

“Excuse me, Miss, are you a lesbian?”

**A Research Report on the Situation of LGBT
Educational Workers in the School System in
Slovenia**

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Contents

1. Introduction: School – an objective and non-discriminatory transfer of knowledge and experience?	3
2. The situation of LGBT educational workers in the Slovene school system: The analysis of the online questionnaire and semi-structured interviews	7
2.1 Methodology	8
2.2 The sample	9
2.3 Coming out	10
2.4 Experiences upon coming out	14
2.5 Violence as the consequence of coming out	16
2.6 Reactions to violence	17
2.7 The reasons for staying “in the closet”	19
2.8 The workplace attitude toward same-sex orientation	21
2.9 The impact of coming out	23
2.10. Change for a safer school environment	25
3. Summary	29
4. Recommendations	31
5. Bibliography	33
6. Organization informational centre Legebitra	34
7. On-line Survey	35

1. Introduction: School – an objective and non-discriminatory transfer of knowledge and experience?

"I believe it would be beneficial for students if all LGBT teachers and professors could come out and talk about it. Not talk about their personal lives, but about homosexuality in general. There are more than a few students, who are gays and lesbians themselves. I see quite a few of them in the hallways and they seem lost due to little or no support."

(Pia, 30)

Kuhar and Švab in their work *The Unbearable Comfort of Privacy* (2005) discuss that LGBT people in Slovenia run into three impediments, which more or less stand in their way toward complete social and legal equality: boundless taken-for-granted heterosexuality, social invisibility and violence. The authors of articles in a special edition of the magazine *Journal of Contemporary Educational Studies: "Homosexuality and School"* (2009) reached the same conclusions. All three elements can be found in one of the most important social systems: the educational system.

The discourse in the above-mentioned edition of *The Journal* reveals that school is an incredibly heteronormative environment, where there is no room for same-sex relationships, and where almost a half of LGBT students are facing violence on the basis of their sexual orientation. The lack of discussion on homosexuality is also pointed out and examined. The subject is mostly rejected as not appropriate for discussion, while it more often than not causes discomfort among teachers and other school (educational) staff. The schools that want to introduce the subject must often battle against adverse reactions from the parents and from the local community.

The discourse on tolerance and inclusive attitudes toward LGBT and the consequences of homophobia in schools are one of possible solutions to the issue, but improving the present conditions would require changes on several levels. Namely, providing safe space for all cannot be the task and responsibility of schools alone. The parents as well as the public leaders and those who shape the curriculum must realize that homophobia in schools is discrimination, which can leave irreparable consequences on a student. The subject must enter the school space in a manner, which does not insult, discriminate, and exclude.

The greatest potential for improving the conditions lies undoubtedly in the hands of teachers, whose primary task is to transfer knowledge, relevant and accurate information, as well as to mould the personality of their students in an objective, plural and non-discriminatory fashion. Educational staff and teachers, besides

the parents, create and direct the teaching process and, with the content and actions, set the foundation on which the learning individuals will later build their lives. Therefore, it is important that teachers are aware of the influence that they have on the lives of those they teach, and that their task is also to create an environment, which encourages self-esteem and positive self-image. The need for a positive self-image in an individual is even greater if they belong to a minority, if they are discriminated due to this minority identity, or exposed to any kind of violence.

Mojca Juriševič in the text "Učitelj kot 'pomemben drugi' pri oblikovanju učenčeve samopodobe" (Teacher as 'the significant other' in formation of student's self-image) (1996) reveals that every teacher's action should display his or her positive self-image, for one must realize that teachers are often the role models for their students – they are their "significant other person".

Teachers should be able to present themselves to their students in their entirety, including all their personal circumstances, backgrounds, identities and beliefs that they hold individually. Or as Stanko Gogolj writes in his script "Didaktika in didaktika religije" (Didactics and Didactics of Religion) (2003) for the circumstance of religious beliefs: "*Religious teachers can positively evaluate our own religiousness and faith. Surely, we cannot impose it on others, but neither should we exclude it from communication with our students. In accordance with our nature we, teachers, have a right to teach 'as we are', the students have the right to communicate with the teacher as a person – together with his or her dimension of religion and faith.*"

Regardless of the specific personal background, highlighted by Gergolj, the public school should transfer knowledge and shape a student's personality in a manner that does not exclude or give privilege to anyone on the basis of their values, religion, philosophical or religious persuasions, gender, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation and other personal circumstances (Šebart, Kuhar, 2009: 6). The teachers from Gimnazija Ptuj, Vida Otič and Mira Janžekovič in their public statement (2010) claim the same, when they convincingly argue, why the discussion on human rights in school is important: "*The school must develop thinking, critical individuals; recognizing prejudice and stereotypes and offering strategies for their eradication is also a part of the education.*" That is why it is important that the school space finally accepts the discussion on homosexuality and recognizes the background and the experience of LGBT students, teachers and other workers in the system as a positive contribution to the curriculum. LGBT teachers, as well as other teachers, who are sensitive enough to this background, can have an important influence on a positive self-image of LGBT students.

The main aim of the project "Excuse me, Miss, are you a lesbian?" was to gather data about whether the Slovene school space allows LGBT teachers to truly carry out their primary mission without restrictions, whether it enables them to offer

all available support to all their students, and whether it openly allows them to teach and present themselves to their students in their entirety

The idea for the research came from the observed increased pressure on the students, teachers and other educational staff, who recognize the importance of the discussion on homosexuality in the school environment. The experiences and stories that we received through our online questionnaire and semi-structured interviews represent an important insight into the experiences of LGBT teachers and professors and some kindergarten teachers in the school environment. First of all, they reveal a deep misunderstanding rooted in the school environment regarding this particular personal background, and secondly, they identify a strong need for additional education activities particularly on the topic of same-sex orientation for all employees in educational institutions.

Through the analysis and the publication of results of the project we would like to raise awareness and point out a great need for a safe and understanding environment for all LGBTs in schools, and sensitize schools and other publics to the degree so that the Gergolj's definition of a teachers presenting themselves in their entirety would, in the general understanding, exceed the specific personal background it was written for, so it could ultimately be read and understood as:

"All teachers can positively evaluate our identity and personal circumstance or several. Surely we cannot impose them on others, but they should in no way be excluded from the way we communicate with the students. In accordance with our nature, we teachers have a right to teach 'as we are', and the students have the right to communicate with the teacher as a whole person including all his / her dimensions of personality and identity."

We would sincerely like to thank all who shared their experiences through the questionnaire and/or personal interviews. Thank you for your trust.

Jasna Magić

EXCUSE ME, MISS, ARE YOU A LESBIAN?

The project was carried out in the period between December 2009 and December 2010 within the “Activate!” and “For LGBT Youth” programs of the Društvo informacijski center Legebitra.

The fundamental aims of the project were:

- To gather and analyze information on the situation of LGBT teachers in Slovenia;
- To monitor and record the level of homophobia in the school system;
- To raise awareness in schools and among the wider public about the situation of LGBT teachers, and to put forward the recommendations for necessary social and systematic changes when fighting homophobia.

The information was gathered via an online questionnaire, available between 22 March and 10 November, 2010. We also carried out semi-structured interviews with 12 teachers and professors, who identified themselves as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. Within the interviews we wanted to gather the respondents’ actual experiences and stories from their school environments.

Due to the specific nature of the environment of the study we encountered some interesting response. Some of the teachers, regardless of where they teach, did not want to take part in the semi-structured interviews, because they were afraid they would get recognized. Here we also want to point out that our call for participation in the online questionnaire was sent to all on-line (publicly) available e-mail addresses of teachers and professors of all the primary and secondary high schools in Slovenia, as well as secretary’s offices at all the Slovene faculties (with the request that they send it on to different departments), in order to reach as many people as possible in our target group. Our call received positive as well as negative responses. The latter came exclusively from university professors, who characterized the research as completely “inappropriate” and “not normal”; one of the recipients even threatened to report us to the Consumer Protection Office, informing us that the research content is unacceptable and that it abuses personal information.

The structure of the report:

The report consists of two parts:

- (1) the statistical analysis of information, gathered through the online questionnaires, and the analysis of the semi-structured interviews (Research Report);
- (2) the summary of results.

The conclusion of the report contains recommendations, which are based on the main findings of the research.

2. The Position of LGBT Teachers in the Slovene School System: The analysis of the online questionnaire and semi-structured Interviews

*"Colleagues at school advised me, upon finding out I was a lesbian, not to discuss much or talk about it."
(Pia, 30)¹*

With the "Excuse me, Miss, are you a Lesbian?" research project we wanted to obtain the information on LGBT teachers and those employees in the educational system, who work with the young people. The main aim of the research was to acquire data about whether the Slovene school environment enables LGBT teachers to carry out their primary mission truly without any obstructions, i.e. does it enable them to provide all the possible support to all their students and at the same time enable them to present themselves in their entirety and as role models.

Up to now, the research in Slovenia, concerning the field of education, predominantly studied the situation of and violence as experienced by LGBT youth in schools, or tried to establish whether and in what manner does the discourse on homosexuality actually appear in the school environment. In the research on everyday life of gays and lesbians (N=445) in Slovenia (Švab, Kuhar, 2005) 53 % of respondents reported at least one experience of violence in school due their sexual orientation. In almost 23 % of the cases the violence (mostly verbal) was committed by their peers. Similar conclusions were drawn from the research on the everyday lives of LGBT young people carried by Društvo informacijski center Legebitra (2007, N=221).

The latter revealed that more than one tenth of LGBT students in the school environment often face violence (mostly verbal) due to their sexual orientation, and more than 35 % of the respondents had at least one experience of violence due to their sexual orientation in school. Both studies specifically emphasized the school environment as a dangerous space for LGBT youth. Legebitra's research also revealed that on average 81 % of secondary school students and 75 % of university students were dissatisfied with the access to information about homosexuality in the context of the school they were attending. Most of the secondary school and university students were also dissatisfied with the school support system for LGBT people. Just over 26 % of the secondary school and university students claimed that the school system does not offer LGBT youth any support whatsoever.

¹ The respondents' statements were translated from colloquial into grammatically correct Slovene, where we took care not to change their tone or the meaning. The names under the statements are fictitious. The number beside the name represents the age of the respondent.

These results are not surprising since the school culture is permeated with heteronormative premises and is often a fertile ground for different forms of (hidden) violence and (direct) discrimination of gays and lesbians (Švab, Kuhar, 2005: 113). As the results of the present research show, in this context LGBT teachers also most often cannot (manage to) be a support system or a part of it, since the personal circumstance of sexual orientation, seen through the experience of the majority of respondents in our survey, is undesirable and interpreted as something negative, while talking about homosexuality is understood as promotion of homosexuality.

2.1. Methodology

The research project was carried out through an online questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. To form a sample we used the snowball method, or the so called bottom-up approach (Atkinson, Flint, 2001), which is suitable for studying hidden social groups. The invitation to participate in both of the stages of the research was thus spread by word of mouth and through notices on relevant web sites, related to LGBT issues or to education (e.g. the SVIZ web site (Education, Science and Culture Trade Union of Slovenia), Legebitra and similar LGBT associations, on LGBT web sites and the teachers' www.uciteljska.net forum, etc.). The invitation was also sent to all online (public) available emails of the Slovene primary and secondary schools and university faculties. At institutions, where the employees have public email addresses, the invitation was sent to each teacher personally, elsewhere the invitation was sent to the secretary's office or the management, requesting they spread the invitation among their employees.

The questionnaire included 24 questions, through which we established to what degree the respondents are out in their school environments, how they bridge the boundaries of the public and private in the school space; we also wanted to discover how safe they feel, whether coming out at workplace is important to them and why, and whether they are facing pressures or other forms of violence due to their sexual orientation, and how they are dealing with them. In the end we asked them to self-assess how open their workplace and the local environment is toward homosexuality and their thoughts on what would have to change for schools to become a more open space for discussion about homosexuality.

Five gay men and seven lesbian women participated in the semi-structured interviews. Three of these teach at university, two in primary school, and the others in secondary school. In the interviews the secondary school teachers were given special attention, since previous research and preliminary results of this research revealed that secondary schools are by far the most dangerous environment for LGBT students, who are in a period of discovering their sexuality, as well as for LGBT teachers, who are, because of this fact, facing

prejudice that they with their personality and personal background can have a detrimental effect on the development of secondary school students.

2.2. The sample

The questionnaire was answered by 139 respondents, of which 58 % were female, 41 % were male, while two respondents did not want to define their gender. In the item, where they had to define their identity, one of them defined as a transsexual, the other as gay.

The sample contained 32 % of lesbians, 33 % of gays, 23 % defined themselves as bisexual, 2 % as transsexual, 3 % as queer, while others could not answer this question.

Two identity categories (transsexual, queer) had too few respondents for a sensible statistical analysis; therefore, these two categories were excluded from further analysis. We also excluded those, who could not define themselves. The primary aim of this research was to examine the experience of those, who have a clearly defined non-heterosexual identity and are potentially facing difficulties because of it in the heteronormative environment. Of course, this does not mean that the other more fluid or unfixed identities are not also important or worthy of research, nor that the individuals with these identities are not experiencing similar violence or issues – the analysis of the remaining part of the sample should be the subject of our future research.

A redesigned sample, for which all the results presented in the continuation are valid (unless specifically stated that only a certain segment of the sample was used), contains 123 respondents – 57 % of women and 43 % of men.

With regard to sexual orientation, the distribution is as follows: 37 % of lesbians, 37 % of gays and 26 % of bisexuals. Among bisexuals there are 78 % of women and 22 % of men.

The majority of respondents work in a larger city (56 %) (Ljubljana or Maribor), almost 29 % in a smaller town, the rest (15 %) in a village or a rural area.

The majority of the sampled respondents are aged between 26 and 42 years (see Table 1).

Table 1 – Age group

Age group	%
From 18 to 25	10.6
From 26 to 34	48.8
From 35 to 42	26
From 43 to 50	10.6
Above 50	4.1

The respondents perform various functions in their educational institutions. Although the majority are teachers, professors or educational staff, the questionnaire also reached counselors and social workers, psychologists, principals, librarians, a few persons from the administrative staff and similar. The sample was again redesigned for further analysis, where we established five job position categories: work in kindergarten, primary school, secondary school, university, or other. This categorization included those respondents, who work in special needs education institutions, music schools, dance schools and similar. The categorization enabled us to capture and established the differences, which occur in the attitudes toward LGBT on different levels of educational institutions.

Institution	Lesbian	Gay	Bisexual	Total
Kindergarten	4.1	/	2.4	6.5
Primary	4.1	13	9.8	26.8
Secondary	13	8.9	6.5	28.5
University	8.9	13	5.7	27.6
Other	6.5	2.4	1.6	10.6
TOTAL	36.6	37.4	26	100

Table 2 – Job position of respondents with regard to sexual orientation (in %)

As shown in Table 2, the distribution of respondents in the sample is fairly even with respect to the primary and secondary schools, and faculties (about one fifth of the sample in each educational institution). The lowest share (less than 7 %) goes to kindergartens, just over 10 % of our sample work in other educational institutions.

The majority (48 %) of respondents, work in their educational institution from 1 to 5 years.

2.3. Coming out

The disclosure of sexual identity can be identified as a process of recognizing one’s own sexual attraction to one’s own gender, the related newly forming identity, by showing this identity to the environment, and by a confirmation of the identity by the environment. Each coming out is processed though a certain social and individual context, where the individual’s race, culture and class, their family situation, workplace situation and similar are important (Kuhar, 2001: 190).

In our sample, almost 40 % reported that they were out to the majority of people around them; almost 40 % were out only to some people. The sample

contained 8 %, who were not out to anyone, and more than 11 % of those, who were also not out, although they believe some people know about their sexual orientation. With regard to sexual orientation, there are no statistically significant differences between the individual groups. Generally speaking, the majority of our respondents were out at least to some individuals and that they feel their identity is relatively stable. This means that in the interpretation of Table 3, not-being out in some contexts, connected to educational institutions, cannot (at least in the majority) be attributed to the fact that some individuals may not be certain about their sexual status and were not out because of that. We believe that the reasons for not coming out are predominantly external.

	Out to all colleagues	Out to all superiors	Out to all students	Out to some colleagues	Out only to some superiors	Out only to some students	Not out
Men	20.8	3.8	/	34	9.4	13.2	45.3
Women	11.4	7.1	1.4	37.1	8.6	18.6	47.1
Gay	21.7	4.3	/	39.1	10.9	15.2	39.1
Lesbian	4.4	4.4	/	42.2	13.3	22.2	48.9
Bisexual	21.9	9.4	3.1	21.9	/	9.4	53.1
Kindergarten	12.5	/	/	37.5	/	/	50
Primary	6.1	/	/	39.4	/	3	51.5
Secondary	17.1	2.9	/	25.7	8.6	14.3	54.3
University	26.5	14.7	2.9	38.2	20.6	38.2	35.3
Other	7.7	7.7	/	46.2	7.7	7.7	38.5

Table 3 – Disclosure of sexual orientation with regard to gender, sexual orientation and work position (in %)

Table 3 shows the level of disclosure of individual respondents in our sample. The question "Are you out at your workplace?" allowed several possible answers, therefore the sums in the table in individual categories may be over 100 %.

The interpretation of results took into account the specific circumstances, where individual respondents work. The level of disclosure most definitely depends on the size of the work organization. If, for example, someone works at a large faculty, it is impossible to expect that all the colleagues, superiors and students know about their sexual orientation. The information, that not everyone knows, cannot and should not be interpreted as a sign that someone is hiding their

sexual orientation, but that the fact is the product of various circumstances. The most interesting in this respect is the information in the last column, which shows the percentage of those not out to anyone in their work environment. One could assume that about a half of our respondents was not out at their workplace. This corroborates the findings from the research on the everyday life of gays and lesbians in Slovenia (Švab, Kuhar, 2005), which also unveiled that 49 % of respondents were not out at their workplace (or were out to a few of their colleagues).

The highest level of disclosure was reported by those, who work at university faculties. Among those more than 65 % were out to all or some of the colleagues. In kindergartens 50 % of our respondents were out, 46 % in primary school, with the lowest share in secondary schools. 43 % of respondents, who work in secondary schools, reported being out to all or at least to some of the colleagues.

The university environment, which is also the most »individualized«, seems to permit a higher level of disclosure of sexual orientation, especially due to the relatively high autonomy of individual teachers. The teachers at primary and secondary schools are most certainly under stricter "social control" by the direct work environment, as well as the students and their parents. The response of one of the respondents confirmed the amount power the parents have in school: *"It is not only the superiors and colleagues, who are the problem in the school, the students are not such a problem either ... the problem is the primitive and narrow minded parents, which is not strange, if you compare it with the tolerant attitude we applied towards the hate speech of our politicians ... the problem is especially in smaller towns. If the parents put pressure on the headmaster, he or she will soon find a reason to let you off ... The reason will be wrapped in such a way it can slip through loopholes in our inadequate laws. And since there are far too many teachers available today, they will rather employ the "flawless" ones."*

The fact that the university environment is by far the most gay and lesbian friendly was confirmed by the participants in our semi-structured interviews. All three participants, who teach at university, were out, at least within their own departments. Manca (35) and Vanja (26) contributed the fact that they were out to different reasons, from the specifics of the department where they teach, to the size of the faculty and openness of the faculty staff to the subject of homosexuality. Manca pointed out that her process of coming out was influenced by the "position of power" – by the fact that she had achieved a certain status within the work environment, where she felt safe enough to autonomously live her personal identity in her professional life.

"I have never had any negative experiences. I teach at a faculty, which fully prevents such discrimination. Most of the colleagues are very liberal. It also gets easier when you reach a certain academic or professional position. I used to believe I would have difficulties, so I waited until I got a full-time contract and reached assistant professor title, which means that you are actually autonomous and free ..."

(Manca, 35)

"With regard to this subject, my department is probably one of the best workplaces in Slovenia – the professors that teach are very diverse and open towards marginal and minority topics. I also have no worries when going to a pride parade or to a LGBT bar. And if I should meet my students or colleagues there, so what, let them deal with that particular information themselves."

(Vanja, 26)

The greater autonomy at the university level could be explained partly also by the fact that at this level two adult persons are entering into the relationship (student – employee), over which parents no longer have control. All this was also confirmed by the finding that no one, who participated in our survey, was out to their superiors in the kindergarten or primary school, and that only a few (less than 12 %) were out to all or to some of their superiors in secondary school. This share is considerably higher at the university level (35 %).

This difference is also confirmed by Bor's experience. Bor (37) first taught at a secondary school, but now he teaches at university. While he had been partially out in the secondary school, he was completely out at the university, out to his colleagues and also to students, especially those with which he was in contact through other faculty activities. The colleagues at the university, the ones who knew him, knew he was gay before he came to teach there. As a reason for not coming out, especially to the students in the secondary school, he mentioned the loss of authority, which is essential for every secondary school teacher and a key component for quality execution of the teaching process.

"At the secondary school I had to establish, mostly with the students, some kind of an authoritative rapport and, if you're a man, your masculinity is authoritative. Students expect from a man to be strict and heterosexual. In that space I got a strong feeling that the students needed me to be, so to say, a real man and that homosexuality was simply not associated with masculinity."

(Bor, 37)

Andrej was also afraid to lose his authority due to being gay colliding with being a "real" man, as it is associated with femininity and weakness, when he taught at a secondary school with a considerably greater male than female student

population. He was partially out to his co-workers and thought the students knew he was gay, as he was visibly active in the LGBT community.

"When my students and I got to know each other better, they started gathering information on who I am and what I do. I knew they would get information about my LGBT activism quickly, and was afraid that the fact that I'm gay would undermine my authority, since gay men are not perceived as real men."

(Andrej, 31)

2.4 Experiences upon coming out

	Positive experience	Negative experience	Neutral experience	Other
Men	25	14.3	50	10.7
Women	42.4	3	48.5	6.1
Gay	25	14.3	50	10.7
Lesbian	40.9	4.5	45.5	9.1
Bisexual	45.5		54.5	
TOTAL	34.4	8.2	49.2	8.2

Table 4 – The experiences upon coming out with regard to gender and sexual orientation (in %)

In the following two items (time of coming out at workplace and the experience upon coming out) we used only those, who were at least partially out at work. Table 4 shows that for the majority (a little less than 84 %), who were out at work, the experience was positive or at least neutral. 8 % of the respondents reported that their experience of coming out at work was negative. Among these there were considerably more gays than lesbians, or considerably more men than women.

Generally, the level of disclosure was higher among gay men than among lesbian women (see Table 3), which was confirmed by the results of the interviews: while the gay men were partially or fully out (irrespective of institution – the survey covers the equal number of universities, secondary and primary schools), the lesbian women, at least in the secondary and primary school environment, were mostly not out or were partially out. In the interviews the men stressed that they were mostly out to their female colleagues – in their opinion, women have less prejudice toward homosexuality – while they had reservations about coming out their male colleagues. The majority of the

interviewees, gay and lesbian, are out to a closer circle of people, usually to those they also socialize with privately.

"I am out to a small circle of colleagues, the ones that I trust. First I tested them about how comfortable they are with the topic of homosexuality and how they would potentially accept me. And then it was not difficult to tell and I also had no bad experiences."

(Maks, 36)

"At both of my workplaces I felt my coming out was not something negative. I felt that the colleagues accepted the information and that was that. I told only the female colleagues, while I think male colleagues did not know."

(Žan, 30)

Among those, who selected the answer "Other", the majority stated that the experience of coming out was not one-dimensional. *"In some ways coming out was positive, in others negative,"* wrote one of the respondents. Someone else believed that *"sometimes it would be better [...] if nobody knew."* A somewhat different experience was described by a female respondent, who wrote that, her coming out was mostly positive, and added: *"The attraction of novelty wears off quickly, so nobody is paying any attention to it anymore."* It is a classic description of reactions to coming out, which at first cause amazement, possible shock or at least surprise, but the first reaction does not last long. Gradually, the knowledge of a person's sexual orientation is translated into a context of something commonplace, although, as Švab and Kuhar (2005) reported in the context of coming out, it can also result in the, so called, transparent closet². It means that the information on a person's sexual orientation was taken in, but the people who surround this person do not want to talk about it, so homosexuality becomes a taboo, a public secret – and this can be a burden, similarly as the time spent in the closet.

The subject becoming a taboo is experienced especially by those, who teach at secondary or primary schools. Maks, Josiene and Pia and three other interviewees pointed out the fact that their co-workers, upon their coming out, advised them "in good will" not to openly talk about their homosexuality. There are usually a number of reasons for such an attitude toward the subject, but the most common is the desire to avoid conflict situations, and being uncomfortable with the subject homosexuality.

² The term comes from the phrase "coming out of the closet", which denotes the disclosure of an individual's sexual orientation and the end of hiding of the same sex orientation. (Švab, Kuhar, 2005:45)

"When I changed jobs, a female colleague warned me not to talk about it at my new workplace. And I told her: that's me, period. If I am going to stay at this new school for some time, it's just a matter of time before somebody finds out, because I won't hide it. She did not like the fact that I told people."

(Žan, 30)

"I had no difficulties with coming out as such, but in every interview they implied I should not talk about my sexual orientation. That it's my business and nobody else's."

(Josiene, 31)

"I had no bad experiences with coming out, but nobody talks to me about it. Nobody has asked me anything about the subject. I know they know because they don't ask me anymore if I have a girlfriend or not, which happened often in the previous job."

(Maks, 36)

The majority of respondents (64 %) came out within the first year on their job. A little less than 20 % made their coming out within the first five years, the rest even later.

2.5. Violence as the consequence of coming out

	Psychological or verbal violence				Physical violence			
	Have not experienced	Experienced and always reacted	Experience, but reacted with regard to situation	Experienced but did not react	Have not experienced	Experienced and always reacted	Experience, but reacted according to the situation	Experienced but did not react
Gay	57.1	14.3	17.9	10.7	92.9	3.6	3.6	/
Lesbian	65.2	17.4	13	4.3	95.7	/	4.3	/
Bisexual	81.8	/	18.2	/	91.9	1.6	6.5	/
Kindergarten	100	/	/	/	100	/	/	/
Primary	80	13.3	/	6.7	100	/	/	/
Secondary	35.7	21.4	35.7	7.1	85.7	7.1	7.1	/
University	71.4	9.5	14.3	4.8	100	/	/	/
Other	55.6	11.1	22.2	11.1	66.7	/	33.3	/

Table 5 – Experiences of violence because of coming out

One possible reaction to coming out is violence. Table 5 shows the share of violent reactions to coming out (upon coming out or afterwards). We distinguished between physical, and psychological or verbal violence.

The majority of our respondents (more than 90 %) have never experienced physical violence at the workplace because of their sexual orientation. The sample contained 5 persons (1 lesbian, 2 gays, and 2 bisexuals), who reported violent experiences, but only one of them always responded to physical violence, the others responded with regard to the situation.

The level of psychological or verbal violence is considerably higher in comparison to physical violence. While almost 82 % of bisexual respondents reported they did not experience such violence, 43 % gays and 35 % of lesbians have at least one experience of psychological violence due to their sexual orientation. In absolute numbers it means that 22 of our respondents reported having experienced psychological or verbal violence because of their sexual orientation. It must be taken into account that it is not necessary that all the victims of violence recognize it as such. A remark in the hallway could not be important enough for someone to recognize it as verbal violence in spite the fact that it is. Almost 11 % of gays and 4 % of lesbians among those, who experienced verbal violence, did not react to it.

If the incidence of violence is viewed from point of the work position of our respondents, then we can see that the level of violence based on sexual orientation is the highest in secondary schools – this goes for psychological as well as physical violence. 64 % of respondents that work in secondary schools had experienced psychological or verbal violence because of their sexual orientation.

2.6 Reactions to violence

Those, who responded to violence, wrote in the questionnaire and reported in the interviews that they tried to talk to the person that attacked them. *"I tried to explain how I felt,"* wrote a female respondent. Similarly, another respondent wrote that he tried to *"calmly explain the situation"*. Some reported they sought help with the management of the institution, some said that they responded "subtly" or "by defending themselves". Some tried to set boundaries to the violence: *"I tried to set a boundary – although I feel I was not clear enough. It was an isolated case of a man, who attacked me verbally indirectly, although it is not exactly clear, whether he was even aware of it."*

Experiences of physical violence were not mentioned in the interviews, while it is interesting that only gays mentioned remarks from the students. This could be attributed to greater disclosure of gays to students, which does not mean that lesbians are not facing such violence.

"I often heard remarks in the hallway. And it was not easy for me. Nobody said anything to my face or challenged me in class, but you hear a lot of stuff like 'look at the way he walks', 'he has a new shirt every day'. Very stereotypical comments."

(Andrej, 31)

"Remarks from students are, for example 'you have a pink shirt', and then I say, 'yes, I have a pink shirt, does it look good on me?' then they ask, 'yes, of course! You are ... are you pink?' and I say, 'yes, I'm totally pink'. And when they see I'm not reacting, they stop asking. I don't perceive these questions as a provocation so they do not achieve their goal."

(Žan, 30)

"I have homophobic experiences mostly with students I don't teach. About once a week I hear 'faggot' and such. I used to get anonymous e-mails. A few years ago I decided not to tolerate it anymore. Now I call the student for a talk and tell them I will not tolerate it. Then these remarks stop. I don't expose myself personally. But I tell them that I feel that it is not alright and I think that's important."

(Azrael, 40)

Those, who did not react to violence, reported feeling afraid, which prevented them to react, or they thought it was not necessary to react. One of the respondents wrote that a reaction would reveal his weakness: *"By reacting I would show my weakness and bring on even more violent reactions and ridicule. I defend my position on a higher level, by not letting myself be provoked. Usually, if the remarks are indirect, I remain calm, but I tell the person what I think."* An experience by Maks shows that a reaction to violence also requires self-confidence and a positive self-image:

"I experienced a fair amount of ridicule, like when a boy or a group of students snicker behind your back. I never reacted to it because it was happening mainly in the beginning, when I was too busy with myself esteem and was working on my own self-confidence to be able to come out one day. Today, I would surely react and act differently, but these things are not happening anymore."

(Maks, 36)

2.7 The reasons for staying “in the closet”

The respondents gave different reasons for coming out at their work or for not coming out. Their answers are shown in Table 6.

Reasons for coming out			
	Gay	Lesbian	Bi-
Because I don't want to hide.	42.9	52.2	45.5
It was not my decision; I came out under pressure from others (gossip, etc.).	/	4.3	9.1
Because I felt I have support of the staff, colleagues, parents' council, etc.	/	/	18.2
It just happened.	35.7	26.1	27.3
Because I believe I set a good example, and also, the potential LGBT students and others now know to whom to turn for help.	3.6	8.7	/
Other	17.9	8.7	/
Reasons for not coming out			
	Gay	Lesbian	Bi -
I'm worried that my superiors would abuse me and I would loose my job because of it.	16.7	4.5	6.3
I'm worried about the reaction of my superiors.	/	9.1	6.3
I'm worried about the reaction of my colleagues.	11.1	4.5	6.3
I'm worried about the reaction of the local community.	/	4.5	12.5
I'm worried about the reaction of parents of the kids/students, etc.	5.6	/	/
I'm worried about the reaction of kids/students, etc.	16.7	4.5	/
My superiors and colleagues have advised and/or hinted I better not come out.	/	9.1	/
I have heard a lot of negative remarks about LGBTQ from the staff and superiors.	5.6	13.6	/
I believe the disclosure of sexual orientation, sexual expression/identity is a personal matter, which is nobody's business.	33.3	31.8	62.5
Other	11.1	18.2	6.3

Table 6 – Reasons for staying “in the closet”

Among those, who came out, the main reasons for doing so, was the decision that they do not want to hide, they do not want to hide their sexual orientation and everything related to it (a partner, private life, etc.). Just over a fifth of those who came out reported also that their coming out "just happened", so it was not especially rationalized or planned. None of the LGBT gave a reason like support from their colleagues, their co-workers, parent's council, etc. The interviewees gave similar reasons. Josiene came to Slovenia from Canada and never wanted to hide her sexual orientation regardless of her work position, nor the fact that she is married to a woman.

"The main reason is that I don't want to hide. I don't want to think about which personal pronoun to use and often when I talk about my wife, people here think I still cannot use the pronouns correctly and are always correcting me, and then I correct them back until they understand I truly don't have a husband, but a wife."

(Josiene, 31)

Azrael teaches in a smaller town in Slovenia. Although he did not intend to hide his sexual orientation, he believes it would also be impossible in such a small town.

"I'm a teacher in a smaller town, where I believe it would be impossible to hide it if you want to live a full life. Sooner or later people would ask you something, of course you can set your boundaries, but they are also set by your environment. I also did not want it, because, the fact that I'm gay is nothing shameful. So, I see no reason to hide it."

(Azrael, 40)

Among the reasons for not coming out in all three identity groups prevailed the attitude that sexual orientation is a private matter, none of anybody's business. It is hard to say to what degree this is internalized homophobia; it appears that such a reason is the most common viewpoint with those who do not come out. However, the fact remains that workplace is closely connected with a person's private life.

"In the teachers' lounge personal conversations begin quickly. On Mondays, when we talk about what we did over the weekend or when someone asks you what you did over the holidays, it's hard to say 'I don't want to talk about it', that would be ridiculous. It's also very hard to exclude your personal life from the classroom, because you are in front of your students as a whole person, and it's hard to be strictly a teacher without a trace of humanity."

(Pia, 30)

As a reason for not coming out the interview participants, in contrast to the online questionnaire respondents, mentioned the negative attitude of the environment toward homosexuality, fear of violence, fear of losing their job, but

especially pressure from parents. Ema (31) and Galebka (29), who teach at different primary schools outside Ljubljana, are experiencing strong parental influence, prejudice and negative attitudes toward gays and lesbians, which are sufficient enough reason for complete or at least partial non-disclosure at their workplaces.

"Because I teach in a very specific environment, I suspect the pressures from parents would be very strong. Here the parents have great difficulties with less important things and believe, for different reasons, that they also have a right to have a say in who will teach the subjects in school. So I suspect I would have difficulties if they knew."

(Ema,31)

"It's true that there are conversations about what you did over the weekend at the teacher's lounge, and, truth be told, I still avoid telling. I'm also afraid what would happen if the parents knew, because in my experience sexual orientation is often associated with the prejudice of pedophilia ..."

(Galebka, 29)

"I myself know quite a number of teachers who are not out. I believe a lot of them are afraid for their jobs, while I'm personally afraid of violence that could potentially come from students. As a teacher I'm much less protected here than I was in Canada. As the only teacher in the school who is out, I'm in a very exposed and delicate situation."

(Josiene, 31)

2.8 The workplace attitude toward same-sex orientation

The level of disclosure depends on the teachers' perception of the workplace and the attitude of this environment toward homosexuality. As shown in Table 7, those who did not assess their environment as LGBT inclusive are more often not out at their workplace (a little less than 20 % of respondents assessed their environment as hostile). In the work environment, assessed as tolerant, 13.5 % of LGBTs were out. The majority (68 %) perceived their work environment as tolerant (tolerant was within the survey defined as "we don't mind, but we don't want to talk about it"); the percentage of those, who believed their work environment is inclusive, was considerably lower (e.g. they organize workshops, round tables to the subject of LGBTs, etc.) – 3.3 %.

	Out to all colleagues	Out to all superiors	Out to all students	Out to some colleagues	Out to some superiors	Out to some students	Not out
Hostile	4.8	/	/	28.6	9.5	4.8	66.7
Tolerant	13.5	5.4	/	43.2	9.5	20.3	40.5
Inclusive	75	50	25	25	/	25	/
Other	22.2	11.1	/	11.1	11.1	22.2	66.7

Table 7 – How would you assess the attitude of your work environment toward homosexuality?

The attitude of the workplace toward LGBTs also affects to what degree and in what manner this subject will enter the school environment. Discussion involving the topic of homosexuality in class is very rare, the teachers, who are out in the school environment, stressed in the interviews that they are specifically avoiding the subject, since they believe that the students, colleagues, parents and the local community could understand this stereotypically as promotion of homosexuality.

"Because I also teach the course on Ethics and Society, which provides space for bringing up such subjects, I have to admit I'm always afraid that if it were known that I'm a lesbian, discussion about homosexuality in class could be understood as promotion. So I'm always careful about what I say. I dare say, were not a lesbian, I'd probably bring up this up in class much more often."

(Galebka, 29)

"Before, when nobody knew about me, I often brought it up in class. But now that I know some of them know I'm afraid I would not be taken seriously anymore, because, of course I'm talking about it since I'm a lesbian – and the message would fall flat. They could also understand it mistakenly as promotion."

(Pia, 30)

Teachers would not have this stereotypical reservation about discussing homosexuality in class if the school environment were open and inclusive and would offer a positive support system for LGBT teachers. The majority of respondents (more than 60 %) said that their school does not offer relevant and accurate information or other support regarding the same sex orientation. To the question about what their school offers about homosexuality, one of the respondents in the online questionnaire wrote: *"Some years ago the school received an educational DVD, and our counselor, at the end of a teacher's meeting, when nobody was really listening anymore, said that the teachers could borrow it if they wanted. I think nobody even wanted it ..."* In the interviews all the participants mentioned the lack of a support system; in this context, Andrej and Žan pointed out the complete lack of interest and negative attitudes of other school staff toward the subject:

"When I was still teaching, the subject never came up. The school psychologists and social workers mostly dealt with the actual educational problems – with those students, who got reprimands and such, and not so much with intolerance and violence. I also noticed that teachers in general didn't work on this subject."

(Andrej, 31)

"Once, during a colleague's class, the discussion brought up homosexuality and one of the students asked if I was gay. Later I found out that she reacted completely inappropriately, denied the information and asked them if they had even looked at me properly, and that I look completely normal, in short, she reacted like there was something wrong with it, like being gay is not normal."

(Žan, 30)

Other teachers' unwillingness to discuss the subject, and allowing intolerance and insults were mentioned by the online survey respondents and by the interviewees. The observations of both teachers, who come from abroad, are especially interesting, since they felt that the Slovene school system allowed greater display of intolerance by students than they had been used to form abroad, while remaining practically unsanctioned.

"The teachers here do not react enough to insults and abuse between the students. I am noticing problems in the attitudes toward the Croats, the Roma people and of course LGBTs and Serbs. The students really go too far, and the teachers often don't react to it."

(Josiene, 31)

"Where I used to teach the ethnic diversity was great, and insults like 'Šiptar' (derogatory term for an Albanian) and 'Bosnian' (also derogatory) were out every day. None of the other teachers reacted. Such an attitude does not distinguish between a 'Šiptar' and a 'faggot'. Therefore, I approached it quite seriously if I noticed it in class."

(Bor, 37)

Homophobia and intolerance are not restricted to students – they also appear among colleagues.

"A number of colleagues had this positively-neutral attitude, they didn't want to talk about it, but were not negatively inclined. But those, who had serious negative stereotypes and prejudice, prevailed, which is actually sad to see in a school environment, since they are adults and teachers."

(Ema, 29)

"I can say that students can be very mean, but teachers can be even worse. Often I heard comments from teachers, which were not directed only against gays, but toward all types of differences and minorities."

(Andrej, 30)

2.9. The influences of coming out

The survey also included a number of statements; the agreement of the respondents was measured with the five-degree Likert scale. Table 5 shows the average level of agreement with a certain statement, where 0 means strongly disagree, and 4 strongly agree. All statements pertain to coming out at workplace, so this part of the questionnaire was reserved only for those, who had the experience.

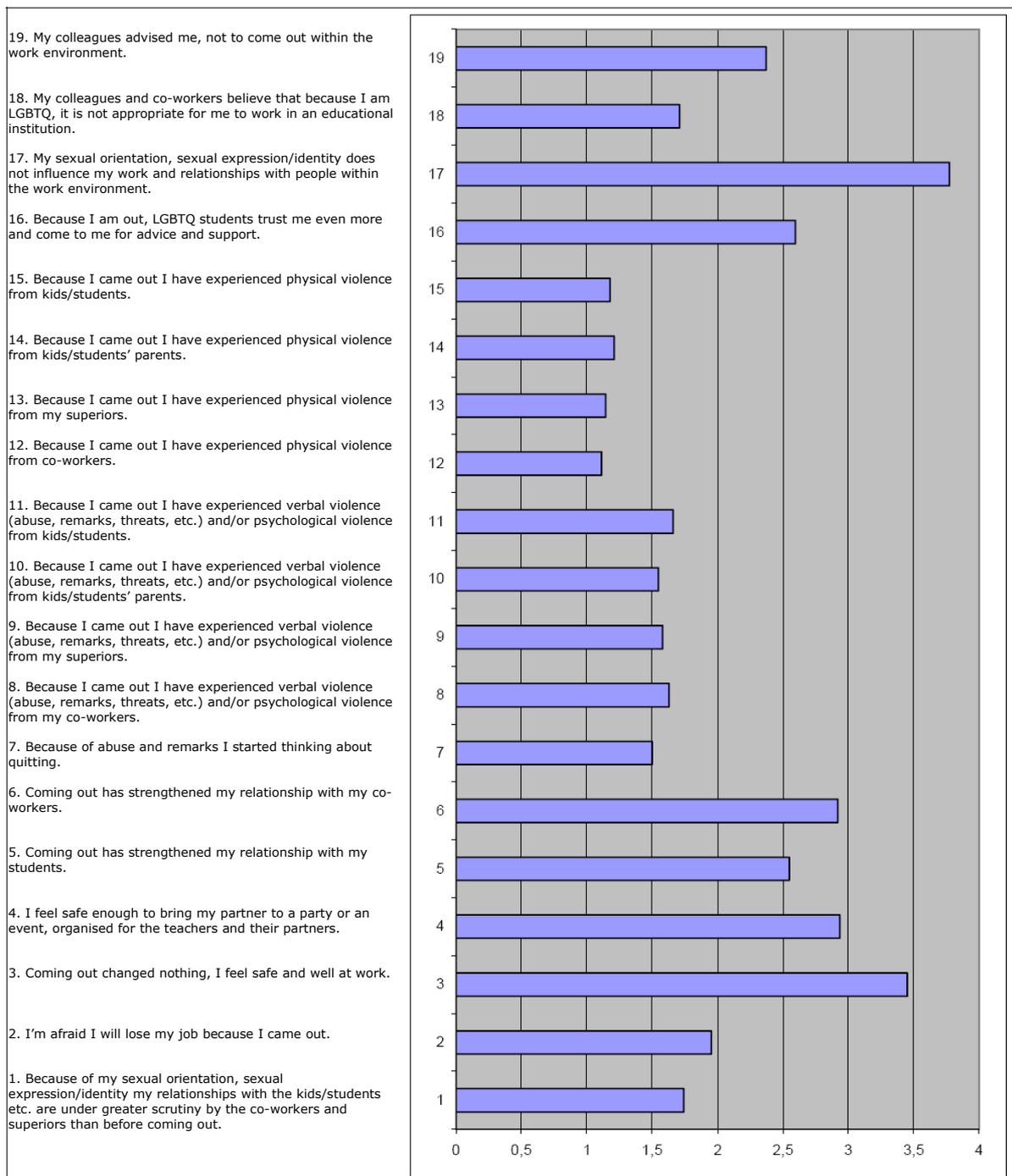


Table 5 – Statements

Table 5 reveals that our respondents agreed most strongly with the statements that put the coming out at workplace in a positive context or a context that had no negative influence on their position at their workplace. The greatest agreement received the statement that their sexual orientation does not influence their work and relationships with people in the work organisation (statement 17, 3.8 average). At the same time, the majority of respondents agreed that their coming out at their workplace did not change anything and that they feel safe and well (statement 3, 3.5 average), some reported that their coming out strengthened the relationships with co-workers even more (statement 6, 2.9 average). The same share of respondents felt safe enough to bring their same-sex partner to a work party or an event (statement 4, 2.9 average).

The majority of respondents believed, in essence, that their coming out even strengthened their relationship with the students (statement 5, 2.6 average), and about the same share believed that the LGBTQ students trust them even more and turn to them for advice and support, because they came out (statement 16, 2.7 average). In spite of the fact that LGBT teachers, who are out, can represent a support system for LGBT students and thus provide them a better quality development and help form a positive self image, about a half of the respondents reported that their co-workers believe that their sexual orientation makes them inappropriate to work in an educational institution (statement 18, 1.8 average). The same share of respondents believed that their relationships with students are under greater scrutiny because of their sexual orientation, by the colleagues as well as by their superiors, than before coming out (statement 1, 1.8 average). According to the experiences revealed by the interviewees this information could be linked to a still very pervasive misconception – associating homosexuality with pedophilia (see page 12). The respondents did neither agree nor disagree with the statement that they could lose their job because they came out (statement 2, 1.9 average).

2.10. Changes for a safer school environment

The respondents were asked to give opinions on what needs to be changed for the school to become a safer space for LGBT teachers and students (open answer). Their answers were classified into three groups:

1. Changes in understanding and acceptance of the subject and additional training for teachers;
2. Option of coming out;
3. Support of the work environment (colleagues and superiors).

1. Changes in understanding and acceptance of the subject and additional training for teachers

The majority of respondents believed that people's attitude toward LGBTs needed to be changed, especially in smaller towns and in the countryside. One of the online survey respondents thus wrote: *"The attitude toward LGBT should change, the opinion of the heterosexual majority about us. We should instill a positive attitude towards diversity among people. To strengthen the awareness that there are many things that connect us (hetero- and homosexuals) and that we have a lot of things in common, and that the things that differentiate us, are only details, which create more or less interesting individuals."* This could, according to many respondents, be achieved by a more intensive and systematic cooperation of schools with the NGOs from this field, and by systematic education of all the participants in the educational system also on the subject of homosexuality.

"I think it is especially important to include the subject in the curriculum and to open a more free discussion, without reservations and prejudice. Schools should cooperate more with different organizations, which work in this field. I think it is important for every school to have visibly available promo-material, posters etc with the information on the subject."

(Josiene, 31)

Both the questionnaire and interview respondents pointed out that additional education of all teachers about homosexuality and the consequences of homophobia is also important. Some also transferred the responsibility to the home environment and stressed that the discussion should begin within the family: *"We need more discussion, especially at home and then in school."* They also stressed the meaning of a responsible and declarative policy, which does not allow or encourage differentiation on the personal circumstance of sexual orientation. *"A lot of things should change. From adoption of a new family law, which would confirm that we made a step forward and at least formally abolished the differentiation, to the schools, where all types of sexuality should be discussed, etc."*

2. Option of coming out

In their research Kuhar and Švab discovered that coming out has an important place in an individual's reinterpretation and redefining of his or her own stigmatized identity (2005: 54). Through the absence of a discussion on homosexuality, especially from the family and school environments, young gays and lesbians grow up in a kind of informational blockade, which maintains the stigmatization of homosexuality (*ibid.*, 2005: 63). Thus, the option of coming out for a teacher has a positive influence not only on the individual, because it

enables him/her to live in accordance with his or her identity, but also facilitates breaking of stereotypes about "otherness" of LGBTs. Coming out, according to some of our respondents, is also one of the key steps toward a more tolerant environment: *"First we must talk about it. LGBT co-workers must come out and show that we are quite numerous. To show that there is nothing wrong with us and that we are made of flesh and bone, too."*

Coming out can also mean that the person can offer a kind of support, be an example and a model for LGBT students, who can turn to them for advice and support. The majority of respondents mentioned that it is important that LGBT teachers come out, since this would improve the visibility of the subject in the school environment. Žan's experience confirms that the colleagues of LGBT teachers are aware of it:

"Two female colleagues mentioned it would be very good and especially positive for our teachers' lounge, for the students and generally for the whole school, if I were out to everyone. Because I'm one of the people, who are very well received, I'm perceived as very hardworking, good, kind and active in many areas of life, as an open and positive person. It's important that people understand once and for all that it's not only the heterosexuals that can be like this, but homosexuals, too."

(Žan, 30)

The importance of supporting information and persons is evident in the experiences, described by one of the respondents: *"A third year student ended up in the headmaster's office because she was gay, where they tried to tell her that the way of life she chose for herself, is simply fatal."*

3. Support of the work environment and superiors

Within the context of "staying in the closet" many respondents mentioned the necessary support from their superiors. One of the respondents wrote: *"The management should make it clear that they support their employees regardless of their sexual orientation and that they will protect them from harmful reactions of parents and students."* Azrael has the support of his superiors, which is important for his work as well as for his wellbeing at work:

"After the discussion about the new family law someone attached a homophobic text to the door of the teachers' lounge. The act was strongly condemned at the following teachers' conference by the assistant to the headmaster as well as the school counselor – and they also said they expect that such a thing would not happen again. So I know I have a lot of support, which is very important."

(Azrael, 40)

The support from the management must exceed the level of passive tolerance. Same sex orientation cannot remain something, which stigmatizes an individual and something that should not be talked about, because, such a position only legitimizes apparent tolerance and allows stigmatization and invisibility of gays and lesbians in the school environment to continue.

"One of the things I notice is how hypocritical the reaction of the superiors can be. Even when they apparently support you, they warn you not to talk about it openly. They justify this by saying it's a private matter and it should stay like that. And this is not true support – especially since we're talking about a topic people are still largely uninformed about. It's sweeping it under the rug. Because my colleagues still have prejudice and I'm still afraid. It is not a solution. From 'I'm not interested, this is work' to a truly safe space we still have a long way to go."

(Ema, 31)

3. Summary

The final sample, formed through a snowball effect, included 123 respondents, with 37 % of lesbians, 37 % of gays and 26 % of bisexuals. With respect to workplace the respondents in the sample are distributed about equally – primary school (26.8 %), secondary school (28.5 %) and university (27.6 %). The smallest share (less than 7 %) comes from kindergarten, just over 10 % is represented by other educational institutions.

Coming out:

- ✓ Almost 80 % of respondents replied they were out to most or at least to some people around them.
- ✓ Disclosure in the work environment is considerably lower: about half of the respondents were not out at their workplace.
- ✓ The highest level of disclosure was reported by those, who work at universities. Among them more than 65 % were out to all or some of the colleagues. In kindergartens the number was 50 %, with 46 % in primary schools. The lowest percentage is in secondary schools. 43 % of respondents, who work in secondary schools, reported they were out to all or at least to some of their co-workers.
- ✓ The majority of respondents (a little less than 84 %), who came out at their workplace, reported a positive or at least a neutral experience. 8 % of respondents reported they had a negative experience.
- ✓ The positive experiences cannot be automatically associated with the fears of those who are not out; the ones, who have not come out, have a good reason for not doing so – and the other way around: those who came out have assessed their workplace is safe enough to come out.

The consequences of coming out:

- ✓ The majority of respondents, who were out (more than 90 %), have never experienced physical violence at their workplace because of their sexual orientation.
- ✓ The level of psychological or verbal violence is considerably higher in comparison to the physical violence. While almost 82 % of bisexuals reported that they have not experienced it, 43 % of gays and 35 % of lesbians had at least one experience of psychological violence. In absolute numbers it means that 22 of our respondents reported having experienced psychological violence at their workplace because of their sexual orientation. Almost 11 % of gays and 4 % of lesbians among them did not react to this violence.

- ✓ The level of occurrence of violence based on an employee's sexual orientation was highest in secondary schools – for psychological as well as for physical violence. 64 % of respondents, who work in secondary school, had experienced psychological or verbal violence because of their sexual orientation.
- ✓ Among those, who are out, the main reason for coming out was the decision that they do not want to hide, that they do not want to hide their sexual orientation and everything associated with it (partnership, private life, etc.)

Self-censorship

- ✓ Among the reasons for not coming out in all three identity groups prevailed the opinion that sexual orientation is a private matter of a person and, therefore, nobody's business. To what degree this is internalized homophobia is hard to say; it seems that this (alleged) reason is the most common attitude of those, who are not out.
- ✓ Discussion about homosexuality in lessons is very rare; the teachers, who are out in their school environment, stressed in the interviews, that they are carefully avoiding the subject, because they believe the students, colleagues, parents and the local environment could stereotypically interpret this as promotion of homosexuality.

System support:

- ✓ More than 60 % of the respondents replied that their school does not offer relevant and accurate information or other support regarding same-sex orientation.
- ✓ The majority (more than 60 %) of respondents assessed their workplace environment as tolerant (e.g. have nothing against homosexuality, but do not want to talk about it), almost 20 % as unfriendly, abusive and disapproving. The answers of more than 60 % of respondents also show that schools have no support systems, which would explicitly protect teachers on the basis of this personal background, The answers to the reasons for not coming out reveal that teachers are afraid of being mobbed and losing their job, while they are also worried about the reactions of their colleagues and parents.
- ✓ 3.3 % of respondents assessed their workplace as inclusive (e.g. organised workshops, round tables, etc. t the subject of LGBTs).
- ✓ The respondents expressed a strong need for additional training and education for employees in educational institutions and proposed to include experts from the field in school activities (NGOs, visiting professors, foreign students, etc.). The respondents also require positive workplace environment and complete support from their superiors for successful work and general wellbeing.

4. Recommendations

The analysis of the research reveals a need for changes that would directly tackle the prejudice and negative attitudes toward homosexuality in the school environment. Within this framework we considered the following recommendations:

Social changes:

Problem: Lack of information on homosexuality contributes to social exclusion of LGBT students, teachers and other staff in educational institutions, while it sustains silence and forces LGBTs into privacy.

- ✓ The educational process must include and actively promote values like human rights, tolerance and solidarity.
- ✓ Within the curriculum homosexuality should be treated with equality. Teachers should lecture on this subject in an inclusive and non-discriminatory manner.
- ✓ Talking about homosexuality, same-sex partnerships and families should not be construed as promotion of homosexuality, but as raising awareness and spreading information about one of the possible lifestyles.
- ✓ Heteronormative school practices must be deconstructed to a degree where they would permit equal co-existence of different lifestyles in the school environment.
- ✓ All the employees in educational institutions should undergo continuous additional training in order to be able to provide professional and inclusive treatment of this subject.
- ✓ Lasting, constructive and open cooperation of schools with experts in the field should be encouraged (NGOs, visiting professors, foreign students, etc.).

Systematic changes

Problem: In the school environment LGBT teachers face a number of challenges, related to prejudice from the local environment and from some of their colleagues and superiors, which prevent about a half of the respondents of this survey from living a full and quality life in the workplace.

On the national level:

- ✓ Ministry of Education and Ministry of Higher Education and Science should, in cooperation with NGOs, which are active in the field of providing equality for LGBTs, prepare a strategy to tackle homophobia. The strategy should define measures for reducing homophobia within educational environments.
- ✓ For a more detailed presentation of the subject, the Republic of Slovenia should provide funds for additional research of the personal circumstance of sexual orientation and homophobic violence in school environment.

On the local level:

- Introduction, and active and consistent implementation of policies against violence and other forms of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation:
 - Policies should be formed so they would provide protection and safety mechanisms against bullying, abuse and other forms of violence
 - Policies should enable autonomous expression of a personal identity also in the workplace and facilitate greater disclosure among teachers
 - Policies should enable LGBT teaches to take the position of role models

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6. Organization informational centre Legebitra

Informational centre Legebitra is a non-profit, non-governmental organization providing psychological and peer support for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans – persons (LGBT) in the fields of social protection and health.

The organization developed out of a non-formal student group Legebitra, which was set up as a project under a Student Organization of University of Ljubljana in 1998.

Legebitra offers professional and quality services and is committed to advocate for the human rights of LGBT persons and implement social protection services for LGBT youth

LGBT youth are due to stigma and discrimination based on sexual orientation one of the most vulnerable social groups. Thus it is of great importance that a support system, that empowers them, influences positively on their self-image and esteem and encourages their social and political participation in the society, is available to them.

Organizational staff has been trained locally as well as abroad on how to work with minority young people when it comes to combating homophobic discrimination and violence. The quality of our services are also confirmed by our long-term partnerships with many local as well as international organizations, that have been supporting us and working with us for over a decade.

Our mission is to better the situation of LGBT persons within various field of life. By providing safe space and by dissemination of relevant and accurate information, we strive to educate and raise awareness in addressing the inequality of LGBT people within the Slovene society. Our main target group is LGBT persons, but also other wider public, as only by establishing a dialogue can we really influence the process of social inclusion of LGBT persons in the society.

Contact:

Website: www.drustvo-legebitra.si

E-mail: legebitra@siol.net

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6. On-line Survey

»**Excuse me, Miss, are you a Lesbian?**»

Situation of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) educational workers in the Slovene school system.

With the on-line questionnaire we strive to obtain the experiences of LGBT teachers and those employed in the Slovene educational system that work with young people. The main aim of the research is to establish whether the educational system allows LGBT teachers to provide all the possible support to all their students, including LGBT students, and at the same time enable them to present themselves in their entirety and as role models.

Your participation in the questionnaire is entirely voluntary and all information that you might provide us with is confidential.

There will be no information used that will identify you to where you live or by your name.

Thank you for participating in this survey,

Organisation informational centre Legebitra

Demography:

1. Age: _____

2. In which educational setting do you currently work? If you currently don't work as an educator / teacher - but you were working as one in the last five years, indicate your most recent working environment:

- kindergarten
- primary school
- secondary school
- university / higher vocational education
- special needs institution
- other

Please provide the following answers based on your experiences within the profession and / or educational setting you indicated within the question 2. All the questions are simplified and in present tense, however they also apply to, your, possible past experiences.

3. Where do you work:

- City (Ljubljana, Maribor)
- Town (Celje, Kranj, Koper, Nova Gorica ipd.)
- Village

4. What is your profession?

Kindergarten teacher
Primary school teacher
Secondary school teacher / professor
University professor
Other, what:

5. How do you identify?

Lesbian (L)
Gay (G)
Bisexual (B)
Trans -
Queer (Q)
Other

6. Are you generally out as an LGBT person? That means that you have disclosed your sexual orientation to the people around you or your surroundings.

I am out to most people
I am out to some people
I am not out but suspect some people know about my sexual orientation
I am not out at all
Other

Your experiences:

7. How long have you been working in your current workplace?

Less than a year
Between 1-5 years
Between 6 – 10 years
More than 10 years

8. Are you out at your workplace? (Multiple answers available)

- Yes, completely: all the co-workers are familiar with my sexual orientation / gender expression
- Yes, completely: all the management are familiar with my sexual orientation /gender expression

- Yes, completely: all the pupils / students are familiar with my sexual orientation / gender expression
- Yes, partly: some of the co-workers are familiar with my sexual orientation / gender expression
- Yes, partly: some of the management are familiar with my sexual orientation / gender expression
- Yes, partly: some of the pupils / students are familiar with my sexual orientation / gender expression
- I am not out at my workplace at all

9. If you are out at your workplace, how would you rate your experience:

- A positive experience
- A negative experience
- Neutral (e.g.: nothing has changed)
- Other, what

10. How long have you been out at your workplace?

- Less than a year
- Between 1-5 years
- Between 6 – 10 years
- More than 10 years

11. Please indicate for each of the below situations the extent to which you agree with it: 5 – totally agree, 4 – agree very much, 3 – agree slightly, 2 – disagree slightly, 1 – totally disagree

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Due to disclosure of my sexual orientation my relationship with pupils / students is under greater control by the management and co-workers					
2. Due to disclosure of my sexual orientation I fear I might loose my job					
3. Disclosure of my sexual orientation didn't change anything – I feel safe at my workplace					
4. My workplace is safe and welcoming, to the extent I could bring my partner along to any events / parties organised for employees					

5. Disclosure of my sexual orientation strengthened my relationship with pupils / students					
6. Disclosure of my sexual orientation strengthened my relationship with co-workers / management					
7. Due to homophobic bullying I am thinking of quitting my job					
8. Due to disclosure of my sexual orientation I have experienced verbal homophobic bullying and psychological violence by co-workers					
9. Due to disclosure of my sexual orientation I have experienced verbal homophobic bullying and psychological violence by the management					
10. Due to disclosure of my sexual orientation I have experienced verbal homophobic bullying and psychological violence by parents of pupils / students					
11. Due to disclosure of my sexual orientation I have experienced verbal homophobic bullying and psychological violence by pupils / students					
12. Due to disclosure of my sexual orientation I have experienced physical homophobic violence by co-workers					
13. Due to disclosure of my sexual orientation I have experienced physical homophobic violence by management					
14. Due to disclosure of my sexual orientation I have experienced physical homophobic violence by parents of pupils / students					
15. Due to disclosure of my sexual orientation I have experienced physical homophobic violence by pupils / students					
16. Due to disclosure of my sexual orientation, LGBT pupils / students trust me more and use / see me as a support and resource person					
17. My sexual orientation does not influence my relationships with the co-workers / management					
18. Co-workers / management have indicated that it is not appropriate for me to work as a teacher / preofessor due to my sexual orientation					
19. Co-workers / management have advised me not to come out / or speak about my sexual orientation at my workplace					

12. If you had due to disclosure of your sexual orientation experienced verbal or psychological homophobic violence, have you reacted to it?

- Yes, always
- No
- I have not experienced verbal or psychological homophobic violence
- I have not always reacted, depending on the situation, please explain below:

12. a) If you had reacted, please explain your reaction:

12. b) If you had not reacted, please explain why not:

13. If you had due to disclosure of your sexual orientation experienced verbal physical homophobic violence, have you reacted to it?

- Yes, always
- No
- I have not experienced verbal or psychological homophobic violence
- I have not always reacted, depending on the situation, please explain below:

13. a) If you had reacted, please explain your reaction:

13. b) If you had not reacted, please explain why not:

14. What was the main reason for the disclosure of your sexual orientation at your workplace?

- I didn't want to hide my sexual orientation and everything else connected to it (partner, personal life etc...)
- It was not my decision, I came out as a result of outside pressure (gossip at workplace etc)
- Because I felt I have support of my management / co-workers.
- It just happened
- Because I believe that by coming out as an LGBT person I can be a role model to, foremost LGBT students, who can use me as support and resource
- Other, what:

Staying “in the closet”

17. Indicate the main reason for not coming out at your workplace:

- I am not sure if I can come out without consequences – I am not aware of all my rights
- I am worried that I will be stigmatised by the management and will consequently lose my job
- I am worried over the reaction of the management
- I am worried over the reaction of the co-workers
- I am worried over the reaction of the local community
- I am worried over the reaction of the parents of pupils / students
- I am worried over the reaction of pupils / students
- Co-workers / management have indicated that it is better for me not to come out at workplace
- I have heard a lot of negative comments about LGBT people coming from the management / co-workers
- I believe sexual orientation is a personal matter and not of anyone’s concern
- I don’t want to become a support / resource person for all the other LGBT persons in the school
- Other, what:

18. How do you perceive your working environment when it comes to the topic of homosexuality:

- Unfriendly, unkind, insulting, not accepting
- tolerant (e.g.: we have nothing against homosexuality, but we don’t want to discuss it within our school)
- Inclusive (e.g.: we organise workshops, round tables, events that also include the topic)
- other:

19. My educational setting has (multiple answers possible):

- support group for LGBT youth
- support person, where LGBT youth can get information and support
- books and other publications in the school library, that include information on homosexuality
- school policy that includes anti-discrimination clause clearly forbidding discrimination also on the basis of sexual orientation
- none of the above
- other

20. What do you think should change for educational settings to become more friendly for LGBT students / pupils and teachers?

21. Is there anything you would like to tell us that you feel is relevant to the

LGBT teachers research? If so, please state below:

Whether you should have any questions on the project “Excuse me, miss, are you a Lesbian” please contact:

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Thank you for participating in this survey,
Organisation informational centre Legebitra