LGBTQ+ YOUTH EXPERIENCES AND WELL-BEING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN COLOMBIA:

SCHOOL, FAMILY, RELIGION, AND ONLINE ACTIVITIES

sentiido

sentiido

LGBTQ+ YOUTH EXPERIENCES AND WELL-BEING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN COLOMBIA:

SCHOOL, FAMILY, RELIGION, AND ONLINE ACTIVITIES

AUTHORS

Juliana Martínez
Sentiido Research Director

Ángela Duarte
Sentiido Researcher

Joseph Kosciw
Director of the GLSEN Research Institute

EDITOR Alxander Bare

TRANSLATOR Camilo Martínez Orozco

COPY EDITOR Santiago Castiblanco

COVER IMAGE Sindy Infante Saavedra

GRAPHIC DESIGN Lila Forero

ISBN: 978-958-53070-7-0

Colombia
Sentiido
2022

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report is the result of Sentiido's team dedication and commitment. Thank you everyone for your time, ideas, and comments, you made this projecLt a reality. We also want to thank **GLSEN's research team**, particularly **Joe Kosciw** and **Adrian Zongrone**, who for the last seven years have supported Sentiido's work. Their participation in this report was essential. They generously shared their expertise on LGBTQ+ youth surveys in the United States, Latin America, and Europe.

MOB Agency played a key role in disseminating the survey, helping us achieve the number of responses. They mobilized influencers to share the survey, which was instrumental in expanding the survey's reach. **Rossana Castro, Francy Mosquera, Diana Guerrero** and **Lina de Arco**, thank you for your generosity and for believing in the project.

Special thanks also to the illustrators that donated the images for the digital campaign. **Sindy Elefante, Edi Jiménez** and **Sebas Santafe,** thank you for supporting Sentiido, and painting our message with bright colors.

Finally, we would like to thank **Open Society Foundation's Latin America Program** for believing in Sentiido's work, and for supporting research that centers the rights and experiences of LGBTQ+ people and cis women.

Lina Cuellar W.
Executive Director

INTRODUCTION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is about the lives and well-being of LGBTQ+ youth during the COVID-19 pandemic in Colombia. In particular, **the study provides, for the first time in the country, data about the experiences of LGBTQ+ youth in four key aspects: school climate, religious life, family life, and online activities.** This information is crucial to 1) better understand and address the needs of LGBTQ+ youth in these aspects of their life and 2) to gain greater insight into the support networks, initiatives, and resources that mitigate bias and discrimination, and the safe and affirming spaces available to them. Our findings are a valuable, **data-based resource for educators, parents and other family members, faith communities, civil society organizations, policymakers, and anyone interested in fostering diverse, inclusive, and affirming communities.**

Another contribution of the study is that it adds to the growing—yet still scarce—data collection efforts about the experiences, needs, challenges, and support networks of LGBTQ+ youth, with the added value of providing data from a country and region statistically underrepresented in available studies.

The report features two parts:
PART I, "Experiences of Hostile School Climate For LGBTQ+ Students," and **PART II,** "Life and Well-being of LGBTQ+ Youth: Family, Religion, COVID-19 Impact, and Online Activities."

PART I used an updated version of the questionnaire and the same methodology implemented in Sentiido and Colombia Diversa's "Encuesta de clima escolar LGBT en Colombia" [LGBT School Climate in Colombia Questionnaire] (2016), which tendered valuable comparative data about the experiences of LGBTQ+ students in the country. The school-related questions were about the 2021-2022 school year. As was the case in 2015 (when previous data was collected), they included questions about hearing biased remarks, feeling safe, being harassed, and feeling comfortable at school. They were also asked about their academic experiences, attitudes about school, involvement in school, and availability of supportive school resources.

PART II provides baseline data about different aspects of the daily lives of LGBTQ+ youth in the country, including their experiences and relationship with organized religion, parental relations, online activities, support communities, principal values, how they experienced the COVID-19 pandemic, and hopes for the future. **The two parts together create the most comprehensive and holistic picture of the lives, experiences, challenges, needs, and support networks of LGBTQ+ youth in Colombia yet.**

One of the principal findings of the study is that rather than being the solution, adults are often part of the problem. Adults are failing LGBTQ+ youth in school, churches, and the home. In all these spaces, LGBTQ+ youth hear homophobic and transphobic remarks from the adults responsible for their education, care, and well-being, and often face institutional harassment. Furthermore, **parents, religious leaders, and even mental health professionals frequently pressure LGBTQ+ youth to engage in different forms of "therapies" or "treatments" that promise to make them heterosexual or cisgender (not trans) or both.** Science has repeatedly shown that this is impossible, and the UN classifies these efforts as "torture."

We hope that these data will be useful to a wide variety of actors looking to design, implement, and evaluate programs, initiatives, and policies that forge a more inclusive present and a better future for all Colombian youth, including LGBTQ+ youth.

CONTEXT

In the last few decades, Colombia has made significant progress in advancing and recognizing LGBTQ+ rights. The country's highest judiciary body, the Constitutional Court, has established a strong precedent that explicitly protects sexual orientation and gender identity from discrimination. Gay couples in Colombia can get married or live in recognized civil unions, adopt children, and have full partner pension and health benefits, among other rights. Furthermore, while there is not a comprehensive gender identity law, trans people can change their name and sex marker on all official documents without psychiatric gatekeeping or any surgical or hormonal intervention.

Regarding education, the Constitutional Court has shown a strong anti-discrimination stance. In 2015, the Court decided the case of Sergio Urrego, a gay teenager who died by suicide after experiencing homophobic bullying from his school's administration. In Ruling T-478, the Court mandated that the Ministry of Education revise all educational community guidelines (manuales de convivencia) in the Colombian school system to ensure they did not discriminate against LGBTQ+ students and that they promote discrimination-free environments.

Since then, other rulings have affirmed the Court's position, homing in on gender identity and expression. Rulings T-363 (2016) and T-192 (2020) mandate that technical institutes and schools, respectively, recognize the gender identity of their students, regardless of whether they match official documents. In both cases, the Court stated that fundamental rights such as education may not hinge on changes to official documents (since many cases involve minors who cannot change said documents, among other reasons) or be curtailed by cumbersome administrative requirements.

Another landmark precedent is ruling T-443 (2020), which specifically names gender identity as a category protected from discrimination in educational settings. The ruling is based on the case of José Manuel Echeverri, a trans student from Sabaneta, Antioquia, who sued his school because they refused to recognize his gender identity. When compelled to accommodate him, school administrators isolated him from his peers, forcing him to take lessons alone in a separate classroom and prohibiting him from going to recess to socialize with other students.

In this case, the Court determined that schools must 1) provide the support students need during their gender transition without imposing undue administrative barriers, 2) promote respectful approaches to diversity, 3) resolve conflicts between students and teachers impartially, and 4) advance practices and hold workshops that allow trans students to feel part of the educational community as equals[1].

It is worth noting that all these cases speak to institutional discrimination. Urrego, Echeverri, and the other plaintiffs were not discriminated against or bullied by their peers (or that was not the cause of the complaint). The principal source of discrimination was from adults in charge of guaranteeing their education, safety, and well-being: school leadership and staff, mental health professionals, and teachers.

Despite these advances, LGBTQ+ people of all ages in Colombia continue to experience widespread discrimination and violence. 98 LGBTQ+ people were murdered in the country between 2020 and 2021, with trans women being almost a third of the victims (27), followed by gay men (14). The first five months of 2022 have not been any better. 21 LGBTQ+ people have been murdered through May, 15 of them trans women. Of the trans women murdered, 13 of them were younger than 35 years old, which is the average life expectancy of trans women in the region, a number that is less than half the average life expectancy of the general population.[2] Furthermore, in the most comprehensive study on LGBT adults in Colombia (2020), 75% of respondents reported they were bullied at least once before they turned 18

[1] The complete ruling can be found at: https://www.corteconstitucional.gov.co/relatoria/2020/T-443-20.htm

[2] https://www.defensoria.gov.co/es/nube/comunicados/10218/Entre-2020-y-2021-asesinaron-a-98-personas-con-orientación-sexual-e-identidad-de-género-diversas-OSIGD-dEFENSORÍA.htm

for their gender identity or sexual orientation, and 25% said they were fired from or denied a job in their lifetimes.[3] This violence and discrimination negatively impact mental health. 55% of respondents in the same survey reported having suicidal thoughts in their lifetime, and one in four (25%) had attempted suicide at least once. Bisexual women (33%) and transgender people (31%) had the highest rates of suicide attempts, with one in three people reporting they had attempted suicide at least once.[4]

In line with this data, our study found that LGBTQ+ youth in Colombia 1) also experience widespread harassment, bias, and discrimination in school and other aspects of their lives, 2) that the majority do not have strong support networks in their schools, families, or churches, and 3) that there few affirming resources and safe spaces available to them. Given this situation, online activities are a key source of information about a variety of issues related to LGBTQ+ experiences, identities, health, and sexuality. However, the unsupervised way in which youth are navigating online spaces may put them at risk and/or confuse them with misinformation.

To make information more readily available to different stakeholders and audiences, we offer below a summary of key findings by topic.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS: THE SHIFTING LANDSCAPE OF LGBTQ+ YOUTH SELF-IDENTIFICATION

Our findings show a major shift in the way LGBTQ+ youth are self-identifying with regards to their sexual orientation and gender identity. A growing number of them are using more fluid categories when it comes to gender identity, and there is a sharp rise in categories such as "bisexual" and "pansexual."

First, however, we offer a note on methodology. Although our findings come from one survey, Part I and Part II of the survey have different sample sizes. Participants completed an online survey about their experiences with family, religion, and COVID-19 in 2021 (Part II). Participants who had been in a secondary school in the past year were also asked about their experiences in school (Part I). Therefore, the sample pool of Part I is smaller than that of Part II (1,555 vs. 3,246).

KEY DATA POINTS

- Regarding sexual orientation, in Part I of the study (school climate), almost the same number of students identified as gay (17.4%) or lesbian (17.5%), while the majority (58.8%) identified as either bisexual (47.8) or pansexual (11.0%).

  In Part II (life and well-being), 56.2% of LGBTQ+ students identified as bisexual or pansexual and 37.7% as gay or lesbian.

- Regarding gender identity, in part I (school climate), 38.1% identified as non-cisgender with 8.6% identifying as trans, 12.6% as "nonbinary/genderqueer/gender-fluid," and 12.9% as "questioning."

  In Part II (life and well-being), 48.1% of youth identified as a cisgender female, 19.5% as cisgender male, 8.2% as transgender, 12.4% as "nonbinary/genderqueer/gender-fluid," and 10.7% as "questioning."

  It is worth noting the low participation of cisgender males in the survey (17.7%) in Part I, compared to 47.0% of cisgender females; and 19.5% in Part II, compared to 48.1% of cisgender females.

[3] Kyu Choi, S. et al. (2020). Stress, Health, and Well-being of LGBT People in Colombia Results from a National Survey. Los Angeles: Williams Institute, UCLA. Available at: https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/lgbt-people-colombia/ Pag. 4.

[4] Ibid. p. 3.

- This is a remarkable shift from the 2015 survey. In it, 67.0% of respondents identified as gay or lesbian, and only 26.3% as "bisexual/pansexual." Also, 41.9% of respondents said their gender was "feminine," 49.4% said it was "masculine," and only 3.7% identified as trans.[5]

That is to say, **the percentage of LGBTQ+ youth that self-identify as gay or lesbian fell by almost half, while the percentage of youth that identified as bisexual or pansexual more than doubled.**

Also, the percentage of LGBTQ+ youth that self-identify as trans more than doubled, while the percentage of youth that identifies with the categories "nonbinary/genderqueer/gender-fluid" or "questioning" increased by five-fold.

These dramatic changes align with international trends that show that younger people are identifying as trans or with nonbinary categories at higher rates than any other generation on record.[6]

Comparative Sample Demographics

Sexual Orientation	2015	2021 Part I: School Climate	2021 Part II: Life and Well-being
Gay/Lesbian	67.0%	34.9% (17.4% Gay - 17.5% Lesbian)	37.7% (20.0% Gay - 17.7% Lesbian)
Bisexual/ Pansexual	26.3%	58.8% (47.8% Bisexual – 11.0% Pansexual)	56.2% (46.9% Bisexual – 9.3% Pansexual)

Gender Identity	2015	2021 Part I: School Climate	2021 Part II: Life and Well-being
Cisgender female	41.9%	47.0%	48.1%
Cisgender male	49.4%	17.7%	19.5%
Trans	3.7%	8.6%	8.2%
Other (Nonbinary/ Genderqueer/ Gender-fluid, Questioning)	5%	25.5% 12.6% (Nonbinary/Genderqueer/ Gender-fluid) 12.9% (Questioning)	23.1% 12.4% (Nonbinary/Genderqueer/ Gender-fluid) 10.7% (Questioning)

[5] Sentiido & Colombia Diversa (2016). Mi voz cuenta: encuesta de clima escolar LGBT en Colombia. Bogotá. Pag. 21.

[6] See: Branigin, Anne (2022). "5 percent of young adults identify as trans or nonbinary, survey says." The Washington Post. Retrieved June 21, 2022. Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/06/08/pew-research-trans-nonbinary-young-adults/, and Ghorayshi, Azeen (2022). "Report Reveals Sharp Rise in Transgender Young People in the U.S." The New York Times. Retrieved June 21, 2022. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/10/science/transgender-teenagers-national-survey.html

PART I EXPERIENCES OF HOSTILE SCHOOL CLIMATE FOR LGBTQ+ STUDENTS

SCHOOL SAFETY

- More than half (54.6%) of LGBTQ+ students in Colombia said they felt unsafe at school in the past year because of their sexual orientation, and more than a third reported missing at least one day of school in the last month (36.5%; see Figure 1.2).
- It is worth mentioning that, counterintuitively, there were no differences in feelings of safety whether the students were in online classes only, in-person classes only, or in a hybrid setting. There were also no differences across the types of learning environments in how frequently LGBTQ+ students missed school for safety reasons.
- This highlights the pressing need of addressing school climate issues and SOGIE-based[7] bullying and harassment in all learning environments and modalities.

EXPOSURE TO BIASED LANGUAGE

- The vast majority of LGBTQ+ students heard homophobic remarks at school (92%), and more than half (52.9%) of LGBTQ+ students reported hearing other students make homophobic remarks often or frequently in school.
- It is disturbing that most students (65.5%) reported hearing homophobic remarks from school staff, and about one in five students (22.2%) said they heard these types of remarks from school staff often or frequently.

  Also, more than one quarter (28.9%) of LGBTQ+ students in our survey reported hearing these comments frequently or often.
- Students who reported hearing homophobic remarks at school were asked how often teachers or other school staff intervened if they were present. Almost half of the students (42.4%) reported that staff never intervened when present. Less than a fifth (18.2%) reported that school personnel intervened most of the time or always.
- It is both troubling and worth highlighting that, when comparing school staff to student intervention in cases of LGBTQ+ related bullying or harassment, respondents reported that other students intervened more and more often than school personnel. Students reported that other students intervened "always" or "almost always" more often than school personnel (27.3% students intervened versus 18.2% school staff intervened). Also, students reported that school personnel "never" intervened at a much higher rate than other students (42.4% of school staff never intervened vs. 31.1% of students). These findings highlight the urgency of training teachers and school personnel on LGBTQ+ identities and issues and on how to effectively act in SOGIE-relate bullying and harassment cases.
- Having school staff that intervene effectively in cases of LGBTQ+ bullying or harassment is key because when students said that teachers and school staff intervened more often, they were less likely to miss days of school because of feeling unsafe (32.1% vs. 40.3%).

  In addition, LGBTQ+ students who reported that teachers and school staff intervene more often regarding homophobic remarks were less likely to feel unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation: 63.1% of students who said that staff intervened less often said they felt unsafe vs. 41.5% of students who said the staff intervened more often.
- LGBTQ+ students in online-only learning environments in 2021 were more likely to hear homophobic remarks from school staff than those in in-person only learning environments (67.9% vs. 53.8%)

7. SOGIE is an acronym for "sexual orientation and gender identity and expression."

EXPERIENCES OF HARASSMENT AND ASSAULT AT SCHOOL

- An overwhelming majority (75.0%) reported being verbally harassed at some point in the past year based on sexual orientation, gender, gender expression, and race or ethnicity, and 25.0% experienced high frequencies of verbal harassment. LGBTQ+ students most often reported experiencing verbal harassment at school because of how they expressed their gender or their sexual orientation.
- 29.9% of LGBTQ+ students had been physically harassed (e.g., shoved or pushed) at some point at school during the past year based on any personal characteristic, and 7.0% experienced high frequencies of physical harassment. Their experiences of physical harassment followed a pattern similar to verbal harassment—students most reported being physically harassed at school because of their sexual orientation or gender expression.
- Progress has been made in lowering verbal and physical harassment and physical assault due to sexual orientation, gender expression, and gender, but not regarding ethnic origin. 18.6% of LGBTQ+ students in 2015 reported high levels of verbal harassment related to sexual orientation, compared to 11.4% in 2021. However, there were no differences over time in the levels of harassment or assault regarding ethnic origin.

RELATIONAL AGGRESSION

- The majority of LGBTQ+ students (74.1%) had mean rumors or lies spread about them at school.
- The vast majority of students (87.0%) also reported that they had felt deliberately excluded by other students.

ELECTRONIC HARASSMENT OR "CYBER-BULLYING"

- Half of LGBTQ+ students (50.3%) experienced some form of cyberbullying from students in their school during the 2021 academic year.
- There were few differences by type of learning environment in the frequency of cyberbullying. In fact, the only significant difference was among those who reported being cyberbullied by people outside their school, which was higher for those who were in school completely in person than for those who were in school online or in a hybrid learning environment.

EXPERIENCES OF DISCRIMINATION AND DISCIPLINE

- Even though discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity and expression is prohibited in Colombia, including in educational settings since 2015, 14.9% of LGBTQ+ students reported that they had had a disciplinary process against them at school for being LGBTQ+.

REPORTING OF SCHOOL-BASED HARASSMENT AND ASSAULT

- Almost 7 in 10 students (69.1%) never reported incidents to staff.
- We asked students who did not always report harassment or assault their reasons for not reporting it. Nearly half (47.7%) said that they did not want to be "outed" to their family. Over a third of students said they thought school personnel would not do anything about it (39.8%), which is roughly equal to the number of students who, as stated before, reported that school personnel "never" intervened (42.4%).
- School staff often did not respond to incidents of LGBTQ+-related bullying and harassment, and, when they did, their responses were not very effective.

  More than a third of students (32.2%) thought that the response from school staff was "completely ineffective" and 26.8% said it was only "somewhat effective." Only 8.6% of students reported that staff reported "very effectively." We also asked these students how school staff responded the last time they reported victimization to them. 32.7% were told to ignore it, and 26.2% said the staff person did nothing.

- 66.1% of students said they never told a family member about incidents of LGBTQ+-related bullying and harassment, and only 5.5% of students said they always did.

- A finding that is worth highlighting is that reporting to adults has gone down since 2015, both for school personnel (59.4% of students never told school staff in 2015 vs. 69.0% of students never told school staff in 2021) and for a family member (60.1% of students never told a family member in 2015 vs. 66.1% of students never told a family member in 2021).

HOSTILE SCHOOL CLIMATE AND EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

- Students who experienced higher levels of verbal harassment related to their sexual orientation, gender expression, or gender were much less likely to plan on pursuing their education after high school.

- More severe victimization was related to lower academic achievement among LGBTQ+ students.

- Students were twice as likely to have missed school in the past month if they had experienced higher levels of victimization. For example, 61.9% who experienced higher levels of verbal harassment regarding their sexual orientation missed at least one day of school in the prior month, compared to 33.1% of those who experiences lower levels of harassment.

- Students who experienced a higher severity of victimization had lower levels of a sense of belonging at school than students who experienced less severe victimization.

  It is important to note that the type of learning environment was also significantly related to their sense of belonging in school. LGBTQ+ students who were in online classes only during the academic year had a significantly lower sense of belonging compared to those who had any in-person school.

- LGBTQ+ students who experienced higher levels of verbal harassment reported worse mental health outcomes, namely, higher depression and lower self-esteem. 50.6% of students who experienced lower levels of verbal harassment reported high levels of depression, compared to 73.9% of those who reported higher levels of this harassment.

SECTION 2: SCHOOL-BASED RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

- Less than half (46.1%) of LGBTQ+ students in Colombia reported that other students at school were accepting of LGBTQ+ people.

- Over 90% of students reported that there are other LGBTQ+ students in their school in addition to themselves.

- The majority of students (91.1%) could identify at least one school staff member whom they believed was supportive of LGBTQ+ students at their school, and 40.7% could identify six or more supportive school staff.

- LGBTQ+ students who were in school only virtually reported a lower number of supportive school personnel than those who were in school only in person.

  Thus, similar to what we found with school belonging, being in online classes may only inhibit LGBTQ+ students' ability to find and engage with adults in their school as sources of support.

- Having supporting school staff is key because students who reported having a higher number of teachers and school staff (more than six) who support LGBTQ+ students were less likely to miss days of school because of feeling unsafe (28.2% vs. 42.8%).

- Nearly half (47.2%) of students said they had not been exposed to representations of LGBTQ+ people, history, or events in lessons at schools.

  A fallow-up question showed that improvement, however, has been made: students in 2015 were more likely to be taught negative LGBTQ+ information in class than students in 2021: 38.7% vs. 28.7%.

- LGBTQ+ students who were taught only positive information about LGBTQ+ people, history, and events had the best outcomes—the most supportive student body, the highest feelings of school belonging, and the least likelihood of missing days of school for safety reasons.

  In contrast, LGBTQ+ students who had only been taught negative LGBTQ+ content had the worst outcomes with regard to the perceptions of their school.

  Regarding school attendance, being taught nothing about LGBTQ+ issues may be better than having any exposure to negative content about LGBTQ+ issues.

- The majority of students (61.8%) noted that they did not have a reporting policy/procedure in their school. Furthermore, most of the students who noted their school had this type of policy also reported that it did not specifically enumerate protections based on sexual orientation or gender expression.

  Only 9.0% of students in the survey reported that the policy mentioned sexual orientation and/or gender expression.

- **Having inclusive policies (ones that mention sexual orientation, and gender identity and expression) matters. Students whose schools had an inclusive policy reported greater intervention by school personnel when homophobic remarks were made, and those students who had no policy in place at school reported the lowest intervention by staff members.**

  Furthermore, LGBTQ+ students in schools were more likely to report that the intervention by staff was effective when their school had a comprehensive reporting policy, compared to those with no policy and those with only a generic policy.

  Nevertheless, rather than seeing progress in terms of having policies/procedures that protect LGBTQ+ students, the country has seen a decline in these key measures in the last six years. LGBTQ+ students in 2021 were much less likely to report having any type of policy than those in 2015 (38.2% vs. 54.9%). Students in 2021 were also less likely to report having any mention in the policy about sexual orientation or gender expression (9.0% vs. 14.7%).

PART II LIFE AND WELL-BEING OF LGBTQ+ YOUTH DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: FAMILY, RELIGION, COVID-19 IMPACT, AND ONLINE ACTIVITIES

VALUES

- Only 19.6% of LGBTQ+ youth believed that religion was "somewhat important" or "very important," and 47.5% said it was "not important at all." In contrast, 67.9% of the general population of youth in in the country said that religion was important.

- The principle that LGBTQ+ youth valued the most was education. 92.2% said education was "very important" (59.1%) or "somewhat important" (33.1%).

FAMILY

- Only about half (54.7%) of LGBTQ+ youth in Colombia are "out" to one or more of their parents. Of those who were out to a parent, only a quarter (25.2%) said they received a great deal of support after coming out from them, while nearly a quarter (22.2%) that they received absolutely no support.

The majority of the LGBTQ+ youth have no support from parents vis-à-vis their sexual orientation or gender identity—either because they are not out to the parent or because they are out and the parent is not at all supportive.

- 68.2% of LGBTQ+ youth "never" or "rarely" speak to their parents when they have problems.

  When they do speak to their parents, 51.6% said they did not feel comfortable talking about any of the following issues: personal problems, religion, dating problems, sexuality, LGBTQ+ issues. Youth were least likely to report that they would be comfortable speaking with their parents about LGBTQ+ issues.

- The vast majority of LGBTQ+ youth in Colombia (87.2%) had heard homophobic or transphobic comments from family members in the past year. Nearly half (44.6%) reported that this happened commonly.

- Almost one in five (19.8%) young people reported they had been physically punished by their parents for being LGBTQ+.

- Only 11.3% of LGBTQ+ youth reported ever talking to an adult outside the family about their problems at home or with their parents because they are LGBTQ+.

RELIGION

- 93.3% of LGBTQ+ youth in Colombia had ever heard negative messages about LGBTQ+ people from their religious congregation or during services, and 60.3% reported this happened "a lot" or "frequently."

- Only 17.7% of LGBTQ+ youth said they identified as the same religion as their family, and an additional18.2% said that they did not know.

- 66% of LGBTQ+ youth did not identify with any form of organized religion. They most commonly identified as agnostic (38.5%) and atheist (27.5%). In contrast, they said their families were primarily Catholic (73.2%), and Evangelical Christians (14.2%).

- Half (50.3%) of LGBTQ+ youth reported never having gone to religious services in the past year. Only 11.6% reported going one or more times a week.

  When asked why they attended religious services, 41.2% reported that they were forced to attend by their parents. Only 1 in 5 LGBTQ+ students (20.9%) said that they chose to attend religious services on their own volition.

- 82.9% LGBTQ+ youth were not out at all in the congregation.

- Youth whose families were Catholic were less likely to hear homophobic and transphobic remarks in their religious institution than those who were Evangelical Christians or another Christian denomination.

  There was, however, no relationship between the family's religion and being out in the congregation.

- Hearing negative statements about LGBTQ+ people from the religious congregation was related to lower self-esteem, greater depression, and an increased likelihood of suicidal ideation.

EXPERIENCES WITH CONVERSION "THERAPY"

- 61.0% of LGBTQ+ youth had said that someone had tried to persuade them to change their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

- Parents (60.2%), other family members (40.3%), religious leaders (31.4%), and a counselor or psychologist (17.4%) were the adults that more commonly tried to change the sexual orientation and/or gender identity of LGBTQ+ youth.

- 78.6% of LGBTQ+ youth who participated in "treatments" to try to change their sexual orientation and/or gender identity reported that they were forced to by their parents.

- Transgender and nonbinary youth were most likely to report having been forced or pressured into some form of conversion therapy. For example, 70.9% of transgender youth and 69.6% of nonbinary youth said this had happened, compared to 59.4% of cisgender female youth and 57.7% of cisgender male youth.

- Having been forced or pressured to change was related to higher levels of depression and a greater likelihood of having seriously considered suicide.

  63.9% of youth who were forced or pressured to change their sexual orientation and/or gender identity seriously considered suicide in the past year, compared to 48.2% of youth who had not had that experience.

EXPERIENCES IN THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

- 55.1% of youth reported that they were worried about their family finding out that they are LGBTQ+ because of spending so much time at home.

- Only half (50.5%) of LGBTQ+ youth said their family had been supportive of them during the pandemic.

- 83.4% of youth reported missing spending time with people who accept and support them as an LGBTQ+ person.

- The vast majority (85.6%) of LGBTQ+ youth reported that their mental health had been worse during the pandemic.

ONLINE ACTIVITIES

- LGBTQ+ youth most commonly reported going online to: watch television, films, or other media with LGBTQ+ themes (76.6%), watch other online videos with LGBTQ+ themes (63.0%), learning about sex and sexuality (61.8%), and to search for information on LGBTQ+ issues (58.2%).

- The majority of LGBTQ+ youth reported going online to look for information about depression, suicide and mental health (76.5%), and sexuality or sexual attraction (74.8%).

- Two-thirds of transgender youth (68.7%) had searched for information on medical transitions in the past year.

- Cisgender males were more likely to search for specific information about sex and sexuality than all other youth, specifically HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, condom use, and the how-tos of sexual activity than all other youth.

HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

- 68.8% of LGBTQ+ youth reported that they thought things would be better in the future—only 5.0% believed that things would get worse.

  There were, however, differences by gender in these hopes for the future:

  Transgender and nonbinary youth were more likely to say that things would be worse than cisgender males and females, with cisgender males being more optimistic about the future than any other group.

METHODS

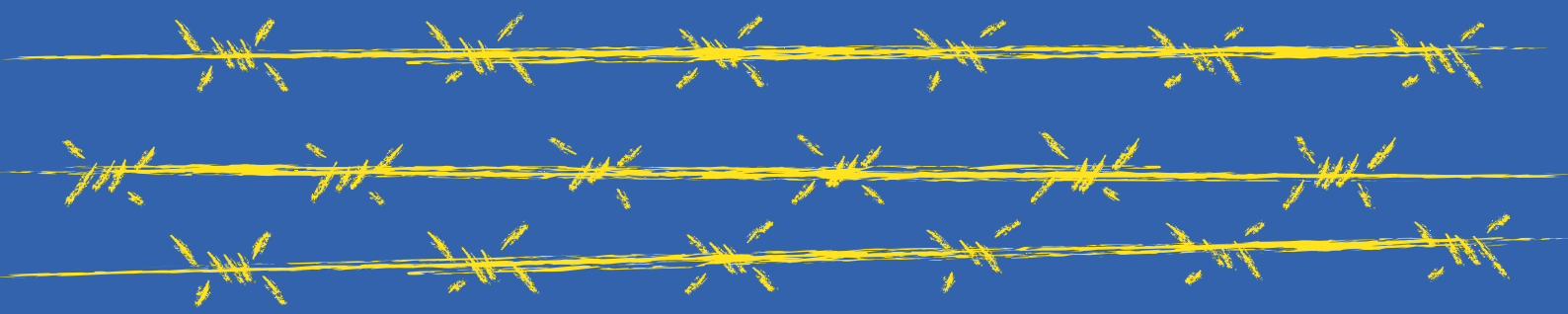
Participants completed an online survey about their experiences with family, religion, and COVID-19 in 2021. Participants who had been in a secondary school in the past year were also asked about their experiences in school, including hearing biased remarks, feeling safe, being harassed, their attitudes about school, their school involvement, and the availability of supportive school resources for LGBTQ+ students during the 2021 academic year.

Youth were eligible to participate in the survey if they were between the ages of 13 and 21, lived in Colombia, and identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or a sexual orientation other than heterosexual (e.g., queer, questioning) or described themselves as transgender or as having another gender identity that is not cisgender ("cisgender" describes a person whose gender identity is aligned with the sex/gender they were assigned at birth, that is to say, a person who is not trans). Data collection occurred in August and September 2021.

The survey was promoted through a three-pronged strategy that included 1) using Sentiido's social media accounts (Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter) and webpage; 2) a combination of paid (Facebook and Instagram) and free ads (Google); 3) and a partnership with MOB (a below-the-line communications and public relations firm). MOB was instrumental in securing the collaboration of allies and influencers who advertised the survey on their different social media platforms, particularly Instagram and TikTok.

It is important to note that the survey protected respondents' identities and data. In the beginning, respondents were informed about the nature and goals of the survey, and personal and contact information was not requested. Participants consented after reading this information before moving forward with the questionnaire. Because the survey is completely anonymous, it did not collect any tracking data, including IP addresses, type of device, or network connection.

PART I EXPERIENCES OF HOSTILE SCHOOL CLIMATE FOR LGBTQ+ STUDENTS



PART I DEMOGRAPHICS.
EXPERIENCES OF HOSTILE SCHOOL CLIMATE FOR LGBTQ+ STUDENTS

The sample of LGBTQ+ students consisted of a total of 1,555 students between the ages of 13 and 18 (average age: 16.6 years). More than one-third of respondents (37.3%) were located in Cundinamarca, where the national capital, Bogotá, is located. Table 1.1 presents participants' demographic characteristics, and Table 1.2 shows the characteristics of the schools attended by participants. Nearly half of the participants identified as Mestizo[8] (48.9%) and more than one-third identified as white (36.4%).

Regarding gender, 47.0% identified as female, 17.7% as male, and 8.0% as transgender. In terms of sexual orientation, 58.8% were bisexual or pansexual and 34.9% identified as gay or lesbian. Students were in grades 6 to 12[9], with the largest numbers in 10th or 11th grades. Students came from schools across Colombia, representing all departments with the exception of Amazonas and Vichada (see Table 2). Over half were in public schools (57.4%) and over a third in religious schools (32.7%), predominately in urban areas (82.2%). As shown in Table 2, over half of the students were in Calendar A schools (55.0%)[10], however, nearly a third did not know what calendar their school followed (31.0%).

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic in 2021, students in Colombia found themselves in a variety of learning environments: either in person, online, or a hybrid mode of learning that mixed features of both. As also shown in Table 1.2, the majority of LGBTQ+ students in Colombia (69.2%) were in a hybrid setting—both in class in person and online during the year—while a small minority were in school in person the entire academic year (6.0%). The type of learning environment did not vary by the type of school (public, private religious, and private non-religious) or grade level. However, there were differences in the type of learning environment by region and by calendar type. With regard to region, students in the Andean region were less likely to have been in an exclusively remote learning modality, while students in the Caribbean region were more likely to have been remote. [11] With regard to calendar type, students in Calendar B schools were more represented in schools requiring in-person classes than expected, and less represented in schools learning only online.[12]

[8] "Mestizo" is a common racial category in Colombia and Latin America. It is often translated as "mixed race." However, the category is part of the region's racist history and ongoing legacy. It originated as part of the attempts to racially classify people according to their levels of pureza de sangre, or "blood purity," during colonial times, and it designated people with both Spanish and Indigenous ancestry. After independence, and particularly during the early twentieth century, new racial theories in the region sought to redefine Latin America's racially mixed demographics as a distinctive and positive trait. Intellectuals like José Vasconcelos in Mexico and José Martí in Cuba (among many others) claimed that centuries mestizaje, or racial mixing, had in fact created a "perfect" or "cosmic race" (in Vasconcelo's words). As a result, the term mestizo gained increasing traction and popularity. However, the term also contributed to the erasure of indigenous and Black communities, reinforcing the idea that they belonged to an idealized past but were not part of the nation's present or future. In other words, the term mestizo became instrumental in the symbolic whitening of the region, as it tried to dilute racial and cultural differences by portraying Eurocentric values and beauty standards as the natural result of the region's sociopolitical, cultural and demographic development. Even today, the term Mestizo is the most popular racial category in the region, and it is very often used as a copout to refuse to acknowledge, engage, and identify with specific racialized communities that continue to experience significant discrimination and violence (including the erasure and epistemic violence performed by the term).

[9] Even though the majority of schools in Colombia go to grade 11, the survey included international schools that go up to 12 grade.

[10] There are two main academic calendars in Colombia. Calendar A's school years goes from February to November, while Calendar B's goes from August to June. Calendar B schools are often international and/or bilingual schools, and therefore are typically associated with a higher socioeconomic status than Calendar A schools.

[11] Chi-square tests was performed looking at region and type of school learning environment (in-person only, online only, and hybrid) and differences in column proportions were examined at $p < .05$: $\chi^2 = 37.44$, $df = 8$, $p<.001$, $\varphi = .16$;

[12] Chi-square tests was performed looking at region and type of school learning environment (in-person only, online only, and hybrid) and differences in column proportions were examined at $p < .05$: $\chi^2 = 14.13$, $df = 6$, $p<.05$, Cramer's $V = .07$;

Table 1.1. Demographics of Survey Participants

Race and Ethnicity (n=1531)		
Afro, Black, Palenquero, or Raizal	2.9%	n=44
White	36.4%	n=558
Roma	0.3%	n=4
Indigenous	2.0%	n=31
Mestizo	48.9%	n=749
Other	3.3%	n=51
Multiracial	6.1%	6.1%

Sexual Orientation (n=1537)		
Gay	17.4%	n=267
Lesbian	17.5%	n=269
Bisexual	47.8%	n=735
Pansexual	11.0%	n=169
Questioning	3.1%	n=48
Other sexual orientation (e.g., marica)	3.2%	n=49

Gender (n=1537)		
Cisgender female	47.0	n=723
Cisgender male	17.7%	n=272
Transgender	8.6%	n=132
Nonbinary/ Genderqueer/ Gender-fluid	12.6%	n=193
Questioning	12.9%	n=198
Other	1.2%	n=19

Mean Age (n = 1,555)	15.2 years

Grade (n=1555)		
6th	1.1%	n=17
7th	7.0%	n=109
8th	17.5%	n=272
9th	22.6%	n=352
10th	24.4%	n=379
11th	24.2%	n=376
12th	1.1%	n=17
Other	2.2%	n=33

Table 1.2. School Characteristics

School Type (n=1536)		
Public	57.4%	n=881
Private, Religious-Affiliated	32.7%	n=502
Other Private	9.9%	n=152

School Size (n=1524)		
Less than 500	17.1%	n=261
From 500 to 1000	36.7%	n=560
From 1000 to 1500	23.0%	n=350
More than 1500	23.2%	n=353

Community Type (n=1519)		
An urban area or city	82.2%	n=1,258
A suburban area or near a city	8.0%	n=122
A small town or rural area	9.8%	n=149

Calendar Type (n=1548)		
Calendar A	55.0%	n=851
Calendar B	12.8%	n=198
Don't know	31.0%	n=480
Other (for example, year-round, personalized)	1.2%	n=19

Type of Learning Environment (n=1554)		
Remote and in-person classes (some kind of hybrid model)	69.2%	n=1,075
All remote classes (with other students from the school)	24.8%	n=386
All in-person classes (on school grounds)	6.0%	n=93

Department (n=1491)		
Antioquia	18.0%	n=269
Arauca	0.2%	n=3
Atlántico	3.5%	n=52
Bolívar	1.4%	n=21
Boyacá	3.0%	n=44
Caldas	2.7%	n=40
Caquetá	0.6%	n=9
Casanare	0.7%	n=11
Cauca	1.0%	n=15
Cesar	2.1%	n=15
Chocó	0.2%	n=3
Córdoba	1.2%	n=32

Department (n=1491)		
Cundinamarca	37.4%	n=557
Guainía	0.1%	n=1
Guaviare	0.1%	n=1
Huila	1.7%	n=25
La Guajira	0.5%	n=7
Magdalena	1.2%	n=18
Meta	2.5%	n=37
Nariño	1.9%	n=29
Norte de Santander	1.6%	n=24
Putumayo	0.3%	n=5
Quindío	1.1%	n=16
Risaralda	2.3%	n=34
San Andrés and Providencia	0.1%	n=2
Santander	3.8%	n=56
Sucre	0.8%	n=12
Tolima	1.7%	n=26
Valle del Cauca	8.2%	n=123
Vaupés	0.1%	n=1

SCHOOL SAFETY

OVERALL SAFETY AT SCHOOL

For LGBTQ+ youth, school can be an unsafe place for a variety of reasons. Students in our survey were asked whether they ever felt unsafe at school during the past year because of a personal characteristic, including sexual orientation, gender, gender expression (i.e., how traditionally "masculine" or "feminine" they were in appearance or behavior), and body size or weight. As shown in Figure 1.1, LGBTQ+ students most felt unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation or gender expression, but also because of their body size or weight:

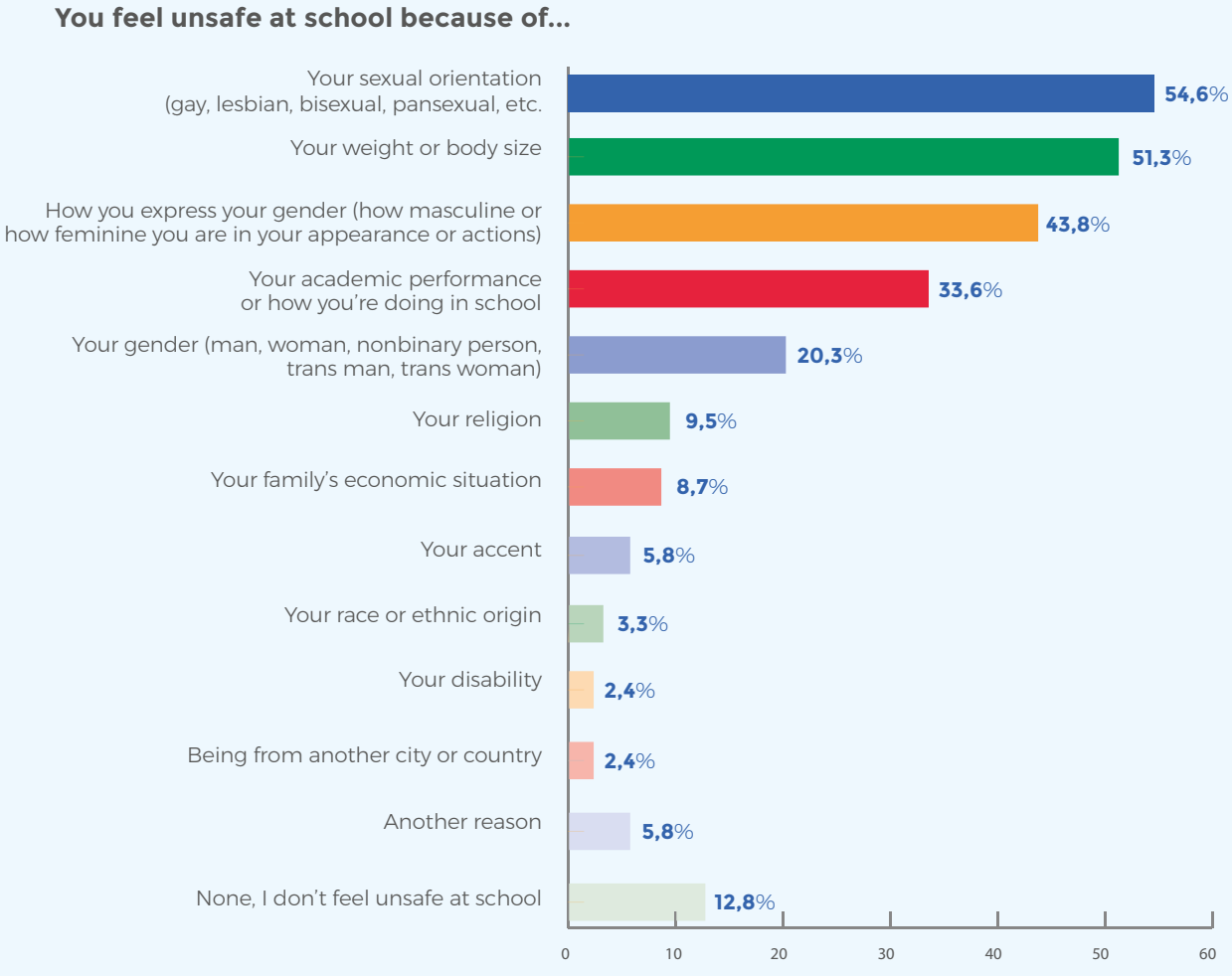
- 54.6% reported feeling unsafe at school in the past year because of their sexual orientation,
- 51.3% felt unsafe in the past year because of their body size or weight (51.3%), and
- 43.8% felt unsafe because of how they expressed their gender.

When students feel unsafe or uncomfortable in school, they may choose to avoid the particular areas or activities where they feel most unwelcome, or they may feel the need to stop attending school altogether. Thus, a hostile school climate can impact an LGBTQ+ student's access to their education. More than one-third of LGBTQ+ students in Colombia reported missing at least one day of school in the last month (36.5%; See Figure 1.2).

Because students across Colombia were in different types of learning environments during the school year due to COVID-19, we might expect that students who were in school in person—whether full-time or part-time—would report feeling more unsafe at school. However, there were no substantial differences in feelings of safety between those students who were in online classes only, in-person classes only, or a hybrid setting. There were also no differences across type of learning environment to how frequently LGBTQ+ students reported missing school for safety reasons.

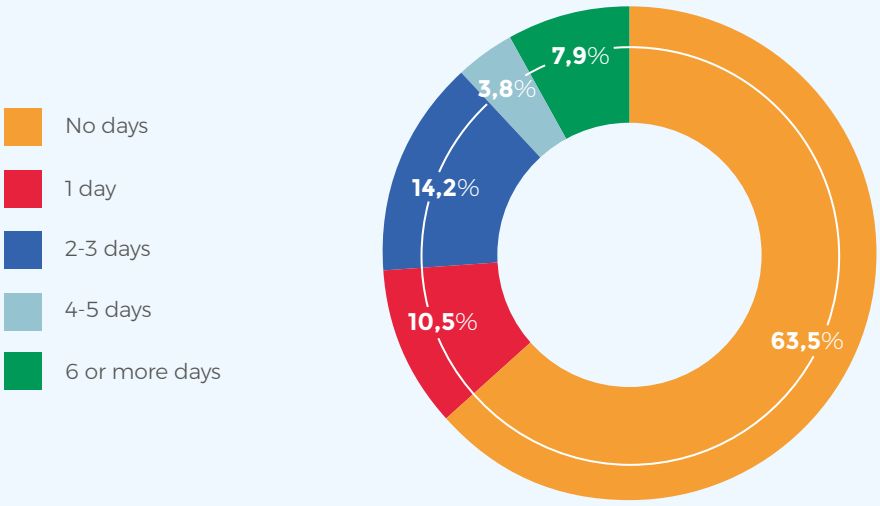
Sentiido and Colombia Diversa conducted the first national survey of LGBTQ+ students in Colombia in 2015. Compared to 2015, LGBTQ+ students in the current survey were less likely to feel unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation (67.0% in 2015 versus 54.6% in 2021) and gender expression (54.8 % in 2015 versus 43.8% in 2021), but they were significantly more likely to feel unsafe because of their gender (6.3% in 2015 versus 20.3% in 2021).[13]

Figure 1.1. Percentage of LGBTQ+ Students Who Feel Unsafe at School Due to Personal Traits, Real or Perceived



[13] The relationship between survey year and feelings of safety was examined through a series of logistic regressions, with demographic characteristics (sexual orientation, gender, age) entered in the first step and year of the survey entered in the second step. For feeling unsafe because of sexual orientation, the model was significant for year of survey: $\chi 2 = 16.32$, df = 1, $p < .001$, Odds Ratio (OR)=.62. For feeling unsafe because of gender expression, the model was significant for year of survey: $\chi 2 = 20.73$, df = 1, $p < .001$, OR = .59. For feeling unsafe because of gender, the model was significant for year of survey: $\chi 2 = 9.50$, df = 1, $p < .001$, OR = 2.11.

Figure 1.2.
How often students skipped one or more classes in person or online because they felt uncomfortable or unsafe in that class



EXPOSURE TO BIASED LANGUAGE

Homophobic, sexist, racist, and other kinds of biased language can create a hostile school environment for students. We asked LGBTQ+ students about their experiences with hearing anti-LGBTQ+ slurs and other types of biased remarks while at school. Because homophobic remarks and negative remarks about gender expression are specifically relevant to LGBTQ+ students, we asked students in our survey additional questions about school staff's use of and responses to hearing language hostile to LGBTQ+ people.

HOMOPHOBIC REMARKS.

We asked students about the frequency of hearing homophobic slurs (such as "maricón," "arepera," or "loca"). As shown in Figure 1.3, the vast majority of LGBTQ+ students heard homophobic remarks at school (92%), and more than half (52.9%) of LGBTQ+ students reported hearing other students make homophobic remarks often or frequently in school. Further, we asked students who heard homophobic remarks in school how pervasive this behavior was among the student population. We also asked students about the frequency of hearing expressions like "Eso es tan gay," "No seas gay" o "Sos tan gay." Use of these expressions was also very common: 56.5% of students heard them often or frequently at school (see also Figure 1.3).

We asked students about the frequency with which they heard homophobic remarks from school staff (see Figure 1.4). It is disturbing that the majority of students (65.5%) reported hearing homophobic remarks from school staff, and about one in five students (22.2%) said they heard these types of remarks from school staff often or frequently.

Students who reported hearing homophobic remarks at school were asked how often teachers or other school staff intervened if they were present. Almost half of the students (42.4%) reported that staff never intervened when present. Less than a fifth (18.2%) reported that these school personnel intervened most of the time or always when homophobic remarks were made in their presence.

In school settings, teachers and school staff bear the responsibility for addressing problems of biased language in school. However, students may also intervene when hearing biased language, especially given that school personnel are often not present during such times. Thus, other students' willingness to intervene when hearing this language may be another important indicator of school climate. However, few students reported that their peers intervened always or most of the time when hearing homophobic remarks (27.3%), and about a third (31.1%) said that their peers never intervened (see Figure 1.5).

Despite these low levels of peer intervention, it is both troubling and worth highlighting that, when comparing school staff to student intervention in cases of bullying or harassment targeting LGBTQ+ students, respondents reported that other students intervened more and more often than school personnel. Students reported that other students intervened "always" or "almost always" more often than school personnel (27.3% said other students intervened vs. 18.2% said school staff intervened). Also, students reported that school personnel "never" intervened at a much higher rate than other students (42.4% of school staff never intervened vs. 31.1% of students). These findings highlight the urgency of training teachers and school personnel on LGBTQ+ identities and issues, and on how to effectively act in cases of SOGIE-relate bullying and harassment.

The frequency of homophobic remarks heard by LGBTQ+ students did not vary by the type of learning environment. However, with regard to homophobic remarks from school personnel, LGBTQ+ students in online-only learning environments in 2021 were more likely to hear these remarks from school personnel than those in in-person only learning environments—67.9% vs. 53.8% of students reporting ever hearing these remarks.

Hearing homophobic remarks from both students and school personnel was significantly lower in 2021 than in 2015. [14] For example, as shown in Figure 1.7, 52.9% heard homophobic remarks "often" or "a lot" in 2021 compared to 69.1% in 2015. Regarding hearing these remarks from school personnel, over half (59.1%) of students in 2015 heard them "often" or "a lot" compared to only 13.6% in 2021.

The majority of LGBTQ+ students report rampant use of homophobic remarks in their schools, and this behavior contributes to a hostile learning environment for this population. Infrequent intervention by school authorities when hearing biased language in school may send a message to students that homophobic language is tolerated. Furthermore, school staff may themselves be modeling poor behavior and legitimizing the use of homophobic language, considering that most students heard school staff make homophobic remarks at some time.

NEGATIVE REMARKS ABOUT GENDER EXPRESSION.

Society often imposes norms for what is considered an appropriate expression of one's gender. Those who express themselves in a manner considered to be atypical may experience criticism, harassment, and sometimes violence. Thus, we asked students two separate questions about hearing comments related to a student's gender expression—one question asked how often they heard remarks about someone not acting "masculine" enough, and another question asked how often they heard comments about someone not acting "feminine" enough.

Findings from this survey demonstrate that negative remarks about someone's gender expression were pervasive in schools. Overall, as shown in Figure 1.6, more than half of LGBTQ+ students reported hearing either type of remark about someone's gender expression often or frequently at school (66.8% and 63.9%, respectively). Remarks about students not acting "masculine" enough were slightly more common than remarks about students not acting "feminine" enough.[15]

In 2021, we also asked whether they heard remarks about gender from school personnel. As shown in Figure 1.8, the majority of students also heard these remarks about gender from school personnel—68.9% reported ever hearing them and 17.8% hearing them "often" or "a lot."

[14] Mean differences in the frequencies of homophobic remarks by survey years were examined using multiple analysis of covariance controlling for demographics characteristics (age, gender, sexual orientation): Pillai's Trace = .19, F(3, 2071) = 94.34, p<.001. Univariate effects were all significant for homophobic remarks from students and from school personnel at p<.05. Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.

[15] Mean differences in the frequencies between types of biased remarks based on gender expression were examined using a repeated measures t-test, and percentages are shown for illustrative purposes. The effect was significant, t(1439) = 4.04, p<.001.

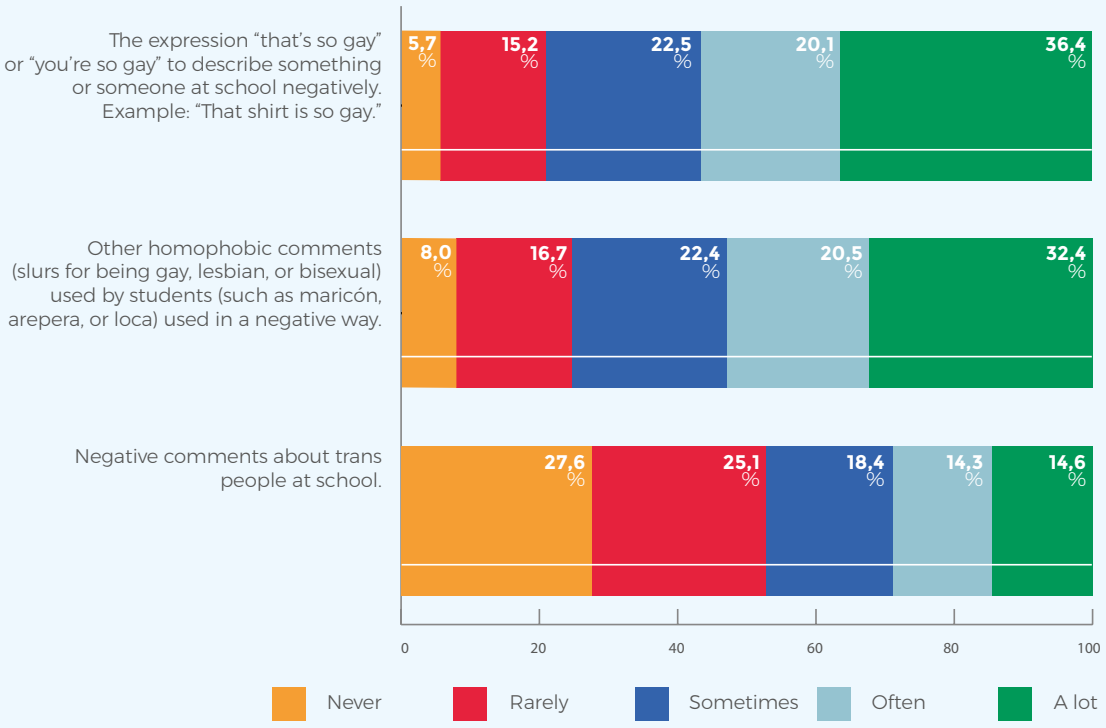
There were no differences in the frequency of hearing negative remarks about gender expression by the type of learning environment in 2021 (online only, in-person only, and hybrid). There were, however, differences between 2021 and 2015. As also shown in Figure 1.7, the frequency of both types of remarks about gender expression from students was higher in 2021 than in 2015.[16] In contrast, these remarks from school personnel were lower in 2021 than in 2015.

NEGATIVE REMARKS ABOUT TRANSGENDER PEOPLE.

Similar to negative comments about gender expression, people may make negative comments about transgender people because they can pose a challenge to traditional ideas about gender. Therefore, we asked students about how often they heard negative remarks specifically about transgender people. More than one quarter (28.9%) of LGBTQ+ students in our survey reported hearing these comments frequently or often (see Figure 1.3). There were no differences in the frequency of hearing negative remarks about transgender people by type of learning environment in 2021. However, there were differences between 2015 and 2021. As also shown in Figure 1.7, the frequency of negative remarks about transgender people was significantly lower in 2021 than in 2015. [17]

The pervasiveness of anti-LGBTQ+ remarks is a concerning contribution to hostile school climates for all LGBTQ+ students. Any negative remark about sexual orientation, gender, or gender expression may signal to LGBTQ+ students that they are unwelcome in their school communities, even if a specific negative comment is not directly aligned to the individual sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression of the LGBTQ+ student who hears it. For example, negative comments about gender expression may disparage transgender or LGB people, even if transgender-specific or homophobic slurs are not used.

Figure 1.3. How Often Students Hear Anti-LGBTQ+ Comments at School



[16] Mean differences in the frequencies of negative remarks about gender expression were examined using multiple analysis of covariance controlling for demographic characteristics (age, gender, sexual orientation): Pillai's Trace = .17, F(3, 1886) = 131.07, p<.001. Univariate effects were all significant for these remarks from students and from school personnel at p<.05. Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.

[17] Mean difference in the frequency of transphobic remarks by survey year was examined using analysis of covariance controlling for demographics characteristics (age, gender, sexual orientation): F(1, 2073) = 58.24, p<.001Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.

Figure 1.4.
How often students have heard homophobic comments from teachers or school staff

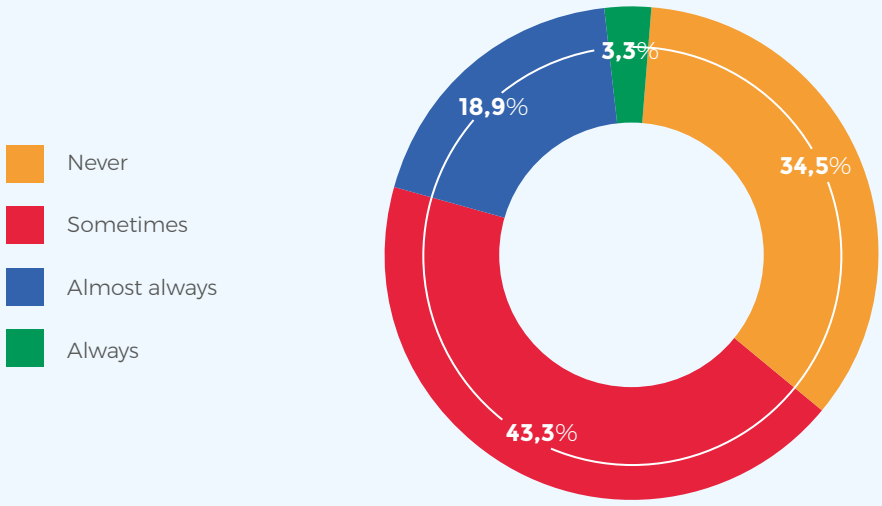


Figure 1.5.
How Often School Staff and Students Intervened When Homophobic Comments Were Made

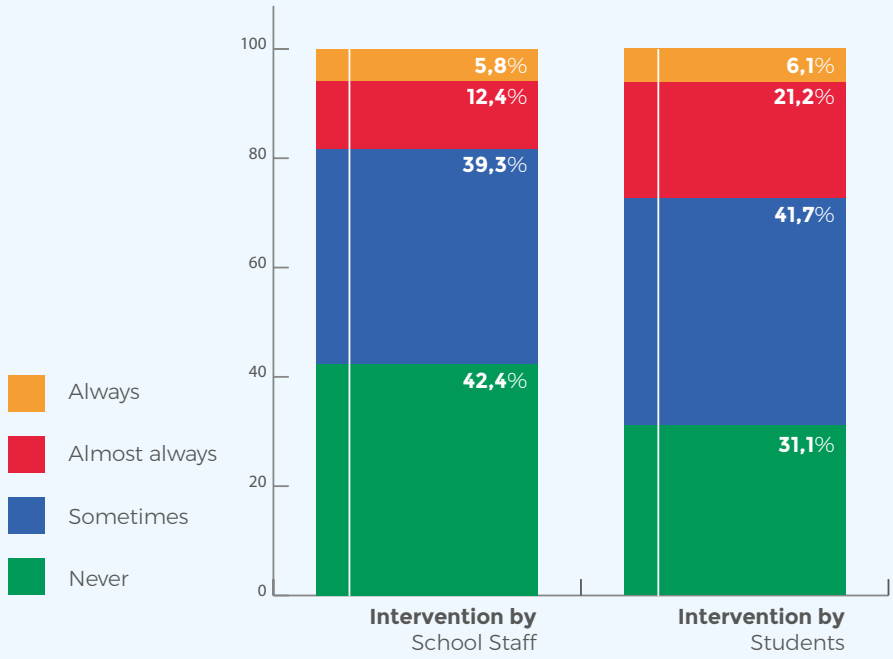


Figure 1.6. How Often Students Hear Comments About Gender Identity

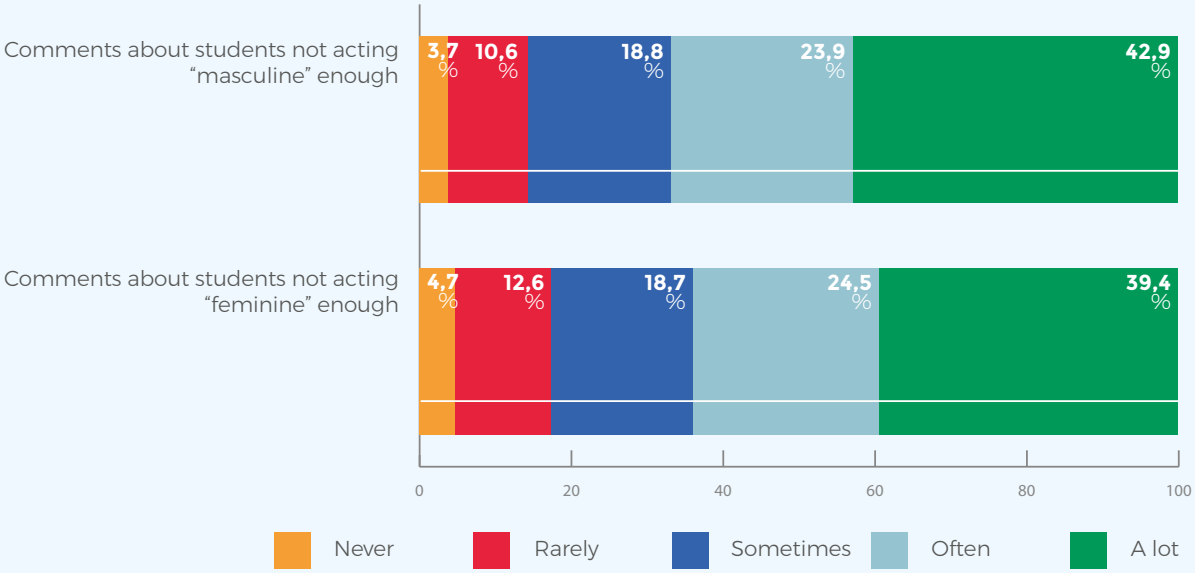
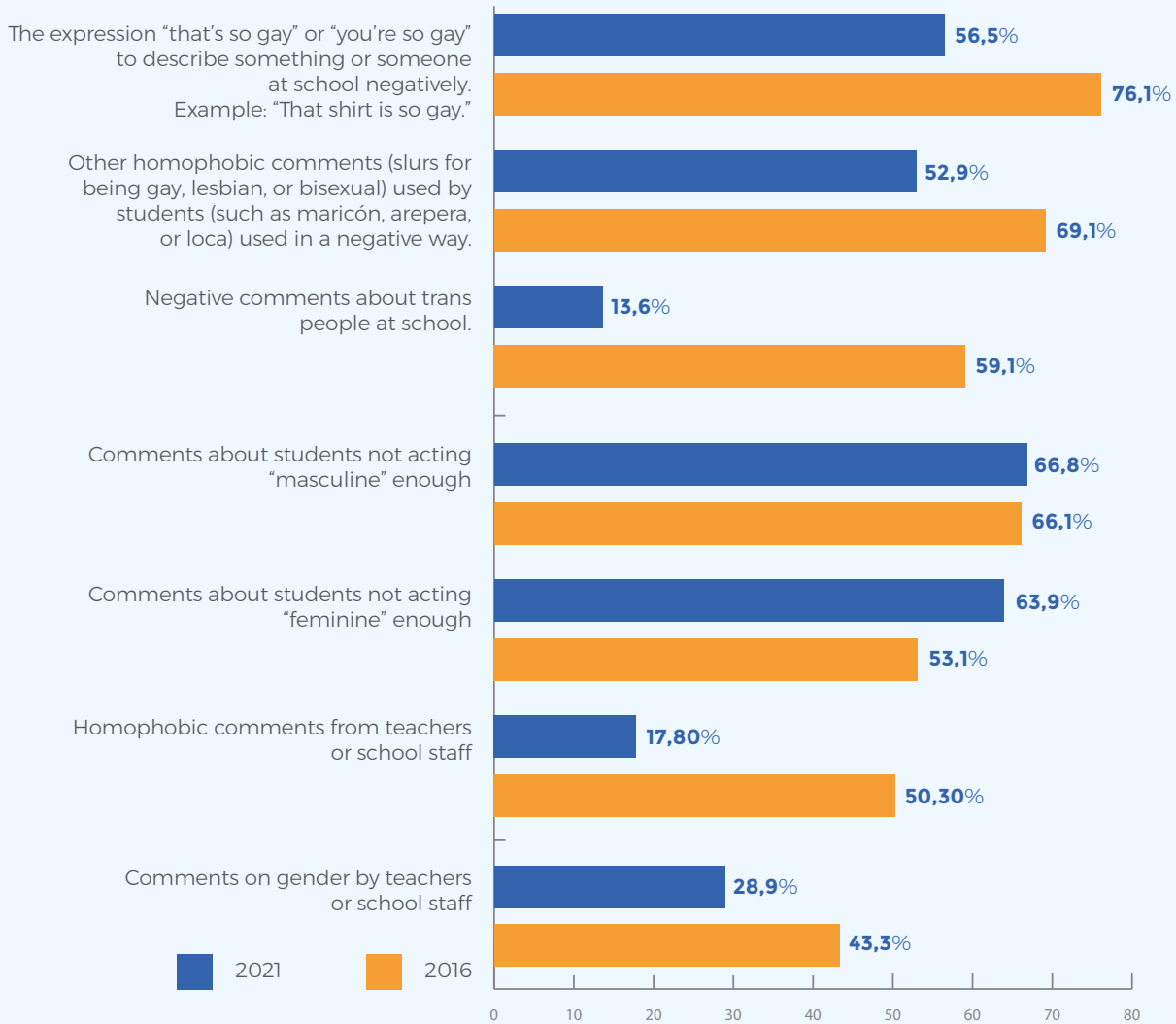


Figure 1.7. Negative Remarks Over Time: 2016 & 2021
(percent reporting "Often" or "A lot")



EXPERIENCES OF HARASSMENT AND ASSAULT AT SCHOOL

Hearing anti-LGBTQ+ remarks in school can contribute to feeling unsafe at school and create a negative learning environment. However, direct experiences with harassment and assault may have even more serious consequences on the lives of these students. We asked survey participants how often ("never," "rarely," "sometimes," "often," or "frequently") they had been verbally harassed, physically harassed, or physically assaulted at school during the past year because of a personal characteristic, including sexual orientation, gender, gender expression (e.g., not acting "masculine" or "feminine" enough), and ethnic origin.

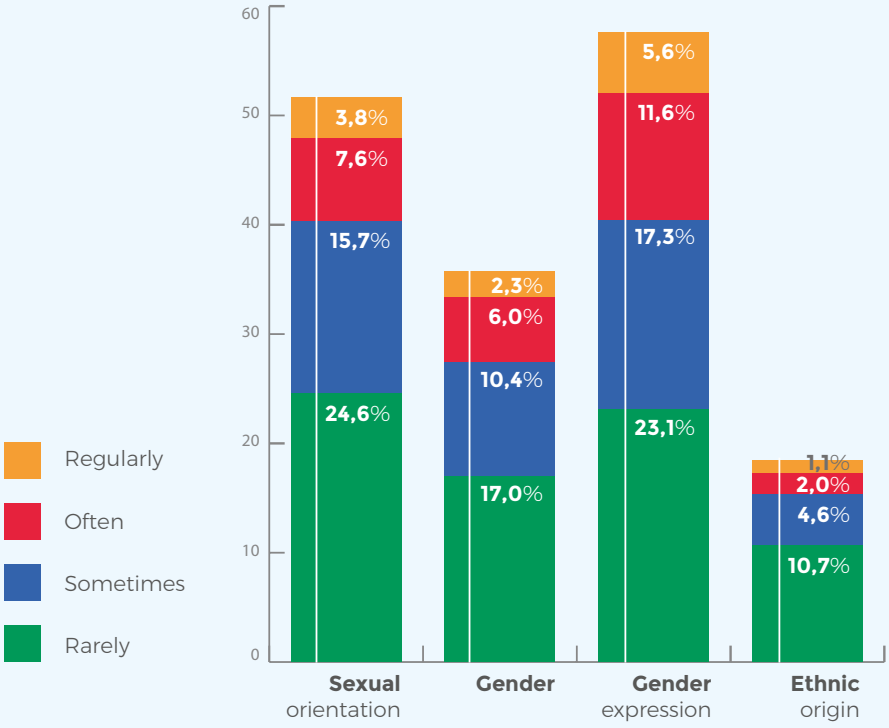
VERBAL HARASSMENT

Students in our survey were asked how often in the past year they had been verbally harassed (e.g., name-calling or threats) at school specifically because of personal characteristics: sexual orientation, gender, gender expression, and race or ethnicity. An overwhelming majority (75.0%) reported being verbally harassed at some point in the past year based on any of these personal characteristics, and 25.0% experienced high frequencies ("often" or "regularly") of verbal harassment. LGBTQ+ students most commonly reported experiencing verbal harassment at school because of how they expressed their gender or their sexual orientation (see Figure 1.9):[18]

- 57.6% of LGBTQ+ students had ever been verbally harassed at school because of their gender expression; 17.2% reported being harassed for this reason "often" or "regularly"; and
- 51.7% had ever been verbally harassed because of their sexual orientation; 11.4% experienced this harassment "often" or "regularly".

Although not as common, many LGBTQ+ students were harassed in school because of their gender or their ethnic origin. Regarding gender, 35.7% reported having been verbally harassed in the past year for this reason, and 8.3% reported high levels of gender-based harassment. Regarding ethnic origin, 18.4% had ever been verbally harassed for this reason in the past year, and 3.1% reported high levels of harassment. There were no significant differences in the frequency of experiencing any form of verbal harassment by type of learning environment.

Figure 1.9. Frequency of Verbal Harassment at School During the Last Year



[18] Mean differences in the frequencies of verbal harassment across types were examined using repeated measures multiple analysis of variance: Pillai's Trace = .32, F(3, 1439) = 225.16, p<.001. Univariate effects showed that the means for all types of remarks were significantly different from one another at p<.001.

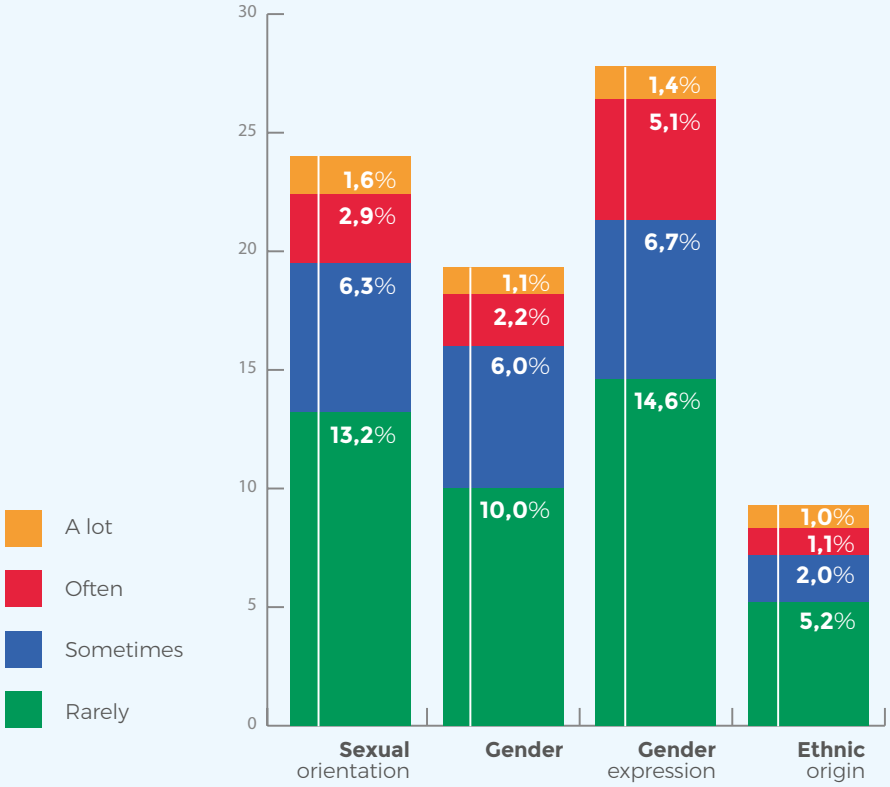
PHYSICAL HARASSMENT

With regard to physical harassment, 29.9% of LGBTQ+ students had been physically harassed (e.g., shoved or pushed) at some point at school during the past year based on any personal characteristic, and 7.0% experienced high frequencies ("often" or "regularly") of physical harassment. Their experiences of physical harassment followed a pattern similar to verbal harassment; students most commonly reported being physically harassed at school because of their sexual orientation or gender expression (see Figure 1.10):[19]

- 27.8% had been physically harassed at school because of their gender expression, with 6.5% experiencing this often or frequently; and
- 24.0% of LGBTQ+ students had been physically harassed at school because of their sexual orientation, and 4.5% reported that this harassment occurred often or frequently.

With regard to other personal characteristics, 19.3% had been physically harassed because of their gender, and 9.3% because of their ethnic origin (see also Figure 1.10). There were no significant differences in the frequency of experiencing any form of physical harassment by type of learning environment (hybrid and in-person).

Figure 1.10. Frequency of Physical Harassment at School During the Last Year (only students who were at school in person some or all of the time during the school year)



[19] Mean differences in the frequencies of physical harassment across types were examined using repeated measures multiple analysis of variance: Pillai's Trace = .12, F(3, 1078) = 47.64, p<.001. Univariate effects were considered at p<.05. Levels of physical harassment based on gender expression were higher than all other types. Physical harassment based on sexual orientation was higher than harassment based on race and gender. The mean level of physical harassment based on gender was higher than physical harassment based on ethnic origin were not significantly different. Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.

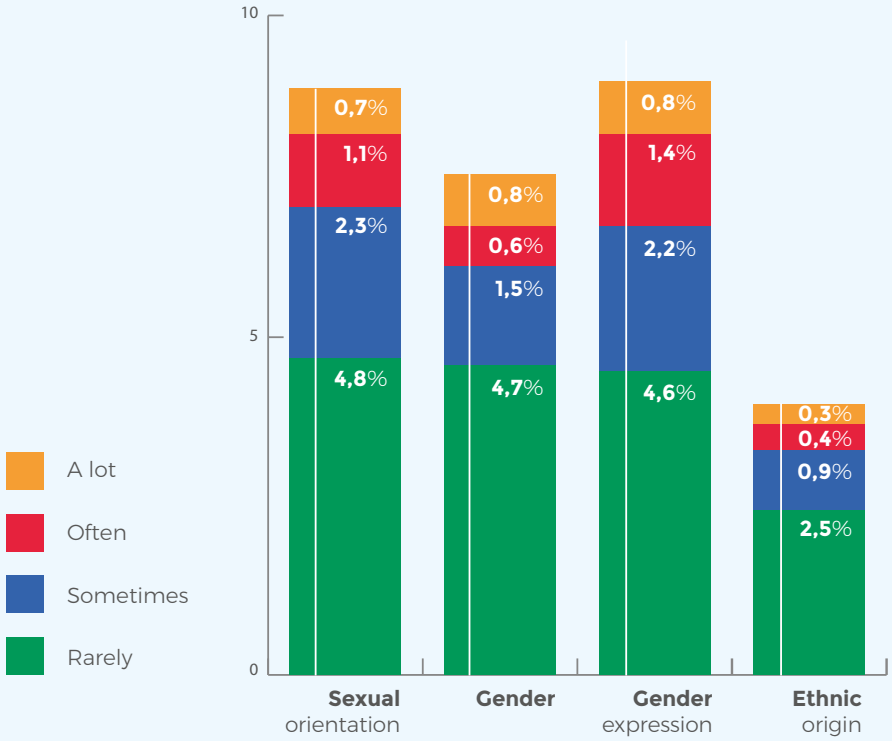
PHYSICAL ASSAULT

LGBTQ+ students were less likely to report experiencing physical assault (e.g., punched, kicked, or injured with a weapon) at school than verbal or physical harassment, which is not surprising given the more severe nature of assault. Nonetheless, 11.2% of students in our survey were physically assaulted at school during the past year for any personal characteristic (see Figure 1.16):

- 8.9% of LGBTQ+ students were assaulted at school because of their sexual orientation, and
- 9.0% were assaulted at school because of how they expressed their gender.

Physical assault based on ethnic origin was significantly less common than physical assault based on other personal characteristics (see also Figure 1.16), and there were no differences in the frequency of physical assault based on sexual orientation, gender, and gender expression.[20] There were no significant differences in the frequency of experiencing any form of physical assault by type of learning environment (hybrid and in-person).

Figure 1.11. Frequency of Physical Assault at School During the Last Year (only students who were at school in person some or all of the time during the school year)

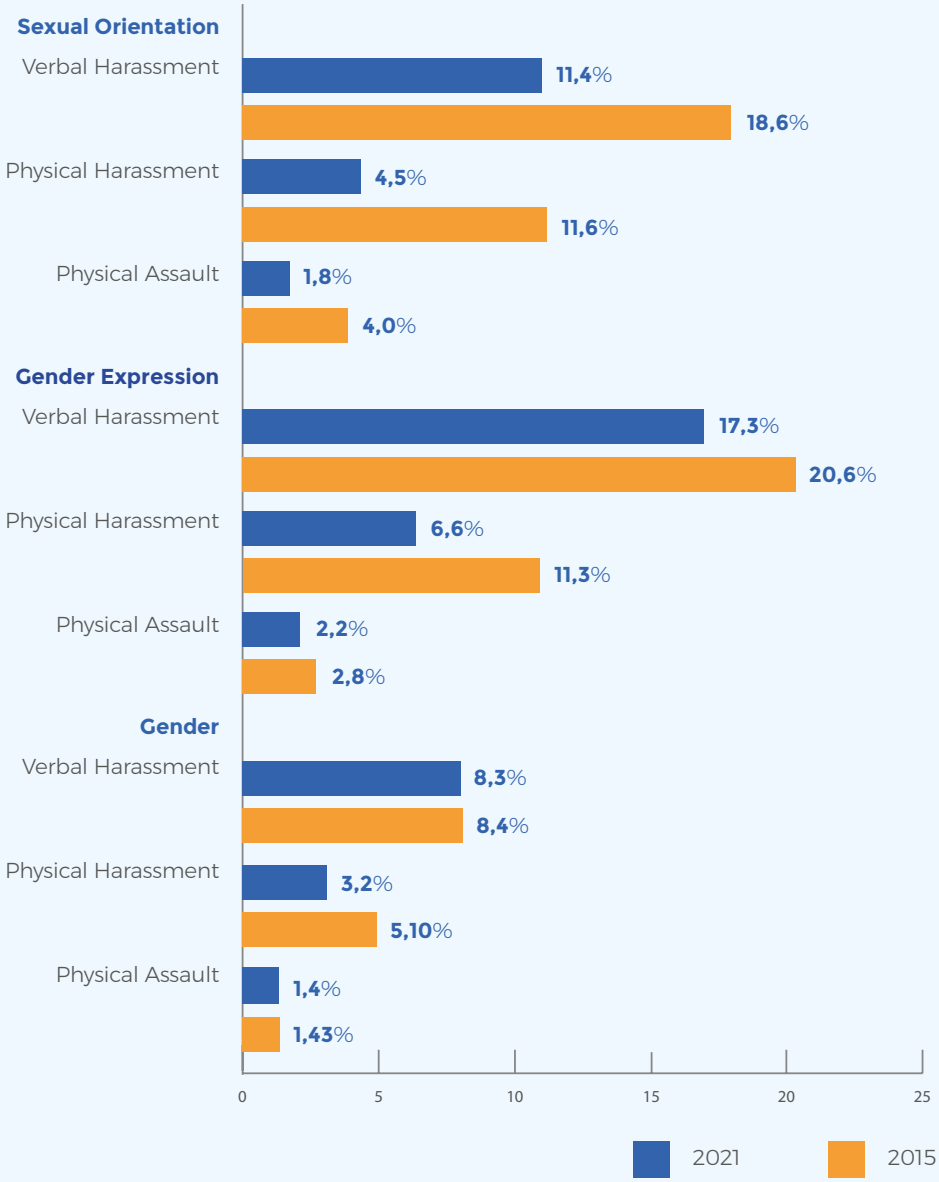


[20] Mean differences in the frequencies of physical assault across types were examined using repeated measures multiple analysis of variance: Pillai's Trace = .08, F(3, 1082) = 13.88, p<.001. Univariate effects were considered at p<.01. Level of physical assault based on ethnic origin was significantly lower than all other types. Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.

DIFFERENCES IN HARASSMENT AND ASSAULT OVER TIME

Verbal and physical harassment and physical assault were lower in 2021 than in 2015 regarding sexual orientation, gender expression, and gender.[21] For example, as shown in Figure 1.12, 18.6% of LGBTQ+ students in 2015 reported high levels of verbal harassment related to sexual orientation ("often" or "regularly") compared to 11.4% of LGBTQ+ students in 2021. There were no differences over time in the levels of harassment or assault regarding ethnic origin. These findings point to the need for an intersectional approach when seeking to understand the experiences and needs of LGBTQ+ youth. Such an approach would consider how categories of race, ethnicity, gender, class, and (dis)ability, among others, may intersect to compound discrimination and violence.

Figure 1.12. Differences in Experiences of Verbal Harassment by Survey Year
(Percentage of the highest levels of verbal harassment "often" or "regularly")



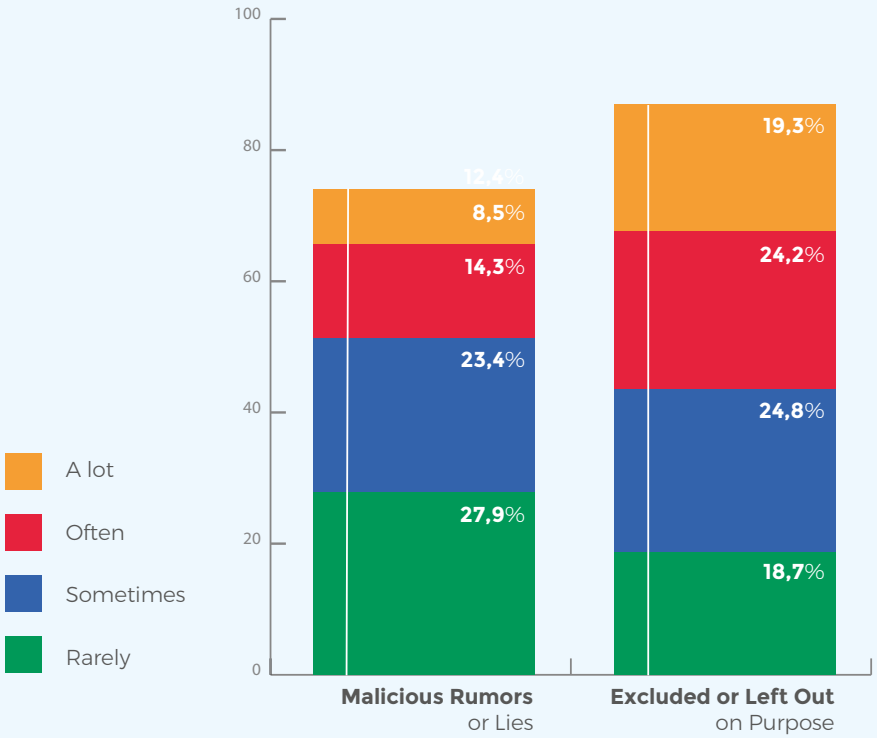
[21] Mean differences in the frequencies of harassment and assault based on sexual orientation, gender, gender expression, and ethnic origin across survey years were examined using multiple analysis of covariance controlling for demographic characteristics (age, gender, sexual orientation): Pillai's Trace = .05, F(12, 1399) = 6.41, p<.001. Univariate effects were considered at p<.05. Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.

RELATIONAL AGGRESSION

Research on school-based bullying and harassment often focuses on physical or overt acts of aggressive behavior; however, it is also important to examine related forms of aggression that can damage peer relationships, such as spreading rumors or excluding students from peer activities. We asked participants how often they experience two common forms of relational aggression: being purposefully excluded by peers and being the target of mean rumors or lies. As illustrated in Figure 1.12 the majority of LGBTQ+ students (74.1%) in our survey had mean rumors or lies told about them at school, and nearly a quarter (22.8%) experienced this often or frequently. The vast majority of students (87.0%) also reported that they had felt deliberately excluded or left out by other students, and 43.5% reported experiencing this often or frequently. Considering the type of learning environment, LGBTQ+ students who were in full-time in-person classes reported the highest levels of this behavior than others, and those who were in full-time online classes reported the lowest levels.[22]

Compared to findings from our 2015 survey, LGBTQ+ students in 2021 reported having had rumors spread about them less—22.8% of students in 2021 reported high levels (often or regularly) compared to 35.8% in 2015. In contrast, LGBTQ+ students in 2021 reported higher levels of feeling deliberately excluded or left out than in 2015—43.5% of students in 2021 reported high levels of this behavior, compared to 30.5% in 2015.[23]

Figure 1.13.
How Often LGBTQ+ Students Experienced Other Kinds of Harrassment at School in the Last Year



[22] Mean differences in the frequencies of rumors and exclusion across survey years were examined using multiple analysis of covariance controlling for demographic characteristics (age, gender, sexual orientation): Pillai's Trace = .04, F(2, 2070) = 45.71, p<.001. Univariate effects were considered at p<.05. The mean for rumors was significantly higher in 2016 and the mean for exclusion was significantly higher in 2021. Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.

[23] Mean differences in the frequencies of rumors and exclusion across survey years were examined using multiple analysis of covariance controlling for demographic characteristics (age, gender, sexual orientation): Pillai's Trace = .04, F(2, 2070) = 45.71, p<.001. Univariate effects were considered at p<.05. The mean for rumors was significantly higher in 2016, and the mean for exclusion was significantly higher in 2021. Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.

ELECTRONIC HARASSMENT OR "CYBER-BULLYING"

Electronic harassment (often called "cyberbullying") is using an electronic medium, such as a mobile phone or internet communications, to threaten or harm others. In recent years there has been much attention given to this type of harassment, as access to the internet, mobile phones, and other electronic forms of communication have increased for many young people. In 2021, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the vast majority of students were in school online (94.0%), either completely or alternating with in-person schooling. Thus, LGBTQ+ students may have been exposed to more cyberbullying from their classmates. We asked students how often they had experienced cyberbullying from other students because of their sexual orientation, gender, gender expression, ethnic origin, or some other reason. Half of LGBTQ+ students (50.3%) experience some form of cyberbullying from students in their school during the 2021 academic year. As shown in Figure 1.13, LGBTQ+ students in Colombia most commonly experienced cyberbullying because of their sexual orientation (33.8% reporting any experience) and for other reasons (32.6%), and more than one-quarter had ever experienced cyberbullying from students because of their gender expression.[24] In addition, as shown in Figure 1.14, over half of LGBTQ+ students (54.4%) had experienced cyberbullying from people outside their school, with 11.7% reported it occurred "often" or "regularly."

There were few differences by type of learning environment in the frequency of experiencing cyberbullying.[25] In fact, the only significant difference was in being cyberbullied by people outside their school, which was higher for those who were exclusively in in-person classes than for those who were remote or in a hybrid learning environment. Thus, it does not appear that spending more time online because of school was related to a greater risk for cyberbullying. Further, it may be that students in in-person schools during 2021 were at greater risk for cyberbullying when spending time online outside of school.

We further asked students in our survey how they had experienced cyberbullying. In other words, what methods students at their school had used to harass or threaten them online. As shown in Figure 1.15, among students who had been cyberbullied, the majority (71.8%) reported that it was through private messages on social media, a third (32.1%) reported it was through text messages, and more than a quarter (29.1%) reported it was through social media posts that others could see.[26] Not surprisingly, there were no differences across methods of cyberbullying based on the type of learning environment.

[24] Mean differences in types of cyberbullying from students at school were examined using repeated measures multivariate analysis of variance and percentages are shown for illustrative purposes. The multivariate effect was significant, Pillai's Trace = .51, F(4, 591) = 153.79, p<.001. Univariate analyses were considered significant at p<.05. There were no differences between the frequency of cyberbullying regarding sexual orientation and for some other reason, but each was higher than all others. Cyberbullying regarding gender expression was higher than cyberbullying regarding gender and ethnic origin, and cyberbullying regarding gender was higher than cyberbullying regarding ethnic origin

[25] Mean differences in the frequencies of cyberbullying across learning environment were examined using multiple analysis of variance: Pillai's Trace = .02, F(12, 2720) = 13.88, p<.01. Univariate effect was only significant for cyberbullying from people outside of school at p<.05.

[26] Mean differences in the manner of cyberbullying using repeated measures multivariate analysis of variance and percentages are shown for illustrative purposes. The multivariate effect was significant, Pillai's Trace = .79, F(7, 669) = 354.63, p<.001. Univariate analyses were considered significant at p<.05. Each manner of cyberbullying was significantly different with the following exceptions: social media posts that others could see and text messages were not significantly different, and email and other forms of communications were not significantly different.

Figure 1.14.
Frequency of Being Harassed or Threatened Online by Students From School
(for example, on social media, over text messages, or in a virtual classroom)

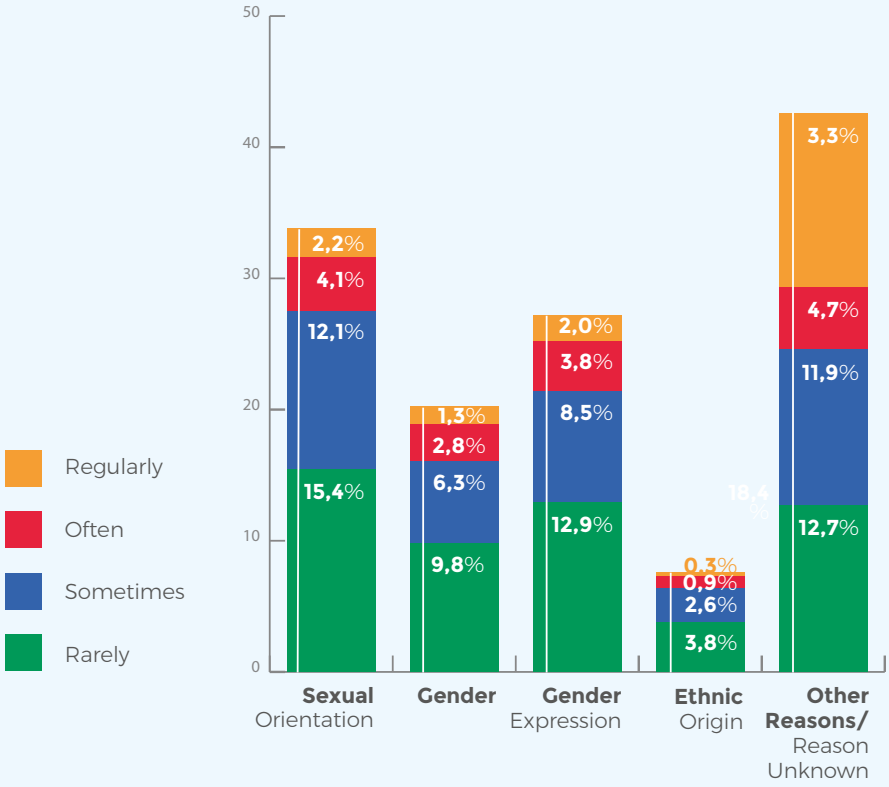
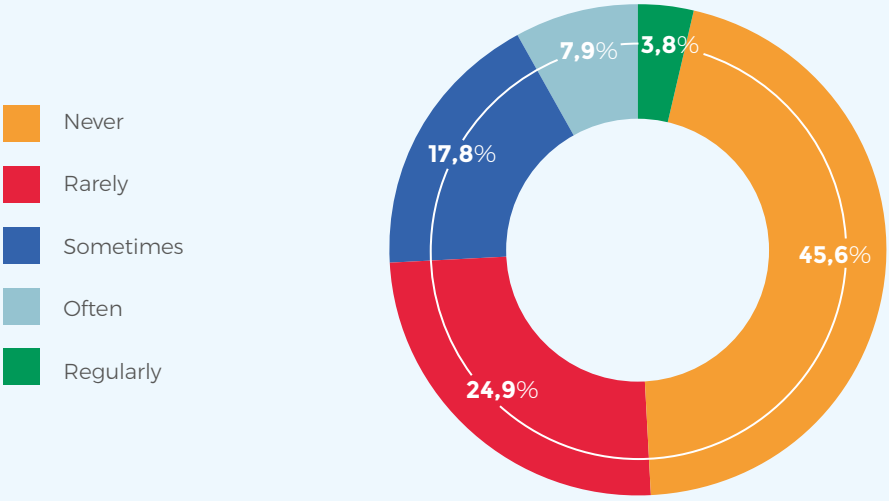


Figure 1.15.
Frequency of being harassed or threatened online or over the phone by people who are not from school



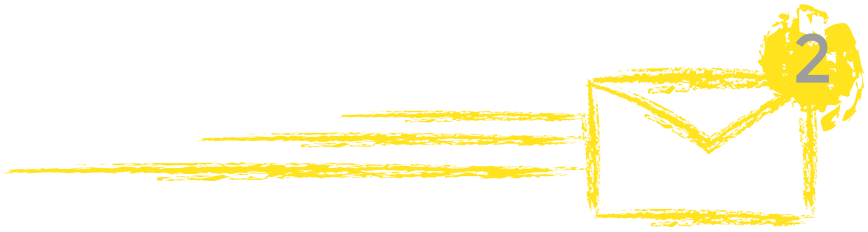
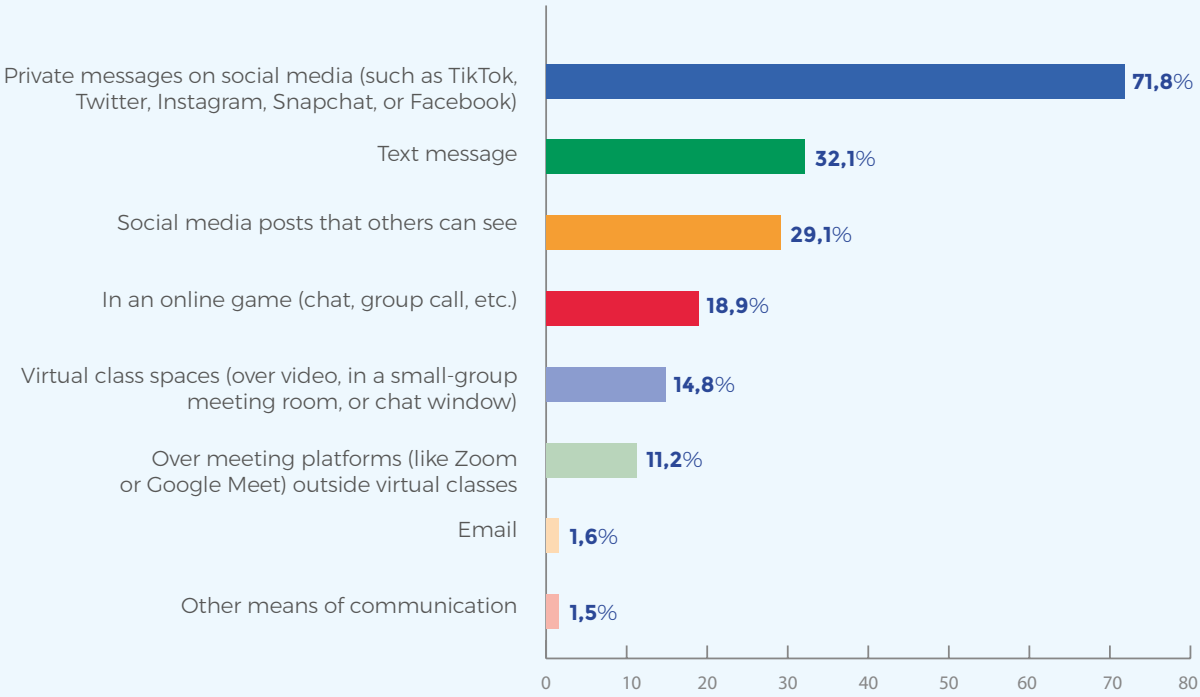


Figure 1.16. Means by Which Students Were Harassed or Threatened Online in the Last Year (percent among only students who had experienced cyberbullying)



EXPERIENCES OF DISCRIMINATION AND DISCIPLINE

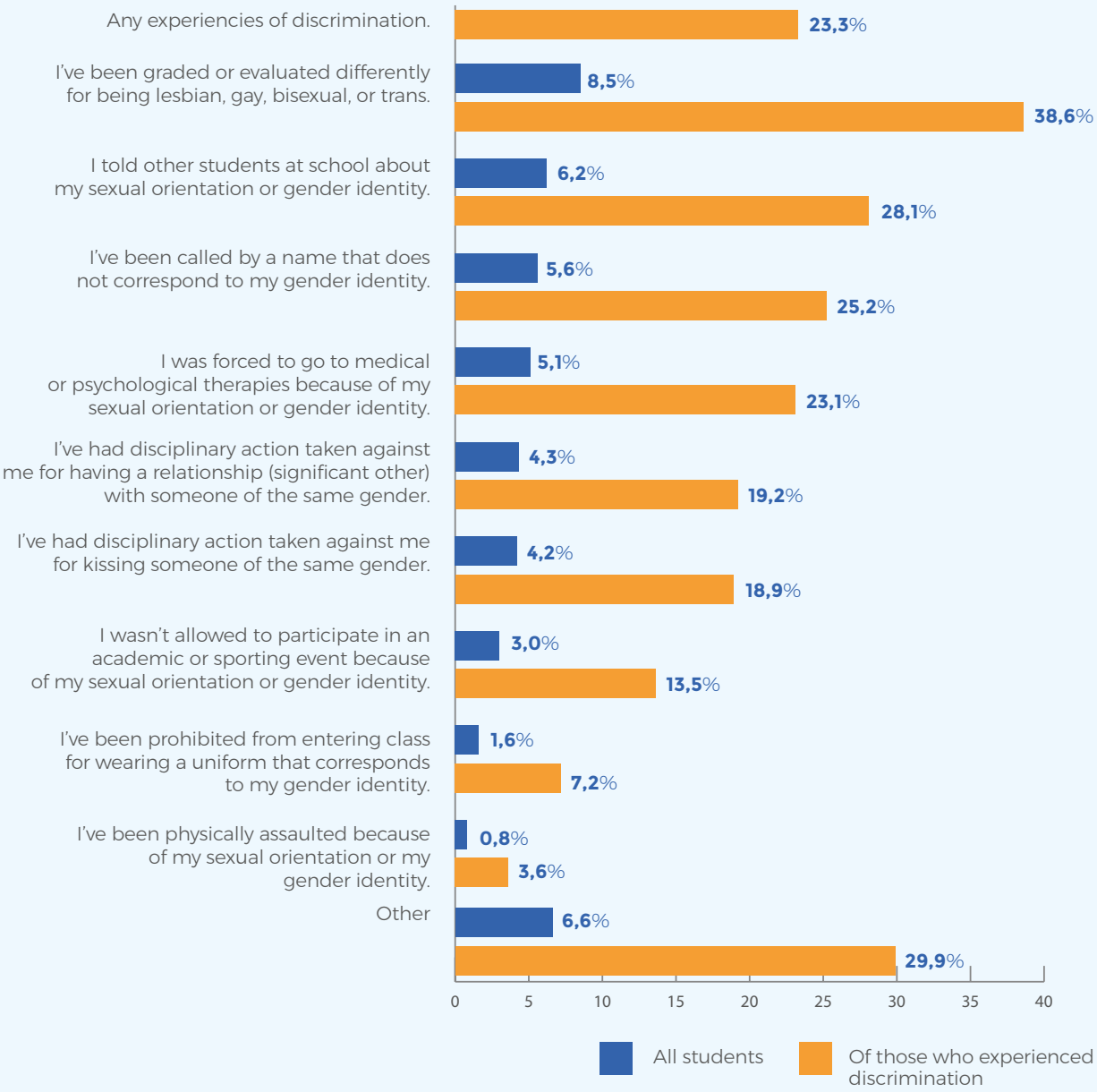
Hearing homophobic language and negative remarks about gender expression in the hallways and directly experiencing victimization from other students clearly contribute to a hostile climate for LGBTQ+ students. Certain school policies and practices may also contribute to negative experiences for LGBTQ+ students and make them feel as if they are not valued by their school communities.

In our survey, we asked students about a number of specific LGBTQ-related discriminatory policies and practices at their school that they may have personally experienced. As shown in Figure 1.17, nearly 1 in 4 students (23.3%) indicated that they had experienced any of these LGBTQ-related discriminatory policies and practices. Figure 1.17 also shows each type of discrimination that students were asked about and the percentage of students who reported it from the total sample and from just the students who experienced any discrimination.

The most common form of discrimination was having been rated or evaluated differently because they were LGBTQ+. 38.6% of students who experienced any kind of discrimination and 8.5% of the total sample reported having experienced this. Numerous students who experienced academic discrimination also reported having experienced some other form of discrimination (29.9% of those students who experienced discrimination, 6.6% of the total sample). The vast majority of these other forms of discrimination reported were faculty making negative comments about LGBTQ+ people in general or making disparaging comments directly about the individual student's identity.

Another troubling finding is that although discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity and expression is prohibited explicitly in educational settings in Colombia, 14.9% of LGBTQ+ students reported that they had had a disciplinary process against them at school for being LGBTQ+.

Figure 1.17. Experiences of Discipline and Discrimination for Being LGBTQ+ in School



REPORTING OF SCHOOL-BASED HARASSMENT AND ASSAULT

When harassment and assault occur in school, we expect the teachers and school personnel to address the problems effectively. However, students may not always feel comfortable reporting these events to staff. In our survey, we asked those students who had experienced harassment or assault in the past school year how often they had reported the incidents to school staff. As shown in Figure 1.18, almost 70% of students never reported incidents to staff.

We asked students who did not always report harassment or assault their reasons for not reporting it. As shown in Figure 1.19, over half (53.7%) said the reason for not reporting was that they did not want to be seen as a "snitch" or a "gossip," and nearly half (47.7%) said that they did not want to be "outed" to their family. Over a third of students gave the reasons that they handled the situation themselves (40.5%), they thought school personnel would not do anything about it (39.8%), and they did not think it was that serious (38.4%).

Students in our survey who said that they had reported incidents of victimization to school staff were also asked how effective staff members were in addressing the problem. As shown in Figure 1.20, school staff often did not respond, and, when they did, their responses were not very effective. More than a third of students (32.2%) thought that the response from school staff was "completely ineffective" and 26.8% said it was "somewhat effective." Only 8.6% of students reported that staff responded "very effectively." We also asked these students how school staff responded the last time they reported victimization to them. As shown in Figure 1.21, 32.7% were told to ignore it, and 26.2% said the staff member did nothing.

Given that family members may be able to advocate on behalf of the student to school personnel, we also asked students if they reported harassment or assault to their parent or guardian or to another family member). 66.1% of students said they never told a family member (see also Figure 1.18), and only 5.5% of students said they always did. Students who had reported incidents to a family member were asked how often a family member had talked to school staff about the incident, and more than two-thirds (68.0%) said that the family member had ever addressed the issue with school staff (see Figure 1.22).

A finding that is worth highlighting is that reporting to adults has gone down since 2015, both for school personnel (59.4% of students never told school staff in 2015 vs. 69% in 2021) and for a family member (60.1% of students never told a family member in 2015 vs. 66.1% in 2021).

Low levels of reporting to adults (either school staff or a family member) signal a lack of trust between LGBTQ+ youth and their educators and caregivers and poses a serious problem in addressing SOGIE-based violence and harassment. Lack of reporting reinforces the misconception that LGBTQ+ bullying is not a challenge that most schools face, or that it is a matter of isolated cases. In other words, it allows the victimization of LGBTQ+ students to remain an "invisible problem." Furthermore, if adults (at school and at home) are unaware that students are being subjected to this kind of violence, they may inadvertently allow it to continue. Finally, this lack of knowledge poses considerable challenges to the design, implementation, and monitoring of effective programs and initiatives that protect LGBTQ+ youth from discrimination and violence in schools.

Figure 1.18. How Often LGBTQ+ Students Report Incidents of Harassment and Assault

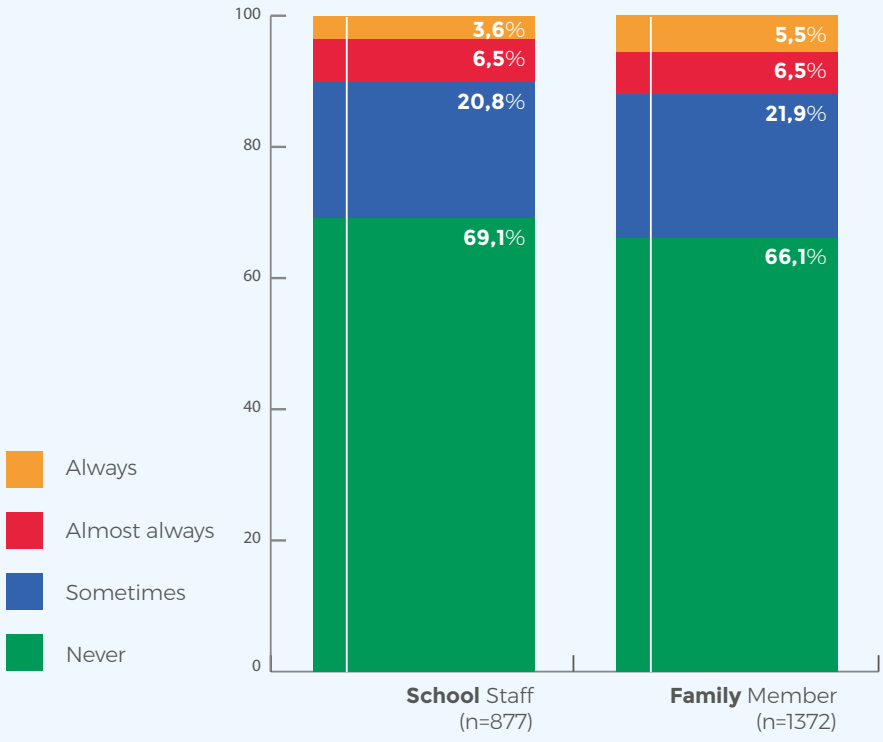


Figure 1.19. Why didn't you always report aggression or an attack to a teacher or staff member at school?

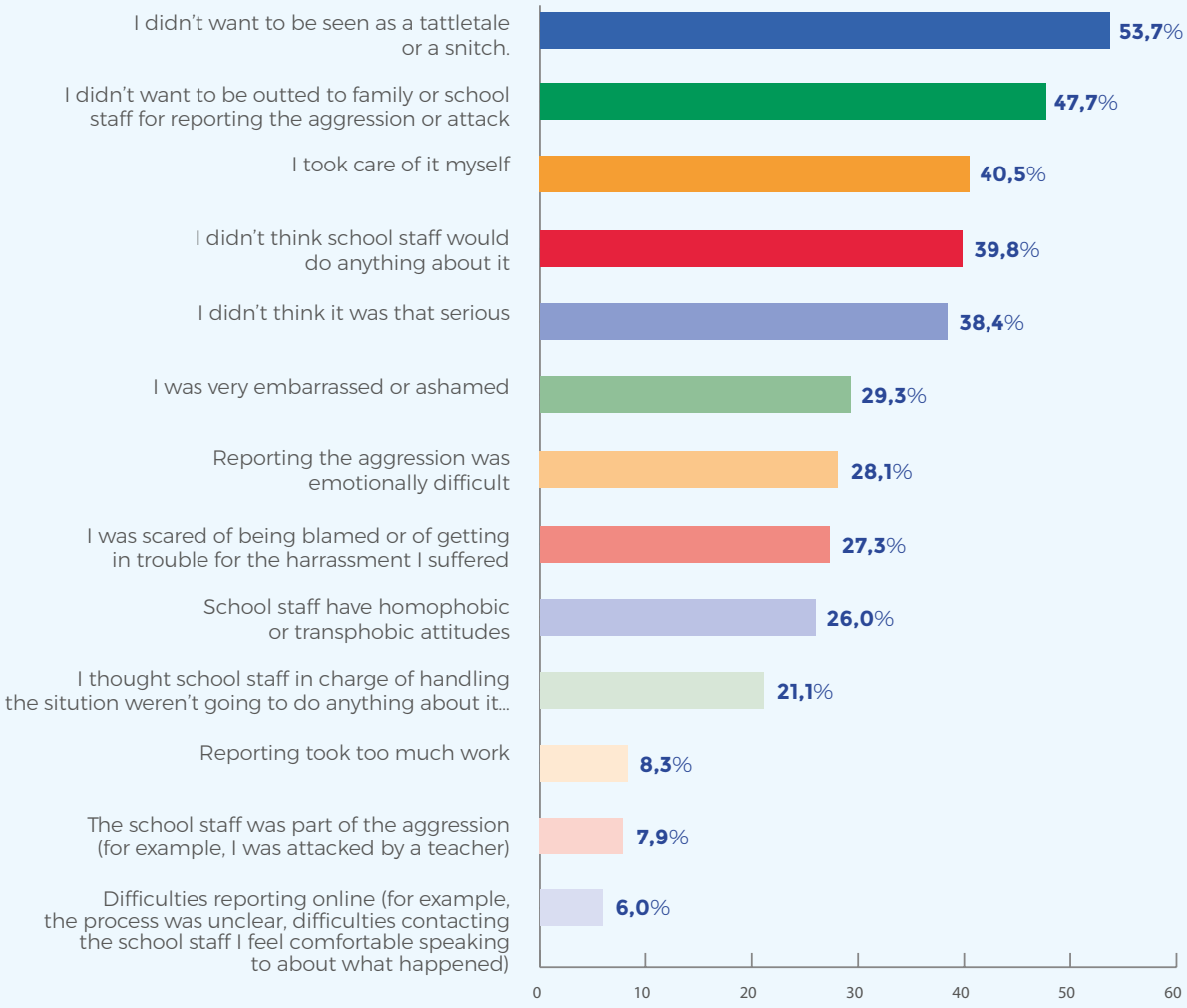


Figure 1.20. Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Reporting Incidents of Harassment and Assault to School Staff (n = 259)

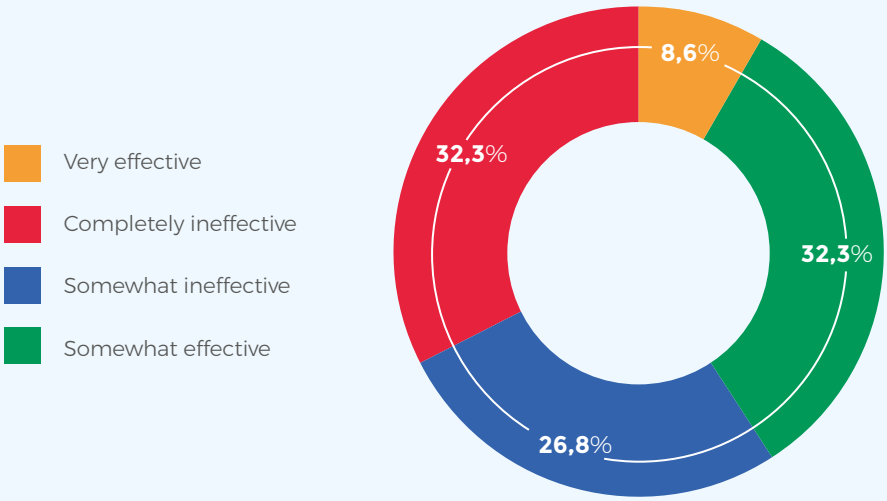


Figure 1.21. What did the teacher or staff member do when you informed them that you had suffered an attack or harassment?
(percent of those students who ever reported harassment to school personnel)

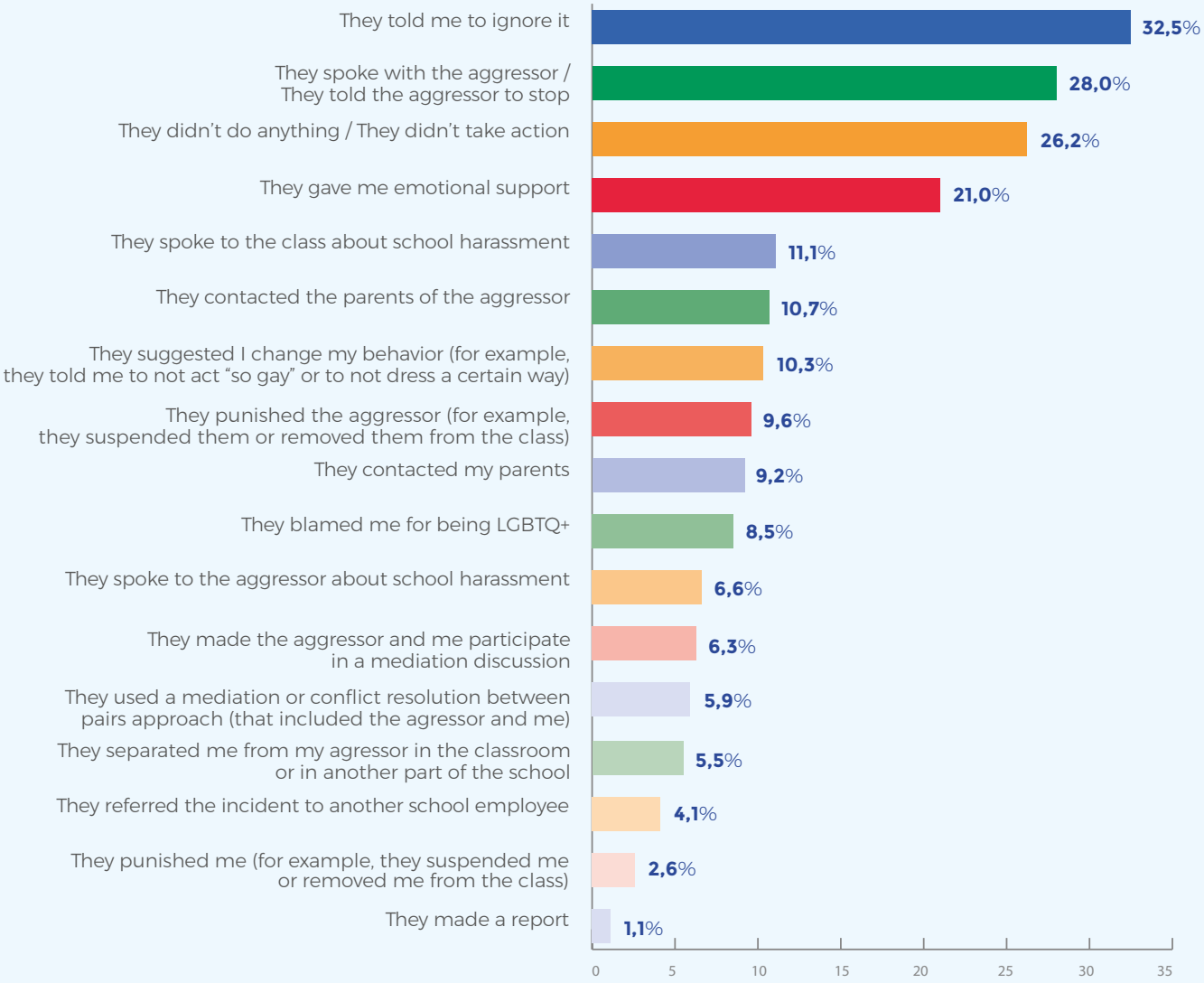
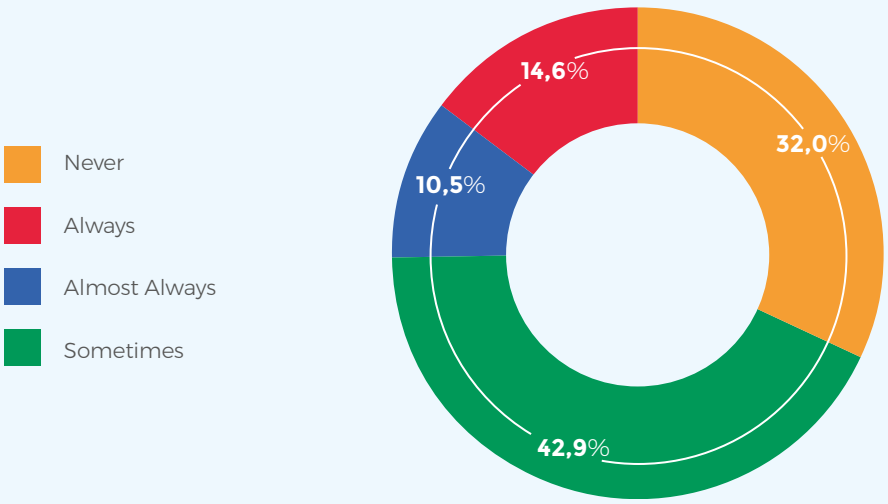


Figure 1.22. How Often a Family Member Spoke with School Personnel About the Harassment or Attack (n=459)



HOSTILE SCHOOL CLIMATE AND EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

Although all students deserve equal access to education, LGBTQ+ students can face a variety of obstacles to academic success and opportunity. Given the hostile climates encountered by LGBTQ+ students, it is understandable that some would have poorer outcomes in school. In this section, we examine in closer detail the educational experiences of LGBTQ+ students, particularly how they might be affected by a hostile school climate.

EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS AND FUTURE PLANS

In order to examine the relationship between school climate and educational outcomes, we asked students about their aspirations for post-secondary education, including their intended field of study. We also asked whether they intended to graduate from high school, as well as their highest level of expected educational attainment.

Educational Aspirations. When asked about their aspirations with regard to post-secondary education, the vast majority of LGBTQ+ students indicated they plan to pursue post-secondary education, with 26.9% planning to achieve a bachelor's degree as their highest education level and a further 63.1% hoping to achieve a graduate degree (see Figure 1.23).

Even though only a minority of LGBTQ+ students did not plan on pursuing post-secondary education, it was important to examine whether future educational aspirations were related to negative school climate. As shown in Figure 1.24, LGBTQ+ students who experienced higher levels of verbal harassment related to their sexual orientation, gender expression or gender were much less likely to plan on pursuing their education after high school.[27] On this point, 3.6% of students who experienced low levels of verbal harassment regarding their sexual orientation did not plan on post-secondary education, compared to 8.5% who experienced high levels.

It should be noted that our survey only included students who were in school during the 2021 school year. Thus, these figures cannot be taken to reflect an overall percentage of LGBTQ+ youth planning to pursue post-secondary education in Colombia, since the figures would not have included students who had already dropped out of high school.

Academic Achievement. Students were asked to describe their academic performance in school in the past year from "unsatisfactory" to "excellent." As shown in Figure 1.25, more than half of students reported their performance as "good" or "excellent" (55.2%). More severe victimization was related to lower academic achievement among LGBTQ+ students. As shown in Figure 1.26, LGBTQ+ students who had higher levels of verbal harassment in school because of their sexual orientation, gender expression, or gender were less likely to report doing well academically than students who experienced less. [28]

Absenteeism. Students who are regularly harassed or assaulted in school may attempt to avoid these hurtful experiences by not attending school and, accordingly, may be more likely to miss school than students who do not experience such victimization. We found that experiences of harassment and assault were, in fact, related to missing days of school.[29] As shown in Figure 1.27, students were twice as likely to have missed school in the past month if they had experienced higher levels of victimization related to their sexual orientation, gender expression or gender. For example, 61.9% who experienced higher levels of verbal harassment regarding their sexual orientation missed at least one day of school in the prior month, compared to 33.1% of those who experienced lower levels of harassment (see Figure 1.27).

[27] Point-biserial correlations were performed examining a categorical variable indicating whether or not the student intended on not pursuing their education beyond high school and the frequencies of verbal harassment related to sexual orientation, gender expression, gender, and ethnic origin. All but ethnic origin were significantly related to the education variable at $p < .01$. Sexual orientation: $r(1426) = .07$; Gender Expression: $r(1382) = .09$; Gender: $r(1376) = .09$.

[28] Because gender is often related to school performance, partial correlations were performed examining the relationships of school performance with the frequencies of verbal harassment related to sexual orientation, gender expression, gender, and ethnic origin controlling for gender. Partial correlations for all but harassment related to ethnic origin were significant at $p < .05$: Sexual Orientation: $r(1498) = -.06$, $p < .05$; Gender Expression: $r(1449) = -.09$; Gender: $r(1454) = -.13$.

It is notable that the rate of missed school days for safety concerns was higher in 2021 than in 2015.[30] It is possible that experiences related to COVID-19 may have contributed to this increase. However, among the 2021 sample group, there were no significant differences in absenteeism between those who were in school completely in-person, completely remote or in a hybrid model. Therefore, if the pandemic was a factor in impacting LGBTQ+ student attendance, it does not appear related to the type of learning environment.

Sense of School Belonging. The degree to which students feel accepted by and a part of their school community is another important indicator of school climate and is related to several educational outcomes. Students who experience victimization or discrimination at school may feel excluded and disconnected from their school community. In order to assess LGBTQ+ students' sense of belonging in their school community, survey participants were given a series of statements about feeling like a part of their school. They were then asked to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with each statement.[31]

As illustrated in Figure 1.28, students who experienced a higher severity of victimization based on sexual orientation, gender expression, or gender had lower levels of school belonging than students who experienced less severe victimization in school.[32] For example, the majority (88.7%) of students who experienced lower levels of victimization over their sexual orientation reported a positive sense of connection to their school, compared to two-thirds (66.7%) of students who experienced more severe victimization based on sexual orientation.

It is important to note that the type of learning environment that a study had in 2021 was significantly related to their sense of school belonging. LGBTQ+ students who were in online classes during the entire academic year had a significantly lower sense of school belonging compared to those who had any in-person school, whether throughout the school year or only during part of the year.[33] Specifically, 36.3% of students who were in school online reported high levels of school belonging, compared to 48.8% of students who were in person and 52.9% who had been in both in-person and online school. There were no differences between those who were completely in-person and those in hybrid learning environments. It would appear that online learning environments may not provide the same opportunities for attachment to peers and to school in general as in-person learning environments.

Psychological Well-being. Experiencing victimization at school can negatively affect students' well-being and the way they feel about themselves, which in turn can negatively affect their academic achievement and future aspirations. In this study, we examined the relationship of negative school climate to depression and self-esteem. As shown in Figures 1.29 and 1.30, LGBTQ+ students who experienced higher levels of verbal harassment related to their sexual orientation, gender expression, and gender reported worse mental health outcomes: higher depression[34] and lower self-esteem.[35] For example, as shown in Figure 1.29, 50.6% of students who experienced lower levels of verbal harassment because of gender expression ("never," "rarely," or "sometimes") reported high depression compared to 73.9% of those who reported higher levels of this harassment ("often" or "regularly").

[29] The relationship between missing school and severity of verbal harassment was examined through Pearson correlations. Sexual Orientation: r(1537) = .23, p < .001; Gender Expression: r(1492) = .25, p < .001; Gender: r(1487) = .25, p < .001. Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.

[30] The mean difference between 2015 and 2021 on days of missed school was tested through a t-test: t(1333) = 8.31, p<.001.

[31] Items assessing school belonging were taken from the 2012 survey of the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment.

[32] The relationship between school belonging and severity of verbal harassment was examined through Pearson correlations. Sexual Orientation: r(1437) = -.27, p<.001; Gender Expression: r(1395) = -.31, p<.001, Gender: r(1389) = -.24, p<.001. Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.

[33] Mean differences across type of learning environments (in-person only, online only, hybrid) in school belonging were examined using analysis of variance and percentages discussed are for illustrative purposes: F(2, 1448) = 18.68, p<.001. Pairwise comparisons were considered significant at p<.05, and the only significant differences were that the mean for students in online only school environments was significantly lower than the means of the other two groups.

[34] The relationship between depression and severity of verbal harassment was examined through Pearson correlations. Sexual Orientation: r(1113) =.20, p<.001; Gender Expression: r(1082) = .21, p<.001, Gender: r(1079) = .20, p<.001. Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.

[35] The relationship between self-esteem and severity of verbal harassment was examined through Pearson correlations. Sexual Orientation: r(1067) = -.12, p<.001; Gender Expression: r(1039) = -.16, p<.001, Gender: r(1036) = -.11, p<.001. Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.

In contrast to school belonging, we did not find that these indicators of psychological well-being differed by type of learning environment during the 2021 academic year. LGBTQ+ students struggled with depression or self-esteem at similar rates across in-person, online, and hybrid models.

Overall, these findings illustrate that direct victimization may lead to less welcoming schools and more negative educational and psychological outcomes for LGBTQ+ students. In order to ensure that LGBTQ+ students are afforded a supportive learning environment and educational opportunities, community and school advocates should work to prevent and respond to in-school victimization. In Section [2] of Part I, we will examine the availability of support in school that may benefit the educational experience for LGBTQ+ students.

Figure 1.23. LGBTQ+ Students' Educational Aspirations

What's the highest level of education you hope to complete in your life?

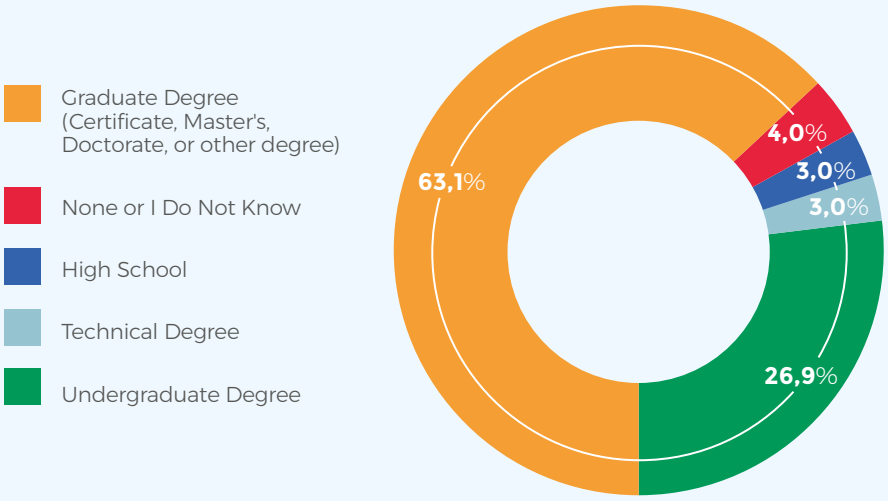


Figure 1.24. Educational Aspirations and Degree of Victimization (Percentage of Students Whe Aren't Going to Finish High School or Attend College)

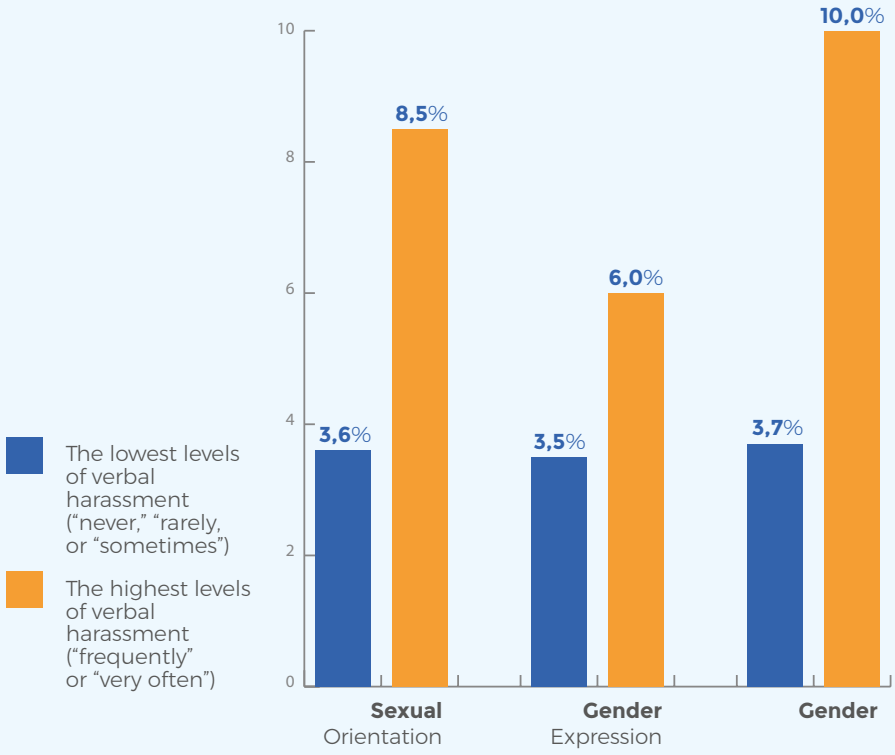


Figure 1.25. During the current 2021 school year, how would you describe your performance?

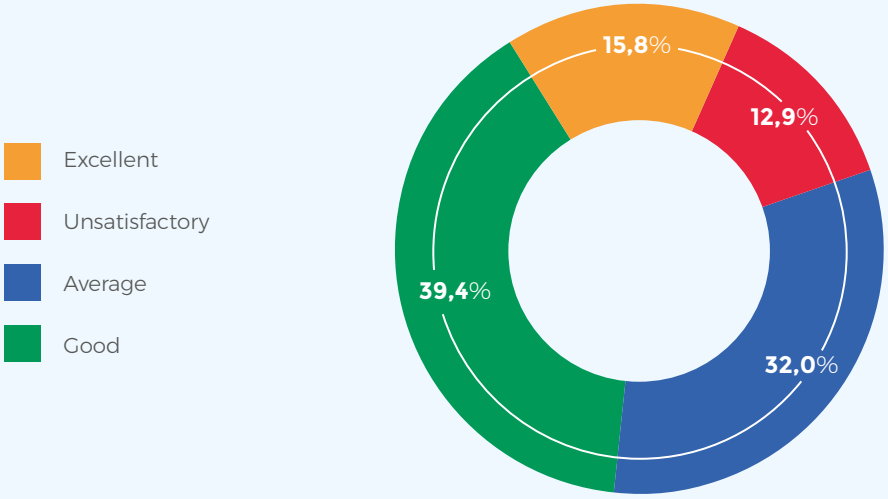


Figure 1.26. Academic Performance and Degree of Victimization (percentage of students who report "good" or "excellent" grades)

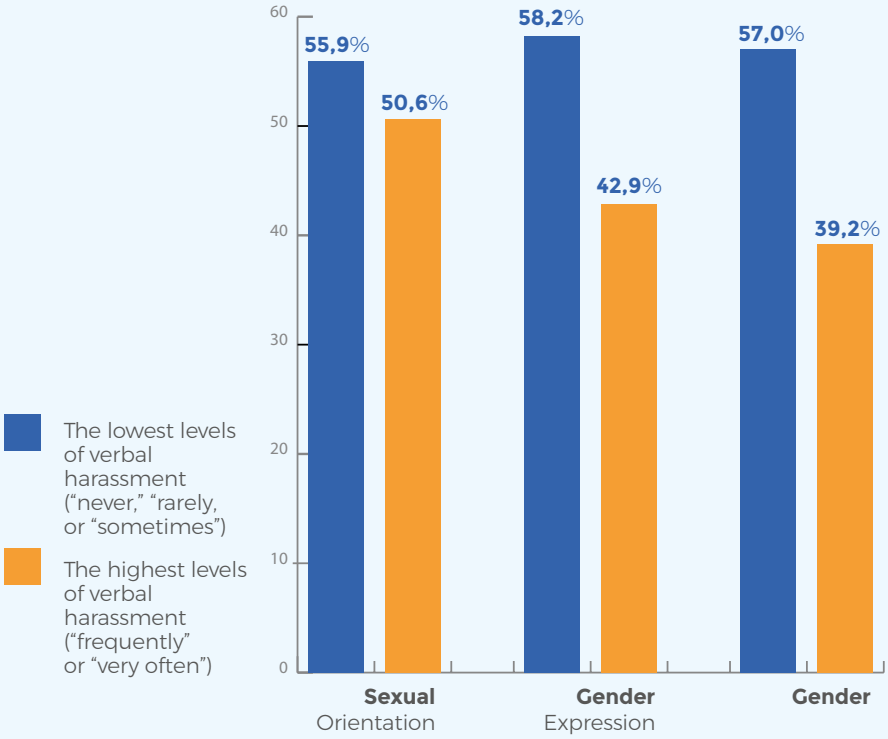


Figure 1.27.
Absenteeism and Degree of Victimization
(percentage of LGBTQ+ students who miss at least one day of school per month)

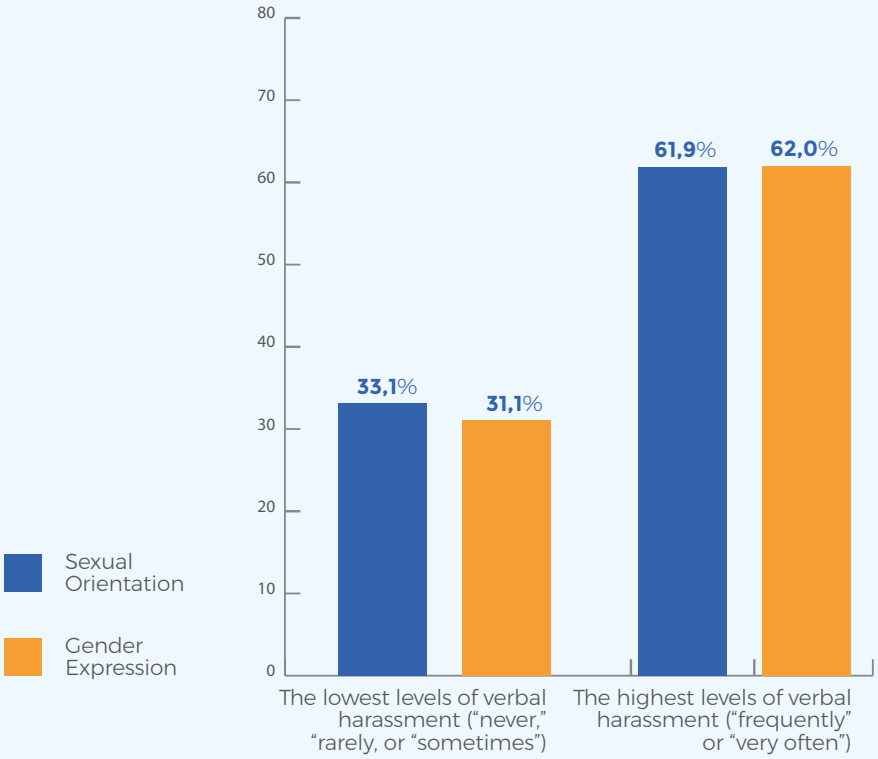


Figure 1.28.
Sense of Belonging at School and Degree of Victimization
(Percentage of LGBTQ+ students reporting high levels of belonging at school)

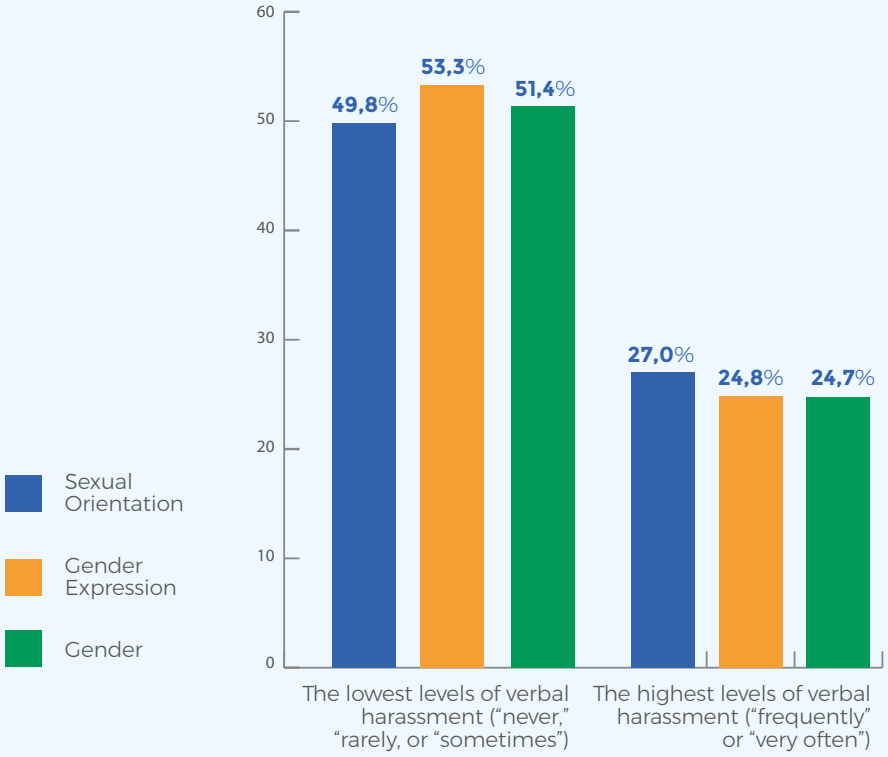


Figure 1.29. Depression and Degree of Victimization (Percentage of LGBTQ+ students reporting high levels of depression)

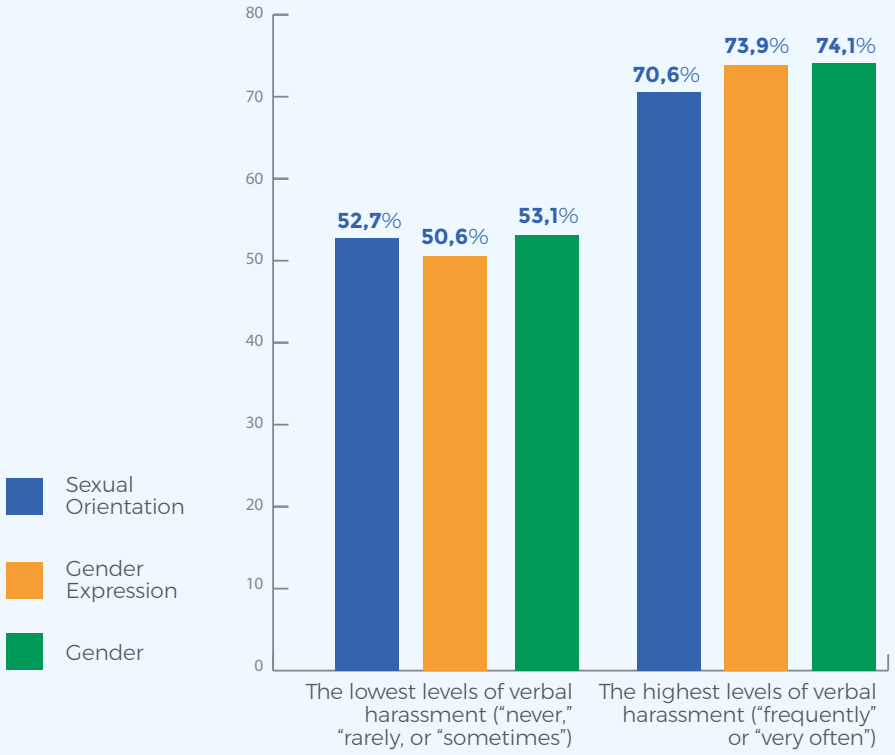
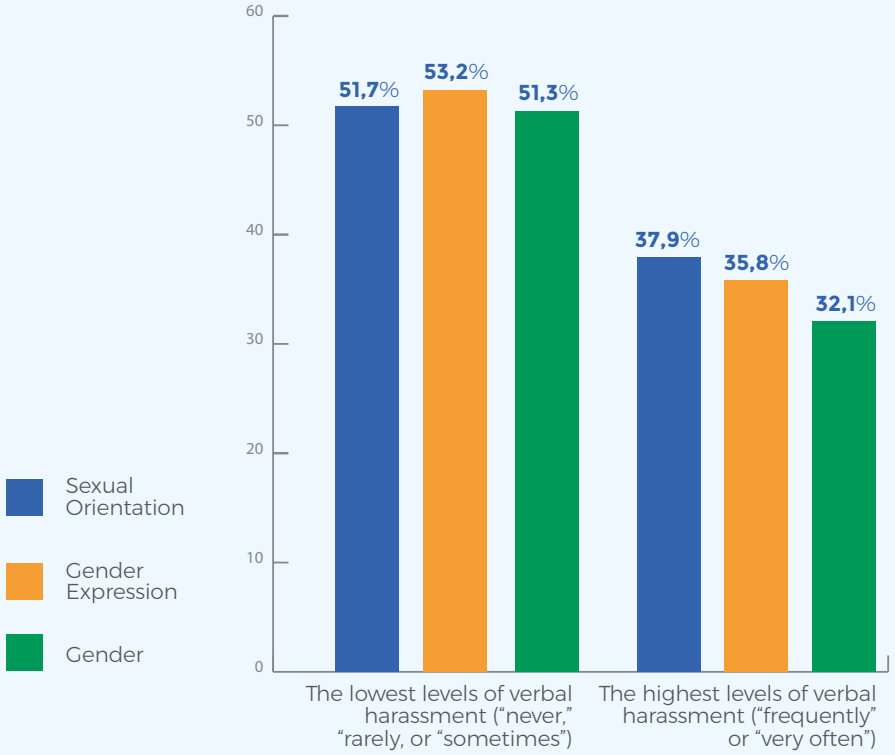


Figure 1.30. Self-esteem and Degree of Victimization (percentage of LGBTQ+ students reporting high levels of self-esteem)



SECTION 2

SCHOOL-BASED RESOURCES AND SUPPORT.
AVAILABILITY OF SCHOOL-BASED RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS

LGBTQ+ students may not have the same types of support from peers at their schools and in their communities. Over 90% of students reported that there are other LGBTQ+ students in their school in addition to themselves, and the largest percentage (41.9%) reported they had more than 10 other students in their school who identified as LGBTQ+ (see Figure 2.2.) Yet, as shown in Figure 2.1, less than half (46.1%) of LGBTQ+ students in Colombia reported that other students at school were accepting of LGBTQ+ people ("completely accept" or "accept a little"). Thus, the availability of resources and support networks in school for LGBTQ+ students can be crucial for this population of youth. There are several key resources that may help promote a safer climate and more positive school experiences for students: school personnel who are supportive of LGBTQ+ students, inclusive curricular materials, and school policies for addressing harassment and assault. As such, we examined the availability of these resources among LGBTQ+ students in Colombia.

Figure 2.1.
Degree of Acceptence of LGBTQ+ People by Students at School

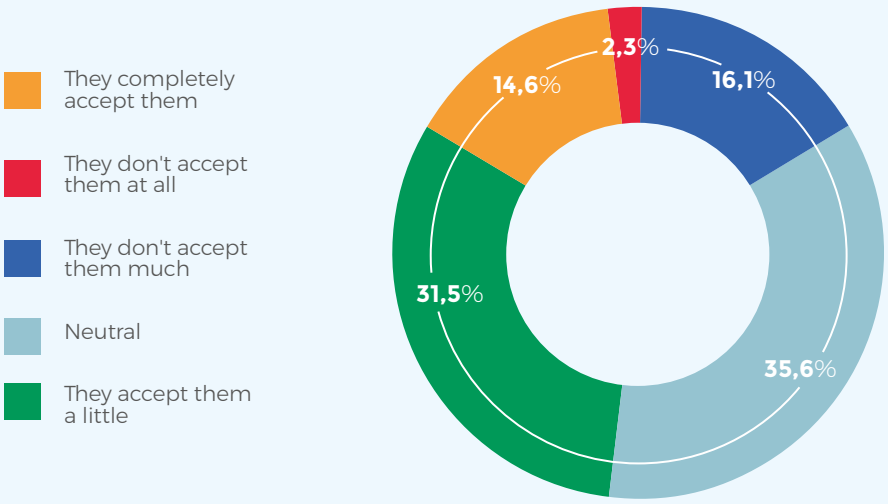
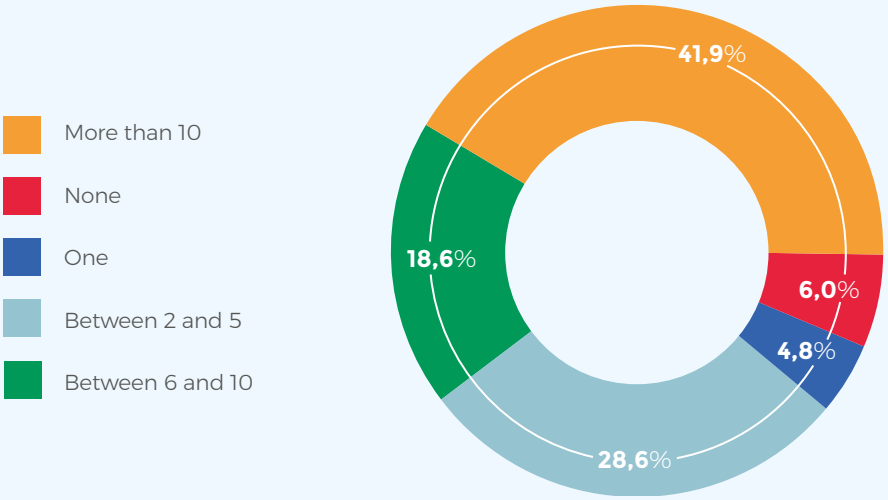


Figure 2.2.
How many LGBTQ+ Students Are There in Your School



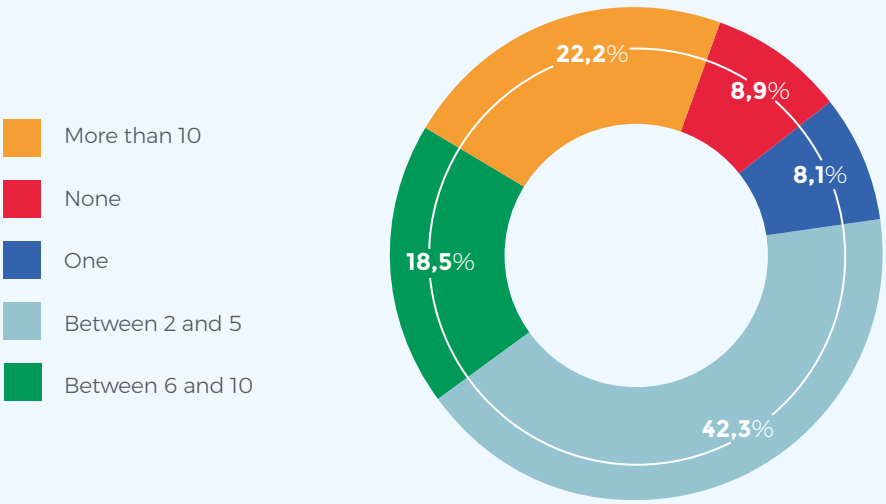
SUPPORTIVE SCHOOL PERSONNEL

Supportive teachers, principals, and other school staff serve as another important resource for LGBTQ+ students. Being able to speak with a caring adult in school may have a significantly positive impact on the school experience for students, particularly those who feel marginalized or face harassment. In our survey, the majority of students (91.1%) could identify at least one school staff member whom they believed was supportive of LGBTQ+ students at their school, and 40.7% could identify six or more supportive school staff (see Figure 2.3).

LGBTQ+ students who were in school online throughout the year reported a lower number of supportive school personnel than those who were in school only in-person and those who were in both online and in-person classes.[36] Furthermore, students in in-person only and hybrid settings did not differ in the number of reported supportive school personnel. Similar to what we found with students' sense of belonging, being in online classes only may inhibit LGBTQ+ students' ability to find and engage with adults in their school as sources of support.

Students in 2021 reported a higher number of educators who were supportive of LGBTQ+ students than those in 2015.[37] 40.7% of students in 2021 reported they had many supportive educators (6 or more) compared to 34.3% of students in 2015—a modest increase of 6.4%.

Figure 2.3. The Number of Teachers and Other School Staff that Are Supportive of LGBTQ+ Students



[36] Mean differences across type of learning environments (in-person only, online only, hybrid) in the number of supportive school personnel were examined using analysis of variance and percentages discussed are for illustrative purposes: $F(2, 1495) = 8.62$, $p<.001$. Pairwise comparisons were considered significant at $p<.05$, and the only significant differences were that the mean for students in online only school environments was significantly lower than the means of the other two groups.

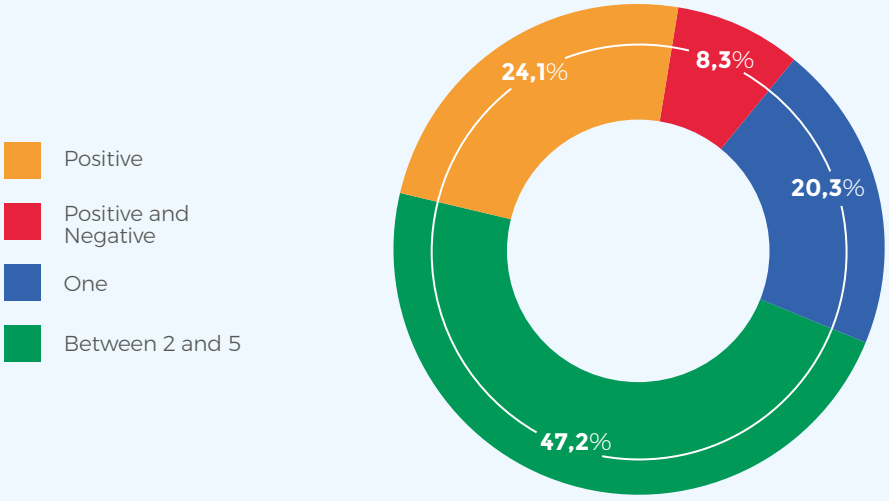
[37] Mean difference in the number of supportive school personnel across survey years was examined using analysis of covariance controlling for demographic characteristics (age, gender, sexual orientation): $F(1, 2008) = 127.12$, $p<.001$. Results indicate a higher mean in 2021 than in 2015. Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.

INCLUSIVE CURRICULAR RESOURCES

LGBTQ+ student experiences may also be shaped by inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer topics in the curriculum. Learning about LGBTQ+ historical events and positive role models may enhance their engagement with the school community and provide valuable information about the LGBTQ+ community. Students in our survey were asked whether they had been exposed to representations of LGBTQ+ people, history, or events in lessons at school, and nearly half (47.2%) of respondents said that their classes did not include these topics (see Figure 2.4). Of the students who said they had been taught about LGBTQ+ topics, about a quarter (24.1%) of students said that LGBTQ+ topics had been discussed only in a positive manner in one or more of their classes, an additional 8.3% of students reported that these topics had been discussed in both positive and negative ways, but 20.3% said these topics were discussed only negatively. We did not find that being taught LGBTQ+ content in class differed across type of learning environment in 2021.

In comparing results from our 2015 survey with this 2021 survey on inclusive curriculum, we did not find that survey year was related to being taught positive LGBTQ+ information in class. However, we found that students in 2015 were more likely to have been taught negative LGBTQ+ information in class than students in 2021: 38.7% vs. 28.7%.

Figure 2.4. Percentage of Students Taught about LGBTQ+ Issues in Class



SCHOOL POLICIES FOR ADDRESSING BULLYING, HARASSMENT, AND ASSAULT

School policies that address bullying, harassment, and assault at school are powerful tools for creating environments where students feel safe. These types of policies can explicitly state protections based on personal characteristics, such as sexual orientation and gender identity/ expression, among others. In this report, we refer to a "comprehensive" policy as one that explicitly enumerates protections based on personal characteristics, including sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. When a school has and enforces a comprehensive policy, especially one which also includes procedures for reporting incidents to school authorities, it can send a message that bullying, harassment, and assault are unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Comprehensive school policies may also provide students with greater protection against victimization because they make clear the various forms of bullying, harassment, and assault that will not be tolerated. It may also demonstrate that student safety, including the safety of LGBTQ+ students, is taken seriously by school administrators.

Students were asked whether their school had a policy about bullying, harassment, or assault at school and if that policy explicitly included sexual orientation and gender expression. As shown in Table 2.2, the majority of students (61.8%) reported that they did not have reporting policy/procedure in their school. Furthermore, most of the students who had reported having this type of policy also reported that it did not specifically enumerate protections based on sexual orientation or gender expression. Of all the students in the survey, only 9.0% reported that the policy mentioned sexual orientation and/or gender expression. There were no differences in whether students had any policy or in the type of policy by type of learning environments in 2021.

There were significant differences between our 2015 and 2021 surveys in the types of policy reported.[38] LGBTQ+ students in 2021 compared to those in 2015 were much less likely to report having any type of policy (38.2% vs. 54.9%). Students in 2021 were also less likely to report having any mention in the policy of sexual orientation or gender expression (9.0% vs. 14.7%).

Table 2.1. Policy or Educational Community Guidelines or Space for Reporting Incidences of Harassment or Assault at School

There is no policy/Unsure	61.8%
Any kind of policy	38.2%
Generic (lists neither sexual orientation nor gender expression)/ Not sure if the policy lists them	29.2%
It only mentions sexual orientation	2.8%
It only lists gender expression	1.8%
It mentions sexual orientation and gender expression	4.4%

UTILITY OF SCHOOL-BASED RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS

School-based resources, such as supportive school personnel, LGBTQ+-inclusive curricula, and enumerated policies for reporting bullying, harassment, and assault may help create a more positive school environment for LGBTQ+ students. In this section, we examine the relationship between institutional support and school climate, as well as educational indicators such as absenteeism, academic achievement, and educational aspirations.

SUPPORTIVE SCHOOL PERSONNEL

Having supportive teachers and school staff can have a positive effect on the educational experiences of any student, increasing student motivation to learn and positive engagement in school. Given that LGBTQ+ students often feel unsafe and unwelcome in school, having access to school personnel who provide support may be critical for creating better learning environments for LGBTQ+ students. Therefore, we examined the relationships between the presence of supportive staff and several indicators of school climate, finding that the presence of school staff supportive of LGBTQ+ students is a critical step towards improving school climate.

[36] To examine type of policy by survey year, we conducted a chi-square analysis with two categorical variables: survey year (2015 and 2021), and policy type (no policy, policy mentioned neither sexual orientation nor gender expression [generic], and policy mentioned sexual orientation and/or gender expression [any inclusion]): $\chi 2 = 47.08$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .15$. Differences in column proportions were examined at $p < .05$ and showed that students in 2021 had a higher representation in the "no policy" category, and lower representation in both the "generic policy" and "any inclusion" categories.

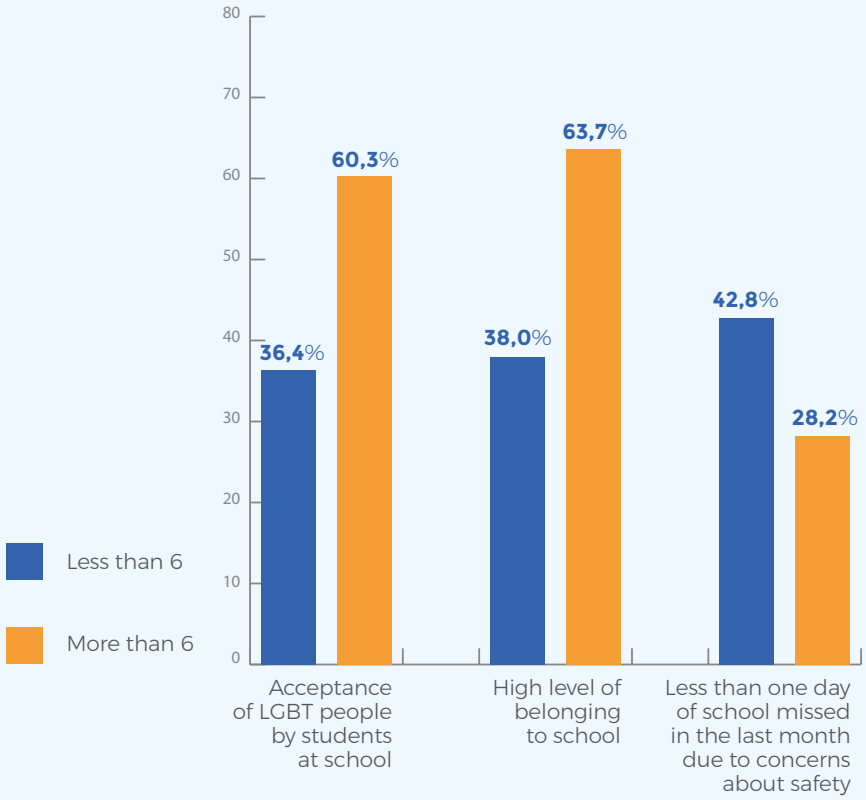
SCHOOL SAFETY AND ABSENTEEISM.

Having staff supportive of LGBTQ+ students was directly related to LGBTQ+ students reporting more positive feelings towards their school and their education. As shown in Figure 2.5, students who reported having a higher number of teachers and school staff (more than six) who support LGBTQ+ students were:

- more likely to report that the general student body is more accepting of LGBTQ+ people (60.3% vs. 36.4%),
- more likely to feel like they belong in their school (63.7% vs. 38.0%), and
- less likely to miss days of school because of feeling unsafe (28.2% vs. 42.8%).

gative LGBTQ+ information in class than students in 2021: 38.7% vs. 28.7%.[39]

Figure 2.5.
The Number of Teachers and School Staff That Are Supportive of LGBTQ+ Students and the Experience of LGBTQ+ Students



School staff members serve a vital role in ensuring a safe learning environment for all students, and as such, should respond to biased language and bias-based victimization. When staff members intervened when they heard homophobic remarks, LGBTQ+ students reported more positive feelings about their school and education. As shown in Figure 2.6, when students said that teachers and school staff intervened more often, they also were:

more likely to report that the general student body is more accepting of LGBTQ+ people (61.2% vs. 41.2%);

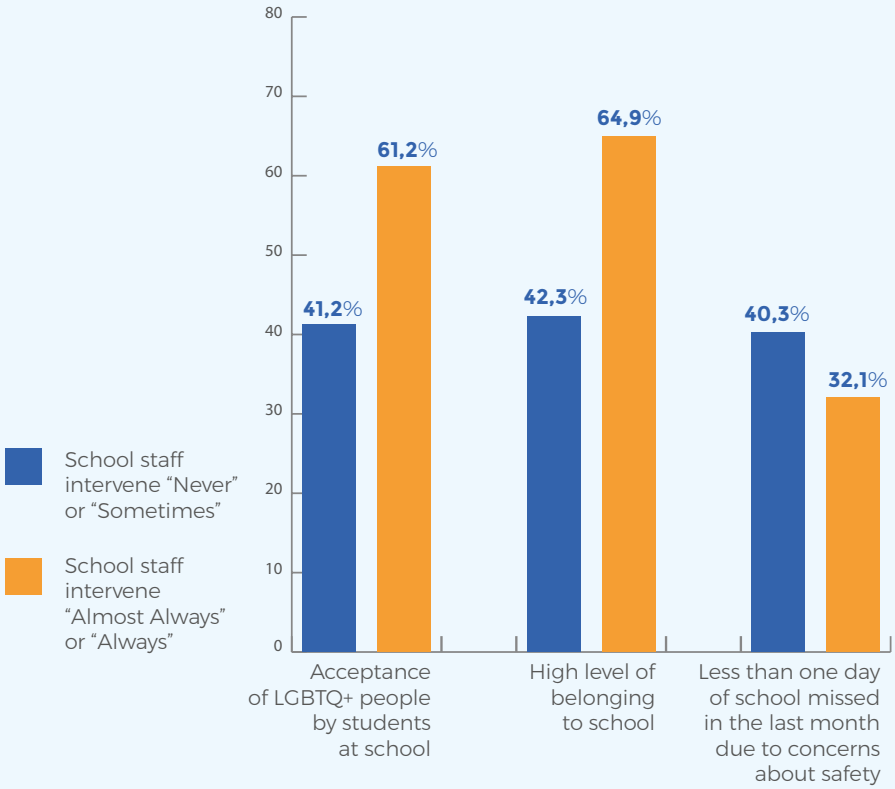
- more likely to feel like they belong in their school (64.9% vs. 42.3%); and
- less likely to miss days of school because of feeling unsafe (32.1% vs. 40.3%). [40]

In addition, LGBTQ+ students who reported that teachers and school staff intervene more often when they heard homophobic remarks were less likely to feel unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation. 63.1% of students who said that staff intervened less often "never" o "sometimes") said they felt unsafe, vs. 41.5% of students who said the staff intervened more often ("almost always" or "sometimes").[41]

[39] The relationships between number of supportive staff and the school-related outcomes were tested through Peason correlations. Student Acceptance of LGBTQ+ People: r(1497) = .32, p<.001; School Belonging: r(1404) = .31, p<.001; Missing Days of School: r(1497) = -.14, p<.001. Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.

[40] The relationships between staff intervention and the school-related outcomes were tested with Pearson correlations. Student Acceptance of LGBTQ+ People: r(1006) =.21, p<.001; School Belonging: r(953) = .22, p<.001; Missing Days of School: r(1438) = -.13, p<.01. Percentages are shown for illustrative purposes.

Figure 2.6. Intervention in Homophobic Comments by School Staff and the Experience of LGBTQ+ Students



INCLUSIVE CURRICULA

Including LGBTQ-related issues in the curriculum in a positive light may make LGBTQ+ students feel like more valued members of the school community. It furthermore may also promote positive feelings about LGBTQ+ issues and people among their peers, thereby fomenting a more positive school climate overall. In fact, as shown in Figure 2.7, LGBTQ+ students who were taught only positive information about LGBTQ+ people, history, and events had the best outcomes—the most supportive student body,[42] the highest feelings of school belonging,[43] and the least likelihood of missing days of school for safety reasons.[44] For example, 60.1% of students who only had had positive curricular inclusion at school reported that the student body was accepting of LGBTQ+ people, compared to 45.3% of students who had been taught positive and negative content, 38.4% of those who had only been taught negative content, and 44.0% of those who had not been taught anything about LGBTQ+ people, history, or events.

[41] The relationship between staff intervention regarding homophobic remarks and student's feeling unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation was tested with a Pearson correlation: r(1006) = -.13, p<.01. Percentages are discussed for illustrative purposes.

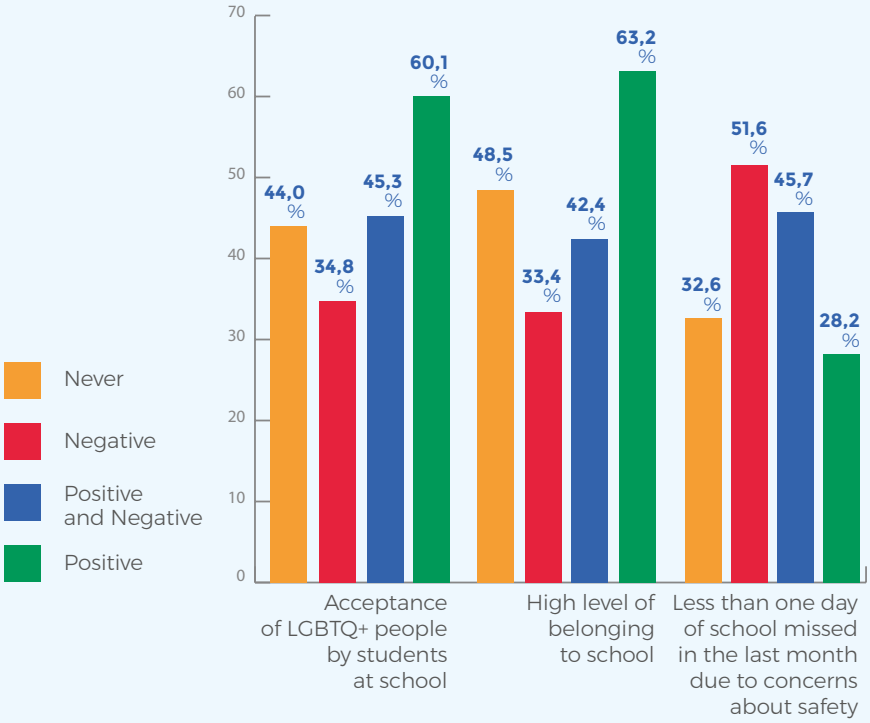
[42] Differences in the perceptions of supportiveness of the student body regarding LGBTQ+ people was examined using analysis of variance using a categorical variable indicating: 1) no curricular inclusion (No Inclusion), 2) only taught negative content (Negative Only), 3) taught both positive and negative content (Positive & Negative), and 4) taught only positive content (Positive Only). Results indicated a significant difference among the four groups: F(3, 1538) = 14.35, p<.001, and pairwise differences were considered at p < .05. The Positive Only group was higher than all others, the Negative Only group was lower than all others, and there were no differences between the No Inclusion and Positive & Negative groups.

[43] Differences in feelings of school belonging by type of curricular inclusion was examined using analysis of variance, using a categorical variable indicating: 1) no curricular inclusion (No Inclusion), 2) only taught negative content (Negative Only), 3) taught both positive and negative content (Positive & Negative), and 4) taught only positive content (Positive Only). Results indicated a significant difference among the four groups: F(3, 1538) = 14.35, p<.001, and pairwise differences were considered at p < .05. The Positive Only group was higher than all others, the Negative Only group was lower than all others, and there were no differences between the No Inclusion and Positive & Negative groups.

[44] Differences in the number of missed days of school by type of curricular inclusion was examined using analysis of variance, using a categorical variable indicating: 1) no curricular inclusion (No Inclusion), 2) only taught negative content (Negative Only), 3) taught both positive and negative content (Positive & Negative), and 4) taught only positive content (Positive Only). Results indicated a significant difference among the four Groups: F(3, 1538) = 14.35, p<.001, and pairwise differences were considered at p < .05. The Positive Only group was lower than all others, indicating fewer missed days of school. The No Inclusion group was also lower than the Positive & Negative and Negative Only groups. There were no differences between the Positive & Negative and Negative Only groups.

Per the data highlighted in Figure 2.7, LGBTQ+ students who had only been taught negative LGBTQ+ content had the worst outcomes with regard to the perceptions of their school. Of particular interest is the data that shows that students who had been taught no LGBTQ+ content in class had fewer days of missed school than those who had been taught only negative content or a combination of negative and positive content. Thus, with regard to school attendance, receiving no messaging from teachers on LGBTQ+ issues may be better than having any exposure to negative content about LGBTQ+ issues.

Figure 2.7. Curriculum that Includes LGBTQ+ Issues and the Experience of LGBTQ+ Students



SCHOOL POLICIES FOR ADDRESSING BULLYING, HARASSMENT, AND ASSAULT

School policies against bullying, harassment and assault can contribute to a safer school environment. These policies can provide guidance to teachers and school personnel about how to address violence in school. These policies can also inform students of their rights to a safe education and provide instruction on how to report incidents of violence. However, for LGBTQ+ students, these school policies may be less effective if they do not specifically address violence related to sexual orientation or gender expression.

We found that the type of policy affected the incidence of intervention regarding homophobic remarks made at school. As shown in Figure 2.8, LGBTQ+ students who had an inclusive policy, i.e., one that mentions sexual orientation or gender expression, reported greater intervention by school personnel when homophobic remarks were made. Those students who had no policy in place at their school reported the lowest intervention by school personnel.[45] Similarly, LGBTQ+ students who had no policy in place at their school reported less intervention by their peers when homophobic remarks were made. LGBTQ+ students whose schools did have an inclusive policy were marginally more likely to report that their peers intervened than LGBTQ+ students who had a generic policy (one that did not include mention of sexual orientation or gender expression). [46]

[45] Mean differences across type of policy (No Policy, Generic, Inclusive) were examined by a one-way analysis of variance. $F(2, 1007) = 11.94$, $p<.001$. Pairwise comparisons were considered significant at $p < .05$. The mean for teacher intervention was higher for Inclusive than both other groups and was marginally higher for Generic than for No Policy at $p < .10$.

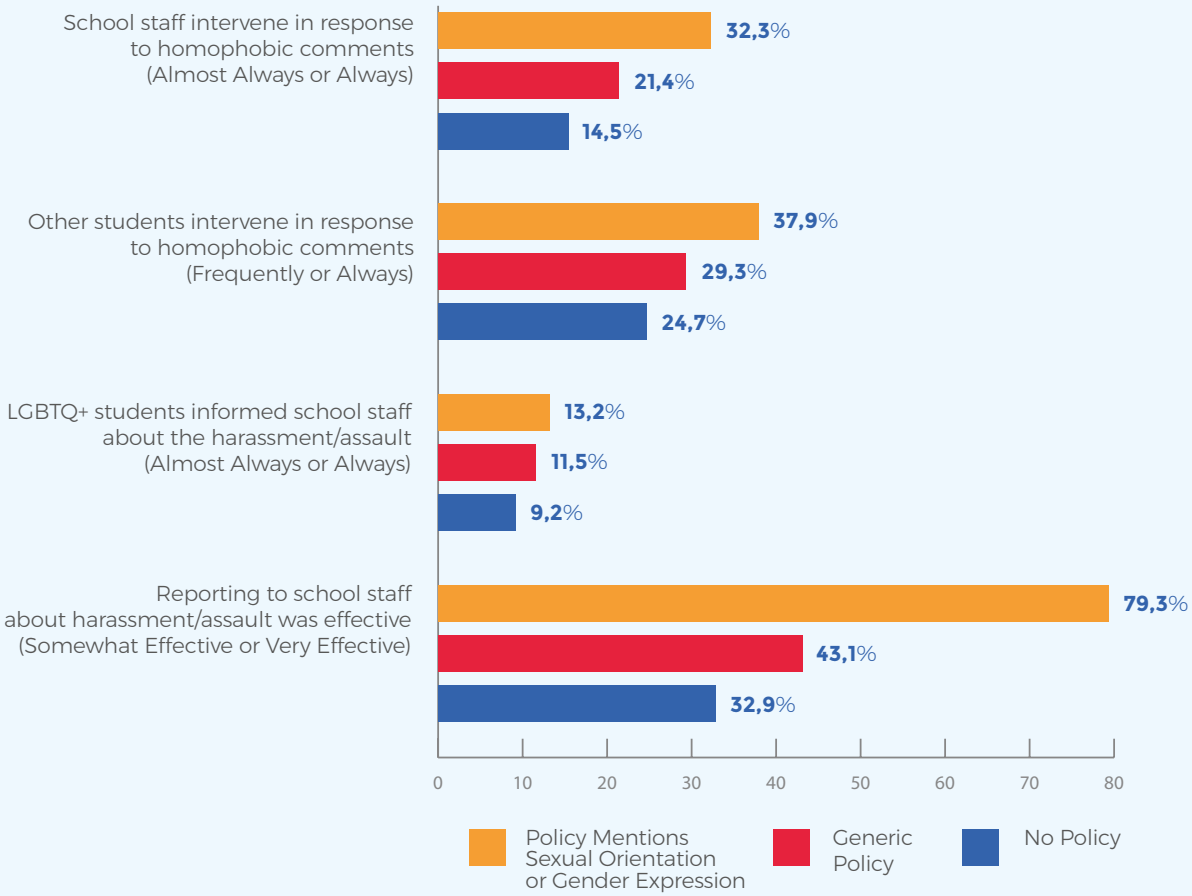
[46] Mean differences across type of policy (No Policy, Generic, Inclusive) were examined by a one-way analysis of variance. $F(2, 1554) = 6.78$, $p<.001$. Pairwise comparisons were considered significant at $p < .05$. The mean for student intervention was higher for Inclusive and Generic than No Policy, and the mean for Inclusive was marginally higher than Generic at $p < .10$.

The type of school policy was only marginally related to the frequency with which LGBTQ+ students reported harassment or assault to school personnel, and those with a comprehensive policy were more likely to report victimization than those with no policy.[47]

Nevertheless, LGBTQ+ students in schools were more likely to report that the intervention by staff was effective when their school had a comprehensive policy, as compared to those with no policy and those with only a generic policy.[48] Furthermore, LGBTQ+ students whose schools had a generic policy were only marginally more likely to report effective staff intervention than those with no policy at all.

These findings indicate that having a comprehensive anti-bullying policy may increase the likelihood of intervention regarding anti-LGBTQ+ actions by members of the school community—both faculty and students—and increase the effectiveness of school staff intervention. However, the policies do not appear to directly increase LGBTQ+ students' reporting of victimization when it occurs. Thus, more effort needs to be made by school leaders to ensure that LGBTQ+ students feel safe and comfortable reporting problems to the school, in addition to ensuring that the school address the problems effectively.

Figure 2.8. School Policies on Harassment and Assault and the Experiences of LGBTQ+ Students



[47] Mean differences across type of policy (No Policy, Generic, Inclusive) were examined by a one-way analysis of variance. $F(2, 872) = 3.00$, $p=.05$. Pairwise comparisons were considered significant at $p < .05$. The mean for frequency of reporting was higher for Inclusive than No Policy at $p < .05$.

[48] Mean differences across type of policy (No Policy, Generic, Inclusive) were examined by a one-way analysis of variance. $F(2, 256) = 14.68$, $p<.001$. Pairwise comparisons were considered significant at $p < .05$. The mean for effectiveness of intervention was higher for Inclusive than both other groups, and Generic was marginally higher than No Policy at $p < .10$.

PART II LIFE AND WELL-BEING OF LGBTQ+ YOUTH: FAMILY, RELIGION COVID-19 IMPACT, AND ONLINE ACTIVITIES

PART II DEMOGRAPHICS.
LIFE AND WELL-BEING OF LGBTQ+ YOUTH: FAMILY, RELIGION, COVID-19 IMPACT, AND ONLINE ACTIVITIES

The full sample of LGBTQ+ youth consisted of a total of 3,246 participants between the ages of 13 and 21. Table 3.1 presents participants' demographic characteristics. About a third of the youth were 15 years old or younger (33.9%), about a third were 16 or 17 years old (31.7%), and a third were 18 years or older (34.4%), with the average age being 16.6 years. Nearly half of the participants identified as Mestizo (48.7%) and more than one-third identified as white (39.6%). Regarding gender, 48.1% identified as female, 19.5% as male, and 8.2% as transgender. Regarding sexual orientation, 56.2% identified as bisexual or pansexual and 37.7% as gay or lesbian.

Table 3.1. Demographics of Survey Participants

Race and Ethnicity (n=3246)		
Afro, Black, Palenquero, or Raizal	3.3%	n=106
White	39.6%	n=1165
Roma	0.2%	n=7
Indigenous	1.6%	n=52
Mestizo	48.7%	n=1562
Other	4.1%	n=133
Multiracial	5.7%	n=184

Gender (n=3214)		
Cisgender female	48.1	n=723
Cisgender male	19.5%	n=628
Transgender	8.2%	n=263
Nonbinary/ Genderqueer/ Gender-fluid	12.4%	n=399
Questioning	10.7%	n=343
Other	1.1%	n=36

Sexual Orientation (n=3198)		
Gay	20.0%	n=641
Lesbian	17.7%	n=567
Bisexual	46.9%	n=1499
Pansexual	9.3%	n=299
Questioning	3.0%	n=97
Other sexual orientation (e.g., marica)	2.9%	n=95

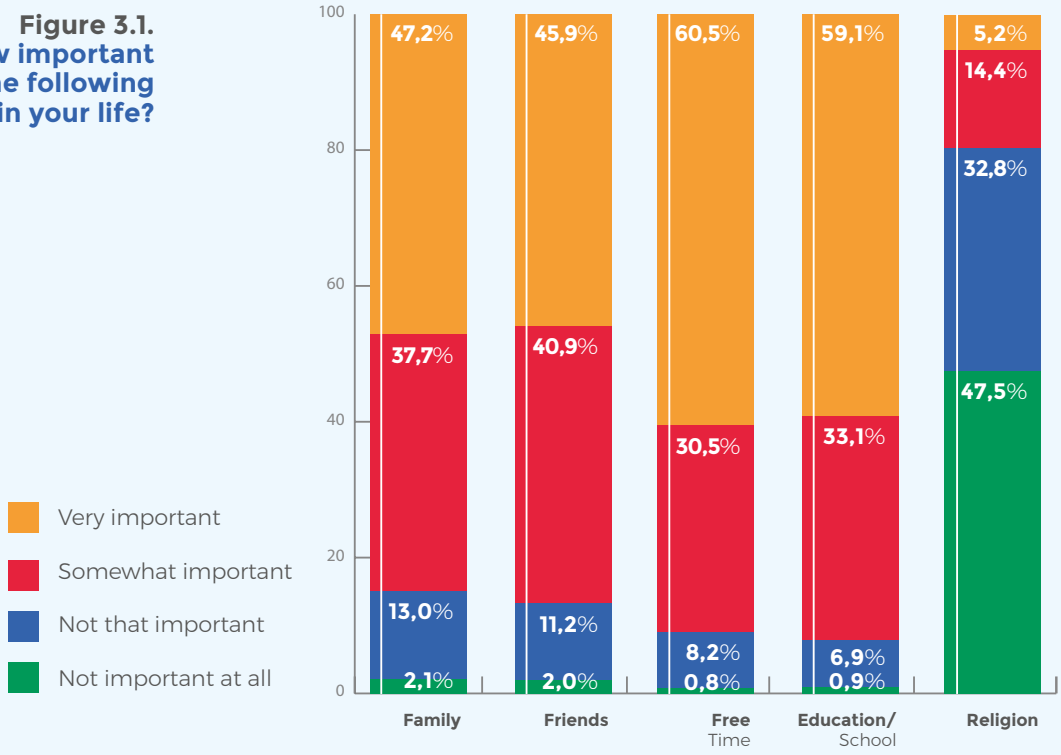
Age (n=3246)		
13	7.9%	n=257
14	12.3%	n=398
15	13.8%	n=447
16	15.6%	n=505
17	16.1%	n=521
18	12.9%	n=418
19	10.7%	n=346
20	9.4%	n=305
21	1.5%	n=49

VALUES

We asked youth how important certain values were in their lives, namely: 1) family, 2) friends, 3) free time, 4) education, and 5) religion.[49] As demonstrated in Figure 3.1, most youth reported that they thought all the values were "somewhat important" or "very important" except for religion. Only 19.6% of Colombian youth believed that religion was important, compared to the 80% who placed importance on the other categories. Youth rated both free time and education as the most important, with no statistical difference between the two.[50] Youth also did not differ in their importance rating for the two categories of family and friends.

To gain some understanding about whether LGBTQ+ youth in Colombia are similar to the general youth culture in Colombia, we compared these responses about values to available population data of youth from 16 to 24 years old for all but the value of education.[51] As shown in Figure 3.2, LGBTQ+ youth rated "friends" and "leisure time" as more important than did youth in the general population.[52] In contrast, youth in general rated "family" and "religion" as more important than did LGBTQ+ youth in Colombia, with the difference being most pronounced for the importance of religion.[53] For example, as shown in Figure 3.2, only 19.6% of LGBTQ+ youth rated religion as "somewhat important" or "very important" compared to 67.9% of the general population of youth in Colombia. It is relevant to note that the age span in the two datasets differ, with the sample of LGBTQ+ youth having a lower limit of 13 years and the general population sample having a higher limit of 24 years. It is possible that a young person's estimate of the importance of family, friends, and leisure time might change across their developmental lifespan. However, when we restricted the age of the LGBTQ+ youth sample to a lower limit of 16 years, the differences across the four values remained significantly different between LGBTQ+ youth and youth in general.

Figure 3.1.
How important are the following aspects in your life?



[49] The value items were adapted from the Word Values Survey: Inglehart, R., C. Haerpfer, A. Moreno, C. Welzel, K. Kizilova, J. Diez-Medrano, M. Lagos, P. Norris, E. Ponarin & B. Puranen et al. (eds.). 2014. World Values Survey: Round Six – Country-Pooled Datafile Version: https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV6.jsp. Madrid: JD Systems Institute.

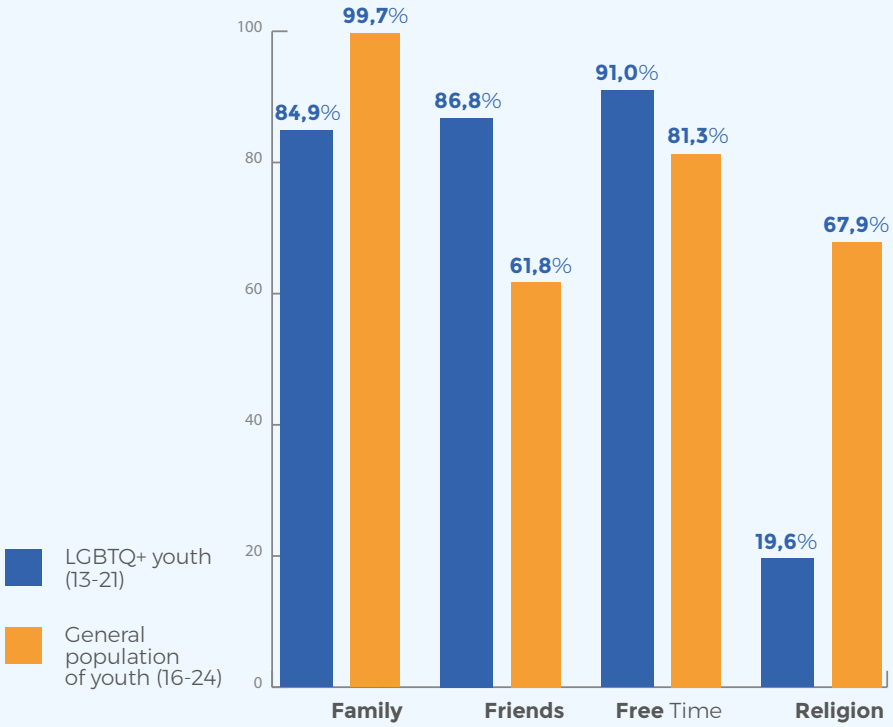
[50] Mean differences in the ratings of importance of the five values (family, friends, leisure time, education, and religion) were examined using a repeated measures multiple analysis of variance: Pillai's Trace = .78, F(4, 2986) = 2614.95, p<.001. Pairwise comparisons were considered at p < .05 and showed that the means for free time and education were higher than the means for family, friends, and religion and did not differ from each other, and the means for family and friends were not different from each other but higher than the mean for religion.

[51] For the general population youth comparison, we used data from 16-24 year olds in Colombia from the Word Values Survey: Inglehart, R., C. Haerpfer, A. Moreno, C. Welzel, K. Kizilova, J. Diez-Medrano, M. Lagos, P. Norris, E. Ponarin & B. Puranen et al. (eds.). 2014. World Values Survey: Round Six – Country-Pooled Datafile Version: https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV6.jsp. Madrid: JD Systems Institute.

[52] We conducted a series of one-sample t-tests to compare the means from the World Values Survey data on Colombian youth (16-24 years old) to the means from our sample of LGBTQ+ youth in Colombia. The mean for the importance of friends and of leisure time were significantly higher among LGBTQ+ youth than would be expected from the mean of the general sample of youth. Friends: t(3018) = 32.95, p<.001, Cohen's d = .75; Leisure Time: t(3012) = 23.47, p<.001, Cohen's d = .68.

[53] We conducted a series of one-sample t-tests to compare the means from the World Values Survey data on Colombian youth (16-24 years old) to the means from our sample of LGBTQ+ youth in Colombia. The mean for the importance of family and of religion were significantly lower among LGBTQ+ youth than would be expected from the mean of the general sample of youth. Family: t(3028) = -35.26, p<.001, Cohen's d = .77; Religion: t(3025) = -77.18, p<.001, Cohen's d = .88.

Figure 3.2. How important are the following aspects in your life?: LGBTQ+ Youth Compared to the General Youth Population in Colombia (percent reporting "somewhat important" or "very important")



EDUCATION

In Parts I and II of this report, we discussed the experiences of LGBTQ+ youth who had been in secondary school in the past year. Of the full sample of LGBTQ+ youth under 21, slightly less than half had said they had been in school in the past year (48.3%). Youth who reported that they had not been in school during 2021 were asked the reasons why. Among those who reported not having been in school doing 2021, youth most commonly reported that it was because they had already graduated from high school (74.8%) followed by the COVID-19 pandemic (21.7%). Few youths reported other reasons besides graduation or COVID-19. Notwithstanding, 4.9% of those who were not in school said it was related to academic reasons (expulsion, poor grades, or uncertainty about what future education they would pursue), 3.4% said it was related to family or economic reasons (e.g., having to work to contribute to the family income or to take care of family members), and 2.5% reported it was because of health or mental health issues. A very small percentage (1.9%) of youth who were not in school reported that it was because of access to education, whether lack of connectivity for online school or being geographically remote).

FAMILY

For some LGBTQ+ youth, relationships with family can sometimes be strained either because family members may not be supportive of their sexual orientation or gender identity or because the young person is not out to their family and that may inhibit communication, particularly as it relates to problems in school, and dating and relationships. With regard to school, for example, in Part 1 of this report on LGBTQ+ secondary school students, we found that the minority of students had ever told family members when they had been harassed or assaulted at school, and many said they did not even report the incidents to school personnel because they did not want to be outed to their family. Nevertheless, as discussed in Part 1, when LGBTQ+ students had told a family member, the majority reported that a family member intervened on their behalf with school officials. Family difficulties may also have been exacerbated during 2021 because of the COVID pandemic as youth in general may have had to spend even more time at home. To further understand the experiences of LGBTQ+ youth in Colombia regarding their family relationships, we asked participants in the survey a series of questions about their family relationships: who they live with, the quality of the relationship, the frequency of discussing problems both in general and about LGBTQ+ issues, and the frequency of hearing homophobic or transphobic remarks from family members.

The majority of LGBTQ+ youth in Colombia live with their parents (91.1%). Among those youth, 57.8% reported also living with siblings, 17.2% with grandparents, and 3.7% with extended family (e.g., aunts, uncles, cousins). Among the minority of youth who do not live with a parent or guardian, youth most commonly reported living with grandparents (37.6%), following by siblings (23.7%).

Only about half (54.7%) of LGBTQ+ youth in Colombia said that they were "out" to one or more of their parents (see Figure 3.3) Of those who were out to a parent, only a quarter (25.2%) said they received a great deal of support after coming out from them, but nearly a quarter (22.2%) that they received absolutely no support. Taken together, the majority of the LGBTQ+ youth have no support from parents vis-à-vis their sexual orientation or gender identity – either because they are not out to the parent or because they are out and the parent is not at all supportive.

As shown in Figure 3.4 LGBTQ+ youth do not often speak with their parents when they are having problems – 68.2% reporting that it happens "nunca"or "pocas veces." LGBTQ+ youth who reported that they ever speak to their parents about problems were asked whether they were comfortable speaking with them about certain topics: sexuality, personal problems, dating and relationships, religion, and LGBTQ+ issues. As shown in Figure 3.5 half of the LGBTQ+ youth who do talk to their parents about issues or problems would feel comfortable speaking to them about any of the topics asked about (51.6%), and less than a third (30.7%) would feel comfortable discussing personal problems. Perhaps not surprising given the number of youth who are not out to parents or reported having unsupportive parents, youth were least likely to report that they would be comfortable speaking with their parents about LGBTQ+ issues.[54]

In addition, we asked youth how often they argued with their parents about being LGBTQ+, and as shown in Figure 3.6, only about a third said that this never happened (35.4%), but less than a fifth (18.7%) reported that it happened "a menudo" or "muchas veces." Very few youth reported that they had ever been physically punished by their parents for being LGBTQ+. As shown in Figure 3.7, only 19.8% of youth reported this type of punishment. Nevertheless, nearly 1 in 20 students (4.1%) reported they had been physically punished "a menudo" or "muchas veces," and although a small percentage of the sample, it is nevertheless disturbing that the frequency of physical punishment is not zero.

LGBTQ+ youth may also be emotionally affected by generally homophobic or transphobic comments from family members. We asked LGBTQ+ youth how often in the past year they had heard these types of comments made by family members. As shown in Figure 3.8 the vast majority of LGBTQ+ youth in Colombia (87.2%) had heard homophobic or transphobic comments from family members in the past year, and nearly half (44.6%) reported that this commonly happened ("a menudo" or "muchas veces").

LGBTQ+ youth may seek support from other adults in their life, such as teachers or coaches. We asked the youth in our survey how often in the past year they had talked to an adult outside of the family about your problems at home or with your parents because you are LGBTQ+. As shown in Figure 3.9 one quarter of youth (23.7%) said they do not have problems at home for being LGBTQ+, but few reported they talked to an adult outside of the family when having problems at home – only 11.3% reported that they spoke with someone "a menudo" or "muchas veces." For those participants who have spoken to an adult outside the family because of problems at home, we asked them who they most frequently speak to. As shown in Figure 3.10, LGBTQ+ most commonly reported speaking with friends (31.4%), followed by a mental health professional (20.2%), such as

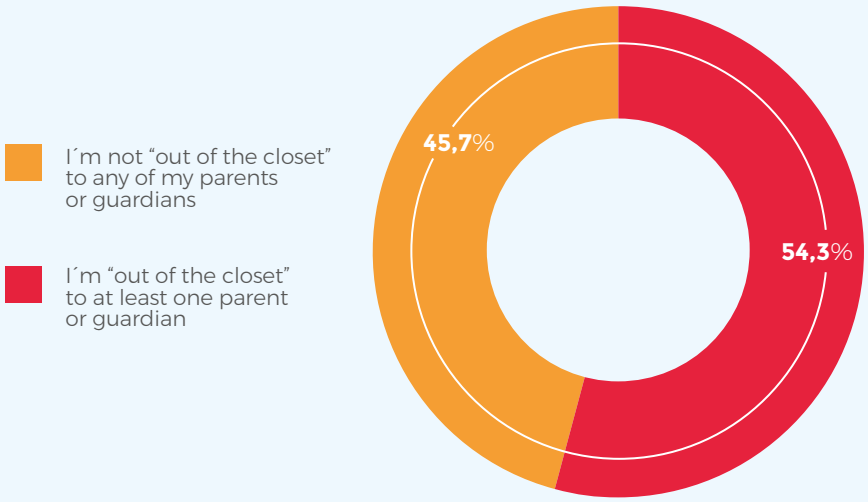
[54] Differences in the frequency of topics discussed with family (Sexuality, Dating and Relationships, Religion, Personal Problems, and LGBTQ+ Issues) were examined using a repeated measures multiple analysis of variance: Pillai's Trace = .06, F(4, 2077) = 32.22, p<.001. Pairwise comparisons were considered at p < .05 and showed that the frequency for Personal Problems was higher than all other topic and LGBTQ+ Issues was lower than all other topics. The frequencies for Sexuality, Dating and Relationships and Religion were not significantly different from one another.

a counselor or psychologist, and a school staff person (14.9%), such as a teacher/professor or coach. Another possible source of support for LGBTQ+ youth are other family members who are LGBTQ+ -- nearly half (46.2%) reported that had at least one other person in their family who was also LGBTQ+.

Taken together, these numbers show that LGBTQ+ youth in Colombia does not have a strong support network in their families. Almost one in five (19.8%) young people have been physically punished by their parents for being LGBTQ+, 87.2% hears homophobic and transphobic remarks in their homes, 68.2% do not talk to their parents about their personal life, and only 11.3% talks to any trusted adult, all of which negatively impacts their physical, mental, and emotional health.

Figure 3.3.
Outness to Parents and Parental Support for Being LGBTQ+

Which of the following options best describes how you are "out of the closet" to your parents and legal guardians regarding your orientation as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, or other?



How much support have you received from your parents since you "came out" of the closet?

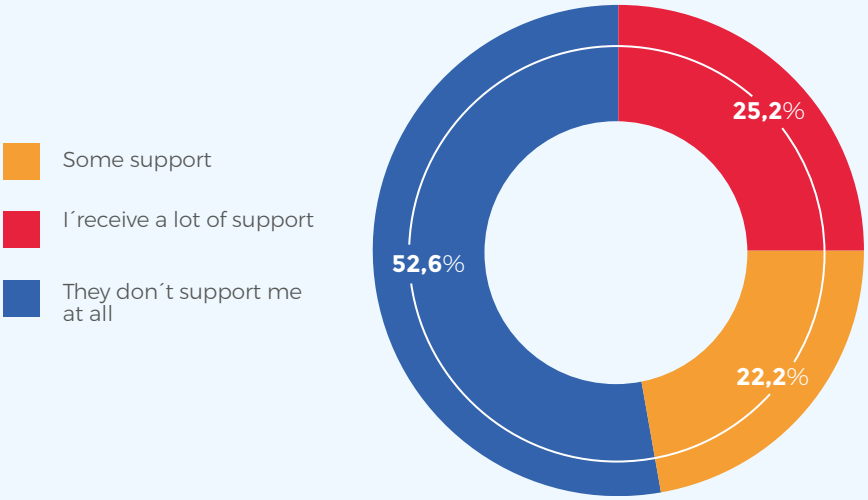


Figure 3.4.
How often to do you talk with your parents when you have problems?

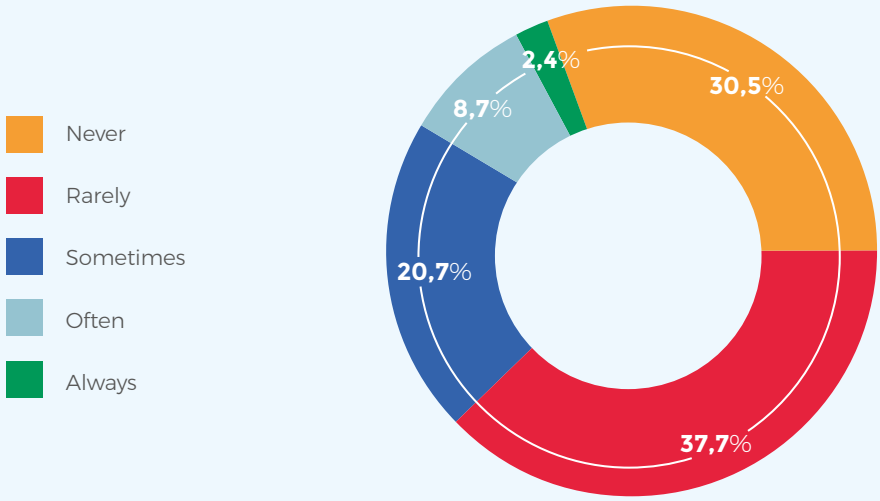


Figure3.5.
LGBTQ+ Youth Comfortable Discussing Specific Issues or Problems with their Parents

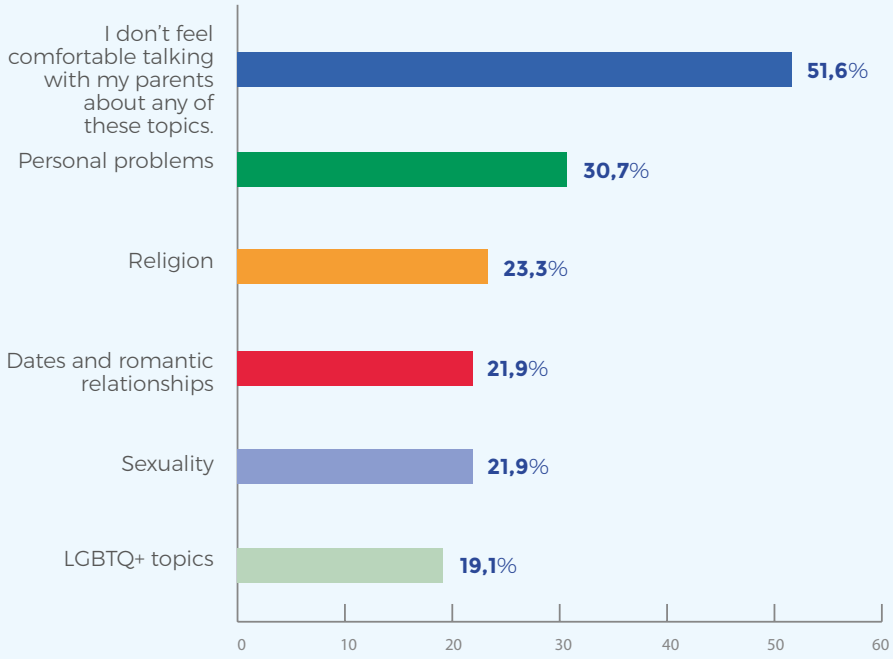


Figure 3.6.
How often do you argue with your parents over being LGBTQ+ or because your parents think you are LGBTQ+?

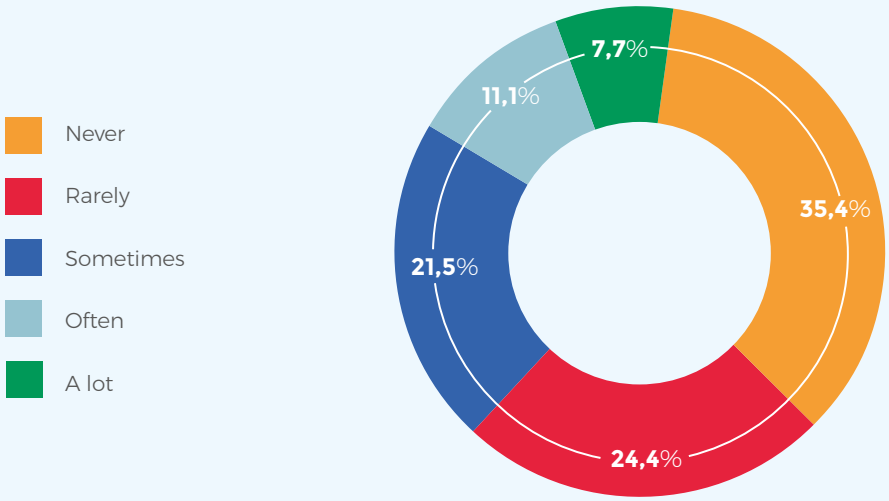


Figure 3.7.
How often have you been punished physically by your parents for being LGBTQ+ or because your parents think you are LGBTQ+?

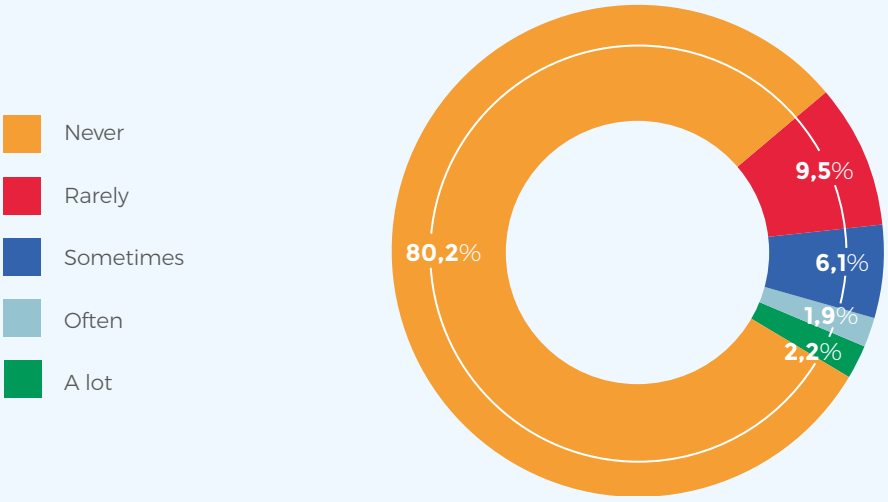


Figure 3.8.
In the last year, how often have your family members made transphobic or homophobic comments?

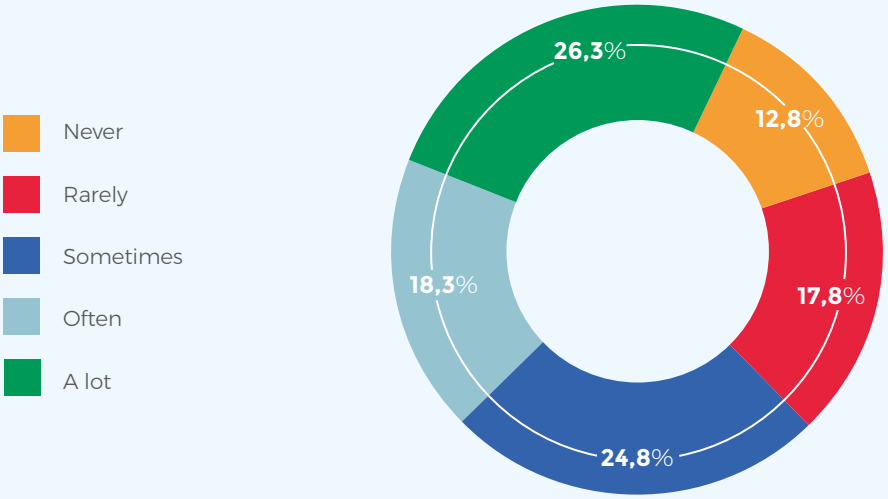


Figure 3.9.
During the last year, how often have you talked to an adult who is not part of your family (teachers, coaches, etc.) about your problems at home or with your parents over being LGBTQ+?

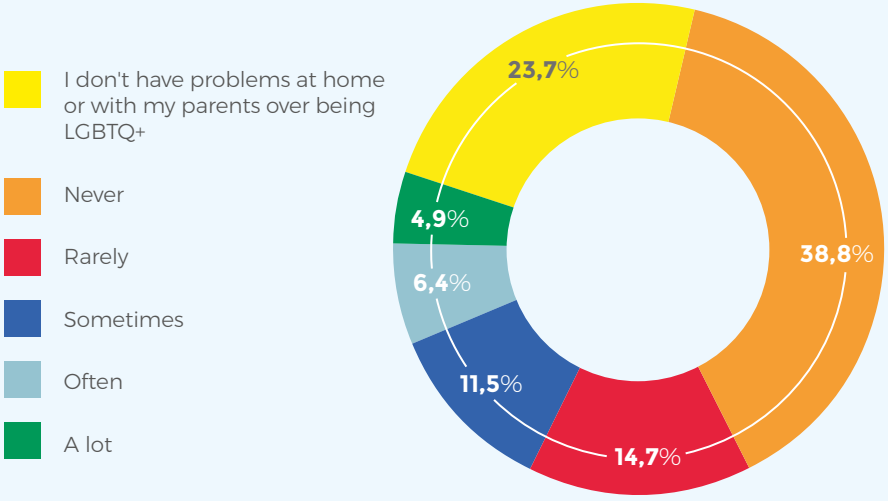
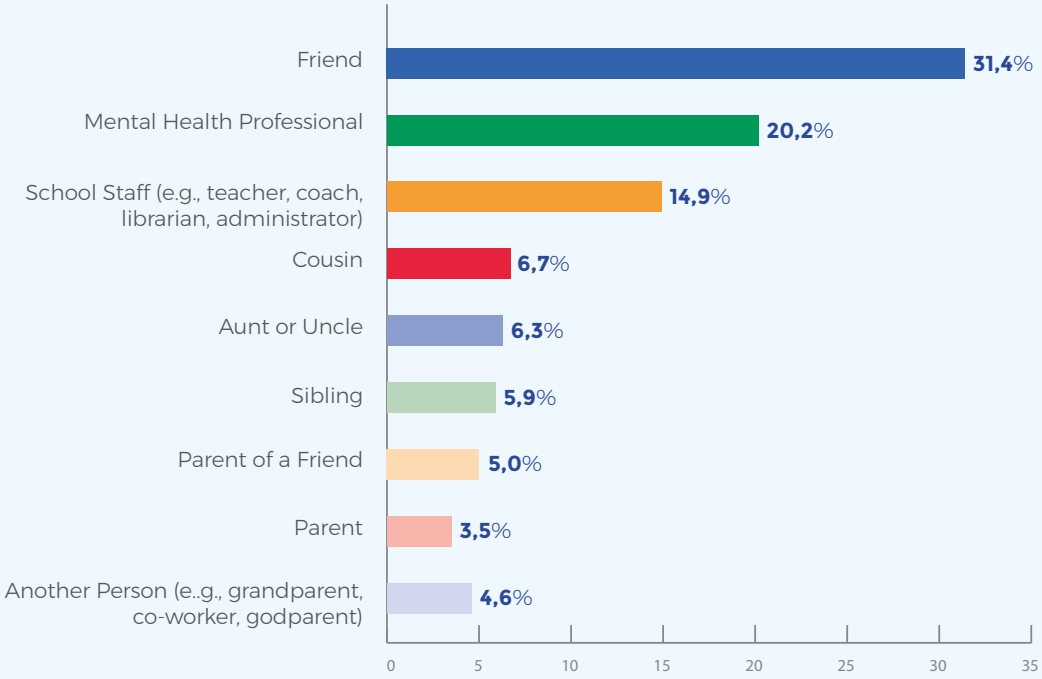


Figure 3.10. Which adult do you speak with the most about problems you've had at home or with your parents or guardians over being LGBTQ+?



RELIGION

In our previous discussion about values among Colombian youth, we noted a significant difference between the importance of religion for youth in general compared to LGBTQ+ youth in Colombia, with LGBTQ+ youth vastly reporting religion as not important.[55] For example, as shown in Figure 3.2, only 19.6% of LGBTQ+ youth rated religion as "somewhat important" or "very important" compared to 67.9% of the general population of youth in Colombia. The importance of religion among the general population of adults in Colombia was even higher than that of the general population of youth. Thus, for many LGBTQ+ youth, there may be a disconnect or rift within their families about the importance of religion and religious practices. In fact, when asked if they identified as the same religion as their family, only 17.7% said that they did, and an additional 18.2% said that they did not know.

Table 3.2 shows the reported family religion as well as the respondents' own religious affiliation. The majority of Colombian LGBTQ+ youth reported that their families were Catholic (73.2%), with the next largest group being Evangelical Christians (14.2%), which reflect recent statistics on religion in Colombia's general population.[56] LGBTQ+ youth, however, most commonly identified as agnostic (38.5%) and atheist (27.5%). Of the organized religions, LGBTQ+ youth most commonly identified as Catholic, although this was still less than 10% of the sample. To better understand the religious involvement of LGBTQ+ youth in Colombia, we asked participants in the survey how often they had attended religious services in the past year, apart from weddings and funerals. As shown in Figure 3.11, half (50.3%) of LGBTQ+ youth reported never having gone to religious services in the past year, but 11.6% reported going one or more times a week. When asked why they attended religious services, 41.2% reported that they were forced to attend by their parents and an additional 14.0% reported that it was a family

[55] We conducted a series of one-sample t-tests to compare the means from the World Values Survey data on Colombian youth (16-24 years old) to the means from our sample of LGBTQ+ youth in Colombia. The mean for the importance of family and of religion were significantly lower among LGBTQ+ youth than would be expected from the mean of the general sample of youth. Family: t(3028) = -35.26, p<.001, Cohen's d = .77; Religion: t(3025) = -77.18, p<.001, Cohen's d = .88.

[56] Results from the Latinobarómetro survey indicated that 68.9% of their national sample from Colombia identified as Catholic and 15.7% identified as Evangelical. Source: Corporación Latinobarómetro (2020). Latinobarómetro Survey 2020 [datafile]. Retrieved from: https://www.latinobarometro.org/latContents.jsp.

tradition (see Figure 3.12). Only 1 in 5 LGBTQ+ students (20.9%) said that they chose to attend religious services of their own volition. Furthermore, some youths indicated that they attended services for another reason not listed. Most commonly, they reported that it was because they attended a religious school that required attendance of services or that they went to keep family members company or make their family happy, as opposed to being forced to attend.

Some LGBTQ+ youth who attend religious services may encounter difficulties stemming from negative messages about LGBTQ+ people from members of the religious congregation and may not be comfortable expressing their LGBTQ+ identities with the congregation. Furthermore, LGBTQ+ youth may directly encounter problems with individuals of the religious congregation related to their LGBTQ+ identities. As shown in Figure 3.13, the vast majority of LGBTQ+ youths in Colombia (93.3%) had ever heard negative messages about LGBTQ+ people from their religious congregation or during services, and 60.3% reported this happened "a lot" or "frequently." Those LGBTQ+ youth who attended religious services were also asked to what degree they were out about their LGBTQ+ identities among the congregation. As shown in Figure 3.14, the vast majority of LGBTQ+ youth were not out at all in the congregation (82.9%). Lastly, we asked youth who attended religious services how often they had had problems with anyone in the congregation related to being LGBTQ+. Fortunately, as shown in Figure 3.15, the majority of LGBTQ+ youth reported that this negative experience occurred "never" or "almost never" (80.5%). This data point is encouraging. However, it should be nuanced with the fact that the vast majority of LGBTQ+ (82.9%) are not out of the closet in the congregation. Therefore, the absence of problems related to their identity may be due to the fact that they are hiding their LGBTQ+ identity, instead of more positive attitudes toward gender and sexuality diversity in religious spaces.

When we examined the family religious affiliation and frequency of hearing homophobic or transphobic remarks, youth from Catholic families were less likely to hear these types of remarks in their religious institution than those whose families were of another Christian denomination.[57] Similarly, we found that youth whose families were Catholic reported a lower frequency of negative interactions with members of the congregation about their LGBTQ+ identities than those of another Christian denomination and a marginally lower frequency than those from Evangelical Christian families. There was, however, no relation between family religious affiliation and being out in the congregation.[58]

For LGBTQ+ youth who attend religious services, hearing negative statements about LGBTQ+ people or having negative interactions on this point with members of the congregation could take a negative toll on their psychological well-being. We found that attending services, in and of itself, was not related to psychological well-being. However, we did find that hearing negative statements about LGBTQ+ people from the religious congregation was related to lower self-esteem, greater depression, and an increase likelihood of suicidal ideation (see Figure 3.16).[59] For example, as shown in Figure 3.16., 57.5% of LGBTQ+ youth who reported higher frequencies of negative remarks in their religious institutions ("a lot" or

[57] Because of the small percentages of many religions represented in the sample, family religious affiliation was categorized into four groups for this analysis: Catholic, Evangelical Christian, Another Christian Religion, and Another Religion. Results of a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicated significant mean differences in the frequency of hearing homophobic or transphobic remarks from the religious congregation: $F(3, 1349) = 8.71$, $p<.001$. Pairwise comparisons were considered at $p < .05$ and showed that the mean frequency of remarks was lower for the Catholic group than for the Evangelical Christian or Another Christian Religion groups, and no other significant differences.

[58] Because of the small percentages of many religions represented in the sample, family religious affiliation was categorized into four groups for this analysis: Catholic, Evangelical Christian, Another Christian Religion, and Another Religion. Results of a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicated significant mean differences in the frequency of hearing homophobic or transphobic remarks from the religious congregation: $F(3, 1301) = 2.76$, $p<.05$. Pairwise comparisons showed that the mean frequency of remarks was lower for the Catholic group than for the Another Christian Religion group ($p < .001$), and marginally lower for the Catholic group compared to the Evangelical Christian group ($p < .10$).

[59] The relationships between frequency of negative remarks and psychological well-being were examined with Pearson correlations. Depression: $r(1159) = .21$, $p < .001$; Suicidality: $r(1155) = .13$, $p < .001$; Self-Esteem: $r(1107) = -.14$, $p < .001$.

[60] The relationships between frequency of negative interactions with the religious congregation and psychological well-being were examined with Pearson correlations. Depression: $r(1120) = .15$, $p < .001$; Suicidality: $r(1117) = .10$, $p < .001$; Self-Esteem: $r(1068) = -.08$, $p < .05$.

"frequently") had higher levels of depression compared to 43.9% of those who reported lower frequencies ("never," "almost never," or "sometimes"). Similarly, as shown in Figure 3.17, having negative interactions with members of the congregation was related to increased depression and suicidality and decreased self-esteem.[60]

Table 3.2. Religious Affiliation: Family and Self (n=2848)

	Family		Self	
Catholics	73.2%	n=2086	8.8%	n=198
Evangelical Christians	14.2%	n=404	2.7%	n=61
Agnostics	2.1%	n=61	38.5%	n=863
Atheists	1.8%	n=52	27.5%	n=617
Pentecostals	1.4%	n=39	0.3%	n=7
Jehovah's Witnesses	1.3%	n=38	0.4%	n=9
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints	1.0%	n=28	0.2%	n=4
Protestants	0.9%	n=26	0.8%	n=17
Spiritual (no particular religion)	0.7%	n=21	5.4%	n=120
Seventh-day Adventists	0.5%	n=15	0.1%	n=3
Jews	0.3%	n=8	0.4%	n=9
Muslims	0.1%	n=2	0.0%	n=1
Buddhists	0.1%	n=3	1.8%	n=40
Other religion	1.3%	n=36	9.4%	n=210
Multiple religions	0.7%	n=20	0.0%	n=0
No religion	0.3%	n=9	3.7%	n=83

Figure 3.11. Besides weddings and funerals, how often did you attend rites or religious services virtually or in person in the last year?

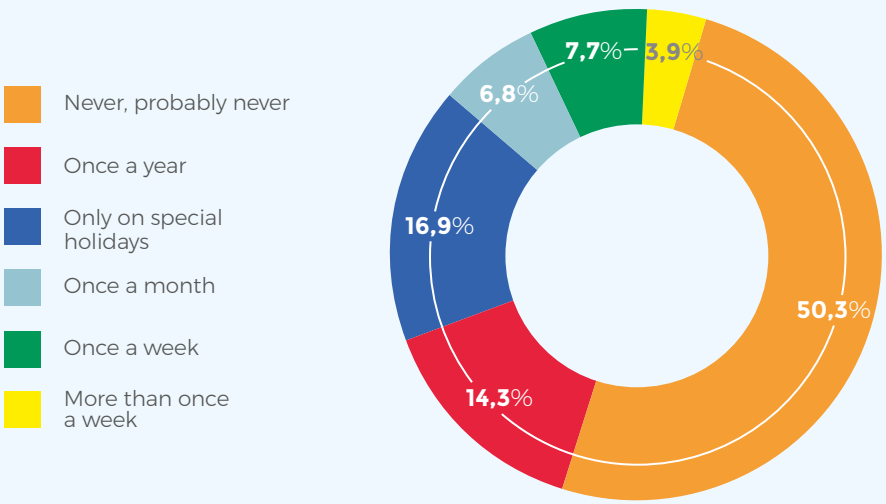


Figure 3.12.
Which of the following reasons describes your interest in attending rites or religious services?

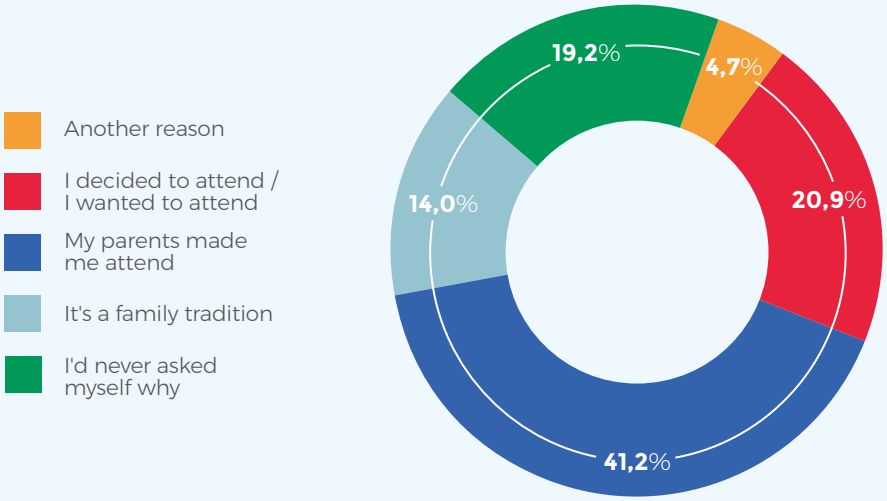


Figure 3.13.
How often have you heard negative messages about LGBTQ+ people in religious services or from members of the religious commmunity?

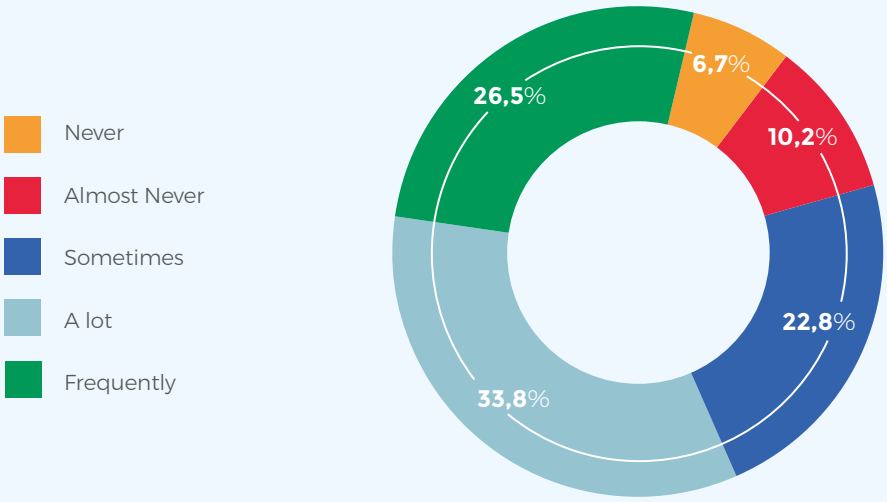


Figure 3.14.
Which of the following options best describes how you are "out of the closet" to members of your church or religious community regarding your orientation as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, or other?

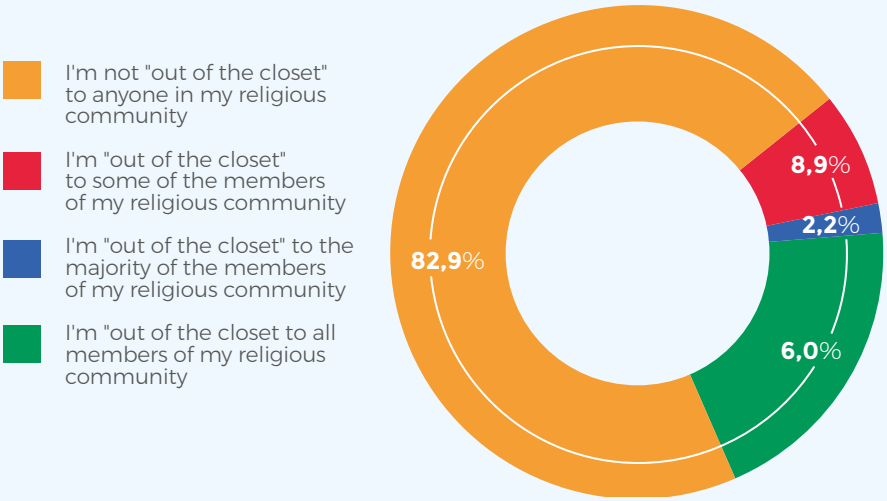


Figure 3.15.
How often did you have difficulties with a member of your church or religious community for being LGBTQ+?

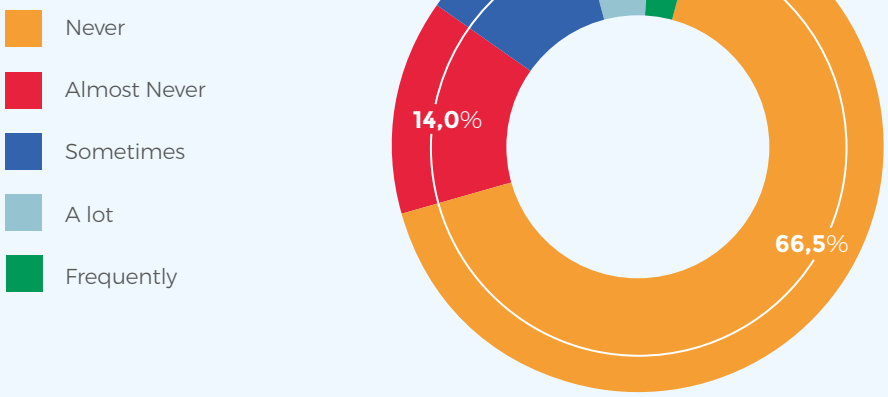


Figure 3.16. Hearing Negative Comments About LGBTQ+ People From the Religious Congregation and Psychological Well-being

How often have you heard negative messages about LGBTQ+ people in religious services or from members or your religious community?

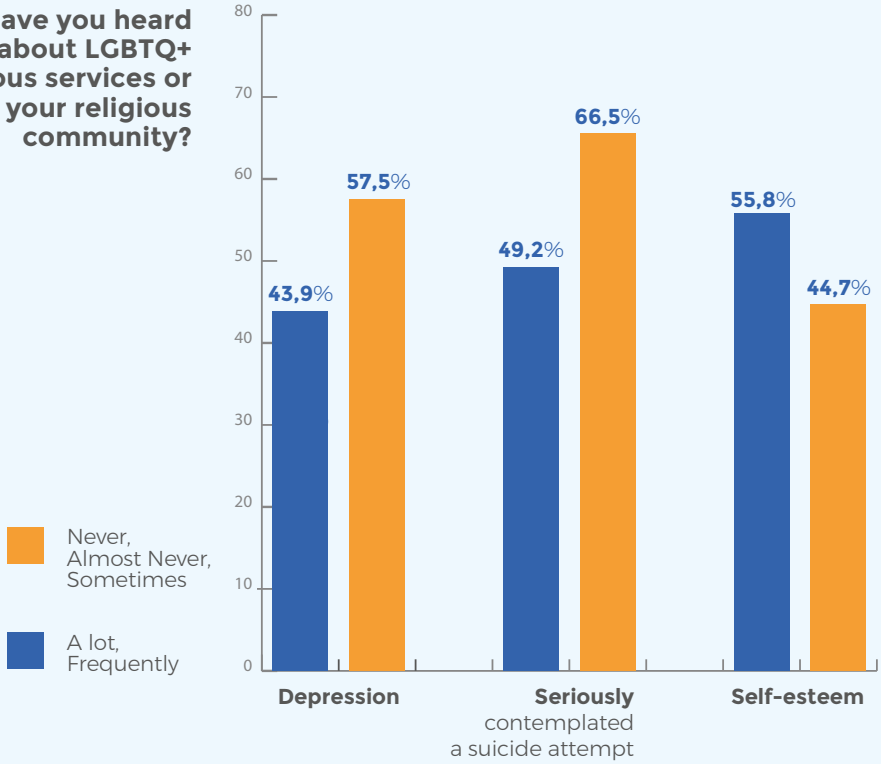
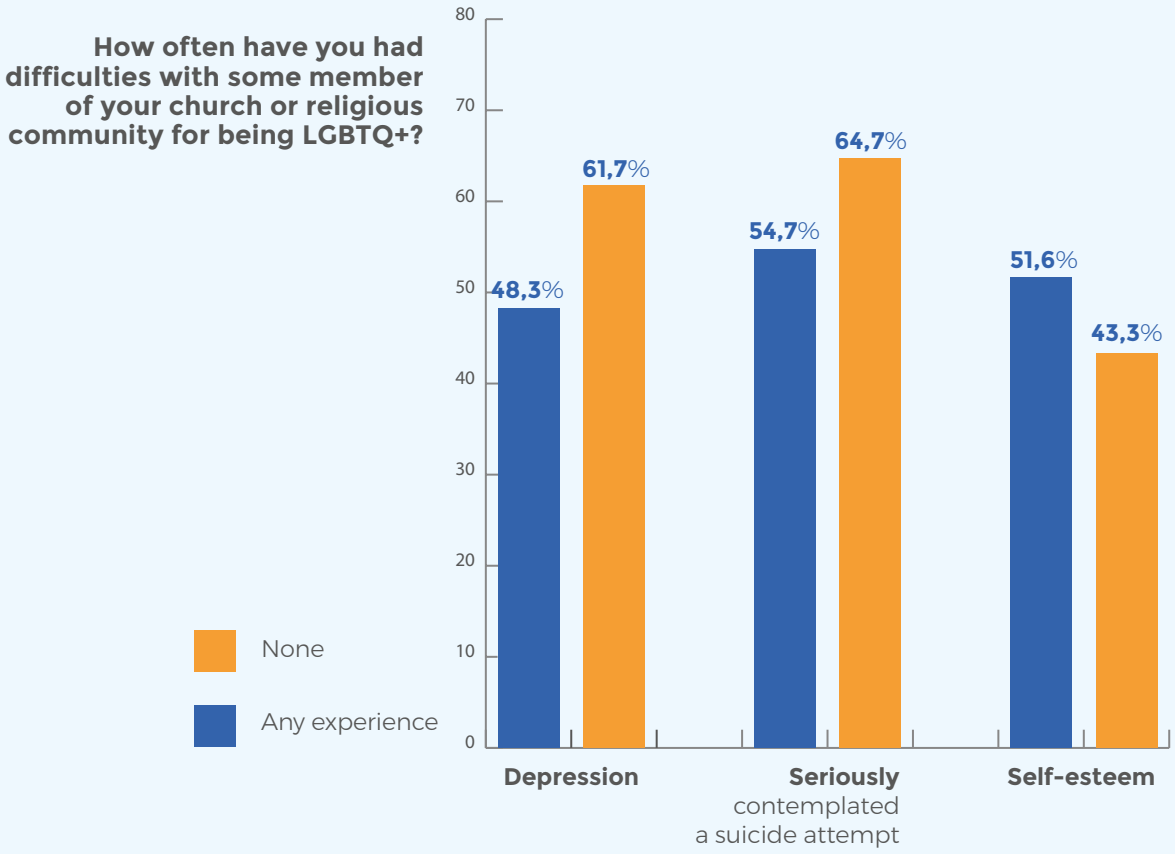


Figure 3.17. Negative Interactions With Members of the Religious Congregation for Being LGBTQ+



EXPERIENCES WITH CONVERSION "THERAPY"

Conversion "therapy" is a discredited practice intended to change the sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression of LGBTQ+ people. Recent research has shown that one in five LGBTQ+ adults in Colombia reported having undergone conversion "therapy," and the rate was even higher among transgender adults.[61] Further, the research shows that nearly half of these adults said it was from a religious leader. In addition, evidence from the United States suggests that conversion "therapy" can be even more harmful for LGBTQ+ adolescents.[62] In our survey, LGBTQ+ youth in Colombia were asked whether someone had tried to persuade them to change their sexual orientation or gender identity. As shown in Figure 3.18, 61.0% of LGBTQ+ youth had said that someone had tried to persuade them, and an additional 10.1% said that they were not sure. It is important to note that this percentage of LGBTQ+ youth in Colombia who had undergone conversion "therapy" was higher than that of the percentage of LGBTQ+ adults who had. This statistic might reflect an increase in these "therapies" for the younger generation in Colombia. However, it may also be that our survey did not specifically ask about "conversion therapy," but was broader in asking whether they had been persuaded to undergo such "treatment" (i.e., not whether they had or had not).

We further asked who had tried to persuade them to change their sexual orientation or gender identity, and most reported that it had been either a parent (60.2%) or another family member (40.3%) as shown in Figure 3.19. In addition, nearly a third (31.4%) reported it had been a religious leader, and 17.4% reported that it was someone in a professional position, including an educator or a medical or mental health professional.

[61] del Río-González, A. M., Zea, M. C., Flórez-Donado, J., Torres-Salazar, P., Abello-Luque, D., García-Montaño, E. A., García-Roncallo, P. A., and Meyer, I. H. (2021). Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Change Efforts and Suicide Morbidity Among Sexual and Gender Minority Adults in Colombia. Los Angeles: Williams Institute.

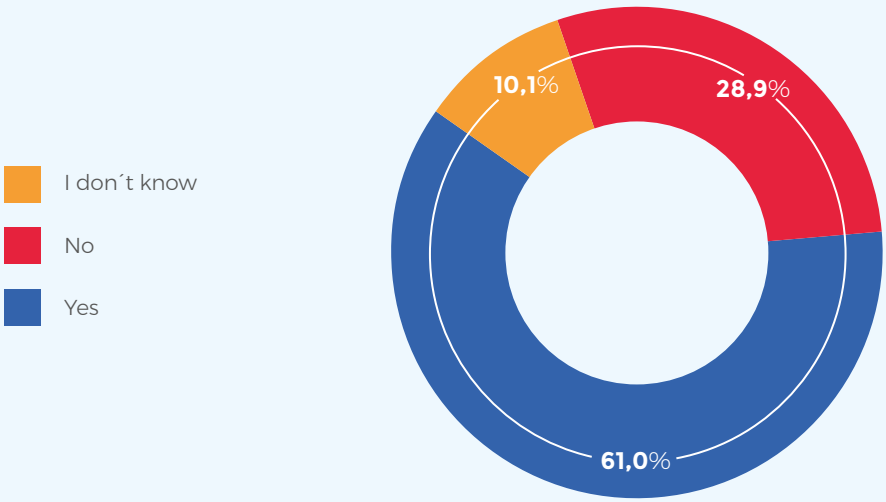
[62] Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Ending Conversion Therapy: Supporting and Affirming LGBTQ Youth. HHS Publication No. (SMA) 15-4928. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2015.

As shown in Figure 3.20, when asked why they participated in "treatments," most youth (78.6%) reported that they were forced by their parents.

We examined whether there were differences across sexual orientations or gender identities in the prevalence of being persuaded into some form of conversion therapy. Although the rates were high across gender identity groups, transgender and nonbinary youth were most likely to report this happening to them, similar to the experiences of LGBTQ+ adults in Colombia. For example, 70.9% of transgender youth and 69.6% of nonbinary youth said this had happened, compared to 59.4% of cisgender female youth and 57.7% of cisgender male youth.[63] With regard to sexual orientation, youth who identified as lesbian or gay, pansexual, or with another sexual orientation were more likely to report having been persuaded to change their sexual orientation or gender identity than bisexual youth, youth who were questioning their sexual orientation, and youth who had another sexual orientation.[64]

Being forced or persuaded to change one's sexual orientation or gender identity can have devastating effects on the well-being of the LGBTQ+ young person. Among the youth in this study, having been forced or pressured to change was related to higher levels of depression and a greater likelihood of having seriously considered suicide.[65-66] As shown in Figure 3.21, for example, 48.2% of youth who had not been forced or pressured to alter their sexual orientation or gender identity reported having seriously contemplated suicide in the past year, compared to 63.9% of youth who had been subjected to that pressure. In addition, being forced or pressured to change one's LGBTQ+ identity was associated with lower self-esteem.[67] As also shown in Figure 3.21, 46.7% of LGBTQ+ youth who had experienced this reported low levels of self-esteem, compared to 51.8% of those who had not.

Figure 3.18.
Has anyone tried to convince you to change your sexual orientation or gender identity?



[63] Chi-square test was performed examining being persuaded to change sexual orientation or gender identity by gender, and differences in column proportions were examined at $p < .05$: $\chi 2 = 36.31$, $df = 10$, $p<.001$, Cramer's $V = .11$. The proportion of youth reporting that they had been persuaded was higher among transgender youth (70.9%) and nonbinary youth (69.6%) than among all other groups: cisgender male and female youth (57.7% and 59.4%, respectively) , youth who were questioning their gender (57.6%) and youth with another gender identity (50.0%).

[64] Chi-square tests were performed examining being persuaded to change sexual orientation or gender identity by sexual orientation, and differences in column proportions were examined at $p < .05$: $\chi 2 = 36.06$, $df = 8$, $p<.001$, Cramer's $V = .11$. The proportion of youth reporting that they had been persuaded was higher among gay or lesbian youth (66.0%), pansexual youth (65.4%) and youth with another sexual orientation (67.5%) than among bisexual youth (56.1%) and youth who were questioning their sexual orientation (47.4%).

[65] To examine the relationship between a categorical variable indicating whether or not youth had been persuaded or forced to change their sexual orientation or gender identity and depression, a point-biserial correlation was performed: $r(2141) = .18$, $p < .001$.

[66] To examine the relationship having been persuaded or forced to change their sexual orientation or gender identity and having seriously contemplated suicide in the past year, a Chi-square analysis was performed: $\chi 2 = 47.00$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$, $\Phi = .15$.

[67] To examine the relationship between a categorical variable indicating whether or not youth had been persuaded or forced to change their sexual orientation or gender identity and self-esteem, a point-biserial correlation was performed: $r(2141) = -.10$, $p < .001$.

Figure 3.19. Who tried to change your sexual orientation or gender identity?

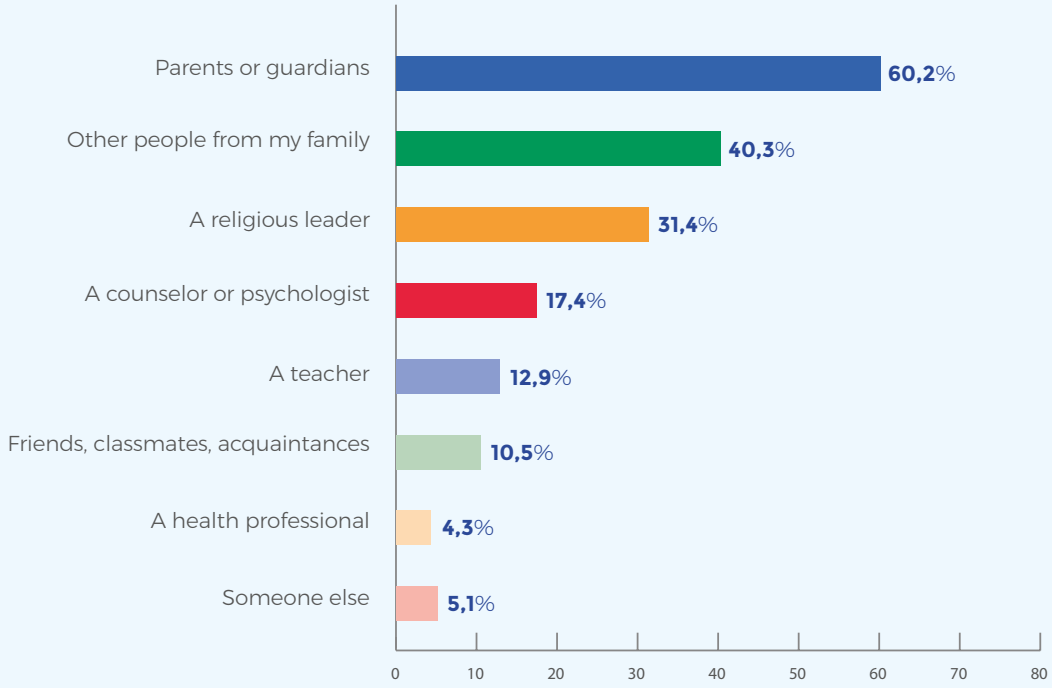


Figure 3.20. Why did you attend those treatments or therapies?

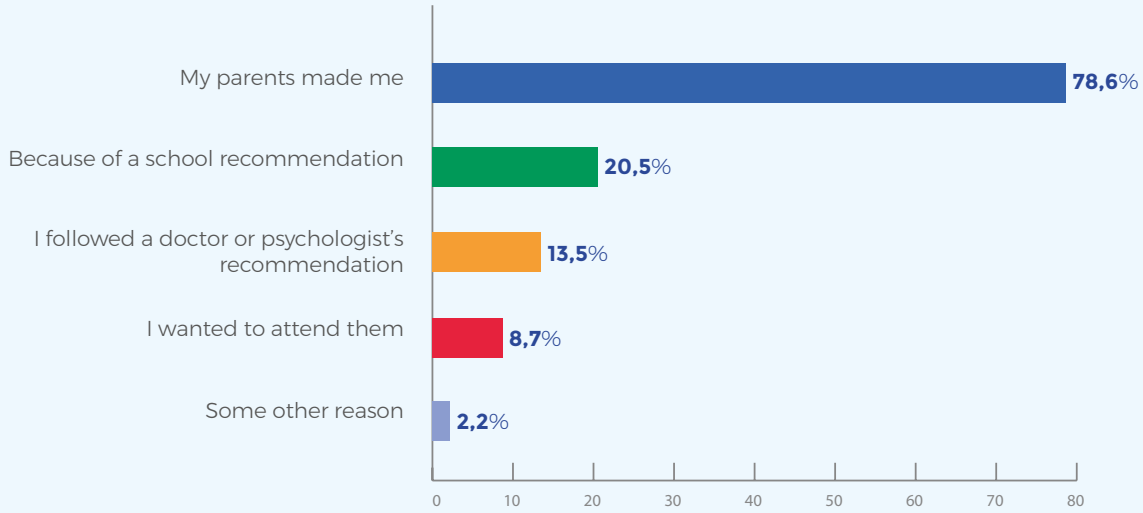
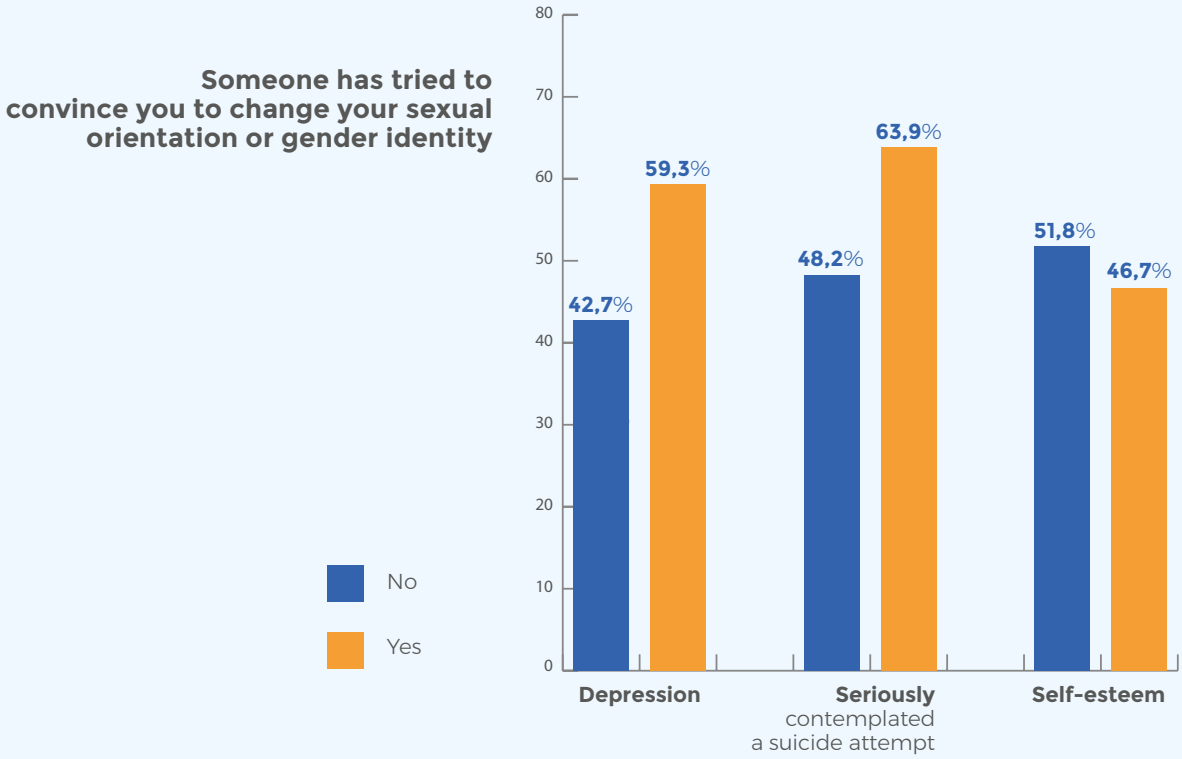


Figure 3.21. Conversion "Therapy" and Psychological Well-being
(Percantage of LGBTQ+ students reporting high levels)



EXPERIENCES IN THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

As discussed in Part I of this report, the ongoing complications brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic into 2021 meant that less than 1 in 10 LGBTQ+ students in Colombia had been in school in person the entire year. Consequentially, LGBTQ+ youth may have been spending more time at home and with their families because of pandemic restrictions, even if they were no longer in school. For youth (LGBTQ+ and otherwise), spending more time with their families may have been a source of stress if they did not enjoy positive relationships with their parents or if there were family conflicts. LGBTQ+ youth particularly may not have had the same access to supportive peers and other resources as they had once had before the pandemic. Furthermore, those youth who were not out to their families may have struggled with the added anxiety of their family members learning about their identities. As is the case for most individuals globally, they may have also had heightened fear and anxiety about their health or the health of family and friends. For these reasons, we felt that it was essential to ask the youth in our survey about their experiences related to the pandemic: 1) LGBTQ+-related matters, 2) support from friends and family, 3) education, and 4) health and well-being (see Figure 3.22).

LGBTQ+-RELATED MATTERS.

About a third of LGBTQ+ youth in Colombia (33.8%) said that being at home with their family because of the pandemic had been a problem because of their LGBTQ+ identities. Nevertheless, the vast majority of LGBTQ+ youth in Colombia (83.4%) missed spending time with people who accept and support them as LGBTQ+ people. Slightly more than half of young LGBTQ+ people (55.1%) reported feeling worried about their family finding out that they are LGBTQ+ because of so much time spent at home. This percentage was understandably higher among those who were not out to any parent or guardian than among those who were out to at least one (78.1% vs. 35.9%).[68]

[68] Chi-square test was performed examining the percent of youth agreeing ("agree" or "strongly agree") with the statement "I'm worried my family will find out I'm LGBTQ+ now that I'm at home more" by whether they were out to at least one parent or not: $\chi 2 = 473.48$, df = 1, $p<.001$, $\Phi = -.42$.

SUPPORT FROM FAMILY AND FRIENDS.

LGBTQ+ youth overwhelmingly (84.4%) reported that their friends had supported them during this time, indicating that social distancing measures may not have necessarily hindered their supportive interactions with peers. About half of the youth in our survey said they were happy to spend more time at home during the pandemic (47.9%), and about half said their family supported them during this time (50.5%). It is important to note that youths' feelings towards spending time at home and having a supportive family are not necessarily independent. The young LGBTQ+ people who reported that their family was not supportive of them were half as likely to claim that they were happy spending time at home (33.1% vs. 62.2%).[69]

EDUCATION.

Slightly more than half of youth (55.1%) reported that they missed school because of the pandemic.[70] However, less than a third (28.9%) reported that they are happier at home because school was an unsafe space for them. Although youth may be spending more time online during the pandemic, few (17.5%) reported being subjected to more cyberbullying during the pandemic.

HEALTH AND WELL-BEING.

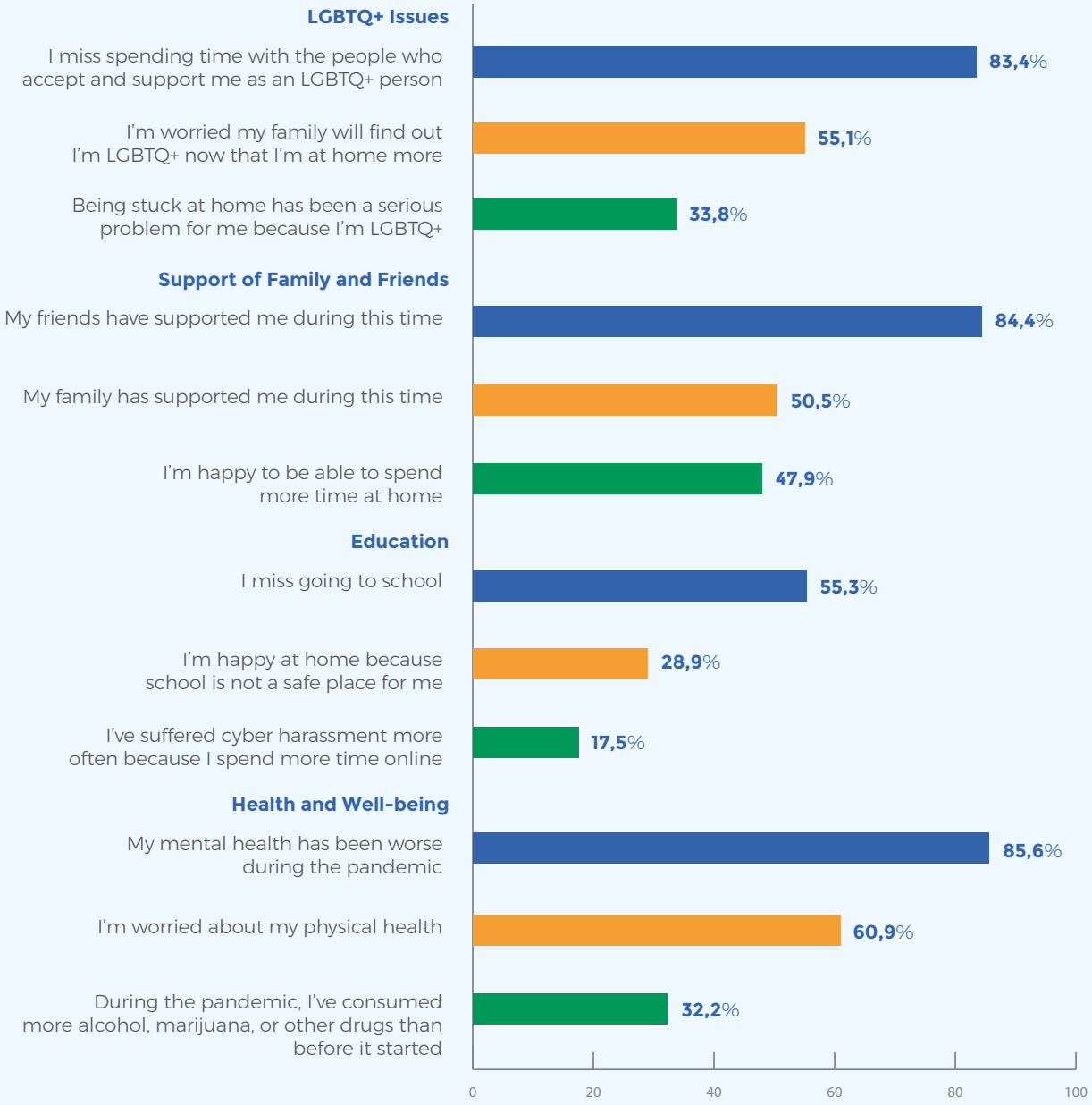
More than half of LGBTQ+ youth (60.9%) reported being concerned about their own health during the pandemic, and the vast majority (85.6%) claimed that their mental health had worsened. In addition, a third of youth (32.2%) reported using more alcohol, marijuana, or other drugs during this period. For some of these youth, the increased use of alcohol or drugs may be a means of coping or self-medicating related to stressors associated with the pandemic. Those who reported having worse mental health during the pandemic were more likely to report using alcohol or drugs than those who did not (33.9% vs. 22.8%). In addition, youth who were unhappy spending more time at home were also more likely to report elevated drug and alcohol use (35.6% vs. 28.5%).[71]

[69] Chi-square test was performed examining the percent of youth agreeing ("agree" or "strongly agree") with the statement "I'm worried my family will find out I'm LGBTQ+ now that I'm at home more" by the percent of youth agreeing with the statement "I'm happy to be able to spend more time at home": $\chi 2 = 220.41$, $df = 1$, $p<.001$, $\Phi = .29$.

[70] The percent of youth who were in school during 2021 were more likely to report that they missed being in school compared to those who were not in school (59.1% vs. 51.5%): $\chi 2 = 15.58$, $df = 1$, $p<.001$, $\Phi = .08$.

[71] Chi-square test was performed examining the percent of youth agreeing ("agree" or "strongly agree") with the statement "I'm happy to be able to spend more time at home" by the percent of youth agreeing with the statement "During the pandemic, I've consumed more alcohol, marijuana, or other drugs than before it started": $\chi 2 = 14.90$, $df = 1$, $p<.001$, $\Phi = -.08$.

Figure 3.22. Concerns About COVID-19 (percent reporting "strongly agree" or "agree")



ONLINE ACTIVITIES

Research on online activities among youth in Colombia prior to the COVID-19 pandemic indicated that 16-year-olds spent, on average, five hours a day on the internet. That time may likely have increased during the pandemic as many schools resorted to remote, online learning. As discussed in Part 1 of this report, very few LGBTQ+ students in Colombia are exposed to positive information on events, figures, and topics related to their identities in school. As a result, the internet may serve as a vital source of connection to peer groups, and as a source of information on LGBTQ+ identity, health, and politics.

Our survey respondents were asked what devices they use to connect to the internet. The vast majority of LGBTQ+ youth (95.0%) reported that they use their cell phone to access the internet, and in addition, more than half (56.8%) have their own computer at home that they use to access the internet (see Figure 3.23). When asked about the types of social media or networks they engage with online, youth most commonly reported spending their time on WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, and less commonly on dating sites (e.g., Tinder, Grindr), Tumblr, and Reddit (see Figure 3.24).

The LGBTQ+ youth in our survey were also asked what online activities they access related to LGBTQ+ information and issues. The most commonly reported activity, as shown in Figure 3.25, was watching television, films, or other media with LGBTQ+ themes (76.6%), followed by watching other online videos with LGBTQ+ themes (63.0%), learning about sex and sexuality (61.8%), and searching for information on LGBTQ+ issues (58.2%).[72] Youth least reported going online to write posts or commentaries about sexual and gender diversity (21.5%) and participate in discussion forums on LGBTQ+ issues. Less than 10% of these youth reported never going online for any of these activities (8.7%). Even though Colombians in rural areas may have less access to the internet, depending on their region, there were no differences among urban, suburban, and rural youth in the types of activities they reported online. However, there were significant differences by gender.[73] Transgender and nonbinary youth, compared to cisgender youth, were more likely to report conducting all of the activities we asked about, with the exception of watching videos on LGBTQ+ issues, learning about sex and sexuality, and finding friends or partners online. Thus, it may be that transgender and nonbinary youth have a greater need for information and are generally more inclined to participate in online discussions.

Lastly, LGBTQ+ youth were asked what types of information they had sought online in the past year. **As shown in Figure 3.26, most youth reported looking for information about depression, suicide and mental health (76.5%), and sexuality or sexual attraction (74.8%)**.[74] Although, as a whole, the survey sample of LGBTQ+ youth were least likely to report going online to learn about medical transitions (16.8%), it was considerably more common among transgender youth—two-thirds of transgender youth (68.7%) had searched for information on this topic in the past year. [75] Cisgender males were more likely to search for specific information about sex and sexuality than all other youth, specifically HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, condom use, and the how-tos of sexual activity than all other youth. Cisgender females were more likely to seek information about contraception than cisgender males and transgender youth.

[72] Mean differences in the types of activities conducted online were examined using a repeated measures multiple analysis of variance: Pillai's Trace = .63, F(11, 2544) =387.55, p<.001. Pairwise comparisons showed that all sites were significantly different from one another regarding the likelihood of being conducted at $p < .05$, with the following exceptions: watching videos on LGBTQ+ issues and learning about sex and sexuality were not different, and participating in virtual communities or discussion forums on LGBTQ+ issues and writing posts or comment on articles about sexual and gender diversity were not different.

[73] Mean differences by gender in the types of activities conducted online were examined using a multiple analysis of variance, comparing four gender groups: cisgender female, cisgender male, transgender and nonbinary, and questioning): Pillai's Trace = .09, F(36, 7476) = 6.71, p<.001. Pairwise comparisons were considered at $p < .05$ and indicated differences by gender in all activities except for watching television and other media with LGBTQ+ themes and learning about sex and sexuality. Transgender and nonbinary students were more likely than all others to: look for information on LGBTQ+ issues, read LGBTQ+ news, and were more likely than cisgender male and female youth to watch LGBTQ+ videos, participate in discussion forums, raise their voice on political issues, be part of a digital community, and write posts or comments on sexual and gender diversity. In addition, cisgender females were less likely than all others to go online to meet LGBTQ+ people and to find friends or partners, and cisgender males were more likely than all others to do both of these activities.

[74] Mean differences in the types of information sought online in the past year were examined using a repeated measures multiple analysis of variance: Pillai's Trace = .72, F(8, 2489) =799.82, p<.001. Pairwise comparisons showed that each type of information were significantly different from one another at $p < .05$, with the following exceptions: information about HIV/AIDS and other STDs was not different from information about condom use, information about HIV/AIDS and other STDs, information about contraception, and information about the how-tos of sex were not different from each other, and information about sexuality in general and information about mental health were not different.

[75] Mean differences by gender in the types of information sought online in the past year were examined using a measures multiple analysis of variance, comparing four gender groups: cisgender female, cisgender male, transgender and nonbinary, and questioning: Pillai's Trace = .28, F(27, 7320) = 27.39, p<.001. Pairwise comparisons were considered at $p < .05$ and indicated differences by gender in all types of information except for general information about sex and sexuality. Transgender and nonbinary youth were more likely to seek our information about medical transition than all other youth and were more likely than cisgender males and females to seek out information about harassment and assault. Questioning youth were more likely than cisgender females to seek out information about medical transition, more likely than cisgender males to seek out information about harassment and assault, and more likely to say they sought no information than cisgender females and transgender and nonbinary youth. Cisgender males were more likely than all others to seek out information about condom use, HIV/AIDs and other STDS, and how-tos of sex and were less likely than all others to seek out information about mental health. Cisgender females were more likely than all others to seek out information about contraception and were more likely to seek information about how-tos of sex than transgender and nonbinary youth.

These results of LGBTQ+ youth's activity online demonstrates the importance of the internet as a tool to engage with peers and learn information about LGBTQ+ issues. With regard to information, it is important to note that this also likely compensates for the lack of any inclusion on LGBTQ+ issues in the curriculum. And although the internet can be a source of many reputable sites, it is also filled with sites with misinformation. And when youth do not received guidance on how to search for information, we cannot be sure they are learning accurate information.

Figure 3.23. Which of the following devices do you normally use to connect to the internet?

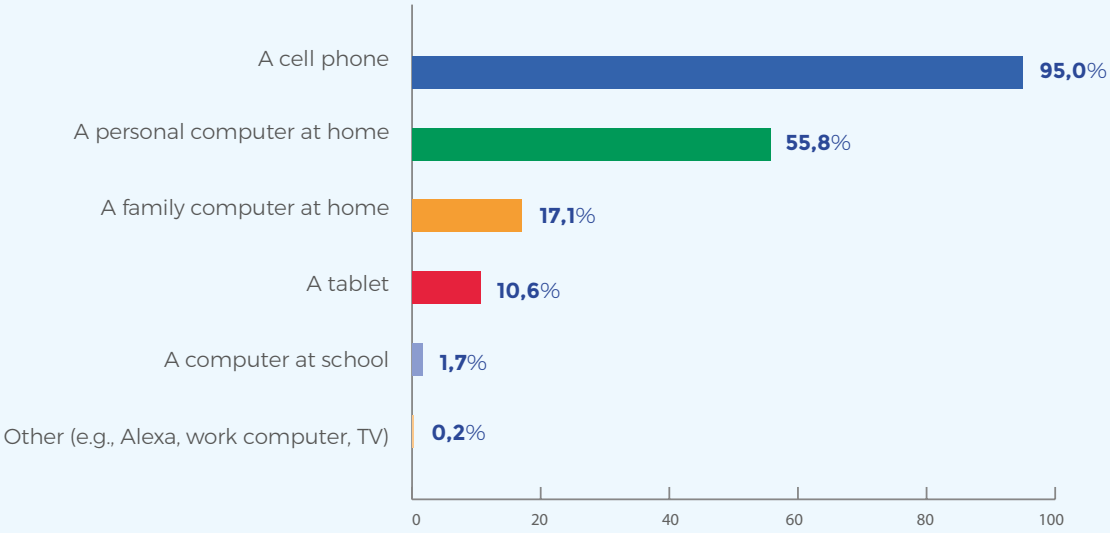


Figure 3.24. How often do you use the following social networks?

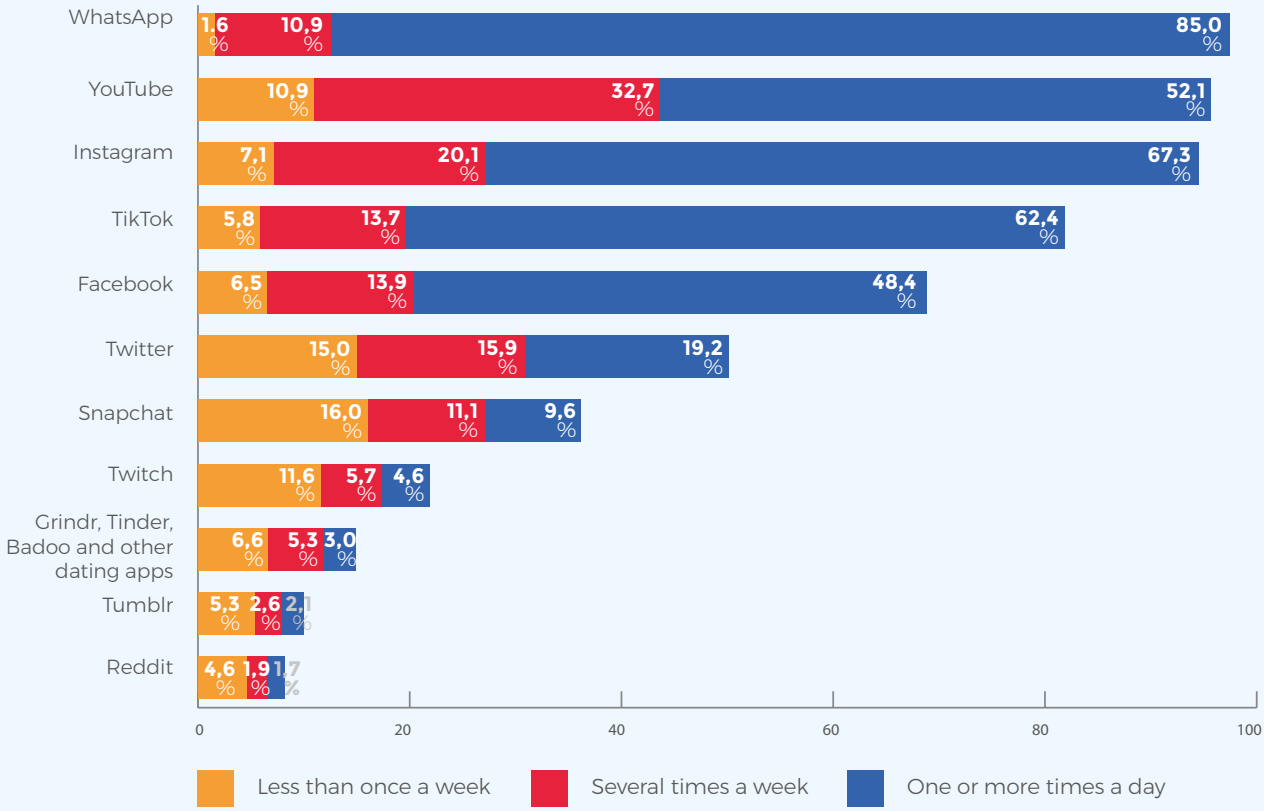


Figure 3.25. Which of the following activities do you perform online?

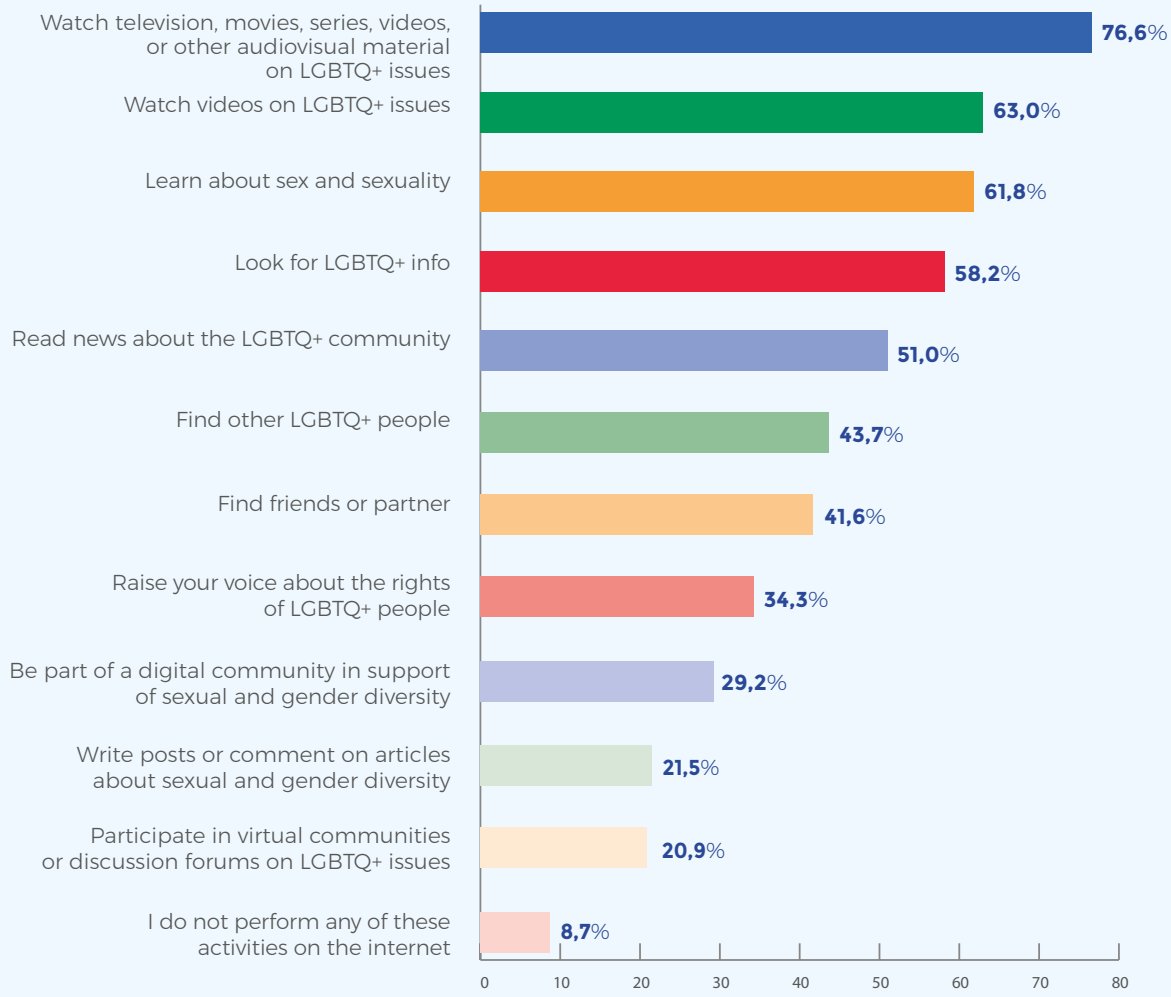
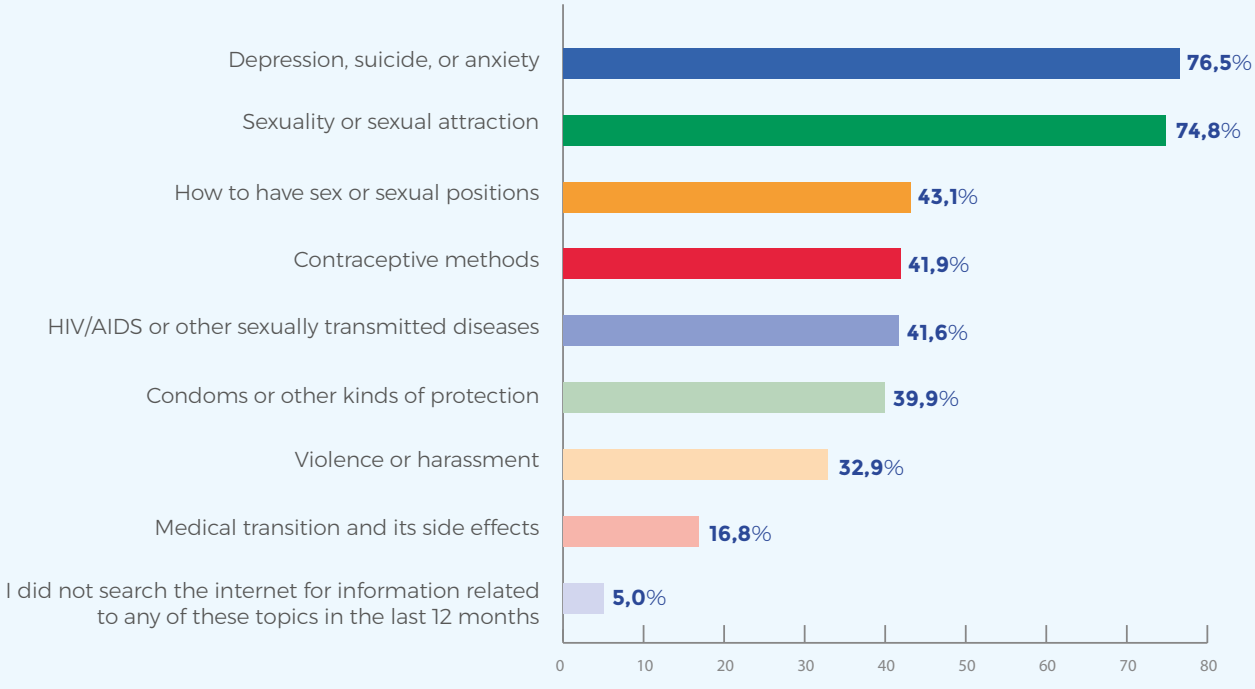


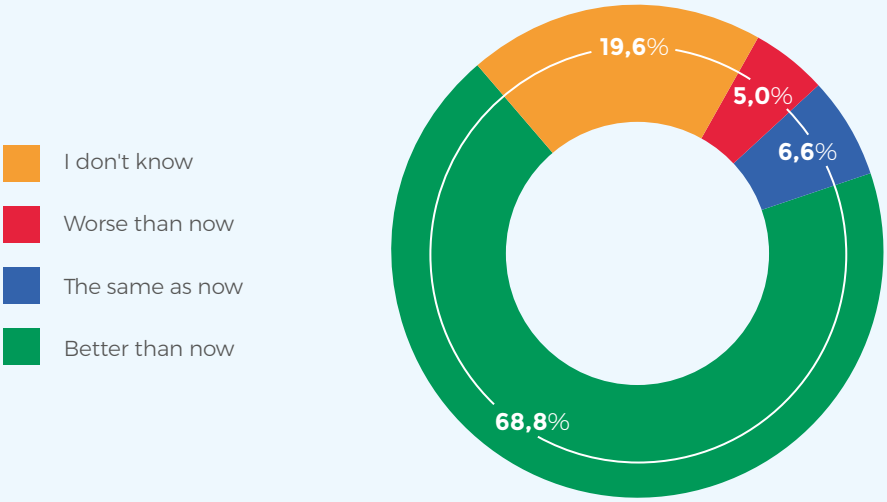
Figure 3.26. En los últimos 12 meses, ¿buscó en internet información relacionada con alguno de los siguientes temas?



HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

Although many LGBTQ+ youth in our survey report challenges regarding school safety, family relationships, religion, the COVID-19 pandemic, and mental health, we also see in what ways some of these adolescents are thriving: many report having family support and many are seeking out information and social connections online. We asked the LGBTQ+ youth in our survey if they thought things would be better in five years, and as shown in Figure 3.27, more than two-thirds (68.8%) thought things would be better in the future, while a mere 5.0% believed that things would get worse. There were, however, differences by gender in these hopes for the future.[76] Transgender and nonbinary youth were more likely to say that things would be worse than cisgender males and females (cisgender males: 3.7%; cisgender females: 4.1%; transgender and nonbinary: 8.1%, and questioning: 5.9%). Cisgender males were most likely to believe that things would be better in five years than all others, and cisgender females were more likely than transgender and nonbinary and questioning youth (cisgender males: 78.9%; cisgender females: 69.8%; transgender and nonbinary: 63.1%, and questioning: 56.1%). Lastly, cisgender males were also least likely to be unsure of the future, and cisgender females were less likely than questioning youth to feel this insecurity (cisgender males: 11.8%; cisgender females: 19.4%; transgender and nonbinary: 22.5%, and questioning: 28.9%). LGBTQ+ youth in Colombia are hopeful overall about the future, but special attention should be paid to those youth within this population who may have more reasons to feel hopeless.

Figure 3.27. In general, how do you think you'll be doing in 5 years?



LIMITATIONS

The methods used for our survey resulted in a nationally representative sample of LGBTQ+ students. However, it is important to note that our sample is representative only of youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (or another non-heterosexual sexual orientation and/or non-cisgender gender identity) and have some connection to the LGBTQ+ community (either through their local youth organization or through the internet, including social media). As discussed in the Methods section, in addition to announcing the survey through LGBTQ+ community groups, LGBTQ+ youth-oriented social media, and youth advocacy organizations, we conducted targeted advertising on social media sites to broaden our reach and obtain a more representative sample. However, youth who were not connected to Sentiido or websites related to lesbian, gay, transgender, and queer issues may not have come across the survey. Some potential respondents might not have felt safe or comfortable going to a link for an LGBTQ+-related survey. Thus, those young people who are perhaps the most isolated—without a formal connection to the LGBTQ+

[76] Chi-square test was performed examining beliefs about the future across four gender groups (cisgender female, cisgender male, transgender and nonbinary, questioning), and differences in column proportions were examined at $p < .05$: $\chi 2 = 62.52$, $df = 9$, $p<.001$, Cramer's $V = .09$.

community and access to online resources and support systems and who are not comfortable identifying their sexual orientation or gender identity in their Facebook profile—may be underrepresented in the survey sample.

We also cannot extrapolate from our data about the experiences of youth who engage in same-sex sexual activity or experience same-sex attractions but who do not personally identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. These youth may be more isolated and unaware of the resources available to them. Even if aware of their existence, they may be uncomfortable reaching out to support networks. Similarly, youth whose gender identity is not the same as their sex assigned at birth but who do not identify as transgender may also be more isolated and lack access to the same resources as the youth in our survey.

It is also important to note that the research findings in this report about school experience only reflect the experiences of LGBTQ+ students who were in school during the 2021 school year. Although our sample allows students who had left school at some point during the 2021 school year to participate, it still does not reflect the experiences of LGBTQ+ youth who may have already dropped out in years prior. The experiences of these youth would perhaps differ from those of students who remained in school, particularly concerning hostile school climate, access to supportive resources, severity of school discipline, juvenile/criminal justice involvement, and homelessness.

Lastly, the data from our survey are cross-sectional (i.e., the data were collected at one point in time), which means we cannot determine causality. For example, although we can say there was a relationship between the number of supportive staff and students' academic achievement, we cannot say that one predicts the other.

While considering these limitations, our attempts at diverse recruitment have yielded a sample of LGBTQ+ students that we believe most likely closely reflects the population of LGBTQ+ intermediate and secondary school students in Colombia.

CONCLUSION

In the last decade, Colombia has made significant progress in recognizing the rights of LGBTQ+ people. Sexual orientation and gender identity and expression are protected categories, and multiple Constitutional Court rulings recognize, protect, and seek to guarantee LGBTQ+ rights. Equal marriage, same-sex adoption, eligibility for pensions and other partner benefits, and the ability to change name and sex markers on all official documents without medical or psychological requirements are all protected. Many of these rights, however, remain notional, and LGBTQ+ youth in Colombia continue to face bias, discrimination, and violence in their daily lives.

Although there is not a lot of quantitative research about LGBTQ+ people in the country, most of the scarce data available focus on the adult LGBTQ+ population. Our study presents a major contribution to LGBTQ+ data collection efforts by providing the most comprehensive picture yet of the experiences, needs, and support networks of LGBTQ+ youth in Colombia. To do so, we focused on four critical areas of their lives: school, family life, religious life, and online activities. The study also gives valuable insight into how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted their daily lives, mental health, relations, etc. This information is valuable for educators, policymakers, parents, religious leaders, and others interested in designing, implementing, and evaluating data-based programs, initiatives, or policies to create a more inclusive society for all young people, including LGBTQ+ youth.

Our findings support and expand previous adult LGBTQ+ data that show that bias, discrimination, harassment, and violence are common experiences for LGBTQ+ youth in Colombia. One of the findings of the study is that, as adults, we are failing LGBTQ+ youth in the spaces where they spend most of their time and which are critical for their development, education, and well-being: school, church, and home. LGBTQ+ youth do not find in the adults charged with their protection, education, and care the resources they need to affirm their identities and manage situations of SOGIE-based harassment or violence. Moreover, they frequently hear homophobic and transphobic remarks from teachers, parents, religious leaders, and even mental health professionals. Also, these adults often pressure them to change their sexual orientation or gender identity or both, something that science has repeatedly and decisively shown is not only not possible but deeply harmful for the individual.

More concretely, our study found that 1) LGBTQ+ youth in Colombia commonly experience incidents of SOGIE-related bias, discrimination, institutional harassment, and violence in schools; 2) the majority of LGBTQ+ youth do not have strong support networks at their home, school, or church; and 3) they do not have access to many affirming resources or safe spaces.

When it comes to school, most LGBTQ+ students face a hostile learning climate. 92% reported hearing homophobic remarks at school, 87.0% said they had felt deliberately excluded by other students, and less than half (46.1%) reported that other students were accepting of LGBTQ+ people.

One would expect school leadership, staff, and teachers to step in to mitigate the harassment and bias LGBTQ+ students face from their peers. However, the role of adults in school settings is also cause for concern. 65.5% of LGBTQ+ students said they hear homophobic remarks from their teachers and other school staff, with students in online-only classes being more likely to encounter this type of remarks from school staff than those in exclusively in-person learning environments (67.9% vs. 53.8%).

When comparing school staff to student intervention in cases of LGBTQ+ related bullying or harassment, respondents reported that other students intervened more and more often than school personnel. Students reported that other students intervened "always" or "almost always" more often than school personnel (27.3% "students intervened" vs. 18.2% "school staff intervened"). Also, students reported that school personnel "never" intervened at a much higher rate than other students (42.4% of school staff never intervened vs. 31.1% of students).

Eight years after institutional homophobia led to Sergio Urrego's death by suicide (2014) and seven years since the landmark ruling that mandated all schools in Colombia to revise discriminatory clauses in their educational community guidelines (manuales de convivencia) (2015), there are still glaring institutional failures. 14.9% of respondents reported that they had had a disciplinary process against them at school for being LGBTQ+.

Moreover, our study found progress that had been achieved in school policies that protect LGBTQ+ from harassment faced setbacks. LGBTQ+ students in 2021 were much less likely to report having any reporting policy/procedure than those in 2015 (38.2% vs. 54.9%). Students in 2021 were also less likely to report any mention in the policy of sexual orientation or gender expression (9.0% vs. 14.7%). Only 9.0% of students in the survey indicated that the policy named sexual orientation or gender expression or both.

Given this situation, it is not surprising that almost 7 in 10 students (69.1%) never reported incidents of SOGIE-related harassment to school staff. Of those who did report, 32.7% were told to ignore it, and 26.2% said the staff person did nothing.

A related data point that is worth paying attention to is that reporting to adults has gone down since 2015, both for school personnel (59.4% of students never told school staff in 2015 vs. 69% of students never told school staff in 2021) and for a family member (60.1% of students never told a family member in 2015 vs. 66.1% of students never told a family member in 2021).

These findings highlight the urgency of training teachers and school personnel on LGBTQ+ identities and issues, and on how to effectively act in cases of SOGIE-related bullying and harassment so that schools can be safe learning environments for all students.

When it comes to life outside school, our study found that the home continues to be an unsafe space for LGBTQ+ youth and that they do not have a strong support network within their family. Almost one in five (19.8%) young people have been physically punished by their parents for being LGBTQ+, 87.2% hear homophobic and transphobic remarks in their homes, 68.2% do not talk to their parents about their personal life (in fact, only 11.3% talks to any trusted adult), and 78.6% of LGBTQ+ youth who participated in "treatments" to try to change their sexual orientation or gender identity or both reported that they were forced to do so by their parents. All these experiences negatively impact their physical, mental, and emotional health.

LGBTQ+ youth cannot find respite from discrimination and bias in their spiritual communities either. Our data shows that congregations are overwhelmingly not safe and affirming spaces for LGBTQ+ youth in Colombia. 93.3% of LGBTQ+ youth heard negative messages about LGBTQ+ people from their religious congregation or during services, with 60.3% reporting this happened "a lot" or "frequently." Given this unwelcoming environment, it is not surprising that 82.9% of LGBTQ+ youth were not out at all in the congregation.

Hearing these types of remarks from religious authorities can have a negative impact on the mental health and well-being of LGBTQ+ youth. We found that hearing negative statements about LGBTQ+ people from the religious congregation was related to lower self-esteem, heightened depression, and an increase in suicidal ideation.

Another troubling finding regarding the experiences of LGBTQ+ youth with their families and faith communities is the widespread prevalence of efforts to change a young person's sexual orientation or gender identity or both through so-called "conversion therapies." Conversion "therapies" are "interventions of a wide-ranging nature, aimed at effecting a change from non-heterosexual to heterosexual and from trans

or gender diverse to cisgender." These "therapies" are considered torture by the UN, while medical and psychiatric communities widely recognize their ineffectiveness and devastating consequences. Nonetheless, 61.0% of LGBTQ+ youth in our survey said that someone tried to persuade them to change their sexual orientation or gender identity. Parents (78.6%), other family members (40.3%), religious leaders (31.4%), and a counselor or psychologist (17.4%) were the adults that most commonly tried to change their sexual orientation or gender identity so that they became heterosexual or cis (not trans). It is particularly worrisome that mental health professionals are participating in this discredited and harmful practice. As mentioned, conversion "therapies" can have devastating—even deadly—consequences for LGBTQ+ youth. Our survey showed that having been forced or pressured to change was related to higher levels of depression and a greater likelihood of contemplating suicide. 63.9% of youth who were forced or pressured to change their sexual orientation or gender identity or both seriously considered suicide in the past year, compared to 48.2% of youth who had not.

Given these data, it should not be surprising that there is a stark contrast between the religiosity of LGBTQ+ youth and that of their families and youth in the general population. For example, only 17.7% of LGBTQ+ youth said they followed the same religion as their family, and an additional 18.2% said that they did not know. Furthermore, the homophobia and transphobia experienced in faith communities (mainly Catholic and Evangelical Christian) may be driving LGBTQ+ youth away from organized religion. 66% of LGBTQ+ youth in the survey did not identify with any form of organized religion. They most commonly identified as agnostic (38.5%) and atheist (27.5%). In contrast, they said their families were primarily Catholic (73.2%) or Evangelical Christians (14.2%). Furthermore, only 19.6% of LGBTQ+ youth believed that religion was "somewhat important" or "very important," and almost half (47.5%) said it was "not important at all." In contrast, 67.9% of the general population of youth in the country said that religion was important.

These findings point to the urgent need to work with religious congregations and leaders. Catholic and Evangelical Christian churches in particular need to build more welcoming, inclusive, and affirming spiritual communities for LGBTQ+ youth so as not to drive them away from their faith.

Despite this data, LGBTQ+ youth in Colombia are optimistic about the future. 68.8% reported that they thought things would be better in the future, and only 5.0% believed that things would become worse. This speaks to the resilience of LGBTQ+ youth in the country and should be uniting force in our commitment to fail their aspirations for a more inclusive world.