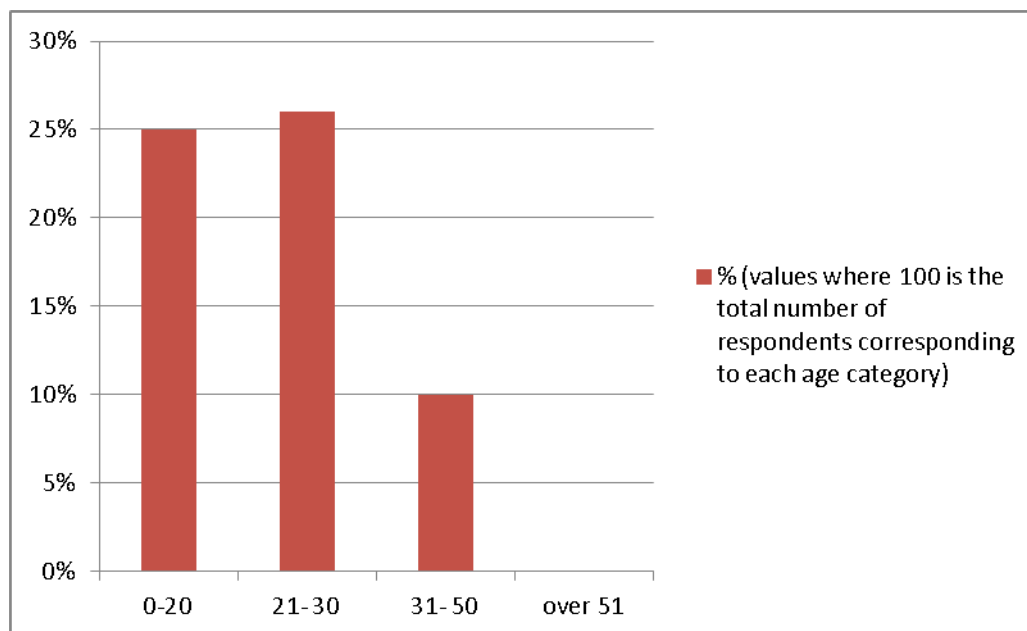
40 % of respondents who didn't come out gave as main reason the fact that they were still unsure about their sexual orientation. They were still doubting or not ready to come out yet. 16% of these respondents didn't come out because they were anxious about reactions or scared of rejection. 4% didn't come out because it wasn't asked and 1 respondent didn't come out because it was forbidden by the school.

### 4.3 Homosexuality in school curriculum

Unfortunately, not only is school considered by many LGBT people as an insecure environment for them, but very few report useful support from school. Homosexuality and homophobia are issues that are almost never discussed expressly during the classes. Only 19% of the LGBT respondents found something useful in the school curriculum, and 20% found on the contrary something that expresses prejudice in it. Considering that adolescence is an extremely important moment of the life for the construction of one's identity, and the moment in which young people develop their sexual identity, school should offer them support regarding these issues.

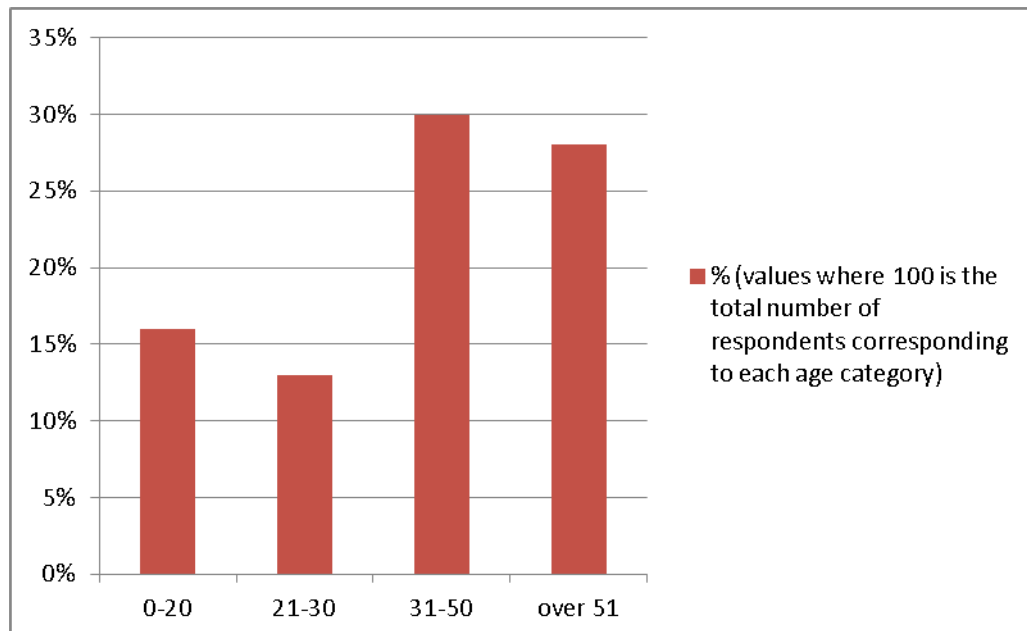
Only 19% of the LGBT respondents declare to have found something useful in the school curriculum. Mostly they refer to LGBT issues as a topic in class within language class, religious education, history and school projects on diversity (movies, class discussions, etc.). Other positive answers concerned talking to teachers and schoolcounselors for information, LGBT issues as subject for homework and group work and LGBT teachers as role models.





*Table 44: Percentage of LGBT respondents who found something useful in school curriculum according to age category*

Table 44 shows that especially the respondents under 30 years old find positive examples of LGBT issues being discussed in school curriculum: 25% of respondents under 20 and 26% of the respondents between 20 and 30 years old. Only 10% of respondents between 31-50 years old have found good examples and no respondents over 50 did.



*Table 45: Percentage of LGBT respondents who found something that express prejudice in the school curriculum for each category of age*

Besides, 20% of the respondents found something that expresses prejudice against LGBT people inside the school curriculum, especially the older respondents (see table 45). 28% of respondents over 50 and 30% of respondents of the age category 31-50 years old have found prejudice, compared to 13% of respondents of 21-30 years old and 16% of the LGBT respondents under 20 years old. The main

prejudices pointed out were jokes and remarks made by teachers during class. Few examples are given as rejection within the subject of religious education and school policies which made LGBT issues as taboo.

## **5 Conclusion**

The two surveys carried out in Belgium regarding the perception of LGBT people and students on the stereotypes and discriminations suffered by the LGBT community have produced interesting results, validating the approach adopted by the NISO project and offering useful information for the researchers and educators involved in the activities inside the schools.

The research offers elements to identify the most common stereotypes attached to gay and lesbian persons among young people.

In the survey for the students, we note that the majority of the students seem to be very tolerant towards LGBT rights and LGBT persons are welcome in their environment. However many agreed with the sentences that stated some traditional stereotypes on the role and the characteristics of men and women. The gender stereotypes with which a higher number of students agreed regard mostly the relationship of the girls with their appearance and some characteristics that men should have, in particular their independence and autonomy. Boys appear to agree to a higher number of statements than girls.

Regarding the students' vision of LGBT people, students believe that gay men have more specific characteristics than lesbian women. The LGBT community members who participated in the survey gave a more "negative" picture of the stereotypes attached to lesbian and gay persons than the students. However, some characteristics were indicated by both target groups: gay men are supposed to be effeminate, more sensible, attentive to their look and to fashion. Lesbian women are considered masculine, different in their physical aspect (especially regarding their hair) and in their clothes.

Beside the analysis of the main stereotypes attached to gender identity and sexual orientation, the research regarded also the homophobic attitudes diffused among students. These were asked to give information not only about what they think about homosexuality and homosexual persons, but also how they act with lesbian and gay persons. This is a way to obtain information on the opinion of students reducing the influence of the "politically correct", and to analyse the difference between a mere tolerance of LGBT people (I accept that they exist and that they should be able to live their life peacefully) and a total acceptance of them (I consider LGBT persons as any other person of my acquaintance). While more than 85% of students believe that LGBT should be free to live their life as they wish, 63% of boys and 39% of girls would rather find it annoying to share a room with an LGBT schoolmate. This shows the influence of image and peer pressure on these students.

The variable of how many LGBT persons the students know seem to be of great influence: the more they know, the more in favour of LGBT rights they are.

On the other side, almost half of the students feel rather comfortable with LGBT persons, and about 79% agree with the fact that it is important that LGBT stand up for their rights. About 80% agree with LGBT rights such as marriage and adoption.

Girls appeared to be in general more comfortable towards homosexuality and homosexual persons, and more in favour of extended LGBT rights, than boys.

In the middle, a large group of students accept homosexuality and LGBT people, think that they do not have any specific characteristics (or only “positive” ones), are conscious of the difficulties that they are confronted with in the Belgian society and of the discriminations they suffer, but are not completely comfortable with gender-expression and gender-roles.

Since all respondents follow the same school level and have more or less higher educated parents, these variables do not make difference.

The number of LGBT persons known has as well a strong influence on the students' attitudes toward members of the LGBT community. It is not surprising to note that the highest number of LGBT persons they know, the more the students are conscious of the difficulties that the latter must affront, the more they are comfortable with them and the more they are in favour of extended LGBT rights.

Regarding the discrimination and prejudices suffered by LGBT people, this report confirms the results of the background analysis. In fact, 84% of the LGBT respondents declared to have suffered experiences of discrimination or prejudice linked to their sexual orientation or gender identity. The places where the higher number of respondents declared to have suffered discrimination are school (56%) and media (52%). The types of prejudices suffered at school by LGBT respondents are verbal and psychological violence, non-acceptance and exclusion.

The students appear not to be aware of the lack of social inclusion of LGBT people as more than half of them think that most of their every-day life are lesbian and gay friendly and about 1/3 thinks that LGBT people are well accepted in society. The place indicated as the less gay/lesbian friendly, the home environment, shows that they are not always aware of the prejudices experienced by LGBT people in other environments, such as the media and internet (the second place where they suffer discrimination according to LGBT respondents). The students appear to be more conscious of what occurs in the environments that are more close and noted to them. The results confirm the fact that school cannot be considered as a safe environment for LGBT students. This has high consequences on the wellbeing of these students, making more complex and delicate the process of identity formation, very important during this phase of life. The consequence for the LGBT youth can be a high level of anxiety, depression and a difficulty to accept their sexual orientation.

According to LGBT respondents, the two main reasons of their social exclusion are the ignorance and lack of education of the population (for 44% of them). Coherently, according to them the two most effective ways to combat homophobia are raising awareness in schools (19%) and making LGBT issues visible in the media (16%). These answers validate the approach adopted by NISO project, which aims at working with the students inside the schools to promote human and LGBT rights through a participative use of media.