

Introduction

The situation of LGBTIQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual trans*, intersex* and queer) persons in general and of LGBTIQ young people in specific in Germany is ambivalent: “In spite of improvements referring the legal equalization in the past years, as for example the legalization of same-sex marriages in 2017, lesbian, gay and bisexual experience discrimination at school, at the workplace and in other areas of life. (...) Despite increasing levels of acceptance, discrimination on grounds of sexual identity (gender identity and/or sexual orientation) is still a reality. (...) On the playgrounds of German schools, the use of the word "gay" is still one of the expressions most commonly used in a pejorative context.” (1)

According to the FRA study, in 2012 (2) the many of the LGBT adults participating in the study (82%) “have been victims of violence and harassment, frequently in public places. Nevertheless, they rarely report either discrimination or incidents of violence or harassment to the police or other authorities.” This corresponds with the reported hate crime cases within police statistics (from 2018): only 351 cases (97 physical violence) were reported as crimes against sexual minorities out of 8,113 cases of political motivated crimes in total (1,078 physical violence) (3). In their daily lives, many survey respondents in Europe are not open about being LGBT with their family (18%), school (32%), workplace (47%) and a majority (53%) avoid holding hands with their same-sex partner for fear of victimisation (4) “Almost half of all respondents (47%) say that they felt personally discriminated against or harassed on the grounds of sexual orientation in the year preceding the survey” (5)

A Study, conducted in 2015 by the anti-discrimination office of the German government shows:, that 53,3% of LGBTIQ participants (minimum age 14), who experienced discrimination during the last 24 month, 53,3% experienced humiliation and invalidation, 39,9% were insulted, 39,3% were denied their rights, 10,7% experience physical violence. (6) LGBTIQ young people still must be considered as a vulnerable group especially when taking in account their existential dependency on their environment (e.g. family and school).

For the research project ‘Participation for Protection’, the German research team conducted two focus groups with five participants in total (Group 1: ages 17; two male gay participants and Group 2: ages 16-18; two trans-male and one trans-female participants). The children and young people took part in two groups at two LGBTIQ centers, which met weekly and were led by youth facilitators/social workers.

Understanding violence

The LGBTIQ young people involved in the German focus groups referred to experiences of different forms of violence (physical, psychological / emotional, bullying / cyberbullying, domestic violence, structural discrimination and violence). Participants of this group were between 16-18 years old, had a high educational background, and therefore demonstrated an ability to communicate detailed and at length. Psychological violence - hate speech, insults and other offences were named most frequently. Main contexts of violence were family and peers especially at school.

Psychological violence - family violence: LGBTIQ young people experienced a lot of psychological violence within their families after coming out (emotional abuse, domestic violence - hearing parents fight):

P1: My dad got a heart attack and ... that was also in the time when I "came out". Then he also blamed me for his heart attack...(LGBTIQ 1 336-338) (...) Yes, I rather put it on the psychological violence, because that is a burden for myself. (LGBTIQ 1 347-352)

"and then there was always a lot of stress with my parents and my parents always argued ... I've always heard when they shouted and (.) yes (.) over the last few years there was no beautiful life

F1: //mmh// after you came out.

P1: Yes. (LGBTIQ 1 338-341)

Psychological violence - Invalidation of sexual orientation or gender identity:

Participants reported, that parent's reaction towards the coming-out of their children is denial or framing non-heterosexual orientations as a phase that has to be overcome:

P: where in part a 14 year old girl comes out as, as bi and then the parents really say yea yea you wait until you're 18 years old (...) and I knew the girl a little better and she really has a slight bend to her- ego. It was a real bend to her self-consciousness (LGBTIQ 1 3150-3155)

Psychological violence - daily ongoing bullying: Participants named an immense amount of bullying and/or cyberbullying experienced on a daily basis by the LGBTIQ young people. Many participants reported to have experienced heavy violence amongst peers:

P: So, if a silly comment or something like that came or so "you faggot" or ... "go back home" or "twist yourself" and so on ... "die", "kill yourself" and so on. All noticed, on a daily basis.

P: So generally in a school always those swear words that you get told every day (LGBTIQ 1 753-754)

Gender issues constantly played a role in the focus group's discussions about violence and experiences of violence. Participants, not matching gender stereotypes, described experiences of violence from peers and family.

Psychological violence - bullying and cyberbullying: Participants argued that digitalisation and social media increased the amount and forms of bullying:

P: (m) "Cyberbullying is the 21st century I always say that because of the digitalisation of the present time with cell phones, WhatsApp, Facebook, it's mostly gotten worse with bullying because if you look at this example so taking a cell phone from a pupil there it's so much stuff you can use to bully the and that I can say for example with you now, if I took your phone now maybe maybe there's stuff (...) photos and other stuff on it, with which I could bully you now and for example I could then blackmail you, for example if I say so now yes give me 100 euros, then I do not post this photo and so on " (LGBTIQ 1 1521-1540)

Psychological violence contexts - family and school: LGBTIQ young people reported experiences of severe forms of homonegative discrimination and violence in school as in families. They also stated, being requested /challenged by others to harm themselves (e.g. go cut yourself, go and commit suicide), as an act of violence:

J: em I wrote verbal violence first, because at schools when youz are excluded there, you are very often bullied, insulted and often also beaten up, that's why I wrote three words, these three words and violence within the family or if it's not easy for you at home and so to speak your are excluded by one of your parents or maybe by both of them exlcuded and bashed/excoriated

I: Can you give an example for exclusion or bashing?

J: as for example the bashing geso like go kill yourself, no one needs you, are worthless em that you have a hard life also outside I didn't have an easy life with when my father still lived with us and at my secondary school I didn't have an easy life as well especially after my coming-out. I was bullied very often at school and then came home where my father was also not the nicest man on earth

Internalized homonegativity - self harm, denying oneself: LGBTIQ young children reported forms of **internalized homonegativity** as a form of violence against oneself and also as a consequence of perceived psychological violence by family peers, teachers and caregivers (e.g. therapists):

P: Also (...) to some extent I haven't come out to some people that I am close with . But it's because I have like this fear. (...) It's not homophobia as such, but rather the fear of homophobia. (...) Wha- what is even more absurd in my opinion. Basically (...)....like I don't know how it is for others, but I was never really discriminated or scorned for it like anything. I have basically only done this to myself. And that is what I find so fascinating, that I was basically, as I said the most homophobic person. That I have been basically the one oppressing myself. And that my inner coming out was basically like overcoming myself. (LGBTIQ 1 2946-2980)

Physical and psychological violence intertwined - coerced outing/being outed and physical violence: Most of the participants reported interrelations of different forms of violence as combinations of psychological and physical violence within processes of bullying by peers often after coming out or being outed by others against their own will:

I told him, so yes I'm gay and that was just the wrong person I have entrusted and then spread the word and thus then ended at school ... I got that and ... because I live in a rural area ... you know that so, the rural area is still on the 20th Century, have not understood it yet and... that was in the winter ... snow was laying and it has just melted and frozen again ... ice ... and thought to himself that he throws me a block of ice against the face. Aaaand (...) I just met the wrong person, thought it would just be a good friend, but .. after that ... it was not. So... [this person outed P1 at school]

F: Yes, Yes, Yes. And that's what led to insults and swearing.. #00:15:30-4#

P:: Precisely! #00:15:30-8#

F: ... how do you say that? ... been insulted with swear words?

P: Yes.

F: ... and even physical violence, also physical violence?! #00:15:37-0#

P: Exactly. #00:15:38-1# (LGBTIQ 1 292-302)

Structural discrimination as violence:

Participants also named structural violence e.g. from the government, police brutality, claims of right wing political parties (as the AfD in Germany) to reestablish § 175 StGB, which puts homosexuality illegal, as form of violence against sexual minorities.

P: Bottom left (..) there it is (.) in other countries (..)they do not know that because homosexuality is still in many countries (...) In 7-9 countries it is still under de- under dead penalty (.) punishable (LGBTIQ 1 748-771)

What would children and young people do if they experienced violence or harm?

Teachers and social workers are important when bullying happens

During the focus groups, the LGBTIQ young people emphasized that they would turn to teachers and social workers for support and help if they experienced violence, in particular when experiencing violence by peers at school (e.g. bullying).

P:: Well first off that she would listen to me and that she understands my problems and I would like tell her about my problems and that she understands how I feel right now.

Young people want to be taken seriously and to have their views validated:

P:: You don't feel like you have been taken seriously if a person doesn't listen and it could also, this feeling of not being taken serious could also lead to a burden. (...) that like in the first moment, the person that isn't listening to you for the person who is talking like why aren't you listening to me? He is not taking me- like as a person he is not taking me seriously. This person probably isn't interested in being in a social contact with me. (LGBTIQ 1 2274-227)

Participants showed a profound understanding how violence occurs and expect teachers and other professionals to take this into account through the enhancement of dialogues between the perpetrator and the victim of bullying.

P:: that they really try, the people, that the young people really feel comfortable, because even the perpetrator is rarely rarely a perpetrator becomes a perpetrator just for for for the joy of being the perpetrator. Maybe the boy hits the child or the girl the child, because it get hit by the father or mother at home (...) and that it basically (...) this chain of violence, is really lies within society and a society is either positioned socially and is able to prevent something like this or it is not positioned socially and has violence (LGBTIQ 1 2484-2497)

Role and support of family members - Participants highlighted the role of family members (third generation or siblings) supporting the victim of bullying outside school, comforting, and taking young people seriously. On the other hand young people stated that they rarely disclose bullying to their families because it was too embarrassing. They highlighted the importance of professionals within the context of violence (e.g. teachers in school) as professionals who can and shall take actions:

P: I would pick Mother too because M- although I would pick Mother at at last because (...) many don't understand why a bullying victim always tells the parents when it's too late (...) well the reason for me is (...) because it's embarrassing to be humiliated in school and in front of others(.) and you don't dare to do this to your family and because you are being humiliated and you like are doing this to your family and that is why you don't always immediately tell you (...) parents (LGBTIQ 1 1310-1316)

The young people were also aware, that bullying, especially occurring as physical violence, is also an issue for the police and could be sanctioned:

P: In regards to the police, that you can go there regarding because bullying is at first more like swear words and such, but also later it will be pushing (...) or getting hit too (...) and that is something obviously something against the law (LGBTIQ 1 1363-1369)

How should Professionals respond?

Professional Communication and Interaction

Young people gave advice on a wide arrange of professionals who work with children across many disciplines, e.g., police, social work, doctor, teacher, and psychologists. Overall, young people's main expectations towards a helpful professional is having the skill to understand the children's issues, their pain and abuse

P: Well first off that she would listen to me and that she understands my problems and I would like tell her about my problems and that she understands how I feel right now. (LGBTIQ 1 2309-2315)

Attitudes of professionals towards LGBTIQ

Young LGBTIQ people made very clear, that they have no tolerance for homo- or trans* negative professionals. Instead they expect LGBTIQ positive attitudes and a respectful approach from professionals:

P: if a social worker, even if he is politically rather conservative or has an opinion like I find this transthing rather, that he needs to be able to leave it behind, this is his personal opinion. As a social worker he has a duty and he needs to fulfill this duty. (LGBTIQ .3329-3333)

Terminology, language and violence

As young LGBTIQ people stated that misgendering or invalidating self-descriptions of identity are acts of violence, they consequently expected professionals to avoid heteronormative language or homo- and trans* negative name calling, offences and to be very keen on how to address LGBTIQ service users and how to talk respectfully to and with them:

P: Yes well, I especially have with names, you have to express yourself selectively, like that for example that as a social worker you don't use words like ,tranny' or ,fag'. Now that, now that might sound like, what? Noone does that! But I know enough social workers that, that somehow still say these things and even if pointed out to them you shouldn't say these things or I don't want you to say these words, to not call me this or that, then you are met with lack of understanding.

Same thing with the pronouns especially with trans, well with trans the problem really is that social workers don't want to accept, why they should- a person that is seeking help, maybe the person even has a problem due to being tran- sex- because of the tran sexuality and then, then it doesn't help if the person is refusing to compromise and at least to use the right name and right pronouns like to use the preferred name and preferred pronouns. And that is like a fundamental respect that is really lacking to some extent with- which is rather really shocking. (LGBTIQ 1 2151-2170)

Taking action

When taking actions participants expected professionals to **involve Q young LGBTI people in decisions and interventions**. Young people expressed their agency and competence of making the right decisions for their own lives as subjects and bearers of rights:

P: And like what I also mean is, there are pedagogical and di- ok not necessarily didactical, but pedagogical methods, how to do something and that you give the child the option to chose, that you don't say so ok I will try this pedagogical tool but rather I will offer the child a range of tools, of options, of tools and let the the child decide what they are most comfortable with and won't make a decision about the child , which the child could very well make for themselves.

P1 (m): And this way doesn't make a decision about the child. The child can very well make decisions about them self, them self. (LGBTIQ 1 2316-2327)

Participants expressed, that they expected professionals to **enhance a dialogue between the perpetrator and the victim** to stop the violence and if that's it might not be sufficient to stop the violence and take radical measures:

P: like to talk to the bully (...) to have them get together and to get along for once (...) why he is even doing it and (.) why this violence even prevails (...) , it can also happen that it is like exactly the usual way will prevail again afterwards, like with the comments or (...) other things, but then I would, I would go to the teacher (...) or the social worker again and then take even more drastic measures (LGBTIQ 1 1256-1474)

Peers as allies - Participants also stated the importance of professionals (e.g. teachers) working with peers and empowering peers (e.g. peer-to-peer-Interventions, multiplier- work, train the trainer) as an effective intervention and prevention against bullying:

P: (m) that we had a very good teacher as guidance counselor (...) and he basically arranged (...) for the class presidents to be sort of trained accordingly and that way made sure that in f. like in most class rooms, again some class rooms obviously not if the class president was not willing to comply, but most- in most class rooms they really were able to not have anything like that, the classic bullying, that it didn't happen again. (LGBTIQ 1 1892-1905)

P: (m) making sure, that people within the group, like within the class room for example immediately solidarise with the victim like make it clear that it is not ok and like if someone tries to gain power at someone else's expense he should like (..) sort of a, a good class president or so who can help out and who is not only class president because everyone thinks he is cool (...) because he has the most friends but rather he is class president because he really has the social skills to lead a group in a sense and who can also that there will be no bullying under my watch (LGBTIQ 1 1850-1860)

Young LGBTIQ people criticized the quality of information and commercial offers in the internet and advised also other ways to inform LGBTIQ children about institutions which provide help and support in case of violence: Add information on a "a visible spot at school e.g. "contact Social worker", "great mentor", Internet address/website, WhatsApp-numbers, email-addresses to support the search for help. Furthermore they emphasised, how important it is, to talk to a potential help providers in person.

Support by service providers and institutions

LGBTIQ Institutions are important to receive helpful support

Participants highlighted the **importance of LGBTIQ Institutions for coming-out and identity development as safe places as well as places of supporting LGBTIQ affirmative practices of social workers:**

P: And I know plenty people that have only found to their identity after coming here [refers to an LGBTIQ Youthcenter]. So they notice something is there [I: mmh] and only here, also because they receive counseling, because when they are told in a neutral tone, all that exists, also if these labels are helpful, labels always help insecure persons in fact one doesn't need labels anymore. (LGBTIQ 1 3066-3082)

Treat young LGBTQ persons as special as necessary as normal as possible:

Importance of undoing gender identity and sexual orientation: young LGBTIQ persons revealed that they don't want to be reduced only to their gender identity and /or sexual orientation. Professionals have to keep in mind that persons are not identity politics or only representatives of groups (here LGBTIQ) but individuals with more attributes beside their gender identity and their sexual orientation. Young people therefore wish for an acceptance of their sexual identity as well as for being seen as a holistic person with other qualities besides their gender identity or their sexual orientation. Professionals should see young LGBTIQ persons first as young persons with interests, fears, problems, skills, strength's and second as persons with a gender identity and/or sexual orientation that differs from the societal mainstream:

P: Well unfortunately it still prevails with many LGBTs that they have this feeling. Yes I also feel to some extent that the existence is a political (.) problem. In part there are for example there was a trans person. She once was really upset and was yelling. My existence like my being is not a political statement. I am not there and I am not here and are am a symbol for an open minded society (...) I am just here und please be quiet and leave me alone. To some extent it is that the people get excited oh yes we have a trans person, we are so diverse, but that is exactly the wrong type of tolerance.

LGBTIQ Institutions also create safe space to be oneself/ feeling of security and to express their views (in line with Art 12 UN CRC):

P: Yes, I feel comfortable here (...) a feeling of security (..) like a feeling that here I can act how I want without the fear of serious consequences. Of course it is something else if I compromise someone else's freedom while living out mine, but for example, that I can completely unfold here(...) I couldn't for example in school or anywhere else I could never be as free, acting as I think fit to say it bluntly as I as I as I can do right here (LGBTIQ 1 2525-2545)

Participants suggested that professionals should work with and counsel parents, family members to increase the acceptance and knowledge about LGBTIQ lives of important persons for the LGBTIQ children and young people etc.:

P: there is a social worker or someone who approaches the parents and says, for example SchLAu (?) or something else that's here, approaches the parents and says accept your daughter it is completely normal. Explaining to the parents what LGBTIQ stands for and what it is and that it is something completely normal and then isn't a phase either because those things tend not to be just phases, actually it never really is a phase. There are behavioral phases, those are not sexual though. (LGBTIQ 1 3164-3171)

This is also important as family members could be powerful allies and provide protection for young people:

P: Yes with my coming out to my parents. My Mom received it well, my Dad didn't and liked totally blamed me for his heart well and now it's good again. Like if you, like I have also tried to talk to him. He blocked most of the time but because my Mom accepted it she talked to him more often which caused them to fight but then they made up again and my Dad then understood because my Mom gave him an ultimatum. You either accept it your son how he is or we'll both be gone. Like she really gave him an ultimatum then (LGBTIQ1 3203-3212)

Endnotes:

1. https://www.antidiskriminierungsstelle.de/EN/AdviceForIndividuals/GroundsForDiscrimination/Sexual_orientation/sexual_orientation_node.html; Klocke, Ulrich (2012): Akzeptanz sexueller Vielfalt an Berliner Schulen.
2. Eine Befragung zu Verhalten, Einstellungen und Wissen zu LSBT und deren Einflussvariablen, Berlin.
3. A follow-up-Survey is currently conducted by the FRA. Results will be published in 2020 see: <https://fra.europa.eu/en/project/2018/eu-lgbti-survey-ii>
4. Volkmer, Katja (2019): Übersicht „Hasskriminalität“. Online: https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/downloads/DE/veroeffentlichungen/2018/pmk-2017-hasskriminalitaet-2001-2017.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=2
5. FRA – European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2014): EU LGBT survey. European Union lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender survey ; main results. Publ. Off. of the Europ. Union: Luxemburg., S. 13 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2014): EU LGBT survey - European Union lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender survey. Main Results: Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, S. 16
6. Kalkum, Dorina/Otto, Magdalena (2017): Diskriminierungserfahrungen in Deutschland anhand der sexuellen Identität. Ergebnisse einer quantitativen Betroffenenbefragung und qualitativer Interviews: Berlin, S. 19
7. Explanation: SchLAU is an acronym for an LGBTIQ-initiative providing educational trainings for schools, teachers, parents and pupils about accepting non-cisgender identities and non-heterosexual orientations in the philosophy of gay affirmative practice, they are working with LGBTIQ specially trained lay volunteers, who work as role models with their own biography see <http://www.schlau-hessen.de/>

