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Understanding Institutional Support and Service Experiences of Lesbian and Gay

Youth

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Abstract

Sexual minority youth, such as youth that identifies as lesbian or gay, often face many specific issues related to their sexual orientation that require institutional support and services, yet little is known about their experiences receiving support and using services. This research aims to explore the institutional support and services experiences of lesbian and gay youth. A qualitative method is used to analyze the experiences of lesbian and gay youth age 16 to 25, who received support or used services either from educational institutions or lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other non-heterosexual and gender-diverse support organizations. Their stories reveal that various factors influence how they perceive the effectiveness of the support and services. This research offers insight into how school staff can provide effective support and services that meet the demands of sexual minority youth.

Keywords: sexual minority youth, gay, lesbian, institutional support, educational institution, LGBTQ+ support organization

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Introduction

Sexual minority youth encounter many problems associated with their sexual orientation and gender identities (SOGI), such as discrimination, prejudice, and homophobia. These problems typically occur in the school environment. Research conducted worldwide indicates that about 20% of the general student population is bullied in school, and sexual minority students, such as those who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender, are bullied almost three times more than this rate (Boroughs, 2017). In addition to school bullying, sexual minority youth encounter difficulties with sexual identity and coming out (Wright & Perry, 2006; Perrin-Walllqvist, & Lindblom, 2015). Experiencing bullying in school and struggling with sexual identity distress and coming out can increase stress and damage the health of sexual minority youth (D'Augelli, 2002; Ryan et al., 2009; Higa et al., 2014). Because sexual minority youth spend a lot of time in educational institutions and because many sexual minority young people become aware of their sexual identity in their teens (Hidaka, Kimura, & Ichikawa, 2007), it is essential to provide effective support and services to them. Considering that some youth may be reluctant to seek assistance from educational institutions and that educational institutions are limited in the support they can provide, sexual minority support organizations outside of schools or universities also are important.

This research aims to explore the perceptions of the effectiveness of institutional support and services for sexual minority youth. An online survey targeting youth who identified as lesbian and gay (LG) in the Czech Republic was conducted to achieve this goal. The main research question is "What are young lesbian and gay people's experiences with the support

and services provided by educational institutions and external lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other non-heterosexual and gender-diverse (LGBTQ+) support organizations?" To answer this main research question, sub-questions are asked: What problems do lesbian and gay youth decide to solve with institutional assistance? How do lesbian and gay youth perceive the usefulness of the received support and why do they find it effective or ineffective?

The first chapter examines the previous research about the problems that sexual minority youth have faced, barriers they encountered when using services, and what support they need. It also discusses sexuality-related social support and effective institutional support and services. Furthermore, it discusses sexual minorities and institutional support and services for sexual minority youth in the Czech Republic.

The second chapter is about the concepts used in the thesis. Five concepts are described: heteronormativity, heteronormativity in school, the "silence" of non-heterosexual topics in school, sexual minority stress, and homosexual identity formation.

The third chapter indicates the methodology. It describes the method used, data collection, data analysis, ethical considerations, and the researcher's positionality.

The fourth chapter draws on the survey results and shows what were the main problems gay and lesbian respondents have encountered and their perceived severity.

The fifth chapter describes the results and provides a case-by-case analysis and interpretation of the respondents' experiences with receiving. It specifically explores the type of support they received or what services they used and who helped them as well as if they perceived

the support as effective and if they felt psychological stress when they received support or used services.

The final chapter reveals the reasons why some respondents did not seek help from educational institutions and their suggestions for providing better support and services for sexual minority students in educational institutions.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

1.1.Homophobia in Schools

Sexual minority youth inevitably face homophobic or heterosexist oppression on their path to adulthood. They suffer a variety of stresses due to their sexual orientation and gender identity, and these factors can make them depressed and anxious. According to Meyer (2003), lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) people are exposed to unique stresses associated with the stigmatization and prejudice they experience in society. Discrimination and prejudice also exist in schools through a form of homophobia and homophobic bullying. Sexual minority young people are at great risk of experiencing victimization, prejudice, stigma, school bullying, and discrimination than their peers (Jones et al., 2008; Mayberry, Chenneville, & Currie, 2013). Bullying has been an everyday occurrence for gay and lesbian adolescents (Llera & Katrirebas, 2010). A study revealed that gay and lesbian adolescents tend to report victimization by bullying than their heterosexual peers, but they are reluctant to report bullying to teachers or school staff (Berlan et al., 2010). For example, almost two-thirds of lesbian and gay youth have experienced homophobic bullying (Stonewall Education Guide, n.d.). Similarly, many gay or lesbian youth reported that they have experienced harassment in schools (Wagaman, 2014). Lesbian and gay adults reported that when they were young, they frequently experienced verbal harassment, such as name-calling (Rivers, 2001). One study found that in several cases, school staff contributes to a harassment atmosphere for lesbian adolescents, and most schools do not provide any services to sexual minority youth because their existence is denied (Varjas et al., 2007). To take homophobia and homophobic bullying in schools seriously is essential because schools are places where young people spend most time before they start to work; it is a place where they learn and internalize social

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roles. Having negative, homophobic experiences can threaten youths' self-esteem and academic achievement and can have a devastating effect on the wellbeing of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth. According to a study carried out in the United States (U.S.), the most common mental health needs of sexual minority youth are suicidality, physical or sexual victimization, moderate to severe depression, and moderate to severe anxiety (Williams & Chapman, 2011). Similarly, LGBT youth are at greater risk of experiencing emotional distress because they have higher levels of depressive symptoms and are more likely to report self-harm and suicidal thoughts (Almeida et al., 2009). A study indicated that belongingness to school plays a vital and indirect role in the connection between peer victimization and suicidality among sexual minority young people. For example, sexual minority young people who have experienced peer victimization reported low degree of belongingness to school and it is related to high percentages of suicidality (Hatchel, Merrin, & Espelage, 2019). Sexual minorities reported that depression and externalizing symptoms did not occur because of sexual orientation but due to their experiences of victimization and lack of support (Williams et al., 2005). In short, homophobia in schools is a serious problem for sexual minority young people and is linked to poor health outcomes for them.

1.2. Barriers Sexual Minority Youth Encounter When Seeking Support

Sexual minority youth face numerous barriers when accessing support services both in the context of external organizations and schools. For example, sexual minority youth have reported that the number of organizations that specifically provide support for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people is limited, and most of them are located in urban areas (Woronoff, Estrada, & Sommer, 2006; Wagaman, 2014). Regardless of the

potential benefits of mental health services for sexual minority young people, a study found

sexual minority young people reported that they are afraid to have health care interactions

because some health care providers are biased against sexual minorities, and this fear

prevents them from seeking help (Elze, 2007). Some sexual minority youth also reported

that the services available for heterosexual youth are unwelcoming to them (Davis, Saltzburg,

& Locke, 2010). According to a study carried out in the U.S., sexual minority adolescents

reported that the lack of information about services for LGBTQ and how to access them

limited their abilities to meet their demands, and they have experienced exclusion and

assumptions regarding their identity from the staff of LGBTQ specific services (Wagaman,

2014). Sexual minority youth encounter barriers not only when attempting to access external

institutional services but also when seeking mental health support at school. Research

indicates that the rate of sexual minority youth who have experienced obtaining mental

healthcare services provided by school was significantly lower than their peers because the

school environment generally does not provide privacy and confidentiality (Williams &

Chapman, 2011). For instance, a student must leave class to talk to a school counselor.

Furthermore, they fear that they will be treated inappropriately by school counselors. A study

found that sexual minority adolescents fear that the school counselor will tell others, such as

other teachers or parents, about their sexual orientation, moreover, they fear school

counselor will try to cure them, pushing them to a direction which they do not want to go

(King, 2008). Moreover, research reveals that some school counselors believe "LGBT

students' lifestyle is unethical" or that "homosexuality as a psychological disorder or a sin

is curable by counseling or spiritual help" (Shi & Doud, 2017). If a gay or lesbian youth

meets a school counselor with these beliefs or ideas, their anxiety and stress will increase

rather than acquiring help. Ultimately, sexual minority adolescents encounter many barriers

when they access support services both in and out of school, and they encounter different barriers in different institutions.

1.3. What Sexual Minority Youth Seek and Aim to Obtain from Institutional Services

There are numerous forms of support that sexual minority adolescents seek and aim to obtain from intuitional services. For example, a sexual minority youth reported that he wants educators to give presentations about LGBT issues to "create a positive environment" in schools; he believes that if educators would create an opportunity to illustrate that LGBT issues are acceptable to discuss, sexual minority students would be less hesitant to converse with the school counselor about identity issues (King, 2008). Additionally, sexual minority youth dislike people view their sexual minority status as their central identity. One gay-identifying youth reported that he had asked support for a non-LGBTQ-associated issue, but the school counselor assumed the issue was associated with his sexual identity and alienated him from getting other support (King, 2008). Another study demonstrated that sexual minority youth value mutually respectful relationships with service providers (Wagaman, 2014). Similarly, one study found that sexual minority adolescents felt that practitioners working in mainstream services with youth regularly should listen and be respectful; they need to be trained more on LGBTQ issues, such as how to handle homophobic bullying problems (Sherriff et al., 2011). Additionally, sexual minority adolescents want to connect with LGBTQ people, which directly relates to their feelings of isolation and loneliness. For example, one young person reported that she was isolated and did not know where to go, so she stayed home in her room, playing games day and night until she found an LGBT organization. She considered the institution as a place where she could connect with others,

and it served as a second family (Wagaman, 2014). In brief, sexual minority youth want schools to provide lectures related to sexual minority topics and create safe environment. They also want to build mutually respectful relationships with service providers and connect with people who also identified as LGBTQ.

1.4. Sexuality Related Social Support

Social support induces positive emotions, enhances the quality of life, and contributes to a positive self-image. Support can come from many resources, including family, friends, colleagues, and organizations. A study found that social support is essential for improving sexual minority young people's health and well-being (Frost, Meyer, & Schwartz, 2016). Social support resources for sexual minority youth can be LGBTQ+ student associations in schools or universities as well as LGBTQ+ support organizations outside of educational institutions. In addition to providing support or services for youth in need, these organizations also work as platforms to connect sexual minorities.

Social support refers to tangible or intangible assistance from others to cope with physical, psychological, and social stressors. According to House (1981), social support is divided into four kinds of supporting acts: (a) emotional support, which provides empathy, affection, faith, and compassion; (b) instrumental support, which involves providing support and services directly to assist people in need; (c) informational support, which offers advice, suggestions, and information; and (d) appraisal support, which includes providing feedback, affirmation, and other information useful for self-assessment. Meyer's (2003) minority stress model proposes that coping mechanisms, such as interpersonal relationships and having supportive friends or family, can buffer the negative relationship between minority

stressors and health problems that sexual minorities face. Different types of interpersonal relationships have different effects on sexual minority youth. For example, acceptance of sexual orientation and support from family can have a strong influence on LGB youths' inner development of self-acceptance (Shilo & Savaya, 2011). Furthermore, acceptance and support of sexual orientation from friends is relevant to LGB youths' public disclosure (Shilo & Savaya, 2011). Heterosexual friends and LGBT-identifying friends can provide emotional and instrumental support to LGB youth, while heterosexual friends' support is limited to emotional support (Munoz-Plaza, Quinn, & Rounds, 2002). In addition to emotional support, LGBT-identifying peers and adults are perceived to be able to provide valuable informational and appraisal support (Munoz-Plaza, Quinn, & Rounds, 2002). Support from teachers and classmates is also essential for sexual minority young people. Sexual minority youth reported high self-esteem when disclosed their sexual orientation at school and received support from teachers and classmates (Harbeck, 1992).

Social support acts can combat stress and improve life quality. Social support is significant for sexual minority youth. Meyer (2003) stated that when an LGBT youths' sexual minority identity known by many friends, it reduces the need for LGBT youth to manage their identities, which can reduce stress. A study found that LGBT youths' high scores for life satisfaction and LGBT-esteem are related to having a high percentage of friends who knew their SOGI during adolescence (Snapp et al., 2015). Support from teachers at school can also positively impact sexual minority youth. The LGB youth who reported having received teachers' support reported experiencing less victimization, higher self-esteem, and fewer school absences (Kosciw et al., 2013). Furthermore, higher levels of sexuality-specific forms of social support are associated with less emotional suffering among LGB youth (Doty et al., 2010). Therefore, social support regarding sexuality is essential for sexual minority youth.

1.5. Effective Institutional Services, Approaches, and Resources

There are many forms of institutional services, approaches, and resources that effectively support sexual minority young people both in and out of school. For instance, Asplund and Ordway (2018) provide the school counselors: educate, affirm, respond, and empower model that can be used to create an LGBTQ-inclusive school climate. It has four tiers. The first tier is education, ensuring school has precise information related to LGBTQ young people. The second tier comprises affirmative adults, which indicates school staff have correct information associated with sexual minority young people and their demands. The third tier is LGBTQ-responsive bullying prevention programs, which means setting a school-level policy or protection for sexual minority adolescents. The fourth tier is student empowerment, which means establishing LGBTQ-responsive bullying prevention programs in schools to ensure that LGBTQ students feel safe. Setting school-level anti-homophobia policies is essential to address homophobia and homophobic bullying in schools. Explicitly prohibiting homophobia creates a safe school environment for all students. Research indicated that students attending schools with comprehensive school policies that prohibit homophobia reported have heard fewer homophobic comments, experienced less victimization and bullying, feeling more supported at schools, and attempting suicide on fewer instances (Kosciw, Diaz, & Greytak, 2008). Having a school-based support group is also a method of addressing homophobia and homophobic bullying in schools. There is an institution called the Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) in the U.S., which is an organization managed by students that unites LGBTQ+ and allied youth, builds a community, and organizes problems influencing them in schools and communities (Gay-Straight Alliance Network, n.d.). The existence of institutions such as the GSA has been associated with the constant feeling of

unsafety that sexual minority youth experience at schools and their desire to increase their sense of belonging (Mayberry, Chenneville, & Currie, 2013). Having a support group such as a GSA in a school can encourage sexual minority students and alienated students to be themselves and make them feel that they are not alone. One study suggests that merely the existence of the GSA – not necessarily participation in it – is related to overall safety of school (Goodenow et al., 2006). Information on the GSA website indicates that the number of GSA in the U.S. has increased dramatically. The GSA assists social workers and other educational staff support the problems that sexual minority youth negotiate daily, such as mental health issues, social isolation, and the heterosexist environment (Walls, Winsneski, & Kane, 2013). Organizing workshops and sessions in schools is an effective way to address homophobia and homophobic bullying. For instance, a study carried out in the United Kingdom found that both students and teachers reported positive comments after attending a session about LGBTQ topics with an external expert (O' Higgins-Norman, Glodrick & Harrison, 2010). There are also many effective institutional services, approaches, and resources for sexual minority young people in the context of external organizations. For example, participating in an LGBTQ specific organization allows sexual minority young people to have opportunities to connect with people who identify as LGBTQ, build social support networks with both peers and adults, and gain information and knowledge about sexual minorities that they may not learn in schools (Wagaman, 2014). These connections and relationships can be critical for sexual minority young people to reduce their anxiety and stress related to their identities. For instance, adult lesbians who are "out" play a significant role in helping to mediate the visibility and power of lesbian youth because they have encountered the same anxieties and overcome similar experiences of oppression (Llera & Katrirebas, 2010). Additionally, online services, such as online counseling and online chat

groups, provided by non-profit organizations can be considered effective services to support sexual minority youth. Moreover, many sexual minority adolescents reported that they have received support on the Internet when they could not find support in schools, and Internet chat rooms, in particular, are important for gaining social support (King, 2008). Ultimately, effective institutional services, approaches, and resources in schools include establishing a school-level policy for sexual minority adolescents, creating school-based support groups, and holding workshops and sessions in schools. Effective institutional services, approaches, and resources in external organizations provide information, online counseling, and opportunities to connect with other LGBTQ in reality and online.

1.6. LGBTQ+ in the Czech Republic

The Czech Republic is one of the most LGBTQ+-friendly countries in the EU. Although same-sex marriage has not been legalized in the Czech Republic, the Act on Registered Partnership was approved in 2006. It enables the rights of inheritance, hospital visits, and alimony between two people of the same sex (Brno Expat Centre, n.d.). Furthermore, in 2009, an anti-discrimination law that referred to "sexual orientation" was passed. There are also cultural events, such as the Prague Pride festival, which began in 2011, and Queer film festival, which began in 2000, hosted in the Czech Republic every year (Prague Pride, n.d.; Mezipatra, n.d.).

The Czech Republic has a history as a communist country. During the communist era, homophobic attitudes of the communist party affected the regulation of sexuality in Czechoslovakia. A new penal code that defined homosexuality as a crime was adopted by the communist regime in 1948. However, in 1962 after a discussion in Czechoslovak,

homosexuality was decriminalized in the new penal code (Zurzolo, 2017). Compared to other former communist countries, acceptance of sexual minorities in the Czech Republic is high. The European Commission (2019) found that 57% of Czech respondents agree that LGB people deserve to have the same rights as heterosexual people, compared to 49% in Poland, 48% in Hungary, and 31% in Slovakia. The tolerant attitude toward LGBTQ in the Czech Republic might be related to its low rate of religious belief. A study found that religiously devout people tend to display a more homonegative attitude than non-religious people (Doebler, 2015). The percentage of religiously devout adults in the Czech Republic is the lowest of the four countries (Pew Research Center, 2018).

1.6.1. The School Environment

School has an essential function in the process of socialization and building common sense. Youth spend most of their time in school during sexual maturation. Therefore, what they learn and feel in school influences the formation of their attitudes toward sexual minorities. Two studies have shown that sex education is essential for forming positive attitudes toward sexual minorities and preventing homophobic bullying in schools (Gegenfurtner & Gebhardt, 2017; Proulx et al., 2018). However, sex education is not mandatory in schools in the Czech Republic. Moreover, in 2009, the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport together with the Pedagogic Research Institute published a sex education booklet for schools, but it met strong opposition. As a result, sex education in schools is voluntary, and there are no clear guidelines for teaching about SOGI (Pitoňák & Soilková, 2016). It implies that most students do not have opportunities to learn SOGI in schools. Furthermore, Czech people's attitudes toward teaching sexual minority knowledge in schools are not positive. In one survey,

regarding the question "To what extent do you agree or disagree that school lessons and material should include information about diversity in terms of sexual orientation (being gay, lesbian, or bisexual people)," 48% of Czech respondents answered totally agree and 46% answered disagree (European Commission, 2019). Moreover, a survey of secondary school educators found that the topic of homo/trans-negativity is not addressed frequently in Czech secondary schools (Simons et al., 2021).

Research about homophobia and transphobia in schools, targeting eighth and ninth grades of primary school, all grades of secondary school, and students who had finished secondary school no longer than one prior, found that sexual minority youth have encountered homophobic language, jokes, and mocking about LGBT people the most frequently at school (Hajdíková, Slíva, & Burešová, 2016). Another survey found that eight out of ten respondents, during their schooling before the age of 18, had heard negative comments or seen negative actions because a classmate was perceived as LGBTQ+, and about 60% of respondents said that they had "often" or "always" hidden or disguised being LGBTQ+ (Fundamental Rights Agency, 2013). The high percentage of students who have heard or seen homophobic language and behavior may be related to the heteronormative atmosphere in schools; teachers lack the knowledge to address homophobia, and they have a low percentage of attending educators' training on homophobic bullying. In fact, a study targeting secondary school educators found that 36% had attended training on homophobic bullying, 23% had attended training on preventing students from using homophobic language, and 21% had attended training on how to intervene in case of homophobic language (Simons et al., 2021).

1.6.2. Sexual Minority Support Organizations

Unlike the situations in primary and secondary schools, universities have clubs or associations for LGBTQ+ people. There are, for instance, the student club, "Galibi," at the Czech Technical University and the association, "Charlie," at Charles University. These associations are not only open to LGBTQ+ people but also their friends, supporters, heterosexuals, and sympathizers. Charlie and Galibi are platforms for meetings, entertainment, solving common problems, and sharing experiences. Their goal is creating a friendly atmosphere and setting for their members and creating opportunities to meet new people (Charlie, n.d.; Galibi, n.d.). The existence of such associations provides students belongingness to the environment and security. Moreover, several studies about the impact of the GSA found that they provide many benefits for LGBT students, including decreasing isolation, increasing participation in school and community activities, and increasing their sense of self-identity and self-esteem (Toomey et al., 2011; McCormick, Schmidt, & Clifton, 2015). The presence of LGBTQ+ support associations in academic institutions can represent an awareness of diversity.

Several external organizations support LGBTQ+ outside of schools and universities in the Czech Republic. Examples include Prague Pride, STUD, and Trans*Parent. The main aims of these organizations are to help LGBTQ+ people develop their identity, raise public awareness of the sexual minorities, organize cultural and social events that show the LGBTQ+ culture, fight homophobia, and promote a tolerant civil society (STUD, n.d.; Prague Pride, n.d.). In addition to providing information on LGBTQ+, the organizations also offer support, such as online counseling and organizing events where people can meet. For example, "Sbarvouven.cz" is an online LGBTQ+ counseling service run by Prague Pride. It

works through peer-to-peer mentoring, allowing clients to choose a mentor and approach the person in a discreet chat environment. The service began in 2015, and during its first three years, 2,085 people used the service (Prague Pride, n.d.). Moreover, Prague Pride manages additional support groups for parents of LGBTQ+ children and for coming out. Prague Pride and STUD also organize workshops and lectures on sexual minority topics for schools or employers. Thus, it can be said that external LGBTQ+ support organizations are active in the Czech Republic and provide various forms of support that sexual minorities need. They also contribute to the increasing visibility and understanding of the LGBTQ+ people through pride and cultural events.

1.7. Previous Research

Previous studies concerning effective institutional services, approaches, and materials have focused primarily on school contexts, including school counselors, school support groups, and school-based anti-homophobic bullying policies (Asplund & Ordway, 2018; Goodenow, Szalacha, & Westheimer, 2006; Jones et al., 2008; King, 2008; Kosciw, Diaz, & Greytak, 2008; Mayberry & Chenneville, 2013; O' Higgins-Norman, Glodrick, & Harrison, 2010). However, most of the studies were conducted in the U.S. (Almedia et al., 2009; Berlan et al., 2010; Davis, Saltzburg, & Locke, 2010; Shi & Doud, 2017; Wagaman, 2014). Few studies aimed to the experiences of lesbian and gay youth who have used services or received support from educational institutions or external LGBTQ+ support organizations. Moreover, not many studies about sexual minority youth have been conducted in the Czech Republic. Therefore, this study focuses on exploring the experiences of Czech LG youth who have used services and received support from educational institutions and external support organizations.

Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework

Several concepts are described in this chapter. It includes five parts: heteronormativity, heteronormativity in school, the "silence" of non-heterosexual topics in school, sexual minority stress, and homosexual identity formation.

2.1. Introduction

Our society is structured to be heterosexual. It is "normal" that a man and a woman fall in love, have a relationship, and get married. People usually do not question heteronormativity in society. This is related to people's life experiences, such as the education from school and the values people gain from family, friends, and media. For example, only male-female relationships are depicted in cartoons and films for children, and most fairy tales end with the marriage of a princess and a prince who live happily ever after. Non-heterosexual characters rarely appear in media for children, and through this media, people come to internalize heterosexuality as natural since childhood. Moreover, when people reach a certain age, family members begin to ask questions about marriage and having children. All these events are based on the heterosexual framework. However, since people were raised in a heteronormative environment, people usually do not question the heterosexual structure in society and unconsciously accept it. When the majority of people accept heterosexuality as natural and follow the rules and laws that only benefit heterosexual people, heterosexuality becomes "normal."

2.2. Heteronormativity

According to Katz (1980), the term "heterosexual," in the modern sense, which means erotic feelings toward the opposite sex, was defined by Krafft-Ebing and appeared in his book *Psychopathia Sexualis* (published in German in 1886 and first translated and published in the United States in 1892). Krafft-Ebing also defined "homosexual" as erotic feelings toward the same sex (Katz, 1980). Krafft-Ebing clearly distinguished the terms heterosexual and homosexual, and his definition of heterosexual provided a new idea that later became one of the dominant views of society. Although Krafft-Ebing made a distinction between the words heterosexual and homosexual in his book, it took a century-long process of medical, legal, and psychiatric discourses to have opposed meanings.

Normative heterosexuality is supported by other divergent sexualities and sexual behaviors (Foucault, 1978). It is reinforced by institutions such as marriage, tax, and employment rights. Michael Warner coined the term "heteronormativity" in 1991. Heteronormativity refers to the invisible standard of heterosexuality (sexual desire and attraction to a person exclusively of the opposite sex) as a normative concept in social theory and devalued people who do not meet this standard (Warner, 1991). Sedgwick (1990) stated that it is only through the creation of the category "homosexual" that the term "heterosexual" appeared, and she identified similar connections between other definitions such as, private and public, knowledge and ignorance, and masculine and feminine. She also argues that closeting someone's sexuality serves the heterosexual power structure, which means the privileged position of heterosexuality depends on the subordination of homosexuality. Similarly, Warner (1991) maintained that the opposition between heterosexual and homosexual is one

of the most common and unique structures in the modern world. The heterosexual privilege depends on the heterosexual culture that excludes others but interprets itself as a society (p. 6-8).

2.3. Heteronormativity in School

Schools can be unwelcoming environments for sexual minority students. This is because schools are hegemonically heterosexual places (Batsleer, 2012). Heterosexuality in schools is enforced by the curriculum and interactions between teachers and students (Chesir-Teran, 2003). Furthermore, research targeting elementary school pupils reveals that the most common, valued, and visible identity category is heterosexuality, and it circulates in conversation throughout the school day, during class time, and in the official school curriculum (Ryan, 2016). According to Wilkinson and Pearson (2009), heteronormativity holds validity and power, creating contexts that limit adolescents' sexuality and stigmatize homosexual desires because the majority of students and teachers operate in heteronormative schemes in schools.

2.4. The "Silence" of Non-heterosexual Topics in School

Heteronormativity in schools creates an atmosphere that treats people outside of the heterosexual framework as if they are nonexistent. Quinlivan and Town (1999) stated that "silence" is crucial school practice used to maintain heteronormativity. In their study, all participants reported that prevalent silence about their experiences, feelings, and perception of their sexuality leads to a sense of isolation and invisibility in the school environment (Quinlivan & Town, 1999). The silence in the school environment is also revealed in more

recent research. A study found that some students reported that teachers never mentioned topics related to sexual minorities or homophobia, and they never heard a teacher challenge an anti-gay remark, such as "please do not say 'fag' or 'that's so gay' in the classroom" (Mayberry, Chenneville, & Currie, 2013). Another study indicates that some teachers recognize the importance of sexual minority topics for their students, but they still tend to avoid discussing them (Puchner & Klein, 2011). Not only do homeroom teachers not want to refer to topics related to sexual minorities but also some school counselors. For example, a gay-identifying student reported that when he approached the school counselor to make a formal complaint about being physically assaulted by another student, the counselor tried to encourage him to talk to the assailant but did not address the whole LGBT issue (King, 2008). The school counselor's inappropriate treatment of the student could be related to the school counselor herself; school counselors may not have known how to address the problem. In one study that surveyed school psychologists, most participants indicated that they had little to no specific education or training on lesbian and gay issues (Savage, Prout, & Chard, 2004). Another study found that most school-service staff (i.e., psychologists, social workers, and counselors) reported that they believe they should provide services to sexual minority students, even though they felt that they could not do so because of inadequate training (Sawyer et al., 2006). In a heteronormative and silent environment, sexual minority students feel reluctant to talk about their sexual minority identities. Research targeting LGBT students' comfort in high school revealed that about four out of ten students feel uncomfortable talking about LGBT issues with school staff (Elze, 2003).

2.5. Sexual Minority Stress

According to Meyer (2003), lesbian, gay, and bisexual people have to encounter the specific stress associated with their minority identities, such as hiding sexual orientation from others, fearing that others will discover their sexual orientation and homophobia. As a result, it causes mental health problems. Meyer (2003) proposed three stress processes: (a) objective and external stressors, including structural and institutional discrimination and direct interpersonal factors, such as victimization and prejudice; (b) an individual's expectation of victimization and rejection will occur and the caution associated with these expectations; (c) internalization of negative social attitudes (Russell & Fish, 2016).

Sexual minority youth often face challenging problems associated with their SOGI. Many LGBT youth reported that they have experienced discrimination or school bullying, such as verbal harassment and physical attacks, due to their sexual minority status (D'Augelli, 2002; Alemida et al., 2009). Not only do sexual minority youth face external stressors but they also struggle with other problems, such as coming out to others. Although Cass (1979) stated that coming out as gay or lesbian is an essential step for a person to establish his or her homosexual identity, there is no guarantee everyone will understand and accept it. Fear is the primary barrier that prevents gay and lesbian youth from disclosing their sexual orientation to peers, teachers, and family. They are afraid of losing support, being verbally harassed, and being physically abused (Munoz-Plaza, Quinn, & Rounds, 2002; Pilkington & D'Augelli, 1995). Additionally, individuals may experience negative emotions during the coming out process (Bernal & Coolhart, 2005). Internalized homophobia can also be a stressor for sexual minorities. According to Allen and Oleson (1999), internalized homophobia is homophobic bias in homosexual people, resulting from developing and living

in a hostile, homophobic environment. Moreover, extreme forms of internalized homophobia can lead to LGB people reject their own sexual orientation (Frost & Meyer, 2009). The above-mentioned factors can damage the mental health of homosexual youth. One study indicates that poor mental health symptoms among LGB youth are associated with experiences of verbal harassment in school (D'Augelli, Pilkington, & Hershberger, 2002). Low self-acceptance of sexuality is also related to poor mental health, including global distress, depressive symptoms, and low psychological well-being (Camp, Vitoratou, & Rimes, 2020). Similarly, the more sexual minority youth expect others to reject their sexual identity, the more they tend to report symptoms of anxiety and depression (Kelleher, 2009). Research has also indicated that internalized homophobia is associated with significantly lower self-esteem and lower emotional stability (Rowen & Malcolm, 2003).

2.6. Homosexual Identity Formation

In addition to struggling with external stressors, such as prejudice and discrimination, sexual minority youth also encounter inner stressors, such as identity confusion and self-acceptance. Identity formation is an important part of the development and is generally considered to be how individuals view themselves, both independently and in relation to others (Erikson, 1968). However, the social pressures LGB people face can complicate identity formation (Zoeterman & Wright, 2014). According to Cass (1984), homosexual identity formation is a process of six stages: identity confusion, identity comparison, identity tolerance, identity acceptance, identity pride, and identity synthesis. In the identity confusion stage, an individual becomes aware of gay or lesbian thoughts and feelings and begins to question their assumed heterosexuality. In the identity comparison stage, the individual begins to

accept the likelihood of being a sexual minority and feels alienation and isolation because of their different identity from heterosexual peers. The identity tolerance stage involves the individual recognizing themself that they are probably gay or lesbian, and they seek people who are also gay or lesbian. The identity acceptance stage involves the individual accepting the sexual minority identity and increasing contact with other people who identified as gay or lesbian. The identity pride stage involves the individual increasingly identifying with sexual minorities and making a clear distinction from heterosexuals. In the identity synthesis stage, the individual integrates the sexual minority identity as one part of their whole identity. However, this identity formation stage model has received criticism for assuming a linear progression of identity development (Yarhouse, 2001). Furthermore, Cass's (1984) model is commonly considered in offline situations (Craig & McInroy, 2014). Today's LGBTQ young people may come out online before they come out offline (Bond, Hefner, & Drogos, 2009). This suggests that today's sexual minorities' identity formation may not be fully understood by Cass's (1984) model.

2.7. Summary

In a heteronormative society, homosexual people are forced to stay in the closet to maintain the "normality" of society. In other words, the privilege of heterosexuality is maintained by the suppression of homosexuality (Warner, 1991). Public places are heteronormative, and schools, one of the public places, are highly heteronormative. The heteronormativity of schools is enforced by the interactions between teachers and students and official school curriculums (Chesir-Teran, 2003). This heteronormative atmosphere in a school causes silence about non-heterosexual topics, and this silence is a crucial practice in maintaining

heteronormativity in schools (Quinlivan & Town, 1999). As a result, topics related to sexual minorities are rarely mentioned by teachers, and homophobic behaviors that occurred in classrooms are neglected by school staff (Mayberry, Chenneville, & Currie, 2013; King, 2008). In this kind of silent environment, sexual minority students feel uncomfortable discussing issues related to their sexual minority identities with school staff (Elze, 2003). Sexual minority young people have specific stressors associated with their sexual minority status that can cause mental health problems (Meyer, 2003). The stressors can be external or internal. For example, external stressors include discrimination and harassment, and internal stressors include the processes of coming out and forming a homosexual identity.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1. Introduction

The research process is presented in this chapter. It describes the research design and methods that were used. This chapter also presents the various stages of the research, including data collection and methods of analysis. Additionally, it describes the ethical considerations and the researcher's positionality.

3.2. Methods

This study focuses on exploring the perceptions of the effectiveness of institutional services that support gay and lesbian youth provided by schools, universities, and external LGBTQ+ support institutions, such as non-governmental organizations. The following research questions were used to determine the aim: What are young lesbian and gay people's experiences with the support and services provided by educational institutions and external LGBTQ+ support organizations? What problems do lesbian and gay youth decide to solve with institutional assistance? How do lesbian and gay youth perceive the usefulness of the received support and why do they find it effective or ineffective?

Integration of a qualitative and quantitative method was used in this research. Specifically, an online survey that included both closed and open-ended questions was conducted. An online survey is suitable for this research because the target population is limited to a specific group of people who may not want to reveal their identities, and an online survey ensures the anonymity of respondents. An online survey provides the respondents with the convenience to complete the survey according to their chosen time and place. Primarily, it

allows participants to take their time to recall memories and write opinions without feeling pressure to answer the open-ended questions. Furthermore, only the people who have received support and used services can speak to their effectiveness. The online survey included multiple-choice and open-ended questions, which was ideal to determine the answers to the research questions.

3.2.1. Mixed Methods

A mixed methods approach was used in this research. According to Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, and Turner (2007), mixed methods research is defined as research that combines components of qualitative and quantitative research methods, for instance, the use of qualitative and quantitative perspectives, data collection, analysis, and inference techniques to meet broad objectives and gain deep understanding. Additionally, the flexibility of a mixed methods approach can remove some limitations that occur a qualitative or quantitative method is solely used.

Mixed methods research has several characteristics. It involves collecting and analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data, using different methods to mix two forms of data, and prioritizing one or both forms of data. In this research, QUAL + quan mixed methods design was used. This design is composed of a qualitatively driven element and a quantitative supplementary element, and the core element and supplemental element are conducted simultaneously (Morse & Niehaus, 2009, p. 28). The online survey consisted of 10 open-ended questions and 10 closed questions. The closed questions asked about personal information such as age, sexual orientation, and issues related to sexual orientation that

participants had faced. Additionally, they were asked if they had ever sought help from schools, universities, or external organizations when they encountered problems related to sexual orientation. The open-ended questions asked participants the details about their experiences using services provided by schools, universities, and external organizations. The questions specifically investigated whom they contacted at schools or external organizations, what assistance they received, and whether the assistance was beneficial. The final question was an open-ended question that asked for participants' opinions on what schools or universities and their staff should do to improve support for sexual minority students.

3.2.2. Translation

Translation is an important part of this study. It allowed the researcher to overcome language barriers and reach the research targets. In this study, translation was used in two important steps: during the creation of the questionnaire and before data analysis. First, the questionnaire was formed in English and translated into Czech. Thus, the questionnaire distributed to respondents was written in Czech, and all the collected responses were also in Czech. Second, respondents' responses to the open-ended questions were translated into English, and the English versions of responses were used in the data analysis. The questionnaire was translated by a native Czech speaker. The responses to the open-ended questions were translated by two of the researcher's colleagues who are both university students; one is native Czech, and the other is not a native Czech but studying in Czech.

Since this study focused on Czech institutions' services, approaches, and tools and the participants were expected to be Czech, the questionnaire needed to be in Czech. The use of

Czech in the questionnaire increased the possibility of obtaining a high number of responses. An additional benefit of using Czech rather than English is that it was easier for the participants to understand the questions and write their experiences and opinions because English is not their first language. If the questionnaire was written in English, they might encounter problems, such as being unable to write about sensitive topics or use metaphors because of limited English vocabulary. The disadvantages of translation are that meaning may be lost in the translation process, and there is a need to analyze the data that was previously interpreted by the translators.

3.2.3. Data Collection

An online survey was conducted between May and June 2021. The online survey was created using Google Forms. Emails about the survey and requests to share the survey were sent to several LGBTQ+ support organizations. While some organizations did not reply, several organizations replied to the email and shared the survey link on their online platforms.

A sample of 44 youth who identified as either gay or lesbian in the Czech Republic participated in the online survey. The age of participants ranged from 16–25. Three participants (6.8%) ranged in age from 16–18, twenty-one (47.7%) ranged in age from 19–22, and 20 (45.5%) ranged in age from 23–25. Twenty-six participants (59.1%) identified as gay and 18 (40.9%) identified as lesbian.

3.2.4. Methods of Analysis

This research used the QUAL + quan mixed method, which focuses on the qualitative component and uses the quantitative component as a supplement. In other words, the open-ended questions were used as the core component, and closed questions were used as the supplementary component of the research. The thematic analysis method was used in this research to analyze qualitative data. The method entails identifying, investigating, and reporting themes within in data set, and it minimizes and describes the detail of data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Inductive and sematic approaches were used for the thematic analysis. The analysis process followed the six phases of thematic analysis developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The phases are (a) familiarization with the data, (b) generating initial codes, (c) searching for themes, (d) reviewing themes, (e) defining and naming themes, and (f) producing the report. In the first phase, before coding, I read the entire data set and made some notes about coding ideas. In the second phase, I reviewed the answers to the open-ended question and highlighted phrases or sentences that were outstanding and potentially relevant and made brief descriptions of their content as initial codes. In the third phase, I identified patterns among the initial codes and created themes. I also combined some codes into a single theme. During the fourth phase, I reviewed the themes I created. I discarded some of the themes because they did not have enough supporting data and combined some themes. During the fifth phase, I defined each theme and wrote a detailed analysis of each one to identify them. In the final phase, I wrote the analysis of data.

3.2.5. Discussion of Mixed Methods Research

Mixed methods were chosen for this research because few previous studies used mixed methods to explore institutional services that support sexual minority youth. Most studies used either qualitative or quantitative methods (Walls, Kane, & Wisneski, 2010; Goldstein, Collins & Halder, 2007; Goodenow, Szalacha, & Westheimer, 2006; King, 2008; Wagaman, 2014; Williams & Chapman, 2011). Mixed methods research provides a comprehensive understanding of a topic. In this research, the mixed method QUAL + quan was used. An online survey with open-ended questions and closed questions was used to collect two types of data. One type was the number of homosexual young people who have used institutional services. The other type was homosexual youths' opinions about service experiences and reasons why they did not use the services. Additionally, problems that participants encountered related to sexual orientation and their opinions about how to improve support for sexual minority students at schools or universities were included. The qualitative data was focused on more than quantitative data in the data analysis process, and the amount of quantitative data from this study was too small to analyze. Though, this does not mean that quantitative data was useless. The quantitative data served as a supplement to understand the qualitative data.

3.2.6. Ethical Considerations

In this study, an online survey was conducted to obtain data. Informed consent was obtained from the participants before they started to complete the survey. To acquire informed consent, a summary of the study purpose and topic was provided to participants. Additionally, the age and identity restrictions of the survey participants were explained. The anonymity of the

responses and the freedom to quit the survey were guaranteed. The information provided included the researcher's email address in case the participants had inquiries. At the end of the informed consent page, there was an option to agree. Only if the participants clicked "I agree," the survey would be displayed.

3.3. Researcher's Positionality

A researcher's age, gender, race, education, and value can affect how the researcher designs a study, conducts research, and interprets and analyzes the data. Moreover, identifying the researcher's positionality is an essential factor of ensuring the validity of the research. In this section, I highlight some aspects of my positionality.

The most important aspect of my positionality in this research is that I am an outsider in two ways. First, I am heterosexual. However, I have friends that identified as gay or lesbian, and I have had opportunities to hear their experiences. Moreover, I have read many articles about the confusion, stress, and difficulties homosexual people encounter. These experiences allow me to understand the responses I received. Second, I am not Czech. I was born and raised in Asia. Therefore, I am not familiar with the Czech culture and education system. However, I have read many articles and heard from my friends about the history, culture, education, and situation of sexual minorities in the Czech Republic. As an outsider analyzing collected data, I do not have inherent or unknowing bias.

**Chapter 4: Problems Related to Sexual Orientation**

The results from the data collection and interpretation of the data are described in this chapter. This chapter addresses the problems that gay and lesbian youth have faced. It is divided into three parts: the severity of problems related to sexual orientation, the types of problems homosexual youth have faced, and the main problem homosexual youth have encountered.

4.1. Introduction

Gay and lesbian youth may encounter a variety of difficulties because of their sexual orientation. For example, numerous LG young people reported that they have experienced school bullying, including verbal and physical harassment (Kosciw, Greytak, & Diaz, 2009). Several studies have shown that relationships between LG adolescents and their parents are often challenging, especially during coming out (D'Augelli, Grossman, & Starks, 2005; Dalia & Katsirebas, 2010; Higa et al., 2014). Gay and lesbian youth not only face issues related to sexual orientation with their peers and family but also struggle with themselves. For instance, during the process of identity development, they face identity confusion. This is featured as a person's consciousness of their sexual minority behavior and becoming confused about the difference between this behavior and identifying as heterosexual (Craig & Mclnroy, 2014). All of these factors can harm gay and lesbian youths' health. For instance, studies indicated that sexual minority youths' depression and externalizing symptoms are caused by their experiences of victimization (D'Augelli, 2002; Williams et al., 2005). Regarding the relationship between gay and lesbian youth and their families about coming out, a study revealed that sexual orientation being accepted by family members or not has a significant effect on the youths' emotional well-being (D'Augelli,1993). Similarly, research

has found that sexual identity concerns are strongly linked to mental distress (Wright & Perry, 2006; Kelleeher, 2009). In the next section, problems associated with sexual orientation that gay and lesbian youth have faced are described.

4.2. The Severity of Problems Related to Sexual Orientation

Being gay or lesbian sometimes brings difficulties into homosexual youths' lives. Participants' responses to the severity of problems related to sexual orientation are illustrated in the graph below.
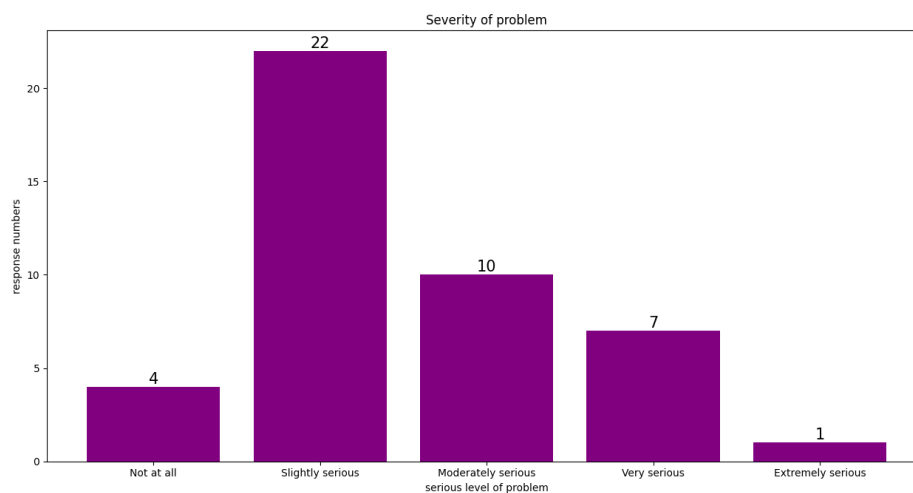
Because the question, "How serious problems have you faced or are you facing," was a mandatory question, all 44 respondents answered. Youths' severity level of problems related to their sexual orientation was measured on a 5-point response scale, ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely serious). This research found that four participants measured their stress level as 1 (not at all), and 22 participants measured their stress level as 2 (slightly serious). Ten participants measured their stress level as 3 (moderately serious), seven participants measured as 4 (very serious), and one measured as 5 (extremely serious). The result suggests

that although the respondents felt different severity levels of problems, most of them have felt some severity of problems that related to their sexual orientation.

4.3. Types of Problems Homosexual Youth Have Faced

Gay and lesbian youth could face various unique problems because of their sexual orientation. The graph below displays the types of problems they have faced.

Types of problems homosexual youth have faced

types of problems	response numbers
come out to family	33
verbal harassment	19
come out to school mates	18
confusion	16
school bullying	11
not relevant	6
physical harassment	5
others	4
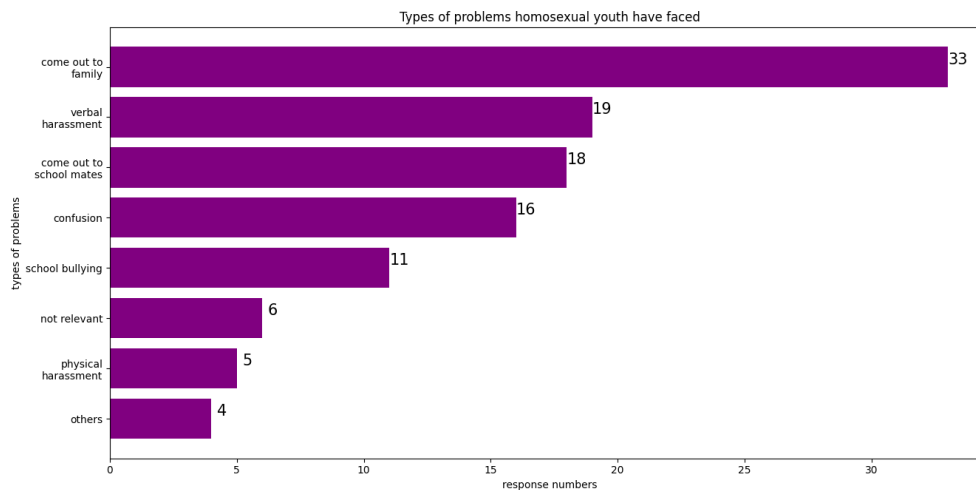
The question "What types of problems you have faced or facing?" was also mandatory. Thus, all 44 respondents answered it. The question allowed for multiple choices to be selected as a response. Most of the respondents chose more than one answer.

The results revealed that lesbian and gay youths have faced various problems related to their sexual orientation. The most common problem was coming out to family, chosen by 33 respondents. Verbal harassment was the second most chosen problem, and the third was coming out to schoolmates. There was only one response difference between the second and third most chosen problems. Nineteen youth chose verbal harassment, and 18 youth chose

coming out to schoolmates. Confusion was the fourth most selected, chosen by sixteen participants followed by school bullying, chosen by eleven participants, and five youth chose physical harassment.

Four participants chose others and described the problems in detail. One of them wrote, "The need to come out all the time because hetero people always assume everyone is hetero like them. Questioning, unpleasant questions, and insulting in case if I don't want to answer."

Another respondent wrote, "A classmate made me come out. After that, the information spread across the school, with a lot of fictive rumors like whom I like or if I am top or bottom." Religious belief can also be a problem for homosexual youth. One participant mentioned it in the response: "The question of Christian belief." Furthermore, one respondent wrote about verbal abuse outside of school.

This result supports Meyer's (2003) view that sexual minorities face unique stressors caused by their minority status. Coming out was chosen by many participants. As one participant wrote, "Need to come out all the time because hetero people always assume everyone is hetero like them," coming out is a lasting event. This is related to a belief that heterosexuality is the only normal sexual orientation in our society. According to Warner (1991), heterosexuality is an invisible normative concept in social theory and was referred to by heteronormativity, and people who deviate from this standard are devalued. In other words, the existence of sexual minorities is typically neglected or they are treated as nonexistent in a heteronormative society because they do not meet the "standard." Homosexual youth have

to come out to avoid being automatically treated as heterosexual and to be honest to themselves and the people they are close to.

The result of this study appears to confirm that coming out to family is the most common problem that gay and lesbian youth have faced (Sbarvouven.cz, n.d.). Families' acceptance of sexual orientation can affect sexual minority youth significantly because families, especially parents, usually are the closest people for most people. Moreover, people value the opinions of and relationships with their families. Coming out to schoolmates was also chosen by many respondents as a problem. As one respondent described in detail above, coming out to schoolmates could lead to the danger of rumors spreading in schools. There is no guarantee that coming out will be accepted. If someone does not accept a person's sexual orientation and ridicules it, the person who came out could face a difficult situation. Fear of rumor spreading, rejection, and homophobia in schools could be reasons that homosexual youth are reluctant to come out to their schoolmates. Verbal harassment was the second most chosen problem. Verbal harassment can happen anywhere and anytime. One gay-identifying participant stated that he had experienced mockery and insult outside of school. Although verbal abuse does not leave any visible scars, it can leave psychological scars and damage a person's mental health. The confusion that LG youth experience ranked as the fourth; this could be linked to participants' anxiety about the future and self-identity. School bullying was the fifth problem chosen by respondents. School bullying has various forms such as exclusion, verbal abuse, mockery, and physical abuse. Research demonstrated that sexual minority youth tend to be targets of bullying in schools more than their peers (Jones et al., 2008). Several respondents also chose physical harassment as a problem they have faced. In the choice of "other," one respondent wrote "Christian belief." A study

revealed that Christian religious ideology significantly affects homophobia (Plugge-Foust & Strickland, 2015). The respondent could struggle with the Christian belief and the person's sexual orientation. Moreover, a study found that being involved in religions that cast negative messages against sexual minorities is linked to the internalization of negative self-images and difficulties in the development and acceptance of one's sexual identity (Page, Lindahl, & Malik, 2013).

4.4. The Main Problem Homosexual Youth Have Encountered

Thirty respondents answered the question, "What was the main problem you dealt with?" Their responses are divided into four categories: coming out, homophobic victimization, clarification of oneself, and fear of bullying and reaction.

4.4.1. Coming Out and Acceptance

Nine respondents reported that coming out was the main problem they have encountered. As described above, coming out was the most common problem that gay and lesbian youth have faced. In the research, although not all respondents described in detail their coming out experience, two youths shared their stories. One youth wrote his story about coming out to schoolmates and his mother:

> Coming out to friends at secondary school, I used to date girls before, so a lot of friends could not believe that I'm gay. In family it was a shock for my mother who considered my coming out as a betrayal, because we always openly say everything, and I had lied to her for many years. It took a while for her to get used to it. Even now she still takes

it as she "understands my decision," which makes me feel tension at home despite the fact that we have a good relationship between us.

Another youth also shared an experience of coming out to her mother:

Coming out to my mother, it took her a long time to accept it. In the beginning, I heard how she would never attend my "wedding" and what people would say about not having grandchildren and she never wants to see my partner...

These two examples reveal that the families had difficulties accepting the youths' coming out at first, but as time went on, they could somehow accept it.

Coming out is an important step for gay and lesbian youth because it relates to self-acceptance and well-being. One study revealed that family support has the most profound impact on young people's mental health (Shilo & Savaya, 2011). Additionally, another study indicated that acceptance from family members is independently associated with higher life satisfaction, LGBT-esteem, and self-esteem for sexual minority young adults (Snapp et al., 2015). These findings emphasize the importance of families' acceptance of youths' sexual orientation.

4.4.2. Homophobic Victimization

Eight participants reported that homophobic victimization was the main problem they have encountered. The homophobic problems they dealt with were quite diverse. They include

school bullying at secondary school and boarding school, exclusion from classmates, stereotypical images of homosexuals, harassment, mockery, homophobic insults, homophobia in the family, and aggression from the ex-boyfriends' parents.

The victimization reported by participants can be divided into two contexts: in schools and outside of schools. Bullying in school is a common form of victimization that many gay and lesbian youth have experienced (Stonewall Education Guide, n.d.), and in this research, more than a quarter of the respondents chose school bullying as the main problem they have faced. Two respondents wrote about their issues outside of school context: their family and their ex-boyfriend's family. The victimizations reported by the eight participants in this research can be defined as homophobic behavior or harassment. According to Meyer (2003), homophobic victimization has a strong association with negative outcomes related to mental health for sexual minorities. A study found LGB young people who have experienced homophobic victimization tend to suffer from mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety (D'Augelli, 2002).

4.4.3. Clarification of Oneself

Four respondents wrote about clarification of oneself as their main problem. For example, "What is wrong being a gay" and "Clarify who I am." One of the respondents also mentioned acceptance of self.

Clarification of oneself can be a complicated and confusing process. For gay and lesbian youth, it can be more complicated than other youth because of their different sexual

orientation. A study found that when a person's sexual orientation is homosexual, the identification process of accepting oneself becomes difficult (Espelage et al., 2008). Therefore, homosexual youth might take a long time to accept their sexual orientation. Research has also indicated that when young people have negative feelings about their sexual orientation, they tend to report serious mental health problems (Wright & Perry, 2006).

4.4.4. Fear of Bullying and Reaction

Four respondents wrote about their fears. Three respondents described their fears at school, specifically fears of classmates. One participant reported that he was afraid that his classmates would find out about his sexual orientation and make an issue of it, and that information had already spread beyond his control.

Another respondent also wrote about her fear that classmates would find out her sexual orientation: "I had an experience of being bullied in school before. I didn't have a very good class team in secondary school, and I was afraid of reactions or even bullying from my classmates, so I never told them that I was a lesbian." One respondent stated his fear of uncertain events: "Will my parents accept me? Do my classmates know? Fear of verbal abuse even if it never happened (at most some gossip behind my back)." Another respondent wrote about his fear in a more general context: "Actually, it's just a fear of the reaction, sometimes some inappropriate question and a feeling of discomfort."

All four respondents mentioned fear as their main problem, but their fears are different. The fear of three respondents originates from the idea that they could be treated inappropriately

after their sexual orientation is known by their classmates or others. The other person's fear stems from her experience of being bullied. A study found that experiencing fear or anxiety at school can affect sexual minority youths' academic performance, such as causing the inability to concentrate on their academic learning assignments (Crothers & Altman, 2007). Ultimately, the mental health of LGB young people is greatly affected by the fear of verbal and physical abuse (D'Augelli, 2002).

4.5. Results Analysis Conclusion

The study found that most respondents felt some severity about problems related to their sexual orientation. As Meyer (2003) stated, gay and lesbian people must face certain issues associated with their sexual minority identity. This research found that gay and lesbian youth have encountered a variety of problems linked to their sexual orientation, including coming out to their family and schoolmates, confusion, school bullying, verbal harassment, and physical harassment. Moreover, most respondents indicated that they encountered more than one problem. The study also found that coming out was the most common problem respondents have dealt with, followed by homophobic victimization, clarification of oneself, and fear of bullying and reaction. It can be said that gay and lesbian youth have to cope with many unique problems related to their sexual orientation.

Chapter 5: The Effectiveness of Institutionally Provided Support and Services for Homosexual youth

The findings and interpretation of the effectiveness of support and services for homosexual youth provided by institutions are described in this chapter. This chapter is composed of two parts: the effectiveness of support and services provided by educational institutions and the effectiveness of support and services provided by external organizations. Educational institutions include primary school, secondary school (middle and high school), and university. External organizations are organizations that support sexual minorities outside of schools or universities.

5.1. Introduction

There are many practical measures that schools can adopt to support sexual minority students. Establishing a comprehensive, safe school policy that includes a ban on the use of homophobic language can reduce the possibility for students to hear homophobic comments and experience bullying. A comprehensive, safe school policy can also make sexual minority students feel support from schools (Kosciw, Diaz, & Greytak, 2007). It is also effective for teachers to make a clear statement about anti-homophobia from their perspective because they are role models for their students. When teachers indicate that homophobia is not allowed in their schools, students are more likely to follow. A study found that teachers' intervention in harassment increases students' sense of safety (O'Shaughnessy et al., 2004). Another effective method is having support groups for sexual minority students in secondary schools or universities. For example, having a group such as the GSA in schools can reduce the isolation that sexual minority youth feel at school (Lee, 2002). Organizing workshops

and sessions in schools can also be an effective way to reach youth who identify as sexual minorities and those who do not. Moreover, a study revealed that students who attended sessions about LGBT issues reported positive attitudes, and some students stated that the experience made them think about their attitudes and prejudices (O' Higgins-Norman, Glodrick, & Harrison, 2010). There are also many practical services offered by organizations that support LGBTQ+ people outside of schools or universities. Generally, these organizations serve as platforms to connect people who have the same sexual orientation and similar identity. By joining an LGBTQ+ community, sexual minority youth can meet people who also identify as sexual minorities and build a social support network with both peers and adults in the community. Through interactions with such people, sexual minority youth can obtain advice and beneficial information about sexual orientation and gender identity (Wagaman, 2014). Some external organizations also offer sex education focused on sexual minorities. For example, an LGBTQ+ youth support group provides sex education that includes information about HIV/AIDS and how to have safe sex between same-sex couples (Deml, 2014). The support and services provided by external organizations are not limited to the real world but also take place on the internet. For instance, many external organizations provide useful information and support on their websites (Prague Pride, n.d.; PFLAG, n.d.; Stonewall, n.d.). The services and support that educational institutions and external organizations provide to sexual minorities are varied. The next section presents an analysis of 13 responses regarding the effectiveness of the support and services provided by two different institutions.

5.2. The Effectiveness of Support and Services Provided by Educational Institutions

Seven respondents wrote in detail about their experiences receiving support and using services from educational institutions. The effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the support and services provided by schools or universities is analyzed case by case.

Case No.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Sexual Orientation	Gay	Gay	Gay	Lesbian	Lesbian	Gay	Gay
Age	23-25	19-22	19-22	23-25	23-25	19-22	23-25
Seek help	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Level of educational institution	Primary school	Secondary school	Secondary school	Secondary school	Secondary school	University	University
Who	Classroom teacher & School counselor	School psychologist	Classroom teacher	Classroom teacher	School counselor & Counseling advisor	Psychotherapist	LGBTQ+ student association
Effectiveness of support	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Psychological Stress	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes

Case 1: Gay (23-25)

One gay-identifying participant wrote about his experience of receiving support at a primary school. His main problem was lack of love and acceptance. He stated that he asked for help from his classroom teacher and school counselor. However, because it was the school's first time to addressed homosexuality, his problem was not solved. The support from the school was ineffective for him. He said, "In practical term, nothing changed. Everything has been

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dealt with only theoretically with vague conclusions." He also mentioned that when he received support from the school, his psychological stress increased.

This case illustrates that the classroom teacher and school counselor were unprepared when the homosexual student sought assistance. They only provided him some theoretical information, which did not help him. For the youth, not only did his problem go unsolved but also his psychological stress increased while using the service. To prevent this kind of event from happening to a sexual minority student, school staff should be more knowledgeable about sexual minorities. If it is difficult to provide appropriate psychological support, school staff should be prepared to provide useful information or contact a specialist who can help the student; they should not make the student feel helpless.

Case 2: Gay (19-22)

Another gay respondent wrote about his experience using services provided by a middle school. He stated his main problem as, "What is wrong about being a gay?" Moreover, he did not seek help himself; he believed he did not need any assistance. However, the school offered him help, and he received therapy from the school psychologist. For him, the service was ineffective, and he felt psychological stress. He wrote, "Actually, I have never wanted to see a psychologist." In his response, he also stated, "Leave the person alone until they come to you ask for a help or unless you actually see a problem."

In this case, the difficulty of approaching a homosexual student from the school's perspective became apparent. Even though the school's offer of support for the student was

out of kindness, the offer was only a burden for the student. It is likely that he could not refuse the offer because he was afraid of being treated differently by school staff if he refused, or because of his position. As a student, he could not refuse an offer from the school. In this case, it appears that the school staff has prejudice toward homosexual people, which is that homosexual people must require some support. It is true for many gay or lesbian identifying people, but not for the gay youth in this case.

Case 3: Gay (19-22)

A gay participant wrote about his experience seeking help in high school. He asked his classroom teacher for help about identity confusion, but the teacher told him that it is his issue, and he must overcome it on his own. The participant claimed that the support was ineffective because instead of listening to him and understanding him, the teacher laughed at him and accused him of exaggeration. He mentioned that he did not feel any psychological stress when he used the support. However, he wrote that he does not trust school staff because they did not consider problems related to sexual orientation as "problems" and treated them as little things.

In the case of this gay participant, two problems became apparent: his problem was unsolved, and he lost trust in the school staff. When a teacher does not have confidence in supporting a student, they can provide information about whom the student can contact, rather than desert the student. The most problematic factor, in this case, is the teacher's inappropriate attitude toward the student who sought help. This inappropriate attitude can directly affect the student's faith in school staff. Ultimately, this gay youth wrote that he does not trust the

school staff because they did not consider problems related to sexual minorities as problems, and they treated those problems as minor issues. If students have experiences, such as receiving an inappropriate attitude from a teacher when they asked for help, they could distrust all teachers in the schools, and this feeling of distrust toward teachers could last for a long time.

Case 4: Lesbian (23-25)

A lesbian respondent wrote about her experience of ineffective support from a teacher. Her main problem was mockery and homophobic insults from her classmates in middle school. She did not seek help from anyone because she felt she has to resolve the problem alone. However, once when her teacher heard her classmates saying homophobic words to her, the teacher defended her. The teacher told her classmates that their behavior was inappropriate, but the teacher did not punish them. As a result, nothing changed. Her classmates continued their behavior because they had not been punished.

Her case reveals the importance of punishing bullies; simply warning students who are bullies is not enough to stop the bullying. In addition to preventing homophobic bullying in schools, it is essential to set clear punishments for bullies. Otherwise, victims will continue to suffer from bullying. Charlesworth (2015) suggests that punishments for bullies should be visible and publicized to students, parents, and staff because it is essential to let everyone know the consequences of homophobic bullying. Moreover, it is related to effectively prevent bullying.

Case 5: Lesbian (23-25)

Another lesbian respondent said she had sought help in both middle school and boarding school. Her problem was school bullying. She went to a school counselor and counseling adviser for help, they listened to her partner and her. Students who bullied them were punished and instructed to avoid offensive language. For her, the assistance from the school counselor and the counseling adviser was effective. She stated, "After the counseling adviser and the counselor talked to the bullies, everything became calmer. The school counselor and the counseling adviser clearly understood how serious the situation was and the consequences it would bring if they did not stop." She also stated that she felt psychological stress when used the service. She identified the cause of her stress as "Stress about how it will end up, if everything will be settled down, and what they will ask about."

This case demonstrates a practical process to solve bullying in school. First, the school counselor and counseling advisor listened to the lesbian youth and her partner. Second, they talked to the bullies. Third and most importantly, the bullies were punished. It is important to punish bullies because only when they are punished, they will understand that what they did wrong, and they will be deterred from repeating the behavior. In this case, the bullying was reduced. Therefore, it could be said that punishing bullies is effective for solving the bullying issue.

Case 6: Gay (19-22)

In the sixth case, a gay participant shared his experience of using a counseling service provided by a university. His problem was coming out to his family and clarifying his role in society. He went to a counseling service center in the university and received psychotherapies. He perceived the psychotherapies as effective for him because he had opportunities to talk with an expert on the human mind. He did not feel any psychological stress when he used the service.

This case illustrates that professional support from a psychotherapist in university is effective. The positive feedback for psychotherapies may be related to the therapist affirming the gay youth's sexual orientation. This affirmation of his identity may also have contributed to the fact that he did not feel psychological stress during therapy. Furthermore, research on the sexual minorities' experiences of psychotherapy has found that LGBTQ individuals perceive therapy as a positive experience when therapists affirmed their sexual minority identity (Berke, Maples-Keller, & Richards, 2016).

Case 7: Gay (23-25)

In the seventh case, another gay-identifying youth shared his experience of using a service provided by a university. His problem was coming out. He sought aid from the university's LGBTQ+ student association. He stated that the support he received was understanding and motivational. Additionally, he experiences the feeling that he was not alone. The support was effective for him because he received reassurance that he is not alone and there is

someone who can understand and support him. He also mentioned that, at first, he felt a little embarrassed when he used the service.

His case reveals another type of effective service provided by the university. The LGBTQ ＋ student associations play an essential role in supporting sexual minority youth. They provide opportunities to meet people who have similar identities and talk about their concerns or worries without the fear of reactions or judgments. Peers who also identify as homosexual can provide a variety of social support, including emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal support (Mufioz-Plaza, Quinn, & Rounds, 2002). Moreover, participation in an LGBTQ＋ student association can provide belongingness and a feeling that the person is not alone, as the participant stated.

Based on the analysis of the seven cases, it can be argued that the effectiveness of the support provided by educational institutions depends on the case. Three respondents perceived the support that they received from educational institutions as effective while four respondents perceived the support they received as ineffective. Various reasons were mentioned for believing the support was ineffective: the classroom teacher and school counselor did not know to provide practical support, the classroom teacher did not take the youth's problem seriously, the individual received unrequested support, and the individual received temporary support. Several reasons were provided for perceiving the support as effective: the school bullying was solved, a conversation with specialist occurred, the individual felt belonging, and the individual gained understanding from people who have a similar identity. In the ineffective cases, it can be said that the prevalent problem is school staff's lack of knowledge about sexual minorities. The effective cases reveal the importance for

educational institutions to have someone who can provide professional help and for connections to be made with people who have a similar identity.

5.3. The Effectiveness of Support and Services Provided by External Organizations

The effectiveness of support and service provided by external organizations is clarified through six case studies. Through analyzing six cases, support and services from external organizations are divided into two groups: anonymous support and services and face-to-face support.

Case No.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Sexual Orientation	Lesbian	Gay	Lesbian	Gay	Gay	Gay
Age	23–25	19–22	19–22	16–18	19–22	23–25
Types of assistance	Online chatting	Online chatting	Online chatting	Calling	Face to face connecting	Face to face connecting
Who	Person with a similar identity	Person with a similar identity	Person in a similar situation	Professional operator	Similarly identifying people	Similarly identifying people
Effectiveness of support	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Psychological stress	Yes	No	No	No	No	No

5.3.1. Anonymous Support and Services

Four cases regarding the use of services provided by LGBTQ+ support organizations are described below. Two cases are gay-identifying respondents and two cases lesbian-identifying respondents. Respondents in Case 1, Case 2, and Case 3 used the same online chatting service provided by an external LGBTQ+ support organization. Respondent in Case 4 used a calling service.

Case 1: Lesbian (23-25)

One lesbian respondent shared her experience using an external organization's service. She contacted a counseling center that an online chatting service, and she chatted with a person who went through similar issues and shared a similar identity as her. She perceived the service as effective because she felt that there is a place where she can send a message asking for help, and it helped her stop feeling desperate. Moreover, she stated, "It is good to have an opportunity to communicate with a person who has the same experience." When she used the service, she had some psychological stress because she was concerned if it was anonymous or if there was a way someone could identify her (for example, from her laptop), but she also wrote this was irrational.

Case 2: Gay (19-22)

In Case 2, a gay participant wrote about his experience using an external organization's service. He also used an online chatting service, which is the same as in Case 1. He wrote

that he used the service because he wanted to make sure that his plans for the future were right. For him, the service was effective because he was reassured that his future is suitable. Furthermore, he felt the help was useful and comfortable because the consultant treated him as an equal person and attempted to help him and gave him advice according to their own life experience. He also stated that he did not feel any psychological stress when he used the service.

Case 3: Lesbian (19-22)

Another lesbian youth also shared her experience using an online chatting service provided by the same organization as the two participants above. She mentioned that the online chatting service allowed her to connect with a person in a similar situation, and the person helped her to clarify "who she is." She considered the service to be effective because it provided her an opportunity to write about her problem, which was that she could not clarify her identity, to someone in a similar situation and find a solution. She wrote that she did not have any psychological stress when she used the service.

Respondents in all three cases stated that the service was effective. Through analyzing the three cases, it can be said that two points contribute to the effectiveness of the service. One point is the anonymity of the service, which allows people who use this service to avoid the risk of being known. A study found that LGBT youth feel safe online, so the Internet can be a haven for them (Ybarra et al., 2015). The second point is the connection with people who have the same sexual orientation or people in similar situations. In real life, identifying a person's sexual orientation through appearance or behavior is difficult because sexual

orientation is an invisible factor. Additionally, many homosexual people conceal their sexual orientation because of afraid of rejection and reaction. This makes finding someone who is homosexual more difficult. However, the situation on the Internet is different. The anonymity of users on the Internet makes homosexual people feel less pressure to come out, and people can easily connect with someone who also identifies as gay or lesbian (King, 2008). Therefore, it can be said that finding someone who is homosexual on the Internet is easier than in real life. The external LGBTQ+ support organization, as a platform to connect people, makes identifying someone who is a sexual minority easier because the online counseling service it provides can directly connect people who are seeking help and people who can help. The concerns and worries of the gay or lesbian young people are better understood by people who are also gay or lesbian. Furthermore, because they share the same sexual orientation and have a similar experience, the person the youth connects with can give them advice and useful information based on the person's own experience. It is something that people who do not share the same sexual orientation cannot do. Moreover, a study found that LGB youth perceived that LGBT-identifying peers and adults can provide them emotional, informational, and appraisal support (Munoz-Plaza, Quinn, & Rounds, 2002).

Case 4: Gay (16-18)

The gay adolescent in Case 4 wrote about his experience using a calling service. He mentioned that using the calling service helped him to clarify his inner process of coming out. He stated that the anonymity of calling made coming out easier because he was afraid of not being accepted in real life. He also stated, "Mostly, I think it just helped me talk to

someone about it with no fear of repercussions." He perceived the service to be effective because he could come out to someone without fear of the person's reaction, and the service was toll-free with a professional operator. He also stated that he did not feel any psychological stress when he used the service.

Like the three cases above, the anonymity of the service is an important aspect that made this participant feel that the support was effective. Unlike coming out to someone close to the youth, such as friends or family members, coming out to a stranger over the phone allows the youth not to be afraid of the person's reaction. Cass (1979) stated that coming out as gay or lesbian is an essential process for individuals to establish their homosexual identity. In this case, the operator's reaction was not mentioned in the youth's response, but the reaction must be positive. A positive reaction to a sexual minority youth's coming out can cause a positive influence on their self-identification and self-acceptance. Although this case and the other three cases are all anonymous services, there is a difference between them. The difference is in the form of service; the three cases above are in written form, and this case is in verbal(calling) form. In this case, the respondent was coming out directly to the operator through the phone. This means that the operator heard his coming out in real-time and responded to it. It is essential that when a person coming out, he or she can know the other people's reaction immediately because it reduces the anxiety and stress of waiting for a response. In this respect, it can be argued that calling services are better than chatting services.

5.3.2. Face-to-face Connections with Other Sexual Minority Youth

Case 5: Gay (19-22)

A gay-identifying participant wrote in detail about his experience using a service provided by an external organization. He mentioned that by using the service, he met other people who are like him and knew that there was someone who can understand him. Moreover, the service provided a space where he did not feel like he was different. He stated:

> Even though my sexuality does not affect me significantly in my everyday life on any level other than that of relationships, it is psychologically challenging to exist in an environment where everyone automatically assumes you are heterosexual. With any new person, you have the uncertainty of whether they would talk to you with respect if they knew you were not, and it can put you in a lot of awkward situations where you feel embarrassed or threatened. It has been liberating to be around people where that expectation is not there, and I can be sure that I will not be judged for it.

He also stated that he did not feel any psychological stress when he used the service.

Case 6: Gay (23-25)

Another gay participant also shared his story. Through using a service provided by an external LGBTQ+ support organization, he built friendships with other gay people. He considered the service effective because he felt that he was not the only one who was

processing coming out and self-acceptance. Furthermore, through connecting with other gay people, he could feel that they are normal people and have fun together. When he used the service, he did not feel any psychological stress.

Case 5 and Case 6 are categorized as a group because both respondents emphasized the importance of connecting face to face with peers who also identifying as gay. Through connecting and building friendships with those peers, the homosexual youths stated that they did not feel lonely anymore because they knew people who also went through similar concerns and can understand their feelings. Furthermore, the most important point is that they do not feel different when they were with people who share the same sexual orientation. In other words, connecting with other gay-identifying people allows the youths to feel belongingness. According to McCallum and McLaren (2010), belonging to an LGB-specific community can positively affect LGB adolescents' mental health.

5.3.3. Ineffective Case

Several participants also answered the question about their experience receiving support from external support organizations, but they did not provide much detailed information. Even though they did not provide detail, one case should be noted. One gay youth wrote that he had sent an email to a counseling service, but he never received a response. He stated that it was probably an old project and not well maintained.

This case reveals a problem of services provided by external organizations. If an organization decided to provide a service to support people, then the service should be

maintained. Moreover, if an organization has closed or abolished the service, the contact information should be deleted from the website; otherwise, people will think it is still in service and ask for help.

Overall, all six cases, excluding the respondent who had written the email, expressed that the services they used and support they received from external support organizations were effective. External organizations serve as platforms that enable homosexual youth who seek help to connect with someone who can help them. It can be a professional person or someone who also identifies as homosexual. In most cases, people who also identify as gay or lesbian provided support to the participants. Regardless of anonymous or onymous support, the most important aspect is connecting with people who are sexual minorities or who can listen to the sexual minority youth without prejudice. Being connected to some with the same sexual orientation can make sexual minority youth who seek help feel that they are not alone or different and that they do not need to fear reactions. Moreover, the youth can get advice based on supporters' own experiences. Connecting with other sexual minorities can reduce the youths' anxiety and sense of isolation.

5.4. Results Analysis Conclusion

The results of the study revealed that the effectiveness of support and services for sexual minority youth provided by educational institutions varied from case to case. Specifically, when school counselors and psychologists had knowledge about homosexuality and could understand the seriousness of the situation, the support they provided was effective. Student LGBTQ+ support associations in universities, which function as platforms for sexual

minority youth to connect, can also be considered as effective support. Conversely, if school staff, such as school counselors and classroom teachers, lacked knowledge about sexual minorities, listened to students' concerns in an inappropriate way, or only provided temporary support to a student, their support can be considered ineffective. Furthermore, offering unrequested support to a homosexual student was also ineffective support. Compared to the support and services provided by educational institutions, the support and services provided by the external organizations appear more effective. External LGBTQ+ support organizations encourage people with the same sexual orientation or a similar identity to connect. Specifically, the support was perceived to be effective when people who have a similar identity as the youth seeking help gave advice based on their own experiences, treated the youth equally, and listened to the youth. Furthermore, by connecting with other sexual minorities, the sexual minority youth can feel secure, knowing that they are not alone and that they are not different. Moreover, they do not have to worry about receiving judgment for being homosexual.

This study also identified a difference in the amount of psychological stress felt by youth who received support from educational institutions and those who received support from external organizations. Almost all the youths who received support from external organizations (five out of six) reported that they did not feel any psychological stress; four out of seven youths who received support from educational institutions reported that they felt some psychological stress. For instance, when a lesbian youth worried about how school bullying problems would be solved and when a gay youth used the LGBTQ+ student association's service for the first time, they felt psychological stress. Similarly, two gay youths, one who sought help but received a theoretical answer with a vague conclusion and

the other who received unrequested professional support, felt psychological stress. It can be argued that sometimes the support provided by school staff is not only ineffective but also causes psychological stress or the increased psychological stress of sexual minority youth.

When comparing the respondents' experiences using services and receiving support provided by educational institutions and external organizations, it can be concluded that the effectiveness of services and support provided by educational institutions depends on the case, and services and support provided by external organizations, in most cases, are effective. However, external organizations may not be able to intervene in some situations that young people face at schools, such as school bullying. Therefore, the effectiveness may depend on the type of problem a person has. The difference in the effectiveness of services and support provided by educational institutions and external organizations is related to the different nature of the two institutions. Educational institutions have more comprehensive roles in educating students. Conversely, external organizations are specialized to support sexual minorities. Although the effectiveness of services and support provided by educational institutions varies from case to case, providing services and support for sexual minority youth is still important because youth spend a lot of time in educational institutions and develop their identities during that time. Additionally, sexual minority youth may have different problems they want to solve in different institutions. Therefore, providing services and support for sexual minority youth from both educational institutions and external organizations is important because it allows sexual minority youth have more options to seek help.

Chapter 6: Other Forms of Support That Sexual Minority Youth Have Received & Recommendations for Improving Support and Services in Educational Institutions

The results from the data collection and interpretation of the data are represented in this chapter. This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part describes reasons why homosexual youth did not seek help from educational institutions when they encountered problems associated with their sexual orientation. The second part discusses suggestions from the perspective of LG youth for improving the support and services for sexual minority youth in educational institutions.

6.1. Introduction

Sexual minority youth tend to encounter many problems associated with their SOGI. As the data illustrates in Chapter 4, gay and lesbian youth have faced many problems, including coming out to family, coming out to schoolmates, verbal harassment, confusion, and school bullying. Even though they have encountered many challenges, many of them are not able to seek help from anyone in schools or universities. Batsleer (2012) stated that schools are hegemonically heterosexual places. In such an environment, topics related to sexual minorities are rarely discussed. A study conducted in the Czech Republic targeting secondary school educators found that topics linked to sexual minorities were not frequently discussed in schools (Simons et al., 2021). The unwillingness of sexual minority youth to talk to school staff about their sexual minority identity may be due to a climate of silence regarding the discussion of sexual minority topics in schools. A different study revealed that over 30% of gay-identifying youth reported that they would not talk to any staff at school about their sexual orientation; some youth said that they were fear of being treated

inappropriately and that staff would intentionally or unintentionally tell others (Lesesne et al., 2015). It is necessary to create a safe space in educational institutions for LGBTQ+ youth because it could contribute to their willingness to seek help from school staff. Several measures can be taken to create a safe space for sexual minority students in educational institutions, for example, having a curriculum includes sexual minorities or setting inclusive antibullying and harassment policies. Additionally, having an LGBTQ+ student association, such as GSA can contribute to sexual minority youth feeling safe at school (Mayberry, Chenneville, & Currie, 2013). Moreover, a study found students attended schools with a GSA were significantly more inclined to indicate that they know a safe adult at the school than students attended schools without a GSA (Walls, Kane, & Wisneski, 2010). The existence of supportive educators is also an important factor. The research found that supportive teachers have a positive impact on sexual minority students (Kosciw, Kull, & Greytak, 2013). In cases where sexual minority youth feel safe in the school environment and there is a supportive teacher, they may be more inclined to seek help from school staff when they encounter issues associated with their sexual orientation.

The next section describes the reasons why gay and lesbian youth did not seek help from staff in educational institutions. Additionally, it presents suggest methods for improving support and services for sexual minority youth in educational instructions from the perspectives of gay and lesbian youth.

6.2. Reasons That Homosexual Youth did not Seek Help from Educational Institutions

Thirty-three participants answered the question, "If you did not contact anyone from the schools or university for help, can you give reasons?" Some participants provided details about their experiences. The reasons given by participants who did not seek help from anyone in educational institutions, excluding those who solved the problems themselves and those who believe they should solve problems alone, can be divided into positive and negative reasons. Positive reasons include acceptance and support. Negative reasons include distrust, fear, and lack of information.

6.2.1. Positive Reasons: Acceptance and Support

Seven respondents' answers about why they did not seek help from educational institutions are categorized as positive reasons. First, homosexual youth were accepted by the people around them. For example, one respondent wrote, "Everyone took my sexual orientation as normal, as long as they knew about it. Nobody sent me to rehab or anything." Similarly, another respondent stated that "There was no need. University professors and classmates were very understanding and considered it as something natural. I have never been disturbed by others about having a boyfriend." Second, homosexual youth have others to support them. Five respondents wrote that their friends or classmates supported them, except one respondent who mentioned that he attended a psychotherapist and discussed with them. Some of the respondents stated that they trust their friends and think that friends can understand them better than school staff. One of the gay participants wrote about his experience in detail. He asked his friends from an LGBT community for help. Through having a conversation with his friends, he realized that he was not alone and that there is

nothing to be afraid of. He also mentioned that thanks to the support from his friends, he stopped referring to his boyfriend as a "significant other" instead of a partner. He also stopped considering himself as a second-category citizen, even though that is how laws and legislation are currently set. Similarly, two lesbian participants briefly wrote about their experiences receiving support from friends and classmates. One mentioned that she received support from her friends, and she came out in middle school. The other stated that her classmates helped her come out, and she did not have to hide her sexual orientation from her classmates.

Although educational institutions are generally perceived as heteronormative public places, these examples demonstrate that not everyone in such heteronormative public places has a prejudice against homosexual youth. Additionally, these examples reveal that the respondents have received social support from their peers. Applying the categorization of social support proposed by House (1981), the support the gay respondent received from his LGBT friends can be perceived as emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal support. The other two lesbian respondents' examples can be perceived as emotional and instrumental support. It could also be said that friends' support contributed to the respondents' coming out in the schools. Moreover, a study indicated that support from friends has a great influence on the public-social disclosure process (Shilo & Savaya, 2011). Furthermore, being accepted by their peers at schools or universities has a positive effect on homosexual youth. According to Meyer (2003), the greater the percentage of peers who know about an LGTB youth's sexual minority identity, the less stress the youth experiences.

6.2.2. Negative Reasons: Distrust, Fear, and Lack of Information

Seventeen respondents' responses to why they did not seek help from educational institutions are categorized as negative reasons. Most respondents indicated more than one reason, and their responses can be divided into distrust, fear, and lack of information. First, homosexual youth do not trust school staff. For example, one respondent wrote, "I didn't trust school staff, and I didn't think they can help me." Another respondent wrote, "I can't believe it would not be a rumor." Second, homosexual youth are afraid to talk to school staff. Specifically, they are afraid of coming out to school staff, being rejected, misunderstood, and laughed at by the school staff. Third, they perceived a lack of information about sexual minorities in schools or universities. For example, one participant stated, "I didn't know which teacher supported LGBTQ+ community. There were no flags or fryers at school. We have never discussed that during class." Similarly, the other two respondents wrote, "I did not feel openness about the homosexual topic from teachers' side," and "I don't know anyone running such a program both in schools and university."

There could be many reasons that homosexual youth distrust school staff. For example, having the experience of hearing or being treated inappropriately by school staff could directly affect a student's faith in them. For instance, one gay respondent expressed hearing a teacher's homophobic remarks. He stated that his physical education teacher once told the students that he hopes none of them is a "fag"; this experience made him feel uncomfortable. Similarly, another participant reported that a school staff member directed an inappropriate remark at him. Negative experiences such as these may make homosexual youth afraid to talk to school staff and may lead them to distrust school staff. Additionally, the lack of

information is a problem that prevents homosexual youth from seeking help from educational institutions. As mentioned in the examples above, the homosexual youths did not know who supported LGBTQ+ in schools, and topics related to homosexuality were never discussed in school. This is related to the "silence" of non-heterosexual topics in schools. Quinlivan and Town (1999) argued that "silence" is a key school practice used to maintain heteronormativity; homosexual students are treated as nonexistent in school. As a result, information associated with homosexuality is rarely discussed or visible in schools.

6.3. Recommendations for Improving Support and Services for Sexual Minority Youth in Educational Institutions

Thirty-three participants answered the question "What do you think schools/universities and their staff should do to be able to help sexual minority students better?" The responses are divided into four categories: education, openness toward LGBTQ+ people and topics, forms of support, and practical suggestions.

6.3.1. Education

Many respondents mentioned the need for education about sexual minorities in educational institutions. In general, at least one lesson should be offered in all levels of educational institutions (primary school, secondary school, and university). Some respondents expressed in detail the type of education they think is necessary at each level of educational institutions. For example, primary and secondary schools should create sex education classes that include topics about sexual orientation and gender. Moreover, the idea that "being different is not wrong" should be mentioned in primary school education. In secondary schools, appropriate

behavior toward LGBTQ+ people should be discussed. Compared to primary and secondary schools, where education should focus on providing knowledge about sexual orientation and gender, the university level is expected to deepen students' understanding of sexual minorities. For example, several participants stated that it would be beneficial for universities to hold workshops on LGBTQ+ topics. In addition to educating students, many respondents suggested that universities should educate school staff in areas such as solving problems with empathy and avoiding prejudicial remarks. Furthermore, school staff need to gather as much information about LGBTQ+ as possible to understand and communicate with students of any age. A prior study revealed that providing training for teachers on LGBT issues can increase educators' capacity to provide support to LGBT students; consequently, trained educators contribute to establishing a positive school setting (Szalacha, 2004).

As a practical example, one respondent, who is currently a high school Czech language and literature teacher, shared her experience. She stated that she tries to work with LGBT literature regularly in her class. However, sometimes the topic is just a minor part of the main class. She also holds "reading workshops" focused on LGBT literature. As a result, students encounter LGBT literature both as a natural part of literary history and as an interesting part of literature that has its structure and roles. She believes these encounters with LGBT issues can lead students to understand that everyone is different, realize that differences are natural, and see that there is no need to be fearful of being different or of different people. She also stated that "awareness helps to get rid of fear and prejudice."

6.3.2. Openness Toward LGBTQ+ People and Topics

Openness toward LGBTQ+ people and topics in educational institutions is another point that many respondents mentioned in their responses. Educational institutions should be openly and publicly be queer-friendly in a visible way. For example, having some symbolic things, such as LGBTQ+ friendly school stickers, or making the openness of the school clear in some official statement. Moreover, educational institutions at all levels should normalize LGBTQ+ issues and take into account the existence of LGBTQ+ people by not perceiving homosexuality as taboo but talking about it and being tolerant of differences. One participant mentioned that small things in school constitute students' awareness of sexual minorities: "Different references during classes not only help sexual minorities accept their sexual orientation but also simultaneously show sexual majorities that homosexuality or other forms of sexual minorities are normal". He also wrote an example based on his personal experience:

> I quote from my Czech language teacher's words in middle school, "During communism, life was terrible for homosexuals; thank God, it's better now"; "It's none of other people's business with whom you go to bed". In this way, she has casually (and not only casually) showed her positive attitude towards sexual minorities. Considering that she was a quite dominant person, it's likely that she has contributed to attitude formation of her students toward sexual minorities.

Similarly, another participant shared his experience hearing a teacher's positive statement about homosexual sexual minorities:

I remember how during primary and middle school, when the teacher of civics talked about homosexuals, it had a positive impact in a way from tolerant to supportive. From my today's point of view, some of the statements weren't exactly perfect, but in my childhood, statements like "I would try to understand that", "They are normal people" helped me to develop confidence.

These two examples demonstrate that teachers' positive attitudes toward sexual minorities can significantly affect students' attitudes toward sexual minorities. Therefore, it can be stated that teachers' attitudes toward sexual minorities are critical because teachers serve as role models for students.

6.3.3. Respondents' Suggested Forms of Support for LGBTQ+ People

Many respondents provided details about the support they believe is necessary for sexual minority youth in educational institutions. Some of them stated that there should be a professional, such as school counselors and school psychologists, who can address sexual minority issues in schools. Several respondents proposed the need for some student associations that support LGBTQ+. Offering information is another form of support several respondents suggested; schools or universities should provide information about whom students can contact and where to go when they need assistance or support as well as support materials for sexual minorities. Some respondents mentioned when schools should offer support to students who are sexual minorities. For instance, two of the respondents stated

that schools should "leave the person alone until you actually see a problem" and "only offer help when students need."

6.3.4. Suggestions for Specific Issues

Several participants wrote about practical suggestions for supporting sexual minority youth in educational institutions. They suggested that inclusive language be used when talking about students' partners. When dealing with school bullying issues, it should be emphasized that victims are not alone, and offenders should be punished so that they will not repeat the same actions. Some respondents also shared practical suggestions based on their own experiences. For instance, one respondent detailed her coming out experience at school:

> At school I have encountered understanding and acceptance. Nobody made any remark on it, even when my partner danced together with me during prom. Teachers didn't change their attitude at all and treated me the same way. They could see I don't have any problems or sorrow.

Based on her experience, she suggests that "it is important if the person is fine with his/her orientation and decided to come out, treat him/her the same as before, not as if he/she had an illness, additionally giving unrequested advice or imposing your point of view."

Another respondent shared her experience of seeking help anonymously:

I have sought help mostly in anonymous way on the Internet, and from the experience of my friends, everything was better dealt with anonymously – unfortunately, we can never be sure if the staff at school are not homophobic (e.g. school counselors or psychologists). Unless the person themselves says or is known to 'support' us, I take it that they are negative about it (again from experience, I went to a primary and secondary school in a village). All I can recommend is the ability to seek help anonymously, open support from school staff, and school promotion of organizations that focus on these things.

6.4. Results Analysis Conclusion

The research found that the reasons why gay or lesbian youth who did not seek help from educational institutions can be divided into two groups: positive and negative. The reasons in the positive group include the acceptance of gay or lesbian identified youth by their peers or the youth have others they can count on and received support from. The reasons in the negative group include distrust toward school staff, fear of coming out, rejection, and being misunderstood. The lack of information about whom to contact or where to go was another reason that youth did not seek help from educational institutions. These negative reasons are related to heteronormativity in schools. The heteronormativity in schools has silenced discussions about sexual minorities (Quinlivan & Town, 1999) and treated sexual minorities as they are nonexistent. Additionally, school staff's negative attitudes toward homosexuality could also affect gay or lesbian youth, influencing their reluctance to seek help from staff. As many respondents in the research suggested, there are many measures that educational institutions can take to create an environment where sexual minority youth feel less stress

and are more inclined to ask for support from school staff. For example, at all levels of educational institutions, schools should conduct sex education that includes sexual minority topics. Furthermore, school staff must be educated to solve problems with empathy and to avoid prejudicial remarks. One study found that even a short two-hour training session can have a great positive effect on teachers' attitudes and self-efficacy to support LGBT students and to create a comprehensive school setting (Greytak, Kosciw, & Boesen, 2013). Openness to LGBTQ+ in educational institutions is essential. It includes displaying queer-friendly attitudes, normalizing LGBTQ+ issues, and considering the existence of LGBT+ people in educational institutions. Many respondents also proposed various forms of support, such as having school counselors. Additionally, having a student LGBTQ+ association, offering support materials about sexual minority topics, and providing information about whom students can contact and where to go to get support are also effective methods to support sexual minority young people. Some respondents provided suggestions for specific issues. For instance, a solution to school bullying is to punish offenders and emphasize that the victim is not alone. When students decide to come out at school, the students must be treated in the same manner as before. These suggestions are important for improving support and services for sexual minorities in educational institutions. The negative reasons expressed by many respondents to the question, "why you did not seek help from school staff" can be solved by these suggestions. It is not easy for educational institutions to make all the suggested changes at once, but it is possible to make changes step by step. Teachers can start by mentioning LGBTQ+-related topics in their classes.

Conclusion

This thesis poses several questions pertaining to the support and services sexual minority youth receive from educational institutions and LGBTQ+ support organizations. "What are young lesbian and gay people's experiences with the support and services provided by educational institutions and external LGBTQ+ support organizations?" To answer this main research question, sub-questions are asked: What problems do LG youth decide to solve with institutional assistance? How do LG youth perceive the usefulness of the received support and why do they find it effective or ineffective?

The research indicated that the effectiveness of support and services provided by educational institutions varied from case to case. When school counselors or psychologists handled homophobic bullying appropriately, the support was effective. Additionally, student LGBTQ+ associations in universities can also be effective platforms for connecting sexual minorities. Conversely, when school counselors and classroom teachers lacked knowledge about sexual minorities, listened to student's concerns in an inappropriate way, and only provided temporary support, the support was deemed ineffective. Providing unsolicited support to a gay student was also seen as ineffective support. In some instances, support from school staff is not only ineffective but also can cause psychological stress to students. Compared to the support and services provided by educational institutions, the support and services provided by external organizations were more effective. External organizations as platforms can connect people who have similar identities. People who have similar identities can share their experiences, understand each other, and provide advice based on their experiences. Connecting with people who have similar identities can allow youth to feel that

they are not alone. Although support and services provided by external organizations were more effective, they cannot intervene in problems that sexual minority youth have in schools, such as school bullying. Therefore, the effectiveness of the support and services depends on the types of problems a person is facing.

In addition to answering the above research questions, the study found that the most common problem LG youth faced was coming out to their families. Moreover, there are various reasons for not seeking help from educational instructions when they encountered problems related to their sexual orientation. Positive reasons for not seeking help include being accepted by peers or having someone to rely on. Negative reasons include distrust of school staff, fear of coming out, rejection, and misunderstanding. The lack of information on whom to contact and where to go is also a reason that youth did not seek help.

The study also presents suggestions from the perspectives of gay and lesbian youth to improve services and support for sexual minority youth in educational institutions. They provided some unique suggestions, such as "not offering unrequested support to sexual minority students unless the school staffs see a problem." This suggestion is a point often overlooked by heterosexual people when considering how to improve services or support for LGBTQ+ youth. Therefore, it is important to listen to the support and service users' requests and feedback to truly improve support and services.

The findings of this study offer an opportunity to explore gay and lesbian youths' experiences receiving support and using services provided by educational institutions and sexual minorities support organizations. However, the study has several limitations. First,

the participants in the research are limited to sexual minority youth who are gay or lesbian and excluded other sexual minority youth, such as bisexual, transgender, and individuals who are questioning their sexuality. Second, the data is based on a small number of samples. Third, the definition of educational institutions in this research is broad, ranging from primary school to university.

Future studies should include more diverse sexual minority youth, not only those who identifying as gay or lesbian. Future studies should also include a greater number of participants to generalize the effectiveness of services and support provided by institutions. Furthermore, future studies should focus on specific educational institutions because primary schools, secondary schools, and universities may provide different types of support and services depending on the age of students.

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Appendix

Online Survey

1. How old are you?
    15-18
    19-22
    23-25

2. What would you say you are …
    Gay
    Lesbian

3. Being a gay or lesbian may sometimes bring specific difficulties in one's life. If you think about your experiences so far, how serious problems have you faced or are you facing?
    1. No problems
    2. Slightly serious problems
    3. Moderately serious problems
    4. Very serious problems
    5. Extremely serious problems

4. Could you please specify what types of problems you have faced or are facing? (You can choose more than one answer)
    Coming out to my family
    Coming out to my schoolmates
    School bullying
    Verbal harassment
    Physical harassment
    The ambiguity of the situation (confusion)
    Not relevant to me (If you choose this option, it is sufficient to fill in only the mandatory questions No.5 and No. 14, and the last question)
    Others

5. When you faced problems related to your sexual orientation, did you ask anyone from your school or university for help?

Yes, from the primary and secondary school

Yes, from the university

Yes, from both schools and university

No

Not relevant to me

6. If you did not contact anyone from the school or university for help, could you please give reasons?

7. What was the main issue you deal with?

8. Who specifically (in terms of job position) did you contact? (Please also specify the level of school – primary school/ secondary school/ university.)

9. Could you please try to describe what kind of help you received?

10. Was the help provided effective for you?

    Yes

    No

    Not relevant to me

11. Could you please describe in more detail how this help was (or was not) effective for you? Please be as specific as possible. Your answer is very important for this research and practical recommendations that this research intends to make.

12. Did you feel any psychological stress when using help or support from school or university?

    Yes

    No

    Not relevant to me

13. If yes, could you please indicate what this stress was?

14. Have you asked for help from a specialized organization that deals directly with supporting LGBTQ people? (This means an external organization that is not linked to a school or university.)

Yes

No

Not relevant to me

15. If you have contacted such an organization, could you please try to describe what type of assistance you received and what was it?

16. Was the assistance provided effective for you?

Yes

No

Not relevant to me

17. Could you please describe in more detail how this assistance was (or was not) effective for you? Please be as specific as possible. Your answer is very important for this research and practical recommendations that this research intends to make.

18. Did you feel any psychological stress when using this from of help or support?

Yes

No

Not relevant to me

19. If yes, could you please indicate in what sense this situation was stressful?

20. Please take a moment to reflect on your experience and people in a similar position. What do you think schools/universities and their staff should do to be able to help students better? (Please also specify the level of school – primary/ secondary/ university.) Please be specific. This answer is also very important because it will help to formulate recommendations on how to improve the help provided.