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Campaign Against Homophobia

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Context

This report presents the results of research on the attitudes of school teachers towards the issues of homophobia and homosexuality in schools. The survey was conducted within the framework of the ‘Breaking the Walls of Silence’ project conducted by the Campaign Against Homophobia in partnership with Legibitra (Slovenia) and LGBT Youth Scotland (Scotland) in October and November 2011.

The situation of LGB people as well as the scale and characteristics of prejudices against the non-heterosexual persons throughout the last decade were extensively examined and described by scientists and Non Governmental Organisations. Since 2003¹, Campaign Against Homophobia and Lambda Warsaw has been publishing reports on the social situation of LGB persons on a regular basis. The major part of these publications is dedicated to the description of discrimination and cases of violence motivated by homophobia.

The first general scientific research on the everyday life of LGB persons and discrimination they face were was carried out by the University of Warsaw in 2009. These studies have very little focus on the aspect of the functioning of LGB people at school. Ireneusz Krzemiński, in his report, lists schools as one of the places LGB people experience homophobic violence against them². However, this phenomenon is not discussed and the detailed analysis of homophobic violence in schools is not offered. Moreover, the research conducted by the Campaign Against Homophobia in 2011 examined the specifics of violence motivated by homophobia³. Its alarming results allowed taking a closer look at the situation of young LGB persons. A large part of the group examined by Mirosława Makuchowska in her report were young people, who had

¹ *Report on discrimination and intolerance based on sexual orientation in Poland.* Lambda Warsaw, Campaign Against Homophobia, Warsaw 2003. *Situation of bisexual and homosexual persons in Poland. 2005 i 2006*, ed. Abramowicz M., Lambda Warszawa, Campaign Against Homophobia 2007

² *Stigmatised. Sexual Minorities in Poland Report 2008.* ed. Krzemiński I., Institute of Sociology, UW, Warsaw, 2009

³ *Violence motivated by homophobia.* Ed. Makuchowska M., Campaign Against Homophobia, 2011

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experienced violence, based on the grounds of sexual orientation in relations with their peers, at school for the first time.

Experiences described by students always included an element of verbal harassment. Besides, the cases of spitting on the victim, threatening, destruction of victim's possessions, poking, and sexual harassment were also reported. Some extreme situations included physical abuse of the victim that resulted in a change of the person's school or even suicide attempts. Cases of extreme violence in schools have also been reported to Campaign Against Homophobia, when a victim had been looking for support oneself. In most cases, a young victim decides not to intervene in the situation due to various reasons what consequently leads to the case being silenced.

Peer-to-peer violence as a problem relevant in schools is being raised more often. Educational and social campaigns as well as courses for teachers are being organised on a regular basis. Yet, the popular educational and social activities neglect the discriminatory grounds when referring to violence. In studies conducted by the Research Centre of Public Opinion in 2010, for instance, a detailed analysis of violence in schools is given on the basis of the representative sample (over 4000 respondents). Nonetheless, the study does not include the grounds of violence and affiliation of victims to the stigmatized groups⁴.

As it appears from the report *Wielka nieobecna - o edukacji antydyskryminacyjnej w systemie edukacji formalnej w Polsce (Great Absent – on anti-discriminatory education in formal education system of Poland – tran.)*⁵ awareness on the issues of homophobia and sexual orientation among teachers may be, indeed, small. According to the report, teachers do not receive essential anti-discriminatory education on the relevant preparatory courses and professional trainings. At the same time, LGB issues are practically absent in the school curriculum. According to the core curriculum, terms indicating the presence of LGB persons in the society, appear only two times, including the one in the extended (non compulsory)⁶ programme. In both cases, the biased and judgemental phrases are used (e.g. sexual otherness, sexual minority).

⁴ *Violence at school. Report on the research.* Giza-Poleszczuk A., Komendant-Brodowska A., Baczk-Dombi, A., 2011 [the research team of the Institute of Sociology, the study for the School Without Violence conducted by the Regional Newspapers and the Orange Foundation]

⁵ *Great Absent – on anti-discriminatory education in formal education system of Poland*, ed. Abramowicz M., Association for Antidiscrimination Education, Warsaw, 2011

⁶ *The core curriculum for general education in middle schools, high schools, which enables obtaining school diploma after passing the matriculation examination.* Minister of National Education 23 December 2008 on the core curriculum of education and general education in particular types of schools.

Objectives of the study

This study is intended to project the perception of homophobia in schools by teaching staff as well as to examine the experiences and needs of teachers with regards to this topic. The voice of educators is particularly important because it is the teachers and school authorities themselves that bring the changes to what students experience. In Scotland, anti homophobic programmes, for educational establishments and proposals for the policies of newly established schools⁷, were created after the extensive study, which included not only the view of male and female students, but also teachers' opinions as key actors in the school life⁸.

Therefore, the main objectives of the study are: examination of teachers' perception of homophobia in schools; studying teachers' accounts on introduction of the issues of homophobia and homosexuality in schools; familiarisation with the teachers' needs regarding the emergence of the issues of homophobia and homosexuality in schools.

Methodology and data collection process

The methodology was worked out jointly with the partner organizations from Slovenia (Legebitra). The quantitative part is, to a large extent, a replication of earlier research conducted in Slovenia. Three focus groups, composed of male and female teachers, were examined in the study. In addition to that the data was collected through a questionnaire. The collected data is presented separately in the form of quantitative and qualitative analysis. The research was conducted in the period between September and November of 2011.

The questionnaire, as a tool used for collecting qualitative data, was constructed on the model of previous research conducted by Legebitra. Introductory part of the questionnaire included the clarification of the objectives and purpose of the research, researchers' contact details and assurance of anonymity. The important part of the introduction included definitions of the concepts and phenomena that appear in the questions: homophobia, peer violence, and homophobic bullying. It was decided to use the term "homosexuality" in lieu with LGBT or LGB.

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The questionnaire was created in both on-line and hard copy versions.

It was initially attempted to use the database of the Information Centre of Education (CIE) in order to invite the teachers to complete the questionnaire by sending information about the study to the school e-mail addresses. It appears, however, that a great number of schools do not have email addresses and they cannot be contacted via internet. Message with a link to the online questionnaire attached was sent to the addresses of more than 1.5 thousand institutions. Around 1/3 of e-mails were not delivered due to various reasons (i.e. non existing address, mailbox sizes were exceeded, etc.) as reported by the auto-respondent. As a result, 20 completed questionnaires were collected via internet. The situation that emerged has forced researchers to distribute the hard copy of the questionnaire, which limited research coverage and capabilities of its representativeness. Consequently, it was decided to benefit from the aid of the Polish Teachers Union (ZNP), a trade union affiliating teachers which is represented in the regional offices (districts) in each province. With the support of the people participating in the ZNP, delegates from the districts had submitted a total of 290 completed questionnaires. Questionnaires completed (or partially completed) by people not working in secondary schools (kindergartens, pre-schools) were excluded from the analysis.

Focus groups were consulted in Warsaw in two public schools (middle schools) and one private school (high school). Public schools had been recommended by the activists of ZNP as ones with the potential interest in further cooperation. The prospect of cooperation was to conduct the training for school employees administered by Campaign Against Homophobia. 13 teachers of various academic backgrounds took part in the focal set studies. Focal set study was based on an interview with participants on the relevant to the study topics using the screenplay scenarios. Interviews took place in the schools where they taught. The facilitator assured that the data extracted during the interviews will not be passed to the supervisors of those interviewed. The interviews were digitally recorded as well as scripted manually. In all focus groups the survey took about 90 minutes.

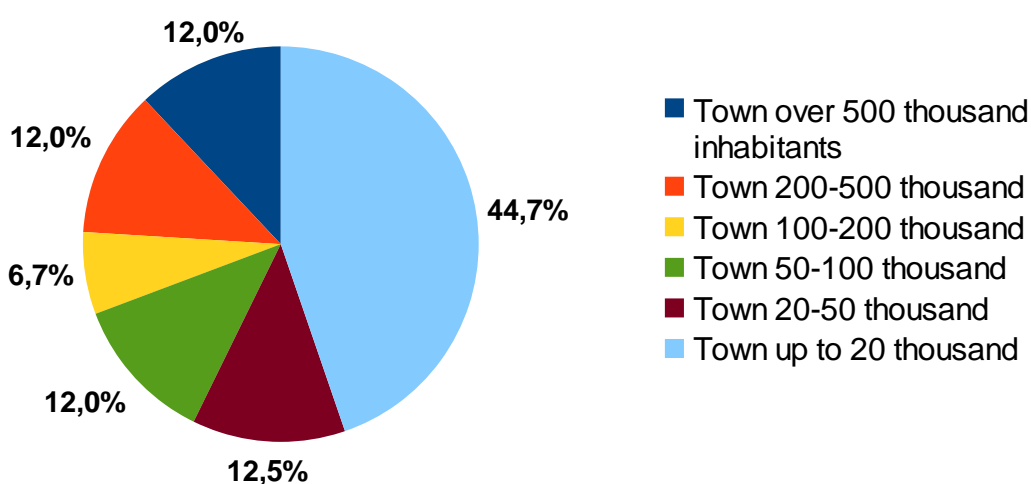
Quantitative analysis

Demographics (Demographic Characteristics)

Eventually, data supplied by 211 people was used for the analyses. Not every person gave complete answers to all questions in the questionnaire. In such cases, the response was codified

as ‘no data’. The following illustrations of the results indicates the number of responses each question was answered.

The youngest person was 24-years-old and the oldest was 65-years-old. 90% of the subjects are people of age between 32 and 56. Average age was 43.8 (SD = 8.9). The vast majority of respondents were women (79.1%). Respondents come from 14 different voivodeships (Lower Silesian, Kuyavian-Pomeranian, Lublin, Lubusz, Lodz, Lesser Poland, Masovian, Opolskie, Podkarpackie, Podlaskie, Pomeranian, Silesian, Greater Poland, and West Pomeranian). Yet, the results are not evenly distributed in proportion to each voivodship. The smallest number of questionnaires was filled in the Masovian voivodship (3 questionnaires, 1.4% of all) and the biggest in the Podlaskie voivodship (46, resulting in 21.8% of results). Most of the respondents come from medium and small towns.



Graph 1. Size of place of residence of respondents

Type of the school, function, experience

The research was focused on the school staff with the greatest emphasis on teachers. As a result, most of the respondents are people engaged in teaching (85.6%), every tenth (10.9%) is school counsellor. Two of the smallest groups are librarians (2%) and school principals (1.5%). Respondents included teachers of different subjects. Years of professional experience of the respondents range from 0 to 35 years. The average number of years worked at school is 14.4 (SD = 8.5). Most of the teaching staff examined is now working in secondary schools (60.7%), quarter of the total number - in high schools (26.5%), the least of the respondents work in

technical, professional schools and school complexes (12.8%).

Anti-discriminatory school policy and peer violence prevention

A total number of 83.4% of respondents stated that the policy relating peer-to-peer violence and discrimination does exist in their schools. Only 5.4% of the respondents do not know whether there are such policies in their schools. 68.4% noted that there is policy that regards sexual orientation in their schools⁹. Every fourth person (26.9%) indicated that the school organises anti-discrimination events which also include the area of sexual orientation.

It is necessary to add that the question regarding the school policy was broad and might have been interpreted differently. While visiting school and interviewing school staff, researchers were notified that anti-discriminatory policy exists which excludes any type of discriminatory violence in schools, including homophobic grounds. When asked to present respective directives and regulations, the general school code and the set of the written school values were addressed, which do not specifically refer to discrimination and specific anti-discriminatory policies. They, nonetheless, include general notions on ‘tolerating others’ and ‘mutual respect’. Referring to the described documents our respondents concluded that the policy that prohibits violence on discriminatory grounds and prejudice exists in their schools. Reasons for such interpretation are best depicted in the comment of one of the respondents:

▲ *I see no reason why homophobic verbal or physical violence should be separated from verbal or physical violence due to other prejudices, such as disability or "otherness" in the broader sense. Highlighting homosexuality, in isolation from other intolerances, can backfire and result in excessive interest in such people (e.g. persons of undecided orientation). [male teacher, 45]*

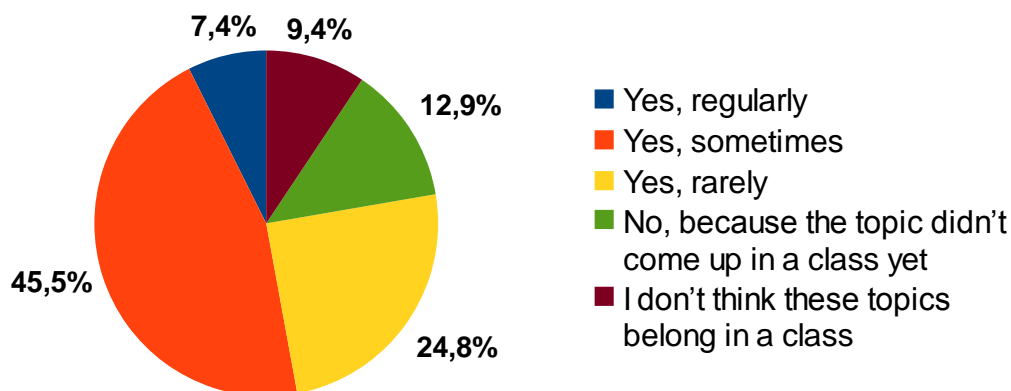
According to certain interviews in the focus groups it appeared that not having clear guidelines, the school regulations are interpreted according to own personal standards. One person argued that since the rules of the school calls for ‘respect for the law’, whereas the Article 32 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland prohibits discrimination for any reason, it consequently means that discrimination in school is also prohibited. Therefore, it is difficult to interpret the answer to the question relating the existence of policy regarding peer violence or discrimination. First of all, it is not known whether the respondents answered in accordance with specific

⁹ It is worth noting that the question is not specifying whether school policy is documented in the formal rules, practices, or is accepted norm. Responses do not necessarily reflect the facts and thus do not reflect preventive or intervention measures employed in practice.

school's regulations or personal interpretation and understanding (which may also be very dissimilar within one school). Similarly, interpretation of equality events organised by schools may vary. It may be assumed that the general events addressing equality and diversity without noting homosexuality as its premise may be understood by some as events regarding all grounds of discrimination and inequality.

Presence of issues of homophobia and homosexuality in the classroom

The majority of teachers (77.7%) admit that the topic of homosexuality and/or homophobia appears in their classroom. One out of ten (9.4%) avoided this subject due to their beliefs. Similar percentage (12.9%) avoided this topic due to the lack of initiative among the students. The majority of respondents had admitted that discussions concerning homophobia and homosexuality appear as their initiative and the students' simultaneously (54.3%). Fewer members of teaching staff introduce the topic on their own (15.4%) or raise the issue when the students themselves demand it (13.8%).



Graph 2. *Do you, within your classes discuss topics on homosexuality and homophobia?*¹⁰

The next question was given in order to identify the cause why the subject of sexual orientation does not appear on the lesson. This question may relate to the respondents, who do not address issues of homosexuality and homophobia in the lesson at all or do it rarely, as well as those who try to raise it often, but this is not always possible for them. The most common reason indicated for the topic of homosexuality or homophobia not being brought up by the teaching staff is the lack of adequate knowledge and expertise in the area (19.3%). Less do not refer to this topic due

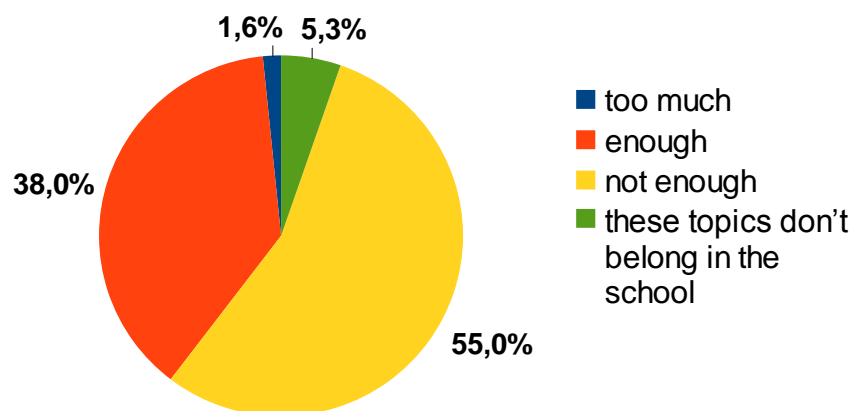
¹⁰ Captions under the graphs made in italics are quotes from the survey questions

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to the belief that "such topics are promotion of homosexuality" (6.8%) or general lack of consent for such discussions in the class (2.5%). 71.4% of respondents did not answer this question by stating that these matters are discussed on their lectures. Commenting on the reasons why the subject of homosexuality and homophobia is avoided during their classes, teachers often noted that they conduct classes in accordance with the core curriculum which does not include such issues.

It was also explained that their subjects are not associated with the issue of homosexuality and homophobia so it is not possible for them to discuss this topic in class. Another reason indicated in the comments is the lack of a proactive interest on the issue of students.

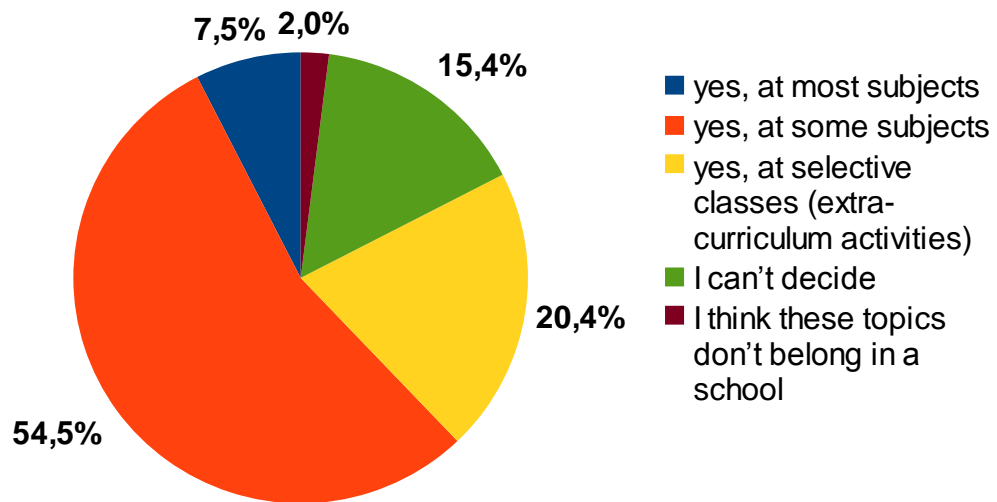
The respondents were asked to assess presence of the subject of homosexuality and homophobia in the present school curriculum. Slightly more than half (55%) of respondents estimated that the subject is not sufficiently present. A very small group (6.9%) relates to the topic unfavourably - believes that it is superfluous or redundant.



Graph 3. *In your opinion is the discussion on homosexuality and homophobia included well enough in the curriculum?*

The vast majority of respondents (82.6%) believe that the topic of homosexuality and homophobia should be present in school curriculum. Respondents agree that this subject should be compulsory for certain classes; yet, not for the majority of them. A small group of educators (2%) are strongly opposed to the introduction of issues of homosexuality and homophobia into

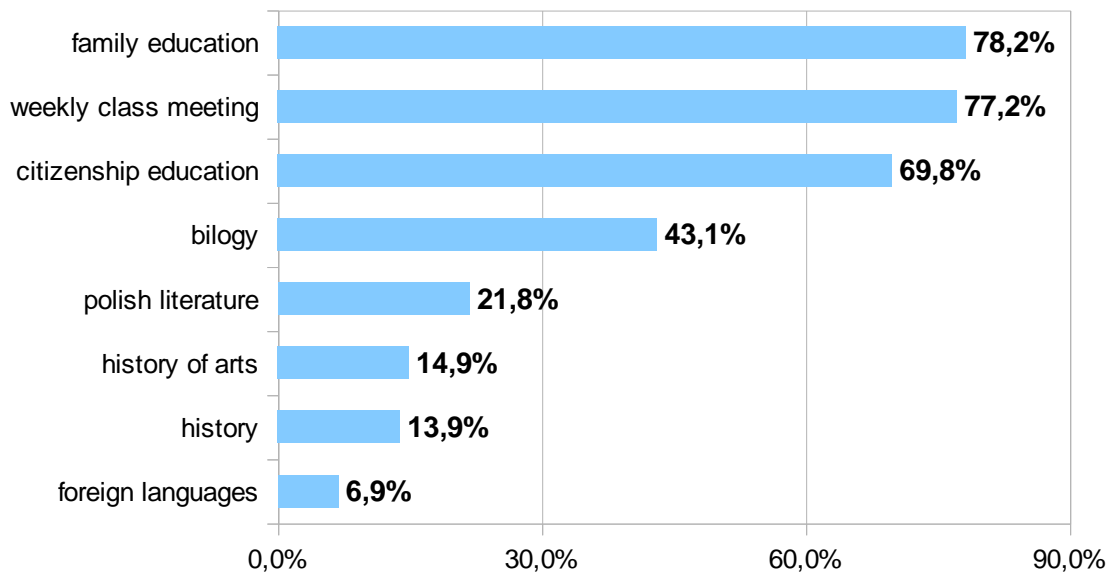
the school curriculum.



Graph 3. *Do you think that the topics of homosexuality and homophobia should be a part of curriculum?*

Subjects that are referred to as the most suitable for the inclusion of issues of homosexuality and homophobia are Family Education and Citizenship Education classes, social studies and biology. It is worth noting that these issues are perceived to be related to the personal values and physiology rather than to culture and art.

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Graph 4. *If you think that these topics should be part of the curriculum, at which subjects should they be discussed? (multiple answers possible)*

Although the possibilities were given, the person completing the questionnaire rarely placed their own comments to the questions. In particular, only few own statements regarding school curriculum were found. Among the few statements phrases "I do not know", "No opinion", "Hard to say" were repeated frequently. Other comments were repetitions of responses to the questionnaire and were an expression of approval to address the issues of homophobia and homosexuality (as well as to include it in the curriculum) during such classes as Family Education and weekly class meetings; yet, the reasons were not given. Two comments can be considered as clearly unfavourable: *Ubiquitous promotion of homosexuality offends my religious feelings* and *Present media does enough to promote LGBT, I do not think the school should be encouraging this*. Other statements seem to support the inclusion of issues and homophobia and homosexuality to be discussed in classes at school, but do not include specific topics.

- ⤴ *Issues regarding homosexuality are present in the discussions about general tolerance.*
[female teacher, 28]
- ⤴ *This issue should be addressed in the context of respect for the other person - special curriculum blocks should not be created.* [female teacher, 36]

Respondents agree to the level of general values or do not have their own opinion on this matter.

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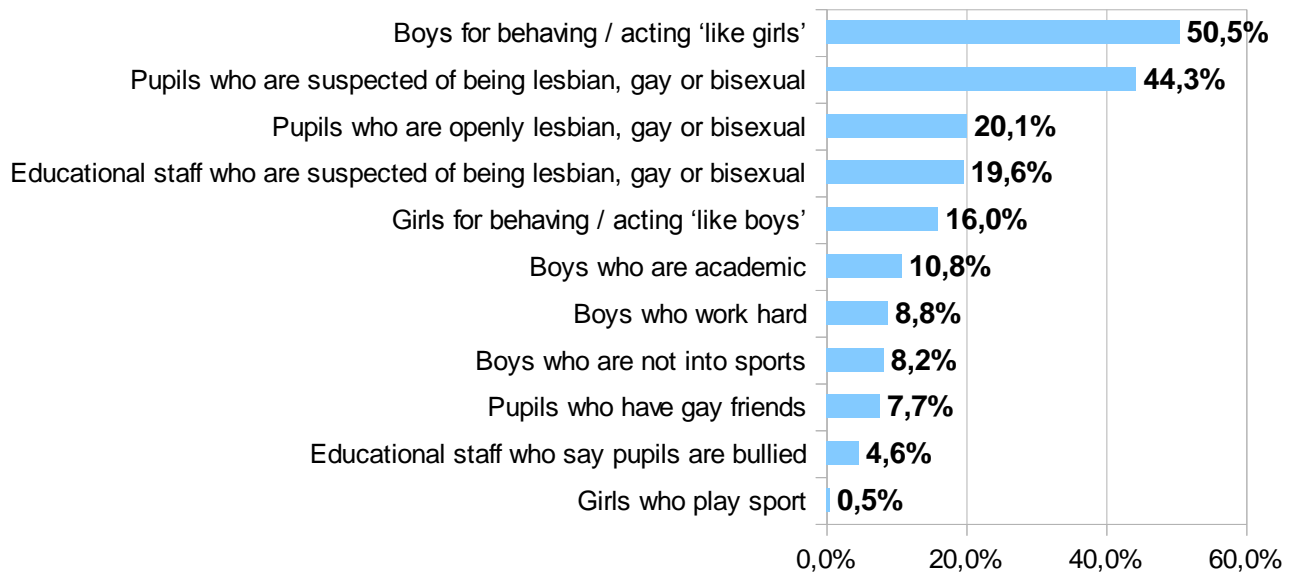
Consent to the inclusion of these issues within the weekly class meetings is not necessarily constitutes the agreement to make changes to the current curriculum for such meetings. Weekly class meetings are generally devoted to the class' activities, as well as to discussions on educational problems and prevention of respective social risks in particular. The issues of homophobia and homosexuality are generally perceived as a problem or challenge for the students (*'Difficult topics should be discussed; School should face the problem when it emerges.'*) At the same time subject of homophobia is also perceived as a matter of a broader context:

▲ *Tolerance and respect for others should be taught* [female teacher, 43]

Persons who have experienced homophobia

Respondents were asked who, to their knowledge, experiences homophobic violence in schools. The question was put very generally and it neither indicated whether it should concern the school the person is working at, nor a time-frame was stated. Boys who act 'girly', or else, male students behaving contrary to the traditional pattern of masculinity, was indicated in the 50.5% of the questionnaires. Another group consists of people suspected to be non-heterosexual (44.3%). 20.1% of the respondents (twice as less as the previous group) indicated male and female students who revealed their sexual orientation to the most vulnerable group for homophobic violence. It should be noted that all questions relate to the familiarity (or rather estimates) of the respondents on the issue. It was not attempted to collect data on whether they know any non-heterosexual people in school and how many there are. Respondents had the opportunity to write what other people apart from ones shown in categories (Graph 5), in their opinion, experience homophobia in schools. No new categories of people experiencing homophobic violence in schools were given in the comments. All the comments denied the existence of homophobia in their school (e.g.: *We do not have such cases; The question presupposes that the problem must exist in the school; No one in my school; Did not notice anyone who had experienced homophobic bullying in our school. There is no such thing as homophobic violence.*)

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Graph 5. *Who in your experience experiences homophobic bullying? (multiple selection possible)*

Furthermore, the surveyed were asked about verbal and physical violence on the homophobic basis in their schools. Nearly a half of the respondents (47.5%) stated that there were cases of verbal harassment in their schools. Every fifth was unaware if such cases took place. Physical violence is less present in schools, as stated by 15.5% of the interviewees. At the same time, more educators marked 'Do not know' in their answers with regards to the physical harassment. The rest stated that such violence is not present in their schools.

	verbal	physical
yes	47,5%	15,5%
no	32,0%	51,5%
don't know	20,5%	33,0%
N	200	194

Table 1. *Are you currently aware of any incidents of homophobic bullying in your school? This can be in the classroom, in the corridors, in the playground or anywhere else in the school or surrounding area.*

Another question regarded frequency of cases of homophobic aggression in respective schools. Respondents were asked to indicated an estimate of appearance of such cases in the last three year period (respective categories were provided). Percentage results are given in the Table 2. Verbal harassment is not only the most noticeable type of homophobic violence, but also is the

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more frequent than physical violence. In commentaries those respondents who observed cases of verbal homophobic bullying in school had marked that such occurrences are widespread:

- ^ *Homophobic name calling – that may be experienced by everyone. Even without suspecting that the victim is of the other sexual orientation.* [female school counsellor, 39]
- ^ *Such homophobic nicknaming is very common, we should be honest. In general, it seems to me that the young people due to various extreme moods and ideas that influence them are generally intolerable.* [female teacher, 54]

	verbal	physical
never	29,5%	61,5%
once	8,7%	9,9%
2-5 times	33,5%	18,6%
6-10 times	12,7%	4,3%
11-15 times	4,0%	2,5%
16-20 times	1,2%	0,6%
21-25 times	0,0%	0,0%
25+ times	10,4%	2,5%
N	173	161

Table 2. *How often would you say homophobic bullying had occurred in your school in the past three years (answer doesn't have to relate to the individual from the previous question)?*

Respondents were asked to specify, who experiences both types of homophobic violence in their school. Table 3 illustrates the results of the data assessed in the surveys. Male students, according to the respondents, experience both verbal and physical violence more than female students.

	verbaly	physicaly
boy	22,00%	48,30%
girl	15,20%	31,00%
boy couple	7,40%	11,30%
girl couple	6,10%	9,60%
educational staff	3,70%	7,30%
N	163	178

Table 3. *Who is being bullied? (multiple selection possible)*

Polish cultural norms are more tolerable towards mutual affection to be displayed by girls than boys. Behaviours such as sitting on the laps, touching, even walking while holding hands may be acceptable when done by girls without suspecting homosexual intimacy. On the smaller scale, the perception of homophobic bullying directed to girls can be attributed to the stereotypes and beliefs underestimating subjectivity of lesbian relationships. It is believed that homosexuality is just a phase that will pass when she meets a right guy. When it comes to boys, physical closeness is less tolerated, as they are subjected to greater social control. Moreover, participants of the focus groups had often used the term ‘gay’ while talking about homophobia and homosexuality which consequently narrowed the topic to the homosexual men only. One of the study participants admitted that homophobic bullying might occur in her school:

▲ *Well, I think that if two boys would happen to be a couple in our "tremendously tolerant" and "cute" school that it would not be so lovely and cute after all. Oppression and discrimination would emerge eventually.* [female teacher, 57]

Attitudes and experiences of the school staff

Little more than a half of the respondents took part in the workshops regarding violence, persecution and molestation in school (52.3%). Every third person (33.7%) did not attend such trainings, whereas 14.5% do not remember what courses they had attended previously. 60.8% of the group that attended workshops, had received information regarding violence motivated by homophobia. According to this data, only 29.4% out of 211 teachers had participated in the seminars which elements included countermeasures to homophobia.

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I believe it is important for students that they feel safe enough to come out as a gay or a lesbian and as a teacher I support that very much	30,40%
I don't think public coming out as a gay / lesbian is necessary at school, however having an openly gay pupil in the class doesn't bother me so much	61,30%
Having an openly gay pupil would make me feel uneasy	7,20%
I'd prefer not to teach an openly gay student	1,00%
N	194

Table 4. *How would you feel about having an open gay pupil in your class?*

Nearly, every third person declares supportive attitude towards students that decided to reveal their non-heterosexual orientation (30.4%). These people declare that the situation of teaching the homosexual person is not trouble for them (*no problem*) and it projects their attitude towards the issue. This attitude is motivated by personal values or beliefs.

- ▲ *I think that everyone has a right to be oneself and has a right for 'otherness'. All should feel safe in the school and beyond* [male headteacher, 55]
- ▲ *All humans are free. I suspect that a particular sexual orientation is not dependent on one's will, yet it is the nature that created them that way. The most gifted people of the world were of a different sexual orientation (Leonardo da Vinci, etc.)* [female teacher, 51]

More than a half of respondents (61.3%) does not see any necessity in revealing of one's sexual orientation in school, while working with such persons will not cause any discomfort for the teacher. Respondents that chose that particular answer noted that school is not a place for sexual orientation to be declared (coming out). It was also noted that sexual orientation belongs to one's private life and is a matter of one's '*intimate personality*'.

- ▲ *Sexual orientation is one's private business, and it should neither be discussed nor exposed in school.* [female teacher, 44]

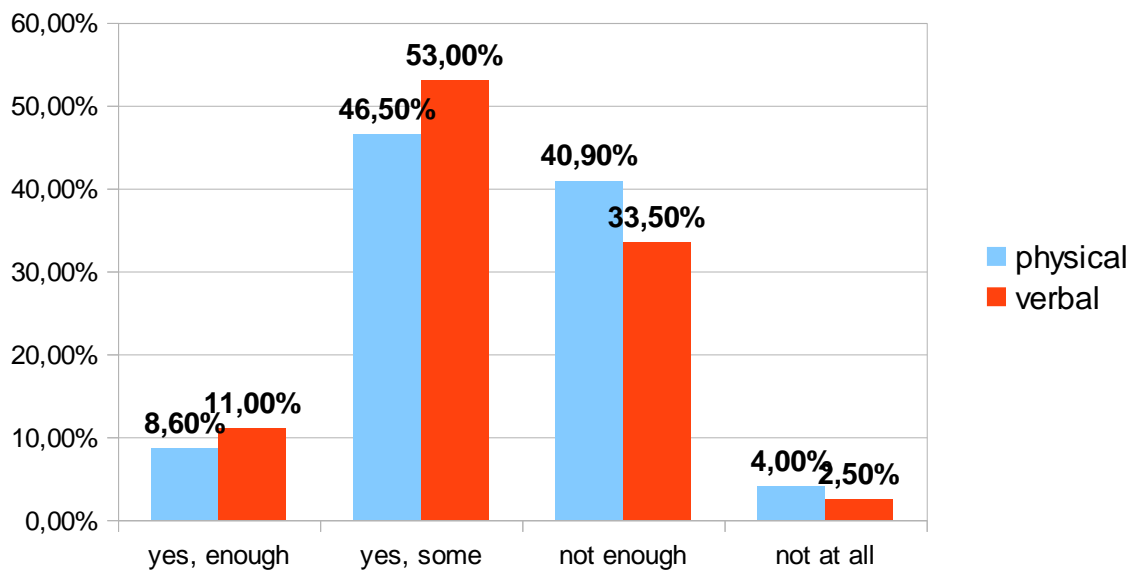
One of the themes given in the comments was conviction that students are too young to understand and expose their sexual orientation. Respondents wrote that *secondary school students do not come out as homosexuals and such feature are yet to be developed and it is not appropriate to talk about 'coming out' yet*. Students were assumed to be unable to understand the

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issue (I think that not all are mature enough to understand this) and reluctance towards this issue despite the question was regarding the feelings and attitudes of the teacher. Very little number of respondents (8.2%) mentioned that the student, which does not conceal own sexual orientation, will distress the teacher, and they do not wish to teach such individuals.

Respondents were asked to declare their most probable reaction in case of occurrence of homophobic violence (both verbal and physical) in schools. The most common method of intervention is conversation with the persons responsible for the conflict. In the case of verbal violence 91.9% (n=198) of educators will conduct disciplinary interviews with guilty students. Relatively low number of respondents chose the option of 'punishment' for the reliable students. Punishment is more widely chosen with regards to the physical violence rather than to verbal (6.2% and 1.4% respectively). Non-intervention prior consulting the school authorities is the least preferred reaction chosen by only 2% and 1.5% of respondents respectively. The results and comments show the need for subjects of the study to engage the third party in the situation. In case of a reaction to physical harassment it is indicated that the intervention should involve parents of an offending student, school counsellor, school management and the class tutor. When it comes to physical violence, teachers have also given specific solutions to the conflicts that erupted. Such included workshops for students in the classroom. One person said that homophobic harassment context, is not important: *The reason does not matter, we do not tolerate violence in any form.*

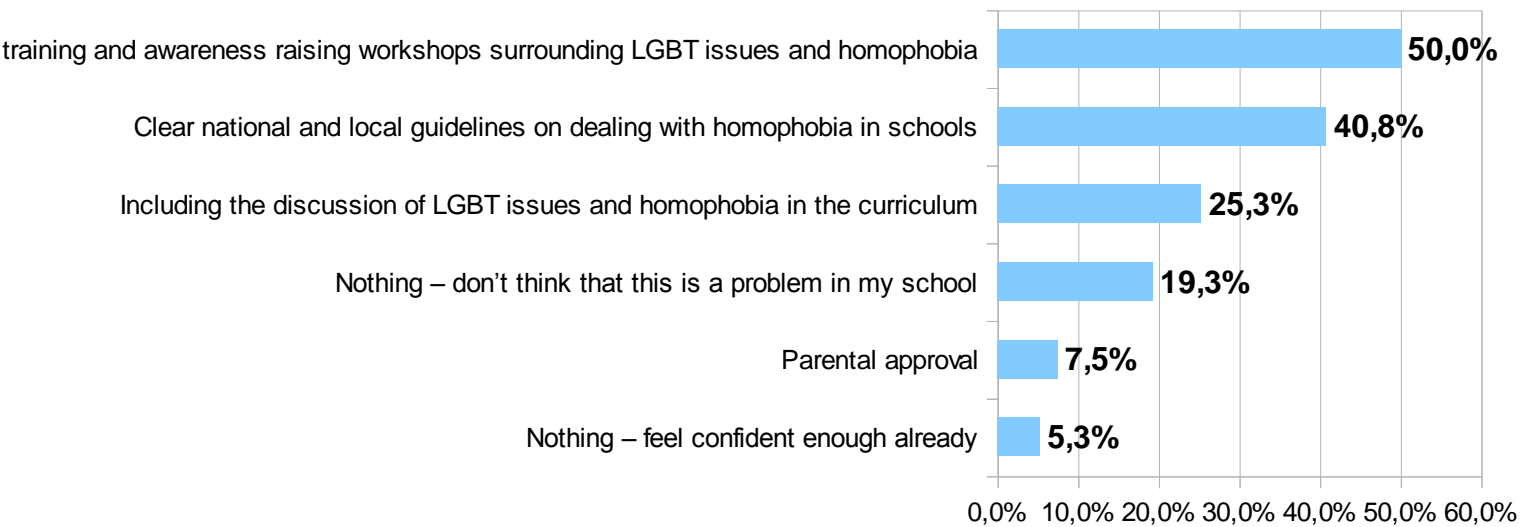
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Graph 6. *In your opinion, do you have enough knowledge and skills to react to homophobic bullying?*

Most of the respondents reckon that their expertise is sufficient when it comes to coping with both verbal and physical homophobic violence in school. The difference in self-assessment of competences regarding verbal vs. physical violence is noteworthy. Despite high estimates of knowledge and skills regarding reacting to homophobic aggression it is visible that respondents are more ready to address verbal rather than physical violence. It might be necessary to consider the results while taking previous observations into account given that respondents are looking for allies in order to react to homophobic violence. The perception of a low level of own competences might contribute to this.

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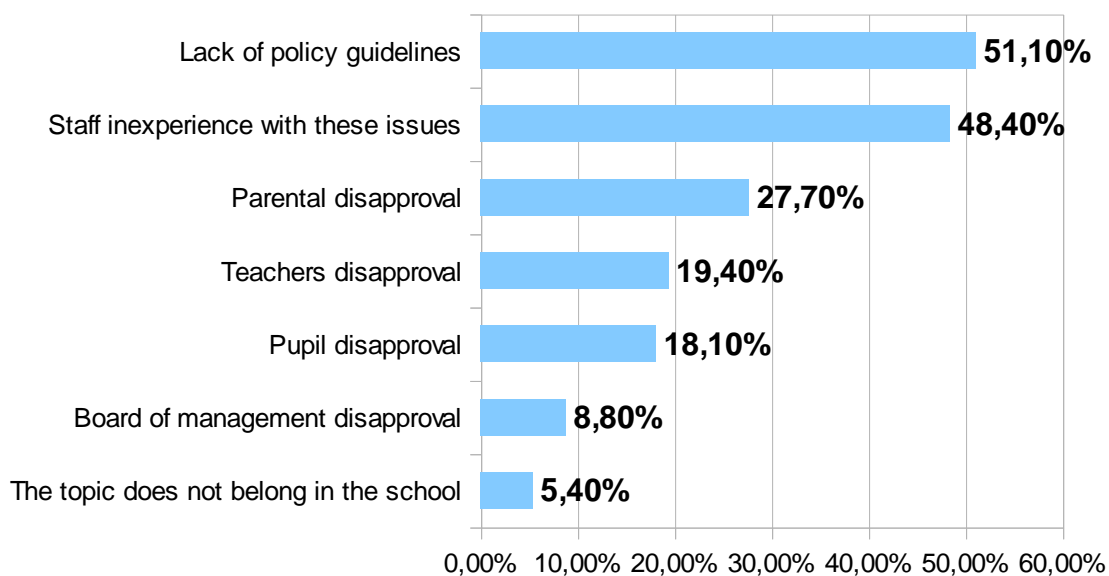


Graph 7. *What might support me better in my efforts to fight homophobia and homophobic bullying in school*

Respondents were asked to indicate the most helpful tool that could be beneficial when it comes to homophobic violence in schools among given categories. Every fifth person (19.3%) stated that this is not a problem in their school, whereas only every twentieth respondent (5.3%) is confident with the issue of peer violence on homophobic grounds. Every second educator would benefit from the homophobia-related workshops; 40.8% will find the official positions of government and educational authorities as helpful, while a quarter of respondents note the lack of the issue in the school curriculum. The role of parents' attitudes towards the issue of homophobia seems to be one of the least concerning for the teachers (7.5%). When analysing these results it needs to be noted that, according to the mentioned studies conducted by the Association for Anti-discrimination Education, topic of sexual orientation is not present in the processes of professional education of tutors and teachers whatsoever. Consequently, more effort needs to be put in professional development of academic staff regarding this matter. The other significant issue is inclusion of homosexuality and homophobia related issues into the core curriculum and active educational policy. One of the respondents commented bluntly

^ *Transparent and consistent educational policy of the states is also required.* [female teacher, 48]

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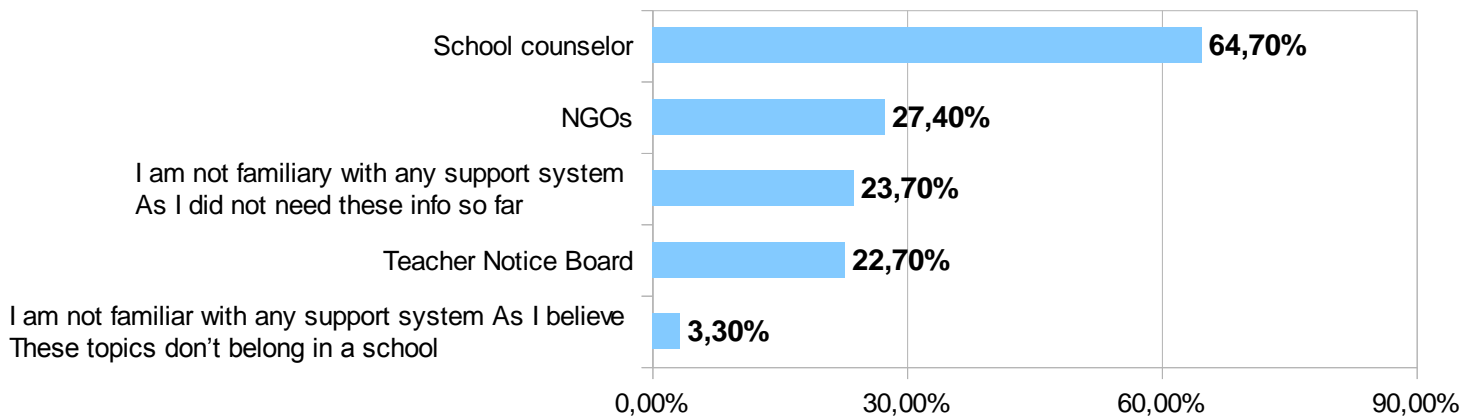


Graph 8. *Where are the barriers in tackling homosexuality-related bullying in your school?*

When asked to identify obstacles for effective methods dealing with homophobia in schools, respondents indicated the lack of appropriate policy and practice on the institutional level (51.1%). Slightly fewer respondents indicated the lack of qualification of academic staff as an obstacle while dealing with homophobia (48.4%). The least of respondents found factors that are in the immediate school environment (resistance of parents, students and academic staff) to be an obstacle in this issue. This is an interesting observation, since the role of parental consent seems to be overestimated in a public discourse. Parents did not appear as any major factors of the presumed change and do seem to be neither allies nor opponents to inclusion of homosexuality related issues into the program. One of the teachers had put it in this way:

▲ *Parents only care for the child to pass school with recognition and pass the graduation exam well enough. Everything else matters less and for teacher's favour parents will agree to send a child to the religion class or else connive something* [female teacher, 49]

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Graph 9. *Are you aware of any – whatsoever support system for teachers to help them tackle the discussion on homosexuality and homophobia?*

Apart from school counsellor NGOs play the most crucial role in the system of supporting school staff:

- ^ *In the question regarding professional trainings and courses all the workshops I had marked were conducted by NGOs. Academic training authorities do not address such issues at all. [female teacher, 57]*

Qualitative analysis

Data of other type was collected during interviews with teachers than data extracted from questionnaires. Interviews with educators allowed hearing the language they use, what topics are the most interesting for them and others worth little of their attention. One of the observations led to the conclusion that teachers do not discuss the topics of the research within themselves in the school. During the discussions in the focus groups it appeared that they have different opinions on this issue, trying to convince others, discover and formulate their opinion on this topic. Discussions, despite being led by the moderator, deviated to the other topics of a bigger interest for them, which resulted in the more lively discussion. It also happened that the group got quite and did not address a particular issue at all. The most important phenomena relating to attitudes and experiences of educators in homophobia and homosexuality are addressed in the analysis.

1. There is no such thing in our school

Almost all interviewees declared that the issue is not relevant to their school and they have nothing to do with such events. Teachers in different ways argued that homophobia is not present in the schools where they teach. The most frequent justification for that fact was absence of LGBT youth in their schools. Following response of one school counsellors might serve as an example

♣ *This issue is somewhere on the background in our school. We have some handicapped students and we concentrate our attention on them so they integrated better and no prejudices appear. I don't think we have such persons, about who you are asking. I would know if we would. Homophobia is not a problem here. [male teacher, 36]*

Non-heterosexual persons are not noticed, whereas school staff is not aware of their presence; neither they have sufficient knowledge in this issue so they could properly identify homophobic bullying. Those teachers, who are aware of the percentage of non-heterosexuals in the population, use different justifications for they cannot conclude that such group is not presented in their school.

♣ *These are only secondary school students¹¹. They do not think about sexuality, but when they do it takes a form of stupid jokes. They do not question their sexuality because it is not the time, yet. [female teacher, 27]*

According to the interviewed, school would not be the best place for addressing the issues of homophobia and homosexuality since it would not appeal to students. Youth in this age is not aware of own sexual orientation, so it is not claiming of someone's homosexuality (*They are too young to claim someone to be gay*) and verbal bullying happens as innocent jokes or else natural for that age phenomena (*They also call names when someone is 'fat' or is an 'imbecile'*).

In some cases teachers admitted that homophobia might be a problem at school, yet the one they teach in is free from this issue due to various reasons. 'Special character' of the school was often used as an argument for justification of school's openness and absence of homophobia.

♣ *This school has developed such traditions out of itself. So, the cases when someone was bullied for one reason or another did not occur. There were few cases when we had received the students from other schools where they were bullied, and here they were equal among equals. I don't remember such cases here. [female teacher, 45]*

¹¹ In the Polish education system age of secondary school students varies from 13 to 16 years old.

Two out of three schools from where the focus group participants worked are integrating schools accepting students with disabilities. This contributes to the visible diversity of the youth and allows mentioning the school as tolerant and free from prejudices. Notion of the exceptionality of the school in this matter is justified by the arguments that handicapped students from different environments as well as those having problems studying (e.g. dyslexics). It relates to the subsequent phenomena regarding superficial perception of diversity in the school.

2. Tolerance must embrace universal respect for people, without separation of their features

Teachers were often talking about values of tolerance and respect on the general level. When asked specific questions regarding homophobia deeper consideration and own views were avoided. It was obvious that homophobia, peer violence and discrimination on the basis of other features, general rules of social co-habitation were reduced to the same denomination when the school regulations and core curriculum were addressed. Interviewed did not see the necessity to extract homophobia as a separate factor, since *this notion is connected to any other else*.

△ *I believe that such regulations make no sense, because it is the rule, it should address all and be applicable for all. It suffices when the regulations address respect and tolerance on the general level. Differentiation according to gender, race and others is dangerous as it may always omit someone. I would have to include someone that misses finger, for instance. It seems to me that the easiest way out is accepting general rules of respect and absence of hate and well-understood democracy. [female teacher, 41]*

Teachers believe that remaining on the level of general regulations that allow equal treatment for all is a better solution for students. Selecting homophobic discrimination in the school program is redundant, and may also lead to exclusion of other groups. Mentioning a specific feature or a certain vulnerable for discrimination group causes doubts that it will be considered as unequal treatment for other groups, which, consequently, contradicts the idea of equality. Teachers' responses showed that their understanding of 'equality' is based on the idea that everyone is treated equally disregarding subject's belonging to the group.

△ *Apart from that, extraction of these features is counter-efficient, because since we start talking about everyone, that everyone is equal, and suddenly we concentrate on homosexuals in that case we are not talking about everyone. So why we concentrate on specific groups? In such situation not everyone is equal as others happened to be extracted. [female teacher, 27]*

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Similarly, the postulate of tolerance and respect is understood as freedom from any violence, yet not as a right to be considered as an essential part of school's life.

^ *We don't exclude anyone and don't give a chance to show themselves. We don't encourage exposure of own otherness.* [female headteacher, 48]

Interviewed were concerned that direct referral to homosexuality and homophobia will be an unfair privilege for non-heterosexuals. According to their statements it may be concluded that they do not understand how the focus on homophobia would serve, how would it benefit. On contrary, some claimed that mentioning homosexuality and homophobia directly could be harmful and create antagonisms in the group.

^ *Exposure of homosexuality, regardless of other prejudices, may result in an unwanted effect and will lead to a greater interest to persons of indeterminate orientation, for instance.*[female teacher, 61]

Teachers see, accord and accept diversity at school. Yet, for them, managing diversity means treating all identically according to one standard. Educators do not seem to understand specifics of experiences and needs of persons vulnerable to discrimination. Consequently, they cannot respond to address these needs. Such may be depicted in the answer of one of the teachers: *If we were to respect others, there would be no place for homophobia.*

3. All the harm directed to this social group comes down to the fact that someone does not like them, but they don't have less burdensome life

Deterioration of the topics regarding homosexuality and homophobia to the general notions of tolerance and respect as well as statements undermining the reasons why this issue should be addressed may lead to the conclusion that teachers lack knowledge on discrimination and situation of non-heterosexual persons. Sometimes, threat of non-heterosexuals being discriminated was underestimated and doubted by the respondents.

^ *I don't view homosexuals as a mistreated group or one subjected to harm. I don't feel like forsaking everything for their protection. Beyond that, I don't know whether it is such a big social problem or it is not artificially cultivated.* [male teacher, 38]

^ *As for me, the issues over homosexuality concerns less than a problem of homeless pets, for instance. Instead, I have an impression that homosexuality is somehow artificially appealed.*[female teacher, 47]

^ *Homosexuality is not something that looms large in my mind. I don't see any necessity in appealing to tolerance, because I don't think that homosexuals are being harmed apart*

from the legal perspective. But that might just concern civil unions only. [male teacher, 41]

4. *Just let the sleeping dogs lie*

Statements of the participants of the research did not only allow noting needs and observations of school staff, but also helped in identification of the stereotypes and prejudices relevant to the school environment. The research did not carry representative character and participants differed in opinions. Therefore, the researchers did not attempt to draw conclusions and project is on the whole academic environment. It is, however, necessary to take some comments into deeper consideration. Such appeared both in the focus groups and in the commentary sections of the questionnaire.

One of our teachers interviewed argued that youth has not yet reached the level of maturity to discuss topics of homosexuality and is not interested in ‘that issues’. She admitted that, in her opinion, addressing issues of homosexuality is ‘not letting the sleeping dogs lie’, that it might cause children to be affected by persons of the same gender. The similar concern was expressed in the commentary section of the survey:

^ *It seems that LGBT groups are getting more financial support and do everything to promote themselves using various methods. Problem of homophobia in regards to sexual orientation did not exist in our area. I suppose that it will soon, as it is being ‘encouraged’ to verify one’s sexual orientation. Indeed, they should be protected from any type of violence, but I view such dissonance regarding this topic as redundant, since LGBT are, unfortunately, not the role-models to be followed.* [female teacher, 41]

Stereotype that homosexuality and homophobia are something that comes from elsewhere, is of an imposing nature and appears due to the external factors is noticed in the expression given above. This may have its roots in the myth about "gay lobby" that emerged in Poland after accession to the European Union. At the same time it is worth noting that the contents of this stereotype are important pieces of information about misunderstanding between the identification of problems at the local level and interventions as perceived from the outside. For some respondents, LGBT activism seems to be alien, intrusive and irrelevant to their school experience. One of the teachers expressed similar attitude:

^ *I believe that ‘institutionalisation’ of the problem is not a good form of activism. I have an impression that ‘gay problems’ took a form of a ‘European trend’ and it is not an attempt to tackle real problems.* [male teacher, 46]

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Vague, cautions and considered responses also appeared. Subjects were able to simultaneously admit the importance of the topic and had agreed to integration of it into the work of teachers, as well as to withdraw from these statements and emphasize that there are large risks associated with a greater inclusion of issues regarding homophobia and homosexuality to school curriculum. Apart from the concerns regarding the upcoming change, fears about ‘*excessive attention*’ to the topic and the form in which it is being put were voiced:

^ *The problem is important and underestimated. Broader education in various environments is necessary in the long-run. Yet, it requires a lot of caution and discretion when addressing the issue.*[female teacher, 42]

Apart from the provided stereotypical and troubled responses, there were also some supporting inclusion of issues of homosexuality and homophobia into the school curriculum. These persons had also agreed that homophobia is a school problem. Such opinions were, however, formed in a way that it did not allow interpreting the needs and experiences behind them. During the focus groups one of the teachers expressed her view, even though it was contrary to the general opinion of the rest of the group:

^ *Guys and girls form couples in our school, break apart – that does not cause any stirs. When I was a student it aroused lot of emotions, so boyfriend and girlfriend did not expose themselves together. They knew it was not allowed. Now it is different in schools – this does not cause any emotions to burst. On contrary, we favour or even root for these couples. I would really want to live to the times when it comes to all the couples.* [female teacher, 57]

Summary

Although the study did not reach a representative sample of teachers, its results provide the deepest hitherto insight into the needs, experiences and attitudes of school staff in the subject of homophobia and homosexuality in Poland. A large proportion of people involved in the study is favourable towards introduction of the issue to the schools and recognizes that the core curriculum is addresses such issues in an insufficient manner. The attitudes of the respondents and the respondents show that homophobic verbal bullying is prevalent in Polish schools. Moreover, boys are the biggest group to be victimised in this regard. School staff recognizes that specialized workshops, and additional materials would help them to respond to violence among students. At the same time subjects of homophobia and homosexuality is treated with caution and

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distance. Teachers do not seem to understand the processes of discrimination and the needs of LGBT students. Yet, harassment of such students by others is widely condemned.

Recommendations

- I. Introduction of issues relating to prejudices, stereotypes, homophobia, and sexual orientation to the school curriculum.
- II. Introduction and enrichment of professional training courses for teachers with topics addressing discrimination processes, emergence of prejudices and stereotypes, sexual orientation and homophobia.
 1. Aid teachers in understanding and reacting to the needs of LGBT students. Strengthening consciousness and comprehension of own role in forming a friendly school environment free from homophobia.
 2. Provide teachers with skills necessary for inclusion of issues relating to discrimination, homophobia and presence of LGBT persons in society to the subjects taught.
- III. Creation of programmes preventing peer violence on the grounds of homophobia
 1. Ensuring safety and preventing violence by providing clear, specific and comprehensive strategies, rules and procedures on the school level.
 2. Creating an atmosphere favourable to acceptance and tolerance of LGBT persons in schools through actions on the national level (e.g. social campaigns, governmental programs).