Proud Voices:
An Exploratory Study into the Needs of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Young People in the Counties of Limerick, Clare and Tipperary.

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Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

This research set out to examine the needs of LGBT young people in the counties of Limerick, Clare and Tipperary.

Defining the research parameters

The Research aimed to identify the support needs of LGBT young people aged 13-25 years in the counties of Limerick, Clare and Tipperary.

Specific research objectives included

- To examine the demographic profile of LGBT research participants
- To identify services that the young LGBT population are currently accessing
- To explore services that LGBT young people would like to use/see
- To identify current gaps in services as perceived by the young LGBT population
- To highlight current challenges as experienced by the young LGBT population.

Research design

The research design included a triangulation approach of quantitative and qualitative research. An online survey was employed, followed by focus groups and interviews. The research was carried out by a team of researchers from the University of Limerick: Patricia Mannix McNamara, Eva Devaney and Emmanuel O' Grady. It was supported by a research working group consisting of members from Rainbow Support Service, Ballyhoura Development Ltd, Belong To, Garda Liaison, Clare Youth Service, Clare VEC, Foróige, Limerick Youth Service, Paul Partnership, Tipperary Regional Youth Service, South Tipperary VEC, and West Limerick Resources.

Research participants

In total there were 167 respondents to the online survey and of those, 135 were in the target age group (13-25). The age profile of the respondents to the survey proved an interesting finding. While a significant majority (81%) were in the target age group for the study (13-25), only 8.5% of the sample was found to be less than 18 years of age. The under 18's are therefore under represented.

Three focus groups were carried out with a total of 13 participants and 10 individual interviews were conduced.

Different geographical areas in the region were unevenly represented. Approximately two of five respondents to the survey reported they resided in Limerick City, followed by one-quarter in County Limerick. Only 14% resided in County Clare and only 7% in County Tipperary. This distribution probably reflects current provision of LGBT specific services, such as Rainbow Support Services located in Limerick city.

Almost seven in ten respondents reported being third-level students, and one in five was employed. Only 7% were secondary school students. This mirrors the age profile of the respondents, with most respondents in the 18 – 25 age groups.

More males (54%) than females (45%) completed the survey. A small proportion (1.2%) recorded their gender as Transgender. This is consistent with previous recent national research (YouthNet 2003, Minton et al. 2008, Gleeson and McCallion 2008, Mayock et al. 2009).

Just under half of the sample identified themselves as gay or lesbian, and just under one-quarter as bisexual. Some respondents resisted labelling identities, questioning the need for society to group people into 'boxes with labels' in a prescriptive manner. This reflects current thinking where gender and sexual identities are not static and polarised concepts, but instead dynamic and with many degrees of variations (Connell 2002). This suggests the need to understand the degree of diversity that exists in the young LGBT population when planning services to meet their needs.

Key Findings

Level of comfort in LGBT
While almost two-thirds of the sample reported that they felt comfortable or very comfortable with their stated identity, one-third of respondents reported feeling uncomfortable or unsure about how comfortable they felt about their identity. This group may be at higher risk for emotional health problems as not fully accepting one's sexual identity can impact negatively on levels of self-esteem and self-confidence.

Hierarchy of Acceptability
A clear hierarchy of LGBT acceptability emerged, with levels of acceptability highest amongst friends, followed by family and community. Approximately half of the respondents reported that they perceived LGBT to be acceptable within their family, while almost one in five reported LGBT was not acceptable. Almost half of the respondents to the survey live (or lived) in a home where they do/did not feel accepted, which can be a source of distress for young people. This may have serious implications as positive relationships in the home have a protective effect on emotional health. It is clear that there is a need for provision of support for these young people.

Parents themselves also need support in the process of accepting their child's sexual identity and in developing positive relationships with their LGBT child.

Disclosure

Many reasons were given for not disclosing one's sexual identity; including fear of rejection, fear of not being taken seriously, fear for physical safety, protecting parents in a small community and losing friends.

Practitioners in different health and social services need to raise awareness of developmental needs and health risks for young LGBT people. Services should not automatically presume heterosexuality as this is a barrier to accessing help. Services need to be explicitly LGBT friendly.

Health Impact

Navigating sexual identity is a time of great stress for young people. Coming out can be accompanied by isolation and loneliness and can have significant adverse impact on emotional well being. Increased susceptibility to substance use at this time was identified as well as the potential vulnerability substance use places upon the young person. Increased risk to suicidal thoughts was also identified by some participants.
The risk factors to health associated with LGBT make a convincing argument for the need for service provision for LGBT young people. A multi-disciplinary approach is essential.

Homophobia

The prevalence of homophobic bullying among participants in this study points to the great need for support services such as Rainbow (Limerick) and ShOUT (Galway), OUTWest among others.

In this study, schools emerged as significant in the prevalence of institutional, personal and cultural homophobia. This was attributed to several factors including; attitudes of principals and teachers within schools and the strong religious influence that was perceived to continue to dominate Irish education.

Students in rural schools run the risk of receiving even less support. The problems of supporting LGBT young people within rural communities is further compounded by the reluctance of rural teachers (more so than their urban counterparts) to engage with LGBT issues.

Nationally some great work has been done such as the BeLonGTo campaign for schools. More is needed. Schools need to foster links and network with services such as Rainbow, BeLonGTo and ShOUT who have the skills and familiarity with LGBT issues and can support schools in developing inclusive cultures.

The reluctance of schools to engage with LGBT issues and with this research indicates that there is quite a journey to go for schools to become more inclusive.

Rural/Urban Location – Implications for Accessibility

The adverse consequences of rural living for LGBT acceptability and/or support emerged clearly from this research. Participants associated rural living with close-mindedness, less freedom to be open about one's sexual identity and prevalence of traditional thinking which led to stereotyping and homophobia. Some participants indicated fear of being assaulted as they perceived their rural community to be strongly homophobic.

The isolation of living in rural Ireland and being away from centres such as Rainbow meant little or no access to the LGBT community for participants. Some rural areas were so badly serviced that it meant little access to a regular public transport system and thus limited capacity to access LGBT services or support. This reiterated the need for effective transportation and also the need to have smaller, more local support groups under the larger Rainbow umbrella.

Clearly, pressures face all LGBT youth, but these are particularly pressing in rural areas that may be less supportive of LGBT young people and that have limited public transport thus increasing societal isolation and alienation.

Desired Supports

The results of this study strongly evidence the significant need for support for all LGBT people and in particular LGBT young people. Social networking was clearly the most pressing need. In prevailing cultures of resistance to LGBT and the prevalence of homophobia, it is unsurprising that the need for a safe environment in which to make friends was a recurrent theme for LGBT young people.

Drop in services, one to one support and individual counselling were all strongly articulated needs. LGBT groups were associated with solidarity and advocacy by participants.

Participants also desired service provision that was specifically targeted for LGBT but also service provision that was not exclusively LGBT, in other words a blend in the targeting of services. While specific LGBT support is necessary, it was felt that advertising more general services meant that those who were not out might be able to come to youth groups that had LGBT sub groups without having to 'out themselves.' Also participants were resistant to what they called the cliché of gayness.

Other supports identified were web access and substance use support. Given the potential health impact associated with LGBT identified earlier, it is little surprise that these emerged as articulated needs.

Transgender

There is little Transgender representation in this study. This is in keeping with both national and international research trends. Transgender people often worry about being open about their sexuality in case they face aggression, discrimination or misunderstanding (Spunout 2009). Therefore, it is little wonder at the limited representation in research. The insights gained from this research indicate the need to approach further research and needs identification for Transgender people in a grounded and informed way.

Service Provision Recommendations in Brief

Setting	Recommendations	Focus
Service Provision	LGBT service planning needs to acknowledge the large degree of diversity that exists among the LGBT population.	Social Support
	Personal development should be an integral aspect of LGBT youth support work: building self-esteem, self-confidence and resilience are essential activities. LGBT youth support should also have specific focus on building skills for disclosure.	Personal Support
	Funding for adequate resources such as meeting venues is essential. It is also essential to support continuous professional development of LGBT youth workers in terms of facilitation skills, personal development and para-counselling skills.	Rainbow Funding
	Education among the heterosexual and LGB communities in order to dispel the many myths that surround Transgender issues.	Social Support
	Mental health, sexual health and substance use need to be included as topics in support programmes for LGBT youth.	Health Support
	Mainstream drug and alcohol services need to be aware of LGBT young people as a risk group as well as gain knowledge of the specific challenges they experience. Proper referral structures for substance misuse are necessary for LGBT youth.	Health Support
	There is an urgent requirement for ongoing access to counselling for LGBT young people.	Personal Support
	Social and emotional support structures are needed for young LGBT people who may not have any support in the family or in the community.	Rainbow Support
	The isolation experienced by LGBT young people in rural communities requires urgent consideration. Smaller satellite LGBT groups are urgently needed in rural areas. These need funding and support. It is recommended that these function under the Rainbow umbrella with Rainbow as the anchor. Drop in services are essential to rural satellite support. Transportation is essential in offering rural support.	Rural Support
	Access to the web for LGBT young people is a pressing need especially in rural areas. A dedicated information officer with IT expertise and skills in using technology in outreach is required.	Rural Web Support
	Peer based support and local education initiatives supported by local community and rural development initiatives would enhance support of LGBT young people in their own communities.	Peer Support
	There can be little doubt as to the urgency of support and education for parents of LGBT youth.	Parent Support
	The development of a parents' network could aid in the education and support of LGBT parents in the community.	Parent Support

School Specific Recommendations in Brief

Setting	Recommendations	Focus
Schools	LGBT culture needs more visibility in the curriculum.	National Policy
	LGBT should be an integral part of curriculum provision such as Social Personal and Health Education and Relationships and Sexuality Education, particularly as both of these subjects deal with developing identity, decision making and health.	National Policy
	Those involved in pastoral care (guidance counsellors/year heads/form tutors) need to be educated on LGBT issues. Pastoral care teams and school counsellors need to be made aware of local LGBT services so that schools and LGBT services can liaise closely in supporting young people. This can be achieved via national in-service processes linked to SPHE.	National Policy
	Pre-service and in-service teacher training should include LGBT issues, awareness and information.	National University
	Policies that protect, value, and nurture young LGBT people are essential in schools.	National Policy School Specific
	All school staffs need to be educated in order to understand the impact of homophobic bullying on young people.	National Policy School Specific
	Schools need to have a zero tolerance of homophobic bullying which should be an integral aspect of the school bullying policy. The policy needs to make explicit reference to the unacceptability of homophobic comments, name calling and aggressive behaviour.	National Policy School Specific
	Schools need to promote poster and information campaigns such as that of BeLonGTo which attempts to address homophobia in schools.	National Policy School Specific
	Schools need to include LGBT support contacts along with the other help contacts advertised.	National Policy School Specific
	At a national level, a greater understanding of LGBT issues should inform educational policy.	National Policy

Research Specific Recommendations in Brief

Setting	Recommendations for Further Research	Focus
Research Specific	Research specific to parental support would help to illuminate the potential for parents to become a collaborative network.	Parent Support
	Research that celebrates LGBT identity would aid the profile of the LGBT community.	LGBT Profile
	There is need for further research into the protective factors of LGBT identity. Some participants appeared to cope quite well while for others it was a significant challenge that impacted on health.	LGBT Health
	While this research focussed on need assessment. There is scope to deepen this research regarding the experiences of LGBT youth specifically under the age of 18.	LGBT Support
	Research into the impact of LGBT on families would also be of benefit in deepening the understanding of service providers of disclosure processes among families.	Family Support
	The potential for research to increase advocacy for the LGBT community is evident. Such research can also facilitate dialogue within the LGBT community itself.	LGBT Profile
	Specific research on Transgender experience and support is warranted.	Transgender

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background to research

Rainbow Support Services is the lead agency in the Mid-West Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Youth Working Group. This group has members from BeLonG To Youth Service, North Tipperary VEC, County Clare VEC, Limerick Youth Services, Clare Youth Services, Foroige, West Limerick Resources, Ballyhoura Development, Limerick City Garda LGBT Liaison Officer and Paul Partnership. It was this group that decided to commission research in order to effectively provide services for LGBT young people. It also aimed to assist and enable existing youth services to become 'gay friendly.'

The working group sought to identify the needs of LGBT young people, and also what young LGBT people want from a support service. They also sought to identify what services LGBT young people are currently using and/or would like to use. The working group were also keen to discover what issues LGBT young people experience as a result of their sexual identity. Finally, it was also deemed important to identify where services should be in order to facilitate ease of access.

As Rainbow is a member on the Tipperary LGBT Youth Working Group (Tipperary Regional Youth Service being the lead agency on this working group) it was also deemed important to include South Tipperary not just North-Tipperary in this research.

Funding was received from agencies in the Mid-West and South Tipperary to conduct this research. Specifically those who provided funding are; South Tipperary VEC, HSE West, West Limerick Resources, Ballyhoura Development, Eiri Coica Baiscinn, Obair, The Community Partnership Network and Paul Partnership. The research was commissioned by Rainbow Support Services (Mid West) on behalf of the Mid-West LGBT Youth Working Group.

The geographical scope of the research includes Limerick City and County, Co. Clare, and also Co. Tipperary. This research was undertaken in the hope that it would serve to inform service providers and policy makers of the urgent need to advocate on behalf of the LGBT population in the region. It also sought to make every effort to

create opportunity to give voice to the young LGBT population in the Counties of Limerick, Clare and Tipperary.

1.2 Research aim

To identify the support needs of LGBT young people aged 13-25 years in the Counties of Limerick, Clare and Tipperary.

1.3 Research objectives

- To examine the demographic profile of LGBT research participants

- To identify services that the young LGBT population are currently accessing
- To explore services that LGBT young people would like to use
- To identify current gaps in services as perceived by young LGBT population
- To highlight current challenges as experienced by the young LGBT population.

1.4 Research Methodology

A mixed method of quantitative (on-line survey) and qualitative (focus groups and interviews) was employed. The research process involved:
- setting up a research working group to oversee and advise throughout the research process
- the design and implementation of an anonymous on-line survey
- recruitment of thirteen participants for three focus groups (at three separate geographical venues Limerick city, Thurles and Ennis)
- recruitment of ten participants for individual interview (one interviewee had also participated in a focus group)
- data collection and analysis

1.5 Content of report

This report outlines the research design, surveys the literature, and presents the data. It also discusses the issues arising from the data and literature in order to make recommendations for policy development and service provision. Chapter two is a review of current literature in this field. Chapter three outlines the research design/methodology. Chapter four details the results from the online survey. Chapter

five illustrates the results from the focus groups and interviews. Chapter six discusses the significance of the research findings. Chapter seven identifies recommendations and makes suggestions for further research.

Chapter 2:   Review of Literature

2.1 Introduction

Adolescence – the transition between childhood and adulthood – is a key time for positive and healthy life outcomes. All young people undergo developmental tasks to successfully negotiate a personal identity. These concur with biological changes and changes in the young person's family relationships and peer social networks. While these years carry challenges for all young people, LGBT youth often face extra stressors such as self-disclosure and disclosure to others, discrimination, prejudice, victimization and isolation as a result of growing up in a prevailing heterosexual, and often homophobic, society. The stressors experienced by LGBT young people are compounded as they are a minority group and as such are prone to minority stress. Moreover, they may not have the social supports that non-LGBT young people can access, such as parents, siblings, friends, teachers and other people in the community. Illingworth and Murphy (2004, p. 198) refer to these challenges as "…an additional set of social burdens unique to their sexual identities."

As this review of literature will demonstrate, these social burdens can have serious health implications for the LGBT young person, and as a consequence for the health of the community and society at large. Supporting LGBT young people is therefore a public health issue. Clearly, it is also a concern for issues of social justice and equality.

There is little research specific to LGBT young people. Much is US based and only began to emerge in the late 1980's. It has taken time for "research and discussion about young people's non-heterosexual desire to find a place on the 'legitimate' academic agenda" (Hillier and Rosenthal 2001, p. 1). Hillier and Rosenthal suggest three main reasons for the paucity of research: a) this area of research has not been funded well; b) it has been difficult to get permission to research with this group of young people, and c) they state that young people often express same sex desires while sexual identity is developed later. Research suggests that there is a significant number of youth who experience same-sex desires, but who may never identify themselves as LGB youth (Savin-Williams 2001). Furthermore, they are unlikely to first out themselves to a researcher administering surveys in a school (Savin-Williams 2001).

This chapter will review literature relevant to the areas of the needs assessment of young LGBT people in the Counties Limerick, Clare and Tipperary. These include challenges for young LGBT people such as self-disclosure and disclosure to others, the school setting, discrimination and victimisation. The specific health risks will be reviewed and the significance of social support networks for young LGBT people will be discussed.

This review of literature does not detail national policy specifically because this has been comprehensively done by Gleeson and McCallion, in their very recent report (2008) on their needs analysis of LGBT population in Galway Mayo and Roscommon. The focus on this review is on the lived experience, impact and the social context and implications of LGBT young people.

In this review, different terms are used as they have been used in research. These include sexual minority youth, same-sex attracted youth, LGB youth and LGBT youth.

2.2 How many young LGBT people in the region?

There is currently no national census data available on the proportion of young LGBT people in Ireland (Mayock et al 2009). Therefore, it is difficult to estimate how many young LGBT people live, work or attend schools or third level institutions in the Counties Clare, Limerick and Tipperary. It is thought to be a significant minority of young people aged 13 to 25, however. The BeLonG To Youth Project (2008) estimates that between 5 and 10% of the population is LGBT. School based health profile surveys in the US, with an average respondent age of 15 - 16 years, found that 2.5 - 6 % of respondents self-identified as LGB, with a larger percentage of young people reporting to be unsure of their sexual orientation (Garofalo et al. 1998, Lock and Steiner 1999, Rostosky et al. 2003).   Other studies have reported proportions of between 5 – 11 % of young people that question their sexuality and/or reported same sex attraction in Australia and the US (Hillier et al. 1996, Lindsay et al. 1997, Remafedi et al. 1992 all cited in Hillier and Rosenthal 2001, p. 1, Russell et al. 2001). However, it is worthy of note when interpreting statistics such as these that for LGBT young people the fears surrounding disclosure may often mitigate against it. Nonetheless, the statistics do point to a significant number of LGBT youth who live in

the community, who attend post-primary schools and third-level institutions and who work in the region.

2.3 Awareness of sexual attraction, self-identification and disclosure

The development of sexual identity is an important developmental task for all young people. This process is developmental in nature, starting with awareness of sexual attraction, and proceeding to sexual behaviour and self-labelling. While some LGBT young people adjust and cope well with the process, for many it can be a source of considerable distress. Young LGBT people may not be as well supported developmentally as their heterosexual peers, because of homophobic societal attitudes that view heterosexuality as norm (Rostosky et al. 2003). Therefore, they are at risk as they may have to choose between a stigmatised identity and secure attachments to family, peers, schools and others in their social network (Rostosky et al. 2003).

2.4 Self-identification as LGBT

While a study found that awareness of same-sex feelings can begin as early as age 10, self-labelling or self-identification happens on average about five years later (D'Augelli 2002). Earlier international research found that the average age for self-identification for gay and bisexual males in a US study was 14 to 16 years, and for lesbians 16 – 18 years (Remafedi 1990 cited in Lock and Steiner 1999). Savin-Williams and Diamond (2001 cited in Savin-Williams 2001, p. 10) estimated that average age for self-disclosure is just before high school graduation.

In a Northern Ireland survey (YouthNet 2003), 40% of the respondents reported they were between 10 and 13 years of age when they realised they were LGBT, and 37% between 14 and 17 years. The average age for men in the study was 12, while girls realised at the average age of 13 that they were LGBT. Recent national research targeting LGBT people from all age groups, found that the average age for self-awareness of their sexual orientation was 14, while most were aged 12 when they first become aware of their status (Mayock et al. 2009). These findings suggest that initiatives for LGBT young people need to meet the profile of self-identification and target early and mid-adolescence to support the process of developing a sexual identity.

Accepting an identity that is often stigmatised by society and the subsequent disclosure or coming out as a LGBT youth requires self-confidence. Indeed, high levels of self-confidence can act as a protective factor against the negative consequences LGBT youth may experience as a result of living in a predominantly heterosexual environment (Pearson et al. 2007). If the sexual identity is not fully accepted by the individual, it may negatively impact on self-esteem, self-confidence and contribute to social anxiety (Pachankis and Goldfried 2006). It is thought that use of drugs and alcohol may artificially and temporarily boost self-esteem and that this is one of the reasons for the high rates of use among LGBT people.

Activities that aim to enhance self-confidence and self-esteem and build resilience are therefore important components of LGBT specific support services for young people. Initiatives should aim to empower LGBT young people to be resilient in a society where homophobic attitudes may prevail. They should aim to "…prepare LGB adolescents to identify, cope with, and resist substandard treatment" (Illingworth and Murphy 2004, p.205). It is important to note that the need to address personal development for the individual LGBT young person does not diminish the need to address prevailing societal attitudes and norms.

2.5 Disclosure

"Being out" is the term most often used in everyday language when a person identifies himself or herself as LGBT and tells other people, while the term "being in the closet" is often used to describe a person who has self-identified as LGBT but has not disclosed their sexual orientation to others. LGBT people can be out to one person, to everyone they know, or anything between. Previous research has found that there is an average of five to seven years between self-identification as LGBT and disclosure to others (D'Augelli 2002, YouthNet 2003, Mayock et al. 2009). This time can be a period of considerable difficulty and distress for LGBT young people. Because they are not in a position to seek support from significant people such as parents or friends, some may need external support that is perceived as safe and confidential as well as personal development and skills building for disclosure. D'Augelli poignantly states:

> Many adolescents who come to self-identify as LGB have known about their feelings for many years before they tell anyone, and these years of secrecy may well be very difficult ones. These years of silence and hiding may be times of considerable worry

and fear, social withdrawal, academic performance problems, and school avoidance (2002, p. 452).

US based research found that the average age for disclosure to others is after high school graduation (Savin-Williams and Diamond 2001 cited in Savin-Williams 2001, p. 10). D'Augelli (2002) found that average age of first disclosure to others occurred at about age 17. Similar findings emerged from the survey in NI, where male respondents on average told someone about their sexual orientation at age 17, while female respondents told someone at 18 years of age (YouthNet 2003). An exploratory study in the ROI, found that the average age for coming out was somewhat lower than in the previous studies, at age 15 years for the respondents in the survey sample (Minton et al. 2008). Those in the study who had not disclosed to anyone expressed fears of being rejected by family and friends, being stereotyped and having to act in a certain manner, and being bullied because of their sexual orientation. A recent national study (targeting LGBT people from all ages) found that the average age for disclosure of LGBT identification among its respondents somewhat later, at age 21, while the highest proportion of respondents had come out at the age of 17 (Mayock et al. 2009).

2.6 Telling friends

Most research seems to agree that a friend is likely to be the first person that LGBT young people will disclose to. The majority of the respondents in the NI survey (78%) had disclosed to their friends first (YouthNet 2003). In the ROI, most respondents had told friends (69%), followed by parents (30%) and siblings (27%), while 13% of respondents reported they had told extended family and 13% a youth worker/leader (Minton et al. 2008). While some may find telling friends relatively easy to do, disclosing to friends can also be a source of distress. The experience of telling friends was found to be "very troubling" by 22%, and on the other hand "no problem" by 34% of respondents in a US survey (D'Augelli 2002). Disclosure to friends can be associated with fears of rejection and losing friends.

2.7 Telling family

Disclosure to family is a challenging process. Research specific to parent-child relationships and disclosure suggests that this time can be stressful for the whole family (Russell et al. 2001). Pilkington and D'Augelli (1995) found that only one-third

of the young people in their study reported "no problem" when disclosing their sexual orientation to family members, and almost one-quarter reported that the disclosure was "very troubling". Similar results were found by D'Augelli (2002) who found that telling families was "extremely troubling" for 23% of young people and was considered "no problem" by 28% of respondents.

It is more common to disclose to mothers than fathers (D'Augelli 2002). However, while just less than half of the respondents in the study (46 %) reported that their mothers had been accepting of the disclosure, fewer (28%) stated this about their fathers. Similar findings emerged from D'Augelli's more recent (2002) study, where 48% of respondents deemed their mothers accepting, and 33% their fathers. Siblings appeared to be more accepting (55%). Almost three-quarters of respondents in NI had experienced homophobic attitudes in the home, and as a result 45% of respondents in the study had felt compelled to leave the family home (YouthNet 2003). The same survey found that 63% of respondents felt that they could not tell their parents when they first came out, with fear of rejection the main reason. Findings from the ROI survey found that half of the respondents had experienced homophobic attitudes from family members, with about half of those feeling compelled to leave the family home (Minton et al. 2008). These findings indicate that a large proportion of young LGBT people live in a home environment where they do not feel accepted and where little or no support is offered.

Living in a home where LGBT young people may feel rejected by one or both parents is clearly a serious situation and source of distress. Positive relationships with parents have a protective effect on mental health for LGBT young people (D'Augelli 2002). Clearly, these findings indicate a need for supports to be put in place for the whole family (Lock and Steiner 1999). Initiatives such as family counselling and parents' groups may be useful. Parents and siblings may need to raise their awareness and receive information about LGBT issues generally, the reality of being an LGBT young person in today's society and the importance of supportive relationships for the young person's mental health.

2.8 Telling people in school

There is limited research on how LGBT young people have experienced telling people in school about their sexual orientation. One American survey found that only one in

five young people reported feeling "very comfortable" with disclosing their sexual orientation at school, while one-third felt "not at all comfortable"; over half of the respondents (58%) hid their sexual orientation from other students and 49% had done so from teachers (Pilkington and D'Augelli 1995). Fear of losing friends, being harassed, verbally or physically abused were factors that influenced their openness about their sexual orientation. It has been suggested that adjustment within the school environment may be more difficult for boys than girls with same-sex attractions, possibly because of more negative perceptions among boys of gender nonconforming behaviour (Pearson et al. 2007). For young boys stepping outside the traditional masculinity behaviours can be distinctly challenging and even threatening. The school is a key social setting for LGBT young people and will be discussed further in a later section of the review their research.

2.9 Telling people in the work place

Research about young people's disclosure of their sexual orientation in the work place is also limited. An American study found that almost half (46%) of the young people in the study had hidden their sexual orientation from their employers, and fear of losing their job was a significant factor for approximately one-quarter of the young people in the survey (Pilkington and D'Augelli 1995). No research has been found that has examined young Irish LGBT people's experiences in the work place, and this area warrants further exploration. While issues may be similar to those that older LGBT people are experiencing, there may be issues specific to younger people that need consideration.

2.10 Telling people in the community

The community setting is similarly difficult for LGBT young people. In the U.S. three in ten respondents felt 'not at all comfortable' while only one in five felt 'very comfortable' with disclosing their sexual orientation in their community (Pilkington and D'Augelli 1995). Furthermore, the study found that respondents often did not disclose their sexual orientation to professionals such as medical staff, lawyers, and police officers. Recent Irish research found that half of survey respondents, who included all age groups, reported that their sexual orientation had stopped them sometimes or always taking part in social activities in their local communities (Gleeson and McCallion 2008). The same study found that 90% of respondents

reported feeling isolated because of their sexual orientation "sometimes" or "always", due to fear of others finding out their sexual orientation (Gleeson and McCallion 2008). This reflects a need for social support and initiatives in the community that address the social exclusion that some LGBT people are experiencing.

2.11 The school setting

The school is a key social setting for adolescents. As social institutions, schools can reflect prevailing societal norms and values. They are also an important setting for creating a sense of belonging, a basic human need. Schools influence motivation and positive life outcomes such as educational attainment. The challenge of developing positive self-identity can be more difficult for students with an emerging sexual identity that does not correspond to prevailing (heterosexual) normative cultures (Pearson et al. 2007). Schools can create environments in which some sexual feelings, behaviours, and relationships are stigmatised, and this potentially has negative consequences for adolescents with non-heterosexual romantic attractions (Pearson et al. 2007, p. 523). Furthermore, LGBT young people are at high risk of being victimized at school compared to their heterosexual peers (Pilkington and D'Augelli 1995, Bontempo and D'Augelli 2002).

As a result, young people may feel excluded and isolated in the school setting, leading to a risk of school disengagement and resulting educational disadvantage, which can impact on future life chances. Indeed, recent research has confirmed that same-sex attracted youth feel less socially integrated in school (Rostosky et al. 2003, Pearson et al. 2007).LGBT young people are also more likely to skip school because of safety concerns (Bontempo and D'Augelli 2002). Sexual minority youth also report lower grades (Russell et al. 2001, Rostosky et al. 2003, Pearson et al. 2007), and more school troubles, even though positive relationships with teachers can counteract this (Russell et al. 2001). It is thought that lower academic achievement is partially a result of school-related problems and mediating risk factors such as emotional distress and substance use/misuse (Pearson et al. 2007).

The findings from international research are also reflected in recent Irish research. Minton et al (2008) found that 19% of survey respondents reported that they had achieved lower results due to their sexual orientation, 11% reported truancy. 6.5% had changed school, and 3.3% had dropped out. Less than one in five (18%) LGBT young

people Minton's survey had sought or experienced support around their sexual orientation while at school. One-fifth of the respondents had discussed their LGBT with a guidance counsellor in school. Overall, these students' experiences of support had been positive.

Survey findings from NI also reflect international research, where 33% of respondents believed they achieved lower results in school, one quarter reported truancy, 9% had changed schools and 15% had dropped out (YouthNet 2003). Only about one in ten had received support or information in school. It is clear from these findings that having a sense of belonging in the school can be an important protective factor or psychosocial resource for LGBT young people, with resultant positive impact on health and educational achievement. This clearly shows the potential and responsibility that schools have for supporting LGB youth. This should not be just "passive tolerance" (Illingworth and Murphy 2002, p. 198). Schools need to promote an ethos of inclusion and furthermore promote the celebration of student diversity. In so doing, they will be promoting the mental health of their students while also preventing potential academic failure, and enhancing the future life chances of LGBT youth. This report will make recommendations specific to schools in the final chapter.

There is a lack of discussion in Irish schools of LGBT issues. Minton et al. (2008) found that 67% of the respondents (young LGBT people) reported that they had not experienced any discussion in their Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) classes and 62% in any other subject. For those respondents who had experienced a discussion of LGBT issues in schools, it was not always positive: half reported negative attitudes towards the SPHE discussions and almost 40% were negative about the discussion in other classes. Most respondents (three-quarters) perceived that their school was not LGBT friendly.

2.12 Homophobia in schools
The phenomena of discrimination and victimisation due to sexual orientation will be discussed in a later section; however, research specific to the school setting will be discussed in this section. Research suggests that while verbal and physical abuse, sexual harassment and bullying can be directed at any student, youth who identify themselves as LGBT are particularly at risk. Homophobia has been linked to student

promiscuity, substance abuse, academic problems and suicide (Lipkin 1999). It has also been linked to violence among heterosexual youth: "that is boys often beat other boys and batter girls to distance themselves from gayness" (ibid 1999 p3).

Homophobic bullying in Irish schools is a recently researched phenomenon. Norman and colleagues were the first researchers to examine the issue, focusing on views and perceptions of teachers (Norman, 2004, Norman and Galvin 2006, Norman et al. 2006). Norman and Galvin (2006) found that 79% of SPHE teachers were aware of verbal homophobic bullying, while 16% reported awareness of physical bullying. A majority (90%) reported that school anti-bullying policies did not refer to homophobic bullying specifically. A NI survey found that 44% of respondents were bullied in school because of their sexual orientation, and 63% of LGBT young people had experienced negative attitudes around sexual orientation while in school (YouthNet 2003). Minton et al. (2008) have added to current knowledge about homophobic bullying in Irish schools by exploring and quantifying the experiences of young LGBT people. Because of the relevance to the present project, findings from this survey will be described in detail.

Minton and colleagues (2008) are the first researchers to explore young Irish LGBT people's experiences in school. While results are not generalisable, they do provide an indication of the current picture. They found that only one in five survey respondents reported that they liked school very much, and the same proportion reported that they disliked school very much. One fifth of respondents indicated that they did not feel safe going to and from school. General verbal abuse in school was common among the respondents; one-third (32%) experienced this on a weekly or daily basis, while verbal abuse specific to their sexuality was reported by 34% on a weekly or daily basis.

When the researchers asked about experiences of bullying, one half responded that they had not been bullied during the previous three months, and 70% that they had not been bullied in the previous five days. 18% reported being bullied frequently in the last three months, and 15% had been bullied three or more times in the previous five days. The LGBT young people in the survey reported that they had most often told friends about bullying incidents. They were most often bullied in school corridors, but episodes also took place in the schoolyard, toilets and changing rooms. Bullying when

going to and from school was also reported by 62% of those who had been bullied. Most were bullied by someone in their own class or year. Feelings expressed as a result of bullying included being angry (57%), humiliated (43%), isolated (42%), ashamed (30%) and embarrassed (40%). Only 13% reported feeling indifferent. When asked about the forms of bullying they had experienced, the respondents included ridiculing, mimicking, aggressive acts, social separation and exclusion, threats, rumours, sexual harassment, graffiti, name calling and guilt trips. Cyber bullying was experienced infrequently by the respondents, only 5% reporting this on a daily or weekly basis, while 76% reported they had not been subjected to this in the previous three months.

Mayock et al (2009) confirm these findings, reporting that approximately one-half of survey respondents reported the existence of homophobic bullying in their schools, with 40% having experienced verbal threats and one-quarter physical threats because of their sexual orientation.

The findings indicate that one-half of LGBT young people are bullied in school. While this figure cannot be directly compared to nationally representative studies on bullying in Irish schools, estimating that approximately one in six children are bullied, the findings suggest that LGBT young people are at risk of experiencing bullying in school. Schools need to be active agents in addressing homophobic bullying by creating safe and supportive environments for LGBT young people. Schools need to prevent homophobic bullying from occurring in the first place. It is essential that schools have effective pastoral care structures in place that identify and support young people who are victimised in schools because of their sexual orientation. Lack of preparation, knowledge and confidence can lead teachers to avoid dealing with LGBT issues and with homophobic bullying. Indeed, when it is dealt with it is often done in a superficial manner-"that is a brief refutation of common "myths and stereotypes" or a guest speaker's thirty minute show and tell" (Lipkin 1999 pxiii). Clearly the need to build capacity among teachers is essential in supporting young LGBT people in schools.

Minton et al (2008) make a number of recommendations for schools. One set of measures aim to challenge generalised homophobia that may permeate schools.

Mullen (2003 cited in Minton et al. 2008, p. 23) suggests a set of measures that would be suitable for Irish schools:

- Challenge homophobic bullying in the same way as other forms of bullying
- Ensure that there is explicit mention of the unacceptability of homophobic comments, name calling and aggressive behaviour in the school's guidelines on behaviour, bullying and equal opportunities
- Include homosexuality in sex education, and other discussions that centre around heterosexual choices
- Include lesbian and gay help lines on notice boards along with other help lines
- Make it clear that they acknowledge gay, lesbian [bisexual and Transgendered] pupils within the school community
- Listen to pupils who want to talk about themselves, they should never have to feel that they are 'the only one' or that they are invisible

Minton et al (2008) also argue in favour of LGBT youth groups as a form of support for young people. They also recommend that LGBT issues, including homophobic bullying, should also be addressed in pre-service and in-service teacher training.

International best practice in the school setting in this area includes providing in-service training on issues such as sexism and homophobia, developing policies that protect but also value diversity and *nurture* LGBT young people, providing 'Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education' and other similar LGBT educational awareness programmes for students, and providing support programmes for sexual minority youths in schools (Fineran 2002, TeacherNet 2008).

2.13 Discrimination and Victimisation

Homophobia, the hate and/or fear of persons who are LGBT, leads to victimization and discrimination. In the literature, victimization because someone knows or assumes that a person is LGBT has been categorised into different levels: verbal abuse (insults and threats of physical violence), minimal physical attack (having personal property damaged or destroyed, being chased, followed or spat upon, having objects thrown at one's body) and physical assault (being punched, hit, kicked, beaten, sexual assault or assault with a weapon) (Pilkington and D'Augelli 1995).

International and national research confirms that young LGBT people are at high risk of experiencing victimisation and discrimination. Being victimized because of one's sexual orientation can lead to levels of distress. Victimisation and discrimination has psychological consequences, due to the effects of the trauma itself, but also because incidents become engrained into personal identity, effecting self-esteem and self-confidence (Sarma 2004). Research into the health effects of experiencing discrimination has found a range of negative health impacts, including physical and mental sympSeans, mental ill health, violent behaviours, physiological measures, health risk behaviour and use of health care services (National Institute of Health 2006). Mayock et al. (2009) conceptualised minority stress as a framework for understanding how external stressors such as victimisation are associated with psychological distress for those who are part of minority groupings.

An American survey of young LGB people found that most (80%) had experienced verbal abuse, while one in five reported they had been physically assaulted. Often, incidents are not reported to authorities, for reasons of fear, embarrassment, or feeling helpless (Pilkington and D'Augelli 1995). These findings were later reproduced by (D'Augelli 2002), who found that over 80% of young LGB people had experienced verbal abuse, 38% had experienced threat of physical attack, 6% had had objects thrown at them and 16 % had been sexually assaulted.

There is less Irish research on experiences of victimisation of young LGBT people in Ireland; therefore, to date strategies to address victimization are based mostly on international findings (Sarma 2004). Local research has been mainly exploratory in nature, not confined to young people, and because of the research methodology used may not be representative of the experiences of all LGBT young people in Ireland. However, such research still provides a snapshot of their experiences. A study in Northern Ireland found that 71% of respondents had experienced verbal abuse, and 55% violence, including having objects thrown at them, being assaulted or being spat at (Jarman and Tennant 2003 cited in Sarma 2004, p. 62). The Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN) survey, conducted in 1995 and not confined to young LGBT people, found that 79% reported verbal harassment, 41% had been threatened with violence, 35% had been chased, and 9% had been assaulted with a weapon (cited in Sarma 2004, p. 62). LGBT participants in focus groups in the West of Ireland study (all ages) also reported different forms of discrimination, including verbal attacks,

physical assaults, receiving hate mail, and damage to personal property (Gleeson and McCallion 2008). An online survey in the same study found that 58% of respondents had experienced verbal abuse, while 20% had experienced physical violence. 41% of respondents reported being discriminated against by people in their community, and 27% by work colleagues. Presumptions of heterosexuality were reported by 58% of survey respondents. Similar findings were reported by Mayock et al. (2009), where 80% of survey respondents reported having experienced verbal abuse, and a quarter reported physical violence because of their LGBT identification.

Research specific to Irish LGBT young people has also found high levels of victimisation. An exploratory survey reported that 76% had experienced verbal abuse, and 39% physical abuse, with 8% reporting sexual abuse (Minton et al 2008). The case is similar in Northern Ireland where 65% reported verbal abuse, 35% physical abuse and 17% sexual abuse (YouthNet 2003).

As referred to earlier, LGBT youth are at risk of being victimised at school. However, other settings are also locations for victimization, including the home, the work place and the community. It follows that there are no risk-free settings for LGBT young people who are open about their sexual orientation.

2.14 Health Risk Behaviour

Risk taking is a normal component of adolescent development, and is often viewed within the context of gaining independence and social acceptance. Risk taking is therefore positive and healthy; however, sometimes behaviour associated with risk taking may have negative impacts on adolescent health. Health risk behaviour can be defined as "those behaviors that compromise adolescent health, life and successful development" (Garofalo et al. 1998, p. 899). There is evidence that young people who identify themselves as LGBT are more likely to experience higher levels of health risk factors and health risk behaviours, compared to their heterosexual peers. Possible explanations will be explored later in this section. It is important to note that much of the research with young LGBT people has focused on the negatives such as risk behaviour. There is relatively little research of the positive experiences of being a young LGBT person, and of positive and protective factors that enable many LGBT young people to grow up healthily and successfully. Savin-Williams (2001, p.6) argues that as a whole, previous research on LGBT youth has been "often ill

conceived with sloppy methodology." This stems from poor definition and recruitment of participants and a focus on problems, possibly creating a distorted picture of the 'typical' young LGBT person as someone who is "highly sexualised and have psychological problems." Future research should also take a salutogenic approach, with a focus on strengths and protective factors.

2.15 Mental health

There is evidence from international research that sexual minority youth are at increased risk for mental health sympSeans and problems (Lock and Steiner 1999, D'Augelli 2002, Pearson et al. 2007). This has also been confirmed more recently in research conducted on the island of Ireland. The findings of a survey conducted in Northern Ireland indicate that LGBT young people responding to the survey were five times more likely to be medicated for depression (24% of respondents) and twenty times more likely to have an eating disorder (21 % of respondents) compared to their heterosexual counterparts (YouthNet 2003). The recent exploratory ROI survey with young LGBT people found a somewhat lower proportion (11%) who reported they were on medication for depression and 17% who reported an eating disorder (Minton et al. 2008). The recent survey of LGBT people (all ages) in the West of Ireland found that 68% of respondents reported that they were in very good or quite good mental health; this is lower than the proportion of the general population (Gleeson and McCallion 2008). A national study found a high prevalence of LGBT people (all ages) reporting having experienced feelings of depression, with one-quarter of respondents having taken medication for treatment of anxiety or depression (Mayock et al. 2009).

2.16 Suicidal ideation and self harm

It is also known that suicide attempt rates are higher for youth who have identified themselves as LGB (Garofalo et al 1998, Massachusetts Department of Education 2000, Bontempo and D'Augelli 2002, D'Augelli 2002) and those who identify themselves as same-sex attracted youth (Russell and Joyner 2001) compared to heterosexual young people. This has also been evidenced in Ireland, where it has been found that gay and bisexual men were more likely to report suicidal intent and suicide sympSeans (Departments of Public Health 2001). In the YouthNet (2003) study, young LGBT people in the NI who responded to the survey were found to be three

times more likely to attempt suicide (29% reported an attempt) and two and a half times more likely to self-harm compared to their heterosexual peers (26% reported having self-harmed). Exploratory ROI research found that 15 % of young LGBT people who responded to the survey had attempted suicide, while 21% reported self-harm (Minton et al.2008). A national survey of LGBT people (all ages) found that 27% of survey respondents had self-harmed and that the average age for onset was 16 years (Mayock et al. 2009). The same study reported that 18% of respondents reported attempting suicide at least once, with the average age at first attempt being 17.5 years. These findings indicate the need for mental health supports for LGBT young people, including positive mental health promotion initiatives and intervention where relevant.

This has been recognised and addressed in the national suicide prevention strategy, where action 15.1 includes "Determine the risk of engaging in suicidal behaviour associated with belonging to a marginalised group, and review the available services and support agencies for marginalised groups" and action 15.2 states calls to "Develop services, supports and information/education resources to improve mental health and well-being and reduce any increased risk of suicidal behaviour among marginalised people, learning from the review in 15.1, in consultation with members of marginalized groups" (Health Service Executive, National Suicide Review Group and Department of Health and Children 2005, p. 37).

2.17 Substance use and misuse

International research has found that use and abuse of substances is also higher among sexual minority youth, especially among boys, compared to heterosexual young people (Bontempo and D'Augelli 2002, Faulkner and Cranston 1998, Garofalo et al. 1998, Rostosky et al. 2003, Russell et al. 2001, Pearson et al. 2007). In NI, 34% of respondents reported having experienced alcohol misuse, and 23% drugs misuse (YouthNet 2003). This is also evident in Ireland. An exploratory study of drug taking among young LGBT adults found high levels of drug taking: 65% had taken drugs at some time in their lives, 60% in the previous 12 months, and 40 % in the previous month at the time of the survey (Sarma 2007). The Minton et al study (2008) found that 17% of young LGBT people reported alcohol misuse while 18% reported drug misuse. The LGBT population (not confined to young people) in the West of Ireland reported higher levels of smoking, alcohol consumption and use of recreational drugs

compared with the general population (Gleeson and McCallion 2008). The use of cigarettes, alcohol and drugs have well documented negative impacts on physical and mental health, and they also act as risk factors for other risk behaviours and health behaviours. For example, binge drinking is associated with a number of adverse consequences including high-risk sexual behaviour, mental health problems and negative impacts on relationships and academic/work performance (Hope *et al* 2005, Ramstedt and Hope 2002). It follows that support services specific to LGBT young people need to include drug and alcohol awareness programmes and supportive referral structures. It also means that statutory and voluntary agencies that address substance use and misuse need to know, understand and meet the specific needs of young LGBT people.

2.18 Sexual health

US based studies have found that LGB young people were more likely to engage in sexual risk behaviours (Garofalo et al. 1998, Lock and Steiner 1999). 29% of young LGBT respondents in the ROI reported having practised unsafe sex (Minton et al. 2008), similar to NI where 27% of respondents reported this (YouthNet 2003). Clearly, there are opportunities for LGBT specific support services for young people to include sexual health initiatives in the course of their work.

2.19 The links between being a young LGBT person and health risks

The links between being a LGBT young person and the higher levels of health risk behaviours have been explored in research. Bontempo and D'Augelli (2002, p. 364) refer to specific "gay-related stress" as "stresses associated with coming out as a LGB, being discovered as LGB, or being ridiculed because of being LGB." Exposure to specific LGB stressors, such as internalised and experienced homophobia, isolation, social rejection, stigma, discrimination and violence, is thought to play an important role. Lock and Steiner (1999) suggest a relationship between discomfort with one's sexual orientation, homophobia and health risks. LGB young people who were least comfortable with their identified sexual orientation were found to be at greatest risk of mental health problems; hence, homophobic attitudes, both internalised and experienced, appear to be risk factors for psychosocial difficulties (Lock and Steiner 1999). Thus, the minority stress comprised of the combination of external and internal

stressors as a result of being LGBT is exacerbated in a society that discriminates and stigmatises.

It follows that practitioners and professionals in different settings (e.g. school, health care, youth and community) who work with LGB young people need to be aware of the specific health risks and developmental needs. Practitioners working with young people must acknowledge that young LGBT people exist. Presumed heterosexuality and/or homophobic bullying can act as barriers for LGBT young people to access services they need. Mainstream services need to ensure that they are LGBT friendly.

2.20 Social support networks

As previously referred to, LGBT young people may have less access to typical social supports, for example, parents, siblings, friends, teachers and other people in the community. These social supports are important for adolescents for the development of healthy and positive life outcomes. Illingworth and Murphy (2002) refer to "trust-breaking experiences" (p. 202) of the LGBT young person, which may have been subjected to "repeated rejection and ridicule", leading to a loss of trust, and social capital generally. It is well known that social capital is linked with positive health outcomes, and that being embedded in social webs is health promoting for the individual and the community at large (Berkman 2000 in Illingworth and Murphy 2002, p. 203). Clearly, initiatives to combat social isolation are important.

Peer-based support and education initiatives have strong potential when supporting LGBT youth, because having a friend who is gay or lesbian is an important support for LGBT youth. Garofalo (1998, p. 901) argues that peer based support groups are "offering a chance to learn and practice social skills, exchange information, establish friendships and positive role models…[and they]…address the isolation, rejection, and social impediments to the healthy development of LGB youth."

Minton et al. (2008) found that just over half (52%) of the young LGBT people in the survey relied on friends for support. Three in ten attended youth groups and one in five relied on family for support. Respondents expressed a need for places to go where they could feel safe, normal, supported and accepted.

There is limited evaluation research about the effectiveness of LGBT support groups. Young people in NI who had participated in LGBT support groups found them useful; they reported that participation had resulted in them feeling accepted and had enhanced their self-esteem and self-respect (YouthNet 2003). This sentiment was echoed by the young people in the ROI who had found LGBT specific support groups useful (Minton et al. 2008).

Recent research conducted in the West of Ireland confirmed the need for LGBT specific social outlets and support that encourage confidence building and networking (Gleeson and McCallion 2008). Participants expressed a need for "LGBT specific social spaces, which were free from alcohol and where they could be without fear of discrimination" (Gleeson and McCallion 2008, p. 30). Furthermore, participants expressed a need for an LGBT resource centre/drop-in centre, social networking activities, and befriending/coming out support groups. Specific to young people, this study found an expressed need for dedicated LGBT accessible and youth friendly premises, outreach work into schools and youth clubs, and a one-to-one support service with dedicated project workers.

A comprehensive overview of LGBT community development in Ireland by Gleeson and McCallion (2008) concluded that the LGBT community was underdeveloped and under resourced as a result of not being recognised as a specific target group by policy makers and funders. Support services specifically for young LGBT people in Ireland are a recent development. The BeLonG To Youth project was established in 2003, and the organisation provides one-on-one support and group support for young LGBT people. It also campaigns and lobbies on issues relevant to young LGBT people. While most of its activities have been based in Dublin, recently BeLonG To has engaged in a national development programme, aiming to support the establishment of youth groups outside of Dublin supported by the regional youth services. As a result, LGBT specific support services for young people in Counties Limerick and Tipperary have been established.

- Rainbow Support Services (RSS) /MYLGB: A Young Adult Support group (ages 18-25) in Limerick
- RSS /Rainbow Teens LGB Support Youth Group (ages 13-17) in Limerick
- Tipperary Regional Youth Service recently set up a LGBT youth support group in Thurles
- Third-level LGBT societies at the University of Limerick and Mary Immaculate College (Out in UL)
- RSS Telephone help line
- RSS one to one support (13-25) in the mid-west
- The Colour Wheel Society (LGBT Society at The Limerick School of Art and Design)

Current provision of LGBT specific support services for young people in Counties Clare, Limerick and Tipperary

Finally, research in the West of Ireland found that many participants in the study did not know about existing LGBT services (Gleeson and McCallion 2008). It follows that access to information about LGBT supports need to be very accessible and mainstreamed, and people need to be able to access information without having to out themselves.

2.21 Conclusion

LGBT young people have similar developmental concerns and needs as they heterosexual peers. It is important to recognise that LGBT young people are not a homogenous group. However, young LGBT people in Ireland today face a set of additional challenges compared to their heterosexual counterparts as a result of developing a personal identity that is stigmatised in a society where heterosexuality is norm. Challenges include self-identification, coming out to others, discrimination and victimisation including homophobic bullying in schools, rejection and social isolation. In particular, the time gap between self-identification and coming out to others, an average of five years, approximately between the ages of 12/13 to 17/18 for most young people, can be especially difficult. As a result of extra stressors, many LGBT young people are at risk for negative health and educational outcomes.

Many young LGBT cannot access the social supports that their heterosexual counterparts can access, such as parents, siblings, friends, and supports in school and the community at large. The literature strongly advocates the need for LGBT specific support for young people to support the development of their personal identity, to build life skills, to allow for social networking; and to allow space for young people to feel normal, safe, accepted and included.

It is not enough to support young LGBT people to better cope with challenges they face. The literature makes a strong case for continuing to challenge homophobic attitudes that continue to prevail in society at large and in social institutions where young LGBT people live, play and work. These include the home, schools, work places and communities. Our society must become more socially inclusive and accepting of diversity; as a result, individuals, communities and society at large will benefit.

Chapter 3: Research Design

3.1 Introduction

This research was designed to identify the support needs of the LGBT population aged 13-25 years in Counties of Limerick, Clare and Tipperary. An underlying principle of the research was the importance of hearing the needs of the young LGBT population as they themselves articulate them. A variety of research methods were considered. The research needed to be cognizant of the various stages that research participants may be at and as such needed to offer anonymous as well as interpersonal methods of data collection. Therefore, an anonymous on-line survey (n=167) was employed along with three focus groups (n=13) and interviews (n=10). One of the interviewees also participated in one of the focus groups. The research process was informed and supported by the LGBT research working group who were an invaluable asset in assisting the researchers whenever possible.

3.2 Rationale for choice of research design

A mixed method triangulation approach was adopted for this research.

In order to arrive at some understanding of prevalence and in order to access a wider population (some of whom may be out, others not) it was decided to employ a quantitative research approach initially. An anonymous on-line survey was created to provide a forum for participants to contribute to the research in a safe manner that would not seek to identify them. The researchers believed that anonymity would also mitigate any reticence on the part of respondents in answering questions.

The strengths of qualitative research were also considered appropriate for this research. Qualitative research in which the researcher engages with participants facilitates systematic inquiry into the meanings that people employ that make sense of and guide their actions (McLeod 2001:117). The interpersonal dimensions of qualitative research allow the researcher to gain deeper understanding of data as it emerges and can at times ensure greater depth of understanding of the case under investigation. In this case the interviews and focus groups allowed the researchers to interact with research participants and during that interaction they were also able to test the data that were emerging from the survey. Therefore the research design looked as follows:

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          ┌─────────────────────────┐
          │  Needs of Lesbian, Gay,  │
          │ Bisexual and Transgender │
          │  Youth in Limerick, Clare │
          │     and Tipperary         │
          └─────────────────────────┘
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        ┌──────────────┼──────────────┐
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│ Online Survey │ │ 3 Focus Groups│ │  Interviews   │
│    N=167      │ │    n=13       │ │    n=10       │
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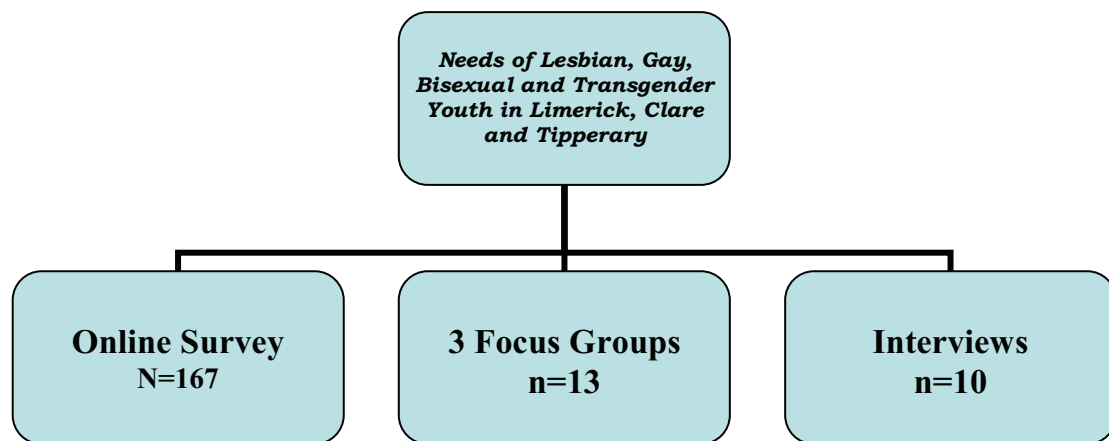
3.3 Review of relevant literature

A review of relevant literature was conducted in order to provide a conceptual framework for the research. This was essential in providing a coherent framework to inform the research design and process but also to support analysis of data and to support the researchers in the process of building pragmatic recommendations.

3.4 OnLine Survey

The online survey was developed in consultation with the working group. The survey was piloted, and feedback was incorporated into the survey design. A key insight gained at this juncture was the importance of using simple language and questioning. The software survey-monkey was used in the survey design. Survey monkey is useful for surveys such as these as it has an attractive and simple design that would appeal to young people. The questions were mainly closed in format with additional comment spaces provided (see appendix A for questions). Thirty six closed questions were included and these were sectioned and titled as follows:

a) General Information included ten questions that sought general demographic information, sexual identity and level of comfort with same.

b) General Opinion included five questions that sought perception with regard to level of acceptability of LGBT.

c) Personal Experience and Personal Opinion included seven questions specific to whether respondents were out, if so to whom? If not why not? If they had experienced homophobia or harassment and any help-seeking for same.

d) LGBT services included twelve questions on services currently being accessed, desired type of services and factors that would increase accessibility of services.

e) Additional comment included an open comment box that allowed for any comments respondents wished to make. It proved a fruitful addition.

3.5 Focus Groups

Three focus groups were conducted. The focus groups were co-facilitated by two researchers. The focus groups were designed to be conversational and interactive in nature. The themes that the focus groups centred on were; listening to the personal journeys of participants, service use or lack thereof, types of services desired and factors that would increase accessibility of services. An open focus group topic guide was employed (see appendix B). Participants were free to raise any theme or issue they wished. The three focus groups were recorded. The focus groups lasted from approximately one hour and fifteen minutes to two hours. One focus group took place in Limerick, one in Ennis and one in Thurles.

3.6 Interviews

Ten interviews were conducted. Each individual interview was recorded and conducted by one researcher. The interviews were semi-structured in nature and the themes that the interviews centred on were; listening to the personal journeys of participants, service use or lack thereof, types of services desired and factors that would increase accessibility of services. An open interview schedule was employed (see appendix C). Interviewees were free to raise any theme or issue they wished. Interviews lasted from approximately thirty-five minutes to fifty minutes. For those who wished to remain anonymous interviews were conducted by phone at their request. Interview participants came from Co. Clare and Co. Limerick. Despite strong effort it was difficult to recruit participants from Co. Tipperary.

3.7 Sampling

The online survey was hosted on the Rainbows Support Services website and bebo pages and also on the websites of Paul Partnership, SpunOut, MarriagEquality, and Out in UL (the University of Limerick LGBT group). It was also hosted on other blogs and bebo sites such as Limerick Drag Kings and on one young person's bebo site from the Tipperary LGBT Youth Group.

Snowball sampling was employed with the survey being promoted through existing networks. Postcards were professionally printed (6,000 in total) advertising the research. These postcards included information on the survey, its location and an invitation to participate in the survey, focus groups or interviews. These were distributed at the Rainbows Support services office, coffee dock and groups, Students Union offices in the University of Limerick, at LGBT events, networks, organisations and night clubs. All the agencies from the Mid-West and Tipperary LGBT working group also distributed postcards where possible to youth services and clubs in the Mid-West and Tipperary Resource and Community Centres. Postcards were also distributed to all VEC's, local libraries, universities and third level colleges in the region. They were also distributed to some schools where possible.

The research was also advertised on local radio stations, local newspapers in the region and local newsletters. A full interview was conducted with Rainbows LGBT Youth Officer about the research which was aired on West Limerick Community Radio several times.

Snowball sampling was also employed for the focus groups and interviews with people connected to existing networks identifying potential participants and then those participants identifying further research participants.

The age range of participants who responded to the survey was between fourteen and fifty-three with the majority being between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five. The participants in focus groups and interviews were aged between eighteen and twenty-three.

Sampling for this research was not easy. It was initially intended to conduct twenty interviews and four focus groups but identifying research participants willing to be

interviewed or to participate in focus groups proved particularly challenging. Also as the sampling attempted to access more rural areas reaching research participants became more and more difficult.

3.8 Data analysis

Quantitative data were analysed examining descriptive and inferential frequencies. The analysis was aided by the use of the Software Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Focus groups and interviews were transcribed verbatim with any potential identifying features removed. The software QSR NVivo (version 7) was employed to support the grouping of data into themes. Thematic coding was then employed to identify emergent themes.

3.9 Research ethics and protocols

The researchers were cognizant of the need for ethical considerations to be prioritised from the initial stages of the research process. Ethical approval was sought and granted from the Research and Ethics Committee, Education and Professional Studies Sub Committee of ULREC, University of Limerick. In addition the researchers adhered to the ethical guidelines as per the declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association 1964, 2000). This declaration is an ethical code which serves to guide researchers in the ethical treatment of human participants in research, commonly used by health promotion researchers.

In order to adhere to the principles of beneficence (doing good) the researchers held participant empowerment as their primary value. The researchers were also guided by Kandirikirira (2005) who advocates careful consideration of power relationships when researching in this field. Therefore, the researchers adopted a research ethos of protection of their participants and active care for them.

In order to ensure non-maleficence (doing no harm) the researchers protected the anonymity of all participants. Survey respondents were anonymous. Focus group and

interview data were held only by the researchers and were only available to participants. Each participant was given a research information sheet (appendix D). The researchers painstakingly went through the information sheet prior to any data collection and gave participants time to consider participation post the reading and explanation of the information sheet. Participants completed a consent form (appendix E) before being interviewed or focus group participation. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage of the research without prejudice.

3.10 Research limitations

Due to the constraints with regard to parental permission to interview participants under the age of consent (18 years) the focus group and interview participants are all over the age of 18.

All participants in the qualitative phase of the research were out to more than one other, therefore the researchers did not interview any person who had not yet come out.

The representation of Transgender young people is limited in 1.3% (n=2) survey respondents. They are not present in the qualitative phase of the research.

The survey did not ask any questions specific to disability or to ethnic origin thus there is no way to identify their representation in the study. However, one person who experiences a physical challenge (what would generally be perceived as a disability but not by him) was included in the qualitative research process (interview) and their views are represented in the research.

The views of parents and of supportive others such as friends or siblings were not sought in the research as it was deemed beyond the scope of the research. However, their absence was made known to the researchers via survey and via a parent who sought to be interviewed. Arising from the interview with the parent, the researchers realised the advocacy potential of supportive parents and believe the research would have benefited from hearing more parent voices.

The difficulties encountered with sampling for the qualitative research phase meant the researchers did not fulfil their qualitative sampling target, in terms of numbers or representation of Transgender participants.   Much insight has been gained from this difficulty nonetheless, not least of which the culture of anonymity that is continuing to surround LGBT issues particularly in rural areas.

Limerick is strongly represented in the data collection. However, given the difficulties of rural access and the existence of Rainbows as a support for LGBT people there is a higher concentration of openly out LGBT people in Limerick city than in the rural areas accessed. It may also be influenced by migration of LGBT young people to the cities.

Chapter 4:   Results from the online survey

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will detail the results from the online survey. It will begin with the demographic profile of respondents and will then outline the general opinions of respondents specific to LGBT identity. It will give insight into the experiences of the respondents and will also identify their awareness of, use of, and level of satisfaction with current LGBT supports. It will also identify respondent's desired supports and their perceptions of the characteristics that would increase accessibility. In total there were one hundred and sixty-seven respondents to the online survey.

4.2 Section A: Demographics

Age

All respondents were asked to state their age. A broader age representation was achieved than what was initially targeted. The range of ages of respondents as a result were between fourteen (the youngest respondent) and fifty-three (the eldest).

Age
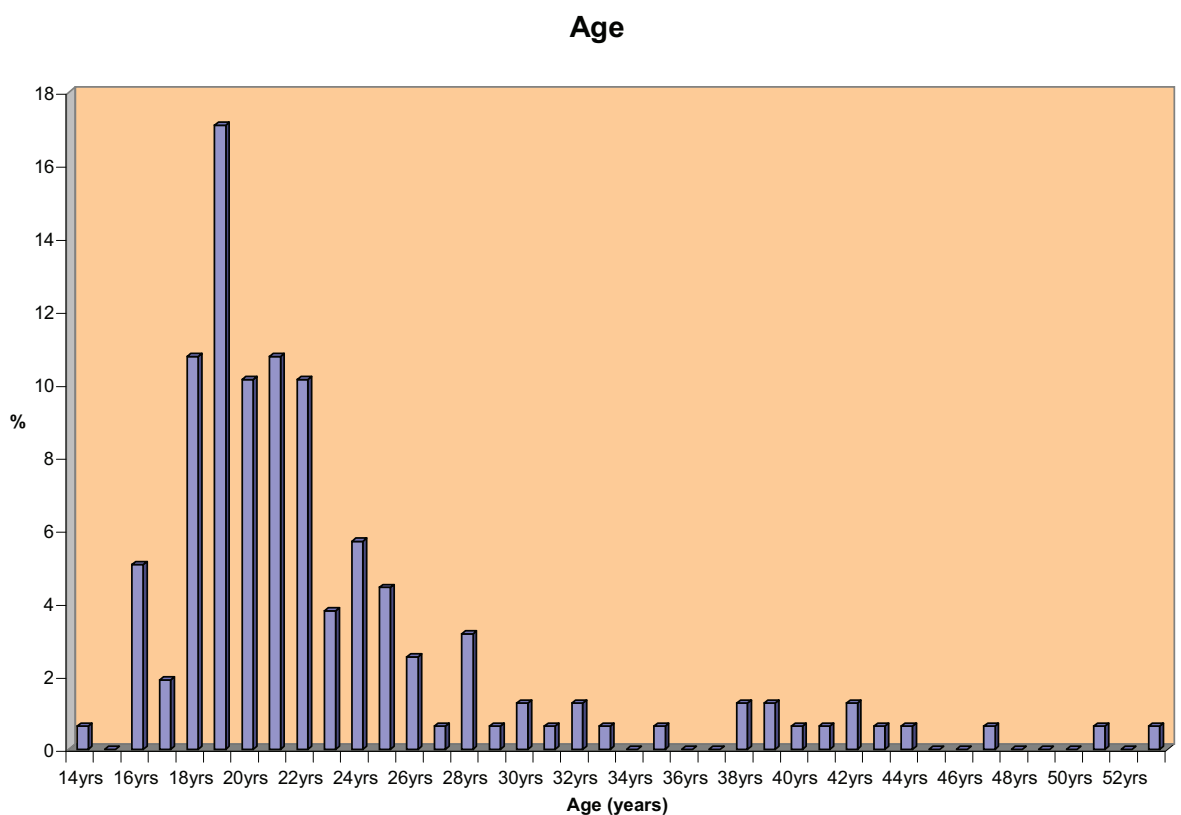
Figure 1

Figure 1 shows that the highest concentration of respondents was between the ages of sixteen and twenty-eight. 1% of respondents were fourteen years of age, none were fifteen, 5.6% were sixteen, 1.9% were seventeen, 11% were eighteen, 17% were nineteen, 10% were twenty, 11% were twenty-one, 10% were twenty-two, 3.4% were twenty-three, 5.6% were twenty-four, 4.4% were twenty-five. Clearly, the highest concentration of respondents (80.9%) was within the originally targeted age range of thirteen to twenty-five years of age.

However, as is the nature of online surveys one cannot control for who will respond and those outside the targeted range also chose to respond. 2.5% were twenty-six, years of age, 0.6% were twenty-seven, 3.1% were twenty-eight, 0.6% were twenty-nine, 1.2% were thirty, 0.6% were thirty-one, 1.2% were thirty-two, 0.6% were thirty-three, 0% were thirty-four, 0.6% were thirty-five, 0% were thirty-six, 0% were thirty-seven, 1.2% were thirty-eight, 1.2% were thirty-nine, 0.6% were forty, 0.6% were forty-one, 1.2% were forty-two, 0.6% were forty-three, 0.6% were forty-four, 0% were forty-five, 0% were forty six, 0.6% were forty-seven, 0% were forty-eight, 0% were forty-nine, 0% were fifty, 0.6% were fifty-one, 0% were fifty-two and 0.6% were fifty-three.

Gender

The gender demographics of participants were as follows:
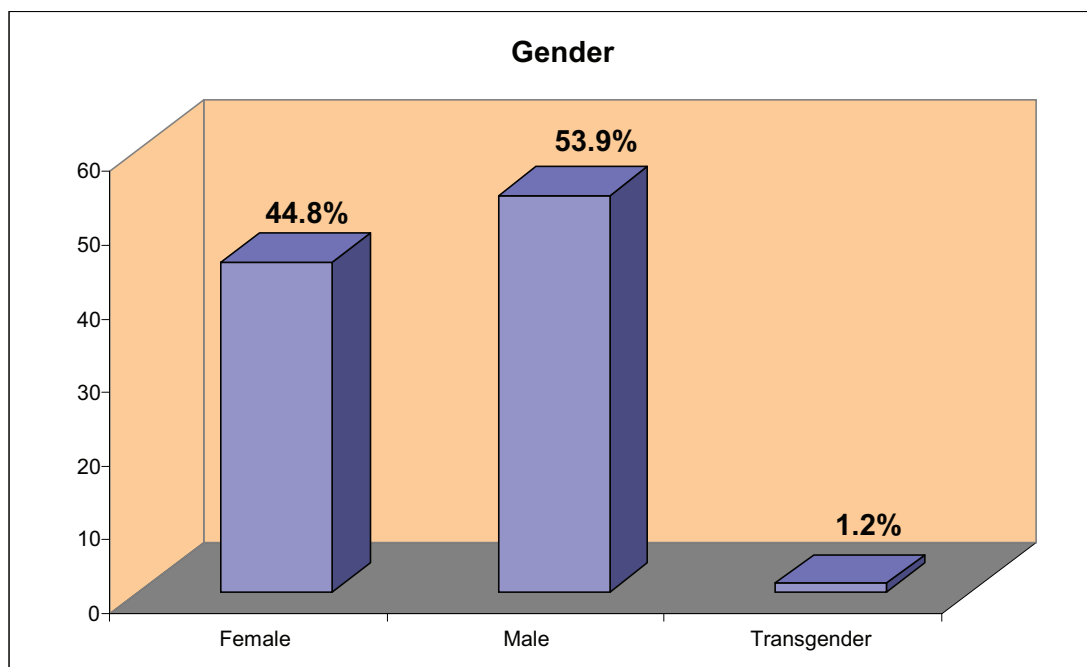
Figure 2

Figure 2 shows that 44.8% of respondents were female, 53.9% were male and 1.2%

Transgender.

Identity

Respondents were asked to indicate their identity and could choose from a set of
responses that included: gay man, lesbian, bisexual man, bisexual woman,
Transgender, heterosexual, unsure and other.
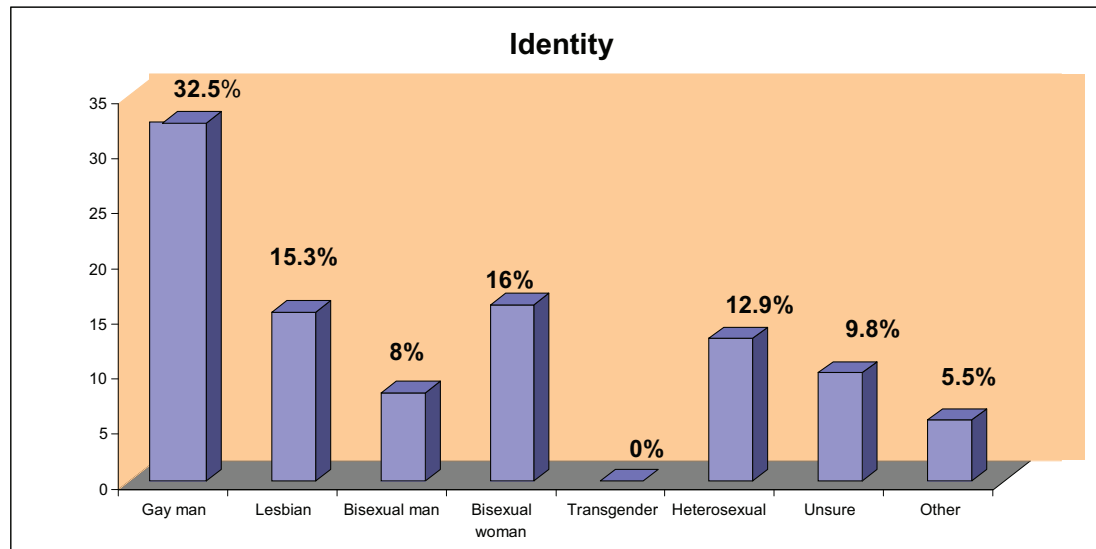
Figure 3

Figure 3 shows that 32.5% of respondents identified themselves as gay man, 15.3%
as lesbian woman, 8% as bisexual man, 16% as bisexual woman, 0% as Transgender,
12.9% as heterosexual, 9.8% as unsure and 5.5% as other. The researchers suggest
that the 0% Transgender indication here is in response to the respondent's perception
of a restrictive use of the term Transgender employed in the study "*I think your definition
of Transgender at the beginning is a bit reductive! What you are describing is transsexual, which is
sort of different*" which may account for the anomaly between gender and identity
responses specific to Transgender.

Participants used the comment box to clarify how they perceived their identity and
such clarifications included;

post-op trans woman;

I just don't call myself anything as I am unsure about the word lesbian,

*I'm bi-curious; I have to adopt the lesbian title but I am more queer and refuse to let society define
me;*

I suppose I'd call myself lesbian. But I hate labels; gay woman; queer;

I am a gay woman, I like women but I don't like the title lesbian so I think of myself as gay.

Level of Comfort with Sexual Identity

Respondents were then asked to indicate their level of comfort in their identity as
lesbian, gay, bisexual or Transgender.
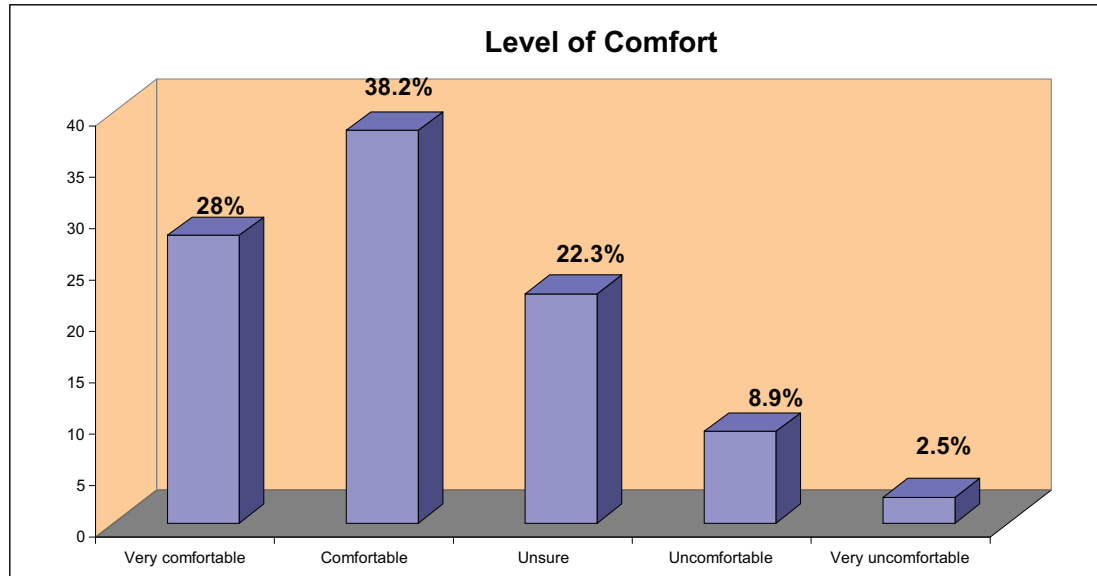
Figure 4

Figure 4 shows that 28% of respondents indicated feeling very comfortable with their
identity, 38.2% indicated comfortable, 22.3% were unsure, 8.9% indicated
uncomfortable and 2.5% indicated very uncomfortable. Therefore, in all 66.2%
indicated feel comfortable with their sexual identification.

Area of Residence

Respondents were asked to indicate where they resided at the time of survey participation.
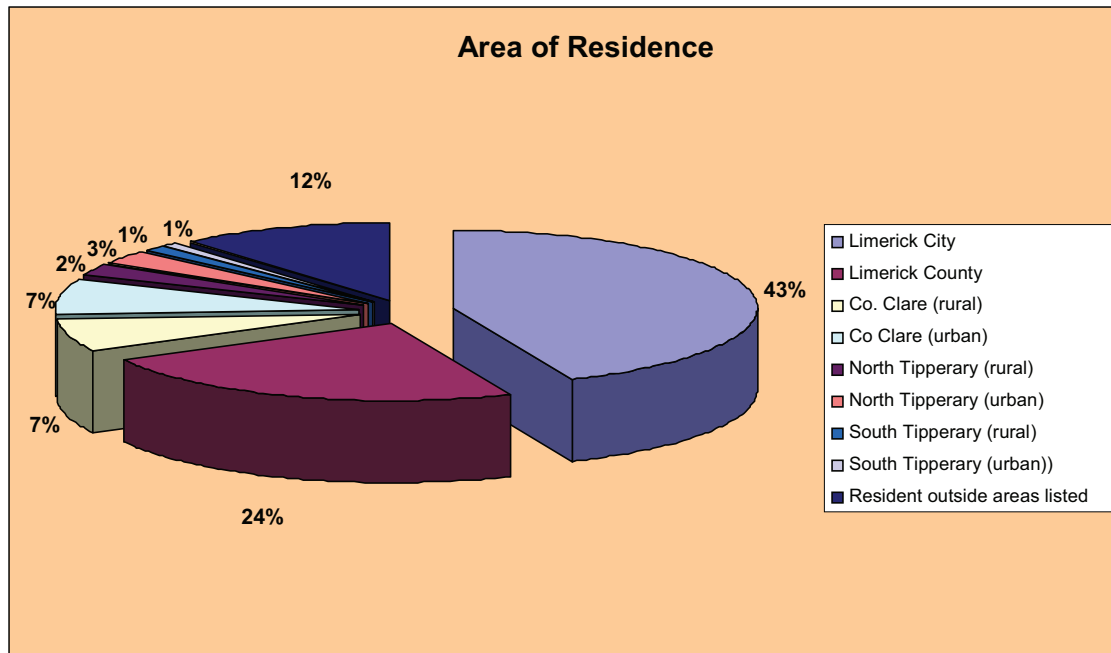
Figure 5

Figure 5 indicates that at the time of survey participation 43% lived in Limerick city. 24% indicated residing in county Limerick and listed places such as: Abbeyfeale, Askeaton, Bruree, Caherconlish, Castletroy, Castleconnell, Dooradoyle, Foynes, Grange, Greenwood, Kilcornan, Knockaderry, Newcastlewest, Pallasgreen.

7% lived in an urban region of Co. Clare and listed places such as Clarecastle, Ennis, Kilrush, Killaloe, and Shannon.   7% lived in Co. Clare rural listing areas such as Ardnacrusha Ardrahan, Broadford, Clonlara, Kildysart, Newmarket on Fergus and Parteen, Whitegate.

In Co. Tipperary 3% were in rural environs with 4% in urban surroundings such as Ballina, Cashel, Neenagh, Newport, Thurles.   12% of respondents were from outside the areas listed in the Mid-West: Bantry, Cork, Dublin, Galway City, Moate, Tralee, Waterford, Wexford (Enniscorthy) and Westport. One respondent from Tipperary was currently living in London (attributing the reason to their sexual identity). One respondent was a third level student (European) on Erasmus exchange.

Current Occupation

Respondents were asked to identify their current occupation.
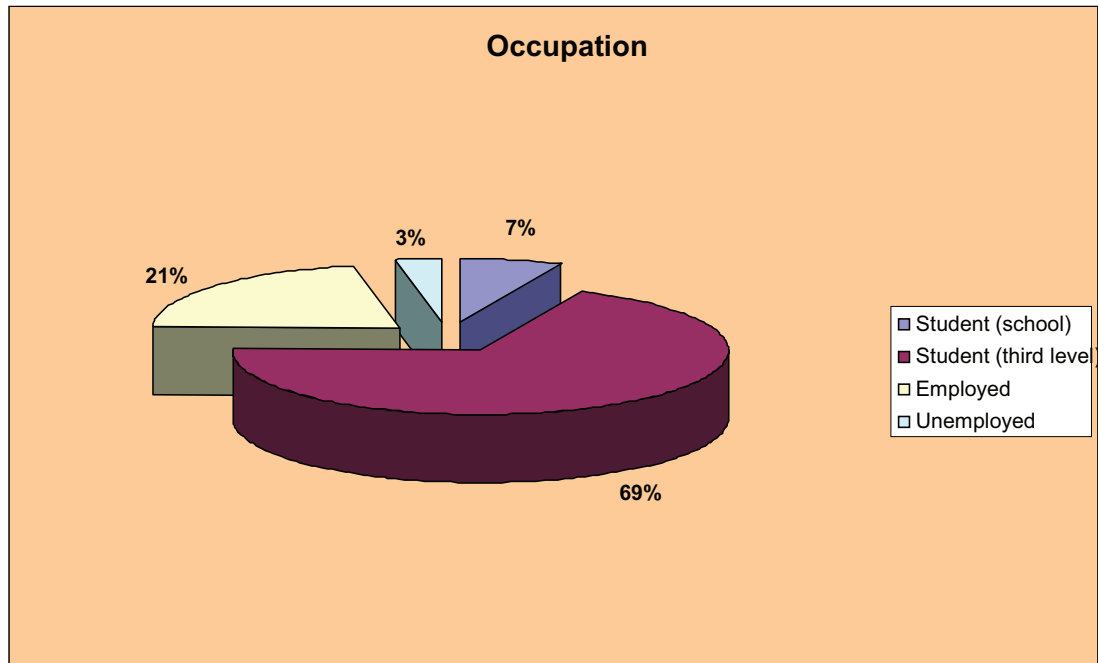
Figure 6

Figure 6 shows that the majority of respondents, 69% were third level students, with 7% of respondents currently students within second level education. 21% of respondents were in employment and 3% were unemployed at the time of survey completion.

4.3 Section B: Perceived Levels of LGBT Acceptability

Level of Acceptability - Family

Participants were asked how acceptable they perceived LGBT to be within their family.
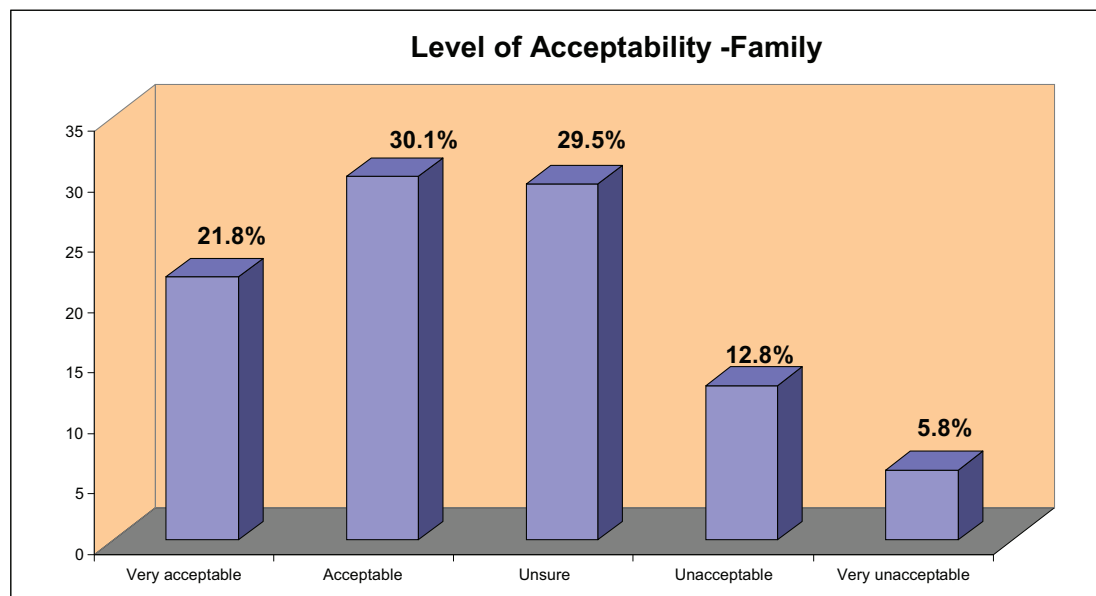
Figure 7

Figure 7 shows the perceived level of acceptability of LGBT amongst their family members. 21.8% indicated that they perceived it to be very acceptable, 30.1% indicated acceptable, 29.5% indicated that they were unsure with regard to levels of acceptability. 12.8% indicated that they perceived LGBT to be unacceptable and 5.8% very unacceptable within their families.

Level of Acceptability - Friends

Participants were asked how acceptable they perceived LGBT to be amongst friends.

Level of Acceptability- Friends
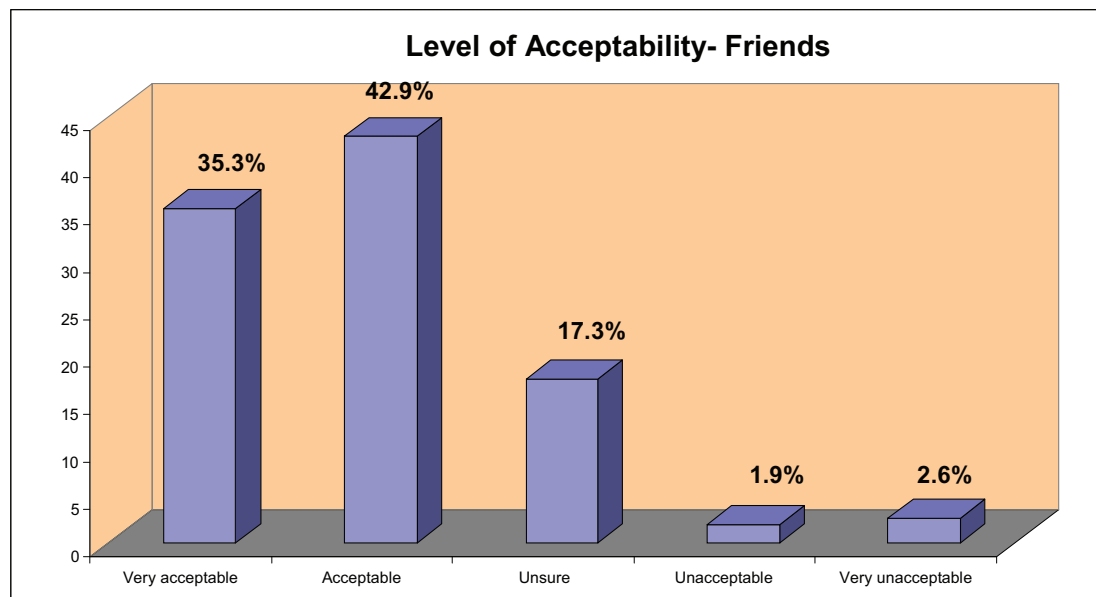
Figure 8

Figure 8 shows the perceived level of acceptability of LGBT amongst their friends. 35.3% indicated that they perceived it to be very acceptable, 42.9% indicated acceptable, 17.3% indicated that they were unsure with regard to levels of acceptability. 1.9% indicated that they perceived LGBT to be unacceptable and 2.6% very unacceptable among their friends.

Level of Acceptability- Community

Participants were asked how acceptable they perceived LGBT to be within their communities.

Level of Acceptability- Community
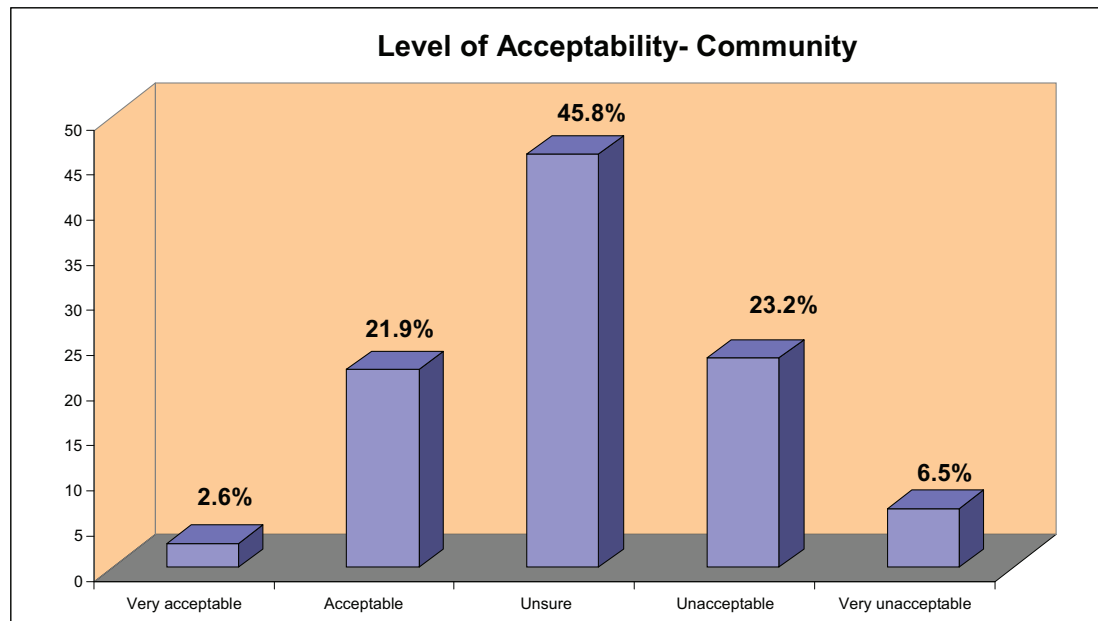
Figure 9

Figure 9 shows the perceived level of acceptability of LGBT amongst their community. 2.6% indicated that they perceived it to be very acceptable, 21.9% indicated acceptable, 45.8% indicated that they were unsure with regard to levels of acceptability. 23.2% indicated that they perceived LGBT to be unacceptable and 6.5% very unacceptable among their communities.

Environment as LGBT Friendly

Participants were asked if they perceived their school/college or workplace to be LGBT friendly.
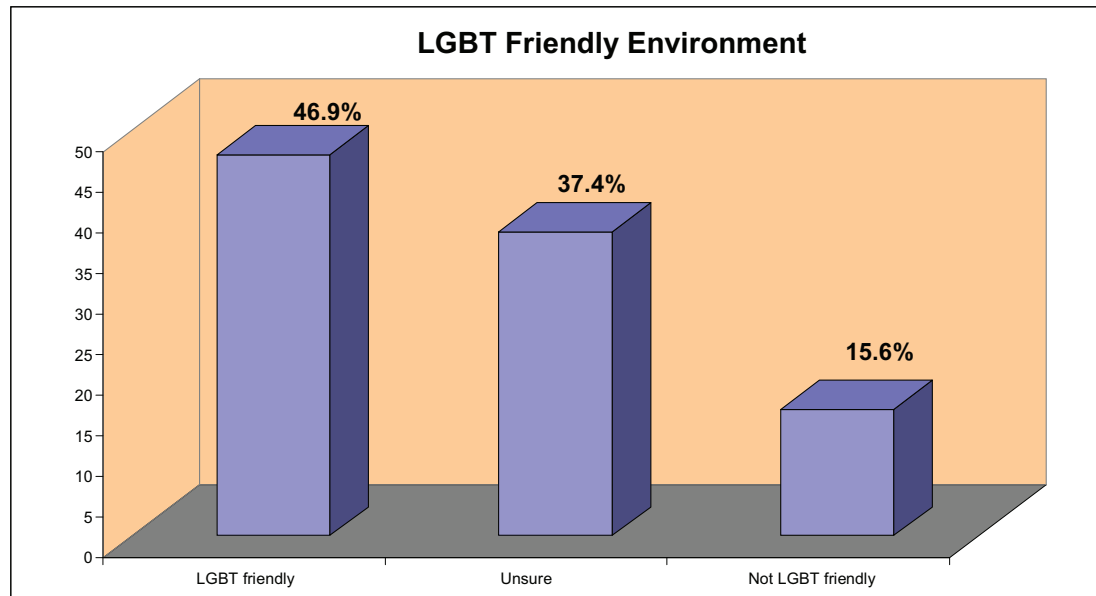
Figure 10

Figure 10 shows that 46.9% of respondents perceived their place of occupation such as workplace, university or school to be LGBT friendly, 37.4% were unsure and 15.6% indicated they perceived it not to be LGBT friendly.

A cross tabulation was done crossing current occupation with perception of LGBT friendliness, in order to identify what places were or were not considered LGBT friendly.

4. Do you feel that your school/college/workplace is LGBT friendly? (Please tick one)				
	What best describes what you do?			
	Student (secondary school)	Student (third-level/university)	Working	Not Working (unemployed)	Response Totals
LGBT friendly	0.00%	51.90%	50.00%	40.00%	47.70%
	(0)	(55)	(16)	(2)	(73)
Unsure	50.00%	37.70%	28.10%	40.00%	36.60%
	(5)	(40)	(9)	(2)	(56)
Not LGBT friendly	50.00%	10.40%	21.90%	20.00%	15.70%
	(5)	(11)	(7)	(1)	(24)

Table 1

Table 1 illustrates the cross tabulation which indicates that no school student perceived their school to be LGBT friendly. 100% of school going respondents indicated unsure or not LGBT friendly. Almost 52% of third level students perceived their environment to be LGBT friendly with approximately 48% either unsure or perceiving their college not to be LGBT friendly. Of those in employment it was half and half with 50% perceiving their workplace to be LGBT friendly and 50% either unsure or not LGBT friendly.

Respondents explained further. For those within the university setting the climate was generally perceived to be LGBT friendly and was evidenced in comments such as:

Well, we have an LGBT society, with lots of members and people who know those members so if that isn't LGBT friendly then I don't know what is?

Art college! We're all individuals, there's not much discrimination.

I'm studying Xxx in UL at the moment and most (not all) people couldn't care less if someone is LGBT. Some people are more stand- offish though but I'd say that's just because they're not used to it because they live in the bog somewhere ;). When given a chance to interact with LGBT the majority of people are more curious than anything. (Although some LGBT people don't do us any justice with the in your face attitudes and bitchiness, and this can be unpleasant to people who have little or no experience with LGBT people and can leave a bad first impression with them).

Topic of LGBT has never been raised in workplace, in university LGBT seem to be largely accepted.

 However, not all felt their respective colleges supportive for example:

 Posters for the LGBT youth group and another LGBT community group have been taken down by college authorities. There's a real thuggish element in some areas of the Uni, so there's homophobia about. The upper management are sort of clueless, though well-meaning, but essentially disinterested in LGBT stuff, though the Union is supportive.

One university student pointed to the invisibility of LGBT within the university lexicon and in the curriculum taught.

All references are made to heterosexuality, all studies even of gender are based on heterosexual relationships. I would feel that the college is not unfriendly, but not transparent to LGBT issues: never addressed, never mentioned, never visible.

Respondents who were school going did not perceive a receptive climate in schools.

Many students don't accept it or use it as an insult.

All Boy's school and the use of gay as a negative term.

There is still a social stigma attached. I don't tell many people as it is none of their business and I am afraid that I will be judged; I get bullied I haven't come out but people know I'm gay! (I'm camp) it's awful but I get over it! I hate being name called but I learned to get over it! I'm used to it! I was very upset over my sexuality last year and thought it was very wrong I even felt like I didn't belong on this planet, but now I'm happy enough with it! I couldn't care I find it normal now! :-D but would like if the bullying stopped! But it's not that bad ...the boys just don't talk to me! They must be afraid!?

In sec. school there was never any talk of homosexuality except in religion where we had this dinosaur of a teacher who strongly protested that the church was against being gay and so was she. It would have been better if there were counselling facilities available then.

Differing perspectives were also evident in workplaces.

I have never had a problem with my co-workers; its not much of an issue where I work, and all the people I work with including the owner are comfortable with the LGBT community, I am not the only one employed there who is Gay.

Some work colleagues would be L.G.B.T. friendly others say they are but actions say otherwise.

I'm really not sure what their policy is or if they've come across LGBT issues before so I really don't know; until people come out and a case presents itself, it is hard to say how friendly a community/workplace is.

With some family members it is acceptable, but not with others. My workplace has some homophobic people in it so it is not easy for me.

In the workplace there is a great deal of homophobic rhetoric. Also in the university there are very little visible supports for the students.

In London it is LGBT friendly but in Ireland it was not so. I moved to London because I am gay I didn't feel I could be honest and happy in Tipperary, lots of hiding of my identity there.

Anger.

The jokes of being in LGBT category are seen as derogatory. You are by people seen to be less of a person by these actions, which are often unintended but are so ingrained in how people think and act.

Homophobic comments at work, so I'm not out at work.

I am not out at work, but I doubt they are gay-friendly based on comments they've made about gay people in the past.

Some respondents were in management positions and in that way had an impact on the prevailing culture;

I am the boss so I create the ethos;

There are and have been LGBT staff members and we deal with LGBT young people on a daily basis.

4.4 Section C: Personal Opinion and Experience

Coming Out

Respondents were asked if they had informed any other person about their LGBT identity.
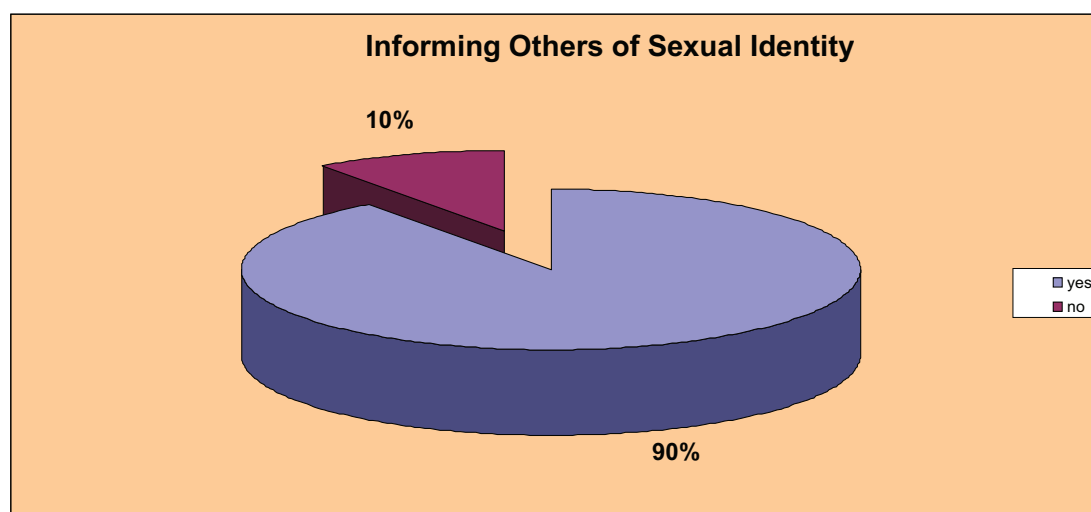
Figure 11

Figure 11 shows that 90% were out to at least one other person while 10% were not. In further explanations as to why they had or had not informed others some respondents feared family responses:

My father is VERY homophobic and I'm not sure about how well he would take the news. I'm really frightened about it and don't really know what to do

My family, despite how much they claim to accept homosexual and bisexual people, would not react well and I don't want to make things worse with them. A lot of people I know, I don't make mention of it because being bisexual is harder for some people to accept because they don't believe you; they think you do it to get attention or guys

Extended family would use it as gossip. Grandparents too old-fashioned to accept it

My parents are very traditional, they view homosexuality as a perversion, as attention seeking (it's only a phase, they will grow out of it) or 'foolishness' as my father puts it. Also I live in a small community, If I made it known to too many people, I am afraid that the gossip would end up 'embarrassing' my parents as they would view it as something shameful and a poor reflection on their parenting abilities

I would be scared of the reaction from my father in particular!! My mother would understand but I'm still unsure to tell her. I'm discovering my sexuality and I'm confused but I tend to enjoy being with females more and I have more feelings for them!

Unsure of their reaction... I hear my parents on about people who are gay and they simply say 'he's weird that fella' to say he's gay. My younger sister (10) has even picked up on this kind of lingo and she thinks those who are gay should be embarrassed....as if it's shameful or something. Then there's all

my guy friends who we've talked about 'hot girls' for ages and it's kinda hard to turn around and say 'ya I was lying'... and if I did tell them would I still be their friend in the same way? I think it would definitely change things

My family would be devastated

Others were waiting to be asked rather than initiate the disclosure themselves:

They haven't asked me yet but if they did I'd say yes.

Many indicated not feeling ready or unsure how to approach disclosure and wrote comments such as:

not ready to

Am not ready

I'm not sure just yet, would prefer to be straight!!!

Unsure what to do

I am not very sure if I would categorise myself as one thing or another. I am still unsure whether I should classify myself as bisexual or not. Until I have figured it out better myself I don't want to create unnecessary problems or drama.

Not sure how to

Some feared harassment and homophobia:

Afraid of reaction and having to listen once more to 'oh really??? I am not like that but I have nothing against you now'

I never met anyone who rejected me, or homosexuality. But everyone has an opinion about it and urge to say it instead of listening to you

My mom has hints but does not want to hear I think

I don't feel I have to show who I live with to everybody

I hear other people being slagged off like gay lesbo and that is just a joke. I don't want to be experiencing that for real

I think they wouldn't understand my sexuality as it's a small homophobic town and my family are traditional Catholics

I am too scared! to tell the people I have said no to!

I'm afraid of being mocked, slagged, homophobia, etc

Choice of person to tell

Those respondents who had informed at least one other person were asked whom they had told. Respondents could tick as many boxes that applied.

Who Respondents Informed

Category	Percentage
Everyone	42.7%
Other LGBT people	86.1%
Mother	60%
Father	46.5%
Sister	39.2%
Brother	37.2 %
A friend	90.3%
Youth leader	32.6%
LGBT support	38.8%
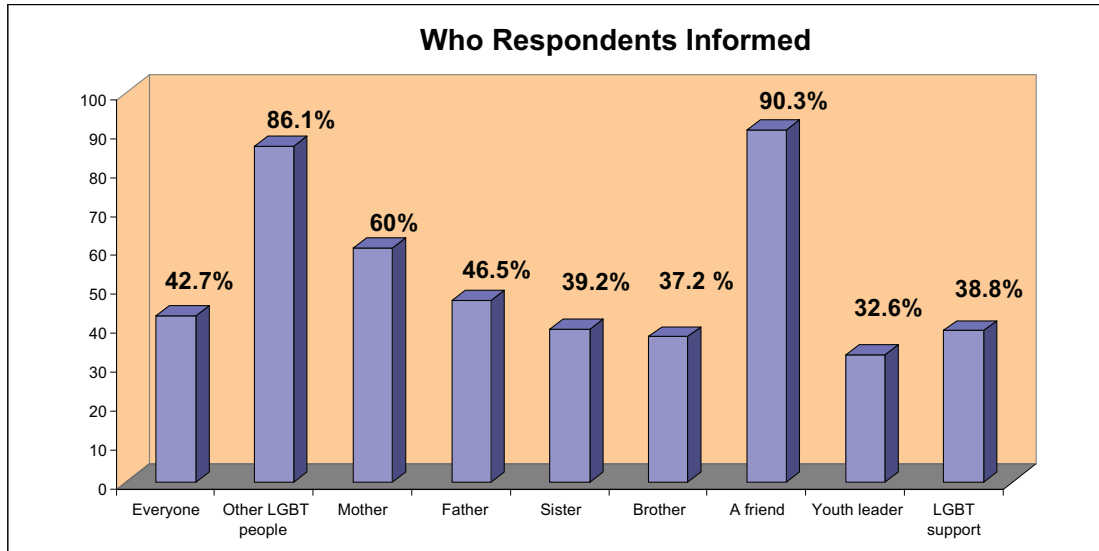
Figure 12

Figure 12 shows that less than half of respondents (42.7%) were out to everyone. Respondents mostly told a friend (90.3%) followed by other LGBT people (86.1%). Mothers were the next most frequently informed (60%), followed by fathers (46.5%). Sisters next most likely to be told (39.2%), LGBT support (38.8%), followed by brother (37.2%). Youth leaders fared as least likely to be told at 32.6%.

Experiences of Homophobia

Respondents were asked if they had experienced homophobic behaviours.
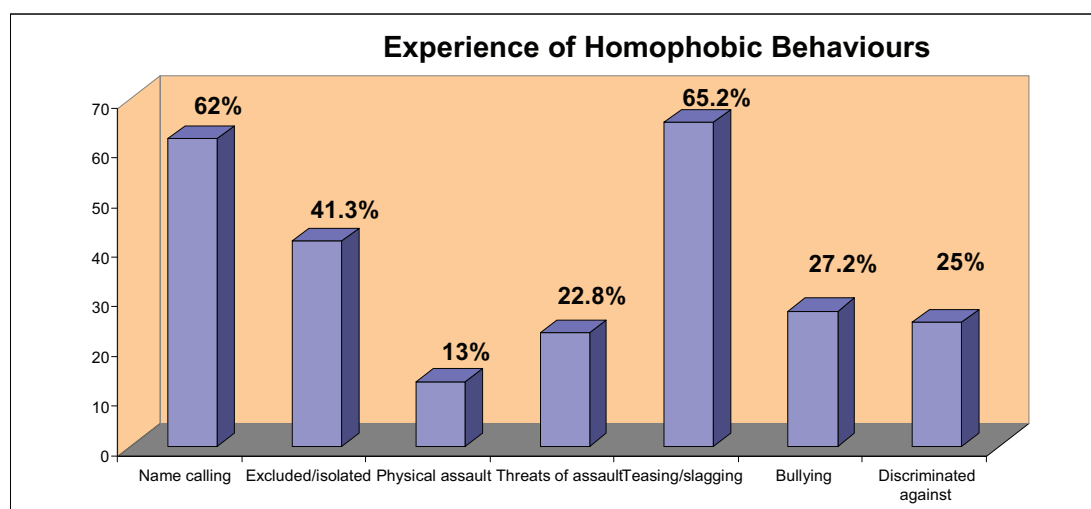
Figure 13

Figure 13 shows that respondents experienced varied manifestations of homophobia. 65.2% experienced teasing/slagging. 62% experienced name calling. 41.3% cited being excluded or isolated. 27.2% identified experiencing bullying, 25% experienced discrimination, 22.8% identified experiencing threats of physical assault and 13% identified experiencing actual physical assault. Respondent's comments included;

Strong sense of implicit exclusion by family

I do have gay mannerisms which are noticed and jumped on by others as a source of amusement.

Experiences of homophobia impacted the well-being of respondents and also influenced decision making. School was the most frequently referred to in relation to homophobic bullying.

Leaving school early

When I was in school I got a lot of slagging of people who thought I was gay and they used to bully me because of it. Other people knew about it too but did nothing that was really hard for me

I went to a different secondary school than many of my friends to avoid the other people in my school

Being bullied in secondary school actually enticed me to study harder and get into Uni here in Limerick...a way of getting away from the bullies?!

I found name calling happened particularly in secondary school. It can happen the odd time but never as bad as Secondary School can be because I think you are more vulnerable and have yet to completely be comfortable with who you are. Secondary school kids can be mal- informed I think

I was treated badly-ish in school. I use the '-ish' as it was bad my definition of most others in school, but on the LGBT scale it wasn't bad at all

I changed class in college due to bullying based on my orientation and gender expression

I moved away from my hometown. I could not live my life in the town I grew up in.
When I first told people about my sexuality in my first job I did not feel accepted, I felt isolated by the guys especially, so I left my job and got another where I was made feel more acceptable

I am very careful of how I am perceived and I hide my identity from many people

No, I internalised it and kept quiet, I did not know where to go for help. It made me cautious to tell people and afraid of letting it be known publicly

Excluded when all the (straight) girls are going out for a night to every 'straight' place and no balance of going somewhere 'gay'

No, just really upset me I cut myself once but never since!! :D I'm happy now! Sometimes

Made me withdraw

Put up the shields

Made me so determined that I went back in the closet, And then did not surface again until my transition could not be derailed by the actions of others

As such no, however I was discriminated against and bullied by a supervisor in my place of work recently which is an equal opportunities company. The worst thing is the company supported the supervisor's stance. The issue is still open and legal road is likely

There was no one I could really talk to

One respondent who is also a parent wrote:

It made me change my son's school because he was getting bullied badly because of my being gay.

4.5 Section D: Services and Support

Respondents who had indicated experiences homophobic behaviours were asked if they sought support.
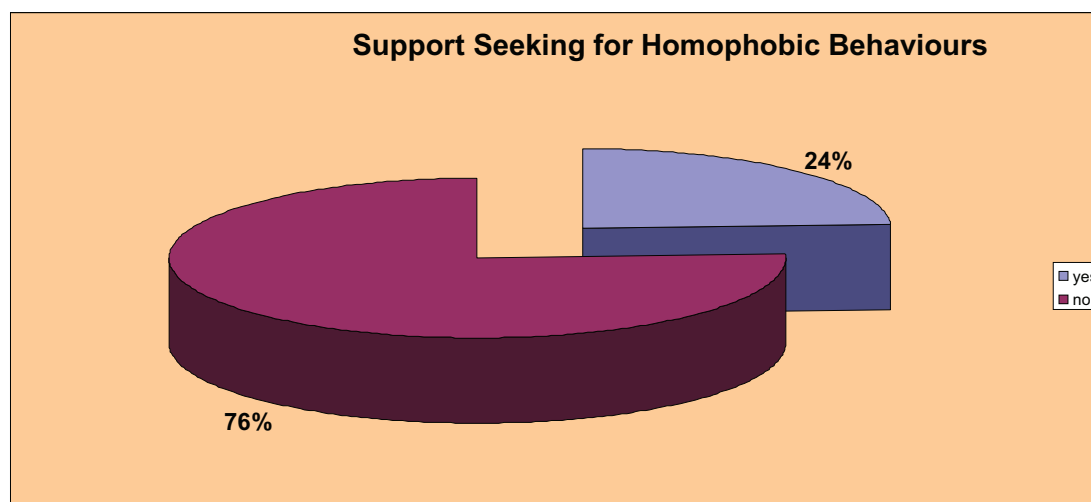
Figure 14

Figure 14 shows that of those who experienced homophobic behaviours, while 76% had not sought help. 24% sought it from varied and often more than one source. 14.3% sought support from a helpline or a support service. 47.6% sought support from a counsellor. 23.8% turned to family for support. 33% turned to partners. Close friends remained the main source of support with 81% indicating that they sought support from their close friends. Other sources that respondents indicated were:

- *Principal of the college;*
- *Doctor; Teacher;*
- *The School Chaplain, however she was of NO help as she did not believe in being gay, she was a mean old nun;*
- *Internet Friends Camp;*
- *Chat room;*
- *LGBT websites – e.g. HRC, Afterellen, Gaire, etc*

Social and Service Supports

The general social outlets used by respondents were pubs and cinema, with 66.7% of respondents indicating those as their most frequently used social outlets. 23.5% of respondents indicated that they had no social outlet currently. 20.5% accessed a sports club, 14.4% accessed music groups, 12.9% were part of a youth group or club

and 10.6% were involved in a theatre or drama group.   Respondents also indicated that the general social outlets available to them were:

- *Karate Club; volunteering. running the college lgbt group;*
- *Irish dancing, horse riding; dance as part of an all-Ireland dance champion team;*
- *12 step meetings;*
- *Media group and lgbt group;*
- *Irish speaking society on campus, a branch of conradh na gaeilge; political society;*
- *UL Archery Soc;*
- *Dance;*
- *community radio station;*
- *Pub that is really all there is for most people my age*

When asked what types of supports (LGBT specific) should be available to them, participants indicated the following:
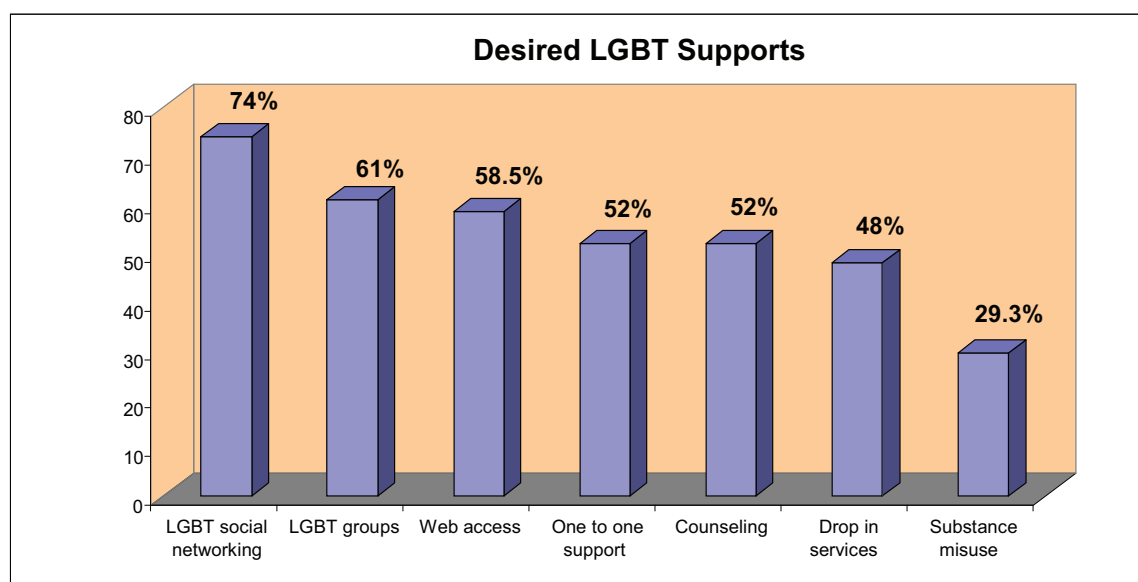
Figure 15

Figure 15 shows that 74% desired social networking; 61% LGBT groups, 59.5% sought web access, 52% identified one to one support and the same (52%) identified counselling, 48% sought drop in services and 29.3% identified substance misuse as an area in need of focus. Respondents had many comments to make about desired supports which included a plea that services be adequately supported:

Rainbow Support Services should be adequately supported by the HSE

Social networking was a common desire:

Any of these options are great outlets for LGBT people; A club for lgbt people to meet; Maybe more gay hang out places?; A gay bar in Limerick would be useful

Wider support that included family was suggested:

The more the better. But I think what should really be put in place are social groups and help for friends and families of homosexuals, so they are educated into what homosexuality really is. Most people think they know but they are full of prejudices and don't really know

I think parents should have educational classes once their child reaches fourth or fifth class in primary school. Many parents are embarrassed to talk about sex or sexuality as it is a taboo and rely on schools to do the work

A parent's class where issues such as sex education, sexual health, sexual orientation, puberty, communication with their child and all such related items should be mandatory. Booklets help but don't have the same effect

A group that can provide information and a place to feel safe was advocated:

I really don't know, it would have to be something confidential anyway, maybe something on the net the likes of a forum

LGBT support group for people with mental health issues, as I have found there can be a lot of ignorance/ stigma in community

Those that have bad experiences will then have somewhere to go, someone to talk to and feel welcomed legal info and awareness and lgbt rights campaigners in the government

The groups would allow the community 2 be more accepting...it's no longer individuals it's a group! The 1-1 support could really help those coming out or just curious...and the counselling should be available to every secondary student regardless of sexuality... but it would help LBGT to deal with any on going issues. Another thing sex ed. is a joke it just tells a man and a woman how to make a baby...face it we learn that from science any way. It needs to have more about infection and diseases hetero and homo

While there was a high awareness of LGBT service in their areas (60.8% were aware of some LGBT service in their area), only 20% indicated that they currently use this service. Limerick city was the most widely known nearest service to respondents however, other areas did not fare so well in awareness levels.

Awareness of local services

Respondents were asked to indicate their awareness of local services.

Nearest Services Known to Respondents
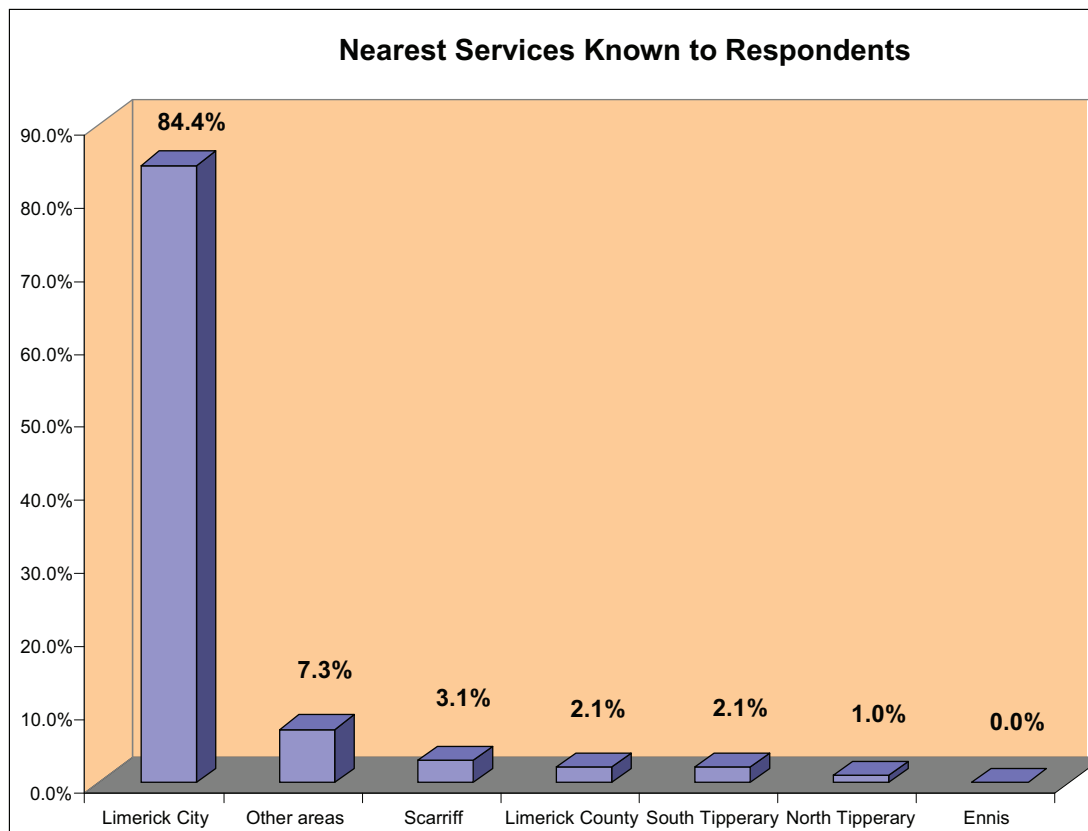
Figure 16

Figure 16 shows that the majority of respondents (84.4%) were aware of the nearest service to them being Rainbow in Limerick. 7.3 % were in other areas. 3.1% were aware of some support in Scarriff, 2.1% were aware of support in Limerick county and South Tipperary respectively. 1% were aware of support in North Tipperary and there was no awareness of any local service in Ennis. In relation to types of supports currently being used by respondents Rainbow Support Services emerged as the most frequently used, the coffee dock emerged as a welcome place to come to and a place where friends are made. Other supports accessed included:

- *Support group in Scarriff*
- *lgbt group in listowel co.kerry womens camp network;*
- *TENI; Online Trans/Gay/Bi/Queer resources on Live Journal, myspace, Bebo and others.;*
- *Drop in; Dining out group;*
- *LGBT sports group; online social networking websites*
- *Night clubs; events organised by LGBT groups; I have been to talks in Galway city on trans allys and psychology students entering research with IAT on attitudes to gay people and some other really interesting talks like those;*
- *Gay websites.*

Level of satisfaction with existing service

Respondents who were accessing services were asked to rate current levels of satisfaction.

Levels of Satisfaction with LGBT Service Provision
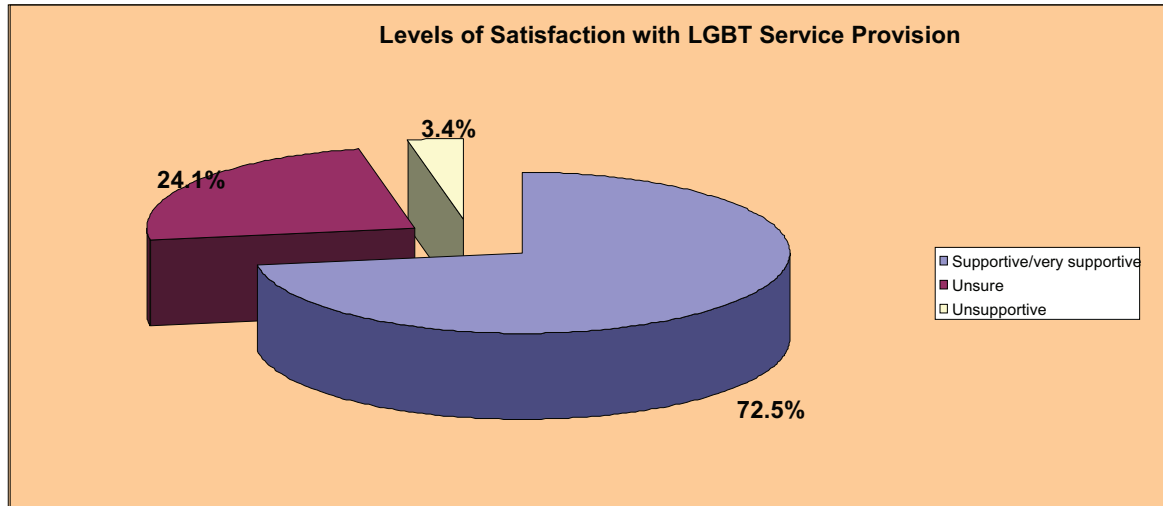
Figure 17

Figure 17 shows that of those accessing service 72.5% found them to be very supportive or supportive. 24.1% were unsure and 3.1% found the experience unsupportive. When asked if they would access LGBT support services if they were available to them, respondents indicated an interest in accessing such a service.

Willingness to Access an LGBT Support Service
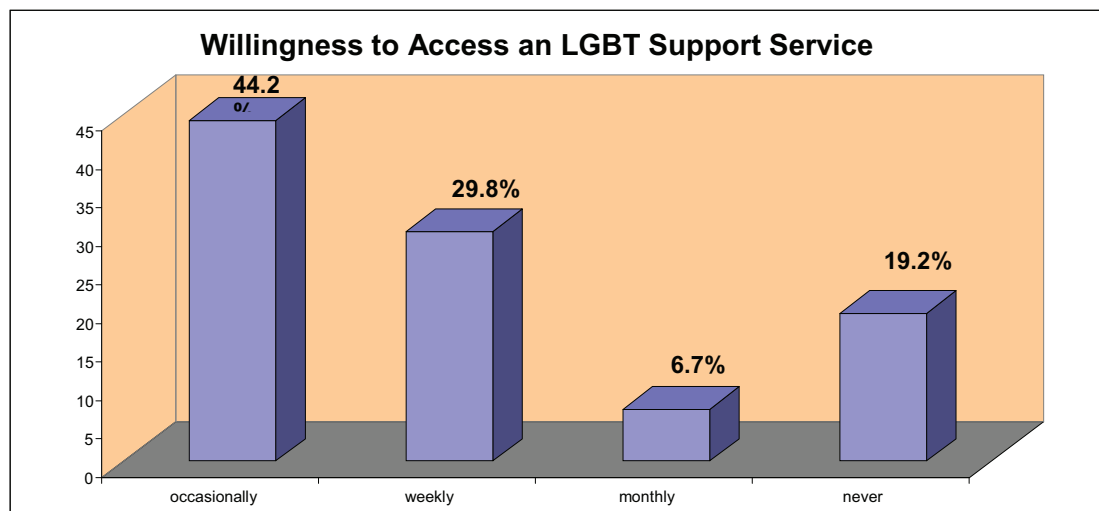
Figure 18

Figure 18 shows that if support were available locally 44.2% would like to access it occasionally. 39.8% would access it weekly, 6.7% would access it monthly and 10.2% did not perceive themselves in need of support. Reasons for reluctance to access services locally included:

They are close to where I live but are not as easily accessible due to the fact I travel in and out of limerick most days and they are only open in office hours;

Don't feel comfortable accessing the services for fear of exposing myself to others;

I am aware that there is counselling available but I have yet to feel that I need it.

When asked what would make it easier for respondents to access LGBT support services. LGBT Interest Workshops featured as most desired by participants at 37.1%. Also deemed of interest were scheduled meetings (33%). Transport also featured as important at 15.5%. Respondents also gave comments to elaborate on their answers and confidentiality emerged as important:

Assurances of confidentiality; confidential one to one support;

Weekend meeting's so I don't have to tell my parents where I'm actually going! like I can say I'm going shopping!

Support in the processes involved in navigating identity also emerged:

At the moment my main support needs are around my Trans identity rather than my queer identity. I've been out for years. Raising of comfort; awareness levels around queer transmen and bisexuality would make things easier for me. At the moment, it feels like I'm splitting the two parts of myself.

Coming Out Support

I think a service that lets young people work through stuff at their own pace and isn't pushy about telling others

A safe community also emerged frequently:

Promoting the sense of community of friendship and of the normality of it. Making it 'other' all the time makes it worse

A place for the lgbt community to meet and chat sort of like a drop in centre but not as serious something fun

Openness and interest in attracting new people - no cliques!

A fun place to stop in and have a chat and laugh not to feel like this is an LGBT service you have to talk about gay things and listen to them but somewhere you can go and hang out and make friends like with no hassle with games music film etc

Well, not formal uncomfortable meetings, fun and relaxing things such as games, outings to the cinema, going for a drink, there is nothing wrong with anyone who is LGBT, so why treat them any different.

The desire for inclusiveness but also assumptions of difference was voiced by some:

It's no longer the case that young people should need to split their friends into LGBT and Straight. Nor should they have to. Sometimes there's a heterophobia in LGBT organisations that doesn't recognise the Bisexual as much as Gay or Lesbian individuals. There is a lot of bi-phobia on the scene and unwittingly spread through unchallenged assumptions. Some young people turn away from services

offered due to it feeling like friends have to be excluded unless they fit a certain mould, like they have to be Gay enough or Lesbian enough.

The problem with most LGBT groups is you're thrown with people who, at the end of the day, have very different interests from your own. Just because you're all gay and may have had the same hard time coming out doesn't mean you have much to tell each other. So conversations revolve around: 'So how long have you known you were gay?'; and stuff like that. I am more for projects for gay people, a gay play, a gay soccer team like the ones they have at uni in Galway, a gay reading book club around gay books or something. So we have other things to say than talk about the same coming out story over and over again.

Not necessarily labelling themselves instantly as LGBT which can be very off-putting for people who don't think they can ever/would define themselves completely along the spectrum. An open discussion night with heterosexual people on getting the issues out there like dating: how it differs and how it is the same-and also to discuss how heterosexuals react to an LBGT couple. Some incentives like a games night where sexuality is not the central issue but have the freedom to express themselves in that environment would be an idea also.

Types of activities

Respondents were asked the types of activities they perceived would be attractive to them. There were a lot of responses to the open comment section of this question with varied and practical suggestions. The suggestions are listed here as follows:

- *Self awareness workshops*

- *More general interest topics*

- *Activities open to everyone, concerts, talks and conferences*

- *Nights out*

- *Meetings not set in pubs all the time*

- *Advertisement in newspapers and on the radio.*

- *More LGBT youth groups in rural areas*

- *Physical sport stuff and outings*

- *Artists; cultural events as well as political events and a larger social scene with scope to meet new people.*

- *Interactive drama games, art therapy workshops, coming out workshops, visiting other youth group*

- *Music gigs (in my experience, a lot of LGBT people come from an alternative background like Goth, Metal, Emo etc. and might like this).*

- *So....anything from comic conventions to whatever else the young people themselves suggest. I'm not young enough to make the right suggestions anymore. Learning a skill or craft together tends to bring up good opportunities for youth workers to deal with issues around esteem and peer pressure etc.*

- *Anything arts based, film making/watching, arts and crafts*

- *Some self defence*

- *Drag workshops*

- *Not necessarily an activity but to know they would feel total acceptance would help greatly.*

- *Computer courses maybe?*
- *Outings, guest lectures, weekend workshops, poster campaigns*
- *Friendship*
  Interest stuff like drama, theatre, outings

- *Counselling from gay counsellors who really understand what it is like so you have one to one space to chat.*

- *Movies/series nights, nights out, debates about lgbt issues, book clubs*

- *Film clubs*

- *Drama groups*

- *Cinema, concerts, parties, street events with music and colours, speeches denouncing discrimination, making European law available to anyone to know their rights*
- *sports activities etc*

- *Parties, BBQs things like that. social events where people can meet people like them*

- *A gig in aid of these support services???*

- *A meeting with an Garda LGBT liaison officer who is hard to get a hold of.*

- *Fun activities like quizzes and a friendly and laid back atmosphere. Music always helps*

- *Talks on relevant matters and charity events like those of outwest etc.*

- *Making it relevant –*

- *Outreach to schools etc...*

- *Young people want primarily social outlets, club, pub scene, large groups banish loneliness*

- *Some kind of activities that are very structured, I think something like youth club...where the watch DVDs organise discos (especially helpful for LGBT if discos etc done on a county scale more networking) paint balling...*

- *Unsure as I am in early 40's however, when I was younger knowing that there was gay and gay friendly bar around helped. Open advertising of gay supports (switchboard) in secondary schools is a great step forward.*

- *Disco, meetings, cafe, adventure outings*

- *Involving straight allies and creating activities where common interests provide comfortable connections.*

As a conclusion to the online questionnaire respondents were invited to make any additional comments they wished to. The reason for this inclusion was to open opportunities for respondents to freely articulate their thoughts. Many varied comments emerged. Some respondents used it to call for specific support and culture change in specific towns such as Scarriff, Ennis and South Tipperary.

Please try get something good into Scarriff.

A group in Ennis please.

I think Ennis is a nice town I lived here all my life there are a lot of people who accept the LGBT community but there are also those who don't and I think a lot of it is down to the fact they don't understand it they think its all YMCA, Madonna, frocks and manly girls or feminine boys. We need a place where we can go that isn't so cliché with normal every day music and things to do so people can see its not all I'm gay gay gay.

Being originally from South Tipperary (Clonmel area) I've noted that a complete lack of any social outlet or support is in place for LGBT people in this area. A significant amount of homophobia and ignorance surrounding the LGBT issues seems to be rampant and it is my experience and others that LGBT individuals are treated as abhor rations. This is no doubt due to a certain degree of misinformation among people living in these areas. Many LGBT people from the area do not begin opening up to others about their orientation until they've moved away for college to the larger towns and cities where a certain level of acceptance is found.

The timing of group meetings was raised:

If there was a drop in centre available during the week after half 4 it'd be really good!!

The need to protect oneself even within group process emerged

From my own experience with un-stable people in the group that I attend, I think there should be some way of keeping other members of the group's personal information, e.g. mobile phone numbers, private and not to be distributed amongst the group without the persons full consent.

Resistance to stereotype was also articulated:

I know I'm one of the few lucky ones that haven't been met with 'intolerance'; or any major bad experiences, probably due to the fact that I don't parade around acting different and drawing attention to myself, in other words 'mincing.' I know some people when they come out feel the need to act a certain way to fit in with their newly found gay community but it tends to alienate close friends and family members making the whole experience harder for them to accept. Personally I don't think there is anything wrong with just being you and not to feel pressured into thinking you have be camp or bitchy. I personally found my friends and family to be more help than the gay community. If you could educate young people more on that it would be great. Why fit into a bad stereotype! No offence meant!

Comments specifically related to service provision were also in evidence with some suggestions around not necessarily promoting events as LGBT specific:

Interconnecting the various services is key. Local government offices, health boards and businesses (HR officers) should all be aware of the supports available. Advertising services shouldn't only be in GCN or sporadically. The web site is a big step forward. Services should also be about fun and coming together to have good times. It's through chilled out relaxed times together that friendships are built to sustain people through rougher times. Plus people are proud and may not want to go to a 'Support Service' but would quite happily attend a cookery class given by a queer chef or book circle, sci-fi group, art class and so on. If they're based in a building where information is readily available, it makes for a good combination. Most people need someone to share a cuppa and a natter with where being LGBTQ isn't the issue. That's how communities are built.

The need to work with young people emerged strongly:

It is really important to help young people. I left Ireland because of being gay and I feel much happier and honest where I am now. School was the hardest time of my life and others must really be feeling that too now. There was nothing there for me. Please find a way to help the young people in school

who may be just trying to survive to get out of school to college. Counselling support from people who really know what it is like is so important too, you would never feel like you could tell a teacher they'd run a mile.

Tackling social stigma is hard, a lot of the images my parents have of the LGBT are based on a lot of TV shows where the characters are excessively 'camp' this does not bode well with their 'down to earth'; sensibilities. Also conditioning that it is somehow wrong is still being ingrained into young people. The insult 'that is so gay'; or worse 'you are Gay'; means that at a young age there is a negative association. Most of the worst verbal abuse that I have gotten on the street is from younger people. I personally think that this generation may be more comfortable with the possibility of the act of sex. The topic is still taboo, even among heterosexuals and not talked about properly. That has lead to a lot of conflicts in this generation. Females are now 'liberated'; so can go and have as much fun as they like, great but they would not advertise too much as they would be considered sluts by a traditional measure. A guy in the same position would not have as much social shame.
An under 18 gay prom would be brill.

The importance of the contribution support can make was also articulated:

I might not be typical of most gay people, because I was eleven when I had my first girlfriend and by the time I was fourteen, I was fully out. However I lived in four different countries and I know from experience Catholic countries like Ireland or Italy are not so good to live in when you are gay. In England, homosexuality is just one of those things. I don't know how often I'd make use of any youth group and such like myself because I'm a hard working girl and not a party animal. However I would strongly encourage any initiative to help the LGBT community lead a better life because being gay can sometimes feel lonely.

Self awareness is the key element required to help support the LGBT community to help themselves. The incidents of abusive behaviour and substance abuse within the community is chronic. An arena to support the community to gain greater self awareness would be a great benefit.

Gotta love the work that ye do, even though I don't avail of it ;-)

Keep up the good work :)

Some suggestions were made in terms of support provision

Poster campaigns, with topics of 'gay is ok' or 'who cares'. The garda liaison officer should learn to do his specific task. Make themselves known to all the LGBT community.

There is a group being set up by a man in Clonmel to organise nights in Clonmel and it's for people in Tipperary http://www.bebo.com/Profile.jsp?MemberId=8391035362
Not sure if it helps or not.

Comments specific to the survey were articulated. Two respondents were unsure about the survey in terms of its focus on LGBT and the lack of inclusion for heterosexual respondents.

I am not sure about this survey; *you are discriminating heterosexuals.*

Not many places for a straight person to answer. I know it's a gay survey but there should be parts for straight people who openly supportive of gay people to answer in the survey

However a strongly supportive theme emerged:

Thank you for this questionnaire. I'm in a small town and I don't like the idea that my family could get slagged about me if people knew and I don't want to hurt my family either. Sometimes I get so stressed about it I think it makes me ill.

Hope I could be of some help!

I think it is great that you are doing this research. I come from a very rural farming community so it is not easy and support is really needed especially to be there for when a person is ready to access it

Thanks

Thanks for the interest. Any tablets that could change me into a straight person?? :)

Best of luck with the study :)

I think your definition of Transgender at the beginning is a bit reductive! What you are describing is transsexual, which is sort of different. Otherwise, thanks for creating this survey; it's good to know that you're on the case, trying to make things better for LGBT people.

Your label Transgender covers a very broad church :) If its TS folk which are the only one's I can talk about. Then having a list of local medical/psychological services/professionals who have dealt with this subject before is probably the best you can do.

Thank you for the Questionnaire, it is great to have something like this. I would be interested in what the results are. Hope we get to see them! :-)

I really hope surveys like this bring forward the issues of the community so that life for the generations to come can be easier for them!

Thank you for doing this.

Chapter 5 Results of Qualitative Data Collection

5.0 Introduction

This chapter details the emergent themes from the qualitative data collection phase. These themes are presented under the three main categories of identity, societal pressures and supports. Pseudonyms have been provided to safeguard the anonymity of participants.

In particular under category of identity the themes are:

- The participants' concerns with regard to coming out, family, friends, gender, workplace, social acceptance, equality, identity and health impact.

Under the category of societal pressure the prevailing themes are:

- The sources of pressure felt by participants such as homophobic bullying, prevailing culture, school, church and rural/urban cultures.

Under the category of supports, the prevailing themes are:

- Current provision of LGBT services, social networking, counselling services and issues of accessibility.

5.1 Section E: Identity

Young LGBT people face particular challenges as they navigate their sexual identity. The process of disclosing sexual identity or "coming out" placed particular stress on participants. The challenges in coming out varied from worries about the reactions of family, friends, to how work colleagues would react. These worries were compounded by their concerns with regard to the reactions of their community and prevailing societal cultures of homophobia. All participants in the qualitative research phase were out to more than one person, though not all were openly out. This was encapsulated in phrases such as '*I am out to everyone'; 'I am out to my friends'; 'Out as in I don't hide it'; I am out to certain people…just a select few that I trust. I am out to my mam but no one else in my family.*' Some participants were careful about being out at work

and this was evident in comments such as '*Everyone but work'; "Well at work I am not out."* One participant indicated the potential danger he perceived in coming out: '*I am just out to my family because it is easy to get beaten up here in this town.'* While another was reluctant to be out to everyone '*I just don't feel the need to be.'*

Coming to terms with identity was a topic that dominated interviews and focus groups:

> *Gay man and proud of it …*
>
> *(John).*

> *Because like coming to terms with your identity like it's a difficulty….for some anyway it's a difficult process*
>
> *(Adam).*

Some articulated always having knowledge of their identity:

> *I always knew I was gay, I always knew I was attracted to guys; I never had any problem with it personally*
>
> *(Keith).*

Developing LGBT identity was perceived as a challenge but had a fun side too:

> *I suppose some people would face the challenge are they bisexual or are they gay or are they heterosexual or what? Like some people in their teens might just go through a phase, a certain phase you do go through like they just want to be heterosexual or they want to be gay or they want to be bisexual. It's a kind of fun challenge to go through at the same time you get to experiment and experience different things and feelings but at the same time it's scary because you could walk down the street and you might look at another guy and you would be like why is this happening to me because it is much easier to be heterosexual then you wouldn't get the slagging or whatever.*
>
> *(Patrick).*

> *I think it's a daily challenge….getting up and getting dressed what are you going to wear and even those…..it's the way you walk….that is if you are in the school….if you are going to school…..you can't act a certain way do you know what I mean?*
>
> *(Sean).*

The internal challenge was perceived to be the first challenge one had to grapple with:

> *I think that the first challenge that they have is themselves because I think that a lot of people really deep down question it and especially at the beginning, people don't want to be gay. Because of the way it is in society, is viewed as wrong and not the norm. Especially when you are of school age, you spend your life trying to fit in and try not to get picked out of the crowd*
>
> *(Keith).*

Trying to mask identity was also discussed:

> *I would have tried to act straight (in school)... trying to convince yourself*
> *that you are...I think when you hit puberty it really... I mean before then you*
> *admire people, you think they're cool and you want to be their friend... there*
> *was this guy and I was mad about him, I thought he was the nicest guy but I*
> *didn't really realise that I was attracted to him.*
>
> <div align="right">*(Ben).*</div>

The need to be comfortable with one's own identity so that others will be too was also mentioned:

> *If you are gay and not happy about it, why would I be happy that you are*
> *gay?*
>
> <div align="right">*(Dan).*</div>

Coming out –family

As to be expected a diverse range of responses from family members was evident. Some were relatively positive:

> *It was I suppose difficult enough to come to terms with telling people*
> *but once you got over the first hurdle of it, it was fine*
>
> <div align="right">*(Dan).*</div>

> *My younger sister, she would have been about 15 at the time. I went*
> *into her room and woke her up because I wanted to tell her. I said*
> *"I like boys" and she said "tell me something I don't know"*
>
> <div align="right">*(Ben).*</div>

One participant described bringing the support of her partner when she met her parents to inform them:

> *I made sure she (partner) was with me so I wasn't on my own.*
> *Well I went on my own to tell my father…but she was with me*
> *telling my mum and she was with me telling my brother….my*
> *brother came up here actually and I told him…he sat there and*
> *laughed for about fifteen minutes and then I was like.....kind of*
> *for that fifteen minutes going oh Jesus is this a good or a bad reaction*
> *I don't know….and so that fifteen minutes was excruciating..... And then*
> *he eventually he stopped laughing, wiped away his tears and goes oh sure*
> *what does it bother me it's not like you are making me gay…….and I was*
> *like ok…fair enough…you know and he was grand about it…*
>
> <div align="right">*(Lisa).*</div>

Another participant indicated having little struggle in telling parents.

> *I came out when I was 11. It never bothered me and I didn't think of it*
> *as a negative thing. Because I was quite positive about it I think*
> *people were very positive about it when I told them, when people have*
> *a negative view of it themselves then it kind of comes across to*

others *(Keith).*

Some participants experienced much less positive reactions:

> *My father says what he thinks he is an atheist and my mother's a catholic….. and a volcano erupted and one is ok about it but not the other.*
>
> *(Sarah).*

> *My Dad is homophobic and so homophobic for his own reasons…..sorry an aggressive homophobic…he just doesn't want a gay around him or that kind of thing….but like if I listened to my da I would be homophobic but I'm not….far from it….*
>
> *(Susan).*

> *I am out three years and my father and I don't speak…..*
>
> *(Lisa).*

Coming out -friends

Coming out to friends was identified as predominantly positive.

> *I. How are your friends about it?*
> *P. They are all fine, they all accept me*
>
> *(Patrick).*

> *Well when I told my first friend I was kind of really nervous and I wasn't sure if I could trust them and things like that. Once I told them I felt much better*
>
> *(Don).*

> *Relatively easy….its just like I knew that was what I was so….ok admitting it to friends. One or two of my friends…..in all fairness they knew I was bi like but they just told me to tell them*
>
> *(Adam).*

Coming out-workplace

Work, however was treated with some concern by participants:

> *Well at work I am not out, I haven't gone around to everyone to say that I am gay but I wouldn't try and hide it in any way at all. I have come out at some level to everybody*
>
> *(Anne).*

> *Well its just I'm kind of in management at work and I take the attitude that my personal life is nobody's business… whether I am straight or gay….they just know my name, that I am the boss and that is about it….. and its more effective. It's just the mentality at work….*
>
> *(Sean).*

Acceptance - family

Acceptance or rejection of one's identity elicited strong depth of feeling from participants.

> *Once they have accepted who you are it's the telling their family…. the coming out to the family which is huge. The fears of rejection*
>
> *(Anne).*

> *No there are a lot of other things but yeah this is definitely a big part of it you know because before I came out things had started to improve big time between me and my father and then I came out and ……..there was a total stop on it*
>
> *(Lisa).*

The invisibility of gay culture was deemed to accentuate the problem:

> *But that doesn't help either when you're trying to bring up your courage. I think even if you show an advert on telly, even if it was for Tea or something, just show homosexual couples like that, not making a big deal out of it, it just happens to be that way*
>
> *(Anne).*

In some cases both parents were accepting

> *I was very lucky I have always had gay and lesbian people in my life...as I was saying, I have always had gay and lesbian and bisexual people around me growing up and my parents were extremely liberal*
>
> *(Evan)*

> *I. What was it like to tell your family? Was it hard?*
> *P. It wasn't really…every one of them accepted me for who I was… the only support I have at the moment is my family*
>
> *(John).*

> *Two of my friends are also from **** and they happen to be gay and they told their parents and they said "Oh my precious thing, how wonderful and how brave of you to tell us"*
>
> *(Anne).*

In some cases one parent was more accepting than another.

> *But like I have a friend now who told both his parents and his Dad was way more accepting than his Mum though…… his Dad you know went to an all boys school himself…. and it was…..like great that way….so he found it very surprising that it was his Dad who was the one who was more accepting of him……*
>
> *(Adam).*

> *My mum…. and to my younger sister who is very very open minded so it was great….. it was very easy to come out to her.*
>
> *(Lisa).*

I do know of one young bisexual girl she is sixteen….she has a lesbian mother who I feel in my own personal view… is stopping her from being who she is….she is kind of pushing her more to the heterosexual side…..which I found very surprising…..as her being a lesbian mother….but I think what it is because her mum has put up with so much. That she doesn't want her child to go through that

(Anne).

Some family members held very traditional views which was perceived to make coming out more difficult

She is only like forty so…..if people that are even in their thirties and forties have that kind of an old fashioned view then just imagine what its like for people coming out to even grandparents

(Adam).

A lot of that would be the older people of Ireland, the ones in their 70s and 80s; they are the ones that give out. My grandmother is 91 years of age and she disowned my cousin because she got married and she broke up with him two months later and moved in with a girl. She won't talk to her or anything, but she is 91. Ninety years ago it was a totally different story being gay

(Peter).

The denial of family members especially parents was also identified as difficult for participants:

I had a friend and there were only two children in the family and both of them are lesbians and they are afraid to tell them both of them. They kind of know that she has been going out with someone who regularly comes over to the house with her for two years and the mother would say. "Are ye two going out, I hope you find a nice boy tonight?" She obviously knows but she just won't accept that in her own head. And me and the girl have had several conversations about how to tell them, because they obviously know. And they can't seem to accept it. They are kind of blocking it out...the gay books in her bedroom and the gay videos in the sitting room, the girlfriend over three nights a week...

(Anne).

The data here shows that participants all felt risk in coming out to family some to a larger degree than others. For those whose families responded positively the relief was palpable; however of those whose families were not accepting, participants were hurt and grieved the loss of relationship. What is apparent is the risk of potential loss of familial relationship that accompanies coming out.

Acceptance- friends

The acceptance of friends was also given particular importance by participants particularly as it was associated with support.

> *I didn't come out at school and I don't intend to but if they did insult me I didn't care as much because I was with my friends…*
>
> *(Adam).*

> *I also had a close group of friends who accepted me and if there were any kind of name calling or anything like that people were doing it very secretly or a long way away from me. It made it easier to challenge discrimination against other people by having someone who was out in school of course. God help the poor little guy in the world who had no-one and all of a sudden had to do deal with the idea that there were people who had everything in their lives it must have been crushing. Hopefully in the future more people will have my experience rather than the other experience*
>
> *(Evan).*

> *But most of my friends were just like…..yeah…..fair enough….they weren't too surprised by me you know I was just like that anyway you know*
>
> *(Carol).*

Having supportive friends lessened the need to access service:

> *I didn't need to because my sister was gay and I was going to gay clubs since I was 16 so for me I am inclined to talk to my sister or some of her male friends were gay*
>
> *(Peter).*

Sexual identity also can lead to the need to have different groups of friends.

> *Anne:* *I do have two almost separate groups of friends, one of the ones I would have lived throughout College and my sister and we have mutual friends, I also have my gay friends.*

> *Interviewer:* *They are two separate groups of friends?*

> *Anne:* *Yes, they are different types of people, the gay group I met through gay bars and the society in ***, they would have spiralled out from there people that knew people. They don't really get on together my two different groups of friends out socialising although now that I am friends with them we go straight as well …it was predominantly gay bars we went to*
>
> *(Anne).*

Trust was central to maintaining friendships but also in facilitating coming out.

Well when I told my first friend I was kind of really nervous and I wasn't sure if I could trust them and things like that. Once I told them I felt much better but it kind of got out a bit to my school and I blamed the friend but she actually didn't say anything so it was really rough for a year or two, like the school knew and they were all like bullying me and things like that. It is not that bad any more. The other friends that I did tell stuck up for me and they were just saying like you know leave him alone. It is grand now like. It is okay

(John).

Well its ok for me because the people I am out to are either gay or bi themselves….and then again there are you know there are those you would never tell and am… I only speak to people I trust…..like X…I don't really worry if they tell anyone or not because I know they won't make a scene they are very trustworthy people…..

(Adam).

Lack of trust was seen as a threat to friendships:

There is a huge trust issue there, because it can actually pull apart friendships because it can push your life in a direction that you don't want it to go. They might tell a lot of your closer friends before you get a chance to, it is very kind of behind the back, backstabbing causing serious rows where friends want to know why you told him and not you

(Keith).

Acceptance – gender

Gender was an interesting factor in facilitating participants in exploring their identity with others. Particularly the gender of the person one first disclosed to was discussed.

I think a gay man would be more comfortable talking to a woman…

(Ben).

John:	*I would say most of us came out to a woman first...*
Interviewer:	*Why the woman thing? Why that?*
John:	*Because I think that a lot of it is whatever makes us gay, I think we have a lot more feminine hormones in us. We feel that bit more feminine. Talking to girls is much easier than to guys, guys want to talk about soccer; I have no interest in that kind of thing. I could talk about dancing all day long.*

(John).

Most guys just prefer, you wouldn't be able to go to a fellow other than your best friend and you can't just tell them yes, I am gay… Girls are more understanding straight off. They kind of know why you go for fellows. A girl won't be able to come out to a girl that easy, they would probably come out to a fellow easier... I think the other bit is if I was to come out to a guy, their immediate reaction is "Oh, you fancy me"...

(Keith).

Equality

Participants expressed a significant depth of feeling about issues of equality.

> *I suppose you would be taking it seriously as others for example we don't have the same rights like to get married you don't have the same rights, I know they are bringing in the civil partnership, I think you are seen in a completely different light. You are not shown the same respect that any ordinary Joe so would be getting*
>
> *(Kevin).*

Schools were perceived to hold different standards in terms of gay equality:

> *I think one of the best ways and I have thought about this and asked other people, even the deck out in schools is very heterosexual that even if I mentioned homosexual anything it was brushed under the carpet. It's the same when it comes to bullying where they say 'so and so is gay and they would just fob it off.' Some let's say a kid is black and they wrote a racist comment there would be an absolute war there would be practically an equality tribunal brought into the scene. They would hammer it down and would have pounded out of the school in two seconds and there would be complete war over it...*
>
> *(Keith).*

Some identified with minority status in school:

> *At the end of the day it is all minorities to a degree and it isn't fair that we are the ones that just get left... If it was brought to the forefront, if it is told to kids that gay people have relationships too. Especially because children put so much faith in teachers... the less people talk about the worse it gets and it is going to spiral and it has, it is only now that it has started to come to the front*
>
> *(Keith).*

Not being able to donate blood was seen as a specific equality issue:

> *Yes, that shocked me. I was at a blood donor clinic in Shannon and I wanted to go over and give blood and my boss said "you can't" and I asked him why and he said because "you are gay". Why? As much straight people are going to have AIDS too as well as gay people...*
>
> *(John).*

Raising awareness and solidarity was suggested as a start in addressing inequalities.

> *Because together we can do more about our situation and you know we can fight for our rights more and talk maybe even discuss the issues that come up and that we all are feeling everyday*
>
> *(Kevin).*

> *I think just getting it out there that there are people everywhere that are gay, like you say if you talk about and you make a big issue, if someone comes in to talk about gayness basically; it makes this a very "other" thing*
>
> *(Anne).*

5.2 Section F: Societal pressures

Specific challenges were identified by research participants and these included homophobic bullying emanating from prevailing cultures of violence. Participants linked this to school culture, teachers, the church and the closed minded nature of communities, particularly rural communities. Being negatively labelled and being on the receiving end of stereotypes were seen as particular challenges.

> *I would say the challenges would be, not being able to socially interact with everybody that there would always be this kind of barrier, they would always be a perception that they are not going to be good at certain things, like for me especially "oh sure, you can't kick a ball you are better in fashion and music and dance that kind of stuff " I would never be good at construction work or building or any sort of thing like that and there would always be that kind of impression and that is a barrier so for example if I went for a job in a construction company or something like that, not saying I would but if I did, I wouldn't be chosen from the job because they would have this perception about you*
>
> *(Kevin).*

> *That guy is wearing make-up; they would call him a faggot. That is what they do.*
>
> *(John).*

One participant discussed the reasons why they perceived that some of the heterosexual community feel threatened by them:

> *I think that the only reason that they feel threatened is that if they are not comfortable with their own sexuality themselves. I have a lot of straight friends, who give me a hug and a kiss and slap me on the ass, but I have a lot of other friends who aren't as comfortable and they would say well "how are you". I think they are afraid that they will end up gay if they shake your hand or something. They think it is a disease. My best friend, she never really heard of it so she said why did you decide to be gay? I said I didn't, I always was I just said it now. Then she said have you Aids? But that's just her not understanding*
>
> *(Keith).*

The experience of very negative stereotype was hurtful:

> *A lot of it has to do with the whole fact that gay men are perceived as paedophiles, there is a huge thing around that there really is. I was in XX and one of her friends, was there. I was just sitting on the couch and his daughter leaned up against my knee. I said 'Hey how are you?' and he said "don't touch my daughter!" I was drinking with him all day you know running around laughing and everything and he got pure thick over it. There is an awful lot of that around.*
>
> *(Kevin).*

> *I suppose everyone had a perception that… Oh they would be no good at playing football or soccer or any sports because that's just not true but it is just this thing that is in people's minds*
>
> *(Sean).*

Teachers correcting stereotypes was deemed supportive:

> *I remember when I was in science in about a third year, I can't remember who it was but basically we were talking about HIV Aids and one of the lads said it is only gay men and gay women that get that. And my teacher corrected him and said no, the majority is passed to straight couples…Yes, it can get passed through needles; a lot of it is through drug use…But she corrected him straight away*
>
> *(John).*

> *South Park doesn't help. A lot of kids watch South Park and that is what they actually promote that gay guys are basically after all the young kids...*
>
> *(Peter).*

> *They will chat away with them for ages and go ah yeah…….but the minute they find out it's like oh I will keep my distance…..they are afraid they might catch something or you know*
>
> *(Carol).*

Parodying gayness was deemed unhelpful:

> *There was one last year. They had one float and it was a bunch of old men dressing up in women's clothes, to me that is totally taking the piss. It was a pure caricature thing. It was called the Miss Clare float. It was just three old men dressed in old Nana clothes. It was people look at us (laughing) and people were laughing saying them they are pretending to be gay, taking the piss is the way I saw it. They might not have seen it that way. But a lot of people on the street would have thought it was hilarious*
>
> *(Peter).*

Homophobic bullying

Homophobic bullying was perceived as a significant pressure for LGBT young people.

> *Interviewer:*   *What do you perceive might happen if you were out to everyone?*
> *John:*   *I would get beaten up*
> *Interviewer:*   *Do you hear or see things that make you think that?*
> *John:*   *I hear…. I'm called faggot and all that kind of talk*
>
> *(John).*

> *Interviewer:*   *We were talking about hassle from people; you want to tell me a bit about it?*

Sean::	I didn't really get a lot of hassle... the two of us are well known for being gay and wherever we go you are going to get a few smart comments. Like last Saturday when there was a row in town and people started calling us names. So we had to go and sort it out

(Sean).

Alcohol was deemed to increase instances of homophobic bullying:

Well, you get the odd guy when you would be out and somebody would say something to you if they were drunk or whatever, it depends on where you go to like, if you go to one of the nightclubs or somewhere like that then you are fine because you are with everyone else who is in the same situation as you but if you go out to a regular club or anything like that or go to a normal pub then you will get people, not every time, just sometimes you will get a fella saying something smart

(Kevin).

Well like we can't just walk into places and assume it is all safe…….you can't be sitting in a Night Club with somebody and basically do what straight people are doing without someone coming over to you and pushing you and hitting you or telling you to stop…..

(Phil).

That's another thing when they have a drink in them. When they're on their own it is a different story...Dutch courage

(Peter).

Parent homophobia was difficult to deal with:

I don't think you will ever win….I tried it many times….you will never will with my father. If you know you are winning…he will say shut up…shut up…shut up…..and he will get…louder…louder…and that's when he knows he has lost…you can't say what you want to say and I will say what I want to say….I am the father….my father keeps telling me if I get a girl pregnant it will sort me out….

(Sean).

Yes, there was never any physical violence involved with them, it was all kind of verbal so really name calling, you know the way everyone says sticks and stones and that kind of stuff but it's not that hard to listen to that kind of advice but I just got over it. While actually a friend of mine is bisexual and he is actually getting bullied by phone calls about being bisexual

(Patrick).

Men in their twenties and thirties were perceived to be more homophobic:

A lot of older men to like in their 30s, late 20s or early 30s. They give you an awful lot of hassle

(Peter).

Well what is also challenging is like the flippant comments that you get like from people…..they don't mean anything by it….but is just ….. gays is a derogatory term…a negative term……if you don't like something…oh that's so gay….. and I think that hinders people in coming out…. in case like… oh I'm bad I don't belong here…. and that kind of thing…..

(Adam).

Living in the community as a gay couple brought challenges:

We would have to be careful because we would get eggs thrown at us…..Our house got egged... And he was called a faggot and all a few nights ago, a big tall fella came out of his house and he said "queer". But when there are two of us they just keep their heads down and their mouths shut. And it is normally a quiet estate. The kids are generally well behaved. Just to look cool because they don't think that a gay man is going to go over and hit them. Well someday someone is going to snap but it is not going to be us. They could seriously get hurt. Because if you take enough of it, I have seen enough of it with my own temper... I don't want to go around hitting people when you see red you just want to hit them. You want to hurt them as much as possible. They hurt you so you want to hurt them as much as possible, to be able to hurt them

(Peter).

Participants were very positive about the support received by nightclub bouncers

Bouncers are very handy…..bouncers are very very handy…..there have been times when I had to call bouncers over because in the past in night clubs we were getting harassed, yeah. I have had bouncers come over and tell me and my mates …….oh your mates are over there and someone is hassling them……cause he saw what happened…….and he thought I was looking out for them. It depends…..it depends on where you are and the bouncers….it depends on the person……usually they will help you out as best they can

(Keith).

School

School culture was perceived to be a strong source of homophobic bullying as well as propagating an anti-gay culture.

One of the main things like any time anything happens in schoolyard they say "that is so gay", it is always put down in such a majorly negative way that if you were gay it would really really have an effect on you. Bullying would probably be main one as an external factor

(Keith).

But like…I….go to an all boys school… so even in that….its particularly….I won't come out to anyone but my friends…. because I go to an all boys school….and its run by….well its not run by the Christian Brother's any more….. It's the ethos…. Homophobia is still very strong I'd say

(Adam).

The bullying in school that was associated with gay young people was a particular challenge:

> *No, first school it was, there was always a huge homophobic atmosphere in school and nobody that I knew anyway... a guy who was from XX I think, he did come out and he actually left because he was getting bullied so badly. He didn't get any support from the staff or anything because there would have been a lot of teachers…that would never talk about it. I remember a religion teacher saying that it was a disability. So definitely school was not a place where you would tend to come out*
>
> *(Kevin).*

> *It was really rough for a year or two, like the school knew and they were all like bullying me and things like that. It is not there bad any more. The other friends that I did tell stuck up for me and they were just saying like you know leave him alone*
> *(Patrick).*

The need for schools to have an awareness of LGBT issues was also important:

> *Schools is where you need to be you know because that's where the majority of people start to come out you know*
> *(Phil).*

> *I was out in school like and I was…it was just like there were bathrooms on each floor and it was just like going in there and being pushed in there and they would lock….they would push up against the door so you couldn't get out and they would put toilet water from the other toilet over the door and I had to go home soaked in toilet water.*
> *(Sean).*

Some schools demonstrated reluctance to engage with LGBT issues or research:

> *I mean we visited many schools…..with postcards for Rainbow about this research and some of them wouldn't even take them…*
> *(Lisa).*

It is important to note that not all experiences in second level were negative.

> *I was out and proud in my second school, I had no problems. The only thing that came close was someone once asked me was I some kind of a bisexual and I said no I am a fully fledged queer*
> *(Evan).*

> *I think a lot of teachers were very okay about. I know a couple of teachers in ******'s and they really nice. They knew I was gay but never really had a problem with it or treated me any differently after they found out. I mean none of the teachers really cared if you were gay or not, they were like whatever which is the right attitude really but there are no real supports in any of those places either. There is nobody you can talk to.*
> *(Peter).*

Teachers were perceived to be integral in facilitating the prevailing culture in schools.

> *A lot of teachers wouldn't stand up to homophobic or racist or anti-Semitic abuse in the classes*
>
> > *(Evan).*

> *Even comments that a few teachers have made in my school on different occasions would make people that are LGBT feel self conscious about it and about even the teachers knowing.*
>
> > *(Luke).*

> *The first thing that I would suggest, until people's frame of mind starts to change in schools then there's no point even going there because from what I could see from certain members of staff that if anybody said anything like that they wouldn't even…they wouldn't correct them. They wouldn't tell them to stop or anything like that. Sometimes we would discuss it in religion class it would come up every now and again. I remember they used to get like Gay magazines it would talk about being gay or lesbian or whatever and they would have topics what would you think of it? And they would ask the students and most students would say "oh it's rotten" or "it's so wrong" and that was mostly fellas and the girls would say I'm fine with that, it's okay. So it would be very hard for especially for a fella to come out like in school. I don't really know to be honest, the whole school system would need to change*
>
> > *(Sean).*

Yet again not all experiences with teachers were seen as negative or un-supportive.

> *A lot of the younger ones had no problem that we met out or anything. There was one and she was well into her late 50s, she was such a girlie woman. When she came in she would be all done up. She loved it. She knew I was then she loved that. So I would say Miss I love your bag where did you get it, she loved that. Some of the male teachers were alright*
>
> > *(Peter).*

The invisibility of gay issues in the curriculum and lexicon of education was noted.

> *So I said to her the Prince and Princess always get married in the books there is no harm in having a Prince and a Princess, then in the next book prince and a prince and then a princess and a princess, not because they want their kids to know about that, you're not literally sitting them down and saying " they're gay" and when guys get married they are gay. It just put it in their head and it becomes the norm for them as they are growing up. In school they are not going to have that problem when they get older they would think we'll I read that in books, guys get married to…People are studying English literature and it is not even in the literature that people are studying. It is mad in this day and age. I think bring in literature when they are younger and as they grow up. They will be so used to it, it could be the norm. For me growing up and for everyone I suppose it was normal. Mammy and daddy, guy and a girl.Even in primary it starts, Tá daidí sa Gairdín, Tá an Mammy sa cistin, it is that kind of stuff, but no daidí agus Daidí..or Mamí agus Mamí*
>
> > *(Ben).*

Religion

Religion was also perceived to have an influence on the prevailing homophobic culture. Participants felt strongly about the negative impact of this influence.

> *Religion then is it supposed to be a good thing when you are mean to people….do you know what I mean…? its like a book of how to live a good life…..there is like a page for these people because they have a false god……you have to hate these people because they have this life…… that's not a life I want to be part of…..*
>
> *(Sean).*

> *I think if more people did that Ireland would be a more accepting society because Ireland is still very old fashioned…. like the….churches ….influence has waned but its still there in regards to homosexuality….its still a taboo*
>
> *(Luke).*

The internal conflict that it engendered was also noted:

> *I had my first ever lesbian kiss with that woman and after that it was like…oh shit! because I had realised then this is what it is and how am I going to stop this…. this is wrong…. I am going to go to hell for this…. you know….Because I grew up in a very catholic family church, every week and you know the whole…..read the bible…and not that I would diss that or anything…..everyone to their own preference*
>
> *(Lisa).*

> *The worst culprits for that are the Catholic Church and all that has gone on themselves. Don't get me wrong, I am not condemning them. I am not condemning the church I am just saying how it is.*
>
> *(Barbara).*

Location-Rural/Urban

Location, rural or urban has left many feeling isolated from the support available in the larger cities. For some it also meant being surrounded by a strongly homophobic ethos.

> *I suppose that there is certainly in rural communities no support whatsoever and that we need to have it in every county… at least a group set up to help people that are having difficulties travelling to anywhere*
>
> *(Sean).*

The anonymity of the city was desirable:

> *There is anonymity with Dublin. It is really big in that you might never see the same person twice. So if you are going to a group that is LGBT, it could*

be on the other side of town and you could get transport by the nearest bus. If you are in a rural town with a thousand people if you look left you will be noticed

(Keith).

The need to challenge prevailing cultures in rural communities was clearly articulated:

I think a lot of it.....has to do with the fact that it is so rural and it's so close minded...I think if the rural areas were given a good boot up the rear end.... into the reality of what society should be then maybe it wouldn't be so frowned upon. But because it is so rural and so quiet and everyone knows everyone.....do you know there are so many older people living in the area and they all settled in their ways.... and you have got this whole thing of everybody knows everybody else's business and people are always trying to keep their own business to themselves.... so you know when you've got a huge skeleton like that in a closet...you've got a gay child.... its like.....you kind of keep it as low key as possible.... because I do know that my little sister...am....when I came out she was...nine....no she would have been ten when I came out and she got beaten up in school..... Because of my sexuality...which I was absolutely livid over and I wanted to go to the parents of those children and the Principal but my mother refused to allow me to go..... She said she would deal with it herself but you know there was a lot of homophobic abuse thrown at my family because of me.....

(Lisa).

The need to exercise care in the rural community was important:

I would be careful what I would discuss around heterosexual people.... in the rural area…… now if I was in the likes of Limerick I wouldn't be thinking twice about what I am saying.....I just come out with it…I feel it is a lot more open

(Lisa)

Well what I would like to do is to set up a support group here for around here and beyond for the small villages as well

(John).

Health Effects

The pressures placed on young people as they navigate their identity impacted on their health and wellbeing.

I hear people say that they are selfish and they are not thinking of anybody else but themselves..... If people are basically saying "you shouldn't be gay" or faggot or queer, it is their fault. They are the ones that should feel guilty. They are the selfish ones...

(John).

Substance use was identified as an issue:

All so drugs and alcohol can be boost your confidence if you have no confidence, being hammered can seem like a really good idea so you can go out and actually talk to people and it reduces your inhibitions, makes you less

87

scared to but it leaves you open to mental abuse, just falling down a flight of stairs anything like that and your long-term health

(Evan).

The potential to effect emotional well-being was also noted:

Partly because it is still such a big taboo and partly because people tend to come out later in life. The average age is 21 in Ireland. That means if someone, the average age for someone to realise their sexuality is between 12 and 15. If you don't realise until you are 15, I think people have a pretty well formed definition of their sexuality at the age of 15 that is six years. That is six years of isolation and loneliness, God knows what it does for your mental health

(Evan).

Some participants referred specifically to suicide and suicidal ideation linking it to LGBT issues.

Mentally we are not disturbed in the head but like..... I know of a few people in Limerick that actually hung themselves because they were gay. They just couldn't come out to people...

(John).

A young man under 25 is in a high suicide bracket anyway. If you are a gay man you are seven times more likely to commit suicide, if you are a gay or lesbian or bisexual woman then it is three times more likely than your average age group. Which means that you are putting huge amounts of stress and pressure on young vulnerable people who have no one to turn to, maybe getting the same insults and abuse at home or in school or around their friends and any services that they access like a local youth group and it's completely unacceptable. It can permanently damage people's mental health, suicide and self harm, drug and alcohol misuse. There is a problem with drug and alcohol abuse in the gay and lesbian community, especially in young people as the "BeLonG To" drugs report highlighted. It shows greater access because the community is more squashed together, it is all ages all social backgrounds all together in the one place because the community is small

(Evan).

5.3 Section G: Supports

Current service provisions to support the LGBT community were perceived as very effective and were believed to successfully support increased socialisation. Participants were aware of supports in the cities of Limerick and Galway.

> *"ShOUT" which is the Galway LGBT youth group that was set up by "BeLongTo" Dublin when they became" BeLongTo" Ireland. They set up eight or nine smaller youth groups around the country. We got e-mails from XXXX asking did we know of anyone that wanted to be volunteers, so me and a few of the other committee members went to help them out at the start but we ended up actually staying around and are still there and giving them a hand and go every week, still attending meetings and stuff...*
>
> *(Keith).*

Being involved was found to be rewarding:

> *I know personally people have come up and thanked me for the work we do. The group is with 14 to 23 year olds which is a hard network to cater for because if there was a 14 -year-old and a 23-year-old at the same meeting, they are a very different stages of life but if that was with any other youth group because it is a gay youth group you could be 50 and not out or 12 and completely out to your friends. It is a different thing to relation to age and to where you are in that stage coming so that tends to be a lot easier. Especially the younger ones say that they think it is really great to have the space they can go to even if it is just once a week where they can be openly gay*
>
> *(Keith).*

Some practical and effective work is currently happening within colleges.

> *Well basically we started around 1994 was it….1991 was when we first originally started up where people can go for a safe space. We have meetings and stuff like that and the student bar afterwards for coffee or whatever. People can sit around and chat and meet other LGBT students from campus. It is totally nobody knows….me and him are the only two that know….the people in the society. We have like a very strict confidentiality rule that if somebody is not out or anything we are not allowed to say hello to them on campus when we walk through campus we don't say hi because people would know that we are gay so if we walk through the campus and we wave at somebody and if they were with their friends the friends go oh why did that person wave at you… ..We don't acknowledge anybody unless they acknowledge us first...*
>
> *(Jack).*

> *General meetings keep it going and we have a monthly meeting. Any time me and him are going out I will send and text to everybody else and say so….It's a lot about communication…we are heading out…..you can come out with out….there is no problem….something like that*
>
> *(Vicki).*

A buddy system within the college was deemed a good addition:

We run a buddy system as well. If people don't want to go along to the meetings by themselves we meet up with them half an hour or an hour before the meeting or whatever have a cup of coffee sit down and chat and tell them what we do…..so that they can see us face to face then as well….and then if they want to go to a meeting or decide well I wouldn't feel comfortable yet coming to a meeting…I will go off and come back another day

(Jack).

Thurles

Newer groups who are in the initial stages such Thurles are deemed to be of good support.

There are groups here…and then there is drop in…where you can sit down talk and play pool….go get a Chinese and meet those guys…..its great yeah….its lovely…..

(Luke).

However transport is a factor

Yeah…I go to the group on Tuesdays and am…I try to come to drop in sometimes on Fridays but like I go to school in K and I live in XX so it's kind of awkward….

(Carol).

The acceptance of the environment in Thurles was very important:

But then we found the acceptance there. So we knew what we could possibly experience here. So we knew exactly what yeah it was like a huge positive influence. We just knew then that we would be facing another accepting environment in coming here we knew we would be safe

(Luke).

Limerick

Rainbow services in Limerick was clearly perceived to be effective doing

this work in very difficult circumstances financially and resource wise.

The centralisation of Rainbow Support Services as a hub and an umbrella in the mid West of Ireland with resource.s… finally there are resources that can be utilised. Of course we always need more money but we are better off now than we have ever been. It is a real strength to have everything under the one roof. To have people talking to each other. To have the sharing of information between East Clare and South Tipp, if they had similar cases or two people that had similar interests. That they could be co-ordinated through Rainbow Support Services to create better networking…The proliferation of LGBT people in the media at the moment, it is better visibility. It is decreasing loneliness showing people that you are not alone. There are other people like this and they are on the telly now which I think is really important because especially if you are young and in a rural area, I

know a lot of people would have absolutely no access to the queer community or the queer population

<div align="right">*(Evan).*</div>

The social aspect of the support provided was very important:

> *Good characteristics of supports, the main thing for me was to be able to meet other young gay and lesbian people. We are one in 10, you spend most of your life with straight people, I suppose it like being a tennis player who hangs around with everyone else occasionally you want to get together with tennis people and talk about tennis stuff. It is the same in the gay community. There is so little so few people are out, so in schools you might not have anyone to talk to about the latest issue of attitude, something you have interests in that wouldn't interest the rest of the community… Having someone that you could talk to, someone that was older, someone that was wiser, someone had lived a bit more and that you could go to for advice and situations. Resources that you just couldn't get anywhere else like PCM. Being able to look at things on the Internet being able to talk to people, okay well I am in this situation so how did you deal with it? How do you do with it? But mainly for me it I think it was meeting up with other young people.*

<div align="right">*(Evan).*</div>

Activities were well received:

> *What are working well in the youth group are the activities. Being able to go out and do stuff with your gay mates. Ice skating or playing computer games. It works it pulls people together. If you have something to do then it makes it easier than just sitting around talking about your feelings or... not that we do very much of that. Also publicity, there needs to be more publicity.*

<div align="right">*(Evan).*</div>

> *We have regular meetings but then we…..basically we set up loads of parties and stuff like that…..so that people can go out with the same kind of people…and feel a little bit safer like.*

<div align="right">*(Sean).*</div>

> *We have word of mouth; a lot of stuff comes through word of mouth. We get a lot of referrals from the wider queer community. I have a friend or my friends' child has come to me and said I wanted a youth group where can I find one. It's that kind of thing there is a lot of "filtering". We have done some press ads; I think maybe it needs to be expanded. I think it needs to be got out there more; it needs to get out into schools. Of course the other thing is that once it is in schools, you have to make sure that it is presented properly that it is safe-guarded and that it's not just thrown in the corner like so many things are. The teachers don't see as entirely necessary to their academic careers*

<div align="right">*(Evan).*</div>

Some participants were attempting to set up their own groups.

> *The only thing that is available here in XX is my own group… mine and X's group…am….but at the moment that only….we can only provide for over eighteen…. am…..because we don't have the remit to work with under*

eighteens....but even in saying that our group isn't and hasn't been advertised properly.... because of funding and different things like that... and am.....also it hasn't taken off really well.....we'll say we had two meetings that didn't take off very well cause the people that we had coming to it were under eighteen.... so the support that we found that was needed was for more under eighteen.... because the over eighteen gay community out here would have.....would maybe have transport there is a lot out here that wouldn't have transport..... to get to Limerick or Galway or something..

<div align="right">(Lisa).</div>

Social networking

The support provided by these organisations facilitates greater social networking, which is deemed important by all participants in this study.

Having your opinion heard and having it taken into account is a big thing in a group like this

<div align="right">(Luke).</div>

To maintain the group we need to like……there is only four of us in it so far so to maintain the group those four need to keep an interest and need to keep attending because like if those four just flitter away then that will be the end of it.....we need to encourage others to come to things like this.....and all groups start off small of course....so we have to just be patient also we can't just give up

<div align="right">(Luke).</div>

The educative dimension was also an important provision:

We have for ourselves volunteers and staff members we have different meetings at different times to discuss future plans and stuff but the group itself meet on Saturday from four to six in youth work Ireland and prospect hill. We try and run kind of fun social events but we still keep a kind of serious attitude towards it because we found that a lot of what people want was information that they couldn't get anywhere else such as sexual health education in schools was always completely trait orientated like about condoms and femidoms but there is never any education gay male or gay female sex. By any means like it is never mentioned, completely separate which again gives it a negative effect that is completely wrong to talk about it, people think that it is wrong to talk about

<div align="right">(Keith).</div>

Counselling

Access to a counsellor was discussed as an important asset for any support group.

We have X (LGBT counsellor) as well…he only has three hours now in the week and its Tuesday five to……is it five to eight or…It's a drop in. Its handy for us some weeks to have it on a Tuesday and then other weeks its handy for us not to have it on a Tuesday…to have at our meetings….because we like to have X there….because he was at all the meetings last year.....because we were able to have the meetings at the same time…one day for a drop in as well and he would come down to us.

<div align="right">(Vicki).</div>

yes….definitely….I have been to counselling since I was sixteen years old and I am continuing to go…. I go to counselling for many reasons um…..you know the line of work I am in obviously and….. when you meet people and stuff it can really rip your heart out…. you kind of need to keep yourself geared up as well…. but I would definitely find in all my years of going to Counsellors and discussing before I ever came out…. discussing the possibility of me being gay……..to a heterosexual Counsellor its just fecking stupid…you know because I had an argument with a Counsellor that I worked with…..she has actually left now but I had this argument with her……she was saying she could be the Counsellor for our gay group…..but we were like no

<div align="right">

(Lisa).

</div>

The sexual identity of the counsellor was also noted as worth consideration:

I would think that it would be a very good idea to have a male gay Counsellor and a female gay Counsellor…. because my preference is to go to a female because how can you sit there talking to a gay man about having sex with a woman when he's…..that's something he is totally not into at all….. there should be some…..there should be a lesbian, a gay, bisexual and transsexual…….. its four different sets of Counsellors I know….and it's a huge thing….but I do think it would benefit massively because…..there's always an issue that they are not going to understand…. there is always going to be something whereas you know if you are sitting there and you are talking to a heterosexual or if you are bisexual or lesbian or I don't know what you are and actually it does matter….but do you know if you are sitting there and talking to someone in the same sexual situation as you….. you might be able to understand them a lot better than maybe I would or somebody else might…

<div align="right">

(Lisa).

</div>

The education and induction of counsellors of LGBT issues was also acknowledged.

I think it would be better, I don't know if there are any places but you know people who do drop-in for everyone, they should be educated on how to talk to LGBT people rather than us have our own separate one. I mean everyone that does the Samaritans or the other drop-in could be educated to talk to LGBT people, rather than we have our own

<div align="right">

(Anne).

</div>

The addition of a counsellor or a counselling service for those without that support was strongly recommended.

Counselling should be available for everything....the emotional stress of it can be...Coming to terms with it on its own...even if you had a counsellor, one person makes it so much easier...

<div align="right">

(Ben).

</div>

I suppose somebody that would understand what you're going through, somebody that knows what you are talking about, so either one I suppose I don't necessarily know if I needed to talk to a counsellor about it, maybe you would

<div align="right">

(Kevin).

</div>

It was also believed that along with counsellors there should also be access to support persons who were not counsellors. This was about having a person who was there to just talk to without the stigma of having to talk to an individual labelled as a counsellor.

Just older people who, like for instance if myself, ***** or *****, in the morning were in here and a few young gay guys came in here and didn't know what to do, they could talk to someone. If they didn't want to talk to a counsellor because they might think that "Oh God I'm here and I have to talk to a counsellor"... whereas I did it the informal way and I think it is so much more comfortable you know, easier

(Ben).

I would feel that having a specifically trained LGBT Counsellor is massively important….. because…..if you faced….like I am a lesbian….I am not a transsexual….. but I think I could sit down and talk to a transsexual and understand their coming out stage….. now…I couldn't understand their transition stage…. I could sit there and attentively listen and talk to them…. about it but as for understanding it…..I couldn't and I would never sit there and say I understand…. when I don't   whereas I feel a lot of heterosexuals Counsellors would turn around and say oh I understand…. when really they have no idea… and that if anything is the worst thing you can say to somebody that is going through something…

(Lisa).

I definitely think somebody young who can relate to them…I suppose it goes without saying….you know who is really friendly and outgoing your know and whose not kind of going to go …you know and set boundaries and rules and…because kids like to…young teenagers even myself like to relax and be respected.

(Carol) .

Accessibility

Lack of support in more remote areas was been identified as a particular challenge. Accessibility to existing support groups was also an issue.

Isolation…..especially in rural Ireland being away from centres like this one….and having no access to the LGBT community…..that the support of being with the LGBT community is just amazing for people when they finally get there and that has been a real challenge

(Vicki.)

Oh definitely……my mam was a bit discouraged at first because it was a half an hour journey…..and am…like…..it is only once a fortnight here granted but like she is only just finished work and she has to drive me

(Carol)

The need for transport was evident:

Transport, there is no public transport, there is some but it generally tends to be appalling it goes at the wrong time comes back entirely the wrong time. It is hard for the young people especially those that are out, to access supports if they need to be picked up or dropped off or if they need to take the bus or if they have the lift to the bus or have to get picked up again

(Evan).

But if his parents…..if he has to turn around to his parents and say there is a sub group going off the youth group which is an LGBT youth group…. can I go to that….it could be a total stopper on it…. so if we had that right…. and we run the youth group the same night as the youth club then that covers a lot of young people to be able to come to the youth club or their parents think they are going to this youth club…. and we will take them to our sub youth club…. that is specifically run for LGBT youth people…. you know….that way we could get that sorted…..but then for the likes of others that their parents don't have transport…. and you know rely on public transport…. if we had some kind of a support system…..or a transport system in place…..whereas this is obviously long term thinking in my own imagination

(Lisa).

If its close by then it is easily accessible and you can go more and if you get to know people through it that maybe from the country

(Adam).

Better public transport, the ability to go and to actually get to places. More accepting youth groups, I really like the idea of umbrella groups. I loved the idea of youth groups across the Midwest

(Evan).

Suggested supports

Participants' recommendations for support covered issues such as teacher education, increased social networks, awareness of services and supports, counselling provision, accessibility issues and further research. Educating teachers in LGBT issues was strongly recommended by some participants.

Just canvas the school that is where the help is needed

(Vicki).

*I think the teachers definitely need an induction or training in it….
Address that…..because they are the ones who are educating us…..they are the ones who are preparing us for the world…*

(Adam).

Get to those teachers and give them the information and get them to have a talk with their class and give them the right kind of information I mean…..not so that they will be go waffling a whole load of information but if they can get it across in the right kind of way

(Carol).

Teachers in the classroom even if they knew a student who might be gay and struggling then they might not know what to say or do

(Anne).

If they were told to watch out a bit more and to be more persuasive and to get students involved with them. In the school that I am in I am lucky that the teachers are very friendly with the students and staff so that you can actually talk to them, I suppose if they persuaded students that if you ever talk to us that it is always confidential, that we won't ring a parent. Because I wasn't sure if they would or wouldn't I'm sure if I told them at the time and said that not to ring my parents they probably would have kept it with me and that would have been it but at the same time if the other students had to go in front of the board then the parents would have to ... and it's really awkward the things that have to be followed

(Patrick).

The benefits of presenting students and teachers with a talk on LGBT issues was identified.

*Especially in secondary schools and it is amazing how quickly things change with a little bit of information. I remember myself and **** went to school in ****, the only time when Rainbow has been invited into school in 21 years, it started off good and it ended better, some of the reactions from the young men were not so favourable, some were extremely favourable. All of them improved throughout the class. That was a morning with 30 or so first years or second years, to my knowledge that is the first time that has ever happened in Ireland. Imagine what it would be like if every class got that as part of their first year orientation. You got to talk about sex and sexuality that you got to understand that not everyone is the same, you could bring in places like rainbow just to say look at these are gay people. This is a gay man this gay woman, he looks nothing like Julian Clary and she is not wearing overalls. Break down the stereotypes. It would boost the confidence of young LGBT people. It will decrease discrimination and fear from those who aren't and they will eventually make people get along a little bit better rather than having the animosity and ignorance and fear which breeds hate and intolerance and downright bloody mindedness*

(Evan).

The first thing I would do is I would make sure there was a support group for the children in the school

(John).

Increasing the social networks and widening the focus of LGBT support services was suggested.

I don't know if there is much point in talking to anyone at all... but I really think it should be more at 15 or 16 when you should start talking about. Because that is when you are coming out of your shell. You start to hang around with

different friends. You are going up on town more with your friends. That's when you are more outspoken

<div align="right">

(Ben).

</div>

Should they have LGBT specific activities, would it work would it not work...? I don't think that it is a thing where people... where they are 15 or 16 and want to go somewhere that is gay, they want to go somewhere like that. They want to go somewhere where they can play games, go for a game of soccer, just chatting, just know that people are gay but not like we're gay so that means you girls you play the games and we do our nails. It's not like that; they do want places like that. We wouldn't want someplace like that... the whole cliché of it, a lot of people don't like it they see the cliché but don't see what's behind it

<div align="right">

(Ben).

</div>

When someone is bothering you go to a support group and they will help you. Having someone to talk to about it is important that is number one. Talking about it with others you'd get ideas on how to deal with it too

<div align="right">

(John).

</div>

A drop in centre was also suggested.

Just someone that sits in here and is ready to talk to people if they need to

<div align="right">

(Ben)

</div>

The lack of formality of the drop in service was perceived to enhance its effectiveness.

*I know it would be hard to organise like what I had in S******, to go to it just happened to be someone's house. It was like a drop in house and she had a Jar saying put money for tea in here, it was just someone's house where it became that much of a drop in*

<div align="right">

(Anne).

</div>

A gay bar or coffee shop was advocated:

The chances of there being a gay bar around here are very slim for another few years. Definitely. If we thought we could get a loan in the morning then we would. If I won the Lotto in the morning then I would open it

<div align="right">

(Ben).

</div>

A place that has less restricted opening hours, I know it's not possible for the cafe at the moment because of funding. Longer opening hours would be very good

<div align="right">

(Anne).

</div>

That's why I think you shouldn't label it as a gay bar. Straight people and gay people would come. Just have a gay bar where straight people would come.

<div align="right">

(Ben).

</div>

I don't know if Limerick has a gay pub, a whole as opposed to a dancing club place, the same thing as a cafe but open later, so a late-night cafe would be the equivalent

(Anne).

What would happen in Holland could happen in Ireland. There regular gay bars closed because they are not needed any more so they close down and that is a brilliant sign. A good sign in Limerick is that we can't keep a gay bar because people feel confident and safe enough to go to other pubs

(Evan).

Community involvement was deemed important as was communicating with the wider community.

More community involvement, more resources to you can get more people involved like the running of "pride". Social events. Any publications that are being put together to be able to have, to be able to put together a focus groups and have people in. More money to do more research which is really necessary. The Outhouse Community Centre in Dublin does very well. It is a good model to build on but it has taken them a long time, outhouse has been there for years. Things just need to be expanded slowly and the community needs to respond with... rather than just "Ah sure that's just there, there is no need to worry about it", they need to be encouraged in to interact with the services that are being provided so the services can blossom

(Evan).

The need for specific under 18 youth groups and transport was reiterated:

If we had some kind of a… mini bus…me as a youth group leader could go to this person's house…..pick them up…… and drop them back…therefore we know that they are getting to and from safely...it would have to be done very very low key as to what the LGBT youth group would be specifically for under eighteens.

(Lisa).

Do you know what I mean…..having a……you know….somebody there and have a place for them to go….. if they do get kicked out…. is definitely important because at least……even though it is going to be horrifically scary you know to go and tell your mum and dad that you are gay and then they kick you out that's going to scare you to death….. anyway…..but at least if there is a place to fall back on…. a place to go…it eliminates the fact that you are going to be on the street…. at least there is somewhere that you are going to have a roof over your head…. even if it is just for a week or two…. until you get yourself sorted or somebody can help you to get sorted…. so to have things set in place for situations like that

(Lisa).

Awareness of services

A lack of awareness of the various services and supports caused some to advocate increased publicity of existing services and supports.

> *I suppose that there is certainly in a rural communities no support whatsoever and that we need it to have in every county at least a group set up to help people that are having difficulties travelling to anywhere or anything like that and have support groups and to have them out there because it is kind of like a secret world like a hidden world where none of this is talked about or are discussed and you have to dig to find out about certain things that are going on like the disco, I hadn't got a clue like that there was one, I had to really really research to find that out*
>
> *(Kevin).*

Subtle identifications were also suggested to illustrate gay friendliness:

> *I don't think that a lot of straight people know what the pride rainbow is. So I think that even just a placard on the side of the wall here with a rainbow on it. Because every gay person has gone on the Internet and looked up all sorts of stuff... and they have seen these rainbow flags, so if there was one here they would know they would be accepted in a sense*
>
> *(Ben).*

The need to advertise was advocated:

> *Broadcast the services that are already there*
>
> *(Kevin).*

> *Because if it is publicized more people understand it more….then am….it will be much easier I think for people to come out….in the first place*
>
> *(Adam.*

Using the internet was suggested as an effective way to communicate with those who may otherwise be difficult to connect with.

> *A few posters, we have websites, BEBO pages and that kind of thing. We have word of mouth; a lot of stuff comes through word of mouth. We get a lot of referrals from the wider queer community. I have a friend or my friends' child has come to me and said I wanted a youth group where can I find one. It's that kind of thing there is a lot of "filtering". We have done some press ads; I think maybe it needs to be expanded. I think it needs to be got out there more; it needs to get out into schools*
>
> *(Evan).*

> *Me and ***** had an idea about having an "out in Ennis" BEBO page, private… that before someone puts up a comment…before someone can leave a comment we would have to approve it so no one could be mean or nasty and it would be totally confidential as well. If you go to any of the BEBO pages, I am talking about myself, it is all just fellas with their tops off or Boys come and get it. We don't want that, it is literally for people that want to chat. And we would be there on the other line, if we could get it on our mobile phones, we can be at home and if a BEBO message comes on to it we can check and talk back to them. I see that at the forefront of everything definitely*

One parent was interviewed for this research. She approached the researcher and requested an interview. She had very insightful views about the necessary supports for parents of LGBT young people. She has been given the pseudonym Barbara for this research. Barbara identified her worries about her son who lives in a rural area. Due to the prevailing climate of homophobia she worried about his social networks. She articulated with sadness her perception that he will eventually have to leave.

> *I know he will never meet anyone here anyway, I know he will eventually have to go to the city. Maybe move out of the country altogether*

She was moved by a movie she had seen dealing with gay issues that had emigration as a theme within it.

> *Now "Breakfast on Pluto" really got to me. Because there was, he was accepted by nobody. Then he had to go away and he went to England, and the beating that he got, it stuck with me for a long long time. I can still picture it even today. How can somebody go out and do that to somebody else just because they are different. At the end of the day they are still human beings.*

She recommended local access to support for those who live in rural areas and also a parents network and support group which could also support fundraising activities.

> *Someplace where people can talk, because he can't talk to me. He could hop on a bus or whatever and he could go there and he could sit down and talk. Or I could go there with him or I could even go myself. Something even for families, for other members of the family to go in and people to say it is okay to be gay.*
>
> *I'd say both like the way the AA have a meeting here and once a month a few of the parents if they wanted could get together and have a cup of tea and sit down had a chat and talk about things. I think when you could talk about things, it is a lot easier. I think that is important, because there will be parents that are out there that will support them 100% but support needs to be there for the parents as well.*

She perceived that this parent's network could then link with young LGBT support meetings.

Even if parents and the children got together once every three months or whatever. Because then that way there would be people out there saying I might never meet anybody, I don't want to meet anybody online or whatever because you always have to be careful. If it was like a social night. Something like that. It could be used like a fundraising thing as well.

I think it would be important to set up a support group for parents as well and where the parents and the kids can kind of... maybe the parents can get together maybe once every couple of months or whatever and maybe the parents and their children would be together.

Barbara spoke with pride about her son and was clear about the love a mother should have for her child regardless of sexual identity.

It could, I mean it is important for the fundraising that they are a group and there isn't much support there. If we are saying that we stand by them and support them, "Fuck everybody", I don't care what anybody thinks. About myself anyway but I do when it comes to my kids. I should be able to say my son is gay or my daughter is a lesbian, so what I am proud of it. I'm their mother it doesn't change the fact that he is my son or my daughter or it doesn't change the fact that they are a different human being to everybody else.

She saw parental involvement as important and her fears about emigration emerged again as she spoke about the need for parent support.

Maybe those other parents that said they wanted to get involved, if they felt like it or whatever people could swap phone numbers and let them decide after that then if they wanted to set up a group. Yes, because it is important for us as parents it is also important for kids because no matter what, I mean look at Oscar Wilde, just because he was gay he died in another country

5.4 Conclusion

There is little doubt that LGBT young people grapple with significant challenges as they move through adolescence and early adulthood. Issues such as prevailing cultures of homophobia, fears of rejection by family, peers and/or society, and health impact are very real challenges they face on a daily basis. The data evidences the pressing need for effective support for LGBT young people. Indeed the LGBT participants in this study were articulate in terms of their needs as was the parent who sought involvement in the study. The issues raised in chapters four and five will be discussed further in the following chapter.

Chapter 6:   Research Significance

6.1 Demographic Profile

In total, 167 persons completed the online survey, and of those, 135 were in the target age group (13-25). The response should be considered successful for a regional online survey. Previous national research with young LGBT people, aimed at secondary school pupils in all of Ireland, using hard copy and on-line versions of a questionnaire achieved a response from 90 people (Minton et al. 2008). The survey in the West of Ireland targeting LGBT people over 18 had a response from 132 people (Gleeson and McCallion 2008). The YouthNet (2003) national survey in Northern Ireland achieved a response from 362 young people. Because sampling is opportunistic, little is known about the representativeness of the sample relative to the whole young LGBT population in the region. Caution is therefore needed in making generalised statements about the findings.

The age profile of the respondents to the survey proved an interesting finding. While a significant majority (81%) were in the target age group for the study (13-25), only 8.5% of the sample was found to be less than 18 years of age. The under 18's are therefore under represented. This was also the case in a recent national online survey targeting LGBT people from all age groups (Mayock et al. 2009). One explanation for this is that this age group may not have accessed information about the survey. While efforts were made to disseminate information and promote the survey using different types of channels and networks, information may not have reached this age group adequately. Another explanation is that some young people who experience same-sex attractions may not self-identify as LGBT and may not perceive the survey to be relevant to them. Previous research suggests that a significant number of young people under 18 with same-sex attractions may never identify themselves as LGB (Savin-Williams 2001).

The different geographical areas in the region were unevenly represented. Approximately two of five respondents to the survey reported they resided in Limerick city, followed by one-quarter in county Limerick. Only 14% resided in county Clare and only 7% in county Tipperary. This distribution probably reflects current provision of LGBT specific services, such as Rainbow Support Services with its location in Limerick city. It may also reflect that LGBT young people in the more

rural towns and areas may not have accessed information about the survey. Gleeson and McCallion (2008) found a lack of awareness about LGBT events and issues generally for some participants in the study that were not involved in networks that included other LGBT friends. If LGBT young people in rural areas are socially isolated, they may not have accessed promotional materials inviting them to participate in the survey.

Almost seven in ten respondents reported being third-level students, and one in five were employed. Only 7% were secondary school students. This mirrors the age profile of the respondents, with most respondents in the 18 – 25 age groups.

More males (54%) than females (45%) completed the survey. A small proportion (1.2%) recorded their gender as Transgender. This is consistent with previous recent national research (YouthNet 2003, Minton et al. 2008, Gleeson and McCallion 2008, Mayock et al. 2009).

Just under half of the sample identified themselves as gay or lesbian, and just under one-quarter as bisexual. Some respondents provided insights into their views on labelling identities, questioning the need for society to group people into 'boxes with labels' in a prescriptive manner. This reflects current thinking where gender and sexual identities are not static and polarised concepts, but instead dynamic and with many degrees of variations (Connell 2002). This suggests the need to understand the degree of diversity that exists in the young LGBT population when planning services to meet their needs.

6.2 Level of Self-Acceptability with Being LGBT

Almost two-thirds of the sample reported that they felt comfortable or very comfortable with their stated identity. While this is a somewhat reassuring proportion, it also means that almost one-third of respondents reported feeling uncomfortable or unsure about how comfortable they felt about their identity. This group may be at higher risk for emotional health problems; because not fully accepting one's sexual identity can impact negatively on levels of self-esteem and self-confidence (Pachankis and Goldfried 2006). This suggests the need for activities that aim to enhance a positive self- concept for young LGBT people, building self-confidence and self-esteem.

6.3 Hierarchy of Acceptability

Respondents were asked to indicate how acceptable they perceived LGBT was within their family, amongst friends and within their community. A clear hierarchy of acceptability emerged, with levels of acceptability highest amongst friends, followed by family and community. When asked if they perceived their school, college or work place environment to be LGBT friendly, a relatively large proportion (47%) agreed while 16% did not. When respondents were asked to comment on this question, many differing perspectives on LGBT friendliness emerged. This may be explained by individuals' own perceptions of their environment and the reality that large differences exist between individual schools, colleges/universities and work places in LGBT friendliness.

Approximately half of the respondents reported that they perceived LGBT to be acceptable within their family, while almost one in five reported LGBT was not acceptable. These findings concur with previous research. Minton et al. (2008) found that half of the young LGBT people in the survey reported homophobic attitudes in the home, while in Northern Ireland almost three-quarters reported this (YouthNet 2003). American research, which differed between mothers' and fathers' acceptance, found just less than half of LGB youth reported acceptance from mothers and a smaller proportion from fathers (Pilkington and D'Augelli 1995, D'Augelli 2002). There are two implications of these findings. First, almost half of the respondents in the survey live (or lived) in a home where they do/did not feel accepted, which can be a source of distress for young people. It is likely that these young people do not receive support from their home environment. This may have serious implications as positive relationships in the home have a protective effect on emotional health (D'Augelli 2002). It is clear there is a need for provision of support for these young people. Parents themselves need support in the process of accepting their child's sexual identity and in developing positive relationships with their child. While this study asked for young LGBT people's views, it did not seek out views of significant others. Previous research, however, has pointed to the need for whole family support systems to be put in place (Lock and Steiner 1999). Parents may need to access information and support to enable them to be more accepting and supporting of the young LGBT person in their home.

It is encouraging that most respondents felt that LGBT was acceptable among their friends. More than three-quarters of the respondents reported acceptability among their friends, while only 4.5% reported that LGBT was not acceptable. Friends are an important source for support for young people and are an important resource to tap into.

The community setting is difficult for many young LGBT people. One-quarter of the respondents deemed that LGBT was acceptable in their community, while three in ten deemed it unacceptable. Just under half of respondents felt unsure about levels of acceptability in their community. Previous research has found that LGBT young people are not comfortable about disclosing their sexual identity in their community (Pilkington and D'Augelli 1995), and that being LGBT had stopped them from taking part in social activities in their local community (Gleeson and McCallion 2008). Clearly, there is a need for social support initiatives based in the community for young LGBT people. Equally important, there is a need for supporting our communities to become more LGBT friendly. There is a need to raise visibility of LGBT, especially in smaller and more rural locations.

6.4 Disclosure

Most of the respondents to the survey (90%) were out to at least one more person and 43% were out to everyone. This probably reflects the age profile of the respondents (most in the 18-25 brackets) and the average age of disclosure of 17/18 years of age. In agreement with previous research, a friend was the most common person that had been told (90%), followed by other LGBT people (86%), mother (60%), father (46%), a sibling (37-39%), LGBT support (39%) and youth worker (33%). Many reasons were given for not disclosing one's sexual identity, including fear of rejection, fear of not being taken seriously, protecting parents in a small community and losing friends.

Practitioners in different health and social services need to raise awareness of developmental needs and health risks of young LGBT people. Services need to not presume heterosexuality as this is a barrier to accessing services. Services need to be explicitly LGBT friendly.

6.5 LGBT and Health Impact

Participants in the study had clear insights into the health impacts they associated with their navigation of their sexual identity. Clearly, the process is accompanied by much pressure and stress for many. One participant questioned the impact of the isolation and loneliness they associated with coming out and questioned its mental and emotional impact when they said *'God knows what it does to your mental health.'* Others explicitly indicated their drug and alcohol use as a coping mechanism and to increase confidence. But they were also clear about the vulnerability which substance usage placed them in *'it leaves you open to mental abuse, just falling down a flight of stairs anything like that and your long-term health.'* Another stated *'it can permanently damage people's mental health…self harm, drug and alcohol misuse. There is a problem with drug and alcohol abuse in the gay and lesbian community especially in young people as the BeLonGTo report highlights.'* Participants were also aware of the types of erroneous perceptions associated with them in terms of health and stated *'mentally we are not disturbed in the head.'* The need to assert ones sanity speaks volumes with regard to the pressures experienced by LGBT young people.

Some participants also indicated the specific dangers for mortality that they associated with LGBT pressures. They made explicit reference to suicide and to suicidal ideation. One participant stated that he was aware of someone who had taken their own life *'because they were gay, they just couldn't come out to people.'* Another participant associated LGBT as a risk factor for suicidal ideation. *'If you are a gay man you are more likely to commit suicide…you are under huge amounts of stress and pressure, especially young vulnerable people who have no one to turn to, maybe getting insults and abuse at home or school and at services they access like the local youth group and its completely unacceptable.'*

The risk factors to health associated with LGBT make a convincing argument for the need for service provision for LGBT young people. A multi-disciplinary approach is essential. This calls for a more proactive engagement from the HSE (in particular health promotion and public health) with existing LGBT services, who currently function on very limited resources but are the only champion for young LGBT people and their parents (where supportive).

6.6 Homophobia

The prevalence of homophobic bullying among participants in this study points to the great need for support services such as Rainbow (Limerick) and ShOUT (Galway), OUTWest among others. Living with the pressures of stereotype and negative labelling as well as fear of physical assault clearly has significant impact on the lives of LGBT young people. Many participants experienced what Norman et al. (2006) defines as personal homophobia (homophobia that is personally directed as a result of sexual identity), institutional homophobia (educational, religious or workplace discrimination as a result of sexual identity), and/or cultural homophobia (the social norms that legitimise oppression of LGBT people).

In this study, schools emerged as significant in the prevalence of institutional/personal and cultural homophobia. Participants in this study attributed the prevalence of homophobia and homophobic bullying in schools to several factors. These included attitudes of principals and teachers within schools and the strong religious influence that continues to dominate Irish education. This is in keeping with other research (Norman *et al* 2006) which points to the lack of challenge of religious influence in schools and the impact of such influence on the teaching of Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE), the two subjects that should facilitate students in the development of their identity and health.

Students in rural schools run the risk of receiving even less support. The problems of supporting LGBT young people within rural communities is further compounded by the reluctance of rural teachers (more so than their urban counterparts) to engage with LGBT issues (Norman *et al* 2006).

Clearly some engagement is happening nationally to address homophobic bullying in schools. The initiative of the Equality Authority and BeLonGTo "Making Your School Safe" which includes a poster campaign "Homophobic Bullying is not acceptable in our school" and distribution of an information booklet "Making your school safe for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students" is welcome and clearly a step in the right direction. However, a whole school approach is necessary. This requires professional development for teachers in LGBT issues *pre* and *in* service. Specific policy formulation and implementation in each school is essential. The policy should not be housed only within a homophobic bullying framework.

There is urgent need for an inclusive school policy, which celebrates student diversity and is not linked only to negative permutations of LGBT identity (in this case homophobic bullying). Schools also need to foster links and network with services such as Rainbow, BeLonGTo and ShOUT who have the skills and familiarity with LGBT issues and can support schools in developing inclusive cultures. The reluctance of schools to engage with LGBT issues and with this research indicates that there is quite a journey to go for schools to become more inclusive.

6.7 Current Service Provision

The current provision of services in the Mid-West to support LGBT youth such as Rainbow and the Thurles youth group were specifically mentioned in this study as valuable support in meeting the needs of LGBT young people. Specifically the Thurles focus group participants referred to their group in positive ways '*but then we found acceptance here, so we knew what we could possibly experience here…yeah it was like a huge positive influence. We just knew then that we would be facing another accepting environment in coming here. We knew we would be safe.* Clearly the provision of such a safe environment is a necessary oasis of support for LGBT people.

Rainbow (Limerick) and ShOUT (Galway) also were identified as an important support, not only for the safe environment they provide but also for their educative provision which young people might not otherwise have opportunities to access. '*a lot of people want information they couldn't access anywhere else such as sexual health education in schools was always completely trait oriented like about condoms and femidoms but there is never any education on gay male or gay female sex…which again give it a negative effect that is completely wrong to talk about it…people think it is wrong to talk about it.*'

It was also evident in the study that in rural areas people were attempting to set up groups to support LGBT young people in their areas, but they like the larger services were struggling with issues such as lack of resources '*even in saying that our group isn't and hasn't been advertised properly because of funding and different things like that.*'

6.8 Rural/Urban Location – Implications for Accessibility

Issues of accessibility permeated the research. Participants identified the problems of living in the rural community. They associated it with close-mindedness, less freedom to be open about one's sexual identity and prevalence of traditional thinking which led to stereotyping and homophobia. Some participants indicated fear of being assaulted as they perceived their rural community to be strongly homophobic.

Participants voiced the isolation of living in rural Ireland and being away from centres such as Rainbow which meant no access to the LGBT community. Some rural areas were so badly serviced that it meant little access to a regular public transport system and thus limited capacity to access LGBT services or support. This reiterated the need for effective transportation and also the need to have smaller, more local support groups under the larger Rainbow umbrella.

Clearly, pressures face all LGBT youth, but these are particularly pressing in rural areas that may be less supportive of LGBT young people and that have limited public transport thus increasing societal isolation and alienation.

6.9 Awareness of Services

Awareness of services is central to successful support of LGBT young people. This is of course difficult given the challenges of accessibility and geography. The existence of LGBT sub groups off existing larger youth groups is one way forward. However, resources are also necessary to provide transportation to facilitate people to travel to larger cities to attend support groups or drop in services, particularly as not all participants wish to attend local groups in order to preserve some anonymity.

Participants voiced the need to saturate with advertising, to broadcast the services and publicize as much as possible so that more people may understand. They deemed that this may support people in coming out. Advertising is expensive and support services are operating on limited budgets. There is pressing need to place more resources at the disposal of services for LGBT young people such as Rainbow in order to increase visibility.

There are subtle options also. One participant suggested that a sign on the side of the wall in youth clubs such as Youth Reach showing that a youth group is gay friendly is a subtle way of advertising gay friendliness.

LGBT support is already successfully utilising the web in order to increase information and advertising saturation. They are also proficient in the use of bebo pages as an effective addition to their outreach strategies. Research participants desired more web access in order to seek information and support services need to be given resources to enhance this as an outreach strategy in order to reach rural communities more effectively.

6.10 Desired Supports

When participants were asked what social outlets were available to them one in four indicated that they currently had no social outlet available. Pubs and cinemas were predominantly the most available social outlet, with few accessing a sports club, music groups, theatre or drama. That the pub features so strongly is unsurprising given that the pub is such a dominant feature of Irish socialising generally. However, given the potential risk factors associated with substance use this is a worrying trend.

The results of this study strongly evidence the significant need for support for all LGBT people and in particular LGBT young people. Key issues identified were the need for such support and the huge need for LGBT social networking. 74% of survey respondents indicated social networking as a necessity. Interview and focus group participants were also unanimous in articulating this need. In prevailing cultures of resistance to LGBT by much in society, and the prevalence of homophobia, it is unsurprising that the need for a safe environment in which to make friends was a recurrent theme for LGBT young people. Within this safe environment participants desired drop in services, one to one support and individual counselling. Being part of a safe LGBT group gave voice to participants '*having your opinion heard and having it taken into account is a big thing in a group like this*' who otherwise might not have opportunities to be heard. LGBT groups were associated with solidarity and advocacy by participants.

Access to counselling was advocated by study participants as particularly important. For those that had access to a counsellor (for example within the university setting,

Rainbow etc) it was deemed to be of great personal support. Participants had specific views about the types of counsellor they wanted to work with. Some desired a counsellor who was gay themselves as they perceived that they could empathise with the challenges that a young LGBT person experiences. Others advocated for the education of counsellors in LGBT issues and also the education of listening services such as the Samaritans in LGBT issues.

Participants also desired service provision that was specifically targeted for LGBT but also service provision that was not exclusively LGBT, in other words a blend in the targeting of services. While specific LGBT support is necessary, it was felt that advertising more general services meant that those who were not out might be able to come to youth groups that had LGBT sub groups off them without having to 'out themselves.' Also participants were resistant to what they called the cliché of gayness. '*It's not like we're gay so that means you girls play the games and we will do our nails, we don't want places like that, the whole cliché of it. A lot of people see the cliché but don't see what is behind it.'* They also wanted social networking opportunities that were not targeted as LGBT but more general activities.

Other supports identified were web access and substance use support. Given the potential health impact associated with LGBT identified earlier, it is little surprise that these emerged as articulated needs. Clearly main stream services in areas such as substance use and suicide prevention (among others) need to be educated in LGBT issues in order to provide sensitive services.

Participants were also enthusiastic about the LGBT youth conference which had happened recently in Galway and this led them to request a consistent national forum or network for young people to meet in person and electronically.

Transgender

The term Transgender covers the continuum of gender transition, from wearing cross gender clothes privately to a cross dresser who goes out publicly, to transvestite who solicalises as male/female, to transition with drug therapy only to the full post operative gender transition (Transsexual) . Transgender also includes people who

identify as gender neutral - who may not identify as either male or female. There is little Transgender representation in this study. This is in keeping with both national and international research trends. Gleeson and McCallion (2008) arising from their recent research call specifically for further research to identify the needs of Transgender people. This research concurs with their identification of the need for information on support services for Transgender and basic information on Transgender issues for services providers, which they deem critical. The insights gained from this research also point to the need to approach further research and needs identification for Transgender people in a grounded and informed way. The Transgender respondents to the survey point to the limitations in understanding of Transgender issues. They also point to some inherent complexities.

The issues surrounding Transgender are complex. Clearly, the visibility of Transgender people within our communities is overly limited. This is possibly influenced by factors such as general representativeness. In Ireland, approximately 1 in 12,000 males and 1in 30,4000 females are living with Gender Identity Disorder (HBIGDA 2009). It may also be influenced by the secrecy that surrounds Transgender identity. Global statistics on the violence experienced by Transgender people indicate the prevailing culture of homophobic violence and bullying which is even more acute than for LGB people (for further insight visit www.teni.ie). Transgender people often worry about being open about their sexuality in case they face this aggression, discrimination or misunderstanding (Spunout 2009). Therefore it is little wonder at the limited representation in research.

6.11 Supportive Others

Little research exists specific to the influence of supportive others or indeed the desire of supportive others to be come involved in assisting the LGBT community. This research did not seek the views of parents or of supportive friends as it was outside the research scope and remit. However, some key insights did emerge specific to this theme. Some research participants articulated their wish to have a voice in the research. In the online survey one respondent wrote: '*I know it's a gay survey but there should be parts for straight people who are openly supportive of gay people to answer in the survey.*' The parent who sought participation in the research articulated the desire to meet other parents, to network with them in supporting their sons and daughters. She also

articulated keen interest in become involved in LGBT support and made suggestions specific to fundraising and capacity building amongst LGBT parents.   This indicates a potential community of parents and friends who could be strong allies of the LGBT community should their capacity potential be harnessed.

6.12 Research as Potential Advocacy

During the research process many participants articulated appreciation for the opportunity to articulate their views, something they may not otherwise have had the opportunity to do for varied reasons such as not being out or living in a rural community. The potential for research to increase advocacy, awareness and foster dialogue within and beyond the LGBT community is worth consideration.

The process of research itself can foster much needed discourse, but was also clearly seen by participants as a supportive step towards engaging with LGBT issues within the community.

> *I really hope surveys like this bring forward the issues of the community*
> *so that life for the generations to come can be easier for them!*

Chapter 7:   Recommendations

The results of this research point to the pressing need for action in key areas. The researchers have several recommendations to make in terms of policy and service provision. Of course with recommendations there are resource implications. However, the voices of the young people contained in this report are evidence of the importance of building capacity among LGBT support providers. They also demonstrate the need for capacity building among LGBT young people themselves, their families, significant others and schools.

7.1 Recommendations for Service Provision

It is important to note that LGBT youth is not a homogenous population; service planning needs to acknowledge that a large degree of diversity exists in this population. There are significant health impacts and risk factors associated with the navigation of sexual identity, thus the need for resources to limit those risk factors is urgent.

Services already providing support for LGBT young people are operating on extremely limited budgets. Funding for adequate resources such as meeting venues is essential. However also of importance is funding to support continuous professional development for LGBT youth workers in terms of facilitation skills, personal development and para-counselling skills

Personal development should form an important part of LGBT youth support work, building self-esteem, self-confidence and resilience are essential but these are activities that can only happen over time, are labour intensive and require ongoing professional development for LGBT youth workers.
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LGBT youth support should also have (or continue to enhance where already existing) specific focus on building skills for disclosure.

Transgender visibility is a significant issue especially in terms being able to reach the transgender population to offer support. The continuation and increase of availability

of workshops like those provided by Rainbows is a first step. There is need for education among the heterosexual and LGB communities in order to dispel the many myths that surround Transgender issues.

There is need for mental health, sexual health and substance use to be included as topics in support programmes for LGBT youth.

There is need for proper referral structures for substance misuse. Mainstream drug and alcohol services need to be aware of LGBT young people as a risk group as well as gain knowledge of the specific challenges they experience.

Social and emotional support structures are needed for young LGBT people who may not have any support in the family or in the community. There is an urgent requirement for ongoing access to counselling for LGBT young people.

Access to information on LGBT issues and events needs to saturate even further than it currently does. It needs to be mainstreamed, in a manner that can be easily accessed so that young LGBT people do not need to out themselves to others.

The isolation experienced by LGBT young people in rural communities requires urgent consideration. Smaller LGBT drop-in services are necessary in rural areas and these can be linked to youth groups (where existing). Smaller fledgling groups, who are struggling to set up and advertise and are generally restricted by lack of funding urgently need resources to be made available to them. Resources need to be placed with existing hub centres such as Rainbow in order to facilitate them to be able to provide practical support to these struggling satellite groups.

For LGBT young people in rural communities the web can often be the only source of access to support. Services such as Rainbow offer this support however, resources are needed to enhance this offering with a dedicated information officer. Web access is a lifeline for some who are experiencing isolation.

There is clearly a pressing need for social outlets and opportunities for social networking in places that are safe and accepting. In larger cities where this is happening such as Limerick, resources are needed to maintain and enhance services.

There can be no doubt that the lack of such services in rural areas increases health risk factors for LGBT young people. The need for localised LGBT support is apparent.

Lack of transport is a significant barrier to accessing necessary services. In many rural communities there are very limited public transport services (for some in this study transport was available only once a week). LGBT support services need to be resourced in order to be in a position to provide necessary transportation.

There is also potential to build community capacity through peer based support and local education initiatives. Community and rural development initiatives need awareness of struggling LGBT populations in their areas. They should target specific interventions to support LGBT people in their communities.

There can be little doubt as to the urgency of support and education for parents of LGBT youth.

This research has also highlights the existence of supportive parents who are willing and anxious to become involved in LGBT support for their children and the children of others. The development of a parents' network could aid in the education and support of LGBT parents in the community. This network could aid in the breaking down of the types of stereotypes in rural communities that facilitate homophobia and homophobic behaviours. The existence of such a network could also address in small measure the isolation felt by many in rural communities. Addressing the homophobia of parents is no small task. A parents' network is essential as one step in this task.

Wherever and whenever possible, homophobia within families, schools and society cannot go unchallenged. This research points to the devastating effects of such homophobia.

7.2 Recommendations for Schools

The invisibility of LGBT issues in the curriculum and in the whole school culture serves only to increase the isolation and 'otherness' experienced by LGBT young people.

LGBT should be an integral part of curriculum provision such as Social Personal and Health Education and Relationships and Sexuality Education, particularly as both of these subjects deal with developing identity, decision making and health.

Those involved in pastoral care (guidance counsellors/year heads/form tutors) need to be educated on LGBT issues. They should also be made aware of local LGBT services so that schools and LGBT services can liaise closely in supporting young people.

Pre-service and in-service teacher training should include LGBT issues, awareness and information. Currently in teacher education LGBT issues feature little if at all. Given the influence that teachers were perceived to have in this study there is urgency in addressing this gap in teacher education.

Policies that protect, value, and nurture young LGBT people are essential in schools.

All school staff need to be educated in order to understand the impact of homophobic bullying on young people. They need to challenge homophobic bullying in the same way as other forms of bullying. Schools need to have a zero tolerance of homophobic bullying which should be an integral aspect of their school bullying policy. The policy needs to make explicit reference to the unacceptability of homophobic comments, name calling and aggressive behaviour.

Schools need to promote poster and information campaigns such as that of BeLongTo which attempts to address homophobia in schools. They also need to include lesbian and gay support contacts along with the other help contacts advertised.

At a national level, a greater understanding of LGBT issues should inform educational policy.

7.3 Suggestions for Further Research

Research specific to parental support would help to illuminate the potential for parents to become a collaborative network. This network could aid in championing the LGBT community.

While this research attempted to engage with the needs of LGBT young people further research is necessary. Specifically research that celebrates LGBT identity would aid the profile of the LGBT community.

There is need for further research into the protective factors of LGBT identity. Some participants appeared to cope quite well while for others it was a significant challenge that impacted on health.

There is scope also to deepen this research more about the experiences of LGBT youth specifically under the age of 18.

Further exploration of LGBT young people's experience in the work place is warranted.

Research into the impact of LGBT on families would also be of benefit in deepening the understanding of service providers of disclosure processes among families.

The potential for research to increase advocacy for the LGBT community is evident. Such research can also facilitate dialogue within the LGBT community itself.

Recommendations in Brief: Service Provision

Setting	Recommendations	Focus
Service Provision	LGBT service planning needs to acknowledge the large degree of diversity that exists among the LGBT population.	Social Support
	Personal development should be an integral aspect of LGBT youth support work	Personal Support
	Building self-esteem, self-confidence and resilience are essential activities	Personal Support
	Funding for adequate resources such as meeting venues is essential.	Rainbow Funding
	Funding is essential to support continuous professional development of LGBT youth workers in terms of facilitation skills, personal development and para-counselling skills	Rainbow Funding
	LGBT youth support should also have specific focus on building skills for disclosure	Personal Support
	Education among the heterosexual and LGB communities in order to dispel the many myths that surround Transgender issues.	Social Support
	Mental health, sexual health and substance use need to be included as topics in support programmes for LGBT youth	Health Support
	Mainstream drug and alcohol services need to be aware of LGBT young people as a risk group as well as gain knowledge of the specific challenges they experience.	Health Support
	Proper referral structures for substance misuse are necessary for LGBT youth	Health Support
	There is an urgent requirement for ongoing access to counselling for LGBT young people.	Personal Support
	Social and emotional support structures are needed for young LGBT people who may not have any support in the family or in the community.	Rainbow Support
	The isolation experienced by LGBT young people in rural communities requires urgent consideration.	Rural Support
	Smaller satellite LGBT groups are urgently needed in rural areas. These need funding and support. It is recommended that these functions under the Rainbows umbrella with rainbows as the anchor.	Rural/Outreach Support
	Smaller LGBT drop-in services are necessary in rural areas and these can be linked to youth groups (where existing).	Rural Support
	Access to the web for LGBT young people is a pressing need especially in rural areas.	Rural Support
	A dedicated information officer with IT expertise and skills in using technology in outreach is required.	Rainbow Outreach
	LGBT support services need to be resourced in order to be in a position to provide necessary transportation especially in rural areas.	Rainbow Outreach
	Peer based support and local education initiatives supported by local community and rural development initiatives would enhance support of LGBT young people in their own communities.	Peer Support
	There can be little doubt as to the urgency of support and education for parents of LGBT youth.	Parent Support
	The development of a parents' network could aid in the education and support of LGBT parents in the community.	Parent Support

Recommendations in Brief: School Specific

Setting	Recommendations	Focus
Schools	LGBT culture needs more visibility in the curriculum.	National Policy
	LGBT should be an integral part of curriculum provision such as Social Personal and Health Education and Relationships and Sexuality Education, particularly as both of these subjects deal with developing identity, decision making and health.	National Policy
	Those involved in pastoral care (guidance counsellors/year heads/form tutors) need to be educated on LGBT issues.	National Policy
	Pastoral care teams and school counsellors need to be made aware of local LGBT services so that schools and LGBT services can liaise closely in supporting young people. This can be achieved via national in-service processes linked to SPHE	National Policy
	Pre-service and in-service teacher training should include LGBT issues, awareness and information.	National University
	Policies that protect, value, and nurture young LGBT people are essential in schools.	National Policy School Specific
	All school staffs need to be educated in order to understand the impact of homophobic bullying on young people.	National Policy School Specific
	Schools need to have a zero tolerance of homophobic bullying which should be an integral aspect of the school bullying policy. The policy needs to make explicit reference to the unacceptability of homophobic comments, name calling and aggressive behaviour.	National Policy School Specific
	Schools need to promote poster and information campaigns such as that of BeLongTo which attempts to address homophobia in schools.	National Policy School Specific
	Schools need to include LGBT support contacts along with the other help contacts advertised.	National Policy School Specific
	At a national level, a greater understanding of LGBT issues should inform educational policy.	National Policy

Recommendations in Brief: Research Specific

Setting	Recommendations for Further Research	Focus
Research Specific	Research specific to parental support would help to illuminate the potential for parents to become a collaborative network. This network could aid in championing the LGBT community.	Parent Support
	While this research attempted to engage with the needs of LGBT young people further research is necessary. Specifically research that celebrates LGBT identity would aid the profile of the LGBT community.	LGBT Profile
	There is need for further research into the protective factors of LGBT identity. Some participants appeared to cope quite well while for others it was a significant challenge that impacted on health.	LGBT Health
	This research focussed on need assessment. There is scope also to deepen this research more about the experiences of LGBT youth specifically under the age of 18.	LGBT Support
	Further exploration of LGBT young people's experience in the work place is warranted.	LGBT Support
	Research into the impact of LGBT on families would also be of benefit in deepening the understanding of service providers of disclosure processes among families.	Family Support
	The potential for research to increase advocacy for the LGBT community is evident. Such research can also facilitate dialogue within the LGBT community itself.	LGBT Profile
	Specific research on Transgender experience, need and support is warranted.	Transgender Support and Profile

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Appendix A - Online survey

LGBT Mid-West Supports Questionnaire

1. General Information

This section asks general information such as age, where you live and where you work.

1. What age are you? (please type age in years in box)

2. What best describes what you do?
- ○ Student (secondary school)
- ○ Student (third-level/university)
- ○ Working
- ○ Not Working (unemployed)

3. Where do live at the moment?
- ○ Limerick City
- ○ Limerick County
- ○ Co. Clare (urban)
- ○ Co. Clare (rural)
- ○ North Tipperary (urban)
- ○ North Tipperary (rural)
- ○ South Tipperary (urban)
- ○ South Tipperary (rural)
- ○ Resident outside the areas listed above

4. What town do you live in?

5. Where do you study/work?
- ○ Limerick City
- ○ Limerick County
- ○ Co. Clare (urban)
- ○ Co. Clare (rural)
- ○ North Tipperary (urban)
- ○ North Tipperary (rural)
- ○ South Tipperary (urban)
- ○ South Tipperary (rural)
- ○ Resident outside the areas listed above

Page 1

125

LGBT Mid-West Supports Questionnaire

6. What town do you study/ work in?

[   ]

7. Are you?

○ Female

○ Male

○ Transgender (feeling like a man in a woman's body or feeling like a woman in a man's body)

8. Do you call yourself (please tick one)

○ Gay man

○ Lesbian

○ Bisexual man

○ Bisexual woman

○ Transgender

○ Heterosexual

○ Unsure

○ Other

9. If other, please explain

[   ]

10. How comfortable are you in being LGBT ? (Please tick one)

○ Very comfortable

○ Comfortable

○ Unsure

○ Uncomfortable

○ Very uncomfortable

LGBT Mid-West Supports Questionnaire

2. General opinions

This section asks general opinions about how acceptable you think it is to be LGBT.

1. In your opinion how acceptable are LGBT people to your family? (Please tick one)

- ⭕ Very acceptable
- ⭕ Acceptable
- ⭕ Unsure
- ⭕ Unacceptable
- ⭕ Very unacceptable

2.) In your opinion how acceptable are LGBT people to your friends? (Please tick one)

- ⭕ Very acceptable
- ⭕ Acceptable
- ⭕ Unsure
- ⭕ Unacceptable
- ⭕ Very unacceptable

3. In your opinion how acceptable is being LGBT in the community where you live? (Please tick one)

- ⭕ Very acceptable
- ⭕ Acceptable
- ⭕ Unsure
- ⭕ Unacceptable
- ⭕ Very unacceptable

4. Do you feel that your school/ college/ workplace is LGBT friendly? (Please tick one)

- ⭕ LGBT friendly
- ⭕ Unsure
- ⭕ Not LGBT friendly

5. Please explain

LGBT Mid-West Supports Questionnaire

3. Personal opinions and experience

This section asks about your personal opinions and experiences in relation to LGBT.

1. Have you told anyone about your sexual or gender identity?

○ Yes

○ No

2. If YES, who have you told? (Tick any that apply)

If you tick a box, please indicate if their responses made you feel accepted by them, rejected by them or if you were not sure.

	yes	No	Does not apply	I felt accepted	I felt rejected	I am not sure
Everyone I know	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other LGBT people	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Mother	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Father	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Sister	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Brother	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
A Friend	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Youth club/group leader	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
LGBT Support Service person	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Other (please specify)

3. If you answered NO why have you not told anyone?

129

LGBT Mid-West Supports Questionnaire

4. Have you experienced any of the following as a result of being LGBT (Tick any that apply)

☐ Called names

☐ Being excluded or isolated

☐ Physical assault

☐ Threats of physical assault

☐ Teasing/ slagging

☐ Bullying

☐ Discriminated against

☐ Got Support

Other (please specify)

[   ]

5. If you have been treated badly did it result in any big decisions? (for example change schools or move away etc.)

[   ]

6. If you have been treated badly did you seek help/ support?

○ Yes

○ No

LGBT Mid-West Supports Questionnaire

7. If YES, what type of support did you seek? (tick any that apply)

- ☐ Help Line
- ☐ Support Service
- ☐ Counsellor
- ☐ Family
- ☐ Close Friend
- ☐ Other friends
- ☐ Partner
- ☐ Other

Other (please specify)

[   ]

LGBT Mid-West Supports Questionnaire

4. LGBT services

This section asks about LGBT services available and those you would like to see available.

1. What social outlets (not LGBT specific) do you currently attend in your area?

☐ Sports club

☐ Theatre/Drama Group

☐ Music group

☐ Youth club/group

☐ Social places (e.g. pub, club, cinema)

☐ None

☐ Other

Other (please specify)

[   ]

2. What type of supports (LGBT specific) do you think should be available to LGBT people in your area?

☐ LGBT groups

☐ LGBT social networking

☐ One to one support

☐ Drop in services

☐ Counselling

☐ Substance misuse services

☐ WWW (web) access

☐ Other

Please explain

[   ]

3. Are you aware of any LGBT services in your area?

○ Yes

○ No

4. Do you currently use any LGBT services in your area?

○ yes

○ No

132

LGBT Mid-West Supports Questionnaire

5. If NO, where are the nearest LGBT services that you know of?

- ⊙ Limerick City
- ⊙ Limerick County
- ⊙ Ennis
- ⊙ Scarriff
- ⊙ North Tipperary
- ⊙ South Tipperary
- ⊙ Other areas

Other (please specify)

[   ]

6. Do you currently use any LGBT services in an area other than where you live?

- ⊙ Yes
- ⊙ No

please explain

[   ]

7. What type of LGBT supports are you currently using?

[   ]

133

LGBT Mid-West Supports Questionnaire

8. If you are using LGBT services how supportive do you think they are? (please tick one)

○ Very supportive

○ Supportive

○ Unsure

○ Unsupportive

○ Very unsupportive

9. Are there LGBT support services close to you that you don't use?

○ yes

○ No

○ Don't know

Please explain

```
[                                    ]
```

10. If an LGBT support service were available to you how often would you use it?

○ Weekly

○ Monthly

○ Occasionally

○ Never

Further comment

```
[                                    ]
```
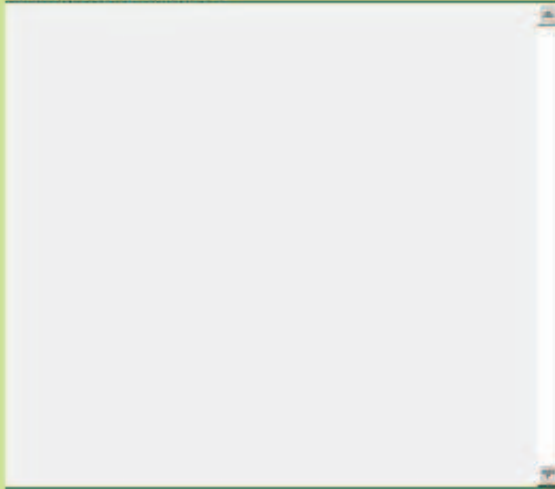
11. What would make using LGBT support services easier for you?

○ Transport

○ Scheduled meetings

○ LGBT Interest Workshops

○ Other

Other (please specify) or further comment
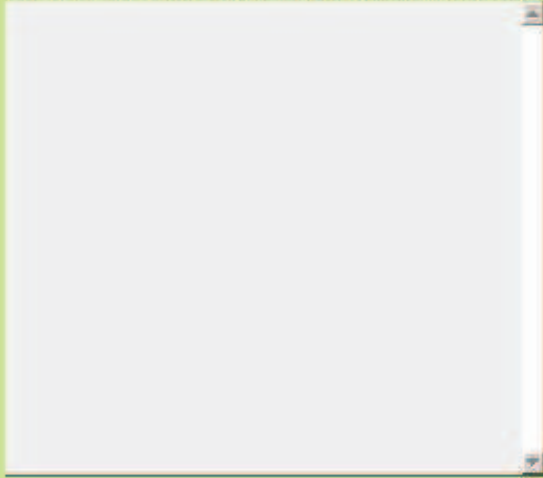
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[                                    ]
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LGBT Mid-West Supports Questionnaire

12. What type of activities would you suggest that would interest young people and encourage them to attend a service?

135

5. Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. It is greatly apprec...

1. If you would like to make any additional comments to inform this study please do so here

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O L L S C O I L   L U I M N I G H

An exploratory study into the needs of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people in Limerick, Clare and Tipperary.

What services are you currently accessing that are non LGBT specific?

Are you aware of LGBT services in your area? Further a field?

What services are you currently accessing that are LGBT specific?

How supportive do you find these services?

What types of services would you like to see available for LGBT people?

Can you explain more?

Would you prefer services local to you or a little distance away?

Why/explain?

What types of challenges do LGBT people face?

What types of supports do you think are necessary to address these?

UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK

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Can you explain more?

Would you prefer services local to you or a little distance away?

Why/explain?

What types of challenges do LGBT people face?

What types of supports do you think are necessary to address these?

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O L L S C O I L   L U I M N I G H

An exploratory study into the needs of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People in Limerick, Clare and Tipperary.

What is the study about?

The study seeks to explore the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in the mid west region. This research is being carried out by the University of Limerick and Rainbows Support Services in order to identify your needs and the supports you would like to see in place and which you could see both yourself and others accessing.

What will I have to do?

Participants are asked to take part in a focus group or interview. The focus group or interview will be tape-recorded and the tapes will be transcribed verbatim with all identifying features removed.

What are the benefits?

It is the intention of the researchers to use the findings of the research to inform a needs assessment which will contribute to the development of services for LGBT people in the mid- west region.

What are the risks?

It is not envisaged that there will be risks to participants. However, this may be a sensitive topic for some people to discuss. Other than the discussion normally arising from participants themselves no other topics or sensitive areas will be introduced. The focus group moderators are skilled facilitators. You will not be asked for any personal or sensitive information. The focus of this research is on needs assessment and service provision.

What of I do not wish to take part?

Participation is entirely voluntary and if you do not wish to take part there is no pressure to do so.

What happens if I change my mind about participating during the study?

You can withdraw your participation and consent at any time, even after the data has been collected. If this should arise any data pertaining to you will be removed.

What happens to the information collected?

The focus groups and interviews will be tape-recorded. The recording will then be transcribed verbatim with all identifying features removed. The transcripts will then be returned to you for your verification, should you wish it. Once verification is received the data will be analysed and a research report completed.

Who else is taking part in the focus groups?

Those who are taking part in interview of focus group are other LGBT people in the mid-west region.

How will the results be disseminated?

The research report will be published by Rainbows Support Services again with absolutely no identifying features.

Freedom of Information

The University is subject to the Freedom of Information Act and the research procedures will adhere to the provisions of Data Protection legislation.

What if I have more questions or do not understand something?

If you wish to ask any more questions about the research process you can contact the principal investigator at the following:

Patricia Mannix McNamara,

Course Director Health Education and Promotion
Faculty of Education and Health Sciences,
University of Limerick,
Tel: (061) 202722.
e-mail: patricia.m.mcnamara@ul.ie

Or

Eva Devaney
Course Director Drug and Alcohol Studies
Faculty of Education and Health Sciences,
University of Limerick,
e-mail eva.devaney@ul.ie

UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK

O L L S C O I L   L U I M N I G H

An exploratory study into the needs of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people in Limerick, Clare and Tipperary.

I have read and understood the research information sheet.

I understand what the research project is about and what the results of the research will be used for.

I am fully aware of all the procedures involving myself, and of any risks and benefits associated with this study.

I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any time without prejudice and without having to supply a reason.

I am aware that the data collected will form the basis of a research report that will placed on the Rainbows Support Services web-site on completion and that no identifying features will be in that report thus guaranteeing anonymity me.

Participant Signature: _____

Participant Name :   _____ (Please print)

Researcher Signature: _____

Researcher Name: _____ (Please print)