



NATIONAL SPORTS COUNCIL

Discrimination of sexual and gender minorities in sports and exercise

PUBLICATIONS OF THE NATIONAL SPORTS COUNCIL 2014:1

English summary

Marja Kokkonen



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1. INTRODUCTION

In its resolution adopted in June 17th, 2011, the UN Human Rights Council expressed its great concern about the discriminatory practices and acts of violence against LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex) people on the grounds of their sexual orientation and gender identity. Finnish researchers have studied this phenomenon already early this century, focussing on working life^(1,2), career choices of young adults⁽³⁾, schoolchildren's experiences^(4,5) and secondary level education, as well as free time⁽⁷⁾. In a few other studies on discrimination in Finland in general^(8,9), on discrimination experiences of children and young people⁽¹⁰⁾ and in accounts on hate crime reported to the police^(11,12,13), the perspective of sexual and gender minorities has also been touched upon.

According to the report "Discrimination in Finland 2008"⁽⁸⁾, funded by the "Follow-up on discrimination" project by the Ministry of the Interior, there has been very little coverage of any forms of action taken against discrimination in sports and exercise. Also, a recent account on gender equality in sports⁽¹⁴⁾ only addresses equality issues from the point of view of gender equality, whereas equality and parity, or the discrimination experienced by competing and amateur LGBTI athletes, have not been focussed on in any study. The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights⁽¹⁵⁾ has, in its report on homophobia and discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity, manifestly concluded that such data in the area of sports and exercise is not available in Finland.

This report is a summary of my study⁽¹⁶⁾ published in Finnish and funded by a grant awarded by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Its starting point was concern about whether LGBTI children, young people and adults have equal opportunities to adopt a physically active lifestyle. First and foremost, I wanted to illustrate, using quantitative research methods, how frequent discrimination of sexual and gender minorities is in competitive and recreational sports, and in schools' physical education (PE) classes. The summary includes discretionary quotations from the research data, selected after close reading, which describe the study participants' lifeworld and illustrate what the LGBTI who practise physical exercise (and sport) have been confronted with. My warmest thanks go to all study participants – your positive attitude towards my study has generated unique knowledge on the discrimination of sexual and gender minorities in the context of sport and exercise in Finland.

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2. CONDUCT OF THE STUDY

2.1 Research objective and research questions

The research objective of this study was to describe, primarily with quantitative research data, perceived discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression and its effects, as experienced by LGBTI sports practitioners in the contexts of competitive and recreational sports, and in physical education (PE) in schools. The research questions were:

1. What were the exercise habits and preferred sports of the studied LGBTI sports practitioners?
2. How often had they experienced discrimination by their coaches, instructors, other team members or members in their exercise group, or by their PE teachers, on the grounds of their sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression, over the past year?
3. What type of structural discrimination had LGBTI sports practitioners encountered?
4. What type of effects had this discrimination had on their well-being and engagement in sports?

2.2 Data collection and data analysis

The research data was collected using an online survey between June and September 2011. The structured questions of a pre-tested questionnaire in Finnish covered the participants' 1) background information, 2) engagement in sports and exercise, 3) resources and emotional well-being, 4) frequency and nature of perceived discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression, 5) perceived discrimination in the sports association, sports team, instructed group exercise or during PE classes in school or other educational institutions, and 6) the effects of discrimination. The online survey also included open questions to map out discrimination, means to prevent it and intervene in it. The space for answering the open questions was limited to 1024 characters for technical reasons. The link leading to the online survey was published on websites, Facebook-pages and internal e-mail lists of more than 40 partner organisations, and it was sent directly to individuals, including general secretaries and other key people in sports associations and sports federations as well as some members of parliament.

The study complied with the principles of good scientific research. The respondents, participating in a strictly anonymous manner, were informed on the opening page of the online survey about the objective and the methodology of the study, the potential disadvantages of participating in the study, data retention and about the publishing methods and channels of the study results. On the basis of this information, the potential participants decided whether they wanted to participate or not – moving on from the opening page required voluntary and informed consent confirmed by ticking a box. The participants could, at any time, decline to participate, discontinue their participation without explanations or consequences or contact the principal investigator through the contact information given on the opening page. The responses were saved by identification numbers only in an electronic data file, located in the university network, and accessible only to the principal investigator with her personal user id and password. All collected data are stored and reported in all its formats in such a way that no single study partic-

ipant can be identified. Numerical answers to the online survey were analysed by frequencies and percentage values and textual answers to the open questions by quantification and content analysis.

2.3 Participants of the study

The online survey had been opened 1869 times. Of those individuals, 560 had given informed consent to use their answers for research purposes. Of them, 424 gave their age and their perceived (227 women, 179 men, 18 other) and legal (236 women, 188 men) gender. Answers such as ‘Santa Claus’, ‘lobster’, ‘dragon warrior’ and ‘apeman’ as the perceived gender of the respondent, and one answer stating that the respondent’s age was 1 year, were removed from the data. Thus, the final research data was made of (at most) 419 participants belonging, as perceived by themselves, to a sexual or gender minority. All of them had given consent for the use of their answers for research purposes, and they gave their age as well as their perceived and legal gender. However, as not all respondents replied to all questions or items in the online survey, the data volume varies between different sections of the online survey.

In the final data, 226 (53.9%) of 419 study participants perceived themselves as women, 179 (42.7%) as men and 14 (3.3%) as something else; androgyne, genderqueen, gender neutral, transgender, transman, transvestite or as a transfeminine person who had been defined male at birth. As for their legal gender, 234 (55.8%) were women and 185 (44.2%) men. The respondents’ age varied between 11–64 years of age (average = 27.08 years, SD = 10.24). 61 were minors (14.7% of the participants), 232 (55.4%) were young adults between 18–29 years of age and 126 (30.1%) were adults between 30–64 years of age. The breakdown of respondents to different minorities is illustrated in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Breakdown on the basis of (the most dominant) sexual orientation (n = 394)

Sexual orientation (most dominant)	n	%
Heterosexual	158	40.1
Homosexual (gay)	69	17.5
Homosexual (lesbian)	82	20.8
Bisexual	61	15.5
Other	24	6.1

25 respondents (6%) did not specify their sexual orientation whereas 394 (94%) did so. Of those who did, 158 (40.1%) stated they were dominantly heterosexual and 236 (59.9%) said they were dominantly non-heterosexual. In addition to gays (17.5%), lesbians (20.8%) and bisexuals (15.5%), 6.1% of the respondents specified something else as their sexual orientation (e.g. asexual, pansexual, sodomist, omnisexual, queer).

Table 2. Breakdown on the basis of gender minority (n = 58)

Gender minority	n	%
Transsexual	18	4.6
Intersex	2	0.5
Transvestite	4	1.0
Transwoman	3	0.8
Transman	8	2.0
Transgender	9	2.3
Other	14	3.6

Of all respondents, 336 (80.2%) did not belong to any gender minority and 25 (6.0%) did not give this information about themselves. Of those belonging to minorities, (n = 58, 14.7% of the respondents to the question), transsexuals were the biggest single group (n = 18, 4.6%). The second biggest group (n = 14, 3.6%) was the “Other” group, where identities varied from ‘asexual’, ‘ladyboy’, ‘female gay’ and ‘man with a transbackground’ to ‘transsexual in the past’.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS

3.1 The exercise habits and preferred sports of LGBTI people

At the time of the study, 18 (4.3%) respondents of 419 reported they were not practising physical exercise. 73 (17.4%) gave no information as to what type of physical exercisers they were. Table 3 illustrates the perceptions of 346 respondents (82.6% of all participants) of themselves as physical exercisers.

Table 3. Research participants' (n=346) perceptions of themselves as sports practitioners

Perception of oneself as a sports practitioner	n	%
Competing athlete at international level	20	5.8
Competing athlete at national level	50	14.5
Competing athlete at regional/district level	52	15.0
Active sports practitioner (min. 4 times a week)	71	20.5
Regular exerciser in recreational sports	83	24.0
Occasional exerciser in recreational sports	52	15.0

Slightly more than one third of the respondents (n=122, 35.3%) were engaged in competitive sports and more than half (n=206, 59.5%) in recreational sports. Their training frequency is illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4. Frequency of training; a minimum of 30 minutes of sport or physical exercise, either unorganised or organised, resulting in at least mild sweating and shortness of breath

Frequency of training	n	%
Maximum once a month	22	6.4
Only in PE at school/other educational institution	8	2.3
Once a week	33	9.5
2-3 times a week	109	31.5
4-6 times a week	101	29.2
Daily	73	21.1

The responses indicate that those who specified their training frequency were very active in sports and physical exercise; half of them (n=174, 50.3%) trained at least four times a week, at least half an hour at a time, and so intensively that it made them experience breathlessness.

Of those who stated their training frequency, 188 respondents (54.3%) saw themselves as ones who practice individual performance sports and 107 (30.9%) as team sports participants. Not belonging to any of these groups was the choice of 51 (14.7%) respondents, and 73 respondents (17.4% of all research participants) did not indicate this at all. A wide variety of sports were represented. The sport groups referred to in the answers given to the question "What are the sports you do most?" are listed in Table 5 so that the sport group mentioned most often in single answers is the last one in the Table, i.e. number 15.

Table 5. The study participants' favourite sport groups, from least popular to the most popular

Sport group	Examples of typical sports in the group
1. Skating	synchronized skating, figure skating, speed-skating
2. Motor sports	car racing, kart racing, rallying
3. Track and field	jumping events, sprint, javelin, discus throwing
4. Skiing	cross-country skiing, alpine skiing, snowboarding
5. Horse riding	horse riding
6. Walking	walking
7. Martial arts	boxing, kick-boxing, wrestling, judo, taekwondo
8. Dancing	ballet, contemporary dance, modern dance, hiphop, voguing
9. Running	running, long-distance running
10. Jogging	jogging
11. Swimming and aquatics	swimming, aquarobics, competitive swimming, diving
12. Cycling	cycling, road cycling
13. Instructed group exercise	spinning, aerobic, zumba, bodypump, yoga, pilates
14. Fitness training	fitness training, gym, weight lifting, kettle bell
15. Ball games	ice hockey, floor ball, volleyball, football, rugby, golf, American football, squash, handball, tennis, underwater rugby, bandy, basketball, flying disc, frisbee golf

The most popular sports among the research participants were ball games, gym/fitness training and instructed group exercise. A few single sports which were mentioned only once (such as archery, chess, agility, sailing, darts) and forms of functional exercise (berry-picking, dog-walking) are not included in any of the above groups.

The perception that aesthetic sports are for girls and gay people was obvious in the open answers of the study participants:

When I hadn't come out yet I used to hear a lot of comments on my dancing hobby 'So you must be gay, right? Dancing is for girls only'. Especially ballet provoked a lot of mockery. (man, 19 years)

Because aesthetic sports cast doubt on the heterosexuality of the person wanting to engage in such sports meant that in some cases they postponed their engagement in the sport:

I would have loved to start modern dance years ago but I experienced other people's comments on 'gay sport' so oppressive that I finally started only years later. (man, 25 years)

3.2 Discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression

3.2.1 Discriminatory encounters in the context of sport and exercise

Table 6 illustrates how often study participants had observed discriminatory behaviour on the grounds of their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression in the context of sport and exercise over the past year.

Table 6. Frequency of discrimination encountered by sexual and gender minorities (n = 195) in the context of sport and exercise over the past year; fr(%)

People...	Never	A few times a year	Every month	Every week	Almost daily
Act as if they think I'm not as good as them.	85(43.6)	69(35.4)	25(12.8)	8(4.1)	8(4.1)
Act as if they think I'm not intelligent.	107(54.9)	54(27.7)	16(8.2)	9(4.6)	9(4.6)
Act as if I were overly sexual.	123(63.1)	39(20.0)	17(8.7)	8(4.1)	8(4.1)
Act as if my sexual orientation were a temporary phase.	126(64.6)	44(22.6)	11(5.6)	9(4.6)	5(2.6)
Act as if I could, if I wanted to, turn straight.	128(65.6)	41(21.0)	9(4.6)	9(4.6)	8(4.1)
Treat me more disrespectfully than they do others.	104(53.3)	59(30.3)	17(8.7)	7(3.6)	8(4.1)
Are afraid of me.	119(61.0)	41(21.0)	17(8.7)	11(5.6)	7(3.6)
Are timid in my company.	86(44.1)	66(33.8)	24(12.3)	11(5.6)	8(4.1)
Avoid my company.	104(53.3)	57(29.2)	21(10.8)	4(2.1)	9(4.6)
Act as if I were less reliable than others.	134(68.7)	35(17.9)	13(6.7)	7(3.6)	6(3.1)
Act as if I were abnormal.	112(57.4)	49(25.1)	14(7.2)	12(6.2)	8(4.1)
Act as if I had lower morals than other people.	128(65.6)	39(20.0)	12(6.2)	8(4.1)	8(4.1)
Act as if I were sick or disturbed.	145(74.4)	27(13.8)	6(3.1)	6(3.1)	11(5.6)
Act as if my sports skills were somehow a result of my sexual orientation.	150(76.9)	25(12.8)	8(4.1)	8(4.1)	4(2.1)
Act as if I had chosen my sport on the basis of my sexual orientation or gender minority.	141(72.3)	25(12.8)	12(6.2)	8(4.1)	9(4.6)

Of the 195 LGBTI people who answered the question, 44% had never noticed any form of discrimination, as listed in Table 6, in the context of sport and exercise within the past 12 months. Slightly more than half of the respondents had noticed, at least a few times a year, that other people had been timid in their company or acted as if they were better than the respondent. Nearly half of the respondents had noticed, at least a few times a year, that other people in their sport and exercise context had acted as if the respondent were not intelligent or were abnormal. In addition, nearly half of the respondents reported having been treated more disrespectfully than others and had noticed other people avoiding their company. More than one fourth had noticed other people behaving, at least a few times a year, as if the respondent had chosen his/her sport on the basis of his/her sexual orientation or gender identity:

I was discussing coming out with a good friend of mine, and she said that most of those who know me already know that I'm not straight because I've played football all my life. I was astonished. What does having started kicking the ball at the age of two have to do with being attracted to someone of the same sex at the age of 24? (woman, 24 years)

My colleagues think that I go to public swimming pools only to see other naked men. To be honest, I only go there for exercise. (man, 31 years)

Nearly one fourth of the respondents had, at least a few times a year, noticed that other people see a link between their sexual orientation and their physical skills. At close reading, answers seemed to suggest that those comments that link sexual orientation to physical skills reduce the value of physical achievements of both men and women. Good performance was seen as a result of good luck and of the additional benefit resulting from the person's sexual orientation:

You're damn good at boxing; of course because you're a lesbian. (woman, 25 years)

The preliminary analysis of the qualitative data suggests that gender determines, at least to some extent, how other people assess the effect of sexual orientation on the performance of a particular or of a similar sport – or whether the respondent had, in general, been discriminated against or not:

Dancing is seen as a sport for straight girls, not lesbians, and a strong hetero-hypothesis exists in that sport. Don't talk, don't tell. The only situation where my lesbianism can be seen is when other people don't believe that I can convey certain emotions, like passion, when I'm dancing. They think that I can't understand what real passion is, i.e. passion between a man and a woman. (woman, 29 years)

In my exercise group there is a gang of forty-something men who cannot follow even the simplest choreography. I have a background in competitive dancing and I enjoy classes requiring coordination and choreographic skills. They imply that I can dance just because I'm gay. (man, 40 years)

3.2.2 Discriminatory behaviour of sports coaches and exercise instructors

Competing athletes (n= 113) estimated that coaches of 51 competing athletes (45.1%) know about the sexual orientation or gender identity of their coachee. In their responses they reported the following, as an example: “I have not really advertised my sexual orientation in my sport circles” or “I have never mentioned it to any of my coaches. I don’t feel that I’m intentionally hiding my sexual orientation but maybe I’m somehow subconsciously controlling what I’m saying”. Table 7 illustrates the frequency of perceived discrimination of LGBTI people (n = 117–130) by coaches or group exercise instructors within the past year.

Table 7. Discriminatory behaviour by coaches/instructors within the past year (n = 117–130); fr(%)

How often has your coach or instructor...	Never	A few times a year	Every month	Every week	Almost daily
Spread sexually coloured rumours about you?	110(88.0)	10(8.0)	4(3.2)	-	1(0.8)
Called you names or insulted you in a degrading, sexually coloured way?	109(88.6)	10(8.1)	2(1.6)	1(0.8)	1(0.8)
Asked about your gender or your sexual orientation in an inappropriate context?	105(86.1)	15(12.3)	1(0.8)	-	1(0.8)
Commented on your gender or your sexual orientation in an offensive way?	105(86.8)	13(10.7)	2(1.7)	-	1(0.8)
Pushed or bumped into you, pinched or hit you, or otherwise attacked you physically?	113(94.2)	4(3.3)	1(0.8)	1(0.8)	1(0.8)
Thrown a dismissive or contemptuous look at you?	98(81.7)	14(11.7)	3(2.5)	3(2.5)	2(1.7)
Told insulting, sexually coloured jokes or stories in your company?	95(79.8)	15(12.6)	6(5.0)	1(0.8)	2(1.7)
Gestured or signalled to you in a sexually charged or suggestive way (e.g. hand signs, body language)?	109(92.4)	7(5.9)	1(0.8)	-	1(0.8)
Suggested having sex with you?	112(94.9)	5(4.2)	-	-	1(0.8)
Made sounds that you have perceived as inappropriate or sexually coloured (e.g. shouted behind you, whistled, gasped or smacked)?	111(93.3)	7(5.9)	-	-	1(0.8)
Intimidated or threatened you on the grounds of your gender or your sexual orientation?	110(94.0)	6(5.1)	-	-	1(0.9)
Turned down your chance to participate in training or competition in an equal way (e.g. given less play time, left you out of the team altogether)?	110(93.2)	6(5.1)	-	1(0.8)	1(0.8)

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How often your coach or instructor has...	Never	A few times a year	Every monw	Every week	Almost daily
Explained your successful sports performance by your gender or sexual orientation?	109(92.4)	7(5.9)	1(0.8)	-	1(0.8)
Explained your unsuccessful sports performance by your gender or sexual orientation?	113(95.8)	4(3.4)	-	-	-
Perceived you as a threat to the athletic success or progress of your team or group?	110(94.0)	5(4.3)	-	1(0.9)	1(0.9)
Perceived you as something of a threat to your team mates or other people training with you?	110(94.0)	7(6.0)	-	-	1(0.9)
Said that you spoil the image of the sport you do?	113(95.8)	3(2.5)	1(0.8)	-	1(0.8)
Said that you ruin his/her reputation?	110(94.0)	4(3.4)	1(0.9)	1(0.9)	1(0.9)
Told you to pull yourself together and turn straight?	112(94.9)	4(3.4)	1(0.8)	-	1(0.8)
Told you to restrict your way of dressing or other distinctive feature essential to your gender identity or sexual identity?	112(94.9)	4(3.4)	1(0.8)	-	1(0.8)
Made belittling or derogatory comments about your family members?	109(93.2)	6(5.1)	1(0.9)	-	1(0.9)

More than 80% of the LGBTI respondents had never experienced any discriminatory behaviour, as defined in the study, by their coaches or instructors over the past year. According to a judoka respondent, the coach has “not behaved in any discriminatory way even though he knows. He is more interested in my results than in my private life outside the dojo.” However, approximately one fifth of the respondents had observed that the coach or instructor had, at least a few times a year, thrown a dismissive or contemptuous look at the athlete, or told insulting, sexually coloured stories or jokes in his/her company:

The nastiest discrimination experiences have been the gay jokes or other dismissive comments on gays which have not been directed to me but have been just everyday joking. (woman, 24 years)

More than 10% of the respondents had noticed their coach or instructor spreading sexually coloured rumours about them, calling them names or insulting them in a degrading and sexually coloured way, asking about their gender or sexual orientation in an inappropriate context or making derogatory comments on them at least a few times a year. Less than 2% of the respondents had experienced weekly or almost daily discrimination. Over the past year, a coach or a sports instructor had suggested sexual intercourse to five adult participants (3 women, 2 men) of the study. One instructor had, drunk and during a night out, tried to “abuse his authoritative position to pick me up”. There were a few single athletes among the study participants whose coaches had used their coachees’ sexual orientation as a means to ridicule their performance:

The hardest part was to hear that I had done well in today’s game only because I’m a tomboy – and interested in the same sex. I fought against tears until I got to the changing room and locked myself in the toilet until I had calmed down. That hurt, and a lot. (woman, 20 years)

The answers also indicated that where respondents had not experienced any direct discrimination by the coach, there was often uncertainty and suspicion in the air:

My fear of their attitudes has made me train less and think whether I can continue with this sport at all. (woman, 28 years)

As an ex-national team member, I believe that my sexual orientation and gender identity have had an impact in the team compositions and in the attitudes of other team members and coaches, I just can’t tell exactly what. (transwoman, 27 years)

3.2.3 Discriminatory behaviour by team members or other exercise group members

More than half (n = 56, 57.7%) of the athletes (n = 97) believed that their team members or members in the same exercise group knew about their sexual orientation or gender identity. Table 8 illustrates how often respondents (n = 94–96) had experienced discriminatory behaviour by their team members or members in their exercise group on the grounds of their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression over the past year.

Table 8. Frequency of discriminatory behaviour by team members or other members in the exercise group over the past year (n = 94–96); fr(%)

How often have your team members or other members in your exercise group...	Never	A few times a year	Every month	Every week	Daily
Spread sexually coloured rumours about you?	79(82.3)	13(13.5)	4(4.2)	-	-
Called you names or insulted you in a degrading, sexually coloured way?	83(86.5)	9(9.4)	3(3.1)	-	1(1.0)
Asked about your gender or your sexual orientation in an inappropriate context?	80(83.3)	12(12.5)	4(4.2)	-	-
Commented on your gender or your sexual orientation in an offensive way?	80(83.3)	12(12.5)	3(3.1)	1(1.0)	-
Pushed or bumped into you, pinched or hit you, or otherwise attacked you physically?	87(91.6)	5(5.3)	1(1.1)	1(1.1)	1(1.1)
Thrown a dismissive or contemptuous look at you?	75(78.9)	11(11.6)	3(3.2)	4(4.2)	2(2.1)
Told insulting, sexually coloured jokes or stories in your company?	74(77.9)	15(15.8)	2(2.1)	4(4.2)	-
Gestured or signalled to you in a sexually charged or suggestive way (e.g. hand signs, body language)?	84(88.4)	7(7.4)	4(4.2)	-	-
Made sounds that you have perceived as inappropriate or sexually coloured (e.g. shouted behind you, whistled, gasped or smacked)?	86(90.5)	7(7.4)	2(2.1)	-	-
Intimidated or threatened you on the grounds of your sexual orientation?	91(95.8)	3(3.2)	1(1.1)	-	-
Excluded you (e.g. from non-sports-related activities)?	80(84.2)	7(7.4)	4(4.2)	3(3.2)	1(1.1)
Explained your successful sports performance by your gender or sexual orientation?	86(90.5)	6(6.3)	2(2.1)	-	1(1.1)
Explained your unsuccessful sports performance by your gender or sexual orientation?	87(91.6)	6(6.3)	1(1.1)	-	1(1.1)
Perceived you as a threat to the athletic success or progress of your team or group?	82(86.3)	7(7.4)	4(4.2)	2(2.1)	-
Perceived you as a personal threat?	75(78.9)	12(12.6)	5(5.3)	2(2.1)	1(1.1)
Said that you spoil the image of the sport you do?	89(93.7)	3(3.2)	2(2.1)	1(1.1)	-
Said that you spoil the image of your team?	86(90.5)	5(5.3)	3(3.2)	1(1.1)	-

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How often have your team members or other members in your exercise group...	Never	A few times a year	Every month	Every week	Daily
Avoided your company in the changing/shower rooms?	78(82.1)	8(8.4)	4(4.2)	3(3.2)	2(2.1)
Called your competitor with sexually coloured, insulting names?	84(88.4)	5(5.3)	2(2.1)	4(4.2)	-
Told you to pull yourself together and turn straight?	89(94.7)	2(2.1)	2(2.1)	1(1.1)	-
Told you to restrict your way of dressing or other distinctive feature essential to your gender identity or sexual identity?	87(91.6)	7(7.4)	1(1.1)	-	-
Made belittling or derogatory comments about your family members?	88(92.6)	6(6.3)	1(1.1)	-	-

Of the LGBTI respondents, 78% had never noticed their team members or other members in their exercise group behaving in discriminatory way, as defined in the study, over the past 12 months. A transwoman participating in the study reported: “I don’t remember ever having been discriminated by my team members. A few times I’ve been told that I’m so flexible because ‘you used to be a woman’ – I haven’t perceived that as insulting, rather as attentive”. Many forms of discriminatory behaviour seemed to be somewhat more common among team members or other members of the exercise group than among coaches or instructors. More than one fifth of the respondents had noticed team members or other members of the exercise group telling derogatory, sexually coloured jokes or stories in the company of the respondent, at least a few times a year. Lastly, more than a fifth of the respondents had noticed their team members throwing dismissive or contemptuous looks at them, and seeing the respondent as a personal threat at least a few times over the past year.

Nearly one fifth of the respondents reported that their team members or other people in the exercise group were spreading sexually coloured rumours about them, asking questions about their gender or sexual orientation in an inappropriate context or making derogatory comments about them, and they were excluding the respondent from a group or avoiding him/her in the changing room or shower room at least a few times over the past year. In the light of data quotes, the respondents had experienced discrimination especially in the changing rooms, as can be seen in the following case descriptions from the worlds of athletics and basketball:

Changing room situations are the most difficult ones, as half-acquaintances know, based on rumours, about my orientation. I have experienced discrimination and I’m often excluded so that I wouldn’t look at the others in a sexual sense. I haven’t been in public shower rooms for ten years.
(woman, 18 years)

They didn’t let me in the changing room until they were ready, so that they wouldn’t become my ‘victims’. I found it tragic. Later during the game one of the girls told, in a loud voice, the other girl not to pass to a lesbian, that is, to me. Such incidents really hurt and remind me that I belong to a minority that is somehow disturbed. (woman, 20 years)

The following floorball player fell victim to extreme discrimination during their sports trip, as can be seen in the following account. He felt that he couldn't report this wide-spread discriminatory behaviour to his coach because the coach's behaviour had also been discriminatory:

A few guys from the team gathered around the TV in the place where we were staying. When I joined them, they started joking to each other and after a while somebody said 'So how's our faggot? Enjoy raping little boys? Don't you fucking ever come to the shower room with us again!' They didn't stay long because they decided they don't want to spend their time with a fag. From that incident onwards, I have often heard similar comments by the same 3-5 guys; they avoid me and behave in a bizarre way, even in matches. As if I weren't there at all. I haven't felt like telling my coach about it, as he also keeps telling gay jokes. The atmosphere is particularly awkward in the changing room after the training.
(man, 19 years)

Avoidance behaviour was also reported in the context of employer-sponsored sports:

I'm not invited to any employer-sponsored sports events although I'm one of the fittest in my workplace. I would beat them in quite a few sports but I'm never invited. (man, 48 years)

Some respondents reported that the behaviour of their training mates had changed in the course of time:

Some of my training mates rolled their eyes when they 'had to' train with me in wrestling. --- It took a long time until they 'got used' to me and could sit next to me in the sauna, not in the opposite corner. Now everything's fine – humour helps and I've also learnt to laugh at myself. (man, 29 years)

3.2.4 Discrimination in physical education in school

Most of those (n=40, 70.2%) who reported on their PE experiences believed that their PE teacher was unaware of their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. The results on the frequency of discriminatory behaviour by the PE teacher on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression over the past year of those respondents who answered the questions in the section on PE in schools (n=61–66) are illustrated in Table 9.

Table 9. Discriminatory behaviour by PE teacher within the past year (n=61–66); fr(%)

How often has your PE teacher...	Never	A few times a year	Every month	Every week
Spread sexually coloured rumours about you?	65(98.5)	1(1.5)	-	-
Called you names or insulted you in a degrading, sexually coloured way?	61(92.4)	5(7.6)	-	-
Asked about your gender or your sexual orientation in an inappropriate context?	62(95.4)	2(3.1)	1(1.5)	-
Commented on your gender or your sexual orientation in an offensive way?	62(95.4)	1(1.5)	1(1.5)	1(1.5)
Pushed or bumped into you, pinched or hit you, or otherwise attacked you physically?	62(98.4)	1(1.6)	-	-
Thrown a dismissive or contemptuous look at you?	55(88.7)	4(6.5)	2(3.2)	1(1.6)
Told insulting, sexually coloured jokes or stories in your company?	55(88.7)	6(9.7)	1(1.6)	-
Gestured or signalled to you in a sexually charged or suggestive way (e.g. hand signs, body language)?	58(95.1)	2(3.3)	-	1(1.6)
Suggested having sex with you?	61(98.4)	1(1.6)	-	-
Made sounds that you have perceived inappropriate and sexually coloured (e.g. shouted behind you, whistled, gasped or smacked)?	61(98.4)	1(1.6)	-	-
Intimidated or threatened you on the grounds of your sexual orientation?	60(98.4)	1(1.6)	-	-
Turned down your chance to participate in PE activities or PE competitions in an equal way (e.g. given less play time, left you out of the school team altogether)?	58(93.5)	3(4.8)	1(1.6)	-
Explained your successful sports performance by your gender or sexual orientation?	58(93.5)	3(4.8)	1(1.6)	-
Explained your unsuccessful sports performance by your gender or sexual orientation?	57(91.9)	4(6.5)	1(1.6)	-
Perceived you as a threat to the athletic progress of your group?	59(95.2)	2(3.2)	1(1.6)	-
Perceived you as a threat to others in the same PE class?	58(93.5)	3(4.8)	1(1.6)	-

Table continues on the next page

Continued from previous page

How often has your PE teacher...	Never	A few times a year	Every month	Every week
Said that you spoil the image of your school?	59(95.2)	3(4.8)	-	-
Said that you spoil his/her image?	59(95.2)	3(4.8)	-	-
Told you to pull yourself together and turn straight?	60(96.8)	2(3.2)	-	-
Concluded that the issues related to your gender or sexual orientation are just a temporary phase?	56(90.3)	3(4.8)	2(3.2)	1(1.6)
Told you to restrict your way of dressing or other distinctive feature essential to your gender identity or sexual identity?	56(91.8)	3(4.9)	1(1.6)	1(1.6)
Made belittling or derogatory comments about your family members?	60(96.8)	2(3.2)	-	-

Almost 89% of the respondents had not, over the past year, noticed their PE teacher behaving in a discriminatory manner, as defined in the study, and none of the respondents had experienced discrimination by the PE teacher on a daily basis. More than one tenth of those respondents who attended school at the time of the study had, however, noticed their PE teacher throwing dismissive or contemptuous looks at them and telling insulting, sexually coloured jokes or stories in their company at least a few times within the past year. Nearly one tenth of the respondents reported that their PE teacher had implied that the sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression of the respondent was only a temporary phase and had ordered the respondent to restrict his/her way of dressing or other distinctive feature essential to his/her gender or sexual identity.

The sections “PE in schools” and especially that of “PE teachers’ behaviour” raised feelings of discontent even among those who had not experienced discrimination or whose experiences from school dated back years, in some cases even decades.

Our upper secondary school PE teacher said homosexuals are paedophiles acting against all natural laws, who like to cop a feel in the shower and make sexual propositions. He pointed a finger towards one boy, a year younger than me, who was the only openly gay student in our school. He was being bullied a lot and I constantly heard rumours about his acts. As a result of this, my coming out was delayed by at least five years. (man, 29 years)

My secondary school PE teacher told me that I’d be in a good shape if I didn’t spend that much time with my girlfriend but did some sports instead. After this comment, I restarted dancing and within weeks my teacher told me that I was in a much better shape, after having stopped all that ‘fooling around’. I didn’t say anything to her but I keep thinking about it sometimes. (woman, 21 years)

In my ninth grade we had PE and were playing volleyball. The teacher instructed me because I couldn’t get the ball where I wanted to, over the net. After a couple of hits my teacher told me, in front of everybody, that ‘you’re playing this like a woman’. (man, 20 years)

Sometimes unpleasant PE memories were the result of student interaction, especially as regards team composition situations:

When teams were composed in school PE classes, and even though others were not aware of my sexual orientation, I felt that I was always the last due to my body language and gestures, speech, clothes and opinions; they concluded that I was gay and therefore somehow more stupid than them and less capable of playing that particular game. I feel that sometimes in these situations it'd be better to be straight and to be chosen 'earlier' and to be considered a good player in that particular sport. (man, 18 years)

In secondary and upper secondary school I hated most boys' team sports because I was always the last one to be selected for a team and not interested in those sports anyway (ice hockey, football, basketball). Only volleyball was ok. --- in sports, the starting point should have been that not everybody is interested in the same sports. I didn't get a good basis for a physically active lifestyle from school. (man, 50 years)

In addition to team selection situations, discriminatory behaviour was common in changing rooms:

Our PE class had just finished. We played basketball, which I'm not good at. A group of 20 guys were slowly filtering into the changing room and some of the guys (those fitter than me) proudly took off their clothes and stepped into the shower, and those who were less happy with their bodies tried to get changed as quickly as possible and go home. I came in the changing room and sat down between two bigger guys and started to change my indoor trainers. All of a sudden I had a penis on my forehead and, a moment later, another one on the other side. Two of the bully boys were standing right in front of me, wet from the shower, swinging their dicks in the air towards me. 'How does it feel to get dick, you fucking faggot!?' I pushed them away and ran home from the changing room, crying. My teacher had taken my belongings and I had to collect them from the secretariat the following day, others still jeering behind me. I don't think those boys remember the incident anymore but I got permanent scars from it. (man, 20 years)

3.3 Experiences of structural discrimination

The open question on structural discrimination was answered 40 times. In 9 cases, the respondent “had not experienced” structural discrimination and one respondent had “experienced very little discrimination”. Answers not related to structural discrimination were left out from the content analysis, such as “my friends ridicule about my hobby, groomed appearance and taking care of myself as a man”, “mmm”, and “my brother abandoned me – has nothing to do with changing rooms”. In the content analysis, 12 different types of structural discrimination experiences could be distinguished from the total of 25 cases.

Most experiences of structural discrimination (13 mentions) were related to changing rooms or changing facilities. The respondents used expressions such as “gender-based changing rooms” and “wrong changing rooms” and suffered from “not having the right to use the changing room of the right gender”. Answers such as “orders to use the women’s changing room and denied access to men’s changing room” were also related to changing rooms. Several respondents had tried to ease the trouble arising from gender-based changing rooms by changing in the gender-neutral toilet facilities or “making a compromise by changing my clothes before the training, just to avoid being involved in embarrassing situations”. However, not everybody, such as the following “non-op woman” was happy with this practice:

Changing rooms and other comparable facilities where bodies are publicly exposed are a problem. --- I don't accept going to the men's changing room just because of my genitals and I wouldn't use any special changing rooms. Being a woman, I would like to use women's changing facilities but I know that I cannot expose my body in public anywhere. --- This has greatly limited my engagement in sports. So far I've changed in the toilet but it doesn't feel like a sustainable, long-term solution.

Seven respondents mentioned “gender-based toilet facilities” which did not seem, however, to cause that much distress and practical problems as changing rooms. Gender-based toilets were perceived mainly as frustrating by those who identified themselves as androgynous and/or asexual. One respondent concluded “I use the men’s toilet if there is a queue on the women’s side. Being an indifferent asexual, it doesn’t feel odd at all. But some people do wonder!” All respondents thought that there should be more gender-neutral toilet facilities. Also public swimming pools (2), saunas (2) and showers (2) were seen as gendered facilities with not enough options to choose from.

“When I did dancing, some studios only had women's changing rooms. I had to use them but it actually very rarely caused any problems.” (man, 50 years)

Also “gender-based exercise groups and gender-based contents of PE classes” and “group division by gender” were each mentioned once as perceived discrimination in the context of sport and exercise. One competitive dancer was not allowed to compete in the official competitions of the sports federation because “in that sport, ‘a woman’ and ‘a man’ always make a pair.” One respondent perceived the following as structural discrimination “people are assumed to do badly in certain sports just because of their gender or, if they like a certain sport, they are considered odd because of their gender” and one said the following “I have experienced the same sort of discrimination as other men do due to their gender as regards e.g. military service or expectations of being helpful to women.”

3.4 Consequences of discrimination

3.4.1 Effects of discrimination on the well-being of the discriminated

Further in the study I asked, to what extent respondents had felt stressed due to other people's attitudes resulting from their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. Of the 162 respondents answering the question, 83 (51.2%) had never experienced any stress due to discrimination. 55 respondents (34%) had experienced only little or some stress (defined as a situation in which the person concerned had felt tense, restless, nervous or anxious, and had had sleeping disorders due to different things bothering their mind) and 24 (14.8%) respondents had felt stressed after having experienced discrimination fairly often or very often. The frequency of other psychosomatic and psychological effects of discrimination among the 152 respondents who answered the symptoms question is illustrated in Table 10.

Table 10. Frequency of psychosomatic and psychiatric effects of discrimination over the past year (n = 152); fr(%)

Effect	Very rarely /Never	Fairly rarely	Occasionally	Fairly often	Very often /always
Headache	118(77.6)	12(7.9)	12(7.9)	9(5.9)	1(0.7)
Abdominal pain	112(73.7)	20(13.2)	10(6.6)	9(5.9)	1(0.7)
Hand tremor	117(77.0)	13(8.6)	16(10.5)	4(2.6)	2(1.3)
Fatigue and weakness	107(70.4)	19(12.5)	16(10.5)	10(6.6)	-
Unwillingness, lack of vigour	104(68.4)	23(15.1)	11(7.2)	10(6.6)	4(2.6)
Feeling of being too fat	104(68.4)	13(8.6)	15(9.9)	15(9.9)	5(3.3)
Difficulties falling asleep	110(72.4)	17(11.2)	12(7.9)	11(7.2)	2(1.3)
Lack of appetite	124(81.6)	12(7.9)	7(4.6)	7(4.6)	2(1.3)
Binge eating	122(80.3)	12(7.9)	8(5.3)	6(3.9)	4(2.6)
Sense of dizziness	127(83.6)	9(5.9)	12(7.9)	3(2.0)	1(0.7)
Diarrhea, irregular bowel function	127(83.6)	14(9.2)	6(3.9)	5(3.3)	-
Vomiting, nausea	135(88.8)	12(7.9)	3(2.0)	1(0.7)	1(0.7)
Heartburn, dyspepsia	131(86.2)	11(7.2)	6(3.9)	2(1.3)	2(1.3)
Profuse perspiration without physical effort	122(80.3)	14(9.2)	8(5.3)	5(3.3)	3(2.0)
Tachycardia, irregular heartbeat	123(80.9)	16(10.5)	8(5.3)	3(2.0)	2(1.3)
Respiratory problems, distress without physical effort	122(80.3)	12(7.9)	8(5.3)	7(4.6)	3(2.0)
Long-term sadness, depression, testiness	107(70.4)	19(12.5)	6(3.9)	15(9.9)	5(3.3)
Feelings of guilt	103(67.8)	18(11.8)	14(9.2)	14(9.2)	3(2.0)
Long-term (days or more) self-discontent	102(67.1)	17(11.2)	15(9.9)	11(7.2)	7(4.6)
Long-term (days or more) lack of libido	102(67.1)	17(11.2)	15(9.9)	11(7.2)	7(4.6)
Self-harming thoughts or plans	121(79.6)	14(9.2)	10(6.6)	5(3.3)	2(1.3)
Suicidal thoughts or plans	125(82.2)	13(8.6)	10(6.6)	2(1.3)	2(1.3)

Most of the respondents (over 72%) who answered the symptoms question had never or only very rarely had any symptoms or had thought that their psychosomatic symptoms (first 16 symptoms in Table 10) were a result of the discrimination they might have experienced. However, depending on a symptom, there were 2–20 respondents (1.4–13.2% of the respondents to the symptoms question) who had fairly often or very often/always over the past year had physical symptoms which they thought were a consequence of discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

Most of the respondents (over 70%) who answered the symptoms question had not had any psychological difficulties resulting from discrimination over the past year. It is worth noting, however, that 20 respondents (13.2%) had, over the past year, felt sad very often or always and depressed or irritated for several days at a time. It is even more worrying that 31 respondents (20.4%) had had self-injurious thoughts or plans, and 27 respondents (17.8%) had had suicidal thoughts or plans over the past year, as a consequence of discrimination. One respondent, who recalled his PE experiences decades after the events had taken place, also had suicidal thoughts:

PE classes at school were pure hell. --- My PE teacher had no understanding or desire to help me or somehow ease the situation. Sports culture, in a hellish way, leads to negative attitudes. Name-calling, ridiculing and degradation... I'm happy I didn't realize the possibility of suicide in those days; had I realized it and had I known how to do it, I would probably have done it, possibly right after one of those PE classes. (man, 38 years)

3.4.2 Effects of discrimination on engagement in sports

Table 11 illustrates to what extent the discriminatory behaviour of a coach or instructor has affected the respondents' engagement in sports over the past year.

Table 11. Effects of discriminatory behaviour by the coach or instructor over the past year

Discriminatory behaviour has made the respondent	Not at all	Fairly little	Somewhere in between	Quite a lot	Very much
Consider giving up that particular sport	116(88.5)	7(5.3)	5(3.8)	2(1.5)	1(0.8)
Consider changing coach	106(82.2)	13(10.1)	4(3.1)	3(2.3)	3(2.3)
Give up sport and exercise altogether	116(89.9)	9(7.0)	3(2.3)	1(0.8)	-
Be afraid of going to training	115(88.5)	7(5.4)	3(2.3)	4(3.1)	1(0.8)
Be afraid of one's sports career and the benefits (e.g. sponsor deals) related to it	120(93.8)	6(4.7)	2(1.69)	-	-
Defend one's rights and tell the coach about issues related to one's gender or sexual orientation	109(85.8)	10(7.9)	3(2.4)	5(3.9)	-

Over 82% of the respondents had not been afraid, after having experienced discriminatory behaviour by a coach or an instructor, of the training or the loss of their sports career and the related benefits, and had not considered giving up that particular sport, sport and exercise altogether or changing coach. However, the coach's discriminatory behaviour had made, at least to some extent, 15 respondents (11.4%) be afraid of going to training, 15 respondents (11.4%) considered giving up that particular sport and 23 respondents (17.8%) considered changing coach. This was the decision taken by one athlete, as a result of discriminatory behaviour by his coach of many years and by his training mates:

--- when the coach pointed out that "the open-air yoga class out there on the lawn might suit you better". He claimed I was gay and my coach made his attitude very clear during the rest of the training time. He didn't keep the information to himself and the following week when I was trying to get into the changing room some of my training mates told me that 'you have no business coming here. The women's changing room is next door!' That pressure from my coach, whom I had always considered nice and fair, left me with only one option: leaving my training group. (man, 19 years)

The effects of discriminatory behaviour by team members or members of the exercise group on engagement in sports and exercise are illustrated in Table 12.

Table 12. Effects of discriminatory behaviour by team members or members of the exercise group over the past year (n = 102–106); fr(%)

Discriminatory behaviour has made the respondent	Not at all	Fairly little	Somewhere in between	Quite a lot	Very much
Consider giving up that particular sport	89(84.0)	7(6.6)	5(4.7)	4(3.8)	1(0.9)
Consider changing team or group	86(82.7)	7(6.7)	6(5.8)	4(3.8)	1(1.0)
Give up sport and exercise altogether	91(87.5)	7(6.7)	4(3.8)	2(1.9)	-
Be afraid of going to training	86(84.3)	8(7.8)	3(2.9)	5(4.9)	-
Defend one's rights and tell the team/group members about issues related to gender and sexual orientation	83(80.6)	8(7.8)	7(6.8)	4(3.9)	-

Over 82% of the respondents had not been afraid, due to discriminatory behaviour by the team members or members of the exercise group, of the training or considered giving up that particular sport, sport and exercise altogether or considered changing the team/exercise group. However, discriminatory behaviour by team members or exercise group members had made, at least to some extent, 16 respondents (15.6%) be afraid of going to training, 17 respondents (16%) consider giving up that particular sport and 18 respondents (17.3%) consider changing team.

Table 13 illustrates the effects of discriminatory behaviour by the PE teacher on engagement in sports.

Table 13. Effects of discriminatory behaviour by PE teacher over the past year (n=60–61)

Discriminatory behaviour has made the respondent	Not at all	Fairly little	Somewhere in between	Quite a lot	Very much
Skip PE classes without permission	54(88.5)	2(3.3)	3(4.9)	1(1.6)	1(1.6)
Skip PE classes with permission	51(83.6)	4(6.6)	2(3.3)	2(3.3)	2(3.3)
Question the assessment criteria of PE grades	52(85.2)	3(4.9)	2(3.3)	3(4.9)	1(1.6)
Give up sport and exercise altogether	55(90.2)	2(3.3)	2(3.3)	2(3.3)	-
Be afraid of going to PE classes	50(82.0)	6(9.8)	2(3.3)	1(1.6)	2(3.3)
Be afraid of other people in the PE class	51(83.6)	5(8.2)	2(3.3)	1(1.6)	2(3.3)
Defend one's rights and tell the PE teacher and other students about issues related to gender or sexual orientation	54(90.0)	4(6.7)	1(1.7)	-	1(1.7)

Of the more than 60 students who answered the question, more than 82% had not experienced any of the effects listed as a result of discriminatory behaviour by their PE teacher. However, there were at most 17 students (27.9%) who had, at least to some extent, skipped PE class due to discriminatory behaviour by their PE teacher, either without permission or with permission. Discriminatory behaviour by the teacher had made 11 students (18.0%), at least to some extent, be afraid of going to PE classes and 9 students (14.8%) question the assessment criteria of the PE grade. The following account by a male respondent demonstrates how his mental well-being and degree of participation had suffered due to discriminatory behaviour experienced some years ago during his PE classes:

First of all, I was bullied throughout my secondary school due to my sexual orientation and lack of interest in PE. I was called names, misled and told where to get off to, my things were hidden and I was always selected last for any team. I skipped PE but my teacher didn't do anything. He told me he had seen a lot of things but he never did anything. In the upper secondary school, I avoided PE for the first 2.5 years, after which my student counsellor forced me to attend both compulsory courses at the same time. I hadn't been able to take these courses because my horrific memories from secondary school made me so tense even just when I tried to enter the PE facilities. In the end, I had to take those courses on my own, by reporting to my teacher before and after each lesson which felt very humiliating especially when I had to face his contemptuous look every single time. Due to anxiety, I began to develop sleeping disorders which disturbed my ordinary school work. And we didn't even have a psychologist at school back then. (man, 20 years)

Examination of Tables 11–13 also shows that the respondents had not really defended their rights nor tried to inform or educate coaches, team mates or PE teachers who were behaving in a discriminatory way. It seems that especially discriminatory behaviour by a PE teacher in a PE class was suffered in silence; 90% of those who had experienced discrimination had not taken any measures to defend their rights or to educate other students or the teacher about issues related to gender or to sexual orientation. In the light of the results of this study, the reason for this silence is understandable:

--- I remain silent and suffer inside because what they say is deeply insulting. I don't have the courage to defend minorities' rights, being afraid that it would only trigger bullying. (woman, 23 years)

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 Summary of results

The main objective of this report was to illustrate how common discrimination of LGBTI people is, in competitive and recreational sports as well as in school PE classes. Secondly, the study aimed to map out the effects of discrimination on well-being and on engagement in sports. Altogether 419 LGBTI people participated in the online survey. On the basis of their own assessment, just under 2/3 of them defined themselves as non-competing, recreational athletes and slightly more than 1/3 as competing athletes. The study participants were physically active; half of them were engaged in physical exercise which made them sweat and got them out of breath at least four times a week for at least half an hour at a time. The most popular sports were ball games, fitness training and instructed group exercise.

In the run-up year to the study, more than half of the respondents had noticed, at least on a few occasions, other people being timid in their company and acting as if they were better than the LGBTI physical exercisers who participated in this study. Also avoidance, disrespectful behaviour and acting as if the LGBTI person were not as intelligent as others were frequent forms of discrimination in different sport and exercise contexts. According to the respondents, other people frequently thought LGBTI people's sports preferences and physical skills were a reflection of their sexual orientation; preliminary close reading of qualitative responses suggested that, according to study participants, other people in different sport contexts thought, at least to some extent, that physical abilities and athletic success depend either on their sexual orientation or on pure luck. In this way, the sportiness of an LGBTI person is invalidated in the context of sport.

Most study participants had not experienced discriminatory behaviour by their coach, team mates or PE teacher over the past year. Most of those who had experienced discriminatory behaviour had mostly had to listen to their coach, team mates or PE teacher telling insulting, sexually coloured jokes or stories and felt that they had looked at them in a dismissing and contemptuous way. A coach had suggested sexual intercourse to five participants – despite the asymmetric relationship based on trust and dependence between the coach and the coachee. Most experiences with structural discrimination had to do with gender-based changing room and bathroom facilities.

Although discrimination had not had obvious effects on mental health and on engagement in sports for most study participants, almost one fifth of all participants (and half of those who answered that question) had felt stressed within the past year due to other people's attitudes towards their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. It is very worrying, in my opinion, that approximately 30 respondents had had self-injurious or suicidal thoughts within the past year, resulting from discrimination they had experienced particularly in the context of sport and exercise. Due to discrimination in sports and exercise, study participants seemed to be afraid of going to training, had considered giving up the sport they are engaged in, or changing coach or team, at least to some extent. Some respondents had postponed getting involved in the sport they were interested in due to other people's discouraging remarks. In PE in schools, discrimination had led to anxiety, doubts about assessment criteria of PE grades and absenteeism.

Although most LGBTI sports participants had not noticed any discriminatory behaviour directed at them in the run-up year to the study, there are, in my opinion, two possible conclusions of this study. First, it seems that the ethical principles of Fair Play⁽¹⁷⁾, in terms of zero tolerance to harassment, are not fulfilled. LGBTI athletes have to face different types of discriminatory behaviour; be it name-calling, insinuation, teasing, questions on private life, timidity, avoidance, exclusion or contemptuous looks. Discriminatory behaviour by coaches and PE teachers is very serious, not to mention their tendency not to intervene in obvious discrimination. They often train or teach children and young people who trust them and who are, due to their coaching or teaching relationship, especially dependant on them. Second, in the light of these study results, the effects of even minor discrimination may be significant, in terms of mental health, engagement in sports or the sports career of the person concerned. Nobody should end up having self-injurious or suicidal thoughts due to discriminatory behaviour by other people. Self-injurious thoughts or plans are particularly tragic in the context of sports and exercise, which are usually seen as a source of physical and mental well-being.

A few notes on the research method used in this study, its results and its conclusions: first, readers should note that despite the total number of study participants being sufficient (N = 419), the sample is, nonetheless, discretionary and not representative. Thus, the results of this study cannot be generalized to apply to all LGBTI people living in Finland. In addition, the number of respondents in different study sections varied considerably; own gender was reported by 419 respondents, sexual orientation by 346 respondents but only 94–130 respondents reported on the discriminatory behaviour by coaches or team mates and only a little more than 60 respondents answered questions on the frequency of discriminatory behaviour by their PE teacher. This calls for great vigilance when interpreting the percentage values. The length of the online survey might have reduced the number of respondents in the PE section which came at the end of the survey. In addition, the online distribution channels of the survey did not reach school-aged respondents in the best possible way, as the survey could not be sent directly to secondary and upper secondary school students. Lastly, the data quotations in this report are meant mainly to describe the lifeworld of the study participants. A systematic analysis of the qualitative data will take place at a later stage.

4.2 Areas of development and proposals for action

I hope that this report can inspire other researchers to study LGBTI people in the context of sport and exercise, facilitate funding in this area of research and, above all, that it generates knowledge that will make Finland an even more pluralist society, where the human rights of LGBTI people are better respected and where they have equal opportunities to lead a physically active lifestyle. What are the other means, in addition to research, to promote the parity of LGBTI people and who should be the main actors in this field?

First, I turn to elite sports, which actively remain silent on the status of LGBTI athletes in elite sports. This can clearly be seen in, for instance, the mid-term review of the Project of the National Elite Sport Development Program⁽¹⁸⁾ by the Finnish Olympic Committee and Finnish Paralympic Committee. The mid-term review proposes, in order to develop the operation of elite sports, to begin with Fair Play -principles. In its section on value choices, it focusses on racism without mentioning the discrimination of LGBTI people, which apparently is included in the mid-term review's reference to 'wide-ranging equality'^(p. 9). On page 19, the review emphasises the importance of Olympic and Paralympic Games, Youth Olympic Games and The European Youth Olympic Festival and other international elite sports events as part of the training and the process in the "athlete's path". It is notable that Gay Games, the main LGBTI sports and culture festival that takes place every four years, and Eurogames, which are the "European Championships for LGBTI people", which in 2016 will be hosted by a Finnish LGBTI sports club, H.O.T, are not on the list of sports events considered particularly important.

International studies^(e.g. 19) indicate that reaching one's personal athletic goals, learning new skills and improving existing skills are among the top sports experiences of most LGBTI people who practice physical exercise. I believe that it is in the interests of Finnish elite sports that all physically talented and motivated athletes, irrespective of their gender or sexual orientation, maintain their interest and engagement in (competitive) sports and that as many diverse athletic talents as possible have the opportunity to progress on their athlete's path, to learn new skills and enhance existing skills, and to reach for the brightest medals. In this way we can take a few more steps towards one of the goals of national sports policy, that is, ethically sustainable elite sports aiming at international success.

The National Elite Sport Development Program has also drawn attention to the development of coaching and the training of coaches. The principles for Coach and Instructor Training⁽²⁰⁾, drafted as a result of a development project of Coach and Instructor Training, puts special emphasis on educational responsibility, the promotion of health and well-being and equal rights to sports and exercise for all, as listed in the Fair Play principles. On the basis of this report it seems, however, that some coaches rather hampers people's equal opportunity of being active in sports and exercise. Telling derogatory gay jokes, name-calling, contemptuous looks, invalidating athletic success on the grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity, and not intervening in discriminatory situations just worsen the athletes' health and well-being. Inappropriate and unprofessional behaviour by some coaches had made some participants of this study consider changing sports or at least changing coach. Thus, it is easy to reason that discriminatory behaviour by the coaches may also prevent potential new athletes from engaging in sports and exercise.

I hope that the new knowledge generated by this study will be actively used at all levels of coach and instructor training. In practical coaching situations I expect coaches, according to Garcia's instructions⁽²¹⁾, to give up homophobic attitudes and rigid ideas as to what is a typical or suitable sport for a given gender. This is important from the point of view of motor development and learning as well as that of health and well-being of athletes. No athlete should be told to

‘throw the ball like women’, ‘hit like a man’, ‘play sissy ice hockey’ – and, yes, also girls can ‘keep their eye on the ball’. I also recommend that the Finnish coaches’ lobbying and service organisations should, in the near future, pay much closer attention to ethical questions related to coaches and coaching. At the moment, the Finnish Coaches Association and the Finnish Professional Coaches Association do not have any ethical guidelines for their members. In my view the results of this study clearly demonstrate that there is a need for such guidelines.

In addition to coach training, also the content and implementation of PE and health education in teachers training should be revised. Already two decades ago, international research recommended offering courses on homophobia at university level⁽²²⁾ to reduce bias towards LGBTI people. The Faculty of Sport and Health Sciences at the University of Jyväskylä is the only faculty in Finland to offer university level PE teacher training. A glance at the current study guide reveals that a few courses on minorities are on offer – special physical education studies and one course on multiculturalism and cultural exchange – but nothing on sexual and gender diversity. For students in health sciences, there is one course on sexual education which has only been organized as a book exam in recent years, for financial reasons.

Both PE and health education teacher students should receive, in my opinion, a wider knowledge-base on diversity issues related to sexuality and gender during their studies than they do now, to become more knowledgeable and confident when discussing these issues^(cf. 23). The more knowledge and self-confidence about sexual education issues the teacher has, the more broadly he/she can discuss these issues with their class⁽²⁴⁾. In this way, future teachers would have better tools to face LGBTI students later in their school work and to notice potential discrimination and intervene in it. Such education would also help them recognize established heteronormative practices at schools which should be reviewed with a more critical eye in any case. In my view all teachers should discuss diversity issues related to sexuality and gender – and all coaches – also from the point of view of the development of their teacher or coach identity.

The European Standards for Sexual Education⁽²⁵⁾ require that teachers and trainers who act as role models for school children are willing to analyse their own attitudes towards sexuality and towards existing societal norms and values. Will alone is not enough, though; time and space are also needed. In degree qualifications in physical and health education, there should be time and space available to reflect one’s own conceptions, values, prejudices and fears about sexuality and gender, both alone and with peers, supported by an adult trainer. This would naturally place new requirements also on the trainers of teacher students.

We can improve the equality of LGBTI people with the help of research and training over time but could we achieve something already overnight? Those of us who work in (physical) education and training and those who are active in sports associations, federations and sports clubs could contemplate – maybe already tomorrow – what can be done about our own attitudes and prejudices and how they are reflected in our behaviour and the way we talk. In addition, we should have the courage to get to know an LGBTI athlete, a coach, a PE teacher or a key person in a sports association – the more we interact with LGBTI people, the less biased we are^(cf. 26) and the more difficult their discrimination becomes.

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