



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

D1.5 National report on homophobic attitudes and stereotypes among young people Italy



European Commission
Justice

Project co-funded by the European Commission, Directorate General Justice, within the Specific Program “Fundamental Rights and Citizenship”

Contract Number: No. JUST/2009/FAC/AG/1179 – 30 – CE – 0377095/00/44
Project Acronym: NISO

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Made available to: Public

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1 Introduction

This report analyses the results of two surveys carried out in Italy within the NISO Project – Fighting homophobia through active citizenships and media education, a two years initiative, co-funded by EU (DG Justice) in the field of its Human Rights and Citizenship Programme. The aim of the project is to involve the students in a participative and interactive process, to improve their knowledge and understanding of human rights and of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) issues.

The first phase of the NISO project consisted in analysing homophobic behaviours, attitudes and stereotypes among the population, and more in particular among the youngest in the four participating countries: Belgium, Estonia, Italy and The Netherlands.

First a background analysis on the situation at European and national level has been carried out on the situation of LGBT people, their rights and the homophobic attitudes diffused in society. This report shows that LGBT people are still regular victims of social exclusion and discrimination, and in many countries, schools are found to be unsafe environments for LGBT students.

In order to obtain a clear picture of the most common stereotypes and of the experiences of discrimination suffered by LGBT persons, the second step of the research consisted in two surveys carried out in parallel in each participating countries: one among the LGBT community and one among students. The surveys were based on two questionnaires, one for each target group, elaborated together by all the partners of the project. The two questionnaires aimed in particular at gathering information from the two target groups on the main stereotypes against LGBT people, their inclusion in the Italian society and their experience at school.

A transnational analysis of the results obtained in the four countries will be also carried out.

The results gathered through the two surveys carried out in Italy (Rome) are presented in this report. First the methodology adopted for the survey and the two samples are presented. The second chapter focuses on the main stereotypes attached to gender identity and sexual orientation diffused in the society and among the students, and their effects on the two target groups. The social inclusion and acceptance of LGBT persons according to them and to the students is analysed in the third chapter, together with the causes of the lack of social inclusion and the opinion of students on some LGBT issues. Finally, the fourth chapter regards more in particular the situation in schools.

2 Presentation of the methodology and the samples

In order to be able to gain a clear picture of the most common discriminative 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 gathering information on the point of view of these two different groups and to compare the experience of LGBT people and the attitudes and vision of the youth in Italy.

This chapter describes first the research methodology and then the main research questions, which guided the definition of the questionnaires. It presents also the difficulties that emerged, linked to the issues tackled, to some of the questions of the questionnaires and to how they have been distributed.

The second and third paragraphs describe more in detail how the two questionnaires have been diffused among the two target groups and the samples' characteristics.

2.1 Methodology

As mentioned, the research here reported is based on two parallel surveys, one for LGBT community members and one for students. We will now introduce the structure of the two questionnaires, which proposed three types of questions: closed, Likert scale and open questions.

The questionnaire for the students was composed of 23 questions touching the following topics:

- Personal information (age, gender, sexual orientation, school of belonging, religious affiliation, level of education of parents and cultural background)
- Opinions on characteristics to be attributed to boys and girls (gender identity and roles)
- Definition of homosexuality and characteristic to be attributed to LGBT people, if any
- Perception of LGBT acceptance at social level and in different social contexts (including school)
- Level of closeness with LGBT people and behaviour towards them
- Opinion about LGBT rights

The questionnaire for LGBT community members was composed of 19 questions and focus on the following themes:

- Personal information (age, gender, sexual orientation, employment, level of education, religious affiliation and cultural background)
- Experiences of discrimination
- Opinions about the reasons behind LGBT discrimination
- Perception of the school environment with reference of LGBT inclusion
- Perceived stereotypes on LGBT people and their consequences at personal level
- Channels perceived as most relevant for confronting homophobia

One of the research questions that guided this double survey was: "what are the factors that influence a more or less open attitude towards LGBT persons and their request of rights in youngsters?". The hypothesis was that those factors could be: the gender of the respondent, the level of education of the parents, the number of LGBT persons known, the cultural background, the school of belonging and the religious affiliation. These hypothesis were based on the results of the FRA report 2011 Homophobia, transphobia and discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation

and gender identity in the EU member states¹”.

Others research questions were:

- “What is the students’ perception of LGBT discrimination/inclusion at social level if compared with that of LGBT persons?”
- “Do the stereotypes perceived by LGBT persons match with the one attributed by students to LGBT persons?”
- “Can we observe a link between gender stereotypes and perception of LGBT people so that persons that are closer to traditional understanding of gender roles are also less incline to accept LGBT persons and requests of rights?”

We will see in the next chapters how the research answered the questions mentioned above but, before looking at the results, few more words on the research processes are needed.

Both in developing and distributing the questionnaires we encountered some challenges that are worth mentioning. First of all it was difficult to tackle the problem of stereotypes and perception with a semi-structured questionnaire: the tendency to answer following political correctness or social pressure on this topic can be high and the NISO consortium carefully thought about questions formulation also looking at previous survey conducted with smaller sample at local level.

An example of this difficulty is related to the interest in knowing the sexual orientation of the respondents. The researchers thought this information was important but, at the same time, they did not want to push for self-labelling. Researchers did not want neither the LGBT respondents, neither the students to be forced to insert themselves into pre-fixed categories such as heterosexual, gay, lesbian, etc. So the choice was to ask for gender identity first and then to ask about the attraction towards same or other sexes in a way in which the respondent could have multiple options.

Related to this difficulty is the challenge of engaging LGBT people; this was overcome by the presence of GayCenter that acted as a facilitator for distributing the questionnaire within the LGBT community. However this introduces a possible misrepresentation of the results due to the fact that we interviewed people that participate in LGBT events and is close to LGBT associations. We did probably reach only a minority of LGBT person that are not openly part of the community and this need to be considered in interpreting the results.

About the questionnaire in the schools different kind of schools have been involved but all in the metropolitan area of Rome; it would be interesting in the future to conduct a comparative analysis looking at schools more peripheral in which, for example a higher number of migrant students would be present. In fact, as we will see, almost exclusively Italian students with Italian background compose the sample so that the relevance of cultural backgrounds in influencing attitudes towards LGBT issues cannot be observed.

In conclusion we can say that the double survey conducted is informative and provided interesting results that succeed in guiding NISO partners in their school activities. Moreover, this research can be seen as a starting point for more in depth, qualitative research but can also be re-used in the future by so doing creating an historical database and adding more data for multiple comparisons.

¹ <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2011/homophobia-transphobia-and-discrimination-grounds-sexual-orientation-and-gender>

2.2 Questionnaire to LGBT persons

GayCentre, one of the Italian partner of the NISO project was responsible for the distribution of the questionnaire to LGBT people in Rome. In order to ensure a wide and various diffusion, it used different channels: it distributed it inside the association's premises, on Rome Gay street and at the occasion of Rome Gay Village in August 2011 (from 4/08/11 to 26/08/11). GayCentre volunteers have also carried out the data entry.

In total, 391 LGBT persons responded to the questionnaire, of which 61% were born male, 39% female and 1% intersexual.

Figure 1 shows the repartition by age of the respondents: almost half of them are aged between 21 and 30. A quarter of the respondents is under 20, and another quarter is between 31 and 50 years old. 2% of the respondents are over 51. The prevalence of young people can be explained in part by the modality of the questionnaire's distribution (mostly in gay bars and pubs).

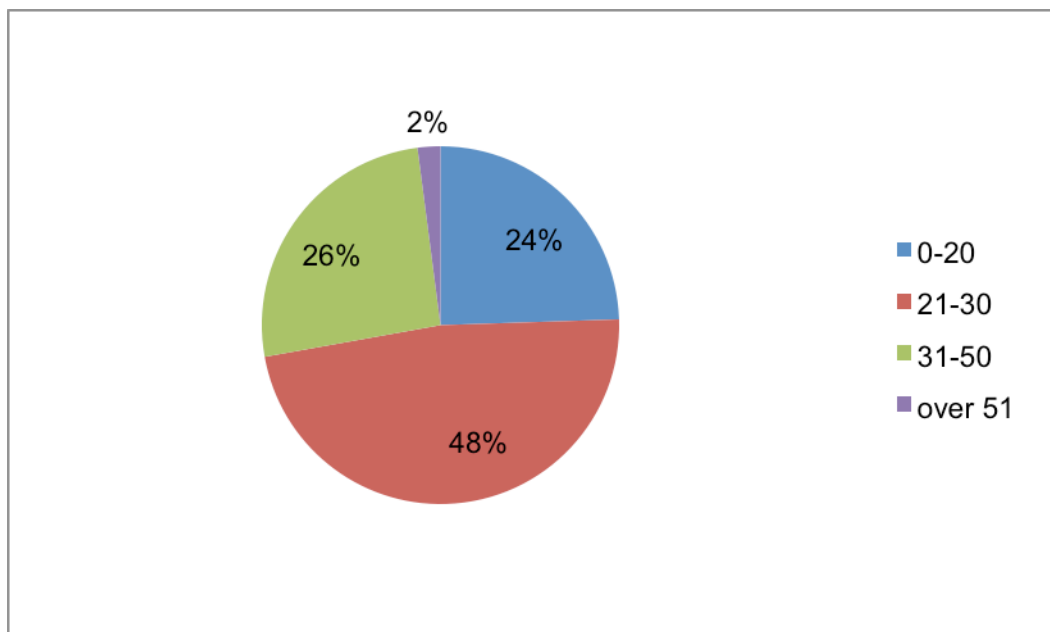


Figure 1: Repartition by age of the respondents to the LGBT questionnaire in Italy

As explained above, the categories regarding the gender identity and the sexual orientation of the respondents were built by the researchers, avoiding direct self-labelling by the respondents.

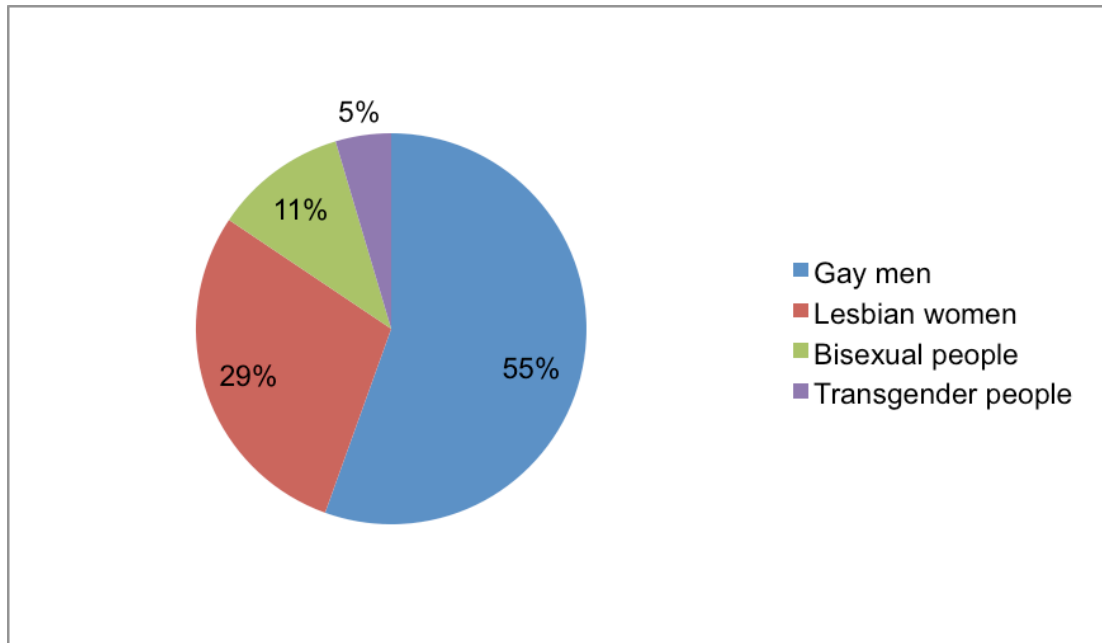


Figure 2: Sexual orientation and gender identity of the respondents of the LGBT questionnaire in Italy

Figure 2 shows that 5% of the respondents can be considered as transgender². Regarding their sexual orientation, 55% of the respondents are gay men³, 29% are lesbian women⁴ and 11% are bisexual persons, of which 5% bisexual⁵ men and 6% bisexual women.

As indicated above, one of the hypotheses of the analysis was that the respondents' socio-cultural background has an influence on their experience and attitude towards LGBT issues. Therefore, different questions of the first part of the questionnaire regarded the respondents' job, their level of education, the language(s) they speak at home (in order to identify their cultural background) and the religious community to which they belong.

Figure 3 presents the job categories of the respondents. 30% of them are students, 22% work in the commerce (sales personnel, hairdressers, restaurants and bars, etc.), 13% are office workers, 9% work in the arts, culture, sport sector, and 8% are self-employed professional (lawyer, architects, doctors, etc.).

The elevated number of students is in part linked to the age of the majority of the respondents.

² In this context, we define a person as transgender when his/her stated psychological gender is different from his/her gender at birth (for example, a person born a male, but who now identifies himself as a woman or mostly woman).

³ Male respondents are defined as gay when they are attracted only or mostly to men.

⁴ Female respondents are defined as lesbian when they are attracted only or mostly to women.

⁵ Respondents are defined as bisexual when they are attracted both to men and women.

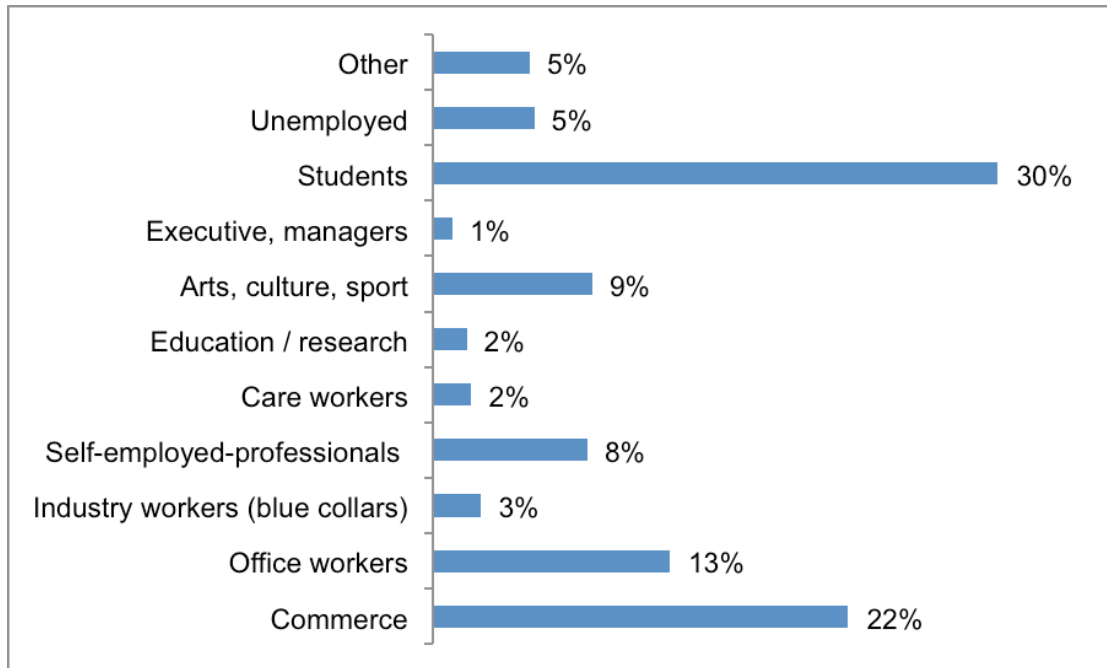


Figure 3: Typologies of jobs of the respondents to the LGBT questionnaire in Italy

The high number of students explains also the fact that almost three fourth of the respondents have a secondary level school title (Figure 4).

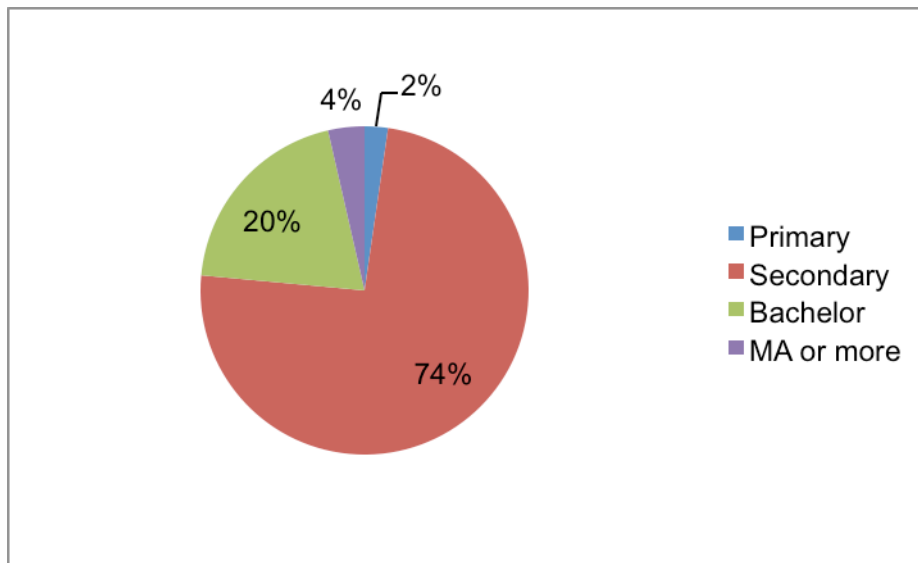


Figure 4: School title of the respondents to the LGBT questionnaire in Italy

The data obtained regarding the language (and therefore the origin) of the respondents show that most of the respondents (92%) speak Italian at home and 8% speak another language. The languages more often indicated were English, Spanish and French. Due to the low percentage of respondents that do not speak Italian at home, no analysis on the basis on the origin will be made in this report.

In the same way, the answers regarding the religious communities to which the respondents belong were not sufficient to make a comparative analysis between the various religions. In fact, 66% of the respondents do not belong to any religious community, 27% declared themselves Roman-Catholic and a very limited number of respondents belong to other religious communities (between 1 and 4%).

2.3 Questionnaire to students

As for the questionnaire to LGBT people, GayCentre was responsible for the distribution of the questionnaire to the students.

Its volunteers, together with a junior researcher of T6 Coop, distributed it between October and November 2011 in 3 Roman high schools and during an event organised by the Province of Rome. Inside the schools, the authorisation of the school councils was necessary and sometimes the questionnaire could be distributed only to over-18 students.

The questionnaire, anonymous, was distributed to small groups of students, after a quick presentation of its contents and objectives by the volunteers. Some expressions that could be complex for the students (such as “gay-friendly”, “transgender” or “lobby”) were also explained. Volunteers were available for possible questions while students were filling the questionnaire.

In total, 741 students responded to the questionnaire, half boys and half girls (less than 1% replied “other” to the question regarding their gender identity).

Regarding their repartition by age, 35% of the respondents were 18 years old, 18% were 17, 34% were 16 or below, and 7% were over 18 (Figure 5). The elevated number of 18 years old students is linked to the fact that in some schools the questionnaire could be distributed only to students of that age.

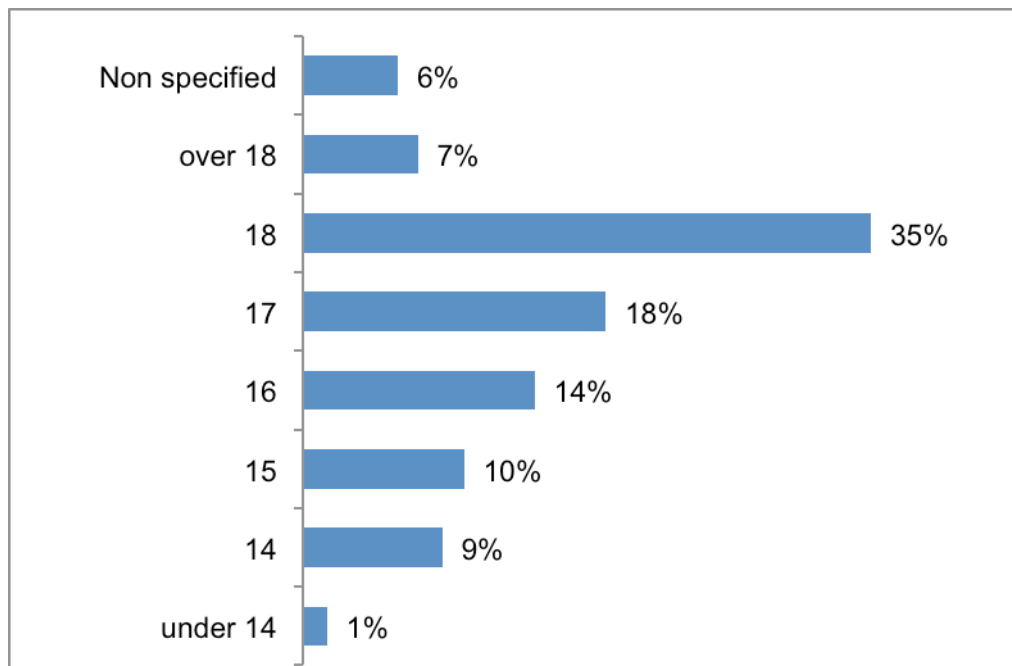


Figure 5: Repartition by age of the students interviewed in Italy

Figure 6 presents the typologies of schools of the respondents. 36% of them go to a secondary school focusing on humanities, 30% to a secondary school focusing on sciences and 22% to a technical school. These three main categories correspond to the three schools in which the questionnaire was distributed. Moreover, 5% of the respondents go to hotel-management or other vocational schools.

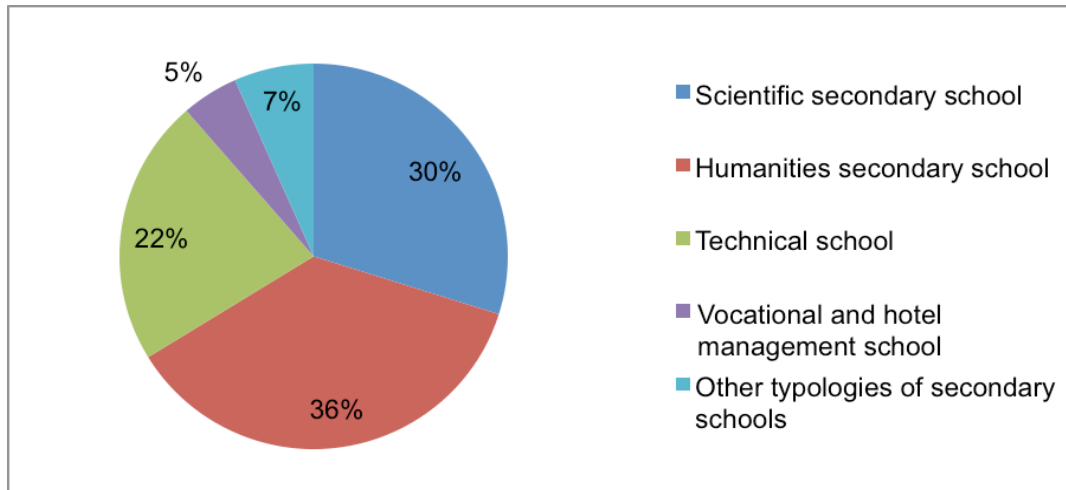


Figure 6: School typologies of the respondents to the students' questionnaire in Italy

In order to analyse the socio-cultural background of the respondents, the students were asked to indicate the language they speak at home, the school title of their parents and the religious community to which they belong.

As in the survey on LGBT persons, a large majority of the students speak Italian at home (94%), 6% indicated another language (mostly Spanish, English, French and languages from Central and Eastern Europe). These figures are too low to be taken into consideration in the analysis of the results.

Regarding the school title of the parents, Figure 7 reports the higher school title between the one detained by the mother and by the father. 11% have a master degree, 42% a bachelor degree, 41% a secondary school title, and 2% a primary school title degree.

These figures show a higher level of education than the national average⁶. This can be explained by the geographical and social context of the high schools in which the questionnaire has been distributed. In fact, the 3 high schools involved were situated in rather central parts of Rome and not in the periphery, and most of the families are of a medium or high socio-economic level.

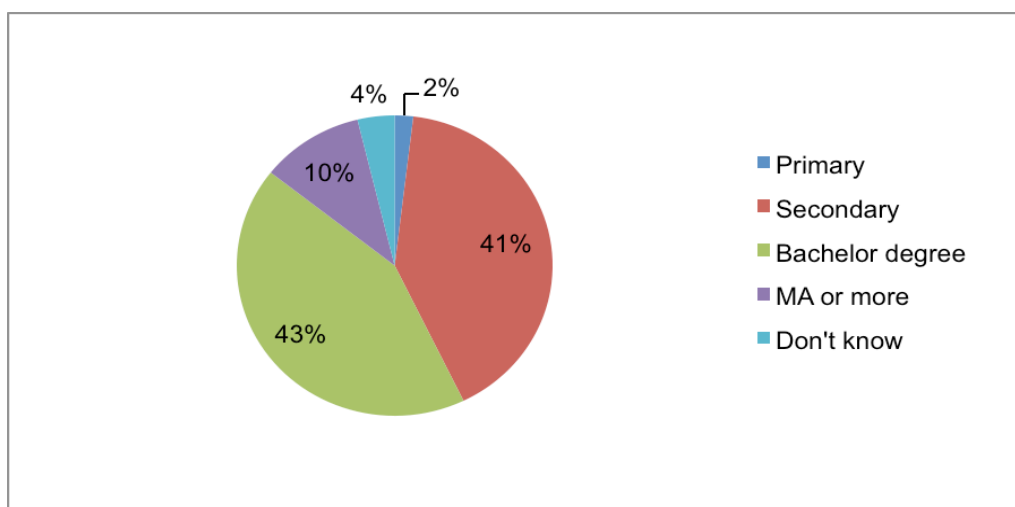


Figure 7: Highest school title detained by the parents of the students interviewed in Italy

⁶ According to the 2001 Census on the population resident in Italy, 7,5% of the population has a higher education degree, 56% a secondary education degree and 25,4% a primary education degree.

Regarding the religious community to which the students belong, 58% declared to be Roman-Catholic, 37% to have no religion, and 4% to belong to other religious communities.

As explained above, the question on the sexual orientation of the students did not use the closed categories of gay, lesbian or bisexual but the more general concept of “attraction”. In total, 2% of the male respondents declared to be attracted only or mostly to boys, 1% of the female respondents declared to be attracted mostly or only to girls, and 1% of all the respondents declared to be attracted to both boys and girls. Consequently, we can say that 97% of the respondents declare to be heterosexual (of course this could be due to their wish not to disclose information about a different sexual orientation).

Considering that one of the hypothesis of the analysis is that the social closeness of the students to LGBT people has an influence on their attitude towards LGBT issues, they were asked if and how many LGBT persons they know (Figure 8), the age of these persons and their relationship with them (Figure 9).

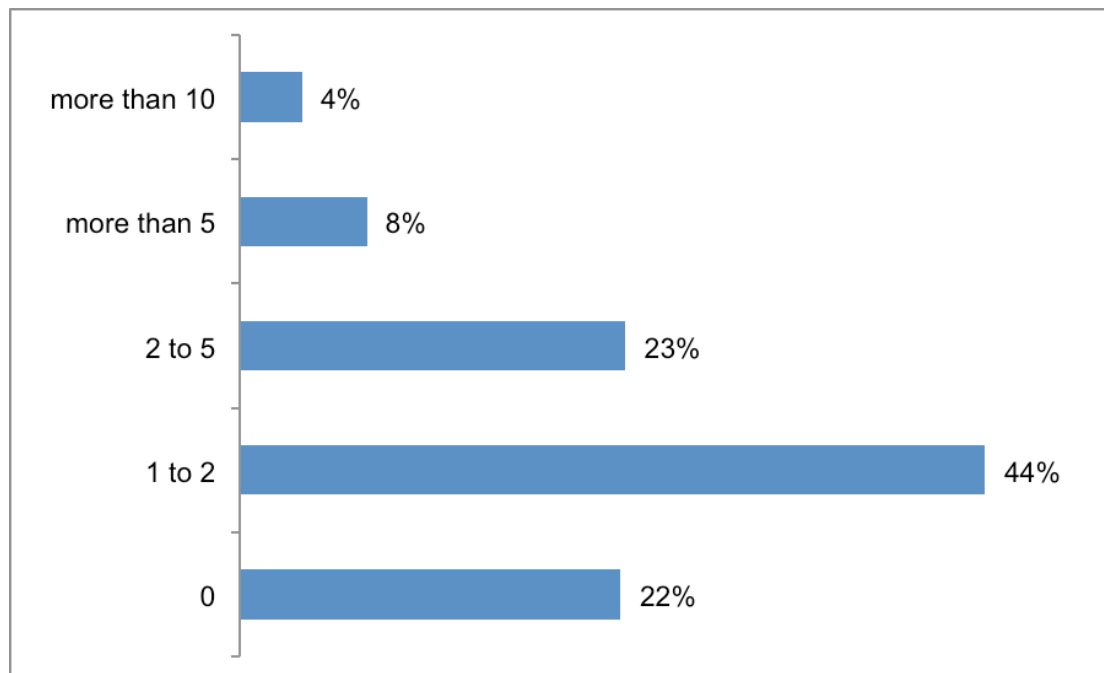


Figure 8: Number of LGBT persons known by the students interviewed in Italy

In total, 22% of the respondents declared that they do not know any LGBT person, while 44% know 1 or 2 LGBT persons, 23% know between 2 and 5, and 12% know more than 5. So the majority of the respondents have at least some contacts with LGBT persons.

Regarding the relationship between the respondents and the LGBT persons they know, most of them are schoolmates (39%), close friends (34%) or parent’s friends (17%).

Accordingly, most of them are also young: 57% are aged between 16 and 20, 19% between 20 and 30, 14% between 30 and 40. 9% are between 40 and 60 years old, and 2% over 60.

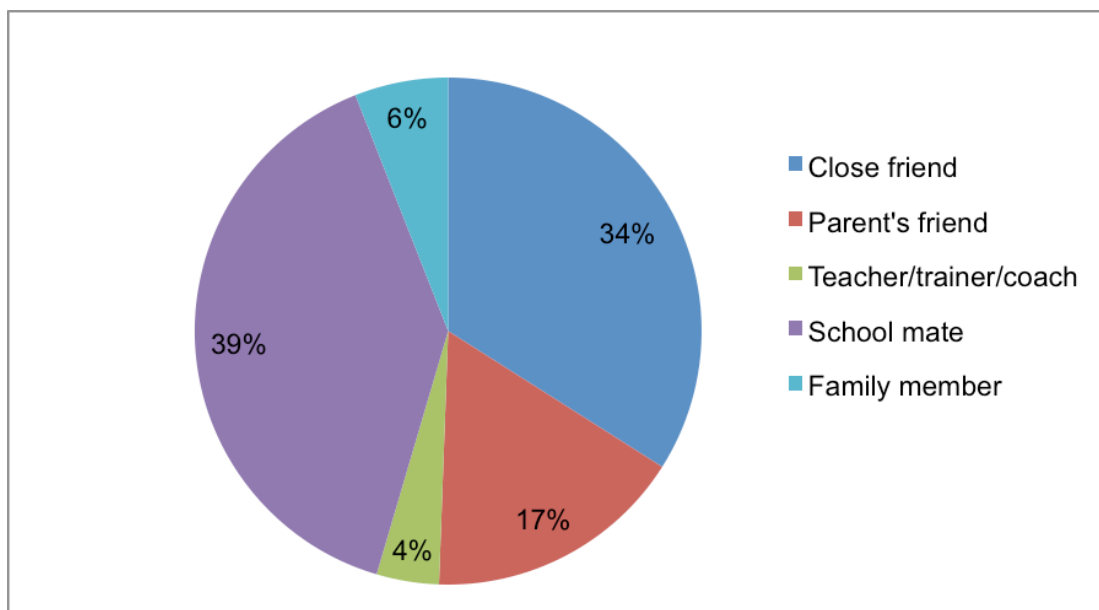


Figure 9: Relationship between the students and the LGBT persons they know

3 Stereotypes attached to gender and to LGBT persons

In this chapter, we will analyse the main stereotypes attached to gender and sexual orientation diffused among the population. Both points of view will be taken into consideration: the opinion of the students and the main stereotypes perceived by the LGBT people and how these affected them.

The first paragraph 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 a set of sentences that recalled 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) and professions men and women should do.

Girls disagreed in general more to the sentences reporting common gender stereotypes than boys. In the same way, students from humanities and scientific secondary schools and students who know a higher number of LGBT persons were less in agreement with the statements.

The second paragraph regards the main stereotypes often attached to LGBT persons and homosexuality. The students, asked to give a definition of homosexuality, consider it for 43% as a natural sexual orientation and for 46% as a choice. 13% of the students' answers give a definition of homosexuality linked to illness or reprehensive actions.

Moreover, the majority of the students do not think that lesbian women and gay men have particular characteristics. Lesbian women appear, according to them, even less visible than gay men.

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. For both gay men and lesbian women, some of stereotypes identified by the students and LGBT people are similar, in particular the lack of femininity for women, or masculinity for men, their appearance (looks, clothes) and some aspects of their characters (sensible, open).

Some of the stereotypes reported by LGBT people on the one hand and the specific characteristics mentioned by the students on the other are completely opposite. While students tend to have a more "positive", or politically correct, vision of LGBT persons, these believe that the population has in general a strong negative image of them.

In order to analyse the attitudes of the students towards LGBT persons, and not only their opinion regarding this issue (which is more susceptible to reflect the politically correct discourse), they were asked how they would react in front of a gay or lesbian schoolmate in specific circumstances (become friend, sit together, make homework together, share a room, etc.). In general, 63% of the students appeared comfortable with a lesbian or gay schoolmate, while 19% appeared uncomfortable. The boys are clearly less comfortable than girls, as well as the students from technical and vocational schools are less comfortable than students from humanities and scientific secondary schools. Another factor that has a strong influence on the reaction of the students is the number of LGBT persons they know. In fact, the students who know a different LGBT persons are much more comfortable than the students who don't know any LGBT persons.

The last paragraph analyses the effects that the stereotypes attached to LGBT persons have on their life. For a high number of respondents they did not have any effect, but for almost 10% of them they had a negative impact on their life (feeling of exclusion, consequence on the construction of their identity, depression, etc.).

3.1 Stereotypes on gender identity

In order to gather information on the students' reactions to gender stereotypes, we selected about 20 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. Figure 10 presents the responses obtained to this question.

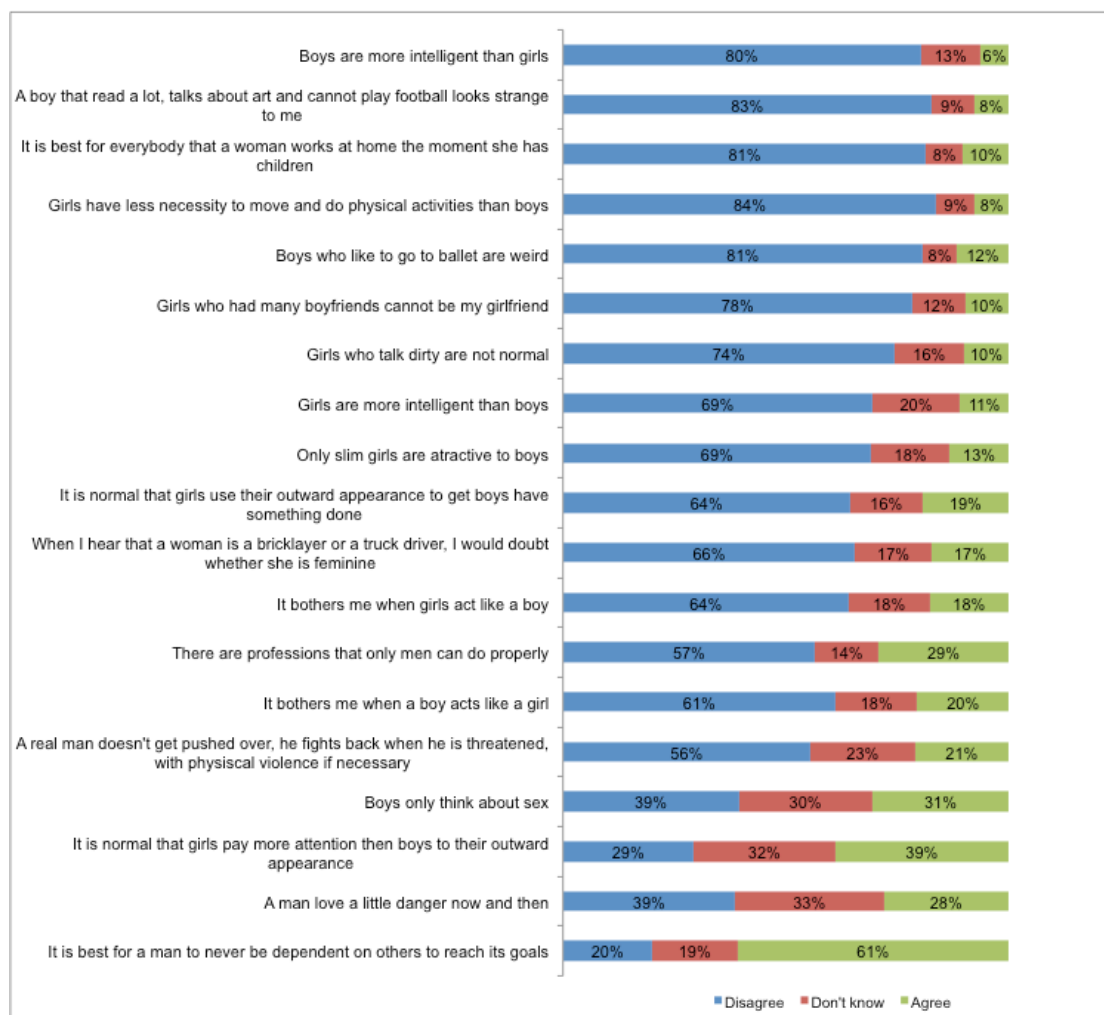


Figure 10: Opinion of the Italian students on statements regarding gender

In general, a majority of the respondents did not agree with most of the proposed sentences, even if some differences appear among the answers.

Regarding the statements on the behaviours and characteristics of boys and men, 8% of the students think that a boy who reads, talks about art and cannot play football looks strange, 12% that boys who like ballet are weird, 20% that it bother them when a boy act as a girl and 21% that a real man doesn't get pushed over, but

fighters back when he is threatened, with physical violence if necessary. The percentage of students who agreed with the suggestions increases to 28% for the sentence regarding men's love of danger, and 61% for the one on men's independence.

Regarding the traditional expectations on women and girls, 7% of the students believe that girls have less necessity to do physical activities than boys, 10% agree that girls who talk dirty are not normal and 11% think that it is better if a woman works at home when she has children. The students agreed more with the statements regarding the relationship of girls with their appearance: 17% 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 38% think that it is normal that girls pay more attention than boys to their appearance. Besides, 29% of the students agreed that there are professions that only men can do properly.

As described above, the statements inserted in the questionnaire were based on common ideas about the role and characteristics of men and women. The majority of the students disagreed with the sentences that expressed more "traditional" stereotypes, for example the ones regarding the activities each gender is expected to practice (ballet and reading for girls, football or physical activities in general for boys). However, a quite high number of students declare that they do not feel comfortable with persons not acting as "required" by their sex: it bothers 18% of the students when a girl acts as a boy, and 20% of the students when a boy acts as a girl.

The sentences with which the higher number of students agreed concern on the one hand the relationship of girls with their appearance, and on the other hand some "typical manly" characteristics (the love of danger, the independence).

While it is not surprising that a majority of students think that it is normal that girls give more attention than boys on their outward appearance, the fact that one student out of five think that it is normal that girls use their appearance to obtain things is more significant. It is a strong indicator of the expectations of the students regarding the behaviours of men and women.

Finally, the fact that more than half of the students agreed "it is best for a man to never be dependant on others to reach its goals" has not a very strong significance in terms of gender stereotypes. In fact, the questions and comments of the students during the filling of the questionnaire demonstrate that a high number of them interpreted this sentence as a statement regarding men in general, and not men as opposed to women. It is to be expected that teenager students give a high importance to independence and autonomy.

In order to analyse the different answers of the students to this question according to their sex, the typology of school they go to, the level of education of their parents and the number of LGBT persons they know, we calculated the sum of the answers to all the statements for each student. The students were divided in five categories: from those who disagreed with all of the statements, to those who agreed with all of the statements.

An analysis of the different answers given by the girls and the boys show that in general girls have less gender stereotypes than boys (Figure 11). 49% of the girls participating in the survey disagreed with all of the statements, 43%, disagreed with many statements, and 7% agreed with some statements. Regarding the boys, 34% of them agreed with some statements, 44% disagreed with many statements and 19% disagreed with all of them.

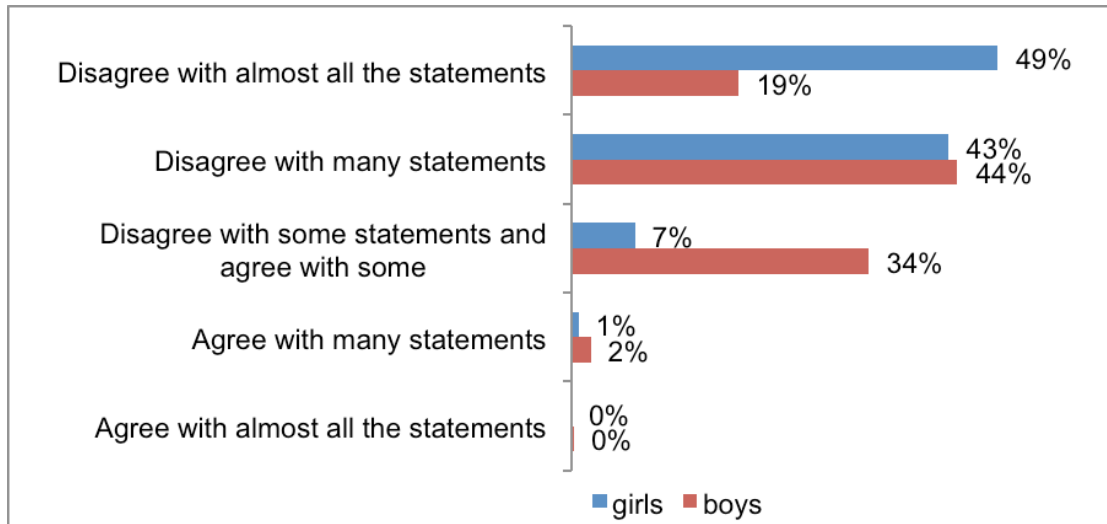


Figure 11: Opinion of girls and boys on statements regarding gender stereotypes

Figure 12 presents a more detailed analysis of the answers given by girls and boys.

	Disagrees		No opinion, doesn't know		Agrees	
	boys	girls	boys	girls	boys	girls
Boys are more intelligent than girls	69%	91%	20%	6%	10%	2%
A boy that read a lot, talks about art and cannot play football looks strange to me	75%	90%	13%	5%	12%	4%
It is best for everybody that a woman works at home the moment she has children	74%	84%	11%	4%	11%	9%
Girls have less necessity to move and do physical activities than boys	80%	87%	10%	8%	10%	5%
Boys who like to go to ballet are weird	69%	92%	13%	3%	18%	8%
Girls who had many boyfriends cannot be my girlfriend	70%	81%	15%	8%	13%	6%
Girls who talk dirty are not normal	66%	82%	20%	11%	14%	6%
Girls are more intelligent than boys	72%	65%	20%	18%	6%	16%
Only slim girls are attractive to boys	63%	74%	19%	15%	17%	9%
When I hear that a woman is a bricklayer or a truck driver, I would doubt whether she is feminine	53%	76%	21%	13%	24%	10%
It is normal that girls use their outward appearance to get boys have something done	55%	73%	17%	14%	27%	11%
It bothers me when girls act like a boy	49%	77%	25%	11%	25%	11%
It bothers me when a boy acts like a girl	43%	78%	24%	13%	32%	9%
There are professions that only men can do properly	40%	71%	17%	12%	42%	15%
A real man doesn't get pushed over, he fights back when he is threatened, with physical violence if necessary	45%	64%	25%	21%	29%	12%
Boys only think about sex	45%	34%	27%	33%	27%	33%
A man love a little danger now and then	33%	43%	31%	35%	35%	21%
It is normal that girls pay more attention then boys to their outward appearance	28%	32%	25%	38%	47%	29%
It is best for a man to never be dependent on others to reach its goals	19%	21%	20%	18%	59%	61%

Figure 12: Opinion of girls and boys on statements regarding gender stereotypes

For all the statements presented, girls disagreed more than boys, except for the phrases “girls are more intelligent than boys” and “boys only think about sex”. But the difference in the answers of boys and girls becomes more evident for some of the sentences: boys appear more attached to the traditional characteristics of men (“a real man doesn't get pushed over, he fights back when he is threatened, with physical violence if necessary”, “boys who like to go to ballet are weird”, “it bothers me when a by act as a girl”), and of women (“it is normal that girls pay more attention then boys to their outward appearance”, “when I hear that a woman is a bricklayer or a truck driver, I would doubt whether she is feminine”). Moreover, while only 15% of the girls think that there are professions that only men can do properly, 42% of the boys interviewed think so.

Figure 13 presents the answers given by the students according to the typologies of their schools.

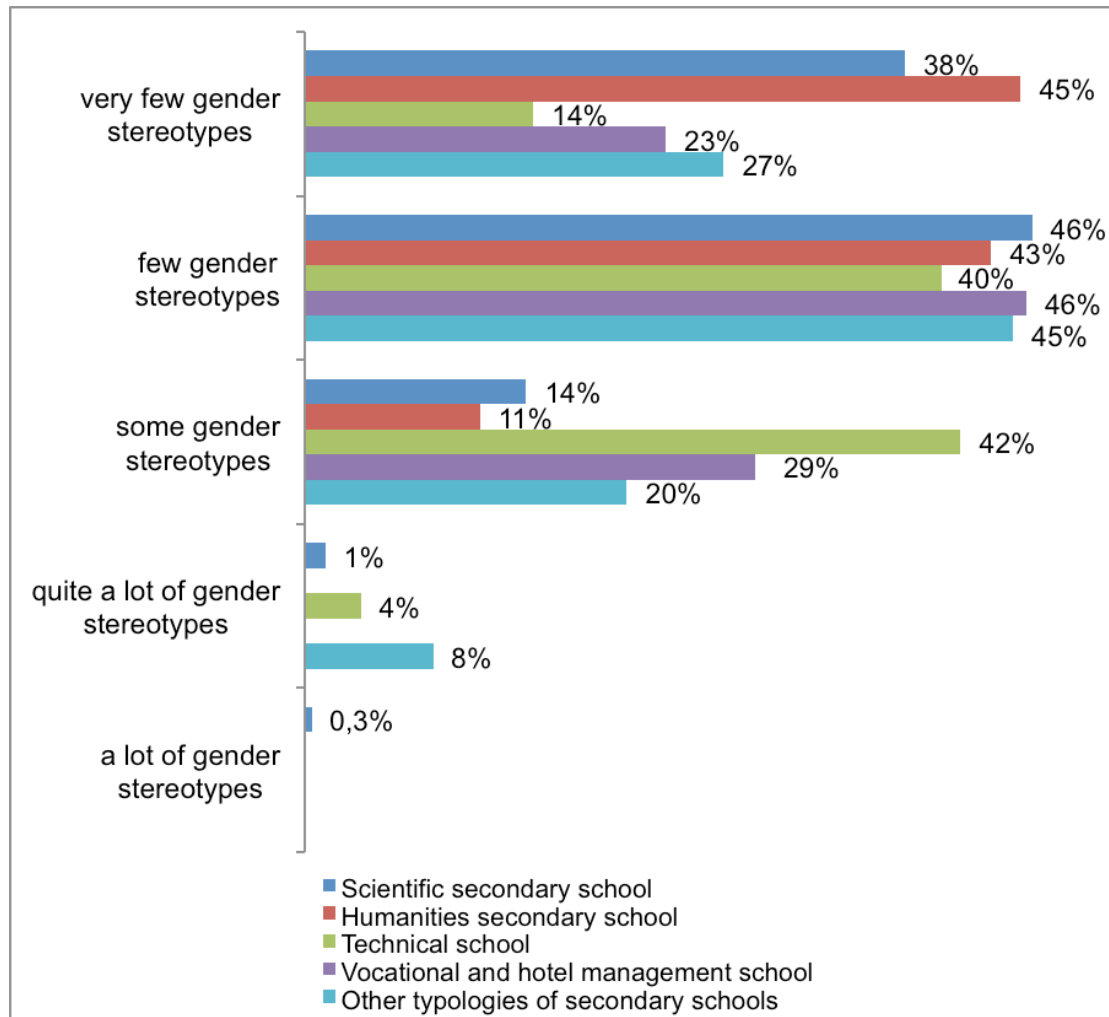


Figure 13: Opinion of students on statements regarding gender stereotypes according to their school typology, Italy

The typology of school of the students appears to have an influence of their opinion regarding gender stereotypes. Students going to humanities and to scientific secondary schools generally were the ones who disagreed more with the statements presented: 45% of the students in humanities high schools disagreed with almost all the statements and 43% of them disagreed with many statements. 38% of the students in scientific high schools disagreed with almost all the statements and 46% % of them disagreed with many statements.

On the contrary, students going to technical schools agreed to a higher number of sentences than the average: 42% of the students in technical schools agrees with some statements.

These results can be interpreted as an indication that the students from humanities and scientific secondary schools agree less with a stereotyped vision of men and women than students from technical schools, or as an indication that they tend to adopt a more political correct discourse.

Moreover, as noted in chapter 1, it is important to remember that the main humanities school in which the survey has been carried out has participated in recent years in different projects regarding gender issues, so the students of this school are particularly aware of this issue.

Another variable that has an impact on the gender stereotypes among the students is the number of LGBT persons they know. It appears that the students who know a higher number of LGBT people agreed with a lower number of statements that the students who know no or few LGBT persons (Figure 14).

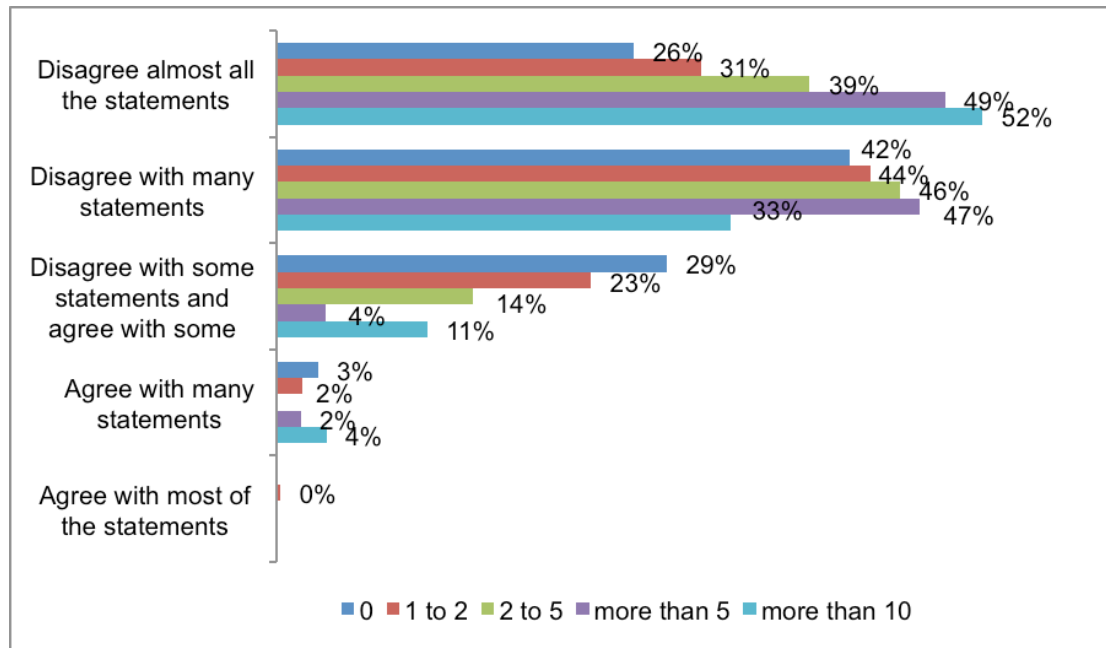


Figure 14: Opinion of students on statements regarding gender stereotypes according to the number of LGBT persons they know, Italy

52% of the students who know more than 10 LGBT persons disagreed with almost all the statements, while 11% of them agreed with some. On the contrary, 26% of the respondents who don't know any LGBT persons disagreed with almost all the statements, while 29% agreed with some.

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.

3.2 Commonplaces about homosexuality and LGBT persons

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

3.2.1 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 (Figure 15). They could give more than one answer (this is the reason why the sum exceeds 100%).

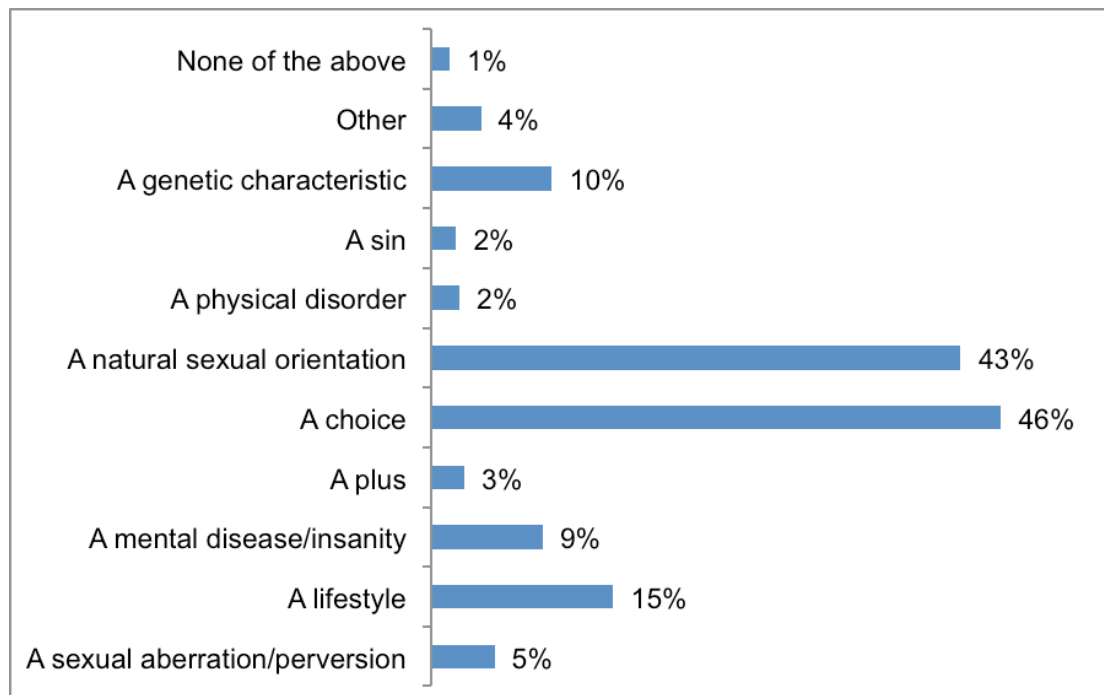


Figure 15: Definition of homosexuality by the Italian students

46% of the students responded that they consider homosexuality a choice, and 43% a natural sexual orientation. For 15%, it is a lifestyle and for about 11% it constitutes a disorder, mental (9%) or physical (2%). Finally, for 5% of the students, homosexuality is a sexual aberration and for 2% a sin.

Figure 16 shows that the answers of the girls and the boys are slightly different.

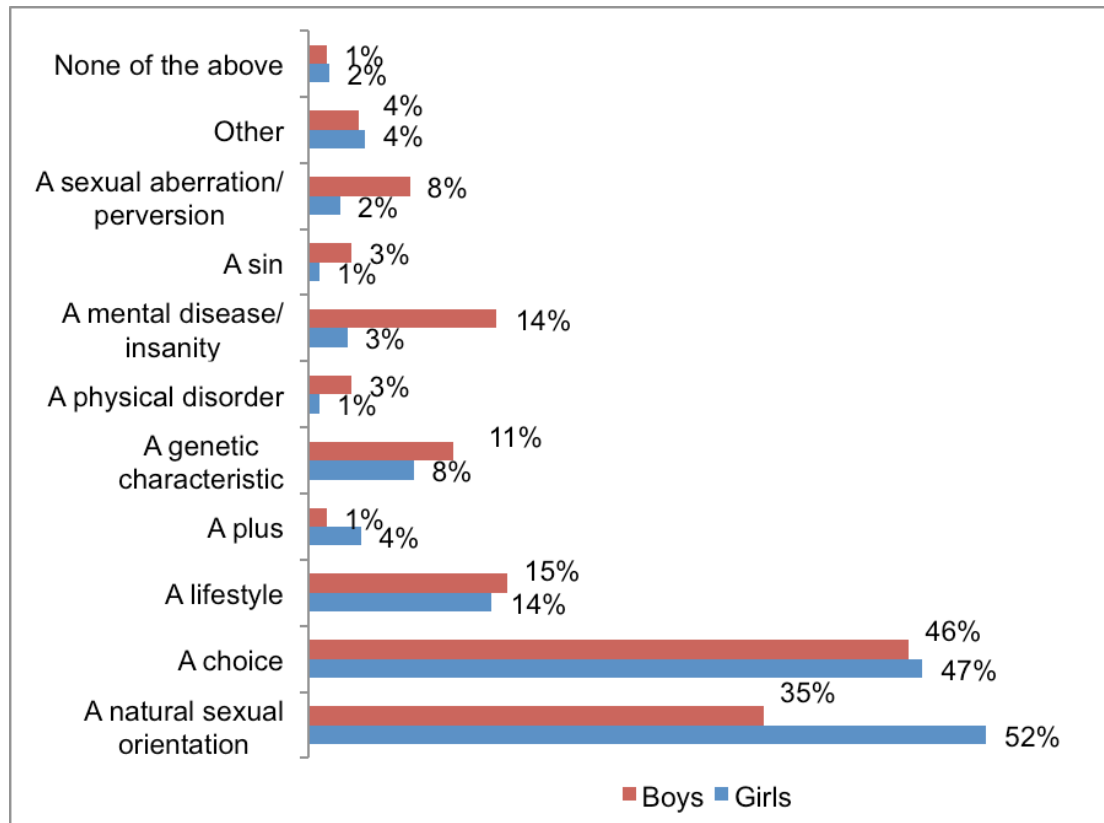


Figure 16: Definition of homosexuality by girls and boys, Italy

A higher number of girls than boys considered homosexuality a natural sexual orientation (53% of the girls against 35% of the boys), while more boys considered it as a mental disease (14 % of the boys and 3% of the girls) or a sexual aberration ((% of the boys and 2% of the girls).

The definition of homosexuality as a natural sexual orientation is an indicator of a good level of acceptance of homosexuality by the students and a positive attitude towards lesbian and gay people. Besides the 43% of the students who choose this definition, 3% defined it as a “plus”.

On the other hand, the definition of homosexuality as a “choice” could imply that the students consider that a lesbian or gay person somehow decides to be homosexual at one point in its life, in a conscious way. To consider homosexuality as a choice has consequences on the understanding of the problems that LGB persons have to face, on the way in which they are considered, and on the opinion regarding their rights.

However, from the analysis of the internal coherence of the questionnaires and the work done by the experts with the students during the NISO project, it appears that a high number of the students who chose this answer have a more “positive” interpretation of it. For them, “a choice” means a liberty, a possibility that people have or should have.

The definition of homosexuality as a lifestyle, even if not directly negatively connoted, implies also a reductive vision of homosexuality, more linked to the attitudes and behaviours of the LGB persons than to their actual sexual orientation.

The other definitions suggested, a sexual aberration, a sin or a disorder, can be interpreted as a refusal of homosexuality, considered as something not normal, but also highly criticizable and reprehensible. Even the definition of homosexuality as a disorder (mental and physical) implies that homosexual persons are sick and should be cured. All together, 13% of all the answers given by the students show some prejudices or a lack of information towards LGB persons.

In a second moment, the students were asked if they consider that lesbian women and gay men have particular characteristics. Figure 17 shows the percentage of students who think that gay men and lesbian women have particular characteristics.

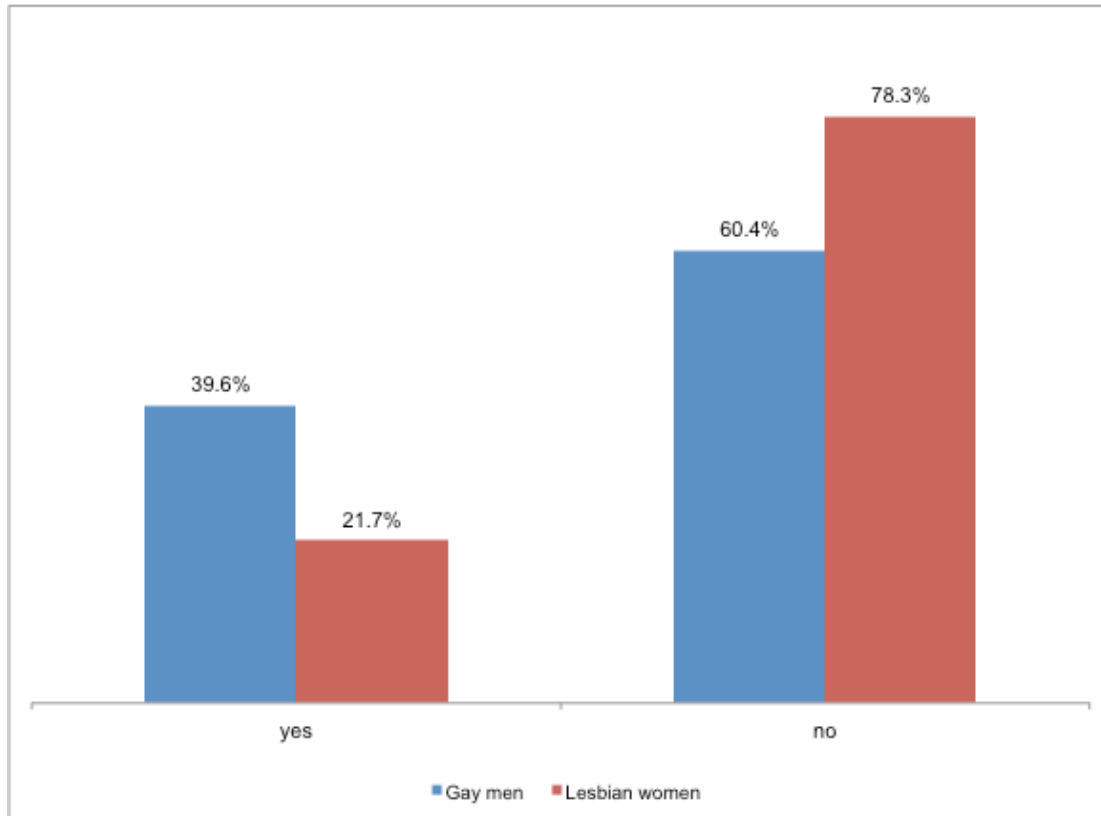


Figure 17: Percentage of Italian students who think lesbian and gay persons have specific characteristics

The majority of the students think that lesbian and gay people do not have specific characteristics.

However, the result is different for gay and lesbian persons: while 39,6% of the respondents think that gay men have specific characteristics, the percentage decreases to 21,7% for lesbian women. This data shows that the students think the gay men are in general more visible and recognisable than lesbian women.

Figure 18 shows that the answers of the girls and the boys are not very different: a slightly higher number of girls think that gay men have particular characteristics (40% of the girls against 38% of the boys), while a slightly higher number of boys think that lesbian women have specific characteristics (24% of the boys against 18% of the girls).

	Do gay men have particular characteristics?		Do lesbian women have particular characteristics?	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Girls	40%	57%	18%	79%
Boys	38%	61%	24%	73%

Figure 18: Percentage of Italian girls and boys who think lesbian and gay persons have specific characteristics

It is interesting to note that also the number of LGBT persons they know does not appear to have an important impact on the answers of the students. However, the results of this question are difficult to interpret beyond a perceived visibility of lesbian and gay people by students. The fact that the students consider that LG persons have specific characteristics doesn't in itself indicate that they have stereotypes against them, and the contrary is also true. Moreover, the answers of the students to this question show a high risk to be influenced by the "politically correct" discourse.

3.2.2 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 persons asked them to indicate the 5 most common stereotypes attached to gay men and lesbian women according to them. The following paragraph compares the results obtained at these two questions.

The main characteristics identified by the students and those stated by LGBT persons have some similarities but also some differences. We will first analyse the answers given for gay men, and then those given for lesbian women. We can already note, however, that there are no significant differences between the answers given by boys and girls to this question in the survey to students.

Regarding gay men, the tag cloud of Figure 19 shows the main answers given by the students. The one in Figure 20 shows the answers of the LGBT respondents.



Figure 19: Specific characteristics of gay men according to students in Italy

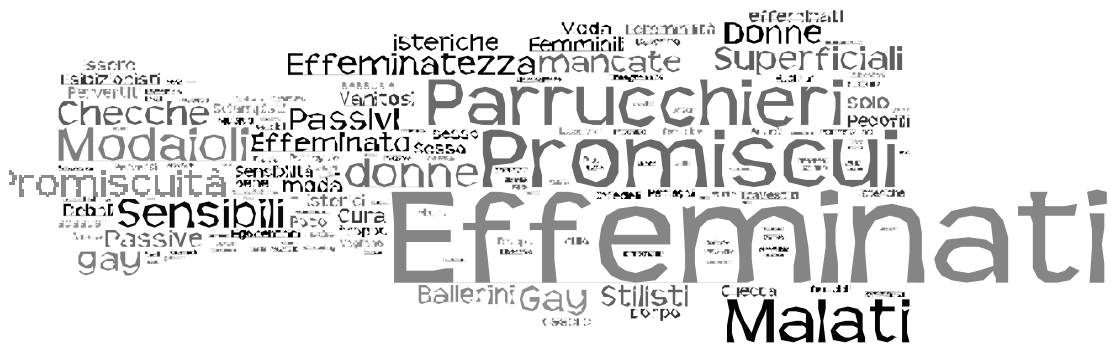


Figure 20: Main stereotypes attached to gay men according to LGBT persons in Italy

Table 1 synthesis the main characteristics indicated by both students and LGBT respondents for gay men.

Answers of students		Answers of LGBT people	
Effeminate attitudes and behaviours	32,4%	Effeminate	23,8%
Effeminate	7,3%	Hairdresser / stylist	10,5%
Sensible	24,0%	Promiscuous / wanton	11,8%
Way to dress	11,1%	Ill	8,5%
Attention to looks, to the body	8,8%	Fashionable	12,7%
Open	1,9%	Sensible	7,4%
Voice, way to speak	8,0%	Failed women	5,6%
Softness, gentleness	3,1%	Passive	7,4%
Attentive	1,9%	Give importance to the appearance / aesthete	7,0%
Showing, eccentric	1,5%	Hysterical	5,3%

Table 1: Synthesis of the main characteristics of gay men according to Italian students and LGBT persons

Some characteristics have been indicated by both students and LGBT people. The first answer given by LGBT persons is “effeminate” (24% of the LGBT answers). In the same way, 32% of the answers given by the students who think that gay men have particular characteristics regarded their effeminate behaviours and attitudes (“they behave like a woman”, “they tend to act as usually girls do”), and 7% was “effeminate”.

Another similar reply is that gay men are “sensible” (24% of the students’ answers and 7% of the LGBT persons’ answers).

The other two other similar characteristics indicated are the fact that they are attentive to their looks and body (9% of the student’s answers and 7% of the LGBT’s) and to the way they dress and to fashion (11% of the students’ answers and 13% of the LGBT’s).

Nonetheless, besides these similarities, we note some differences in the other characteristics mentioned.

LGBT people indicated a high number of negative stereotypes that according to them are associated to gay men: the fact that they are promiscuous (12%), ill (8,5%), passive (7%), hysterical (5%) or “failed women” (6%). “Hysterical” is an answer given more by lesbian women than by gay men. Altogether, almost 40% of the answers are negatively connoted.

Another frequent answer given regards the typologies of jobs gay men are supposed to do: hairdressers, stylist or other jobs linked to art and fashion.

On the contrary, the other characteristics named by the students are more neutral, or even positive. The students indicated the way they speak (6%), the fact that they are soft and gentle (2,4%), more open (1,5%) and attentive (1,5%). Only 1,2% of the answers were less positive, considering gay men showing and eccentric and very few insulting answers were given. Some of the answers of the students appear very “politically correct” and, as explained in chapter 1, it is difficult to obtain certain information of the students’ opinions on this issue by using a codified questionnaire. More in-depth, qualitative research is necessary to obtain a clearer picture about the stereotypes against LGB persons diffused among the youth.

The two figures below report the answers given by the students and the LGBT respondents regarding the main characteristics and the stereotypes associated to lesbian women.

Answers given by students		Answers given by LGBT persons	
Masculine attitudes and behaviours	40,2%	Masculine	24,0%
Clothes, way to dress	13,8%	Truckdriver	20,7%
Physical aspect, hair	13,8%	Rough/ coarse, vulgar	12,0%
Masculine, not very feminine	11,5%	Quarrelsome, violent	7,8%
Good looking, attractive	6,9%	Agressive	6,7%
Hard, tough, with a strong character	6,9%	Short haired	6,6%
Sensible	3,4%	Football player	6,7%
More open	3,4%	Ugly / fat	5,6%
		Not neat	5,1%
		Problems with men	4,7%

Table 2: Synthesis of the main characteristics of lesbian women according to Italian students and LGBT persons

As for the gay men, there are some similarities and differences between the answers given by the two groups of respondents.

The first characteristic given for lesbian women by both groups is, as for gay men, they are masculine and lack femininity. 40% of the answers given by the students regarded the masculine attitudes and behaviours of lesbian women, and 11,5% their masculinity in general. In the same way, this aspect was indicated by 24% of the LGBT persons.

Another common characteristic indicated by both is the physical aspect of lesbian women, in particular their hair. Students included also the way they dress (14%). Finally, the students consider them tough, with a strong character (7%), where LGBT persons think that people see them as rough (12%), quarrelsome (8%) or aggressive (7%). These last stereotypes were in majority stated by gay men.

Regarding the differences in the characteristics indicated by the two groups, students indicated here again more positive or neutral ones: they believe lesbian women are attractive (7%), sensible (3%) and more open (3%).

On the contrary, the stereotypes associated to lesbian women indicated by LGBT people are more negative, and sometimes quite the opposite: they think people see them as ugly or fat (6%) and not neat (5%).

Again, some stereotypes mentioned by LGBT persons are associated to their jobs or activities: 21% of the answers of the LGBT persons was truck driver, and 7% football player. Considering that “truck driver” was the second stereotype mentioned, after masculine, it is interesting to note that the majority of the students did not agree with the sentence “When I hear that a woman is a truck driver, I would doubt whether she is feminine” (see paragraph 2.1): 66% of the respondents did not agree with this statement, and only 17% agreed.

The last stereotype stated by LGBT persons, and especially by women, is that lesbian women have problems in their relationships with men, or that they did not find “the right one”, explaining their sexual orientation by their interrelations with men.

3.3 Between homophobia and acceptance, the attitude of students towards LGBT schoolmates

As explained in chapter 1, the students sometimes tend to answer to the questionnaire using what they think is the “socially right” or expected reply, and not what their real opinion or sensation on the matter is, and this makes it difficult for the researchers to understand what the students really think about this issue.

The results analysed until now show that a large part of the young population tends to accept LGBT persons (considering homosexuality a natural sexual orientation and lesbian and gay “normal” people without specific characteristics). But it is difficult to separate the weight of the “politically correct” that impose a determined social

behaviours and the real opinion of the students.

In order to get more in-depth information on the opinion of young people, the researchers decided to add questions regarding not only their opinions, but also their attitudes towards homosexual persons. The students were asked to indicate what their reaction would be towards a gay (for boys) or lesbian (for girls) schoolmate in different situations. In particular, they had to indicate whether or not they agreed with the following statements:

- I would make it clear he/she should keep his/her hand off me;
- I would feel at ease becoming friends with him/her;
- I would feel at ease making homework with him/her;
- I would rather sit next to someone else during the break;
- I would find it annoying to share a room with him/her on a school excursion/project week.

In order to analyse the results, a global sum considering the answers of the students to each situation was calculated, and the students were divided in three groups between those who feel comfortable with lesbian and gay schoolmates and those who do not (Figure 24). Figure 24 presents the answers of the students to each specific statement.

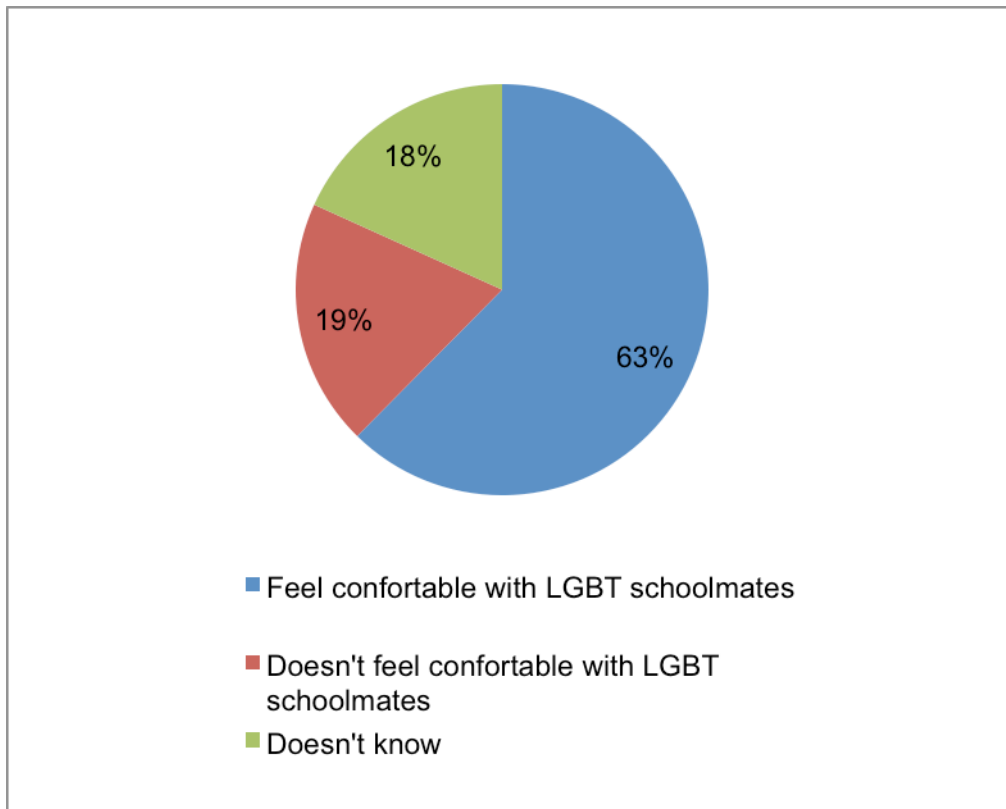


Figure 23: Attitudes of students towards lesbian or gay schoolmates

	Disagree			Doesn't know			Agree		
	girls	boys	Total	girls	boys	Total	girls	boys	Total
I would make it clear he/she should keep his/her hand off me	74%	53%	64%	16%	19%	18%	8%	26%	18%
I would feel at ease becoming friends with him/her	11%	15%	14%	8%	26%	17%	80%	57%	70%
I would feel at ease making homework with him/her	13%	20%	17%	9%	22%	16%	77%	56%	67%
I would rather sit next to someone else during the break	76%	45%	62%	13%	24%	19%	9%	29%	19%
I would find it annoying to share a room with him/her on a school excursion/project week	61%	35%	49%	23%	20%	22%	15%	43%	29%

Figure 24: Attitudes of Italian boys and girls towards lesbian or gay schoolmates

In average, 63% of the students declared that they would feel comfortable with a gay or lesbian schoolmate, while 19% would not feel comfortable, even if the reactions of the girls and the boys are quite different.

All of the respondents feel more comfortable about becoming friend or making homework with a gay or lesbian schoolmate (respectively 70% and 67% of the respondents), than with sharing a room on a school excursion (only 49% of the respondents would not find it annoying).

But boys appear to be much less comfortable with a gay schoolmate than girls with a lesbian schoolmate. 43% of the boys would find it annoying to share a room with him (against 15% of the girls), 29% of them would rather seat next to someone else during the break (against 9% of the girls), and 26% would make clear he should keep his hands off him (against 8% of the girls). These figures confirm the fact, already highlighted during the analysis of the definition of homosexuality chosen by the students, that the boys find in general homosexuality less natural and that they feel more threatened by homosexual schoolmates than girls.

The answers obtained are, as expected, also very different according to the number of LGBT persons that the students know. The more LGBT persons they know, the more the students feel comfortable sharing everyday life moments with them (Figure 25). For example, among the students who know more than 5 LGBT persons, 76% feel comfortable with them and 2% do not, while among the students who do not know any LGBT person, only 28% feel comfortable enough to share a room or make their homework with them, and 12% do not feel comfortable enough.

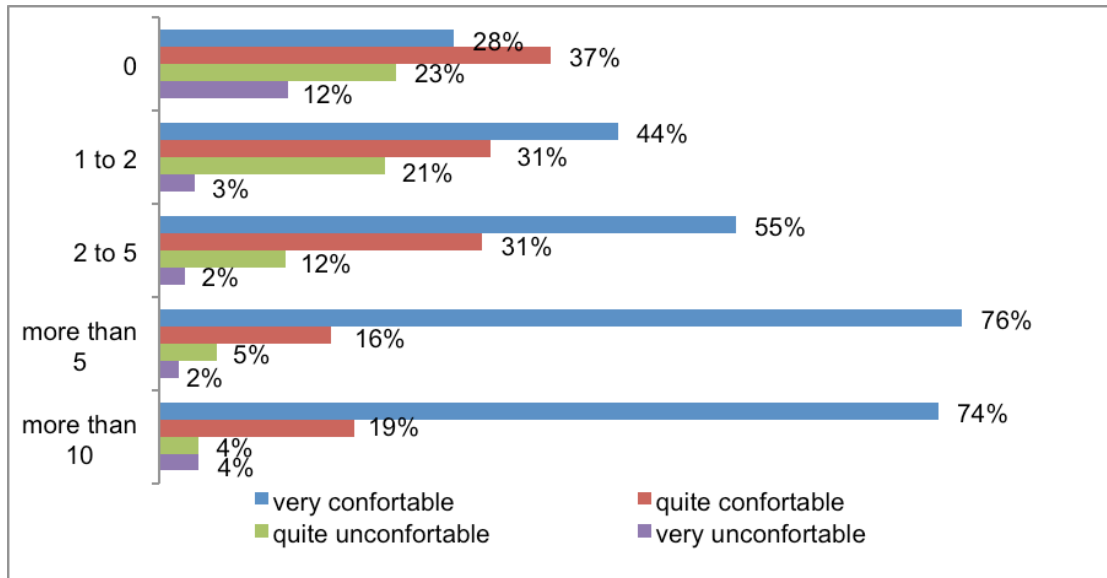


Figure 25: Attitudes of student respondents towards lesbian or gay schoolmates according to the number of LGBT persons they know

The attitude of the students changes also in relation to the typology of their school. Figure 26).

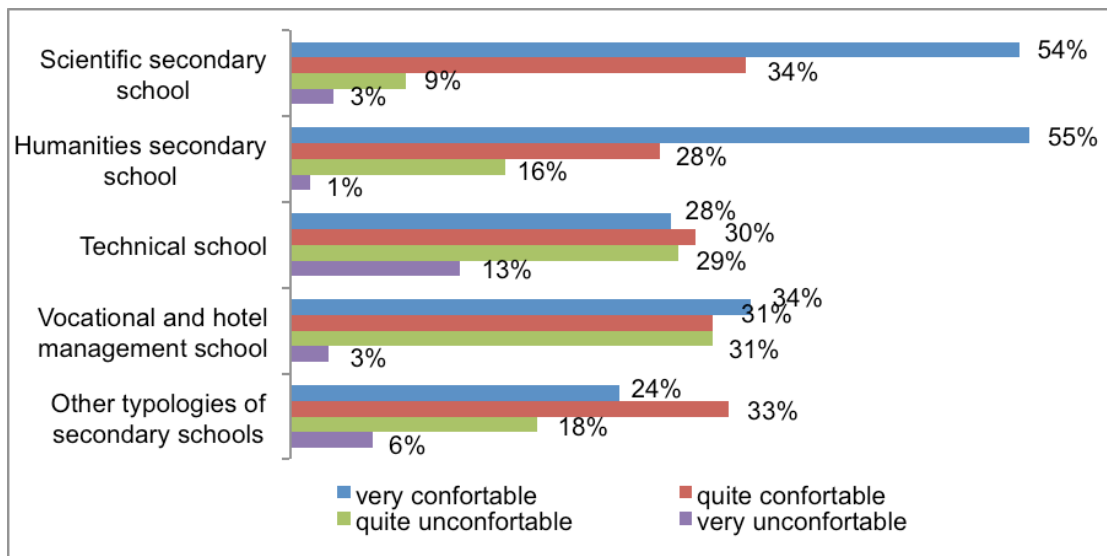


Figure 26: Attitudes of students towards lesbian or gay schoolmates according to the school typologies

Students from scientific and humanities schools are much more comfortable with lesbian and gay schoolmates (respectively 54% and 55% of them) than students from technical or vocational schools (respectively 28% and 34% of these students). On the contrary, the students who feel the most uncomfortable in the presence of lesbian and gay schoolmates are students from technical schools (13% of them). These figures are coherent with the results we obtained regarding the opinion of the students on gender stereotypes (paragraph 3.1). Considering the statements to which they agree, the students from technical and vocational schools appeared more attached to the behaviours and characteristics traditionally expected from girls and boys, and therefore they do not feel comfortable with students who, according to them, do not conform to these expectations.

3.4 The effect of stereotypes on LGBT persons

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.

Figure 27 presents the main answers obtained in the LGBT questionnaire.

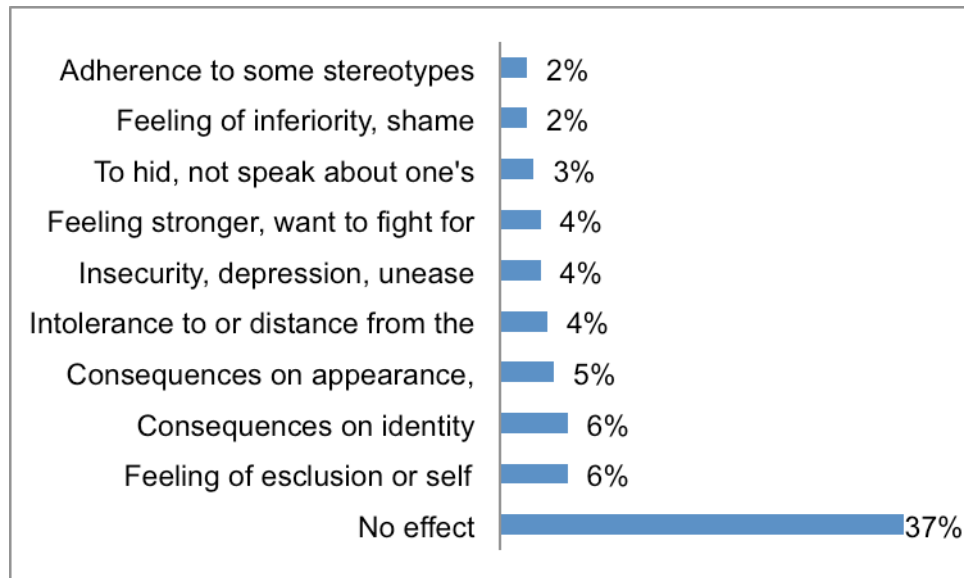


Figure 27: Effects of stereotypes attached sexual orientation on LGBT persons

Most of the LGBT respondents who answered this question (only 162 persons did) declared that the stereotypes did not have any effect on their life (37%).

Some respondents declared that these stereotypes made them feel excluded or engendered self-exclusion (6%).

For some, these stereotypes had consequences on the construction of their identity and on the acceptance of their homosexuality (6%).

To others it provoked a sense of insecurity or depression (4%) or a feeling of shame (2%). The literature confirms that many LGBT persons suffer from depression and mental health problems, particularly the younger ones⁷. Adolescence is a very delicate moment in which one builds its own identity, and social pressure and non-acceptance can have very strong effects on young people.

Finally, the stereotypes attached to LGBT people have also consequences for some on their relationship with the LGBT community on a negative (distance from it for 4%) or positive (desire to fight for LGBT rights for 4%) way.

As we have seen above, the perception that LGBT people have of the stereotypes attached 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 Italian society.

⁷ Garofalo R, Wolf RC, Wissow LS, et al. Sexual orientation and risk of suicide attempts among a representative sample of youth. Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med. 1999;153(5):487-93.

4 Social inclusion of LGBT persons in the Italian society

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

73% of the LGBT respondents declared to have experienced discrimination or prejudice in their life. The two contexts of discrimination most often indicated are the school and the family, followed by bars and pubs and the media. Transgender people and gay and bisexual men appear to be more often victims of discriminations than lesbian and bisexual women.

Students are quite aware of this situation as more than half of them think that homosexuality, bisexuality, and, even more, transgenderism are not accepted at social level. 55% of them think that LGBT people are discriminated. According to them, the environments less gay and lesbian friendly are their neighbourhood, school, their associations and after-school activities and their groups of friends.

The third paragraph regards the main causes of the social exclusion of LGBT people and the most effective ways to combat homophobia. According to LGBT people, the two most important causes of their social exclusion are the lack of information of the population and the Christian religion of homophobes. Therefore, the better channels to combat homophobia in their opinion are information and communication, through the media, the internet and the school. Another important aspect mentioned by the respondents is the enhancement of the visibility of the LGBT community in the society.

In order to share best practices on the fair treatment of young LGBT people between the countries participating in the NISO project, the respondents presented some positive examples from Italy. The majority of them indicated the Gay and the Euro Pride, the work of the LGBT associations and the Gay Village or other places of aggregation for LGBT people.

Finally, the last paragraph presents the opinion of the students on LGBT rights. The Italian students appear in general more open to LGBT rights than the Italian, or even the European average. More than 70% think that LGBT persons should be free to live their life as they wish, 58% are in favour of same-sex marriage, and 34,5% think that adoption by lesbian and gay couples should be authorised.

Girls, students from scientific or humanities high schools, students whose parents have a higher education level and those who know a higher number of LGBT persons appear to be the ones more in favour of LGBT rights.

However, a small part of the students appear still totally against any recognition of rights to LGBT persons.

4.1 Experiences of prejudice or discrimination suffered by the LGBT respondents

According to the LGBT survey, almost three fourth of the respondents experienced, at least once in their life, prejudice or discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity (Figure 28).

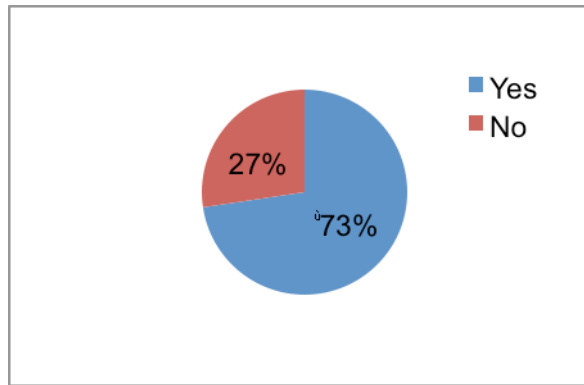


Figure 28: Number of respondents to the LGBT questionnaire in Italy having experienced discrimination or prejudice

The contexts in which such discriminations were suffered are various (Figure 29).

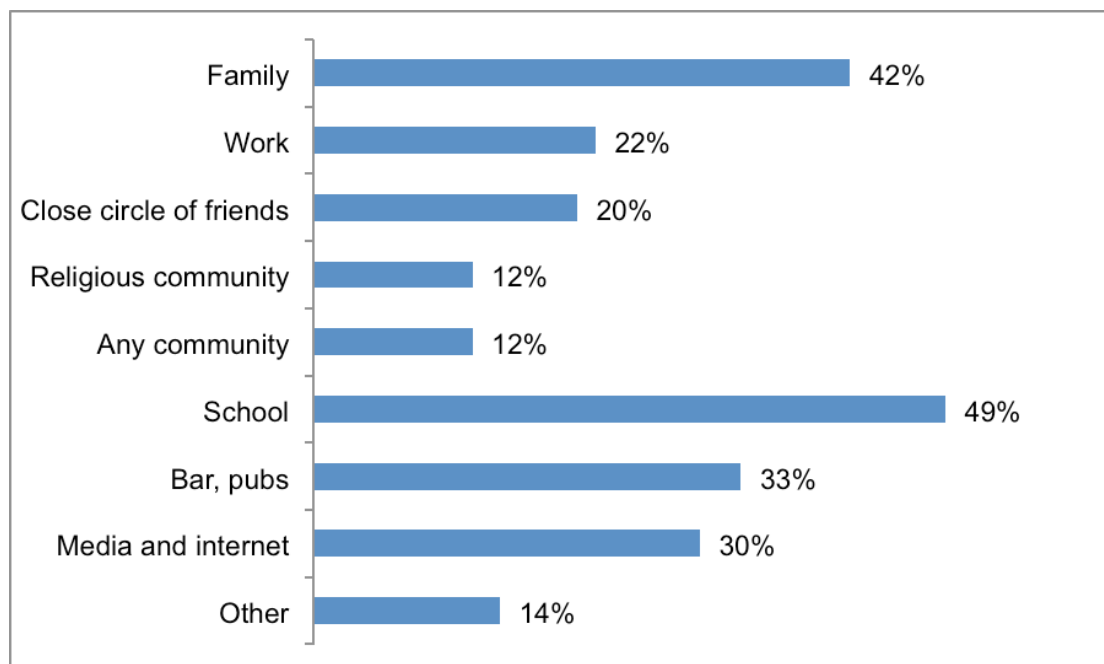


Figure 29: Contexts in which the respondents to the LGBT questionnaire in Italy have experienced discrimination or prejudice

Almost half of the respondents who have been victims of prejudice or discrimination declare to have experienced it at school (49%). The other contexts of discrimination often indicated are: family (42%), bar or pubs (33%), media and the internet (30%).

To date, 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 persons 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 most important context of discrimination, the family, presents more complex difficulties, as it is a private setting. Cultural factors and generation differences can explain sometimes the difficulty for the family to accept the sexual orientation of one of its member.

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 Figure 30 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). The sum of the percentages is higher than 100% because the respondents could indicate more than one context of discrimination.

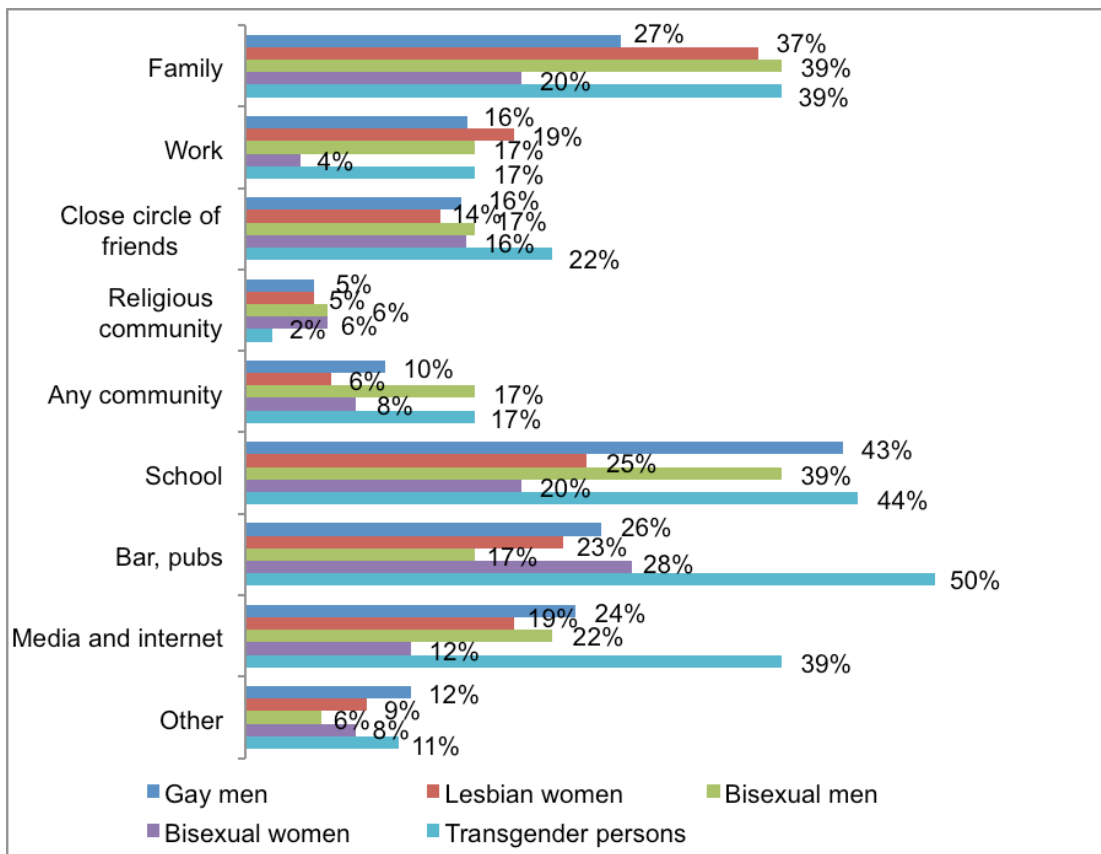


Figure 30: Contexts in which the respondents to the LGBT questionnaire in Italy have experienced discrimination or prejudice by category of respondents

Transgender people appear to be more often discriminated in bar and pubs (50% of the transgender respondents), at school (44%), in the media/internet (39%) and in their family (39%). Gay and bisexual men have been victims of prejudice particularly at school (respectively 43% of the gay respondents and 44% of the bisexual men), while lesbian women suffered discrimination more in family (37% of lesbian women) and bisexual women in bars and pubs (28% of bisexual women).

In general, transgender persons and gay and bisexual men report more experiences of discrimination and prejudice than lesbian and bisexual women. Transgender person are in general more easy to identify than LGB persons and, according to the FRA, they are less accepted in Europe⁸. This explains the fact that they report more episodes of discrimination and prejudice.

⁸ European Agency for Fundamental Rights, *Homophobia, Transphobia and discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation and gender identity in the European Union member States*, 2011

The fact that gay men are more often discriminated than lesbian women could be linked also to a “visibility” factor (as we have seen in chapter 2, the students think that gay men have more specific characteristics than lesbian women) or to a major acceptance of lesbian women in the Italian society.

More than half of the respondents (51%) did not give any specification or example on the kind of prejudice or discriminations they have experienced (Figure 31). About one quarter (24%) indicated forms of verbal violence and insults, 10% jokes, 5% forms of refusal and 3% episodes of psychological violence.

Other respondents indicated that they have been excluded (2%), that they have lost relationships (2%), or that they have been victims of physical violence (2%). The episodes of physical violence reported took place in the streets, at school and at work.

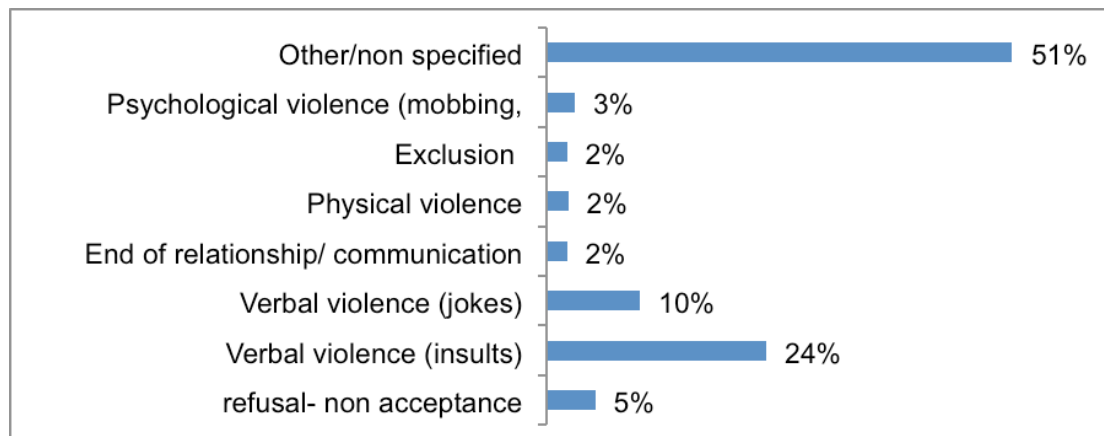


Figure 31: Typologies of discrimination and prejudice suffered by the LGBT respondents, Italy

4.2 The social inclusion of LGBT persons and the importance of homophobia in the Italian society according to the students

After analysing the experience of discrimination by the LGBT Community members, 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 (Figure 32).

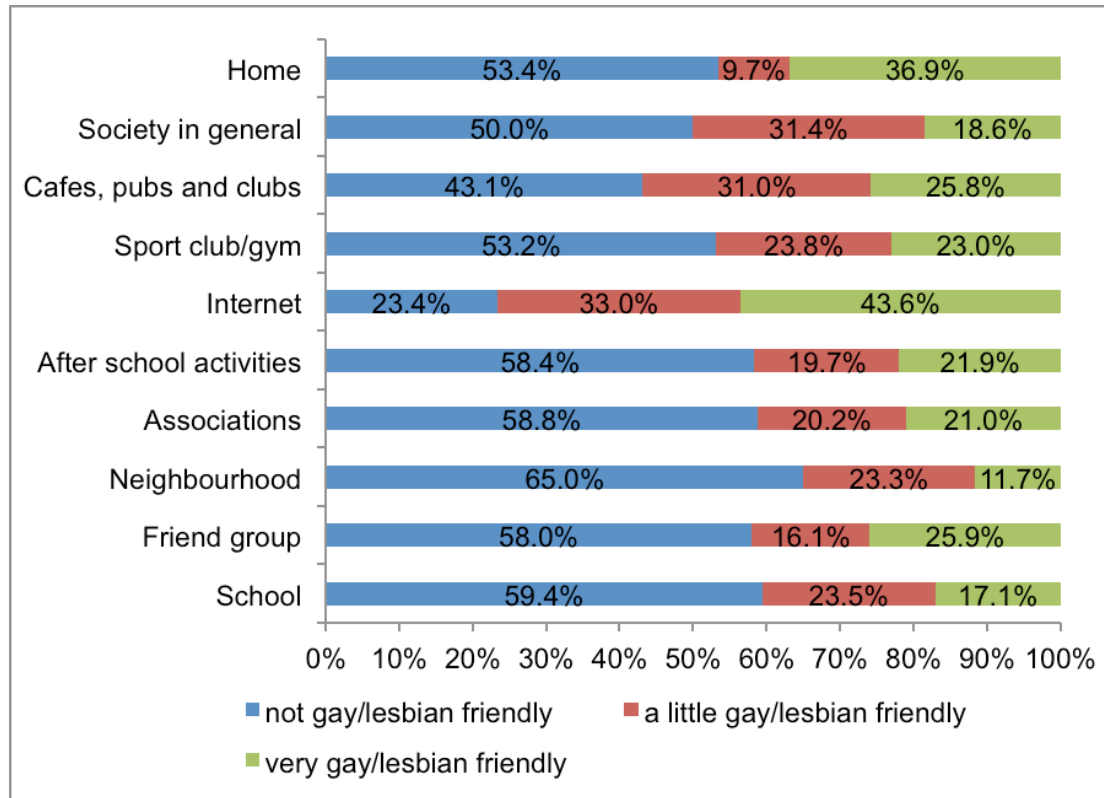


Figure 32: Evaluation of how much gay/lesbian friendly their everyday environments are by the Italian students

For almost all the contexts, a majority of the students do not consider them as gay and lesbian friendly.

The environments that the students consider as the less gay/lesbian friendly are: their neighbourhood (65%), their school (59%), the associations they belong to (59%), the after school activities and their group of friends (58%).

On the contrary, the environments that they consider as the most gay and lesbian friendly are internet (44%), home (37%) and the cafes and bars they frequent (26%). These answers are in clear opposition with the ones of the LGBT persons. These places are, after school, where they have experienced the major discriminations (family 42%, bar or pubs 33% and media and the internet 30%). This is particularly relevant for internet, as only 23% of the respondents consider it not gay/lesbian friendly.

It is interesting to note that the places that the students consider as the less gay/lesbian friendly are those in which they often see the young people interact between themselves and where they can witness directly episodes of discrimination or bullying. Their schools, their associations or their groups of friends represent environment that they know very well and of which they understand the interpersonal relations. The fact that they consider these environments as the less gay/lesbian friendly is an indicator of the real lack of acceptance of young LGBT people. On the other side, on internet or in bars they have less probabilities to see directly or understand an on-going discrimination taking place.

Regarding the answers on home, the opinions of the students are more clear-cut than for the other environments: fewer students replied in an uncertain way. 53% of them believe their home is not gay/lesbian friendly, and 37% believe that it is. It appears that the students have a good knowledge of whether this issue would be accepted or not at home, and the fact that more than half consider that it would not

be well accepted is a significant figure.

The boys in general have a more critic evaluation than girls of the gay and lesbian friendliness of the different environments in which they live (Figure 33). For example, 68% of them think that their school is not gay/lesbian friendly, while only 49% of the girls agree with this opinion. In the same way, 51% of the boys against 30% of the girls think that the cafes or pubs they go to are not gay and lesbian friendly.

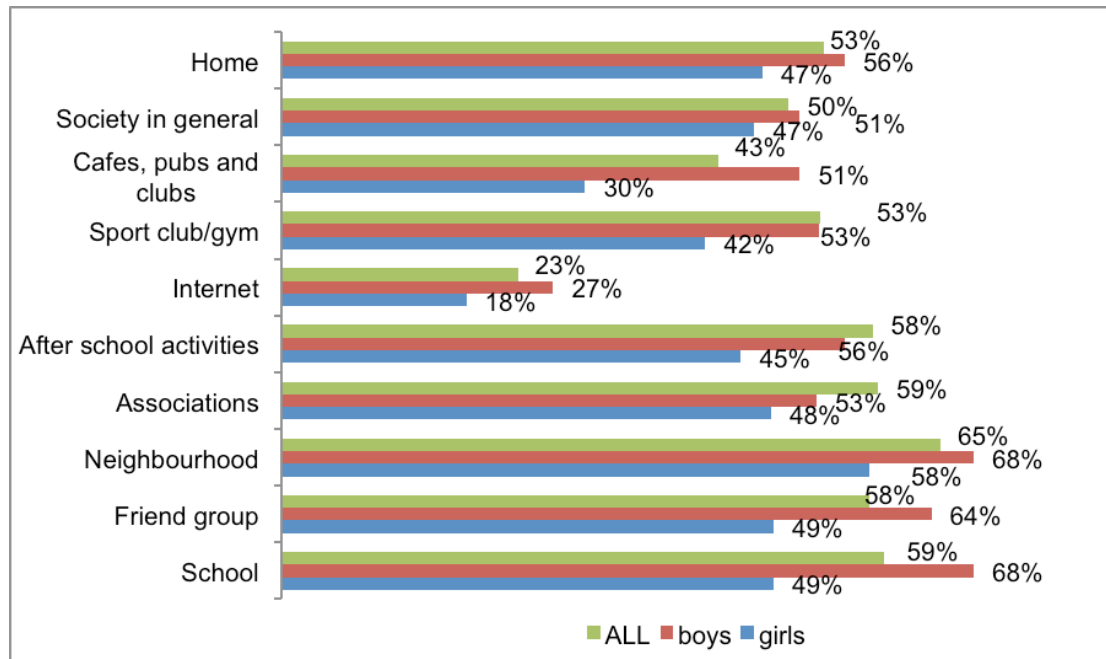


Figure 33: Repartition by gender of the Italian students who think their different every-day environments are NOT gay or lesbian friendly

In order to analyse the students' perception of the attitudes towards LGBT persons in the Italian society, they had to indicate whether or not they agree with 8 statements (Figure 34).

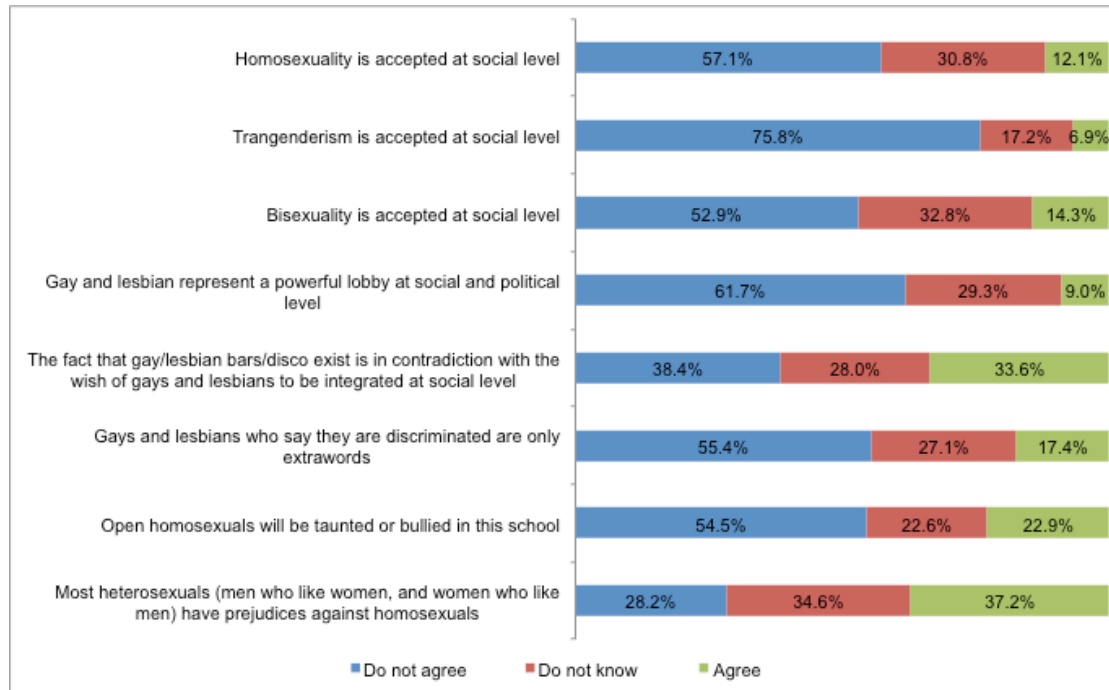


Figure 34: Students' perception of the attitudes towards LGBT persons in the Italian society

More than half of the respondents think that homosexuality (58%) and bisexuality (53%) are not accepted at social level, and the percentage is even higher for transgender people (76%).

Moreover, 62% of the students do not agree that gay and lesbian represent a powerful lobby at social and political level, and 55% think that those who say that they are discriminated are not extra words. Overall, answers of boys and girls are very similar, even if a slightly higher number of boys think that LGBT persons are accepted at social level.

These data show that the students are in majority aware of the negative attitude towards LGBT people in the Italian society and only a small minority think that they do not face acceptance problems.

These figures are higher than 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 diffused⁹.

The answer regarding acts of bullying at school is less clear and a little in contradiction with the other results observed above. In fact, only 23% of the respondents think that open homosexuals would be taunted or bullied in their school, while 59% of the students considered that school is not a gay/friendly environment. This difference can be due to errors of compilation made by the students. The 6 sentences before this statement were formulated in a "positive" way (homosexuality is accepted at social level), while this sentence has a "negative" approach (homosexuals will be bullied). As explained in the first chapter, many students had difficulties in filling the questionnaire.

⁹ Special Eurobarometer survey on discrimination in the EU of November 2009.

4.3 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.

Regarding the most important causes of social exclusion of LGBT persons, the respondents were asked to choose a maximum of three factors among a suggested list (Figure 35).

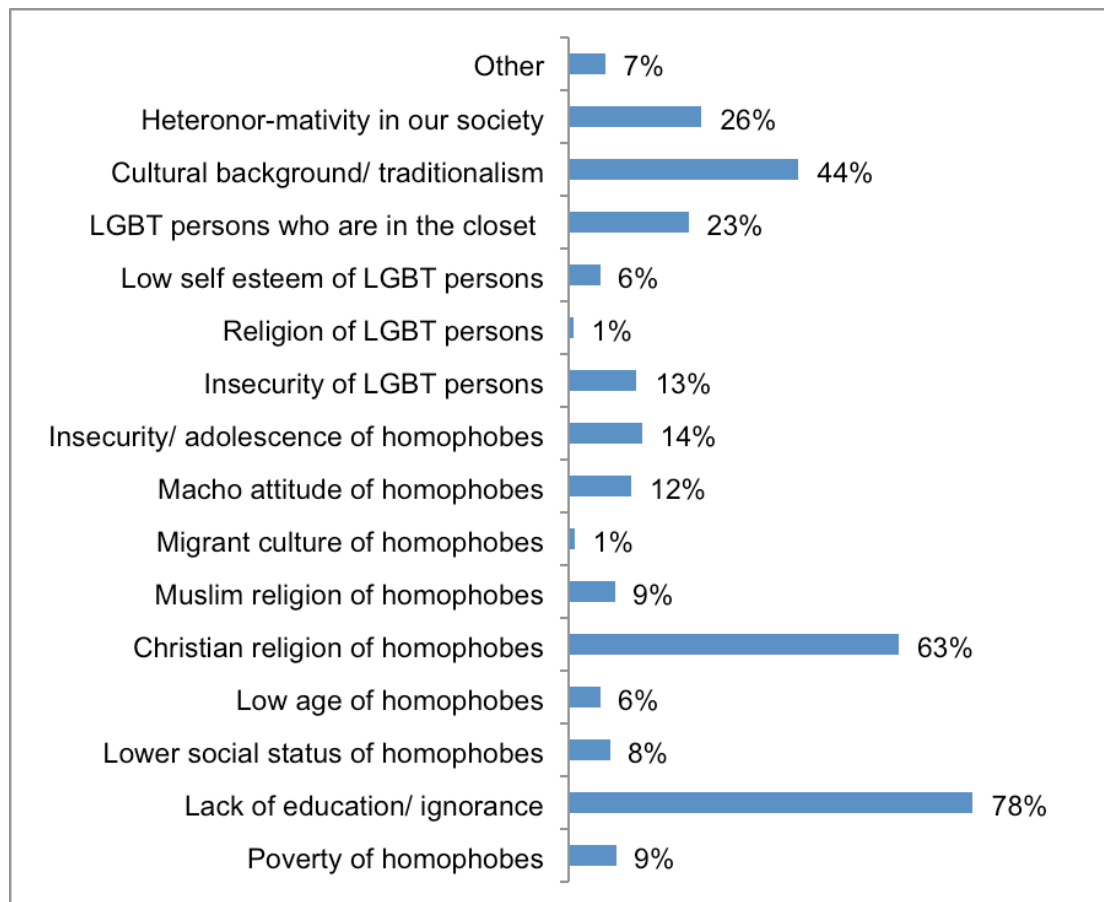


Figure 35: Most important causes of social exclusion of LGBT persons in Italy according to them

78% of the respondents consider the lack of education and knowledge as the most important cause of social exclusion of LGBT persons. The second cause indicated by the respondents is the Christian religion of homophobes (63%), followed by the cultural background and traditionalism (44%) and the hetero-normativity of the Italian society (26%).

A large number of respondents consider also that the LGBT Community has some responsibility in the social exclusion of its members: 23% indicated the fact that LGBT persons remain in the closet, and 13% the insecurity of LGBT persons.

In parallel to the importance given to the Christian religion, 9% of the respondents chose the Muslim religion as another factor that may have a role in homophobic

behaviours. Considering the predominance of the Catholic religion in Italy, the position of other religions towards homosexuality is not well known or considered as influential in the society in general. More research would be needed to have a clearer vision about this aspect.

The actions suggested by the LGBT respondents to combat homophobia are connected to what they consider its causes (Figure 36).

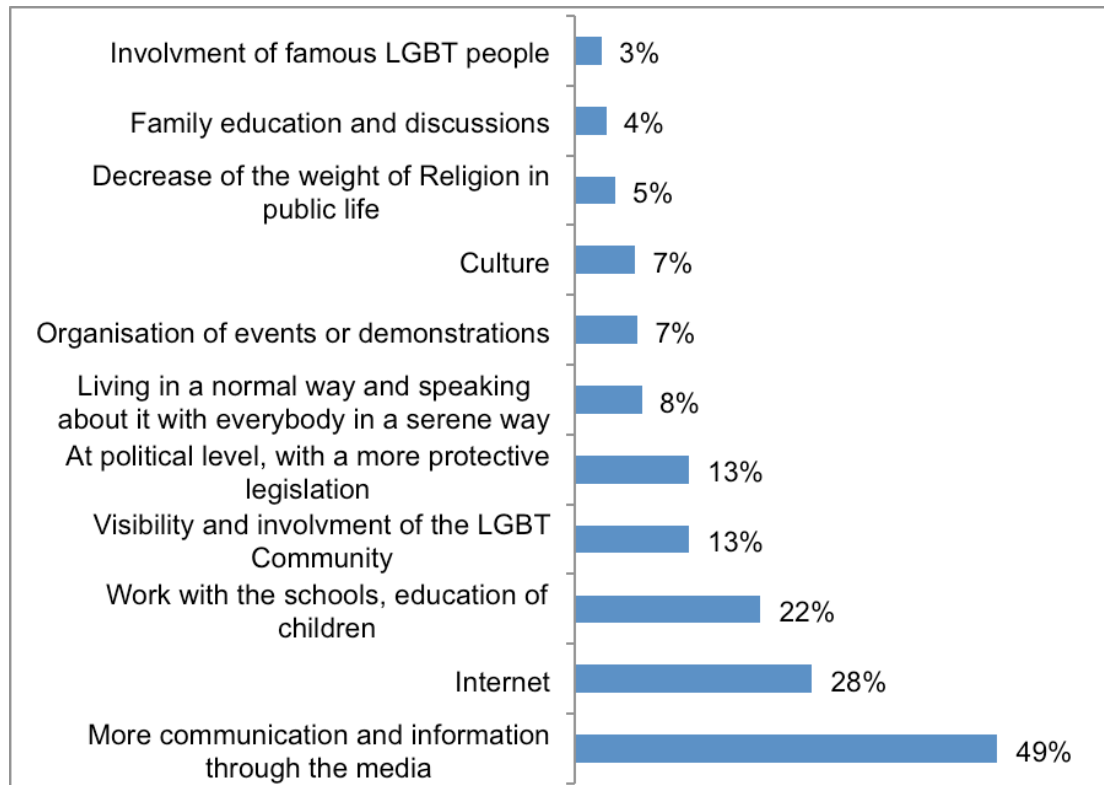


Figure 36: Effective ways to combat homophobia according to LGBT respondents

Information and communication are considered as the most effective ways to combat homophobia: through the media (49%) or more specifically internet (28%), thanks to the work with schools (22%) or in family (4%).

Another important suggestion of the respondents is to increase the visibility of the LGBT Community (13%), through the organisation of events or demonstrations (7%) and thanks to the involvement of famous LGBT persons (3%). Some respondents consider important also the behaviour of each individual LGBT person, who should live in a more open way and speak about its homosexuality with serenity (8%).

A major protection at political level with the adoption of specific laws was also suggested by 13% of the respondents.

Finally, considering that the Christian religion is considered as one of the factors of social exclusion by almost two third of the respondents, some suggested to decrease the weight of the Church in the public life to reduce homophobia in our society (5%).

It is interesting to note that many of the obstacles and solutions mentioned by the LGBT respondents are in line with those indicated by the FRA in its report on homophobia and transphobia. In fact, the report states that: “*media, political and religious leaders, as well as education institutions have a key role in determining*

public opinion on LGBT issues” and that “the absence of legislation securing LGBT rights undermines the possibility of challenging the continuity of particular practices and directly challenging stereotypes”.¹⁰

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 (Figure 37).

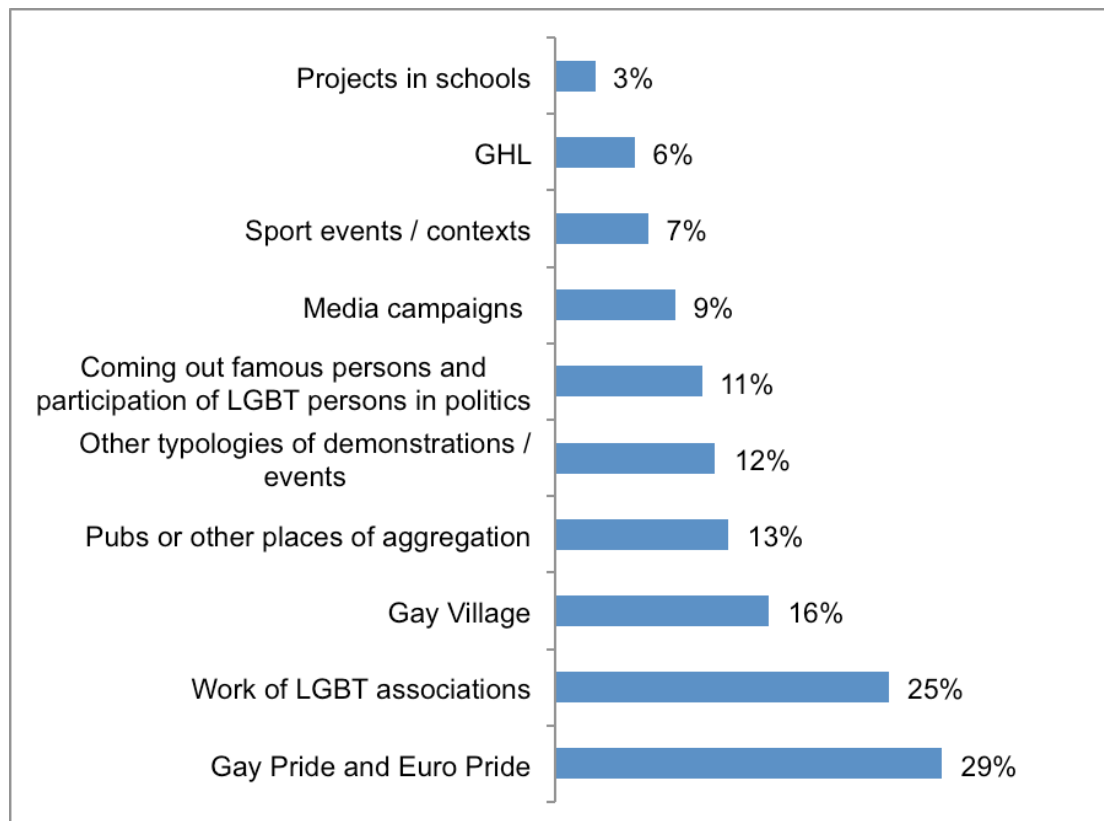


Figure 37: Best practices in Italy regarding the fair treatment of LGBT people

Most of the examples given by the respondents are events that give a major visibility to the LGBT Community such as the Gay Pride and the Euro Pride (29% of the answers), media campaigns (for example from the Ministry for Equal Opportunities, IKEA, etc.), or other typologies of demonstrations or events (12%).

The respondents also consider the work of LGBT associations, and in particular of GayCentre or GHG, as an important asset in the fight against homophobia (respectively 25% and 6%).

The organisation of the Gay Village in Rome during the summer¹¹ (16%) and the pubs or other places of aggregation dedicated to LGBT persons (13%) was the third

¹⁰ European Agency for Fundamental Rights, *idem*, p.10 of the synthesis report.

¹¹ The Gay Village is a festival that takes place every summer (from June to September) in Rome since 2002, in a public park. Besides disco activities, a high number of events dedicated to music, theatre, cinema and debates are organised each evening. More than 250.000 persons participated during the last edition, which won the Best Event Awards 2011, an award given by the Communication Agency to the best events organised in Italy.

aspect stated by the respondents as positive developments for the fair treatment of young LGBT people.

Finally, the coming out of famous persons and the participation of LGBT persons in politics were also indicated, as well as the projects organised in the schools for students.

It is important, in the analysis of these answers, to remember that GayCenter distributed the questionnaires in the above-mentioned initiatives.

4.4 The opinion of Italian 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.

In the same way as for the previous issues, the students had to indicate whether they agree or not with 11 sentences that regarded first LGBT rights in a more general way, and then more "sensible" issues such as marriage and adoption by gay and lesbian couples (Figure 38).

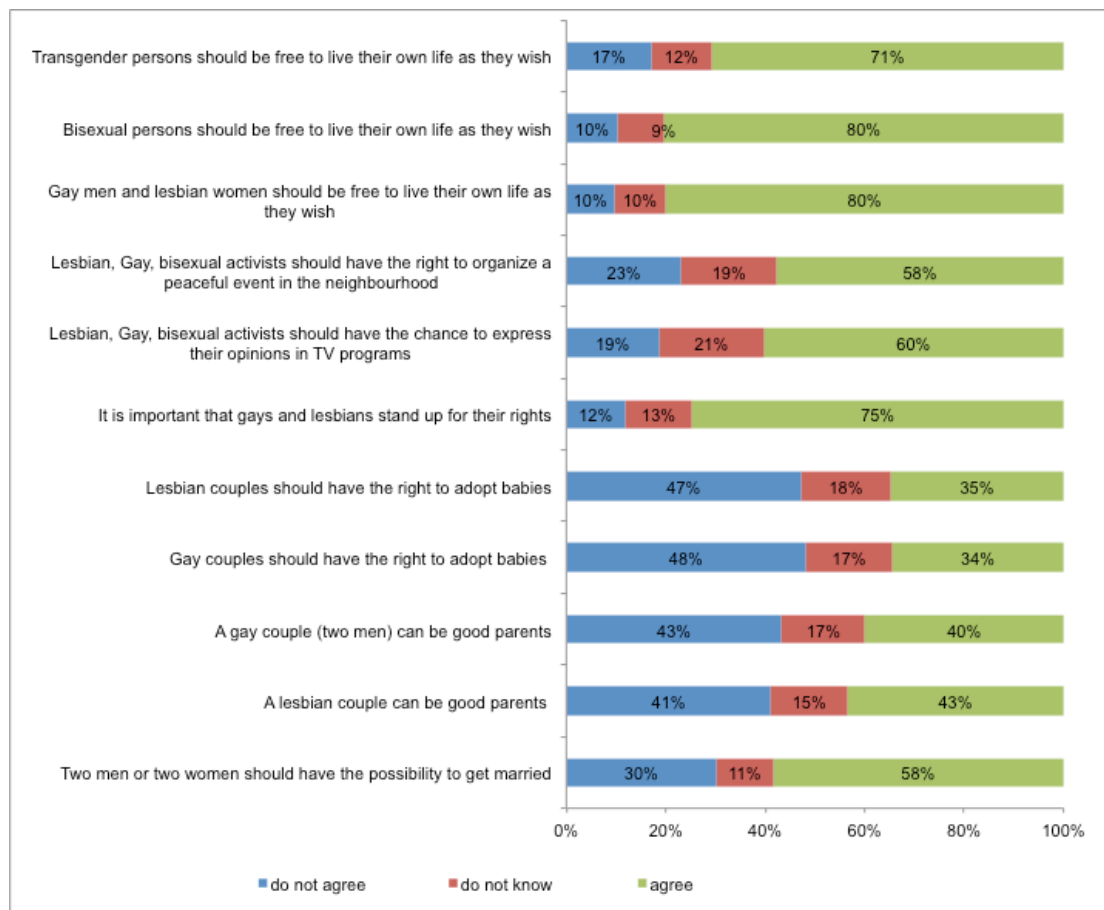


Figure 38: Opinion of Italian students regarding LGBT rights

A very large majority of the students consider that LGBT persons should be free to live their own life as they wish, even if the percentage is higher for gay, lesbian and bisexual persons (80%) than for transgender persons (71%). Still, however, 10% of the students do not agree with this fact, and this figure rises to 17% for transgender persons.

Regarding LGBT political and civil rights, 75% of the respondents consider that it is important that gay and lesbian persons stand up for their rights. 58% agree with the fact that they should have the right to organise a peaceful event in the neighbourhood and 60% that they should have the right to express their opinions in TV programs

Regarding specific rights, 58% of the students agree that two persons of the same sex should be able to marry, 43% that a lesbian couple can be good parents and 35% that lesbian couples should have the right to adopt babies. The percentages are almost equivalent for the adoption by gay couples (34%).

These results show that a majority of the students are in favour of LGBT rights, even if a small part is opposed to them, in particular for transgender persons.

The difference between the 75% who consider that it is important that gay and lesbian persons stand up for their rights and the 58% - 60% that agree that they should have the right to organise peaceful events or express their opinions in TV programs is interesting. It shows that some students agree with the importance of LGBT rights in theory, but are less agreeable once the expression of these rights becomes more concrete.

Moreover, even if a majority of the students are not ready to recognise all civil rights to LGBT people (including marriage and adoption), the number of respondents who are is still higher than the Italian average. In fact, according to the 2006 Eurobarometer survey, 31% of Italians thought that same-sex marriages should be allowed throughout Europe and 24% were in favour of opening up adoption to same-sex couples (the EU average amounted respectively to 44% and 32%). This confirms the FRA analysis that younger people tend to be more tolerant than older ones¹².

The opinion of the students on LGBT rights differed with their sex, their school's typology, the level of education of their parents 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 four categories of students, going from those who didn't agree with any statement, to those who agreed with all of them.

First, girls appear more in favour of LGBT rights than boys (Figure 39). While 44% of the girls totally agreed with all or most of the sentences regarding LGBT rights, only 26% of the boys did. This result confirms the fact that the boys appear to be less comfortable than girls with gay and lesbian people and homosexuality in general.

¹² European Agency for Fundamental Rights, *idem*.

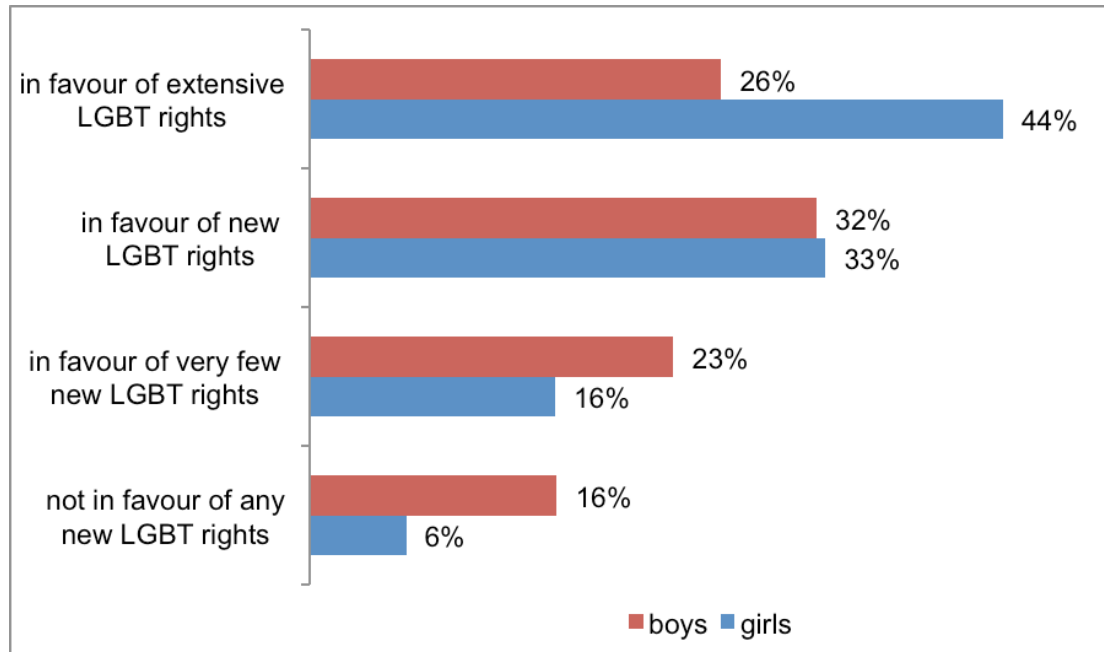


Figure 39: Opinion of Italian girls and boys regarding LGBT rights

The level of education of the parents appears also to have an influence on the opinion of the students. In general, the students whose parents have a higher level of education agreed more with the statements than those with a lower education level. For example, 29% of the students whose parents have a primary education diploma agreed with all or most of the sentences compared to 44% of those whose parents have a MA or more.

These results are in line with the FRA report on homophobia and transphobia that declares that more educated people are in general more tolerant towards LGBT people¹³. Higher educated parents, more in favour of LGBT rights, transmit their more open views to their family.

Another significant variable is the typology of school of the students (Figure 40). Students from scientific and humanities secondary schools are more in favour of LGBT rights than the students of technical and vocational schools. For example, 43% of the students of the scientific schools and 40% of those of the humanities schools agree to a full recognition of LGBT rights, and respectively 7% and 6% are against it. In parallel, in the technical school, only 22% agree to all the statements, while 21% are against.

¹³ European Agency for Fundamental Rights, *idem*.

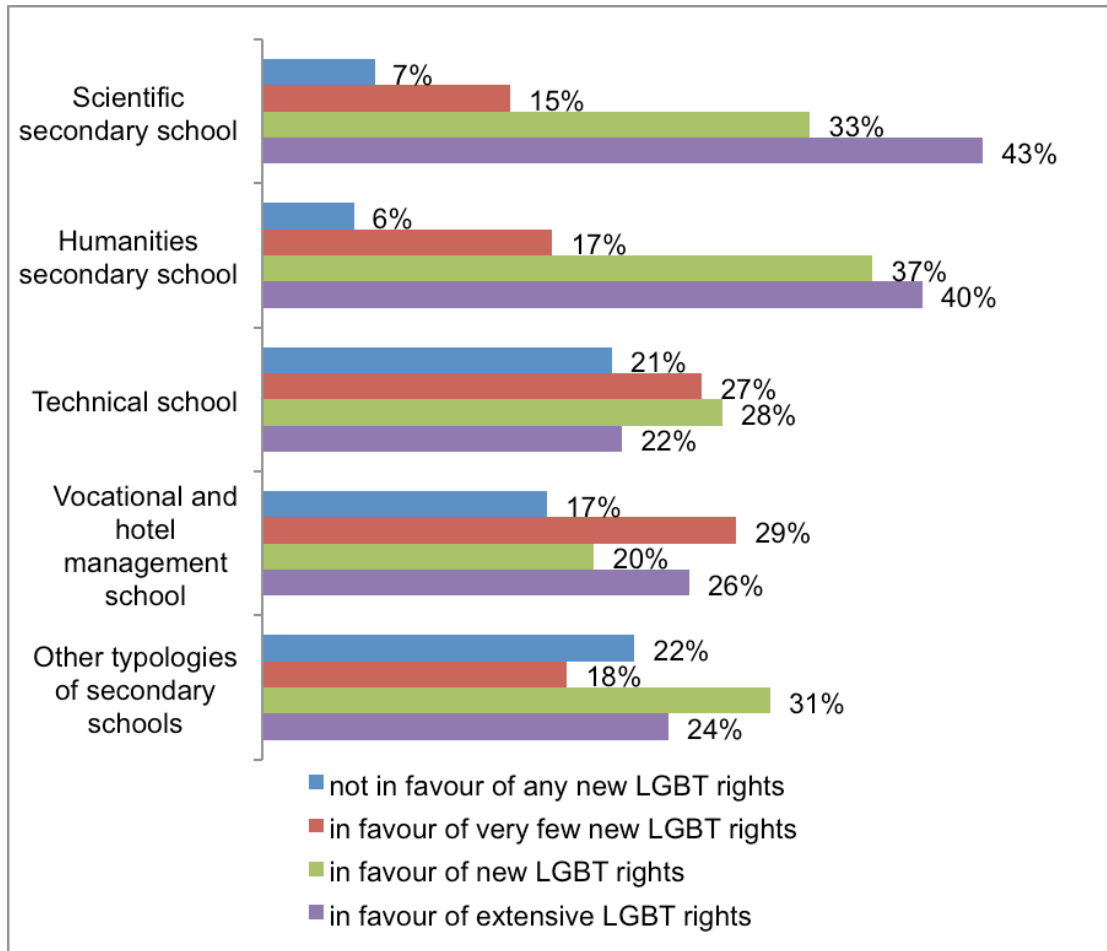


Figure 40: Opinion of Italian students regarding LGBT rights according to the school typologies

These figures confirm the fact, already observed in the paragraph 2.1, that the students of technical and vocational schools are less comfortable LGBT people. However, it is important to keep in mind, in the analysis of these results, that the humanities school in which the questionnaire has been distributed has been carrying out an important work on fundamental rights and equal opportunities in these past years, so these students are particularly aware of these issues.

Finally, the variable that has the stronger impact on the opinion of students on LGBT rights is the number of LGBT persons they know (Figure 41).

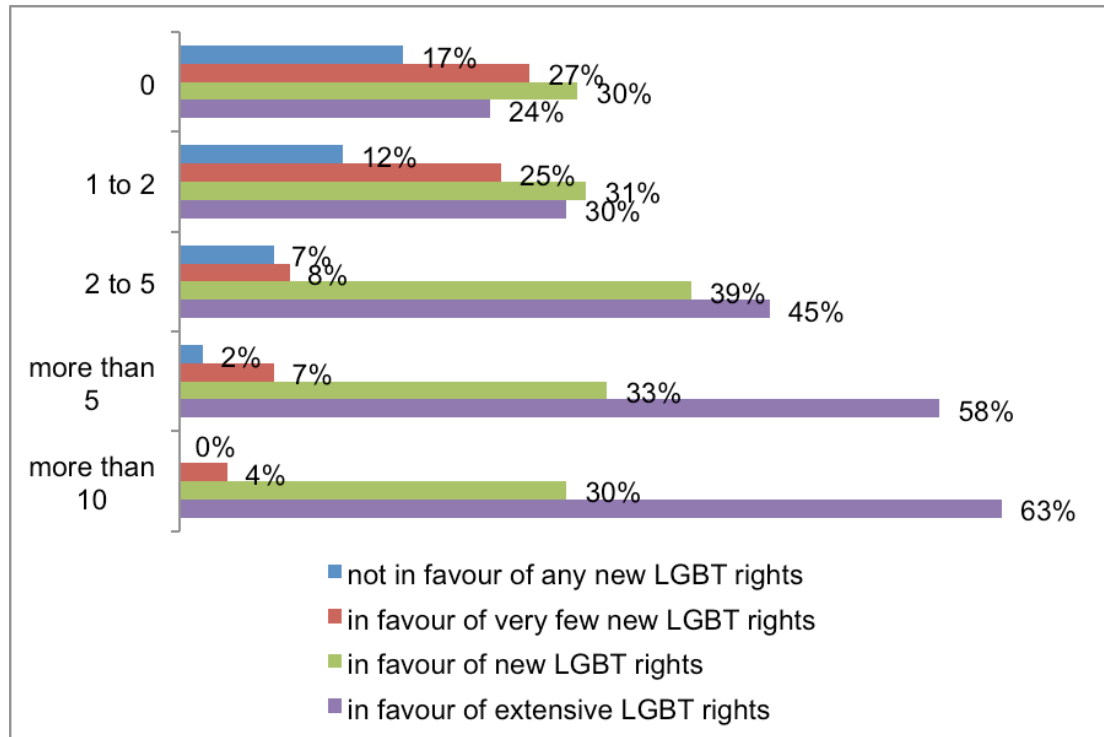


Figure 41: Opinion of Italian students regarding LGBT rights according to the number of LGBT persons that they know

The students who are more in favour of LGBT rights are clearly the ones who know many LGBT persons, while the students who are against any recognition of their rights are those who know no or very few LGBT persons. For example, among the students who do not know any LGBT persons, 17% didn't agree with any statements regarding LGBT rights, and 24% agreed to all or most of them. These percentages become 0% against and 63% pro LGBT rights in the case of students who know more than 10 LGBT persons.

A possible interpretation is that 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. Moreover, maybe a personal acquaintance with LGBT persons lessens the fears and the doubts regarding the recognition of marriage and adoption for homosexual couples.

After analysing the main stereotypes against LGBT persons and their experiences of discrimination and prejudice in general in the Italian society, 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.

5 Homophobia and discrimination at school

In order to obtain information useful for the activities of the NISO project, which will be carried out with students of 3 Roman schools, a specific chapter is dedicated to the personal experience of the LGBT respondents at school.

School is the first context of discrimination indicated by LGBT respondents, and more than one third of them has experienced discrimination or prejudice there. Transgender persons and gay men appear to have been more discriminated than lesbian women in this context.

Students also have a critical vision of their school and more than half of them do not consider their school gay and lesbian friendly. Moreover, students from technical schools consider their school much less gay and lesbian friendly than students from humanities high schools.

According to the results of the LGBT survey, only a limited number of the respondents declares to have made their coming out at school (23%), even if younger LGBT respondents did it more often than older ones. The respondents who did not make their coming out at school did it mostly because they were not conscious of their sexual orientation at that time, because they thought it was a private issue, or because they feared the reaction of the others.

Finally, homosexuality and homophobia are issues that are almost never discussed openly during classes. Only 13% of the LGBT respondents found something useful in the school curriculum, and 19% found on the contrary something that expresses prejudice in it.

5.1 Discrimination against LGBT persons at school

As stated in chapter 3, school is the first context in which the LGBT respondents suffered experiences of discrimination. 36% of them declare to have been discriminated at school.

Gay men and transgender persons appear to be the ones who were the most subjected to episodes of discrimination at school: 43% of all the gay men interviewed and 44% of the transgender persons (Figure 42).

Lesbian and bisexual women report a lower, but still significant number of experience of discrimination or prejudice at school: 25% of all the lesbian respondents and 20% of the bisexual women.

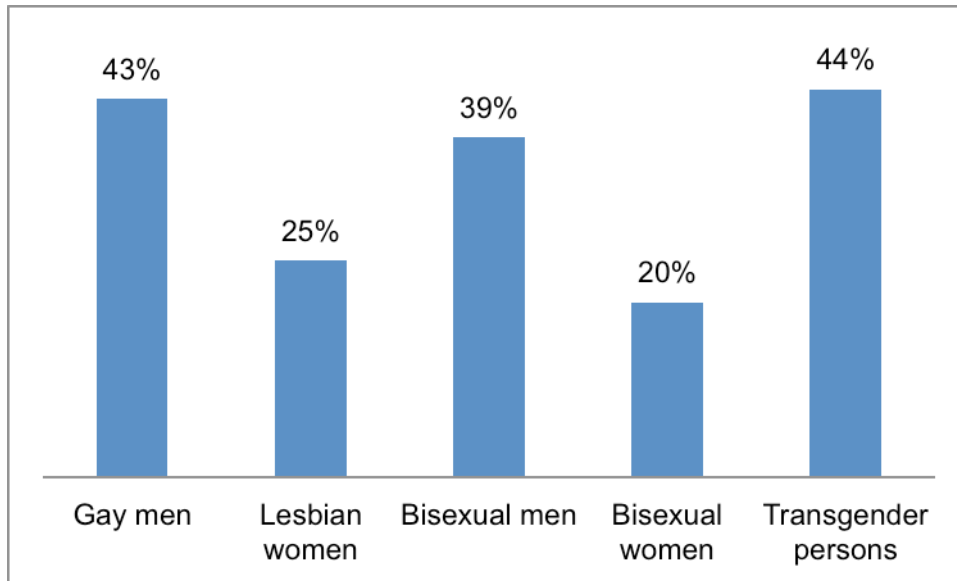


Figure 42: Percentage of the various typologies of respondents who experienced discrimination at school in Italy

These figures confirm that school cannot be considered a secure environment for LGBT young persons. Respondents indicated that they experienced mostly forms of verbal and psychological violence, insults and jokes. But some respondents reported also physical violence, and teachers had carried some of the discriminative behaviours mentioned.

The students involved in the survey are quite aware of the fact that school is not a secure environment for LGBT persons. In fact, the majority of them (58%) do not consider their school as a gay and lesbian friendly environment.

Figure 43 shows more in detail the opinions of the students on the gay and lesbian friendliness of their school according to typology of their school.

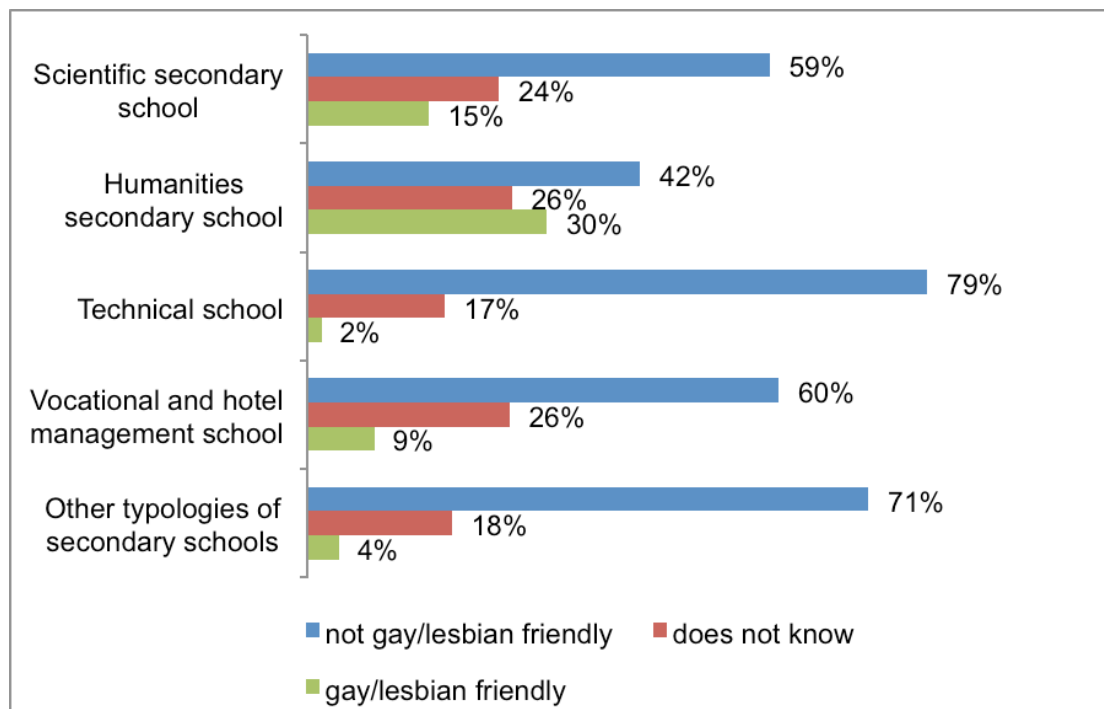


Figure 43: The perception of the gay/lesbian friendliness of their schools by the students according to the school typologies

The students who consider their school less gay and lesbian friendly are those of the technical schools (79% of the students coming from technical school think that their school is not gay and lesbian friendly). In parallel, 42% of the students of humanities high schools do not consider their school gay and lesbian friendly, while 30% do consider it gay and lesbian friendly.

These figures are coherent with the results analysed above. In fact, the students coming from technical schools appeared in general less comfortable with LGBT persons and less in favour of LGBT rights than students going to humanities and scientific high schools.

5.2 The coming out of LGBT persons 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 22% informed only a limited number of persons of their sexual orientation at school.

Figure 44 shows the percentage of LGBT persons who made their coming out at school for each age category.

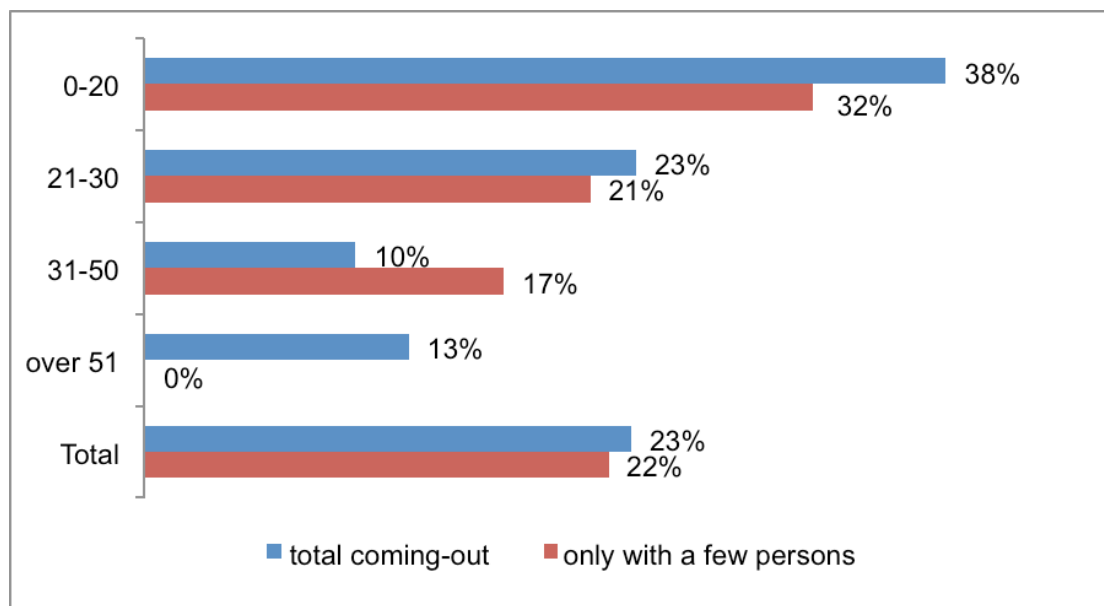


Figure 44: Percentage of LGBT respondents who made their coming out while at school for each age category

We can see that the respondents of the younger generations made more often their coming out while at school than older ones: 38% of the respondents under 20 made their total coming out at school, and 13% of the respondents over 50 did.

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 and the first sexual experiences happen earlier for young people, and therefore they tend to be aware of their sexual orientation before.

The main reason given by the respondents for not making their coming out at school is that they were not conscious of their sexual orientation at that time (for about a third of the respondents who did not make their coming out). About 20% of them thought that it was a personal matter and did not see any reason to disclose it publicly. Moreover, almost 30% feared the reactions of the others and to be discriminated, and some stated that they were too ashamed of their sexual orientation to speak about it. Others thought that the environment, or society in general, was not ready for such a declaration.

The fact that almost one third of the respondents who decided not to make their coming out at school did it by fear or shame show that a high number of LGBT young people do not live their gender identity and sexual orientation in a serene way and do not feel protected at school.

Finally, in order to analyse the perception of the students on the presence of LGBT schoolmates in their school, they had to indicate how many lesbian, gay or bisexual persons, according to them, are in their school, and how many are open about it (Figure 45).

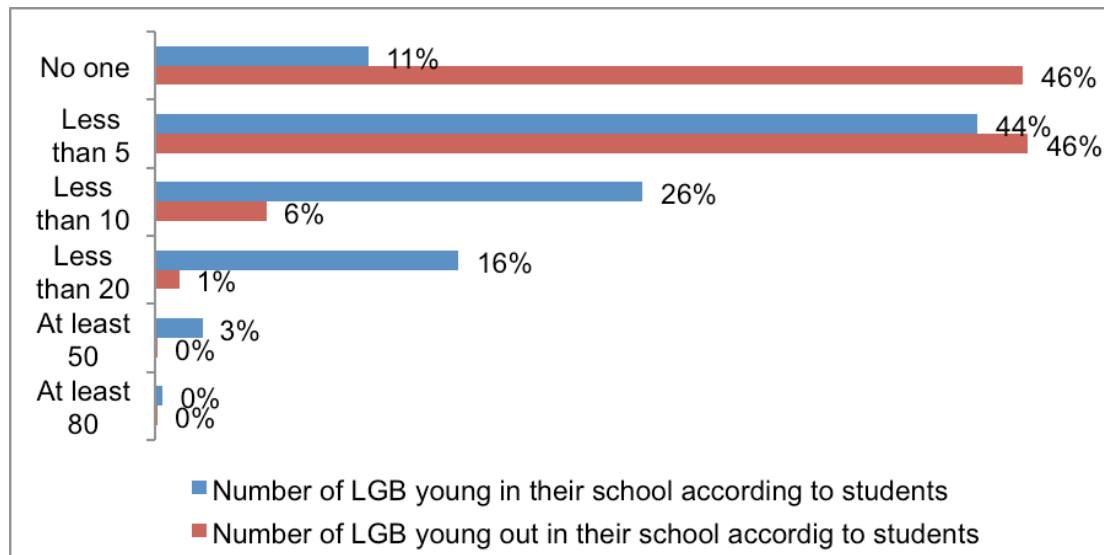


Figure 45: Number of LGB young persons that the students estimate are in their school

Regarding the number of lesbian, gay and bisexual students in their school, 44% of the students think that there are between 1 and 5, 26% that there are between 5 and 10, and 16% that there are between 10 and 20. The repartition is different between boys and girls: girls think that there are more LGB students in their school than boys.

In parallel, almost half of the students (46%) report that no LGB schoolmate is actually out, and another 46% think that there are less than 5 LGB students out in their school. The difference between the estimated numbers of LGB students and of LGB students out according to the respondents could be an indication that the students are aware of the fact that a high number of gay, lesbian and bisexual students chose not to be open about their sexual orientation at school.

5.3 Homosexuality in school curriculum

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. As reported in chapter 3, 22% of the LGBT respondents think that one of the best way to fight against homophobia would be to work with schools and students, to inform them and raise their awareness on this issue.

Unfortunately, not only do many LGBT people consider school as an insecure environment for them, but also very few report to have obtained any useful support from school.

Only 13% of the LGBT respondents declare to have found something useful in the school curriculum. Mostly they refer to Greek and Latin classics and other famous homosexual writers, and to philosophy and psychology lessons. Only a few indicate specific interventions or projects regarding this issue organised at school.

Besides, 19% of the respondents found something that expresses prejudice against LGBT persons inside the school curriculum (Figure 46).

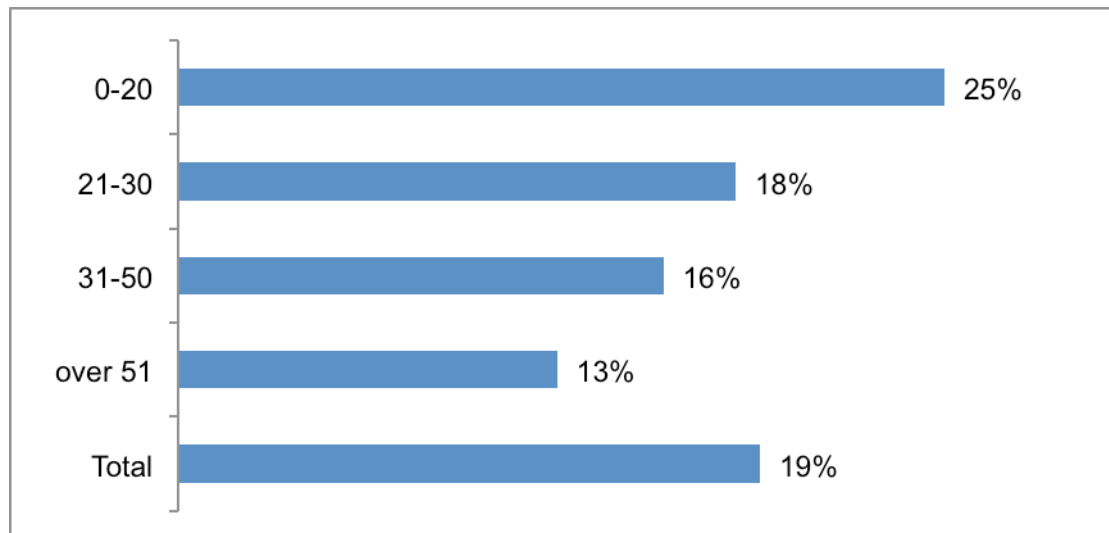


Figure 46: Percentage of LGBT respondents who found something that express prejudice in the school curriculum for each category of age

Young LGBT persons reported a higher number of examples than older ones: 25% of the respondents under 20 found something that expresses prejudice in the school curriculum against 13% of the over 50.

More than a more discriminating school curriculum, this result can be due to the fact that young generations are more aware of their rights in general, and more attentive to discriminating behaviours and prejudices.

The main lesson during which prejudices were expressed is religion, and sometimes philosophy or literature. The respondents referred also to comments and behaviours of the professors, either criticising directly homosexual persons, or consciously ignoring and omitting anything related to homosexuality during the lessons.

This chapter describes a situation in the Italian schools not very comforting for LGBT young people. In fact, school is an environment in which an important number of LGBT persons have experienced forms of discrimination or prejudice, at the hand of other students or teachers themselves. Very few respondents report positive

experiences, regarding the issues of homosexuality or homophobia, which helped them during their school time. The number of negative experiences quite outnumbers the number of positive ones.

These results are even more significant considering that adolescence is a very important moment in a person's life in the forming and in the acceptance of his or her identity (first by him/herself, and then by others).

The NISO project aims at addressing this problem offering tools to schools and teachers to help them to tackle these issues inside the classes, in a positive, respectful and peaceful way.

6 Conclusion

The two surveys carried out in Rome 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 first positive result of the research is the high number of respondents involved in the surveys. It demonstrates an interest, or at least the availability of schools and of parents to talk about homophobia (the parents had to give their agreement in the school council before the submission of the questionnaire).

Only one of the three schools involved in the survey participates in the *Voice OUT* activities. In the other schools, contacts and accord were made to organise later specific activities on homophobia (projection of films, debate, etc.).

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

First, we note that a majority of the students did not agree with most of 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 role of appearance in girl life and some characteristics that men should have, in particular their independence and autonomy. On the contrary, very few students agreed with the more traditional stereotypes linked to the hobbies or the social role of men and women (boys play at football and girls dance ballet, women should stay at home to take care of children, etc.). However, boys seem to be more close to traditional view of gender roles than girls. This is more evident when referring to sentences such as “it bothers me when a boy acts as a girl” and “It bothers me when a girl acts as a boy”, confirming that trespassing gender boundaries and opening up to unclear division between masculinity and femininity is perceived as problematic, especially by boys.

Regarding the students’ vision of LGBT persons, the adjective they associate to gay and lesbian are some how close to the ones that gay and lesbian interviewed perceived as attached to them. It is important, however, to highlight that LGBT respondents think people associate to them much more negative adjectives than the one proposed by the students. Therefore we can say that, LGBT persons who participated in the survey gave a more “negative” picture of the stereotypes attached to lesbian and gay persons than the students (for example for gay men, 40% of the characteristics indicated were very negative, while only a restricted number of characteristics stated by the students were so). The stereotypes indicated by LGBT persons regarded also often the typology of jobs they are expected to have, while the students didn’t indicate anything on this aspect. However, both targets groups indicated some characteristics: gay men are supposed to be effeminate, more sensible, and caring about their look. Lesbian women are considered masculine, different in their physical aspect (especially regarding their hair) and in their clothes, with a strong character.

Besides the analysis of the main stereotypes attached to gender identity and sexual orientation, the research regarded also the attitudes diffused among students towards LGBT persons and rights. Students 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 and we tried to go behind “politically correctness”, and to analyse the difference between a mere tolerance of LGBT persons (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). And in fact, while three fourth of the students gave a rather positive definition of homosexuality, only 49% of them feel comfortable enough to share a room with a potential lesbian or gay schoolmate (even less among the boys).

In total, within the group of students interviewed, there is still a small minority strongly refuting LGBT persons: 8% of the students consider homosexuality a physical or psychological disorder and 5% gave a very negative definition (sin, sexual aberration, etc.). 10% of them do not agree that LGB persons should be able to live their own life as they wish, and this figure increases to 17% for transgender persons.

On the other side, almost half of the students feel rather comfortable with LGBT persons, and about 58% think that they should be allowed to get married. 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 accepts homosexuality and LGBT persons, is conscious of the difficulties that they are confronted with in the Italian society and of the discriminations they suffer, but is not completely comfortable in their interaction with them and not ready to recognise them all the civil rights enjoyed by heterosexual couples.

For all the results regarding the most diffused stereotypes and attitudes among young Italian students, the main factors that influenced the answers of the students were, besides their gender, the typology of school they go to, the number of LGBT persons they actually know, and sometimes the school level of their parents.

In fact, the students going to scientific and humanities secondary schools expressed less prejudiced opinions and appeared more open towards LGBT issues than students from technical and vocational institutes. Another aspect that should be taken in consideration in analysing these results is the composition of the different typologies of schools. In fact, while in humanities schools a majority of the students are girls (almost two third of the students in our sample), the technical institutes receive a much higher number of boys than girls. As we have seen, boys appeared to be less comfortable with LGBT persons and less in favour of LGBT rights, so this aspect can have an impact on the results at school level. Moreover, in a very masculine environment, the weight of the expectations on how a “real man” should behave is much stronger than in a more mixed context.

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 later must face, the more they are comfortable with them and the more they are in favour of extended LGBT rights. But this variable has as well an impact on the stereotypes diffused among the students, attached not only to sexual orientation, but also to gender identity.

Regarding the discrimination and prejudices suffered by LGBT people, this report confirms the results of the background analysis and of the survey available at national level. In fact, 73% of the LGBT respondents declared to have suffered experiences of discrimination or prejudice linked to their sexual orientation or gender identity. Transgender persons, gay and bisexual men appear to be more often victims of discriminations than lesbian and bisexual women. The places where the higher number of respondents declared to have suffered discrimination are school (49%) and home (42%). The types of prejudices suffered at school by LGBT

respondents, and especially transgender and gay persons, are verbal and psychological violence, insults and jokes, but also physical violence.

The students appear to be aware of the lack of social inclusion of LGBT persons as more than half of them think that most of the environments in which they spend their every-day life are not lesbian and gay friendly and only 11% of students think that LGBT persons are well accepted in society. If the places indicated as the less gay/lesbian friendly, such as school or the group of friends, are the same indicated by LGBT respondents, students seem to be not aware of the prejudices experienced by LGBT persons in others spaces, such as the media and internet (the fourth place where they suffer discrimination according to LGBT persons).

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. 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 persons, the two main reasons of their social exclusion are the ignorance and lack of education of the population (for 78% of the LGBT respondents) and the Christian religion (for 63% of them). Coherently, according to them the two most effective ways to combat homophobia are the media (49% of the answers) and the schools (22%) as they are channels to address the lack of information and understanding of the society on LGBT issues. These answers validate the approach adopted by NISO project, which offer a method for working with the students inside the schools to promote human and LGBT rights through a participative use of media.