

# Life of LGBTQ+ youth in Saint Petersburg and the Leningrad Region in 2021



**COMING OUT**

LGBTQ+ group

2021

18+










Coming Out has been operating since 2008. Our mission is to support the LGBTQ+ communities in Saint Petersburg as well as to facilitate recognition of human dignity and equal rights for LGBTQ+ people by the state and society.

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# COMING OUT

## LGBTQ+ group

Life of LGBTQ+ youth in Saint Petersburg and the Leningrad Region in 2021.  
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# Introduction

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Coming Out has been working to support LGBTQ+ communities and promote the equal rights movement in Saint Petersburg since 2008. We provide free psychological and legal help to LGBTQ+ people and their close ones; conduct public awareness campaigns: host meetings, seminars, and roundtable discussions; publish informational materials on LGBTQ+ issues and related topics; monitor discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression; and arrange cultural events in Saint Petersburg, thus creating platforms for people from different social backgrounds to communicate.

The present study is dedicated to the life of LGBTQ+ youth in Saint Petersburg and the Leningrad Region in the last couple of years. Our goal was to understand how the legislation that bans “non-traditional sexual relationships” propaganda affects non-heterosexual and non-cisgender youth and their ability to discover themselves, get support, get help, and get objective information about gender and sexuality.

When we started collecting data, the public prosecution office in the Central District of Saint Petersburg demanded that the Russian LGBT Network’s website be blocked for publishing a survey on a similar topic (LGBTQ+ Teenagers and Bullying at School)<sup>1</sup>. This demand was based on a verdict of an expert who claimed that under the guise of research, “LGBTQ+ values” propaganda was being spread among minors.

This incident perfectly exemplifies “the propaganda law”: LGBTQ+ teenagers end up in an information vacuum, while any attempt to give them the right to speak up is met with resistance.

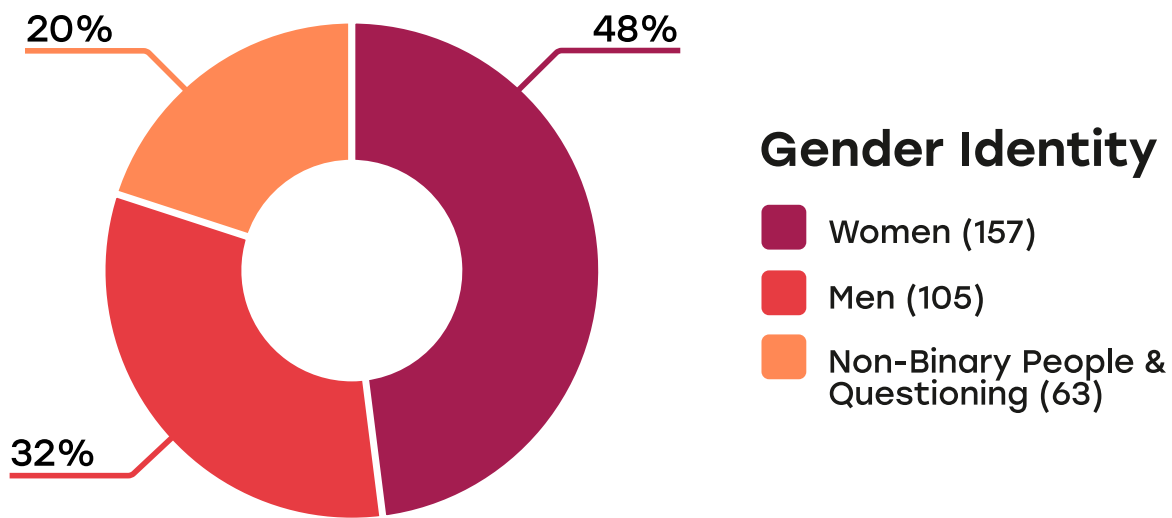
To avoid potential problems while conducting research, we decided to focus on the experiences of those who had recently been teenagers, i.e., people aged 18 to 23. We were changing our methods of research while data were being collected, so some underage people still ended up in our already small sample (only 325 people), totaling 32 people.

We attempted to compensate for the lower volume of the selection by including a greater number of quotes from open question answers so that both teenagers and those who have recently been teenagers could share their experiences. The survey was carried out between September 2020 and February 2021.

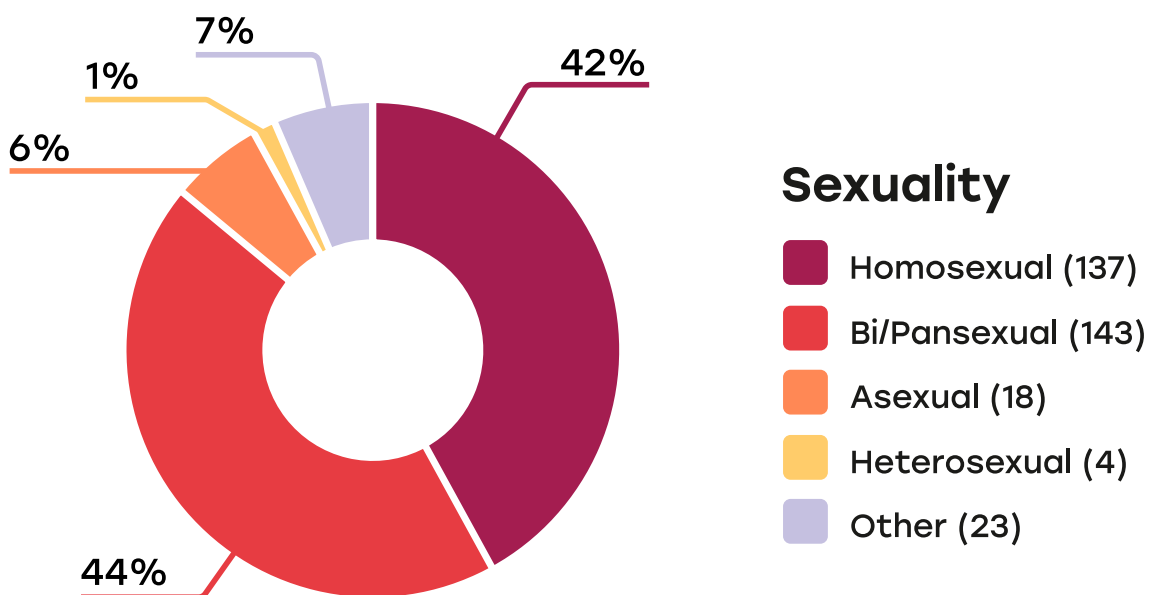
# Survey Demographics

In total, 325 people from 13 to 23 years old took part in the survey. The respondents' average age is 19 years old. Underage participants account for a tenth of the selection (32 people, or 9.9%).

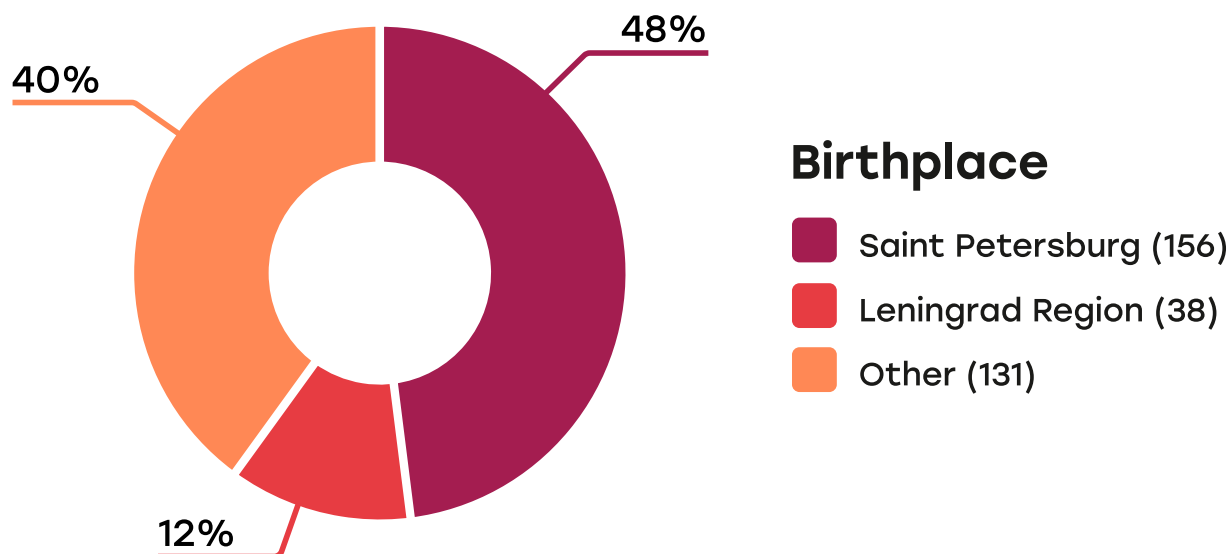
The gender distribution of the sample is as follows: 157 women (including 7 who are transgender), 105 men (including 37 who are transgender), and 63 non-binary people and those who are questioning their gender identity.



The majority of respondents are bi/pansexual or homosexual (44% and 42%, respectively).



More than half of the respondents were born in Saint Petersburg or the Leningrad Region, with the remaining 40% born in other Russian regions.



The majority (76%) of those surveyed lived in Saint Petersburg as teenagers; a quarter (24%) lived in the Leningrad Region.

The majority (93.8%) of respondents lived with blood relatives until they turned 18 years old, and only 20 people (6.2%) mentioned other options: in orphanages, with foster parents, in a dormitory, or with partners or friends.

## Access to Information about Gender, Sexuality, and LGBTQ+

26.2% of respondents (85 people) have stated that their family members tried to restrict their access to websites or social media where they could find information concerning sexuality, gender identity, or LGBTQ+. 68.3% of respondents (222 people) have encountered that certain websites where they could find information regarding sexuality, gender identity, or LGBTQ+ were blocked.

32% of respondents (104 people) have heard adults say that they could not say a single thing about sexuality, gender identity, or LGBTQ+ to them, fearing that it might be illegal. 37.5% of participants (122 people) have questioned their adult relatives about sexuality, gender identity, or LGBTQ+. More than half of those people (62.3%, or 76 people) have had their attempts to discuss such topics turned down, and even more (80.3%, or 98 people) have received negative reactions.

17.9% of those surveyed (58 people) have questioned their teachers about sexuality, gender identity, or LGBTQ+. 69% of them (40 people) have been denied an answer to the question, and just as many (70.7%, or 41 people) have received a negative response.

These findings show that LGBTQ+ teenagers rarely talk to adults about their sexuality or gender identity, and when they do, they talk to their parents twice as often as their teachers. This is probably due to the fact that they fear being judged or do not trust adults. As the numbers demonstrate, such concerns could be justified: the majority of those who dared to ask the intriguing questions have been turned down or encountered a negative reaction.

189 people under 18 years old have attempted to purchase books or magazines about sexuality, gender identity, or LGBTQ+ or buy tickets to movies or events on the same topics. More than half of them (57.1%, or 108 people) have been turned down. 73 people under 18 years old have attempted to borrow books or magazines about sexuality, gender identity, or LGBTQ+ from a library. More than a third of them (35.6%, or 26 people) have also been turned down.

The aforementioned data show that LGBTQ+ teenagers often encounter restrictions on access to information concerning sexuality, gender identity, or LGBTQ+. Our respondents were questioned about whether such information had been generally accessible before they turned 18 years old. Only 27.6% of those surveyed were able to obtain such information easily and without any difficulties; more than half of participants faced some restrictions or prohibitions.

<b>Access to information regarding sexuality, gender identity or LGBTQ+ before 18</b>	<b>Absolute metric</b>	<b>Relative metric</b>
Quickly acquired necessary information but had to overcome certain difficulties and restrictions while searching	143	44.0%
Acquired necessary information easily and without difficulties	90	27.7%
Managed to acquire necessary information, but the search took a long time and involved constant restrictions and prohibitions	69	21.2%
Never sought such information	12	3.7%
Failed to acquire necessary information	11	3.4%



The respondents have mentioned certain encounters when they were unable to obtain the desired information whilst being underage:

“The majority of events related to LGBTQ+ in Saint-Petersburg have a strict 18+ entrance policy. I wanted to attend them, but I was afraid of being kicked out, so I didn’t go.”

(bi/pansexual woman, 18)

“My application to a course about stigmatization was denied because LGBTQ+ issues were to be discussed and I was underage (but had already become aware of my identity at the time).”

(homosexual man, 19)

“When I was 14, I tried to have a conversation about these [LGBTQ+] topics with my parents, but I only received numerous insults and realized that it would be pointless to talk to them any further. They started monitoring me closely, stalking my social media, and checking my Google search history. Multiple arguments took place, which often resulted in physical violence or nervous breakdowns.”

(homosexual woman, 16)

“Due to the anti-‘propaganda’ law, all community centers only accepted people over 18, but I was in a crisis situation as a teen. Things aren’t much better now, but I can have an independent life and seek legal support.”

(bi/pansexual woman, 18)

“I tried to buy a concert ticket but was turned down because the artist mentioned their homosexuality in the lyrics.”

(bi/pansexual woman, 20)

“Some of the queer communities on VKontakte that I was subscribed to were eventually banned. I was afraid that I might be prosecuted for liking some of the posts.”

(bi/pansexual woman, 19)

“The issue for me was not the inaccessibility of information but rather the amount of misinformation around.”

(bi/pansexual woman, 19)

“My parents strongly insisted that I didn’t look into Freddy Mercury’s personal life. In particular, when Bohemian Rhapsody came out, they tried to forbid me from watching the movie (I was almost 18 at the time).”

(bi/pansexual woman, 20)

# Parents

139 interviewees reported that their parents or relatives, with whom they had continuously lived in the same house until adulthood (at least one of them), knew about their sexuality or transgender identity.

The majority of those who were out to their parents had their sexuality or transgender identity disregarded, invalidated, or stigmatized. More than half have been told by their parents that their sexuality or gender identity is a disease or a sin, something that is wrong, sick, or unnatural, or that it is caused by propaganda or a bad influence (friends, internet, movies, etc.).

Less than half of those (47.9%) who came out to their parents received words of support and acceptance. Nearly a quarter have faced harassment and attempts to “cure” or otherwise somehow “fix” them. 20 people have faced physical violence from their parents because of their sexuality or transgender identity, and 12 people were kicked out of their homes.

<b>Encounters</b>	<b>Absolute metric (139 people)</b>	<b>Relative metric</b>
Disregard for their SOGIE	109	78.4%
Assumptions that their SOGIE are a sin, a disease, or something unnatural	87	62.6%
Assumptions that their SOGIE are a bad influence of their friends, the internet, movies, cartoons, TV shows, or “LGBTQ+ propaganda”	80	57.6%
Support, acceptance	66	47.5%
Verbal abuse	34	24.5%
Attempts to “cure” or “fix” their SOGIE	32	23.0%
Parents outed them to others	31	22.3%
Threatened to be kicked out of their home	26	18.7%
Physical abuse	20	14.4%
Kicked out of their home	12	8.6%

Several respondents told us more about the problems in their relationships with their parents due to their sexuality or gender identity:

“During another argument about this topic, my mother raised her hand against me. And [it happened] more than once.”

(homosexual woman, 16)

“When I was 16-17 years old, my relatives accessed my VK page without my consent. The browser accidentally saved my password, but I didn't notice. They found a conversation between me and a girl who I was in love with, to whom I confessed my feelings.

There was a big scene, and I was immediately outed to the whole family, from my parents to my younger sister, my grandmother, and my uncle. There was a very unpleasant conversation about it with everyone at once, and then everyone felt obligated to talk to me personally about it and spill a bunch of their own portions of thoughts and insults on me.

The only one in the family who supported me was my uncle, but he had suspected it all along. The funny thing is that he was the one who first accessed my page and, as it turned out later, had been tracking my posts for quite some time.

What came out of it is that I had to find other ways to talk to my loved one and hide the fact that we kept in touch. They also took away the money I had been saving for a new phone while working by myself. Once, they tried to prohibit my younger sister from talking to me. Years later, the situation is still not fully resolved.”

(homosexual woman, 20)

“When I was 17 years old, my stepfather, who had a bad attitude toward me in general, decided to ground me (it was entirely because I was afab) at the exact moment when I desperately needed to go to my ex-partner to prevent his possible suicide.

His mother is a judge with a large sphere of influence, and once she had already sent him to a psych ward on an emergency call because of his gender identity (trans man), and she wanted to do it again that day (a repeat call is already a serious issue, and he wouldn't have been released from the psych ward as quickly as the first time, and that was for two weeks).

I always mediated their conflicts, and if I had come, nothing terrible would have happened. My stepfather ignored my explanations and eventually gave me an ultimatum that if I were to leave now, I would take my belongings with me. My mother was on a business trip and couldn't stop him. So, he basically kicked me out. This is the most vivid case [of discrimination], but it is far from being the only one.”

(homosexual transgender man, 20)

“My coming out was just awful. I heard some of the ‘best’ things ever. I remember bringing my parents booklets from Coming Out that had information about coming out and that my mother then called Coming Out a cult.

She also accused everyone of propaganda, claimed that I was zombified, and that I read all kinds of crap on the internet and filled my head with nonsense. I tried to quote articles saying that transgender people are real and not made up and so on, but she ignored me.

To this day, she still doesn't address me with the right pronouns or by my name, and all my attempts to talk some sense into her have had no effect. It's been four years now.”

(transgender man, 19)

“My father threatened to send me to a psych ward when I was about 16 years old. After I came out, my mother searched my whole room under the guise of cleaning. She made vulgar, crude jokes about me.”

(homosexual man, 20)

“[There were] attempts to take me to a psychologist who ‘knows our family well’ in order to fix me.”

(bi/pansexual non-binary person, 20)

“Any attempts I made to talk about my sexuality were completely ignored. Basically, everyone thought it was a teenage rebellion, a whim.”

(bi/pansexual woman, 20)

## Relatives

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85 respondents stated that other relatives (those who did not live in the same house with them) knew about their sexuality or gender identity.

Similar to the situation with parents, most of the respondents have encountered disregard for their sexuality or gender identity or have been criticized for it by the relatives.

Only 48.2% of respondents received acceptance and support from them. A third of those out to their parents faced verbal abuse; one in five encountered attempts to “fix” them, and another 5 people experiences physical violence.



<b>Encounters</b>	<b>Absolute metric (85 people)</b>	<b>Relative metric</b>
Disregard for their SOGIE	55	64.7%
Assumptions that their SOGIE are a sin, a disease, or something unnatural	51	60.0%
Assumptions that their SOGIE are a bad influence of their friends, the internet, movies, cartoons, TV shows, or “LGBTQ+ propaganda”	50	58.8%
Support, acceptance	41	48.2%
Verbal abuse	26	30.6%
Relatives outed them to others	20	23.5%
Attempts to “cure” or “fix” their SOGIE	18	21.2%
Physical abuse	5	5.9%

Several respondents provided more specific information regarding issues they were having with their relatives:

“Since the time I was 6 years old, my father has not lived with me. When I came out at 15 (I was outed because my father busted my LGBTQ+ VK subscriptions), he said, like, well, it's okay; life is an experiment, so experiment. Now, he talks about the origins of masculinity and femininity and masculine and feminine energies. He says that ‘M’ and ‘F’ need one another in order to be fulfilled. And to put my energy ‘in its place’, he wants to bring me to Tantra yoga.”

(homosexual woman, 21)

“My mom's brother unintentionally learned that I'm gay when he saw an LGBTQ+ flag in the background of one of my photos. He demanded I take it down, inquired if my mother knew about this, and pleaded with me to ‘not hurt’ my grandmother with this. For my birthday, he wished me to ‘get on the right path’ and promised that he would ‘fight for me by any means possible.’”

(homosexual non-binary person, 20)

# Friends

280 respondents stated that their friends (or at least one friend) knew about their sexuality or gender identity. As our data show, LGBTQ+ teenagers come out to as well as get support and acceptance mostly from their friends.

Negative reactions, prejudice, or disregard come much less often from friends than from other people. At the same time, the proportion of those who have faced homophobic or transphobic insults is 30%, and about the same number of people have experienced their friendships ending because of their sexuality or gender identity. 19 people have encountered physical violence.

Encounters	Absolute metric (280 people)	Relative metric
Support, acceptance	257	91.8%
Disregard for their SOGIE	132	47.1%
Friends outed them to others	127	45.4%
Assumptions that their SOGIE are a sin, a disease, or something unnatural	96	34.3%
Verbal abuse	84	30.0%
Coming out ended the friendship	82	29.3%
Physical abuse	19	6.8%

Several respondents provided additional information regarding issues with their friendships:

“At school, my friend would say that LGBTQ+ is disgusting and scary. After I mentioned that I like not only boys but also girls, she ran away from me and told me it was awful. I had to pretend the whole conversation was a joke.”

(bi/pansexual woman, 18)

“Well, I fear for myself all the time. More specifically, I'm afraid of being beaten the fuck up for my sexuality. I'm afraid of all these ‘gopniks’. I've been afraid of them since I was 12. I'm very stressed about it. Sometimes, I even cry hysterically. My parents don't know about my sexuality and are obviously homophobic and transphobic. I don't know what to do. Every time we have ever brought up the topic with my parents, they have always asked, like, ‘We hope you're not one of those?’ I'd always say, ‘Ewww, no.’”

(homosexual transgender woman, 14)

“Friends I came out to stopped talking to me.”

(homosexual non-binary person, 17)

“One of my school friends thought it was okay to tell her boyfriend that I was gay, and after that, he discussed this news with his friends. One of them later came up to me, asking, ‘What are you, a butt pirate?’ or ‘Which chick do you like at school?’ My requests to step back and not bother my enjoyment of his absence from my field of vision any further were responded to only after an extended period of time.”

(homosexual non-binary person, 20)

“Since I am bisexual, I like both guys and girls. However, my friend is only willing to listen to me if I fancy a guy. My liking for girls she ignores and doesn't want to discuss or support. Speaking of my genuine crush on one girl, she told me it would pass soon, saying, ‘It's all hormones...’”

(bisexual woman, 18)

## Classmates

202 respondents stated that at least one of their classmates knew about their sexuality or gender identity. Consequently, classmates were come out to less often than friends but still more frequently than parents, other relatives, or teachers, which could be explained by the fact that respondents frequently have friends among classmates.

Most of the time, LGBTQ+ teenagers encounter disregard from their peers on the grounds of their sexual orientation or gender identity, but many of them also receive support and acceptance. Significantly more often than other social groups, classmates verbally or physically abuse respondents. One third of respondents who came out (intentionally or unintentionally) to their classmates were bullied or boycotted at least once.

Encounters	Absolute metric (202 people)	Relative metric
Disregard for their SOGIE	129	63.9%
Support, acceptance	125	61.9%
Classmates outed them to others	99	49.0%
Verbal abuse	93	46.0%

Encounters	Absolute metric (202 people)	Relative metric
Assumptions that their SOGIE are a sin, a disease, or something unnatural	92	45.5%
Boycott, bullying	61	30.2%
Physical abuse	33	16.3%

Several respondents provided additional information regarding issues with their classmates:

“Drunk classmates in PE classes would harass me, throwing things (especially shoes) [at me]... once, two of them tried to drag me to the restroom, taunting me, ‘But you like to suck!’”

(homosexual cisgender man, 18)

“Everything was quite alright. No one ever bullied me or gossiped about me, but once my classmate stumbled upon a VKontakte group that had some content about sexuality (including LGBTQ+), saw me there, and sent a screenshot with a taunting comment to our class groupchat.

It wasn't discussed much, but it was unpleasant because I was mocked the next day, like, ‘Are you a dyke or something?’ and such.

Also, my best friend at school identified as gay, and he was much more often humiliated for his ‘mannered behavior’. People had been constantly coming up to me to ask if he was gay and if I was okay with being friends with him, and this became very unpleasant and hurtful for me with time.”

(bi/pansexual woman, 19)

“I went to a private Orthodox boarding school for the first eight years, and I was bullied there, partially because of my sexuality.”

(demisexual non-binary person, 18)

“Constant bugging and questions about my sexuality. At some point, classmates started refusing to change clothes if I were in the same locker room, ‘I like girls, so I'll stare at them.’”

(homosexual woman, 21)



# Teachers

76 respondents stated that at least one of their teachers was aware of their sexuality or gender identity. According to our data, LGBTQ+ teenagers rarely open up to their teachers. This is likely a result of a lack of strong emotional connection and a low degree of trust.

44.7% noted that teachers persuaded them that their sexuality or gender identity was something unnatural. At the same time, 43.4% of respondents mentioned getting support and acceptance from teachers.

One third of those who came out to their teachers were unable to talk about the subject further because of the teachers' fears of the anti-“propaganda” legislation. There were only a few cases of verbal and physical abuse from teachers (reported by 7 and 2 respondents, respectively).

<b>Encounters</b>	<b>Absolute metric (76 people)</b>	<b>Relative metric</b>
Assumptions that their SOGIE are a sin, a disease, or something unnatural	34	44.7%
Support, acceptance	33	43.4%
Prejudice	26	34.2%
Refused to continue conversation on the subject because of the fear of the anti-“propaganda” legislation	25	32.9%
Teachers outed them to others	21	27.6%
Verbal abuse	7	9.2%
Physical abuse	2	2.6%

Several respondents provided additional information regarding issues with their teachers:

“At school, I was bullied and sometimes even pushed around by the teachers. The behavioral upbringing instructors could silently observe me being pushed against the corridor walls.”

(homosexual cisgender man, 20)

“I was summoned to the school headmaster's office because I went to the ‘wrong’ restroom.”

(bi/pansexual non-binary person, 20)

“When I was a sophomore, I came out to my computer science teacher as lesbian. She did a good job accepting that about me, and we still keep in touch. But some other teachers, when I kind of subtly but openly declared my identity, started treating me poorly, lowering my grades, and making fun of my mental abilities.”

(homosexual non-binary person, 19)

“My class headteacher was aware that I was friends with a non-binary pansexual student from a class two years above and that we were similar. He forbade me from talking to that person, bullied me, and discussed it with my classmates.”

(bi/pansexual non-binary person, 21)

“The PE teacher pestered me constantly and would not let me train in peace. She even brought a psychologist to the lesson to keep an eye on me. Others lowered my grades and refused to grade me because ‘they don't have such a student.’ Only the class headteacher treated me decently when she found out.”

(bi/pansexual transgender man, 20)

One respondent shared a positive encounter:

“A happy moment of school life I can remember was in my senior year, when a new history teacher was assigned to us. We resonated right away, and afterwards, our communication was filled with respect and trust (mutual, of course).

By chance, the subject of sexuality came up, but I knew that he would not take anything that I said the wrong way. It turned out that he supported me and expressed disappointment in the way how the public behaves, seeking to mentally destroy people rather than help those in need.”

(bi/pansexual cisgender woman, 18)

# Access to Psychological Help

Almost a third of respondents stated that their parents consider psychological help harmful and dangerous (31.4%, 102 people). Less than a third (29.5%, 96 people) indicated that their parents find it helpful and even necessary in some cases. About a quarter (23.4%, 76 people) indicated that their parents did not have an opinion about psychological help.

Several more people described their parents' attitudes toward psychological help as follows:

“They believe it [psychological help] could be helpful, but only in the most extreme cases, which neither I nor my family fall into.”

(homosexual cisgender woman, 19)

“My parents think that LGBTQ+ people should be eliminated rather than integrated into society. That's their idea of ‘psychological help’. It can hardly be called that.

So, my answer is that they consider it useful, but their conception of psychological help is seriously flawed. For example, once they advised me to see ‘a priest and a psychologist’ since I support LGBTQ+.”

(homosexual cisgender woman, 21)

“They find it [psychological help] useful in some cases and don't mind me receiving it, but somewhere deep down they still don't trust ‘headshrinkers’ and can sometimes quite unreasonably criticize the specialists I visit.”

(queer non-binary person, 21)

Taking these parents' attitudes toward receiving psychological help into account, it is possible to conclude that for LGBTQ+ teenagers, the access to any psychological help is hampered by negative attitudes of their parents.

One third of respondents (32%, 104 people) reported that they had discussed their sexuality or gender identity with a psychologist (one or more) before the age of 18. In the majority of cases (74.5%), this was a psychologist with no relation to the school. Only 9 people discussed their sexuality or gender identity with a school psychologist. Another 19 people discussed it both with a school psychologist and with another psychologist from outside the school.

11 people encountered the precedent that a psychologist outed them to their parents, relatives, or teachers (10.6% of those who consulted a psychologist). 9 people heard from a psychologist that they cannot tell LGBTQ+ teenagers anything about sexuality, gender, or LGBTQ+, cannot answer any of their

questions, or work with them at all because they are afraid that it is against the law and they may be punished or fired for it (8.6% of those who consulted a psychologist).

More than one third of those who discussed SOGIE with a psychologist (37.5%, 39 people) reported that the psychologist was prejudiced against their sexuality or gender identity. 22.1% of those who discussed SOGIE with a psychologist (23 people) reported that the psychologist tried to “fix” or “cure” their sexuality or gender identity.

Almost a quarter of those who discussed SOGIE with a psychologist heard that their sexuality or gender identity was a disease or a sin, something unnatural (24%, 25 people).

Several respondents provided additional information about negative encounters with a psychologist:

“The psychologist doubted that I was a lesbian because, when asked how I envisioned my future family, I said that I would discuss the decision of how I would have children only with my partner.”

(homosexual cisgender woman, 21)

“The issues we were discussing were unrelated to sexuality, but the psychologist felt it was necessary to discuss it as if it were a fantasy it was time to abandon.”

(homosexual cisgender woman, 21)

“She [the psychologist] told the school headmaster about her findings during the session (I behaved calmly and did not even do anything ‘strange’), and my parents were summoned to the school. However, I myself was not a part of the conversation, and almost all of this occurred without my involvement, for some reason.”

(bi/pansexual transgender man, 20)

“One psychologist that I saw at 15 spent an entire hour of the session telling me how he didn't understand gay pride parades and people like me instead of helping me with my suicidal thoughts. Another psychologist, after my suicide attempt at 16 years old, tried to fix me by saying that I just ‘took the easy way out’ and that ‘it's harder with guys, of course, but it's really necessary, and sooner or later you'll have to date them.’”

(homosexual cisgender woman, 21)

“My psychologist did not try to fix my sexuality; instead, she avoided the subject and never brought it up again during our subsequent sessions.”

(homosexual cisgender woman, 18)



“I was led to believe that my sexuality was merely a fear of getting pregnant. That's the whole story.”

(homosexual non-binary person, 21)

“I needed psychological help to figure out my sexual identity, but after seeing a psychotherapist (we had sessions over several years, but they were not very frequent), my mental state deteriorated significantly.

I didn't have any luck with psychotherapy due to a variety of reasons, ranging from the specialist's incompetence in terms of LGBTQ+ issues to the disregard for the specifics of how to work with this group of people.

In particular, I was told that my sexuality was a choice, although this contradicted reality and was harmful to me. What's more, he was one of the highest-rated psychologists in St. Petersburg, mind you...”

(homosexual cisgender woman, 18)

“It happened in a sanatorium<sup>1</sup>; my mother and I were on vacation there. I have bipolar affective disorder (she is prejudiced against mental illnesses and towards the fact that I am taking medication, too, but I continue anyway), but I nevertheless decided to see a local therapist.

Given that was never going to see him again, I decided to tell him about my sexuality, too. He began making some absurd claims about masculine and feminine energies and advised me to do something to ‘fix myself.’”

(homosexual non-binary person, 19)

We have asked those who have not discussed their sexuality or gender identity with a psychologist whether a psychologist was available at their school and whether they would have felt comfortable telling them about their sexuality or gender identity. The majority of them (76.5%) had a psychologist at their school. The remainder either did not remember, were unaware that their school had a psychologist, or assumed there was no such person.

Only 26 people would have come out to their school psychologist (15.4% of those with a psychologist at their school). The respondents were very eager to explain why they would not have trusted a psychologist, and we received the most thorough responses to this open-ended question.

Respondents shared their concerns and stories about the inept psychologists who worked at their schools. Nearly all respondents were confident that a school psychologist would definitely have told everything to either teachers or parents. Lack of confidentiality in the school psychologist's office was the most common issue, according to the respondents' answers. Another common fear, which was justified in a number of cases, was the psychologist being homophobic or transphobic, as well as them lacking expertise in working with LGBTQ+ people. Respondents' stories show that psychological services in many schools leave a lot of room for improvement.

“I was afraid that they would tell my parents, treat me as a marginalized person, and force me to undergo conversion therapy. In our school, at social studies, homosexuality was referred to as a type of deviant behavior in the alcoholism–drug addiction–homosexuality chain.”

(homosexual cisgender woman, 19)

“Overall, the psychologist was cruel, mocked all my concerns, and gossiped about other children’s secrets and problems: there was a case when a girl from the 5th grade was physically assaulted. Generally, her communication was based on humiliation.”

(bi/pansexual cisgender woman, 21)

“First and foremost, our school psychologist was an elderly woman who I doubt knew much about the subject. Like most elderly people (she was about 60 years old), I'm afraid she wouldn't have understood this [being a part of LGBTQ+].

And what’s more, in our school, the relations between teachers were quite close (if you know what I mean), so the next day, all (or most) my teachers would have known about it. And a week later, the whole school. That is certainly not something I would have wanted.”

(bi/pansexual cisgender woman, 18)

“All information [students would share] would be passed to their parents. His job was apparently not to help, but rather to make things worse.”

(homosexual non-binary person, 21)

“[I would not have shared anything] out of the fear of being expelled or them telling my parents everything.”

(homosexual cisgender woman, 21)

“It seems to me that school psychologists don't have the necessary expertise in this area”

(bi/pansexual cisgender woman, 20)

“A good friend of mine who went to the same school as me and graduated two years earlier than me was openly gay and dated a girl (who also went to my school). The psychologist gossiped about them very often and said it was unnatural.”

(homosexual cisgender man, 18)

“It was unclear how to seek her help at all, where to find her, and how she consults. I doubted her qualifications.”

(bi/pansexual non-binary person, 21)

“Well, she once said that mental problems are divine retribution from God... kind of doesn't really motivate any revelations.”

(bi/pansexual cisgender man, 20)

“She was terrible. Sexual education was reduced to waltzing around the topic, pioneering, and measuring penis length by palm size, by which she ‘educated’ the girls.”

(homosexual cisgender woman, 22)

“She encouraged the whole class to bully me and said I was a reason for hate; she despised me.”

(homosexual non-binary person, 20)

“Because, firstly, our psychologist passed the information about everyone who came to her to their teachers, and secondly, it could ruin my reputation with the teachers.”

(homosexual cisgender man, 19)

“The psychologist refused to discuss the subject [LGBTQ+] further because she thought she could be fined or even fired.”

(bi/pansexual transgender man, 18)

“The school psychologist was completely untrustworthy. She once told me that ‘I was mutilating myself’ because of my blue hair (which she saw once when I didn't have time to redye it) and the dots I drew above my eyebrows (as a part of my makeup).

There was also an incident where she yelled at one girl because she had cuts on her arms. She said she was a fool, called her mother, and told her everything (that girl did not have the best relationship with her mother at that time, and the psychologist got a very big kick out of it).

There was a case when we were taking a career guidance test with her, and she started yelling at me because I asked her to repeat the question. Trusting such ‘a psychologist’ is out of the question.”

(bi/pansexual cisgender woman, 17)

# Access to Healthcare

72.6% of respondents (236 people) indicated that necessary healthcare was fully accessible to them before they turned 18 years old.

Only 42 people reported discussing their sexual orientation or gender identity with a doctor (at least one) before turning 18 years old. 6 of them had encounters in which a doctor outed them to parents, relatives, other doctors, or nurses.

Half of those who attempted to discuss their SOGIE with a doctor encountered doctors being prejudiced against them on the grounds of their sexual orientation or transgender identity (50%, 21 people). A quarter of them experienced doctors attempting to “cure” their sexuality or gender identity (26.2%, 11 people).

Some respondents gave additional information about issues when interacting with doctors:

“The ob-gyn wrote ‘lesbian’ on the first page of my medical record.”

(homosexual cisgender woman, 20)

“I needed a certificate to apply for homeschooling. At the psych ward on Chapygina Street, an elderly psychiatrist (I don’t remember who exactly, maybe the Department Head) examined me. The conversation didn’t last more than 20 minutes, so the doctor wouldn’t have had time to “cure” me of anything, but the impression from the visit was exactly like that.

He didn’t take any of the problems I expressed seriously, trying to convince me that I was lying and that I was actually a good healthy child. I was also lectured about whom I should marry, what role I should abide by, and who I should be.

Then, the doctor made unsolicited and explicitly racist comments about my family and relatives. And the conversation had nothing to do with that at all; I just had a migraine. To sum up, I won’t step foot in psychiatric wards anymore.”

(queer non-binary person, 21)

“Once, the local psychiatrist was replaced by a new one. She said that my sexuality was a sick fantasy and that it would pass soon. Another one scolded me for my sexuality.”

(homosexual cisgender man, 19)

# Aggression in Public Places

More than half of the respondents reported encounters where strangers on the street or in other public places verbally abused them, condemned them, harassed or assaulted them, or made comments about their sexuality or gender identity (174 people, 53.5%).

Some respondents described these situations in more detail:

“In 2018, when I still identified as a trans guy, my partner and I were threatened, which might as well have escalated into physical violence. On the subway, a stranger suddenly approached us, began threatening to whack us and hurling insults like ‘What are you doing, faggots?’”

(homosexual cisgender woman, 19)

“My girlfriend and I were walking, holding hands. We passed a group of teenagers, and they started shouting insults back at us and throwing stones.”

(homosexual cisgender woman, 19)

“They yelled at us as we walked hand in hand with my boyfriend, debating among themselves whether I was a boy or a girl, and tore off our rainbow ribbons. They beat my partner and me once, and another time, it almost escalated to a fight.”

(homosexual transgender man, 20)

“I was about 15 or 16 years old. On the tram, two young guys, probably slightly older than me but not by that much, noticed the rainbow pin on my backpack. They followed me and then pushed me from behind, snatched the pin, and fled. I wasn’t physically harmed, but it was terrifying.”

(bi/pansexual cisgender woman, 19)

“There have been numerous instances where two of my transmasc friends were called ‘faggots’ or ‘dyke.’ They heard all sorts of derogatory words and threats to beat them up.

Once, in the subway, when I was about 15 years old, three guys aged 18-20 approached me and asked why I was wearing an LGBTQ+ pin and said that they found it offensive and that it was disgusting and against the law. I told them it was none of their business and that I had the right to wear it. They continued to harass me, so I asked, ‘Why are you approaching a stranger in the subway?’ and said that if they persisted, I would approach a subway employee (near the escalator).

Then, they told me, 'Let's get out of the subway then', and I said I wasn't going anywhere with them. So, they told me that if they saw me on the street even once, they'd pepper spray me.

This conversation took place while we were walking to transfer from one metro station to another, where there was an escalator. When they said that, I simply walked around the railing, and they didn't notice me and were already on the escalator. I waited a few minutes, went up, and saw that they were standing next to it. When they noticed me, they started laughing, and I just walked by. Some time later, at another station, I noticed that my pin was missing.

There was another encounter at Petrogradskaya subway station when I was 16. I was with friends, and we were on our way to the subway. About 100 meters from it, we saw a group of teenagers, possibly younger (around 14-15 years old) – they were looking at something. When we approached, we saw that there was a dead cat there.

I went a little closer, and then somebody from that group jerked my backpack. I turned around and saw a girl holding my pin in her hand and saying in a very aggressive tone, 'Are you fucking LGBTQ+?' (she was probably drunk). I demanded she give my pin back, and my friends came over, and she started running away with the group of hers. I was shocked by this, turned around, and started walking toward the subway.

After a while, I turned around and saw only one of my friends standing in the same place. I went back to her and asked where everyone else was, and she said that everyone had run off to chase that group. Later, when we met with the other friends, they said that they wanted to return my pin, and in the end, that girl tore the trans pride pin from my friend's hoodie (making a hole in the hoodie) and pulled out a butterfly knife. And when they threatened to call the police, she ran away.

Another thing, when I was about 14-15, I was standing right by the exit of the subway at Ploshchad Vosstaniya with my friend. Then, a guy about 19 years old approached me and asked why I was wearing the pin. I said it was because I support LGBTQ+ and because I liked it [the pin]. Then, he told me to take it off. I said I wouldn't. He said that if I were a boy, he would 'beat the shit out of me.' He asked if I often went to 'Etazhi' (a loft space with art exhibitions, shops and cafes). I took my friend and left to stand somewhere else.

Once, my gay friend and his boyfriend were beaten by a group of skinheads in the backstreet.

Once, when I was 16, someone tore off my badge right in the store. I went up to those guys at the checkout and started loudly demanding that they return it, and I called a security guard. He came over, and I told him that they had ripped it off my backpack. He started laughing and said, 'Ha-ha, give her back her pin.' They said that they had dropped it somewhere in the store and laughed. I was shaking for a very long time afterwards. There have been many more similar cases.

Once, a group of teenagers threatened to beat my friends and me on the subway just because we 'looked different.' It's terrible."

(bi/pansexual cisgender woman, 17)



# Internet Safety

64.9% of respondents (211 people) reported that they had to create fake accounts on social media (without their real name, age, or pictures) for the sake of their safety (e. g., to avoid bullying or to prevent someone from finding out that they follow LGBTQ+ public pages or accounts).

Most respondents (88.9%, 289 people) indicated that they followed LGBTQ+ groups or public pages before turning 18. Lately, there have been periodic reports about school teachers being encouraged to monitor students' social media. Therefore, we asked our respondents whether they had encountered such cases.

Only 17 respondents responded that they had problems with school or law enforcement officials for following LGBTQ+ public pages or groups on social media. Presumably, such practices are not widespread in schools. Examples that were further described by respondents indicate that problems emerged due to other reasons and not because of teachers monitoring their social media:

“Personally, there haven’t been any issues, but I know a girl from a year below me (I was either in my sophomore or junior grade back then), who had problems because one of the ardent homophobes – sadly, I don’t remember his name, but he’s quite famous – anyway, he filed a lawsuit against her under this law.

Then, she contacted lawyers from Coming Out, and as far as I know, everything worked out fine, but she got very scared. He tried to bring her to trial for a photo, in which she was kissing another girl in front of the pride flag.”

(bi/pansexual transgender man, 19)

“A man wearing a shirt with Putin’s face on it once attacked my friend and me because of the way we looked. The police arrived and arrested us. They checked our phones and then threatened to do everything in their power to get me expelled from school.”

(homosexual non-binary person, 18)

41.9% of respondents (136 people) encountered cyberbullying during their teenage years on the grounds of their sexuality or gender identity, such as threats, insults, or blackmail.

Bullying was perpetrated primarily by strangers (62.5%) and less often by both familiar people and strangers (34.6%). Cyberbullying from familiar people was the least common (2.9%, or 4 people). More than half of those who have experienced online bullying feared that the threats and harassment on the Internet would escalate into real actions (52.9%, or 72 people).

Some of those surveyed shared more details about online threats and bullying:

“I was 13, I subscribed to a few groups, liked a few posts, wrote a few comments on VK, and voted in a few polls. That same evening, some guy texted me and threatened to send screenshots of my online activity to my parents.

They weren’t hard to find; they were on my friend list. I had a rather rocky relationship with my mom, and we were just getting back on track with my dad, so I wasn’t ready to come out yet. I was terrified and really hysterical. Ultimately, he didn’t do anything because I managed to convince him that they already knew everything. But the fear didn’t go away, and I never rejoined any LGBTQ+ groups until I turned 18 and graduated.”

(homosexual cisgender woman, 18)

“Some unknown people hacked into my personal account and sent scams to my friends; they even sent out my nudes.”

(non-binary person, 16)

“A stranger tried to blackmail me to get my nudes so that he wouldn’t out me to my family.”

(homosexual non-binary person, 20)

“They were just calling it [my sexuality] disgusting and abominable, dropping slurs, and saying that if they ‘met me in real life, they would beat the living hell out of me.’”

(bi/pansexual cisgender woman, 17)

“Before I made my personal account private in order to follow some LGBTQ+ groups, I received some offensive messages a few times. But I would immediately delete them and block those who sent them.”

(bi/pansexual cisgender woman, 19)

# Engagement in Street LGBTQ+ Events

Just 47 people took part in street LGBTQ+ events during their teenage years. 46.8% of them saw or heard that the organizers of such events requested underage people to refrain from participating (either personally or through announcements).

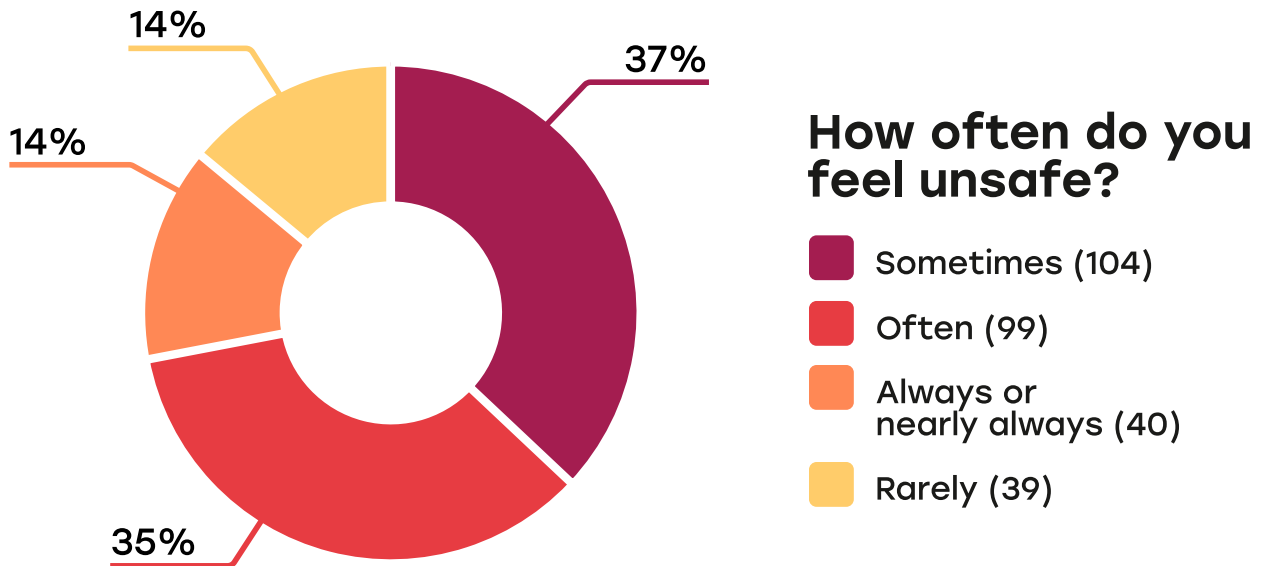
During such events, more than half of the participants encountered verbal abuse. A third received threats, and another third indicated that their engagement in LGBTQ+ events led to them being outed to others. For partaking in LGBTQ+ events, 9 individuals were stalked, 6 were physically assaulted, 5 were expelled due to their participation in such activities and 3 individuals were detained.

<b>Encounters</b>	<b>Absolute metric (47 people)</b>	<b>Relative metric</b>
Verbal abuse	26	55.3%
Threats	16	34%
They were outed because they participated in the event	16	34%
Stalking (including online)	9	19.1%
Physical abuse	6	12.8%
Expulsion	5	10.6%
Detention	3	6.4%

All those detained during street LGBTQ+ events were verbally abused by the police. One person suffered from physical abuse at the hands of law enforcement due to their sexual orientation or gender identity while still a minor.

# Comfort and Safety

243 respondents felt unsafe due to their sexuality or gender identity during their teenage years. Half of them reported feeling unsafe always or often, and a third reported feeling unsafe on a regular basis.



We presented the respondents with a list of concerns related to their sexuality and gender identity and asked to mark the ones they shared. More than half of those surveyed could relate to nearly every option we presented. The most common fear turned out to be that LGBTQ+ people would never be able to feel safe in Russia.

Furthermore, nearly all respondents were afraid that if they got in trouble due to their sexuality or gender identity, they would not receive any help or support. The majority of those surveyed were also concerned about their own psychological well-being. The concerns and their frequencies are shown in the table below.

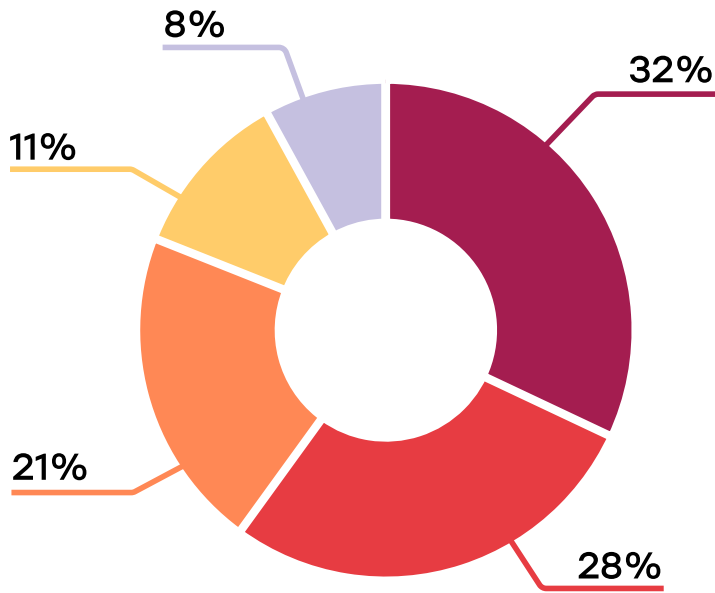
Concerns	Absolute metric (282 people)	Relative metric
I would never feel safe in Russia	238	84.4%
If ever were discriminated against because of my SOGIE (verbal or physical abuse, etc.), I wouldn't receive the needed help (the police wouldn't investigate the crime, a psychologist wouldn't provide proper support, etc.)	216	76.6%

<b>Concerns</b>	<b>Absolute metric (282 people)</b>	<b>Relative metric</b>
I'm concerned about my psychological well-being (I might be bullied, verbally abused, pressured, etc.)	200	70.9%
I wouldn't be able to achieve everything I want from life (education, career, etc.) in Russia because of my SOGIE	182	64.5%
I'm concerned about my physical safety (there is a risk of being assaulted or even killed)	179	63.5%
I'm afraid I would be outed	171	60.6%
I might be persecuted because of my SOGIE by the government or the police (they could fine, arrest, or even imprison me)	146	58.1%
The adults around me might be persecuted for supporting or helping me by the government or the police (they could fine, arrest, or even imprison them)	87	30.9%

136 respondents (41.9%) were concerned that their sexuality or gender identity might have a negative impact on the adults they are close to (parents, relatives, teachers, etc.).

A third of the participants have mentioned that during their teenage years, roughly half of their social circle was homophobic or transphobic. One in every five people surveyed indicated that their environment was predominantly homophobic or transphobic. However, another third of the respondents reported encountering few, if any at all, homophobic or transphobic people around them.

We presented our respondents with various homophobic and transphobic statements in order to determine which ones they had encountered more frequently, thereby indicating the most common ones. The most frequently encountered statements claimed that being homosexual or transgender is a disease, as well as the assertion that adult homosexual and/or transgender people should stay under the radar (demanding that they "not flaunt" and "not propagate" [their sexuality or gender identity]). Other statements and their frequencies can be observed in the table below.



## Homophobic/transphobic environment

- Approximately half (103)
- Few (91)
- Most (70)
- Almost none or none at all (36)
- Everyone or almost everyone (25)

Homophobic/transphobic arguments	Absolute metric (325 people)	Relative metric
Being homosexual or transgender is a disease; such people must be treated medically	292	89.8%
Homosexual or transgender people can live as they wish, but it mustn't be displayed/flaunted/propagated, especially to children	291	89.5%
Being homosexual or transgender is unnatural. There is no homosexuality in other species	278	85.5%
Being homosexual or transgender is not acceptable in Russian society and is not a part of Russian culture or traditions. These values are imposed and propagated by the West	273	84%
Our demographics are decreasing because of homosexual or transgender people. Our nation or humankind may eventually die out, or the population may decline	232	71.4%
Being homosexual or transgender is shameful, disgusting, or repulsive	223	68.6%
Being homosexual or transgender is a sin. God forbids, disapproves of, or punishes such things	210	64.6%



Homophobic/transphobic arguments	Absolute metric (325 people)	Relative metric
Homosexual or transgender people can never be happy	121	37.2%
Being homosexual or transgender is illegal. Talking about it might lead to fines or even imprisonment	114	35.1%

Only 3 people have never encountered homophobic or transphobic statements. Only 30 respondents (9.2%) were unaware of the Russian law that prohibits “the propaganda of ‘non-traditional’ sexual relationships among minors” during their teenage years.

272 respondents (83.7%) are confident that their lives as teenagers would have been more comfortable if there were no legal restrictions on spreading information about sexuality, gender, or LGBTQ+ among minors.

206 respondents (63.4%) felt that the propaganda law affected their lives or the environment before they turned 18. Some elaborated on how exactly their lives were affected. Many respondents have mentioned the lack of access to information about sexuality and gender for teenagers, the inability to attend LGBTQ+ themed events, and the feeling of isolation.

Moreover, many emphasized that the law had contributed to their perception of themselves as wrong and illegal, as well as the environment around them, resulting in an overall illiteracy in terms of sexual education and gender and state-endorsed homophobia and transphobia.

“Perhaps if this law hadn’t existed, I would have come out to my parents and would have had a much more peaceful and happy life.

Also, people wouldn't have gossiped about me behind my back at school when we were having a lecture on HIV and AIDS, and neither would they tell us that it could only be transmitted among gay people.”

(homosexual cisgender man, 18)

“The definition of ‘propaganda’ in the law is very vague, which is why any unbiased or positive statement about LGBTQ+ may be considered propaganda. That's why I'm scared to talk about my experience, scared to share queer-themed art, and scared to even hang a flag by the window at home. Living is scary.”

(bi/pansexual non-binary person, 20)

“I just feared for my life. I was afraid that because of my homophobic counselor, I would have problems in college. I often couldn't attend queer-themed events or get to know someone just so I wouldn't feel lonely or maybe have a chance at a relationship. I had to lie about my age and pretend to be older than I actually was.”

(bi/pansexual cisgender woman, 18)

“I believe that at the very least, such information should have been more accessible not just for me but also for my family or friends, and it might have prevented the nonsense associated with the queer community from taking root in their minds.”

(bi/pansexual cisgender man, 20)

“If this law didn't exist, I would have been calmer because I could have sought help at LGBTQ+ community centers. I wouldn't need to lie about my age almost everywhere, especially since my problems were no less ‘taboo’ than other adult problems, and without this law, we could have discussed and resolved them.”

(homosexual non-binary person, 20)

“There was no chance of getting support from adults, including teachers and counselors. The topic became forbidden, and what's forbidden is considered bad by the masses.”

(homosexual cisgender woman, 21)

“It's a shame that I had no adult that I could go to for support.”

(homosexual cisgender man, 20)

“Access to information was restricted. [There was] the fact that I could be prosecuted for a rainbow ribbon on my backpack, the inability to publish materials on LGBTQ+ youth because it's not very legal to conduct research on them. Living in general isn't too great.”

(homosexual non-binary person, 21)

“[There was] restricted access to information about my own sexuality, the fact that I could be prosecuted for supporting LGBTQ+, for example, on social media. Also, this law gave a free hand to many homophobes, as they now sensed impunity and state support.”

(homosexual cisgender man, 18)

“Not having access to the information I needed was the lesser evil. The bigger concern for me was the feeling that since LGBTQ+ topics can't be discussed openly, with every breath, I am marked as a criminal. Frequent homophobic comments in the media and around me only confirmed the fact that I'm illegal as a person and that I need to hide away.

I was afraid to join LGBTQ-friendly groups, to hold my girlfriend's hand in the street, to use any terms other than ‘my significant other,’ to discuss relationships in any way, to create art, and to contemplate my future. All of this was incredibly stressful, and my life had already not been a piece of cake.”

(homosexual cisgender woman, 18)

“Teachers were afraid to discuss this topic. The browser's ‘parental control’ function blocked any LGBTQ+ information (even though my parents had enabled this feature for a different purpose). In my textbooks on social studies (a guide for the Unified State Exam preparation), ‘homosexuality’ was given as an example of a negative deviation.”

(bi/pansexual cisgender woman, 20)

“It was immense psychological pressure – feeling alien and marginal. The fear that I would never be able to live a fulfilling and free life in my own country. This adds to the lack of access to information about Russian LGBTQ+ communities, their culture, to support from older and ‘more experienced’ peers, which is also very, very important. Information about the lives of ordinary LGBTQ+ people – especially in Russia.”

(homosexual cisgender woman, 21)

“I'm generally very intimidated by the law. All my partners have usually been slightly younger than me (by a year or two), and I was always paranoid that when I would turn 18 and my partner would still be 17, I would be breaking the law. I was also afraid of posting anything related to this topic [LGBTQ+] on social media.”

(homosexual cisgender woman, 21)

“I didn't receive adequate information about being transgender, and I had a vague understanding of the process of going through the transgender commission and transitioning overall. I had to get information from unreliable sources. As a result, I struggled for a long time with my gender identity and wasn't able to understand who I was.”

(homosexual transgender man, 20)

“I can't kiss whomever I want in the street because I fear I could be fined.”

(homosexual transgender man, 20)

# Conclusion

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As the results of our research demonstrate, LGBTQ+ adolescents are in a particularly vulnerable position, and the “propaganda law” exacerbates this problem by largely constraining teenagers and their environment. Our assumptions about the limited access to information about gender, sexuality, and LGBTQ+, which is censored because of Russian laws, have been confirmed.

Adults who were approached by our respondents with questions about sexuality or gender frequently held distorted, unrealistic views, reacted negatively to relevant inquiries, or refused to respond at all. Teenagers are unable to purchase informational materials about sexuality or gender nor can they attend LGBTQ+ events that interest them. This not only deprives them of the necessary knowledge for self-discovery but also hinders their socialization within an accepting and supportive community. Furthermore, while the majority of adolescents can access some information, the quality of that information is a major reason for concern.

LGBTQ+ adolescents are especially vulnerable because they are dependent on their parents. Many of them encounter condemnation and a lack of understanding from their parents and relatives due to their sexuality or gender identity. A substantial proportion of respondents experienced people attempting to somehow “correct” them or endured verbal abuse. In certain cases, family members have evicted LGBTQ+ teenagers from their homes or physically abused them.

In school, many LGBTQ+ adolescents are verbally abused by their peers (and, in rare instances, even teachers) as well as have to suffer from bullying and violence toward them.

Additionally, teachers may be prejudiced against them, reacting negatively to their sexuality or gender identity, condemn them, or persuade them that it is wrong, unnatural, or immoral. There have been cases when teachers and psychologists refused to discuss gender, sexuality, or LGBTQ+ issues with adolescents, referring to “the propaganda law.” Consequently, even those adults who could support teenagers and provide them with unbiased information may hesitate to do so due to Russia’s legislative system.

It is important to emphasize that our research has shown how poorly school psychologists perform their jobs. In some ways, their work seems formalistic because the students do not trust them, will not talk to them about their problems, or hold strong opinions about their incompetence, which harbors homophobic and transphobic views. Some students have expressed confusion about how to seek psychological help at school or whether such assistance is even available. A few stories from respondents demonstrate that certain school psychologists brazenly violate professional ethics.

LGBTQ+ teenagers also struggle to get psychological help outside of school. Many parents do not consider it helpful and, in some cases, even think it is dangerous and harmful. This limits teenagers' access to mental health services, especially private ones. Furthermore, in the psychologist's office, LGBTQ+ adolescents are highly likely to encounter homophobia and transphobia as well as condemnation and attempts to “fix” them.

Despite the fact that the majority of respondents reported having full access to medical care during their adolescent years, most attempts to discuss their sexuality or gender identity with a healthcare professional were turned down or led to some other negative experience. In some cases, doctors attempted to “cure” or “fix” respondents' sexuality or gender identity.

Public spaces have proven to be unsafe for LGBTQ+ adolescents: many respondents have been verbally or physically abused by strangers on the street. Adolescents are left in a helpless state, while the surrounding adults either remain indifferent or pose a danger themselves. Law enforcement either takes no action or targets the victims of attacks themselves (for instance, by detaining them instead).

The internet is just as unsafe: adolescents encounter cyberbullying and occasional verbal abuse for following LGBTQ+ groups or communities or posting content on related topics. Some have been blackmailed or threatened.

Overall, the lives of LGBTQ+ adolescents are negatively impacted by the constant discomfort about their sexuality or gender identity. The majority fear that they will never be able to feel safe in their own country due to homophobia and transphobia. A significant number of respondents noted that during their adolescent years, they were predominantly surrounded by people with homophobic or transphobic views.

The growth of such sentiments is one of the consequences of the anti-LGBTQ+ “propaganda” legislation. Many respondents have stated that the legislation led to the creation of an atmosphere of fear, isolation, and exclusion in Russian society. Consequently, the propaganda law negatively impacts adolescents' lives on various levels, both directly and indirectly.





Coming Out has been operating since 2008. Our mission is to support the LGBTQ+ communities in Saint Petersburg as well as to facilitate recognition of human dignity and equal rights for LGBTQ+ people by the state and society.

If you need legal or psychological help, if you encountered discrimination or physical violence, or you just need to talk to someone, write or contact us.

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# COMING OUT

## LGBTQ+ group

**We send our thanks to everyone who took part in the research and shared their stories for this report.**