
LGBTI* Young People in Luxembourgish Schools: Stories and Analysis of Discrimination, Social Support, and General Well-Being (Integral version)

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LGBTI*-Jugendliche in luxemburgischen Schulen: Diskriminierung, soziale Unterstützung und allgemeines Wohlbefinden

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1. Description of Research Projects and Concepts

Personal well-being is commonly defined as the cognitive and affective evaluations of one's own life (Diener et al., 2002). To reach a stable well-being, individuals need enough psychological, social, and physical resources to help them cope with specific psychological, social, and / or physical challenges (Dodge et al., 2012). Discrimination against young people based on their sexual orientation or gender identity can be described as such a challenge, which, when it occurs in school, may also affect the pupils' well-being.

We use data from three different sources to assess various aspects associated with the well-being of sexual and gender minority young people¹ in Luxembourgish schools.

(1) The *LeJuLu-study (Lebenssituationen und Erfahrungen von LGBT*-Jugendlichen in Luxemburg - Life situations and experiences of LGBT* young people in Luxembourg)* provides the framework for the analysis of the different dimensions related to discrimination and well-being. This mixed-methods exploratory study dealt with the living situations of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth (LGBT) in Luxembourg (Meyers et al., 2019). The research question was whether and in what way LGBT youth in Luxembourg are stigmatised because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Among other data, we thus also conducted interviews with eight LGBT adolescents aged 18-20 years. The young people were contacted via gatekeepers in various social services. For the semi-structured, narrative interviews we developed an interview guide, which was validated by previous expert interviews. The interviews were conducted by two researchers in the familiar premises of the social services. They were recorded and transcribed, ensuring anonymity. The data was analysed using Atlas.ti software in accordance with the principles of grounded theory, particularly the coding guidelines of Strauss and Corbin.

(2) The *HBSC Study Luxembourg (Health Behaviour in School-aged Children)* is part of an international research collaboration that aims to evaluate adolescent's health behaviours to understand the relationship between health and social factors. The target population in Luxembourg concerns pupils aged 11 to 18 attending Luxembourg national public and private schools (whose teaching is based on the national curriculum) and those attending Luxembourg international public schools. In 2022 a total of 9.432 pupils, from 688 classes and 152 schools took part in the survey. Data collection involved self-administered questionnaires covering a wide range of health-related topics. The sampling strategy ensured a representative sample of the student population, and data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods to understand health behaviors and their social determinants. Among other questions, pupils answered about their health, health behaviours, and well-being, as well as their socio-demographic characteristics and social context. Specifically about gender, secondary pupils were asked about their sex registered at birth and their

1: We use the terms "Young people from sexual and gender minorities" and "LGBTI* young people" synonymously. The term LGBTI* includes lesbian, gay, bi-, trans-, and intersex people, the asterisk represents all other people who are non-heterosexual or non-cisgender. If other populations of young people were interviewed in the studies, we use the adapted terms LGBT and LGBTI in each case. Sexual orientation and gender identity refer to two different aspects of identity. Sexual orientation describes the romantic or sexual attraction to one or more genders; gender identity refers to the internal sense of having a particular gender.

gender identity. For the purpose of this essay, they were afterwards categorized as: a) gender conforming boy (born male, identify as boy; n = 3.536; 50,9 %); b) gender conforming girl (born female, identify as girl; n = 3.169; 45,6 %), and c) gender non-conforming (whose gender identification differs from sex registered at birth; n = 241; 3,5 %).

(3) The *EU-LGBTI-surveys*, conducted in 2012 and 2019, are large-scale web-administered surveys on the experiences and views of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) individuals. The data collection involved a custom web-based questionnaire on discrimination, violence, and harassment in various life areas such as employment, education, and healthcare, ensuring anonymity and data security. An awareness-raising campaign based on national contact points, a social media strategy, and various offline strategies was designed to reach the targeted population and ensure a diverse and representative sample (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2020). The targeted population were people aged at least 15 (2019) respectively 18 (2012) years and living at least a year in an EU member State. The Luxembourgish youth sub-sample comprises 110 respondents in 2012 (aged 18 to 29) and 167 individuals in 2019 (aged 15 to 29). The original data processing included data validation, editing of open responses, and error handling to ensure quality.

2. How LGBTI* Youth Feel Discriminated or Supported in Schools

Many of the negative interactions that LGBT youth are confronted with take place in the context of school, as this is where young people of different cultural backgrounds and values encounter each other on a daily basis. The interviewed LGBT youth in the *LeJuLu-study* describe a wide range of stigmatising and discriminatory behaviours they have faced in different life situations. In theory, discrimination is the final step in the social multi-layered process of stigmatisation that begins with the labelling of people who are perceived as different. It uses negative stereotypes or attributions to isolate a group of people (Pescosolido & Martin, 2015, p. 6). In the *LeJuLu-study*, in addition to various forms of labelling, for example, by using terms that create difference (see Quote 1), it is above all clichés and stereotypes related to homosexuality that seem to persist in the youth peer groups and lead to discriminatory behaviour (see Quote 2).

Quote 1 from Katia (trans*)

„Si mussen dech an eng Kategorie eramaachen, dat heescht ass et lesbesch, ass et schwul, ass et trans. Dat muss sinn bei hinnen. Wou ech mir soen: ‘Okay, ech gesinn mech als lesbesch un, mee ech sinn net, dat definéiert mech net, dat Lesbescht.’ [They have to put you in a category, that is, is it lesbian, is it gay, is it trans. That's what they have to do. Where I say to myself: ‘Okay, I see myself as lesbian, but I'm not, that doesn't define me, the lesbian part.’]”

Quote 2 from Julie (trans*)

„Hie géif homosexuell eng psychesch Krankheet fannen, an dat géif alles nëmmen d'Leit sech abilden, datt se keen Jong wieren, an sou weider a sou fort, also sou Saachen halt. [He would

see homosexuality as a mental illness, and it's all just people imagining they're not a boy, and so on and so forth, things like that.]”

LGBT young people are subjected to discrimination, on the one hand, by frequently experienced verbal devaluations (daily harassment, homophobic jokes) (see Quote 3) as well as exclusion and avoidance by other young people (see Quote 4).

Quote 3 from Jo (lesbian)

„Et huet ugefaangen mat den, mat sou domm Geschwätz, d.h. sou domm Remarquen: ‘Ou, kuck wéi s du ausgesäis!’ [It started with such stupid talk, such stupid remarks: ‘Oh, look how you look!’]”

Quote 4 from Christian (gay)

„Also, et war wierklech ganz krass, an déi éischte Kéier wou mir eis getraff hunn, mir waren an en Café, an deen ass all fënnef Minutten, ass deen erausgaangen, dee konnt net méi un engem Dësch mat engem Schwule sëtzen, sou krass war dat. [It was really really extreme, and the first time we met, we were in a café, and every five minutes, he went outside, he couldn't sit longer at a table with a gay man, that's how extreme it was.]”

In particular, LGBT youth whose gender identity deviates from binary gender concepts tend to report such devaluations more frequently. Physical violence, on the other hand, was mentioned less frequently by the young interviewees.

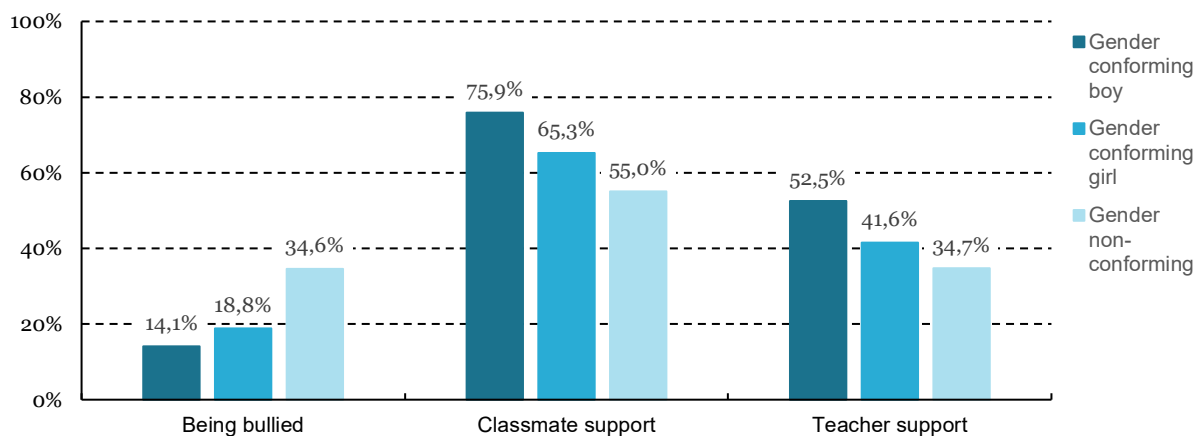
The results of the quantitative studies provide further evidence for these various discrimination experiences of young people who belong to a sexual or gender minority in the school environment. In the *HBSC-study*, 34,6 %² of the non-gender-conforming pupils report being bullied (see Fig. 1). This proportion is almost twice as high as that of pupils with a conforming gender identity (boys: 14,1 %, girls: 18,8 %; $p < .05$). In the *2019 EU-LGBTI-survey* 42,7 % of 15-29-year-olds retrospectively state having experienced often or always negative comments or behaviour in school (a further 31,3 % have experienced them rarely). There is no significant change compared to 2012. LGBTI young people of school age also very frequently state that they have been exposed to general harassment situations in the last five years (15-17 years: 72,2 %), most of which were perpetrated by other young people or people from the school environment.

The counterbalance of these frequent negative discriminatory situations at school can be experiences of support and acceptance at school. In the *HBSC-study* pupils reported on classmates and teacher support (both on 3-item scales, which includes an item on how accepted they feel by their classmates or teacher) (see Fig. 1). Good classmate support is reported by 55 % of gender non-conforming pupils, a significantly smaller prevalence when compared to their gender conforming peers (75,9 % of boys and 65,3 % of girls; $p < .05$). Similarly, 34,7 % of gender non-conforming pupils reported a good teacher

2: Cross-tabulation with post-hoc analyses were used to compare the results between groups.

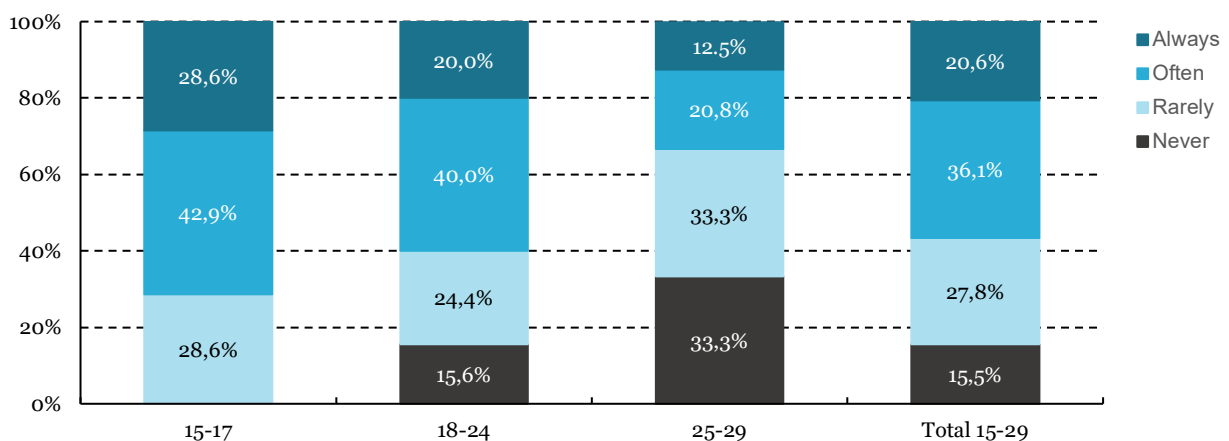
support, compared to 52,5 % of gender conforming boys and 41,6 % of gender conforming girls ($p < .05$). Participants in the 2019 *EU-LGBTI-survey* indicated whether someone supported, defended, or protected them or their rights as LGBTI during their time in school (see Fig. 2). Among 15-29-year-olds, 56,7 % said that someone had often or always stood up for them. This proportion is significantly higher among younger LGBTI groups (71,5 % of 15-17-year-olds, 60,0 % of 18-24-year-olds) than among older age groups (25-29-year-olds: 33,3 %). The results may suggest that support for LGBTI* pupils in school has improved over the years. Nevertheless, the fact remains that around half of the LGBTI* pupils do not feel accepted at school and have not received any support.

Fig. 1: Experiences of bullying, classmate and teacher support (in %)



Source: HBSC 2022.

Fig. 2: Experiences of support of LGBTI young people during time in school by age (in %)



Source: EU-LGBTI-survey 2019. Original question: During your time in school, has anyone supported, defended or protected you and your rights as LGBTI person?

3. How LGBTI* Youth Deal With Discrimination and How it Affects Their Well-Being and Openness

The extent to which discrimination influences the well-being depends strongly on the way that the discriminated person deals with these experiences. The *LeJuLu-study* looked at the interpretation, the narratives, and strategies of LGBT youth in connection with stigmatisation experiences. On the one hand, LGBT young people try to take away the power of the discrimination experiences through retrospective relativization narratives (see Quote 5). Discrimination is dismissed as banal, seen as normal (the deviation from the norm is internalized by the youth) or LGBT adolescents try to understand the perpetrator by adopting his/her perspective or defining themselves as complicit.

Quote 5 from Christian (gay)

„Heiansdo als Kand hunn ech dat méi schlëmm fonnt. Als Kand héiert een dat jo net gär, mee lo sou, wou ech méi al gi sinn, huet, mäi Gott, ech verstinn Spaass an ech sinn och een deen, deen och selwer den Geck iwwer mech ka maachen, dat heescht ech hunn do och guer kee Problem. Ech maachen och haut nach ëmmer de Geck, datt ech schwul sinn an sou. Also, jo. Mär mécht dat guer näischt aus. [Sometimes as a kid I thought it was worse. As a kid you don't like to hear that, but now that I'm older, oh my god, I understand fun and I'm also one of those who can make fun of myself, which means I don't have a problem with it at all. Even today I still make fun of being gay and stuff. So yeah. It doesn't bother me at all.]”

The positive or negative way in which the interviewed LGBT young people deal with discrimination is interrelated with their self-confidence and resources of their social networks, but also with the perceived social norms. The young people in the *LeJuLu-study* use different strategies to avoid discrimination and to protect themselves. This can be withdrawal from the public eye, avoiding contact with discriminatory people, concealing bullying or even self-denial. In the worst case, a young trans* adolescent has reported how the denial of his gender identity and the socially desired suppression of his real feelings have led to depression and suicidal thoughts. But LGBT youth also have strategies for coping with discrimination. In addition to ignoring or being indifferent to discrimination and non-acceptance, it is above all their offensive handling of discrimination that supports their self-esteem (see Quote 6).

Quote 6 from Jo (lesbian)

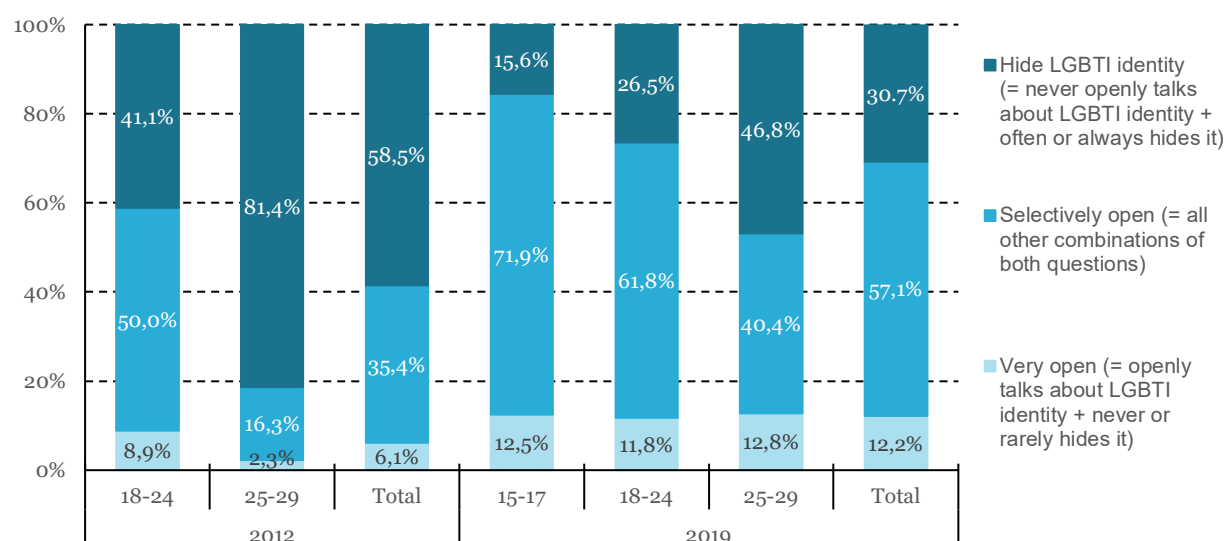
„Hautdesdaags weisen ech mech méi selbstbewosst, an d'ass mer egal wat där denkt, an da soen d'Leit: 't gëtt souwisou net dovunner beaflosst, also loossen ech et einfach liewen.' Et ass einfach esou, wëll mär zu zwee [Jo a seng Partnerin] och méi staark eriwwerkommen. [Nowadays, I show myself more confidently, and I don't care what you think, and then people say: 'She's not going to be affected by it anyway, so I'll just let her live.' It's just because the two of us [Jo and her partner] also come across stronger.]”

LGBT young people who are open and self-confident about their own sexual orientation or gender identity seem to be better able to cope with discrimination and its effects and thus also protect themselves.

In the two quantitative studies, different sets of questions provide insights into how sexual orientation or gender identity affects the openness and well-being of LGBTI* young people.

The *EU-LGBTI-survey* asked respondents how often they were open about their sexual orientation or gender identity during their time in school using two questions. In 2019, 34,7 % of those aged 15 to 29 answered often or always to the first question about whether they were talking openly about being LGBTI. At the same time, 38,1 % of this group said in the second question that they never or rarely hid their LGBTI identity. These proportions were significantly lower in 2012: only 17,2 % of 18-29-year-olds spoke openly about their sexual orientation or gender identity, and only 23,2 % never or rarely concealed this. Cross-referencing both questions shows that only a small proportion of LGBTI young people speak openly about their identity and at the same time do not hide it (see Fig. 3): in 2019, only 12,2 % of 15-29-year-olds were completely open, 30,6 % tended to hide their LGBTI identity and 57,1 % decided on their openness/hiding depending on the situation. The younger age groups were though less likely to hide their LGBTI identity than the older ones. Compared to the 2012 survey, LGBTI youth in recent years seem to be more open about their sexual orientation or gender identity (2012: 6,1 % of 18-29-year-olds were very open, 58,6 % hid their LGBTI identity, 35,4 % were selectively open). Despite a trend of improvement over the past ten years, more than the majority of LGBTI youth still prefer not to openly show their LGBTI identity at school.

Fig. 3: Openness about being LGBTI at school (in %)



Source: EU-LGBTI-surveys 2012 and 2019.

In the *HBSC-study*, cognitive well-being was evaluated with the Cantril's ladder (Cantril, 1965) and affective well-being with the WHO-5 (WHO, 1998). Cantril's ladder range from 0 to 10 and the WHO-5

from 0 to 25, in both cases, higher values indicate better cognitive and affective well-being³. With a life satisfaction mean of 5,52, gender non-confirming pupils report a significantly lower cognitive well-being than their gender conforming peers ($M_{\text{boys}} = 7,40$ and $M_{\text{girls}} = 6,83$; $p < .05$). Similarly, the mean affective well-being score is lower for the gender non-confirming pupils, a mean of 9,81, compared to 14,80 and 12,10 for boys and girls respectively ($p < .05$).

4. Conclusions

Our results show that young people who do not have a heterosexual orientation and/or do not have a binary gender identity suffer from multiple discrimination and stigmatization at school, in addition to having worst levels of well-being than their counterparts. In recent years LGBTI* pupils have also felt better supported at school.

Although it is not possible to directly analyse the correlations between experiences of discrimination, experiences of support and openness, and well-being, our results suggest that there might be an interconnectedness and mutual influences. In a positive school climate, where respect and support for minorities is promoted, discriminatory behaviour towards sexual minorities might be less prevalent. Which in turn, might also encourage an open approach to one's own sexual orientation or identity and increase well-being. At the same time, being open about one's sexual orientation or identity might lead to more visibility and support. This can boost self-confidence, which can also help make experiences of discrimination less likely.

At the end of the interview, the young people interrogated in the *LeJuLu-study* formulated their personal wishes and suggestions for social change. At the forefront was their desire for social acceptance, in the sense of normalizing diversity, amongst other through greater visibility and tolerance of diversity. Measures to increase the quality of life of LGBTI persons in Luxembourg, which LGBTI youth from the *2012 EU-LGBTI-survey* would like to implement, concerned first societal changes and then school.

For every pupil, school is a biographically significant place, which also determines the transition to adulthood. School as an institution should provide a safe and supportive environment for every pupil. According to the participants in the *LeJuLu study*, schools could do this more by imparting diversity-sensitive knowledge and offering a space/place to discuss relevant topics. In addition to structural measures that make equal treatment possible, the challenge for schools in implementing measures will be on the processes and daily interactions that can have a major impact on students' self-identity and resilience.

³: In addition to descriptive analyses, a one-way ANOVA followed with post-hoc tests were undertaken in order to compare means in cognitive and affective well-being between the groups.

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