



# No one left behind

**A 2024 Community Study on LGBTQ+  
Discrimination and Inclusion in Singapore**

**pinkdot.sg**

supporting the freedom to love

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## Content Warning

To convey an accurate representation of the lived reality of LGBTQ+ people in Singapore, this report contains references to **abuse, bullying, physical and sexual violence, self-harm, forced outing, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia** and **discrimination** in a broad range of contexts. Readers are advised to be mindful when navigating difficult and sensitive topics, and take appropriate steps to safeguard their mental well-being.

# Foreword

Teo You Yenn

*In the mid-1990s,  
a dear friend came  
out to me.*

I was in my early twenties and did not have other out gay friends. I was ill-informed, had not given much thought to what being gay might mean and what coming out is. I remember being shocked, responding clumsily, having no script or framework to reach for to properly comprehend or react to what he was telling me. It is difficult now to precisely recall the social mood of the time, but I think this was true: I heard my friend's words as a confession of a vulnerable secret, and I felt afraid for him. Indeed, for several years after, I continued to worry — about what being out would mean for his life, about his safety, about how our friends would react if they found out.

Over the next decades, little by little, I stopped worrying. And I think that happened not only because he and I as individuals grew up, got strong, but also because the world changed around us. The stories told about and by gay people multiplied and became more complex. Their lives — both in their specificity and universality — reached the mainstream. Homophobia received more attention as a problem requiring calling out and correction. Bit by bit, systematic forms of this homophobia were chipped away. More friends came out, I came to befriend more people who identify as queer.

Today, I marvel when I see younger people — friends, students, my kid and her peers — take for granted that there are varied experiences and expressions of sexuality and gender identity. In the popular discourse, there is language — words, terms, vocabulary that everyone of all ages can and do draw from — that brings visibility and recognition, even if not always acceptance, to LGBTQ+ lives and identities. These changes did not just happen spontaneously, an agentless evolution. Instead, they are the result of the struggles and efforts of activists all over the world — organising to bring people together in solidarity, pushing against prejudices and restrictions, fighting to overturn unjust practices.

In Singapore, Pink Dot has been a crucial agent of change — expanding the space for LGBTQ+ activism, enriching society's shared understanding about queer lives, enhancing the rights and dignity of the LGBTQ+ community. I could not have imagined these changes in 1996. This is one of the most significant and progressive cultural shifts I have witnessed in my adult life thus far.

*Given how much has changed, it  
is troubling how much has not.*

Pink Dot's report details the harms and indignities that people who are LGBTQ+ continue to face in Singapore today. Just as there was when I was growing up in Singapore, there are today deep prejudices as well as discriminatory practices. Just as things were then, we see these manifest at individual and interactional levels as well as at systemic and institutional levels. Harms occur in multiple spaces and across the life course — in schools, at work, in the family, in national media — resulting in reduced rights and compromised well-being. As the report makes clear, what is at stake — what is always at stake in cases where one group's status is differentiated from others' in a society — are not things that can be fixed just by rhetorical calls to live and let live, or symbolic gestures like politicians turning up at Pink Dot.

*Because what people who are LGBTQ+ need are what all humans need: access to work, family, housing, healthcare, education, safety, representation, and dignity.*

Where there is inequality built into a system — reproduced through regulations and practices; perpetuated by the absence of formal recourse when harm is done — undoing inequality requires more than a softening in language or a reminder to change mindsets. This is, I think, the thrust of this report. In what follows, you will read about what is happening for LGBTQ+ persons in various areas of life as well as recommendations for changes to how things are now systematically organised and materially conducted. If inequality is built into a system, then it is in regulations and practices where we must look to reduce inequality.

The strides our society has made on the LGBTQ+ front are significant.

But reading Pink Dot's report,

*I am reminded of the importance of staying befuddled, perplexed, saddened, enraged at the real harms and indignities that persist.*

And thinking about how changes have come about from the efforts of people pushing against the grain, working to bring about more just societies, I am hopeful. Inclusion, so often mentioned by our nation's leaders today, is a great goal for our country; here are members of our society contributing ideas for how to build toward it.



**Teo You Yenn**

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# Introduction

Pink Dot exists **“precisely because members of the LGBTQ community in Singapore continue to face discrimination and inequality in a multitude of ways, on a daily basis”**.<sup>1</sup>

This was our response in 2019 to then Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, who had held up Pink Dot’s yearly rally as proof that LGBTQ+ people have not been “inhibited... from living” in Singapore.<sup>2</sup> But five years on, and with a new prime minister leading our nation, our words still ring true.

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<sup>1</sup>“An Open Invitation to Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong,” Pink Dot SG, June 27, 2019, <https://pinkdot.sg/2019/06/an-open-invitation-to-prime-minister-lee-hsien-loong/>.

<sup>2</sup>Ng Jun Sen, “377A Will Be Around ‘For Some Time’, Will Not Inhibit How S’pore Attracts Tech Talent: PM Lee,” TODAY, June 27, 2019, <https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/377a-will-be-around-some-time-will-not-inhibit-how-spore-attracts-tech-talent-pm-lee>.



# The multiple faces of discrimination

In 2022, the government took a step in the right direction by repealing 377A, bringing relief to many who lived through a time of police entrapment and anti-gay raids.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, discarding one piece of legislation has been far from enough.<sup>4</sup> Discrimination against Singapore's LGBTQ+ community remains pervasive and entrenched, as the debates in Parliament following the repeal clearly exposed. In this report, we will show how these harms and inequalities have adversely affected the diverse identities encapsulated within the LGBTQ+ umbrella, with some — such as Singapore's transgender community — affected worse than others.

Our report presents both quantitative and qualitative evidence. **First, Pink Dot conducted an online survey of over 900 Singaporean citizens and Permanent Residents (PRs) between May and June 2024, in collaboration with the local survey company Milieu Insight.**<sup>5</sup>

This research explored LGBTQ+ Singaporeans' experiences of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity or expression (SOGIE) across various aspects of life.

**Second, at Pink Dot's 16th edition in Hong Lim Park, we invited attendees to pen messages to Prime Minister Lawrence Wong. We received over 600 responses, many of them from LGBTQ+ Singaporeans sharing stories of trauma and survival.**

These messages were breathtaking in their vulnerability and diversity, unveiling a wide swathe of needs and concerns which heretofore had remained unexpressed and kept away from the eyes and ears of the general public.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the diverse backgrounds and aspirations of the writers, a common theme emerged: at almost every stage of life, LGBTQ+ Singaporeans face significant challenges, reduced support and an increased risk of discrimination.



<sup>3</sup>Tessa Wong, "377A Repeal: Singapore Turns Page on Dark LGBT History," December 4, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-63832825>.

<sup>4</sup>The repeal was accompanied by a constitutional amendment "protecting" the heterosexual definition of marriage from judicial challenge, as well as utterances by various politicians that the government's policy on LGBTQ+ rights has not changed.

<sup>5</sup>See our [Methodology](#) section.

<sup>6</sup>Before repeal, it was potentially unsafe to reveal one's identity as an LGBTQ+ individual.

# Making the invisible, visible

It was not so long ago that then education minister Ong Ye Kung claimed there was “no discrimination” against LGBTQ+ people in “work, housing and education”.<sup>7</sup> Comments such as these are symptomatic of a wider problem: **in the eyes of the government, LGBTQ+ Singaporeans do not face legitimate challenges or have a legitimate claim to rights as a group.**<sup>8</sup>

We see this manifested in almost every area of policy-making. LGBTQ+ identities are all but erased in schools and in the media. Our needs are virtually ignored in areas ranging from housing to healthcare to financial planning.

In the recent national renewal initiative, the needs and issues facing Singapore’s LGBTQ+ community were **conspicuously absent** in the 180-page ForwardSG report despite claiming the participation of over 200,000 Singaporeans.

Singapore does a lot for vulnerable groups (such as racial minorities, the elderly, disabled people, those with lower income), but does not appear to concern itself with the plight of LGBTQ+ individuals. For instance, the government rejected calls to cover sexual orientation and gender identity or expression (SOGIE) in the recent Workplace Fairness Legislation, citing a lack of SOGIE-based complaints.<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, compelling research shows that victims of SOGIE-based discrimination face barriers to reporting precisely due to the government’s perceived anti-LGBTQ+ policies.<sup>10</sup>

Ignorance means victims continue to **suffer in silence**, whilst institutional actors point to government policies as a justification for maintaining the status quo. This report will show how this vicious cycle repeats itself across multiple areas, such as the reporting of sexual and family violence,<sup>11</sup> and the readiness of companies to implement LGBTQ-affirming policies.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Faris Mokhtar, “No Discrimination Against LGBTQ Community at Work, in Housing and Education Here: Ong Ye Kung,” *TODAY*, September 14, 2018, <https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/no-discrimination-against-lgbtq-community-singapore-ong-ye-kung>.

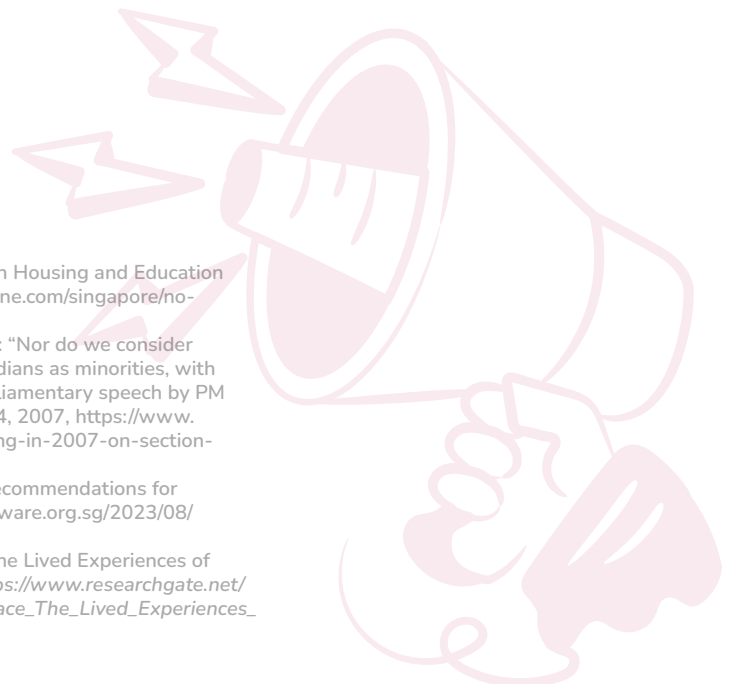
<sup>8</sup> Then Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong in a parliamentary speech in 2007: “Nor do we consider homosexuals a minority in the sense that we consider, say, Malays and Indians as minorities, with minority rights protected under the law”. See *The Straits Times*, “Full parliamentary speech by PM Lee Hsien Loong in 2007 on Section 377A,” *The Straits Times*, October 24, 2007, <https://www.straitstimes.com/politics/full-parliamentary-speech-by-pm-lee-hsien-loong-in-2007-on-section-377a>.

<sup>9</sup> Sabrina Zolkifi, “Aware’s Response to the Tripartite Committee’s Final Recommendations for Workplace Fairness Legislation,” *Aware*, August 14, 2023, <https://www.aware.org.sg/2023/08/response-tripartite-committee-workplace-fairness-final-report/>.

<sup>10</sup> Wen Zhi Ng et al., “Discrimination and Harassment in the Workplace: The Lived Experiences of Singaporean LGBTQ Individuals+,” *ResearchGate*, November 1, 2024, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/386982871\\_Discrimination\\_and\\_Harassment\\_in\\_the\\_Workplace\\_The\\_Lived\\_Experiences\\_of\\_Singaporean\\_LGBTQ\\_Individuals](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/386982871_Discrimination_and_Harassment_in_the_Workplace_The_Lived_Experiences_of_Singaporean_LGBTQ_Individuals).

<sup>11</sup> See [this section on family violence faced by LGBTQ+ people](#).

<sup>12</sup> See [this section on workplace discrimination faced by LGBTQ+ people](#).



# The “queer agenda”

LGBTQ+ people and the community groups that advocate for their wellness and survival have been oftentimes accused of having an “agenda”.

**So: what do queer Singaporeans want?**

We want what other Singaporeans already have.

We want to marry our significant other, live as a family in our jointly owned HDB flat, amongst our loved ones and friends, here in our homeland, like other Singaporeans. We want to be assured that our chosen partner will have the same rights as the spouses of other Singaporeans. Above all, we want to know that our needs will be taken care of, that we are safe and respected, just like other Singaporeans.

Don't leave us behind please.  
You promised you wouldn't.

— Clarisse<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> One of over 600 responses collected through Pink Dot's “Dear PM” initiative held in June and July 2024, where we invited Singaporeans and PRs to pen messages to PM Wong.

In service of that mission, this report will provide policymakers with examples and data alongside direct recommendations, all in keeping with the spirit of Prime Minister Lawrence Wong's call to join him in building a brighter future for "all Singaporeans".<sup>14</sup> These recommendations can be distilled along the following key themes:



### Inclusion as a valid and equal stakeholder group

- **Recognition of the LGBTQ+ community as a legitimate stakeholder** in policy planning and design, rather than being sidelined or addressed indirectly (e.g., as "singles" under public housing policy). This should include changes to legislation that ensures the government is committed to achieving this aim.<sup>15</sup>
- **Directly address specific needs and vulnerabilities of the LGBTQ+ community** (including those exacerbated by the effects of long-term systemic discrimination), as ignoring them undermines efforts to address the needs of the community effectively.



### Needs-based approach focused on protecting the most vulnerable

- **A comprehensive review of policy and legislation to eliminate SOGIE-based discrimination** in all aspects of life including employment, housing, and public services, with a focus on protecting the most vulnerable members of the LGBTQ+ community.
- **Support research to identify and address LGBTQ+ needs and vulnerabilities**, as we cannot effectively support a community we do not fully recognise or comprehend.<sup>16</sup> Such efforts should prioritise the safety and informed consent of individuals e.g. any data collected should only be with informed consent, and be kept confidential and anonymised.
- **Enforcement of legal protections and clear mechanisms** for addressing violations.



### Promote transparency and open public discourse

- **Revision of repressive censorship laws and media guidelines** which serve to perpetuate stigma and discrimination.
- **Greater transparency in policies and their implementation**, such as the publishing of civil service policies, educational policies, and policies on the provision of support services.
- **Promote and facilitate open and constructive dialogue** rather than reacting defensively or shutting down public discourse out of fear.

<sup>14</sup> "I ask each of you to join me in this journey. Share your ideas, share your passions and dreams. Work with me and my team. Together we can build a future that shines brightly for all Singaporeans." Then Deputy Prime Minister Wong in [a video address on April 2024](#), shortly after he was announced to be the next Prime Minister. "I am honoured to be asked to undertake this new responsibility as the Prime Minister of Singapore," April 15, 2024, accessed October 20, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=952540232765451>.

<sup>15</sup> Some examples include recognising SOGIE in Article 12(2) of the Constitution as a characteristic deserving of equal protection before the law, similar to race or religion, and consequently, expand the composition and function of the Presidential Council for Minority Rights (Part 7) to include sexual minorities.

# Good policies, or good politics?

Our leaders have long pointed to a conservative Singapore public for the lack of progress. Mr Ong framed LGBTQ+ rights as a matter of “social mores and societal values”,<sup>17</sup> while Mr Lee similarly said: “It is the way this society is.”<sup>18</sup> This view of Singapore society is outdated. More Singaporeans than not support same-sex unions, and a majority agree that same-sex couples should not only have the same rights to adopt children, they are just as likely to raise children successfully.<sup>19</sup>

Equally significantly, such a view ignores the power of state policies and narratives shape societal norms, influencing perceptions of what is considered acceptable and possible. In Chapter 4, we examine how state-defined narratives around family affect the broader public discourse and imaginations of who can call themselves a family and have the rights and privileges that families are entitled to. At their worst, such policies and narratives have the effect of entrenching prejudice and discrimination, alienating LGBTQ+ individuals from their loved ones and preventing them from accessing the rights and resources they need.

We know that doing the right thing may not be politically expedient. There will always be a small but vocal conservative minority who are opposed to progress in the name of preserving “traditional family values”.<sup>20</sup>

Yet LGBTQ+ people are being abused and assaulted.<sup>21</sup> Our livelihoods are being threatened.<sup>22</sup> Our children are being bullied.<sup>23</sup> Are these the “traditional values” we want to uphold?

The repeal of Section 377A came more than a decade after India had repealed a similar law and nearly three decades after Taiwan and Hong Kong. Just this year, both Thailand<sup>24</sup> and South Korea<sup>25</sup> took major steps toward ensuring equal rights for LGBTQ+ people. As more and more countries decide to do right by their queer citizens, will LGBTQ+ Singaporeans be left behind yet again?

<sup>16</sup> To public knowledge, the government currently does not collect or publish specific data based on SOGIE.

<sup>17</sup> Faris Mokhtar Victor Loh, “No discrimination against LGBTQ community at work, in housing and education here: Ong Ye Kung,” TODAY, September 14, 2018. Retrieved November 18, 2024. <https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/no-discrimination-against-lgbtq-community-singapore-ong-ye-kung>.

<sup>18</sup> Ng Jun Sen, “377A will be around ‘for some time’, will not inhibit how S’pore attracts tech talent: PM Lee,” TODAY, June 26, 2019. Retrieved November 18, 2024. <https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/377a-will-be-around-some-time-will-not-inhibit-how-spore-attracts-tech-talent-pm-lee>.

<sup>19</sup> “Ipsos LGBT+ Pride Report 2024,” Ipsos.com (Ipsos, June 2024), accessed October 20, 2024, [https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2024-06/Pride-Report-2024\\_2.pdf](https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2024-06/Pride-Report-2024_2.pdf).

<sup>20</sup> Loraine Lee, “Politicians Show up for Pink Dot Despite Scorecard Grading Their ‘Family Values’, Say It’s Important to Engage Different Groups,” TODAY, July 2, 2024, <https://www.todayonline.com/news/politicians-pink-dot-scorecard-family-values-2450116>.

<sup>21</sup> Shynn Ong, “Police Probe Alleged Assault at Marina Bay Sands in Incident Where Drag Performer Tells of ‘homophobic’ Slur,” TODAY, March 12, 2024, <https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/police-probe-alleged-assault-mbs-homophobic-slur-2380816>.

<sup>22</sup> See Chapter 2, Employment and the Workplace, in the section “Work-related discrimination”.

<sup>23</sup> See Chapter 1, Education and Youth, in the section “An unsafe space”.

<sup>24</sup> Rebecca Ratcliffe, “Thailand Passes Historic Bill Recognising Marriage Equality,” The Guardian, June 19, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/jun/18/thailand-same-sex-marriage-equality-vote-bill-legislation>.

<sup>25</sup> Hyunsu Yim, “In landmark ruling, South Korea’s top court confirms state benefits for gay couples,” Reuters, July 18, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/south-koreas-top-court-upholds-landmark-ruling-over-same-sex-spousal-state-2024-07-18/>.

# Terminology & acronyms

## Bisexual

Describes a person who has the potential to be physically, romantically, and/or emotionally attracted to people of more than one gender, not necessarily at the same time, in the same way, or to the same degree.

## Cisgender

Describes a person or people whose gender identity corresponds with the sex registered for them at birth.

## Cis-het/cishet

Cisgender and heterosexual.

## Closet

A state of concealment regarding one's homosexuality or any other aspect of one's sexual or gender identity. An LGBTQ+ person who is not public about their identity is said to be "in the closet" or "closeted"; to be public about one's sexuality or gender identity is to be "out" or to "come out of the closet".

## Conversion "therapy"

Treatment intended or claiming to change or suppress a person's sexuality, gender identity, or gender expression, especially to "make" a gay or bisexual person heterosexual, or to make a transgender person identify with their birth sex. Such practices can include religious and spiritual rituals or counselling and aversion therapy. Various medical studies and rights groups have noted such practices can cause deep psychological and other harm.<sup>26,27</sup>

## Deadname

The former name of a person (especially a transgender person) who has chosen a new name.

## Deadnaming

To address or refer to (someone, especially a transgender person, who has chosen a new name) by a former name. Deadnaming may be unintentional, or a deliberate attempt to deny, mock, or invalidate a person's gender identity.

## Gender dysphoria

Persistent dissatisfaction with or distress relating to one's anatomic sex. Treatment includes psychosocial therapy, pharmacotherapy for underlying depression and/or anxiety, hormonal therapy, non-genital and/or genital feminisation or masculinisation operations.<sup>28</sup>

## Gay

Describes a person whose enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attractions are to people of the same sex (e.g., gay man, gay people). Sometimes lesbian is the preferred term for women.

## Gender-nonconforming, gender fluid, gender diverse

Designating a person who expresses gender or gender identity in ways that do not correspond to traditional or stereotypical expectations of binary masculine or feminine behaviour, dress, etc.; or of relating to such a person or their gender expression.

<sup>26</sup> Human Rights Campaign, "The Lies and Dangers of Efforts to Change Sexual Orientation or Gender", accessed November 13, 2024. <https://www.hrc.org/resources/the-lies-and-dangers-of-reparative-therapy>.

<sup>27</sup> Ilias Trispiotis and Craig Purshouse, "'Conversion Therapy' as Degrading Treatment," *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* 42, no. 1 (June 29, 2021): 104–32, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ojls/ggab024>.

<sup>28</sup> Danyon Anderson et al., "Gender Dysphoria and Its Non-Surgical and Surgical Treatments," *Health Psychology Research* 10, no. 3 (September 23, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.52965/001c.38358>.

## Heteronormative

Describes an attitude or view (e.g. in policy, narratives) that promotes the idea of heterosexuality as the normal or preferred sexual orientation, in particular a cisgender, heterosexual marriage (between a man and a woman).

## Heterosexual

Describes a person whose enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction is to people of a sex different than their own. Also: straight.

## Homosexual

Sexually or romantically attracted to, or engaging in sexual activity with, people of one's own sex. This term has formal and clinical connotations, and has been negatively associated with the historical pathologisation and criminalisation of LGBTQ+ people.

## HRT

Hormone replacement therapy, sometimes also called gender-affirming hormone therapy. Medical treatment that uses hormones to help transgender, nonbinary, and gender-expansive individuals align their physical characteristics with their gender. Gender-affirming hormone therapy often is associated with significant alleviation of gender dysphoria, improvement in mental health, and enhancement of overall quality of life.<sup>29</sup>

## Intersectionality

The interconnected nature of social categorisations such as race, class, and gender, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.

## Legal sex marker

The indicator on official legal documents, such as one's birth certificate and National Registration Identity Card (NRIC), which marks one's sex. Trans people in Singapore who wish to change their legal sex marker must submit a medical examination report signed by a Singapore-licensed endocrinologist, gynaecologist, urologist or plastic surgeon to the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA), certifying that their genitalia has been completely changed.<sup>30</sup>

## Lesbian

A woman whose enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction is to other women.

## LGBTQ+

An initialism for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer or questioning. The 'plus' (+) sign includes those that do not identify with the other initials.

## Misgendering

The action or fact of deliberately or accidentally mistaking or misstating a person's gender, especially of addressing or referring to a transgender person in terms that do not reflect the gender with which that person identifies. Intentional misgendering can cause real harm to transgender people by invalidating their identity and worsening their gender dysphoria.

## Out

To expose the undeclared sexuality of someone. Outing someone who is in the closet without their consent is deeply offensive, as it can expose the outed person to severe consequences they may be unprepared for, such as familial and social rejection or discrimination.

## PEP

Post-exposure prophylaxis. The use of antiretroviral drugs after exposure to a high-risk event to prevent HIV infection.

## PrEP

Pre-exposure prophylaxis. Treatment of an HIV-negative person with antiretroviral drugs before his or her exposure to a situation in which transmission of the virus is a risk.

<sup>29</sup> Rogers, K.. "gender-affirming hormone therapy." Encyclopedia Britannica, September 26, 2024. <https://www.britannica.com/science/gender-affirming-hormone-therapy>.

<sup>30</sup> TransgenderSG, "Changing documents - TransgenderSG," TransgenderSG.com, accessed October 24, 2024, <https://transgendersg.com/docs/#legalsex>.

## Queer

Any sexual or gender identity that does not correspond to culturally entrenched ideas of sexuality and gender, especially heterosexual norms. Sometimes used synonymously with LGBTQ+. Historically a pejorative term, but now in common usage by some LGBTQ+ people as a neutral or empowering term.

## Questioning

Describes someone who is unsure or exploring their sexual orientation, sexual identity or gender identity.

## SOGIE

An acronym for sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

## Transgender or trans

Describing a person whose sense of personal identity and gender does not correspond to that person's sex at birth. It is important to note that being transgender is not dependent upon physical appearance or medical procedures. A person can call themselves transgender the moment they realise that their gender identity is different from the sex they were assigned at birth.

## Transition

Also called gender transition. The process by which a transgender person comes to live as the sex or gender with which that person identifies. It is a complex process that occurs over a long period of time and the exact steps involved in transition will vary from person to person. Transition can include: social transition (telling family, friends, and co-workers, using a different name, using different pronouns, dressing differently, starting or stopping wearing make-up and jewellery, etc), legal transition (changing one's name and/or sex marker legally) and medical transition (e.g. undergoing hormone replacement therapy and/or one or more surgical procedures).

## WFL

An acronym for Workplace Fairness Legislation.

# Executive Summary



# Education and youth

Singaporean schools often fail to provide a safe and nurturing environment for LGBTQ+ students. **Nearly half** report experiencing discrimination in school and LGBTQ+ students are **31%** less likely to feel safe than their cisgender and heterosexual counterparts, indicative of systemic issues within the education system.

- Discrimination reported includes bullying, attempts to change LGBTQ+ students' 'lifestyle', and being outed without consent, with the most common example being taught false and discriminatory narratives about LGBTQ+ identities.
- This has led to greater risk of mental health issues, self-harm and suicide among LGBTQ+ youth.
- **64% of transgender students** face discrimination such as forced gender conformity or being denied access to gender-affirming care.
- MOE's current educational policies reinforce heteronormativity, marginalising and **erasing LGBTQ+ identities** in the classroom, allowing harmful stereotypes to perpetuate. Educators are ill-equipped to support LGBTQ+ students due to a lack of clear, inclusive policies and insufficient training.
- Teachers and staff sometimes perpetuate or fail to address abuse, while those that try to be affirming risk accusations of advancing a "personal agenda".

## Policy recommendations

### Inclusive and transparent policies

- Set public policies for LGBTQ+ students including standards of care and inclusion
- Introduce framework to assess implementation of these policies in a manner that does not compromise LGBTQ+ students' privacy

### Anti-bullying protections

- Set clear and transparent anti-bullying policies with specific protections for LGBTQ+ students
- Educate students and staff on bullying awareness, prevention and intervention
- Facilitate spaces and support groups for bullied students that are inclusive, safe and help promote peer support and understanding

### Student-centered care and support

- Enable access to LGBTQ+-affirming counselling. Support should prioritise the student's well-being and autonomy, and should take into account the complexities surrounding parental consent
- Prohibit conversion "therapy"
- Provide sensitivity training for counsellors, staff, teachers

### Non-discriminatory curriculum

- Include evidence-based education (including sex education) acknowledging LGBTQ+ relationships and identities are valid

### Safe and welcoming environment

- Allow and respect gender-related choices (e.g. uniforms, amenities, pronouns, names, processes, documents)
- Review potential discrimination against queer teachers

# Employment and the workplace

Workplace discrimination takes a significant toll on LGBTQ+ Singaporeans, with **7 in 10** citing instances including losing job opportunities, a skewed hiring process, being treated badly at the workplace and being paid or promoted less.

- Beyond the significant personal toll, such discrimination contributes to wage gaps, decreases productivity, and may drive talented LGBTQ+ individuals to leave the country, harming Singapore's competitiveness.
- Discrimination is compounded by factors including age, race and gender, with **transgender individuals** particularly vulnerable.
- Work-related discrimination is **severely underreported** due to fear of retaliation or lack of faith that issues will be addressed.
- The Workplace Fairness Legislation (WFL) does not protect against SOGIE-based discrimination – a failure of justice to prevent harm against queer Singaporeans.

## Policy recommendations

### Expand legal protections

- Make SOGIE a protected characteristic under WFL
- Revise guidelines to expressly prohibit SOGIE-based discrimination
- Establish protected whistleblowing channels

### Public service taking the lead

- Revise and improve transparency of HR policies in public sector to cover SOGIE-based discrimination
- Ensure equal benefits
- Provide sensitivity training

### Promote best practices

- Implement best practices for LGBTQ+ inclusivity in guidelines
- Partner with LGBTQ+ groups for employer education



# Health and well-being

LGBTQ+ individuals face major barriers in accessing healthcare. Harmful medical practices often go unchecked, worsening the health and well-being of queer Singaporeans and making healthcare difficult and costly.

- Mental health issues are prevalent, with **59%** of LGBTQ+ respondents reporting that their mental well-being has been impacted by discrimination.
- **HIV-related stigma** persists and is perpetuated by society, while both preventative (e.g. pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP)) and post-exposure treatment (e.g. post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP)) remain costly and under-promoted.
- Harmful **conversion “therapy”** practices continue to be unregulated, causing significant and long-lasting psychological harm.
- A lack of government support and recognition for LGBTQ+ affirming services further exacerbates these issues, especially during crises like the Covid-19 pandemic.

## Policy recommendations

### Safe settings

- Implement anti-discriminatory guidelines
- Provide LGBTQ+-specific training to healthcare professionals
- Develop and fund LGBTQ+-specific programmes and policies in healthcare, social services and mental health

### Inclusive care

- Subsidise and cover vital, evidence-based treatments for LGBTQ+ individuals (e.g. HIV prevention or gender-affirming care)
- Recognise LGBTQ+ relationships in healthcare financing schemes

### Ban conversion “therapy”

- Legislate protection for LGBTQ+ minors and vulnerable adults from conversion practices
- Require professional associations to adopt rules against conversion “therapy”



# Family and future

The government's national policies and nation-building narrative centre a cisgender, heterosexual "traditional" family that has long excluded LGBTQ+ families and other models of kinship, while misleadingly **portraying LGBTQ+ Singaporeans as a threat** to wider society.

- Exclusion from marriage denies LGBTQ+ people access to various **rights, benefits, and protections** across areas such as housing, healthcare, parental rights and citizenship/residency.
- **Barriers to housing** are the most urgent issue facing the community, such as barriers to accessing more affordable public housing and an often discriminatory rental market.
- These barriers prevent escape from family violence and abuse (exacerbated by societal stigma), causing lasting psychological damage and other harms.
- LGBTQ+ couples wishing to start families cannot legally adopt children, causing them to face a plethora of legal, logistical and other administrative obstacles that ultimately compromise the safety and well-being of their children.
- LGBTQ+ individuals are only **half as likely to be confident** of planning for the future as other Singaporeans, facing legal barriers for healthcare and retirement.
- A lifetime of discrimination compounds the financial insecurities and legal issues faced by ageing LGBTQ+ individuals (e.g. end-of-life decisions).

## Policy recommendations

### Legal recognition

- Recognise LGBTQ+ partnerships to ensure equal access to healthcare, housing, and social security benefits

### Equal access

- Review policies for citizenship and residency, housing, Central Provident Fund (CPF) and MediSave, and other benefits (e.g. financial assistance, taxes) to ensure equality for same-sex couples

### Inclusive housing

- Allow LGBTQ+ individuals and couples earlier access to public housing
- Protect LGBTQ+ people from rental discrimination
- Fund shelters for homeless LGBTQ+ youth and seniors

### Support abuse victims

- Implement protocols and training to protect LGBTQ+ victims from family abuse, with a focus on youths and transgender individuals

### Parental rights

- Update adoption and reproduction laws to be more inclusive
- Protect the integrity of same-sex families
- Ensure children's rights regardless of family structure

### Ageing and death

- Treat LGBTQ+ seniors as a valid stakeholder group
- Conduct research around the needs of ageing LGBTQ+ Singaporeans



# Transgender community

Trans Singaporeans face the highest incidence of discrimination among LGBTQ+ groups, with **8 in 10** facing discrimination in the last five years, including verbal abuse and a lack of physical security in schools, workplaces and wider society.

- Trans people are the most likely within the LGBTQ+ community to face **violence** over their identity, with more than 1 in 5 reporting being threatened or physically assaulted.
- Transgender individuals face significant **job search and workplace discrimination**, including misgendering, harassment, and lack of promotion opportunities.
- There are many barriers to legal **gender recognition** in Singapore, including the requirement for genital surgery, which is costly, risky and fails to account for the diversity of transition journeys.
- Trans people also face several challenges in accessing gender-affirming care, including high costs, limited availability and discriminatory attitudes and practices.

## Policy recommendations

### Protection against violence

- Enact specific legislation against SOGIE-based violence and offer SOGIE-based protections
- Conduct sensitivity training for law enforcement
- Fund shelters for victims of SOGIE-based violence

### Gender self-identification

- Review gender markers on legal documents
- Allow legal gender changes without requiring surgery
- Provide sensitivity training for public servants
- Review gender-determined national policies (e.g. NS)

### Healthcare access

- Include gender-affirming treatments in national healthcare financing
- Train healthcare providers in gender-affirming care

### Workplace

- Ensure safe, supportive workplaces with gender-neutral practices
- Provide education and sensitivity training for employers, starting with the civil service

# Media and public discourse

The government's censorship regime reveals a deep misunderstanding and **pathologisation** of LGBTQ+ identities, an attitude that has permeated into other public or educational bodies and spaces, perpetuating discrimination against queer Singaporeans.

- Media censorship by IMDA restricts LGBTQ+ content across all mainstream platforms, with LGBTQ+ themes often rated M18 or R21 even if they have no explicit or adult themes, effectively marginalising queer identities in Singapore.
- **Negative portrayals** of LGBTQ+ individuals in mainstream media reinforce harmful stereotypes and stigma, while IMDA's content codes group LGBTQ+ identities with objectionable and criminal practices (e.g. incest, drug abuse and bestiality).
- Educational and public events related to LGBTQ+ topics often face **censorship or cancellation** due to pressure from conservative groups.
- The denial of fair and positive representation of LGBTQ+ stories or people leads to further marginalisation and a lack of understanding.

## Policy recommendations

### Review content codes

- Remove the automatic assignation of higher ratings to LGBTQ+ content
- Allow balanced discussions and non-explicit depictions of LGBTQ+ issues
- Remove references to LGBTQ+ content alongside criminal behaviour
- Permit ads that promote LGBTQ+ health and well-being

### Negative portrayals

- Sanction discriminatory portrayals in a proportionate and sensitive manner
- Introduce SOGIE as protected characteristics in content regulations

### Transparency and accountability

- Make the decision-making process for censorship known
- Ensure censorship bodies are free from discriminatory influence
- Publish IMDA's censorship decisions

# Methodology

The primary research featured in this report is based on data collected through an online quantitative survey commissioned by Pink Dot SG and carried out by independent research company Milieu Insight. The survey includes a total of n=933 respondent samples, with a margin of error of +/- 3% at a 95% confidence level. Fieldwork took place between May 27<sup>th</sup> 2024 and June 14<sup>th</sup> 2024.



## Research objectives

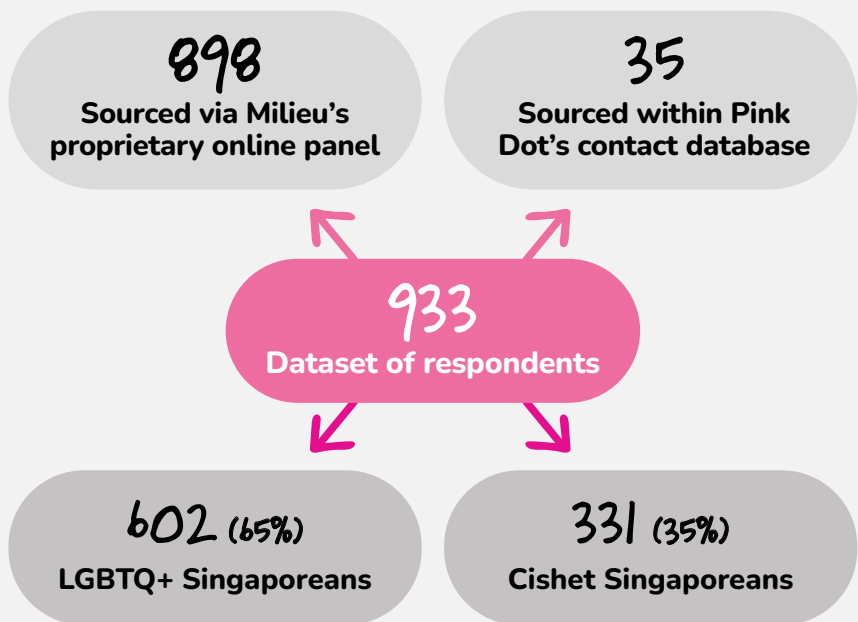
- ✓ The study focused on assessing the impact of structural discrimination on various segments of the LGBTQ+ community.
- ✓ Our study specifically targeted members of the LGBTQ+ community to explore their experiences with discriminatory or exclusionary environments, as well as to assess how these factors influence their future plans, including their perceptions of Singapore as a viable place to live.
- ✓ For context and comparison, relevant questions were also answered by a control group of cisgender-heterosexual (cishet) Singaporeans.

## Sample sources

The dataset is representative of two primary populations:

- ① LGBTQ+ Singaporeans and ② cishet Singaporeans

Respondent samples for the study were sourced via Milieu's proprietary online panel as well as Pink Dot's contact database. In total, n=898 respondents were sourced from Milieu's panel. N=35 respondents were collected by surveying individuals within Pink Dot's contact database in order to reach a minimum quota of n=30 for transgender individuals.



65% of the overall respondent sample (n=602) is representative of LGBTQ+ Singaporeans aged 16 and above, while 35% (n=331) is representative of cishet Singaporeans aged 16 and above. The LGBTQ+ Singaporean sample included a minimum quota of n=30 for transgender individuals, while all other demographics fell out naturally.

## Respondent screening

The LGBTQ+ Singaporean sample was screened based on a combination of sexual orientation and gender identity. The following questions and accompanying lists of responses were used for screening:

### S1. Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?

- ☐ Heterosexual (Straight)
- ☐ Lesbian
- ☐ Gay
- ☐ Bisexual
- ☐ Pansexual
- ☐ Asexual
- ☐ Questioning
- ☐ My answer isn't listed here

### S2. Which of the following best describes your gender identity?

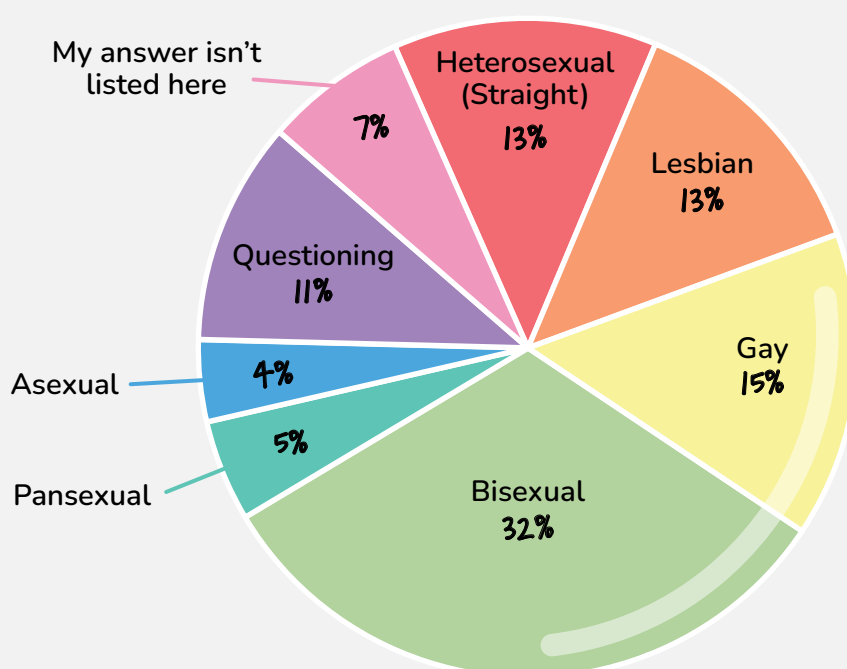
- ☐ Cis Male
- ☐ Cis Female
- ☐ Transgender Male
- ☐ Transgender Female
- ☐ Intersex
- ☐ Non-binary, gender-nonconforming, genderqueer or gender fluid
- ☐ My answer isn't listed here

Based on the screening questions listed above, respondents who selected “Heterosexual (Straight)” (S1) AND (“Cis Male” OR “Cis Female”) (S2) were screened into the cishet sample, while all others were screened into the LGBTQ+ sample. Note that the cishet sample was only exposed to a subset of survey questions that were relevant to both groups.

## Demographic composition

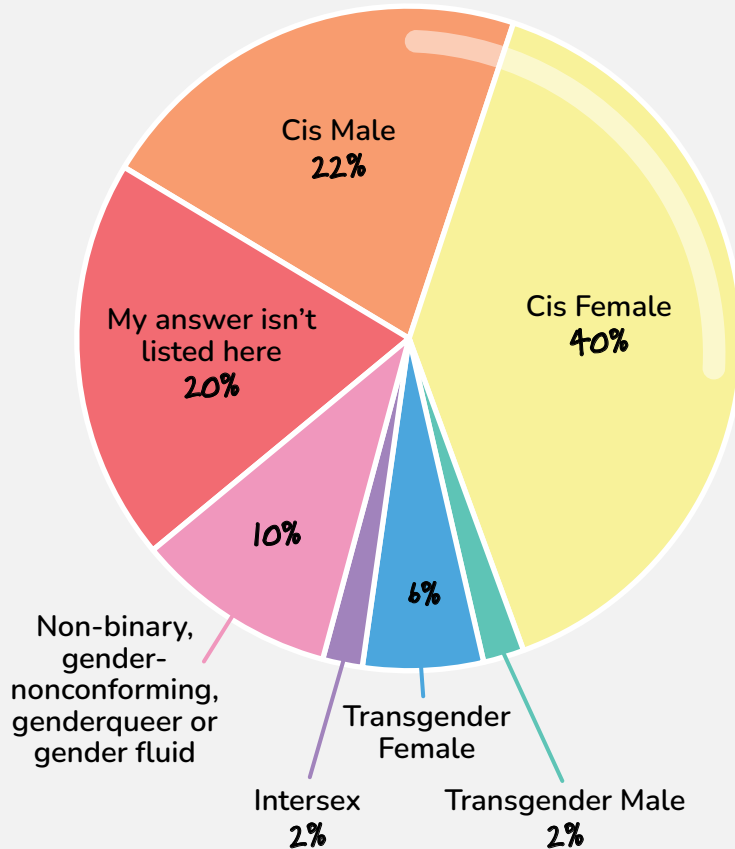
The demographic breakdown for the LGBTQ+ Singaporean respondents was as follows:

### S1. Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?

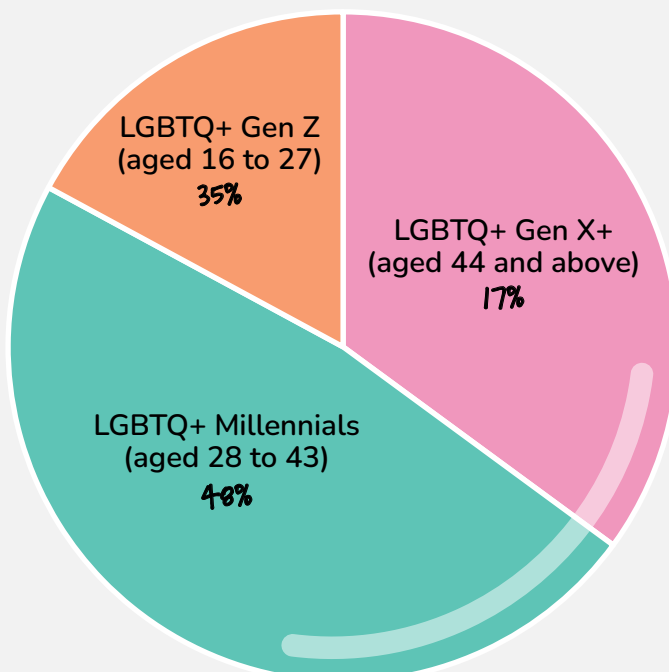


## Demographic composition

**S2. Which of the following best describes your gender identity?**



**The sample's age composition for LGBTQ+ Singaporeans was as follows:**



## Questionnaire design and duration

The survey questionnaire included 21 questions and took approximately five minutes to complete. The survey was only available in English. The following statement was shown to respondents at the beginning of the survey to inform them of the subject matter and their right to opt out of questions they were not comfortable answering:

*In this survey we will be exploring issues facing the LGBTQ+ community. We recognise that this topic may be sensitive for some, and to make sure we keep the survey experience positive we have included options like "I prefer not to say" or "not applicable" for specific questions; please select either of those options if you don't feel comfortable offering a response.*

Note that the statement was shown to respondents after the S1 and S2 screening questions.

# Education and youth

Educational institutions in Singapore set the stage for students as they prepare to engage with society. **However, for LGBTQ+ children, this formative period is often fraught with early encounters of rejection and marginalisation.**

The Ministry of Education's stance on LGBTQ+ issues, which it says are based on Singapore's prevailing norms, have impacted various aspects of the school experience including sex education, the regulation of gender expression, and the support available for LGBTQ+ students dealing with bullying or mental health issues. These policies, which are based on restrictive views of gender and sexuality, not only reinforce societal prejudices, but can also create an environment where educators' discretion and personal biases may proliferate unchecked.

For transgender students, the school environment can be particularly hostile, with too many facing bullying and other abuse.<sup>31</sup> Lacking adequate support or being forced to leave school early, many have turned to peer support organisations like Transbefrienders, which provide crucial resources such as educational materials, mentorship and even subsidies of fees for private candidates taking the General Certificate of Examination (GCE) examinations.

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<sup>31</sup> 23% of our transgender respondents reported facing bullying or abuse by peers in schools, 9% by teachers or school administrators.

# An unsafe space

Our research indicates that nearly **half of LGBTQ+ students (47%)** have experienced some form of discrimination in Singapore schools. Compared to their cisgender-heterosexual peers, LGBTQ+ students are **31% less likely to feel safe** at school<sup>32</sup> and **34% less likely to have an adult they can go to for support** at school<sup>33</sup>. The situation is particularly challenging for transgender students, a topic we will explore further in the [following section](#).

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the experiences of LGBTQ+ students can vary widely, largely depending on the personal attitudes of educators and school authorities.<sup>34</sup> For many, schools can be actively unsafe spaces where they face bullying or abuse — not just from peers (16%) but also from teachers and staff (5%). While official statistics are not available,<sup>35</sup> our findings broadly align with reports from students, educators, counsellors and community groups of various harmful and discriminatory practices.

<sup>32</sup> 61% of LGBTQ+ respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I feel safe at school", compared to 89% of cisgender respondents. Amongst transgender respondents, the figure was even lower (38%).

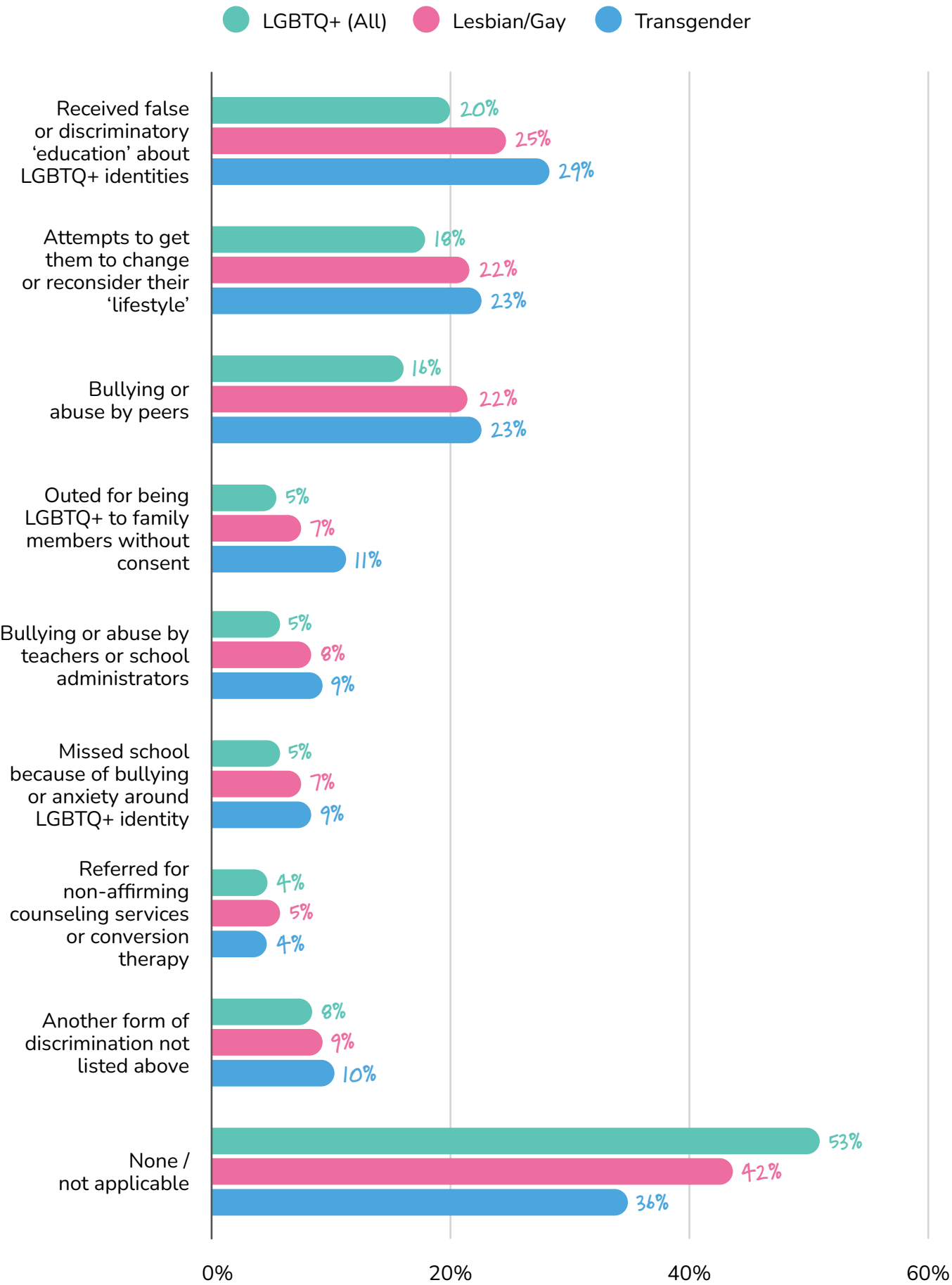
<sup>33</sup> 43% of LGBTQ+ respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I have a teacher, counsellor or other school staff whom I can go to for support in school", compared to 65% of cisgender respondents.

<sup>34</sup> "Elizabeth, a secondary school student, shared an incident where a teacher exclaimed, 'Get that disgusting shit out of my classroom!' in response to two boys sharing a hug." - The Editorial Board, "The Miseducation of Singapore's Queer Youth," RICE, February 26, 2024, <https://www.ricemedia.co/feature-storytellers-miseducation-singapore-queer-youth/>.

<sup>35</sup> The government does not currently publicly collect or release specific data on SOGIE, including statistics relating to bullying, educational outcomes or mental health.



LGBTQ+ respondents' experiences of SOGIE-related discrimination or harassment while attending a Singaporean educational institution



Various studies offer corroborative insights and context to these statistics.<sup>36</sup> A 2018 Sayoni report highlighted **peer bullying** as a common issue, often driven by intolerance toward gender nonconformity.<sup>37</sup> The study found that instead of protecting victims from bullying, teachers and schools often engaged in **victim-blaming** and further punished queer students, using disproportionately harsh measures to separate same-sex couples and invading their privacy. In one example, schoolmates filmed and shared a video of two female students engaging in sexual activity in a toilet cubicle. Rather than focusing on the privacy violation, the school imposed only minimal consequences on the trespassers. In contrast, the school dealt with the same-sex couple disproportionately harshly, asking them to withdraw from school in an attempt to close the case quickly.<sup>38</sup>

Our research also showed that 18% of LGBTQ+ respondents have, in their schools, been subject to attempts to get them to change or reconsider their “lifestyle”. **Gender policing** — efforts to shame or correct non-conforming behaviours — not only infringes on students’ rights but perpetuates harmful stereotypes and exacerbates the stigma associated with LGBTQ+ identities.

Teachers and counsellors who wish to support LGBTQ+ students face barriers due to implicit or explicit policies which tend to be non-inclusive (see the section on **erasing queer identities**). Educators who affirm LGBTQ+ students may be accused of advancing a “personal agenda”, and even well-meaning staff may inadvertently cause harm due to a **lack of clear and inclusive guidelines** on how to support LGBTQ+ students (e.g. in Character and Citizenship Education or form teacher training).<sup>39</sup>

Despite the repeal of Section 377A, MOE does not condone or protect teachers who disclose or are outed regarding their queer identities,<sup>40</sup> and many queer teachers remain understandably reluctant to share their identities even if it could help vulnerable students. Consequently, schools and educators are not adequately equipped to support LGBTQ+ students, address bullying or create inclusive, safe environments.

<sup>36</sup> Another 2021 report by Aware featured further accounts, including that of an 18-year-old transgender student who was bullied for his gender expression but was told by his teacher that what he experienced was not bullying, and could not find the necessary support. Aware, “Sexuality Education for a Safer Singapore,” July 2021, accessed October 24, 2024, <https://www.aware.org.sg/wp-content/uploads/AWARE-Reimagining-Equality-2021-Community-Policy-Wishlist-Sexuality-Education.pdf>, p 10.

<sup>37</sup> Sayoni, “Violence and Discrimination Against LGBTQ Women in Singapore,” *Outright International*, 2018, accessed October 20, 2024, [https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/Sayoni%20Human%20Rights%20Documentation%20on%20the%20violence%20and%20discrimination%20of%20LGBTQ%20persons%20in%20Singapore%20\(EBook%20Version\).pdf](https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/Sayoni%20Human%20Rights%20Documentation%20on%20the%20violence%20and%20discrimination%20of%20LGBTQ%20persons%20in%20Singapore%20(EBook%20Version).pdf), pp 54-55.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Teachers who spoke to Pink Dot on condition of anonymity. See also: William Hoo, “The First Singaporean Teacher to Come Out Did so in 2007. Have Things Changed Since Then?” *RICE*, July 12, 2019, <https://www.ricemedia.co/current-affairs-features-singapore-queer-teachers-have-things-changed/>.

<sup>40</sup> When asked what protections there are for gay teachers and if teachers are allowed to come out to their students, MOE reiterated that its education policies and curriculum remain anchored on Singapore’s prevailing family values and social norms. “Our teachers are expected to discharge their duties and responsibilities in a way that can win the trust, support and cooperation of students, parents and the wider community...This includes demonstrating personal character and conduct appropriate for a role model to students, in line with the established norms of our society.” - Jean Iau and Ng Wei Kai, “Is It Okay for Gay Teachers to Come Out in Class? Gay Teachers List Qualms, Parents Urge Caution,” *The Straits Times*, January 1, 2023, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/is-it-okay-for-gay-teachers-to-come-out-in-class-gay-teachers-list-qualms-parents-urge-caution>.

I am in constant fear that my career will be jeopardised should my identity be revealed at the workplace... I don't feel safe in the workplace because of homophobic and queerphobic discourse at the school leadership level.

— Roy  
Teacher, queer

School counsellors are restricted from providing affirming counselling or referring students to NGOs that offer such support.<sup>41</sup> Whilst no formal guidelines have been made public, school counsellors have told non-profit counselling organisations such as Oogachaga that policies require the disclosure of LGBTQ+ students' identities to their families, potentially exposing them to unsafe home environments.<sup>42</sup> In our research, 5% of LGBTQ+ respondents report being **outed to family members** without consent, and a further 4% report having been referred to non-affirming counselling or **conversion therapy**.

Adolescence is a challenging time for anyone, but it is particularly difficult for LGBTQ+ students who constantly receive signals from teachers, counsellors and peers that reinforce their sense of otherness and inferiority. Sayoni noted that given the lack of support from educational institutions, it is unsurprising that the LGBTQ+ respondents surveyed often did not seek support from teachers, counsellors or other authority figures in times of need.<sup>43</sup> Research has shown that LGBTQ+ youth are more susceptible than the general population to poor mental health and suicide because of stress linked to their identities.<sup>44</sup> For a more detailed discussion on mental health, see [our section on this topic](#).

<sup>41</sup> Leow Yangfa, executive director of LGBT-friendly non-profit counselling organisation Oogachaga, as quoted in an Asia Times article. Kirsten Han, "A Rally Cry Mounts for LGBT Rights in Singapore," Asia Times, February 18, 2020, <https://asiatimes.com/2018/07/a-rally-cry-mounts-for-lgbt-rights-in-singapore/>.

<sup>42</sup> Leow Yangfa, executive director Oogachaga, as quoted in Heckin' Unicorn article. Heckin' Unicorn, "How Schools in Singapore Suppress LGBTQ+ Identities // LGBT Rights in Singapore," Heckin' Unicorn, April 6, 2021, <https://heckinunicorn.com/blogs/heckin-unicorn-blog/how-schools-in-singapore-suppress-lgbtq-identities-lgbt-rights-in-singapore>.

<sup>43</sup> In a case documented in the Sayoni report (n 37, pp 54-55), Elaine, a 21-year-old Chinese lesbian, recounted how her girlfriend was molested by a male classmate and how the perpetrator threatened to out Elaine to teachers and get her into trouble.

<sup>44</sup> "A recent study among 469 lesbian, gay and bisexual young adults published by the National University of Singapore Social Service Research Centre found that past experiences of discrimination, microaggressions, internalised homophobia (that is, negative attitudes towards oneself due to one's sexual orientation) and rejection anticipation were associated with higher levels of psychological distress. Another recent study among 570 sexual minority men aged 18 to 25 by researchers from the NUS Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health found that 59 per cent reported contemplating suicide, whereas 14 per cent had attempted suicide." - Anthea Ong and Rayner Tan, "Why More Needs to Be Done to Help LGBTQ Youth," *The Straits Times*, August 3, 2022, <https://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/why-more-needs-to-be-done-to-help-lgbtq-youth>.

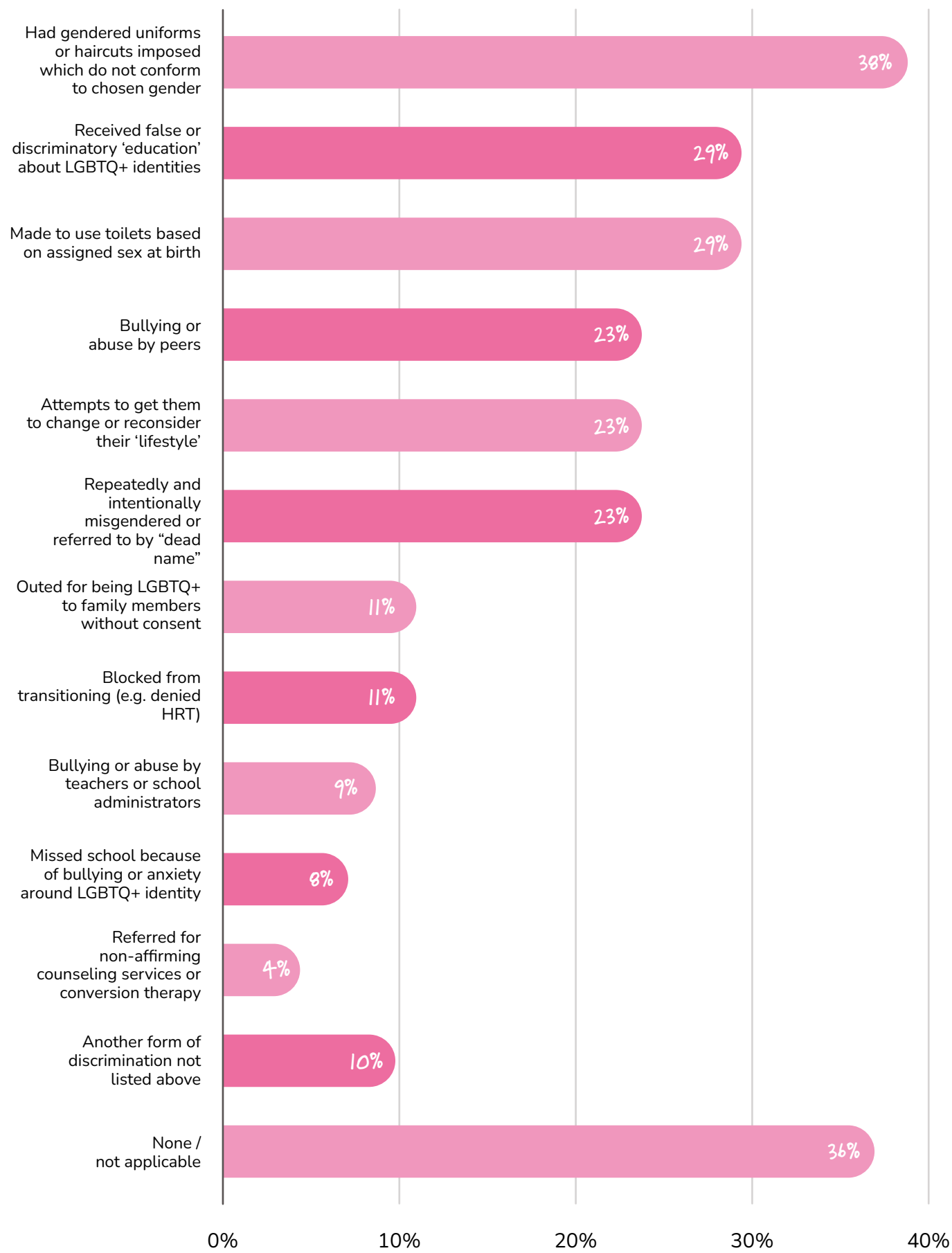
# Trans and gender non-conforming youths (see also [chapter 5](#))

Among the LGBTQ+ population, our research found that **transgender students were the most likely to experience discrimination** when at school (**64%**). This corroborates past studies including a 2021 report by Transgender SG, which found that **77.6% of openly transgender students** reported negative experiences at school including bullying and sexual abuse.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>45</sup> TransgenderSG, "Challenges facing Singapore's Transgender Community: A Quantitative Review," TransgenderSG.Com, July 25, 2021, accessed October 20, 2024, <https://transgendersg.com/singapore-transgender-survey.pdf>, p 12.



**Transgender respondents' experiences of SOGIE-related discrimination or harassment while attending a Singaporean educational institution**



Navigating a non-affirming school environment presents particular challenges. Practices such as forcing transgender students to wear uniforms they were uncomfortable with, or use bathrooms that do not align with their gender identity, not only undermine their sense of identity and dignity, but also place them in situations of heightened vulnerability.

Such policies exacerbate discrimination against transgender students who cannot alter their legal gender marker. TransgenderSG reported on a case of a 16-year-old transgender boy, who had legally changed his name and started hormone therapy with parental consent.<sup>46</sup> Despite being generally perceived as male, his junior college's administration required that he wear a girls' uniform due to his legal sex — or not attend school. He consequently stopped attending school.

Then Minister of Education, Ong Ye Kung, expressed sympathy but upheld MOE's uniform policy, offering to facilitate the student's transfer to another junior college after the student completed sex reassignment surgery. However, such surgeries are generally not available or advisable for those under 21.

Transgender students in Singaporean universities also encounter considerable difficulties due to housing policies that assign students to gendered accommodations based on their legal sex, regardless of their transition status. Bathroom provisions for transgender students are typically limited to unisex bathrooms, which are not always available in every building. Transgender women are often placed in housing with male students or on the same floor,<sup>47</sup> inadvertently disclosing their transgender status and exposing them to potential risks of sexual and physical violence.

Among some of the more alarming allegations made by transgender students include school administrators seeking to **prevent them from transitioning** or denying them access to hormone replacement therapy (HRT) **(11%)**<sup>48</sup>, and sometimes even reaching out to their healthcare providers without their consent.<sup>49</sup>

In a highly publicised case in 2020, a male-to-female transgender junior college student, who had been diagnosed with gender dysphoria by the Institute of Mental Health (IMH), detailed online a traumatic experience in which she claimed MOE had blocked her HRT treatment despite having the support of her father, doctor and teacher.<sup>50</sup> In a statement, the ministry denied it had “interfered” with her treatment and continued to refer to her with male pronouns.<sup>51</sup> Community groups such as Oogachaga have stated that this issue is not isolated, with many transgender students reporting being pressured to delay their treatment until after they have left their respective schools.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>46</sup> TransgenderSG, Sayoni, and Asia Pacific Transgender Network, “38th Universal Periodic Review of Singapore Joint Stakeholder Submission,” *TransgenderSG.Com*, March 17, 2021, accessed October 20, 2024, <https://transgendersg.com/upr-report.pdf>, pp 5-6.

<sup>47</sup> n 46, p 6.

<sup>48</sup> Sayoni, “Statement of Solidarity with Transgender Students in Singapore,” Facebook, January 19, 2021, accessed October 20, 2024, [https://www.facebook.com/fbSAYONI/posts/pfbid0JwB9983AkMinBFBP5HUdKQFiGjfxs857u9ZrLPPX8cjlTocpFrRQixnXc6madoLPI?locale=zh\\_CN](https://www.facebook.com/fbSAYONI/posts/pfbid0JwB9983AkMinBFBP5HUdKQFiGjfxs857u9ZrLPPX8cjlTocpFrRQixnXc6madoLPI?locale=zh_CN).

<sup>49</sup> n 46, p 6.

<sup>50</sup> AcanthisittaParty986, “[Rant] Transgender Discrimination in Singapore Schools and MOE's denial of mental health issues,” Reddit, January 14, 2021, accessed October 20, 2024, [https://www.reddit.com/r/SGExams/comments/kwqqdu/rant\\_transgender\\_discrimination\\_in\\_singapore/](https://www.reddit.com/r/SGExams/comments/kwqqdu/rant_transgender_discrimination_in_singapore/).

<sup>51</sup> Rei Kurohi, “MOE Denies Blocking Transgender Student From Receiving Hormone Therapy,” *The Straits Times*, January 16, 2021, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/moe-denies-blocking-transgender-student-from-receiving-hormone-therapy>.

<sup>52</sup> Leow Yangfa, “Transgender Student's Experience Not Unique, Others Face Difficulties in School Due to Gender Identity Issues,” *Today*, January 18, 2021, <https://www.todayonline.com/voices/transgender-students-experience-not-unique-others-face-difficulties-school-due-gender-identity>.

“How can young people concentrate on our education when we must deal with transphobic and unsupportive teachers and staff?”

How can schools be our second home when they are just as uncaring and ignorant of trans struggles?

— Jun

## Erasing LGBTQ+ identities

The harms faced by LGBTQ+ students are not isolated incidents but indicative of systemic issues within the education system. Despite MOE's broad assertions of promoting values like “mutual understanding, respect, and empathy” while condemning “bullying and cancel culture”, **there is a clear disconnect between these values and the realities experienced by many LGBTQ+ students.**

In a statement shortly after the repeal of Section 377A was announced, the ministry said its policies were based on “prevailing family values and social norms” which include a heteronormative definition of marriage. It also repeatedly stressed avoiding “advocacy or contestation on socially divisive” issues and advancing personal “agendas”.<sup>53</sup> In practice, this has created an environment where any view beyond the narrowly heteronormative risks being seen as biased or contrary to MOE policy, leading many teachers to remain silent and to treat LGBTQ+ topics as taboo. The fear of ideological conflict also potentially sidelines broader inclusivity and the well-being of queer students — who are notably absent from the statement altogether.

The lack of transparency in MOE’s policies, particularly regarding the care and support of LGBTQ+ students, further compounds the issue. Anti-bullying and counselling policies often either fail to recognise the unique needs of LGBTQ+ youth, or are shared only with selected personnel on a restricted basis. This opacity leads to inconsistent policy implementation, depending on the attitudes of individual educators and school leadership, and makes it difficult to verify or challenge anti-LGBTQ+ practices. Educators are neither adequately trained nor equipped to create inclusive, safe spaces for LGBTQ+ students.

A 2022 memo to parents from a school showed<sup>54</sup> showed how sexuality education is conducted. The programme’s stated aim was “encouraging... healthy, heterosexual marriages and stable nuclear family units”. LGBTQ+ or non-nuclear family structures were neglected entirely.<sup>55</sup> This narrow perspective teaches LGBTQ+ students that their identities are abnormal, and perpetuates the harmful and misleading notion that a particular sexual orientation can be “encouraged” or changed.

It is no wonder then that schools perpetuate some of the most harmful misinformation about LGBTQ+ identities, with **35% of our respondents reporting false or discriminatory “education”** about LGBTQ+ identities at school. As recently as 2022, a Hwa Chong Institution staff member made baseless claims in a presentation to students, associating gay and lesbian people with intestinal worms, paedophilia, alcoholism and sexual assault.<sup>56</sup> There are many similarly egregious examples that have not been widely reported; the 2021 Aware study cited an account of a teacher giving a lecture comparing homosexuality to bestiality, while also describing how someone had “turned” heterosexual through conversion therapy.<sup>57</sup>

Students deserve a safe space to explore their identities. The current system, however, forces them to fit into an oppressive structure where only one expression of sexuality is deemed acceptable — leaving countless children feeling isolated, misunderstood and unsafe.

<sup>53</sup> MOE statement concerning Section 377A,” MOE.gov.sg, August 22, 2022, accessed October 20, 2024, <https://www.moe.gov.sg/news/press-releases/20220822-moe-statement-concerning-section-377a>.

<sup>54</sup> Koh Ewe, “Leaked Letter Shows Singapore Schools’ Promotion of ‘Heterosexual Marriages’ in Sex Ed,” VICE, July 27, 2024, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/letter-singapore-school-sex-education-lgbtq-abstinence/>.

<sup>55</sup> A mother of two told Aware in its 2021 study that her children’s school rejected her request of teaching about alternative families because “it was against the idea of a nuclear family”. Aware, “Sexuality Education for a Safer Singapore,” Aware, July 2021, accessed October 20, 2024, <https://www.aware.org.sg/wp-content/uploads/AWARE-Reimagining-Equality-2021-Community-Policy-Wishlist-Sexuality-Education.pdf>, p 10.

<sup>56</sup> Ng Wei Kai, “Hwa Chong Reprimands Staff Member, Suspends Him From Sexuality Education Over anti-LGBTQ Content,” *The Straits Times*, July 18, 2022, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/parenting-education/hwa-chong-reprimands-staff-member-suspends-him-from-sexuality-education-over-anti-lgbtq-content>.

<sup>57</sup> Aware, “Sexuality Education for a Safer Singapore,” Aware, July 2021, accessed October 20, 2024, <https://www.aware.org.sg/wp-content/uploads/AWARE-Reimagining-Equality-2021-Community-Policy-Wishlist-Sexuality-Education.pdf>, p 10.

# Policy recommendations

## 1 Implement inclusive and transparent policies

To foster a student-centered environment that is safe, inclusive, and non-discriminatory, schools must prioritize the needs and well-being of all students, including those from LGBTQ+ communities.

**MOE should work closely with queer community groups and/or qualified queer-affirming professionals to develop policies that are not only inclusive but also genuinely responsive to the diverse needs of students.** Such policies should

be clear, transparent, and communicated effectively to schools, educators and counsellors, ensuring they are implemented in a way that actively supports, rather than inadvertently undermines, LGBTQ+ students.

- Define and implement a uniform standard of care and inclusion for all LGBTQ+ students.
- Clarify and publicise inclusive policies for LGBTQ+ students in all school matters e.g. anti-bullying, counselling, classroom culture etc.
- Set out a framework to assess the implementation of the above standards and policies, making sure that student safety and consent is prioritised while doing so. For example, regular audits on bullying incidents or educational outcomes should prioritize the protection of student identities, ensuring that no potentially identifiable data is collected that could lead to discrimination or harm.

## 2 Strengthen protections against bullying

**While the goal of any anti-bullying policy is to protect all students, specifying particular characteristics (e.g. race, religion, disability, SOGIE) is necessary to protect those most marginalised by societal discrimination.<sup>58</sup>**

Research shows that compared to generic policies, such policies lead to less bullying and more effective intervention by school staff.<sup>59</sup>

- Establish clear and transparent anti-bullying policies, ensuring that they specifically include protections for LGBTQ+ students against bullying perpetuated by both students and staff. Policies should ensure that school staff address incidents in ways that do not victim-blame.
- Provide education to promote understanding and awareness amongst students, and equip staff and administrators with the skills to handle incidents of homophobic and transphobic bullying.
- Have a clear parental notification policy that does not risk outing a student without the student's consent or placing a student in an unsafe home situation.
- Facilitate school spaces and support groups for victims of bullying that are safe, inclusive and help promote peer support and understanding.

3

### Provide student-centered care and support for LGBTQ+ students in crisis

- Allow access to LGBTQ+-affirming counselling that is sensitive to the unique needs and complexities faced by LGBTQ+ students, especially in crisis situations. Support should be student-centred, prioritising the student's well-being and autonomy, and should take into account the complexities surrounding parental consent, such as in cases where parental support is lacking, where parents could be contributing to the student's distress, and/or where disclosing a student's LGBTQ+ identity could lead to harmful consequences.
- Provide sensitivity training to inhouse counsellors, ensuring they are equipped to support LGBTQ+ students effectively. Counselling guidelines should be transparent and designed to empower students while respecting their privacy and safety.
- Prohibit the promotion or practice of all forms of conversion therapy, recognising that such practices are harmful and have no place in a supportive educational environment.

4

### Implement a non-discriminatory curriculum

Claiming objectivity or neutrality whilst erasing or invalidating LGBTQ+ and other non-heteronormative identities fuels harmful misinformation. **We call on MOE to provide evidence-based, inclusive education that acknowledges the validity of LGBTQ identities, to be applied transparently and consistently across all schools.**

5

### Establish a safe and welcoming environment for all LGBTQ+ students and educators

- Allow students to choose uniforms and access amenities and facilities (e.g. bathrooms and campus housing) that reflect their preferred gender identity and expression, and/or offer gender-neutral facilities and options where possible.
- Ensure school documents, teachers and other staff use the names and pronouns by which students wish to be referred, even if they do not match those on official records.
- Collaborate with the Ministry of Manpower to assess and address potential discrimination against LGBTQ+ teachers regarding pay, work, and promotion.

<sup>58</sup> Overseas literature shows that in spite of existing anti-bullying policies, LGBTQ+ students continue to endure higher incidents of bullying and harassment than their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts (e.g., Mark A Schuster et al., "A Longitudinal Study of Bullying of Sexual-Minority Youth," *New England Journal of Medicine* 372, no. 19 (May 6, 2015): 1872–74, <https://doi.org/10.1056/nejmc1413064>). In fact, non-LGBTQ+ inclusive anti-bullying policies are as damaging to LGBTQ+ students as not having anti-bullying district policies at all (Ryan M. Kull et al., "Effectiveness of School District Antibullying Policies in Improving LGBT Youths' School Climate," *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity* 3, no. 4 (December 1, 2016): 407–15, <https://doi.org/10.1037/sgd0000196>).

<sup>59</sup> Joseph G. Kosciw et al., "The 2017 National School Climate Survey: The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Youth in Our Nation's Schools," *GLSEN.Com*, 2018, accessed October 20, 2024, <https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2019-10/GLSEN-2017-National-School-Climate-Survey-NSCS-Full-Report.pdf>.

# Employment and the workplace

LGBTQ+ Singaporeans have long contributed to the nation's economy through their roles in the workforce, yet they continue to face work-related discrimination that takes a significant toll on their **mental well-being** and **financial security**. Nearly **9 in 10 (87%)** of LGBTQ+ individuals who reported workplace discrimination also cited negative mental health impacts as a result of discrimination.<sup>60</sup> Beyond the personal toll, these inequities contribute to wage gaps, economic insecurity,<sup>61</sup> and can diminish productivity.

The case for preventing discrimination, even from a purely economic standpoint, is clear: skilled individuals may be driven away and diversity-conscious multinational investment could be deterred, harming Singapore's competitiveness. But the harm done to individuals should alone be more than sufficient reason to take action.

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<sup>60</sup> The share of LGBTQ+ respondents in Pink Dot's 2024 survey who reported facing discrimination or harassment in the workplace or while searching for jobs who have also reported negative effects on their mental health.

<sup>61</sup> HRC Foundation, "The Wage Gap Among LGBTQ+ Workers in the United States," HRC.org, 2021, accessed October 20, 2024, <https://www.hrc.org/resources/the-wage-gap-among-lgbtq-workers-in-the-united-states>.

# Work-related discrimination

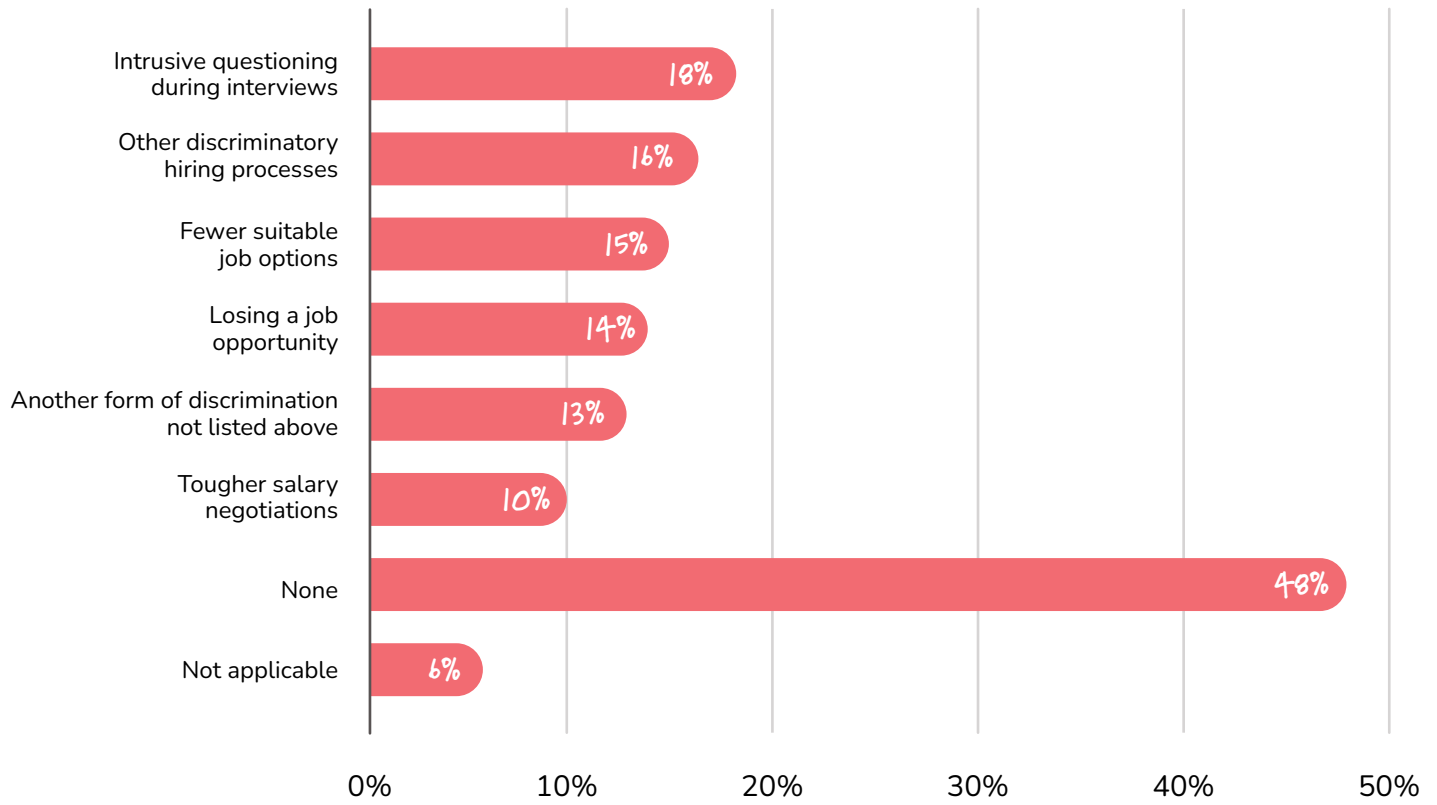
Due to prejudices against gender-nonconformity, LGBTQ+ individuals frequently find it more difficult to secure work. In the workplace, employees face additional stressors such as fear of harassment or having their career prospects compromised which may force many to stay in the closet.

Our research shows that an overwhelming **69%** of our LGBTQ+ respondents reported encountering some form of discrimination or harassment during the job search or within the workplace environment because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, **72%** of which have experienced multiple forms of discrimination or harassment.

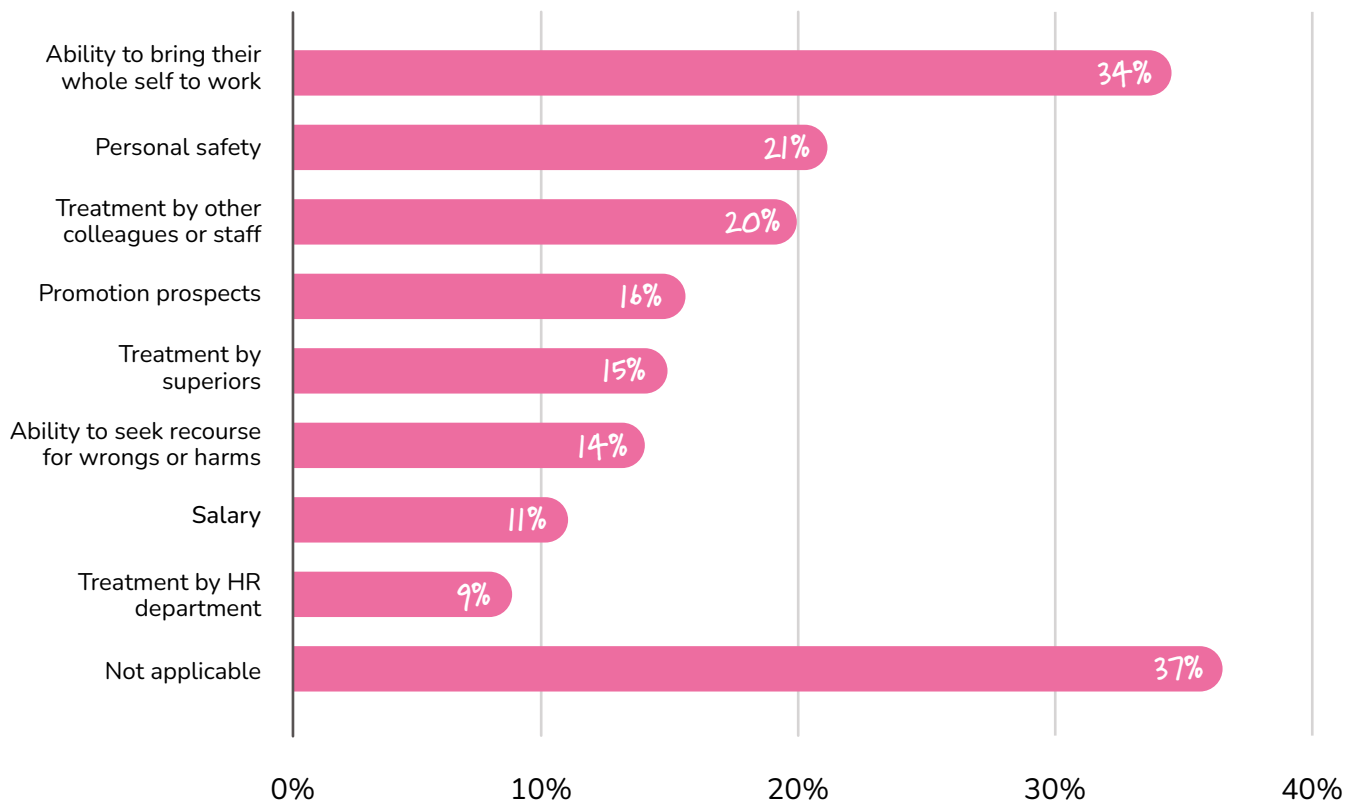
**69%**  
Experience  
discrimination  
when looking  
for a job



### LGBTQ+ respondents' experiences of SOGIE-related discrimination or harassment while searching for jobs



### LGBTQ+ respondents' reporting that in their workplace, their SOGIE has directly or indirectly affected their...



Our findings are backed up by other research studies, such as a 2022 Aware study which found that LGBTQ+ people in Singapore faced much higher rates of workplace discrimination (68%) compared to people who did not identify as LGBTQ+ (56%).<sup>62</sup> A separate 2024 study focused on SOGIE-based discrimination found that over half (50.85%) of LGBTQ+ participants experienced at least one form of discrimination or harassment at the workplace due to their SOGIE in their lifetime.<sup>63</sup>

# Compounding factors

Workplace discrimination appears to be affected by multiple factors such as age, race, gender, educational background and an individual's SOGIE. This intersectionality obscures hiring and termination processes, allowing employers to more easily deflect accountability.

Within the LGBTQ+ community, **transgender Singaporeans** were most vulnerable to work-related discrimination, with **97%** of our transgender respondents encountering issues during the job search or at the workplace. Transgender individuals were much more likely to report fewer or lost job opportunities, discriminatory hiring practices and be concerned about their ability to seek recourse for wrongs or harms done (see the [chapter on transgender Singaporeans](#) for more details).

Whilst our own research did not collect ethnicity data, other studies on SOGIE-based discrimination have shown higher reported rates of discrimination and harassment amongst **racial minorities** compared to Chinese respondents.<sup>64</sup> Analysis of the intersectionality of factors showed that participants who were **more open about their SOGIE** and had more minority statuses reported increased levels of lifetime discrimination and harassment.<sup>65</sup>

Pink Dot's own research also highlighted deep-seated problems in national service (NS), the legally mandated conscription regime for all Singaporean adult men.<sup>66</sup> **12%** of queer-identifying men in our survey reported that they were treated unfairly or faced harassment during NS in the last five years. Another recent study found the prevalence of verbal, physical and sexual harassment experienced by LGBTQ+ participants to be significantly higher in the military than in other industries.<sup>67</sup> While policies on LGBTQ+ people in NS are not made public, media reports and personal accounts have said that the military considers homosexuality and "transsexualism" "diseases".<sup>68</sup> Those who come out during NS have been downgraded to non-combat and non-leadership vocations, according to several accounts, even if they are physically fit and wish to serve in such roles.<sup>69</sup> It is unclear if this is still the case given the secrecy surrounding military practices, but this lack of clarity itself creates fear and ambiguity, worsened by a regimented environment that places individuals in a vulnerable position.

<sup>62</sup> Aware, "1 In 2 Experienced Workplace Discrimination in Singapore Over the Past Five Years, With Race, Age and Gender Discrimination Most Common," Aware.org.sg, September 21, 2022, accessed October 20, 2024, <https://www.aware.org.sg/2022/09/1-in-2-experienced-workplace-discrimination-aware-milieu-survey/>.

<sup>63</sup> n 10.

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> NS is not technically "employment" given it is imposed by the Enlistment Act, but this only makes it more imperative that it should strive for the highest standards of non-discriminatory environment as there is no exit option as with a conventional employer.

<sup>67</sup> Note that this study focused on regular military personnel, not national servicemen. Experiences of physical and sexual harassment were more prevalent within the military compared to other employer types (for-profit, non-profit, civil service and law enforcement), while verbal abuse was more prevalent within the military and law enforcement compared to other employer types. See Wen Zhi Ng et al., "Discrimination and Harassment in the Workplace: The Lived Experiences of Singaporean LGBTQ+ Individuals," The Courage Lab, National University of Singapore, October 2024, p 29 [https://drive.google.com/file/d/16RwVRN1WtfnJlkB-fcftptiNFyh\\_bol/view?usp=drivesdk](https://drive.google.com/file/d/16RwVRN1WtfnJlkB-fcftptiNFyh_bol/view?usp=drivesdk).

<sup>68</sup> Allegedly based on ICD-9 (the International Classification of Diseases, 9th revision), an outdated system, where the Singapore Armed Forces uses a specialised category, Category 302. See The Singapore LGBT encyclopaedia Wiki, "Category 302", retrieved on November 14, 2024. ([https://the-singapore-lgbt-encyclopaedia.fandom.com/wiki/Category\\_302](https://the-singapore-lgbt-encyclopaedia.fandom.com/wiki/Category_302)) and Gayhealth.sg, "Ever wondered what it's like declaring your sexuality or HIV status during National Service?", retrieved on November 14, 2024 (<https://www.gayhealth.sg/wp-content/uploads/PCY-NS-Brochure.pdf>).

<sup>69</sup> Yeo Boon Ping, "What's It Like To Come Out As Gay To The SAF?", *Rice Media*, June 27, 2020, accessed November 14, 2024. <https://www.ricemedia.co/culture/people-homosexuality-saf/>.

# Suffering in silence

Despite calls by advocacy groups to address these high rates of discrimination, the government has refused to spell out specific protections for LGBTQ+ people in its Workplace Fairness legislation (WFL), even going so far as to **expressly exclude** sexual orientation and gender identity as protected characteristics under the WFL.<sup>70</sup> The Tripartite Committee on Workplace Fairness had earlier said the WFL should only “protect against the more common and familiar forms of discrimination, which support [Singapore’s] key social and economic objectives”.<sup>71</sup> It was further explained that the characteristics it listed — age, nationality, sex, marital status, race and religion — accounted for almost all discrimination complaints reported to the Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices (TAFEP) from 2018 to 2022.<sup>72</sup>

This apparent discrepancy between official data and the reality on the ground comes from severe underreporting. Indeed, recent research into LGBTQ+ workers in Singapore shows only 10.71% of those who experienced workplace discrimination or harassment reported it to their company or the authorities.<sup>73</sup> One reason for the underreporting could be a lack of faith that the problem would be treated seriously; half (50.00%) of these reports were dismissed without investigation while only 21.88% resulted in some action taken against the perpetrator.<sup>74</sup> Some LGBTQ+ workers also said they were discouraged by their employers from making reports, or were told that no action would be taken on the basis that Singapore law does not protect LGBTQ+ persons.

Another commonly raised issue was the fear of retaliation or additional penalties — for example facing backlash from the employer or retaliation from the perpetrator — with 80.29% citing this risk as the reason they chose not to report.<sup>75</sup> This is an especially pronounced concern for LGBTQ+ individuals as making a report would likely entail outing themselves.<sup>76</sup> This would have been particularly dangerous with Section 377A still in force, making it unsurprising that TAFEP received fewer complaints in the five years to 2022.<sup>77</sup>

All of this creates a vicious cycle: When instances of harm go unreported due to fear or the lack of reliable channels, policymakers do not take the harms suffered by LGBTQ+ workers seriously. Yet without policies that protect them, marginalised Singaporeans feel they can only continue to suffer in silence, since reporting does little to help and may even backfire.

<sup>70</sup> Section 10(2) of the Workplace Fairness Act 2024 states that “The protected characteristic of sex, in relation to an individual, does not include the following characteristics of the individual: (a) sexual orientation; (b) gender identity.”

<sup>71</sup> Tripartite Committee on Workplace Fairness, “Building Fairer and More Harmonious Workplaces,” MOM.Gov.Sg, August 2023, accessed October 20, 2024, <https://www.mom.gov.sg/-/media/mom/documents/press-releases/2023/tripartite-committee-on-workplace-fairness-final-report.pdf>, p 21.

<sup>72</sup> “Forum: Sending a strong signal there is no place for workplace discrimination in Singapore,” *The Straits Times*, April 15, 2023, <https://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/forum/forum-sending-a-strong-signal-there-is-no-place-for-workplace-discrimination-in-singapore>.

<sup>73</sup> n 67, pp 18–22.

<sup>74</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> Sayoni and ASEAN SOGIE Caucus, “Report on Discrimination against LBTQ Women in Singapore,” *Sayoni.com*, October 2017, accessed October 20, 2024, <https://cedaw.sayoni.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Sayoni-2017-CEDAW-Shadow-Report.pdf>, p 8.

<sup>77</sup> Section 377A of the Penal Code was only repealed in January 2023.

## 2. EMPLOYMENT AND THE WORKPLACE

It is thus disappointing that SOGIE has not only been left out of the WFL, but has been singled out for exclusion in the proposed legislation. Offending employers may see this as a signal that such discrimination will go unpunished, further harming and marginalising LGBTQ+ workers. Whilst we have been told that TAFEP would continue to protect against “all other forms of workplace discrimination”, it is unclear how these guidelines apply to SOGIE as they do not specifically mention sexual orientation and gender identity. It is also noteworthy that unlike the WFL, employers are not legally obliged to follow TAFEP guidelines. This is a continuing failure of Singapore’s justice system to prevent harm to queer Singaporeans.

We can be  
healthcare workers,  
blue collar workers,  
white collar workers...

We just want to be viewed equally.

— Lee Chu Hong  
Nurse, lesbian Singaporean



# Policy recommendations

There are several causes for workplace discrimination, including ignorance and long-held cultural prejudices, which we acknowledge take time to change. But while there are already hopeful signs that these are shifting, outdated laws and regulations still reinforce discrimination. More needs to be done to promote workplaces where queer Singaporeans do not feel that they are penalised when contributing to the workforce.

1

## Expand our legal and regulatory framework to protect against SOGIE-based discrimination

Research has found that LGBTQ+ people face significant workplace discrimination in Singapore. **Yet, many do not expect support or fear retaliation when reporting such grievances, and employers often cite legal ambiguity as a basis for not taking action.** Our recommendations on this front include:

- Make SOGIE a **protected characteristic** under the WFL, to clearly protect against SOGIE-based discrimination. Doing so would acknowledge the issue of SOGIE-related workplace discrimination and reduce underreporting of grievances.
- Revise the **tripartite guidelines** (Tripartite Guidelines on Fair Employment Practices and Tripartite Guidelines on Wrongful Dismissal) to expressly state that discrimination based on SOGIE is prohibited, including by way of illustrations.
- Set up **provisions for whistleblowing** to safeguard LGBTQ+ employees who report discrimination and harassment.

2

## Review policies within the public service

The public service has long been a champion for taking the lead in policies that improved workplace culture, including for parental leave.<sup>78</sup> **However, when it comes to protecting LGBTQ+ employees against SOGIE-based discrimination, the public sector lags significantly behind.** Our recommendations include:

- Revise and improve transparency of HR policies in public sector organisations to **cover SOGIE-based discrimination**.
- Review how gender and sexuality are constructed in the language of official documents (e.g. using inclusive, non-gendered language).
- Provide **treatment and benefits** for queer Singaporeans equal to cisgender heterosexual counterparts in similar roles, including for spousal and family care benefits.
- Provide for education and sensitivity training for all hiring managers, and anti-discrimination training and onboarding that establishes clear reporting mechanisms for harassment.
- Clarify, review and reform policies in sensitive sectors (e.g. MOE policy on queer educators, policies governing national servicemen).

<sup>78</sup> Amelia Teng, "Budget 2023: Paid paternity leave doubled to 4 weeks, unpaid infant care leave from 6 to 12 days," *The Straits Times*, February 14, 2023, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/budget-2023-govt-doubles-paid-paternity-leave-from-two-to-four-weeks-unpaid-infant-care-leave-from-six-to-12-days>.



### Educate and promote best practices

#### **Not all things can be legislated away.**

Discriminatory attitudes may persist, and being aware of that, Pink Dot and other queer community groups have held numerous workshops, talks and seminars with our corporate partners to help change these prejudices. But these efforts can only do so much.

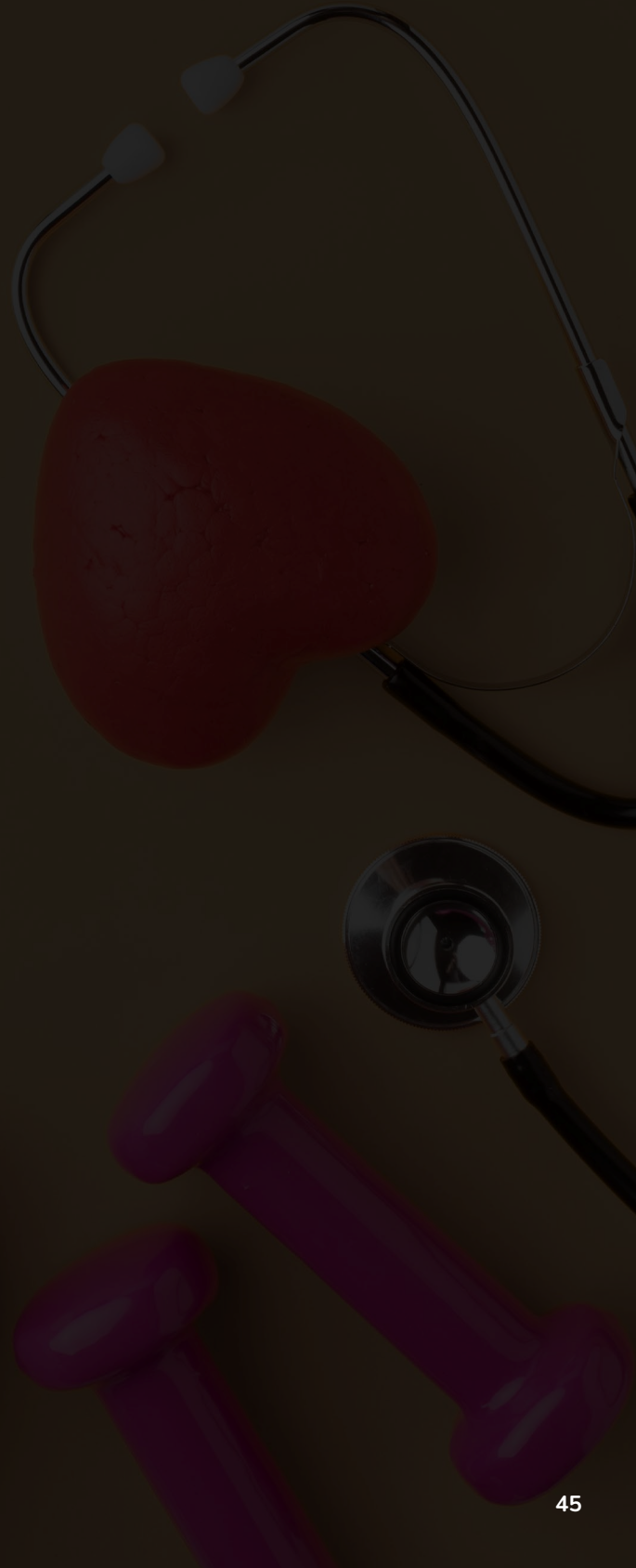
TAFEP provides employers with best practices to create environments against discrimination and progress more equitable workplace policies, and should be equipped to do so for SOGIE-related issues as well. This might include:

- Include best practices for the equal treatment of LGBTQ+ employees in relevant policies including those related to healthcare and family care.
- Partner with LGBTQ+ community organisations to **educate employers** on how to address SOGIE-based discrimination.
- Send all frontline staff from TAFEP, TADM and the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) for **LGBTQ+ sensitivity training**.

# Health and well-being

Healthcare in Singapore is recognised for its world-class standards, with high international rankings in hospital quality and health outcomes such as longevity. Yet this system fails precisely those that need it most.

For LGBTQ+ Singaporeans, getting adequate access to healthcare can be a painful, laborious and costly process. Multiple barriers exist in the provision of potentially life-saving medicine or treatments, including for those living with HIV, seeking help for mental health issues or who need gender-affirming services. Worse still, medical practices and practitioners inimical to the health of LGBTQ+ people face few, if any, consequences.



# Access to LGBTQ+ affirming healthcare

Healthcare and social services are most effectively delivered when there is a trusting relationship between providers and clients, as it often involves the disclosure of sensitive information by clients. But as a result of systemic discrimination and social stigma, LGBTQ+ people often feel uncomfortable disclosing their sexual orientation or gender identity in healthcare settings due to fear of mistreatment, harassment, or denial of services.<sup>79</sup>

This discomfort is exacerbated by insensitive or homophobic behaviour from healthcare providers, a lack of LGBTQ+-friendly medical protocols, and insufficient knowledge among both providers and patients.<sup>80</sup> Several studies have shown that national medical curricula do not equip medical professionals with the knowledge to provide adequate care or treatment for LGBTQ+ people.<sup>81</sup>

The lack of trust between LGBTQ+ people and healthcare providers greatly diminishes the quality of — and access to — the care LGBTQ+ people can receive. A report by Sayoni on queer women in 2018 found that 40% had delayed or avoided testing for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) due to fear of discrimination.<sup>82</sup> This is echoed by the results of the 2020 TransgenderSG survey, with 51.6% of their respondents stating that they avoid seeking general healthcare out of fear of harassment or discrimination.<sup>83</sup>

The problem is even more pronounced for healthcare issues where SOGIE is directly relevant. For example, gender-affirming healthcare plays a significant role in the gender transition journey for the overwhelming majority of trans people, yet multiple barriers limit the provision of such care (refer to [the chapter below on 'Transgender community'](#)).

Due to the lack of legal recognition of their relationships, same-sex couples in Singapore also face significant financial and legal inequalities when accessing public and private healthcare services. Although they contribute to the compulsory national medical savings scheme, they cannot use their MediSave savings to support their same-sex partners, unlike their heterosexual counterparts. Additionally, most workplace health insurance policies do not extend benefits to same-sex partners. In the area of assisted reproduction, women wishing to utilise their frozen eggs must be legally married, a requirement that excludes lesbian couples and others from accessing reproductive technologies and exercising their right to have children.

<sup>79</sup> For example, researchers have found that most medical students in Singapore are unfamiliar or uncomfortable with LGBTQ+ health issues. See Caitlin A O'Hara et al., "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex (LGBTQI+) Healthcare in Singapore: Perspectives of Non-governmental Organisations and Clinical Year Medical Students," *Medical Education Online* 28, no. 1 (February 6, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1080/10872981.2023.2172744>.

<sup>80</sup> n 37, pp 73-75.

<sup>81</sup> See Michael X. Fu et al., "Medical Students' Perceptions of LGBTQ+ Healthcare in Singapore and the United Kingdom," *Frontiers in Medicine* 10 (October 24, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fmed.2023.1236715>.

<sup>82</sup> n 37, pp 73-75.

<sup>83</sup> TransgenderSG, Sayoni, and Asia Pacific Transgender Network, "38th Universal Periodic Review of Singapore Joint Stakeholder Submission," *TransgenderSG.Com*, March 17, 2021, accessed October 20, 2024, <https://transgendertsg.com/upr-report.pdf>, p 8.

# HIV prevention and stigma

The pathologisation of the queer community lies at the heart of much of the stigma LGBTQ+ Singaporeans face throughout their lives. An example of this is the association of conditions such as HIV as something to be blamed on a particular “lifestyle”, a harmful stereotype that has been perpetuated even in the media (see [the chapter on media and public discourse](#)). While organisations such as Action for Aids (AfA Singapore) have done much to ease the stigma faced by individuals living with HIV, many in the public still see it as a “gay disease”.<sup>84</sup>

Such stigma is harmful and discriminatory to queer people in and of itself, but more dangerously, it creates barriers to accessing life-saving treatment and care, especially amongst gay men (HIV prevalence is significantly higher in men who have sex with men (MSM)).<sup>85</sup> People living with HIV who perceive high levels of HIV-related stigma are 2.4 times more likely to delay treatment until they are very ill, according to AfA Singapore.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>84</sup> Louisa Tang, “‘They Used to Physically Recoil’: How Stigma Around Singaporeans With HIV Changed Over the Years,” CNA, November 30, 2022, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/singaporeans-hiv-stigma-healthcare-world-aids-day-not-gay-disease-3098186>.

<sup>85</sup> In 2022, MOH reported that 55% of new HIV transmission were via homosexual or bisexual transmission, compared to 37% via heterosexual transmission. MOH, “UPDATE ON THE HIV/AIDS SITUATION IN SINGAPORE 2022 (JUNE 2023).” Press release, June 2023, accessed October 20, 2024, <https://www.moh.gov.sg/resources-statistics/infectious-disease-statistics/hiv-stats/update-on-the-hiv-aids-situation-in-singapore-2022-%28june-2023%29>.

<sup>86</sup> AfA Singapore, “Addressing HIV Stigma and Discrimination,” AfA Singapore, July 21, 2022, Accessed October 20, 2024. <https://afa.org.sg/what-we-do/advocacy-partnerships/addressing-hiv-stigma-and-discrimination/>.



Singapore's policies and laws have unfortunately been complicit in this. Until recently, individuals with HIV faced jail terms of up to 10 years and a fine of up to \$50,000 if they did not inform their sexual partners of their status. Welcome amendments to the Infectious Diseases Act earlier in 2024 have eased this requirement for those with an undetectable viral load for six months. This has brought it in line with scientific research on HIV transmission while also reducing the fear of getting tested.<sup>87</sup>

However, other barriers remain in place. When someone undergoes HIV testing in Singapore, all doctors and laboratory staff are required to inform the Ministry of Health (MOH) of a confirmed case within 72 hours of diagnosis.<sup>88</sup> There are also strict employment restrictions on foreigners who are living with HIV. These laws discourage individuals from seeking information or services related to sexual health, for example HIV screening, out of fear.

According to statistics released by MOH, only 35% of new infections were detected either through routine programmatic HIV screening or self-initiated HIV screening, highlighting the need for more robust campaigns to de-stigmatise HIV and improve awareness on effective protective measures, including pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP). To this end, we are glad the government has recently decided to make HIV self-testing available at some retail pharmacies, lowering the barrier to diagnosis.<sup>89</sup>

But on the prevention front, more can be done. PrEP has proven to be an effective tool in preventing HIV transmission, but the government has neither subsidised nor promoted it sufficiently over fears that it could be seen to promote casual sex or discourage other safe sex practices.<sup>90</sup> Once again, this is a harmful narrative that inaccurately conflates PrEP with a “lifestyle” choice that needs to be curbed, as opposed to a safe sex practice that should be encouraged, such as condom use. The cost and lack of awareness of PrEP are significant barriers in achieving higher utilisation and safe access to PrEP locally.<sup>91,92</sup> Effective and comprehensive preventive strategies based on scientific evidence should not be abandoned in favour of stigmatising social perceptions.

<sup>87</sup> AfA SINGAPORE, “AfA Welcomes the Amendment to Section 23(1) of the Infectious Diseases Act.” Press release, March 8, 2024, accessed October 20, 2024, <https://afa.org.sg/afa-welcomes-the-amendment-to-section-231-of-the-infectious-diseases-act/>.

<sup>88</sup> “List of Infectious Diseases Legally Notifiable Under the Infectious Diseases Act,” by MOH, MOH.gov.sg, <https://www.moh.gov.sg/docs/librariesprovider5/legislation/list-of-legally-notifiable-infectious-diseases.pdf>.

<sup>89</sup> CNA, “HIV self-test kits to be sold at some retail pharmacies as part of Singapore’s efforts to boost testing,” CNA, November 30, 2024, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/hiv-self-testing-kits-selected-pharmacies-aids-4779086>.

<sup>90</sup> MOH, “Feasibility of Subsidising PrEP and PEP for HIV.” Press release, February 27, 2023, accessed October 20, 2024, <https://www.moh.gov.sg/news-highlights/details/feasibility-of-subsidising-prep-and-pep-for-hiv>.

<sup>91</sup> Yeo, B, “PrEP in Singapore,” 11th Singapore AIDS Conference, December 2018.

<sup>92</sup> Roy Chan, “Commentary: After 40 years of AIDS, why do we still not have an HIV vaccine?” CNA, March 31, 2024, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/commentary/hiv-aids-vaccine-40-years-testing-treatment-trials-4210821>.

# Mental health

There is increasing awareness of the importance of mental health. Following years of tireless work by mental health and well-being advocates, the government launched a national strategy for mental health last year, detailing plans to provide additional support for our youth, pregnant women and new mothers, and persons with disability or chronic illnesses, among others.<sup>93</sup> But as with so many areas highlighted in this report, the LGBTQ+ community has once again been left out of policymaking, despite clear links between the incidence of mental health issues and SOGIE-based discrimination.

In my work with youth, I've been told that youth don't know what they want, that parents should be informed if their child comes out as queer during a counselling session, and that there isn't enough research to back up gender affirming care...

As a social worker I'm constantly told to stay neutral. But when you're neutral in the face of injustice, haven't you chosen the side of the oppressor? Prime minister, I am writing to you because I am in pain and tired.

— Keeshan Menor

<sup>93</sup> Interagency Taskforce on Mental Health and Well-being, "National Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy 2023," 2023, accessed October 20, 2024, <https://file.go.gov.sg/national-mental-health-and-well-being-strategy-report-2023.pdf>.

### 3. HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

International and local research consistently shows that LGBTQ+ populations are at increased risk for mental illness and suicidality due to minority stress.<sup>94</sup> However, there remains a lack of comprehensive understanding and targeted support for the mental health needs of LGBTQ+ individuals in Singapore. To better address these issues, there is an urgent need for policies and initiatives that study and address the specific health-related challenges faced by this community.<sup>95</sup>

Our own research showed that 59% of LGBTQ+ respondents considered SOGIE-based discrimination to have negatively affected their mental health. Within the LGBTQ+ community, trans people are most affected, with almost a third of the respondents stating that their mental health has been impacted **to a large extent** by SOGIE-based discrimination, compared to around 9% of other LGBTQ+ respondents. These findings reiterate those from the 2012 survey by Oogachaga, which found that more than two-thirds of their respondents who faced SOGIE-based abuse or discrimination had suicidal thoughts or attempted suicide.<sup>96</sup>

The lack of LGBTQ+ affirming mental health services makes seeking help extremely problematic as members of the LGBTQ+ community fear being retraumatised or subject to further discrimination by providers who may dismiss their sexual orientation or gender identity as untrue or a “lifestyle choice” that can be resolved. LGBTQ+ youths who are not out to their parents face additional obstacles as mental health services require parental consent before assessment and treatment for youths below the age of 21 years old.<sup>97,98</sup>

<sup>94</sup> Sayoni's research found increased psychological distress associated with coming out and denial of one's LGBTQ+ identity, leading to negative impacts on mental health and self-esteem. See n 37, pp 38-45.

<sup>95</sup> Any efforts to study the needs of LGBTQ+ individuals must prioritise safety, confidentiality and informed consent, to avoid perpetuating further harm.

<sup>96</sup> Oogachaga, “Impact of Homophobia and Transphobia on LGBTQ Individuals in Singapore,” May 2012, accessed October 20, 2024, [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a65ffdbf9a61e45b684f769/t/5ac632c08a922d6acb96e284/1522938567268/Homophobia\\_Transphobia\\_Summary\\_Report\\_May2012.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a65ffdbf9a61e45b684f769/t/5ac632c08a922d6acb96e284/1522938567268/Homophobia_Transphobia_Summary_Report_May2012.pdf).

<sup>97</sup> Coming out as LGBTQ+ can lead to significant psychological distress due to societal and familial rejection, impacting self-acceptance, mental health and relationships (n 37, pp 39-43).

<sup>98</sup> Loraine Lee, “Annual Mental Health Checks, Easing Parental Consent Rules: 5 Suggestions by MPs to Enhance Youths’ Well-being,” *TODAY*, February 6, 2024, <https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/annual-mental-health-checks-ease-parent-consent-rules-5-suggestions-mps-2357581>.



# Harmful conversion practices

When LGBTQ+ individuals manage to access healthcare, they may still encounter practitioners who engage in dangerous practices such as conversion therapy. These practitioners may present themselves as trusted figures, including religious leaders or counsellors, but their methods lack scientific credibility and can cause serious psychological harm.

Any attempt to change or suppress someone's sexual orientation or gender identity is a form of "conversion therapy". This can take many forms, such as aversion therapy, masturbatory reconditioning, "gender lessons", religious counselling, or exorcism.

Many international psychiatric organisations have condemned "conversion therapy" practices because the medical consensus agrees that they not only do not work, but can cause harm to participants. One gay man shared his story of such an attempt to suppress his sexual orientation with the "guidance" of a local church counsellor. The repeated threats of hell if he were to give in to any of his natural urges have left him with significant and persistent psychological and mental distress decades after the "counselling" sessions have ended.<sup>99</sup>

Research has consistently shown that sexual orientation change efforts are ineffective, harmful, and linked to depression, suicidality, and decreased capacity for intimacy.<sup>100</sup> The Singapore Psychological Society has also released statements citing similar studies.<sup>101</sup> However, while MOH has publicly acknowledged that "sexual orientation alone is not to be regarded as a clinical disorder that needs to be cured",<sup>102</sup> they have stopped short of stating an official position against conversion therapy despite being asked directly to consider doing so.

<sup>99</sup> Heckin' Unicorn, "It hurts when I touch myself now" — Sam's story of "conversion therapy" in Singapore," Heckin Unicorn, October 14, 2024, <https://heckinunicorn.com/blogs/heckin-unicorn-blog/sam-story-of-conversion-therapy-in-singapore-lgbt-rights-in-singapore>.

<sup>100</sup> Jack Drescher, "Can Sexual Orientation Be Changed?," *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health* 19, no. 1 (October 15, 2014): 84–93, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19359705.2014.944460>.

<sup>101</sup> Singapore Psychological Society, "Full Statement Clarifying SPS' Post on Conversion Therapy," July 5, 2021. Retrieved November 18, 2024. <https://singaporepsychologicalsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/SPS-Position-on-CT-05Jul2021.pdf>.

<sup>102</sup> "Government's Stance on Changing One's Sexual Orientation Through 'Conversion Therapy.'" Press release, May 4, 2020, accessed October 20, 2024, <https://www.moh.gov.sg/news-highlights/details/government-s-stance-on-changing-one-s-sexual-orientation-through-conversion-therapy>.

# Access to social services

At present, the government's response to understanding the overall psychosocial, mental, sexual, and physical health needs of LGBTQ+ Singaporeans is marked by troubling neglect, if not outright discrimination, resulting in significant gaps in access to essential services. Yet where non-governmental organisations (NGOs) attempt to bridge the gap, they are faced with further obstacles.

Singapore has over 450 non-profit social service agencies (SSAs) addressing various community needs, but to date no LGBTQ+ focused non-governmental organisations have successfully obtained membership with the National Council of Social Services (NCSS), the statutory board coordinating SSAs in Singapore.<sup>103</sup> The lack of government support for local community groups who provide LGBTQ+ affirming services, such as counselling services, makes the consistent and reliable provision of such services challenging.<sup>104</sup> The disparity in governmental support was emphasised during the COVID-19 pandemic as LGBTQ+ community groups were unable to tap on emergency funding in order to support the increased need of their services throughout the pandemic.

NGOs serving the LGBTQ+ community often lack access to public funding and have historically faced difficulties in registering themselves as charities, which limits their appeal to donors.<sup>105</sup> Meanwhile, very few mainstream SSAs openly provide or publicise LGBTQ+-affirming services, to avoid potential funding issues or public controversy.<sup>106</sup>

<sup>103</sup> NCSS, "Empowering a Connected Social Service Sector," [NCSS.gov.sg](https://www.ncss.gov.sg/docs/default-source/ncss-publications-doc/ncss-annual_report_fy23.pdf?sfvrsn=18c4fddb_6), June 2024, accessed October 20, 2024, [https://www.ncss.gov.sg/docs/default-source/ncss-publications-doc/ncss-annual\\_report\\_fy23.pdf?sfvrsn=18c4fddb\\_6](https://www.ncss.gov.sg/docs/default-source/ncss-publications-doc/ncss-annual_report_fy23.pdf?sfvrsn=18c4fddb_6).

<sup>104</sup> Oogachaga and Pink Dot SG, "38th Universal Periodic Review of Singapore Joint Stakeholder Submission," May 2021, accessed October 20, 2024, [https://pinkdot.sg/pinkie/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Singapore\\_OCPD\\_submission\\_14.10.2020PDF-1.pdf](https://pinkdot.sg/pinkie/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Singapore_OCPD_submission_14.10.2020PDF-1.pdf), p 3.

<sup>105</sup> Registering as a charity is the first step to becoming an Institution of Public Character, which allows the issuance of tax-deductible receipts to donors.

<sup>106</sup> Only a few mainstream SSAs, such as AfA Singapore and Aware, openly offer LGBTQ+-affirming support. See n 104, p 12.

# Policy recommendations

1

## Ensure healthcare settings and services are safe and welcoming for members of the LGBTQ+ community

- Implement clear anti-discriminatory guidelines in all healthcare and social service institutions and adopt international standards on LGBTQ+ sexual and mental health care.
- **Include LGBTQ+ needs in healthcare policies** (e.g. provision of gender-affirming care and PrEP, financing schemes) and **ensure adequate LGBTQ+ representation in consultation processes** (e.g. when updating guidelines for counsellors working with youth).<sup>107</sup>
- Implement and fund LGBT-specific training for professionals in medicine, nursing, social work, counselling and psychology, aligned with the latest scientific evidence.
- Recognise LGBTQ+ relationships within the frameworks of public and private healthcare financing schemes.

2

## Protect LGBTQ+ minors and vulnerable adults from psychological violence, including conversion practices

- Take a clear stance **against conversion practices** in line with the medical consensus, and acknowledge they are harmful and affect the well-being of LGBTQ+ people.
- Prohibit all clinical or other practices that actively seek to change one's sexual orientation and/or gender identity (conversion practices), imposing appropriate professional or other sanctions on those who endorse or offer such services.
- Require any person who practises "conversion therapy" to display a warning that such practices lack scientific basis and may cause psychological harm.
- Include coercive conversion practices as forms of ill-treatment under relevant domestic violence and child abuse laws.

<sup>107</sup> Singapore Parliamentary Debates, Official Report (7 November 2023) vol 95 at col 57, <https://sprs.parl.gov.sg/search/#/sprs3topic?reportid=written-answer-na-15060> (accessed 20 October 2024) Assoc Prof Jamus Jerome Lim, Member of Parliament asking and Mr Ong Ye Kung, Minister of Health in reply.



#### **Enhance access to evidence-based care for LGBTQ+ health and well-being**

- Develop and allocate resources to LGBTQ+ specific programmes in social service, healthcare and mental health sectors.
- Extend subsidies and insurance coverage to gender-affirming care and other treatments such as PrEP.

# Family and future

Singaporeans are often reminded that family is “the basic unit” or “basic building block” of society. Politicians utter this mantra constantly,<sup>108</sup> schools teach this as a core value<sup>109</sup> and even new citizens are made to learn it.<sup>110</sup>

“Family” can mean many different things to different people, for a variety of valid reasons, but the state insists that it should be centred on a union between one man and one woman with children. This heteronormative ideal actively excludes other family structures such as divorced spouses, same-sex couples, unwed mothers, and singles. Policymakers have frequently cited the “need” to “protect traditional family values” as justification for discriminatory laws and policies, notably the 2023 constitutional amendment “protecting” the heterosexual definition of marriage from legal challenge.<sup>111</sup>

As a state narrative, discourse of this kind already does real harm as it spreads in society. It portrays LGBTQ+ people as a **threat to families**, despite many LGBTQ+ individuals seeking stable and meaningful family lives, either through acceptance from their biological families<sup>112</sup> or by creating their own chosen families.<sup>113</sup> They also perpetuate stigma and alienate LGBTQ+ individuals from their loved ones.

As an ideology that undergirds national policy, it has led to the **denial of basic needs** to generations of queer Singaporeans, deepening social and economic inequalities.

<sup>108</sup> MHA, “State of the Family 2022 - Remarks by Mr K Shanmugam, Minister for Home Affairs and Minister for Law.” Press release, March 11, 2022, accessed October 20, 2024, <https://www.mha.gov.sg/mediaroom/speeches/state-of-the-family-2022/>.

<sup>109</sup> Student Development Curriculum Division, MOE, “Character and Citizenship Education Syllabus Secondary,” 2020, accessed October 20, 2024, <https://www.moe.gov.sg/-/media/files/secondary/syllabuses/cce/2021-character-and-citizenship-education-syllabus-secondary.pdf>.

<sup>110</sup> Citizens’ Workgroup, MCCY, “Singapore Citizenship Journey,” MCCY.gov.sg, 2021, accessed October 20, 2024, [https://www.mccy.gov.sg/-/media/MCCY-corp/Sectors/Citizens\\_Workgroup\\_for\\_Singapore\\_Citizenship\\_Journey\\_Report\\_22122020.pdf](https://www.mccy.gov.sg/-/media/MCCY-corp/Sectors/Citizens_Workgroup_for_Singapore_Citizenship_Journey_Report_22122020.pdf), pp 7-8.

<sup>111</sup> Vanessa Lim, “PAP MPs raise concerns about protecting family values and social policies as Parliament moves to decriminalise gay sex,” CNA, November 28, 2022, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/377a-pap-marriage-constitution-family-values-gay-sex-3106046>.

<sup>112</sup> 31% of our LGBTQ+ respondents reported worrying about being rejected by their families and important people in their lives.

<sup>113</sup> When thinking about their future, 37% of our LGBTQ+ respondents reported worrying about not having their marriage or partnership recognised; 22% worried about not being able to have a family and children.

# Marriage as a pathway to rights

Decades of pronatalist public policies based on the state's narrow conception of family have made access to various rights, benefits and protections — in areas as diverse as **public housing, citizenship, parenthood, estate planning** and **caregiving** — contingent on marital status. The lack of marriage equality or comparable recognition for LGBTQ+ people means such policies are in effect discriminatory.

LGBTQ+ individuals who seek to form family units face systemic disadvantages across multiple areas and stages of life, as the following sections will elaborate on. For example, transnational same-sex couples are not entitled to stay together in the country. Same-sex couples are denied rights and benefits such as spousal employee benefits, rights to jointly purchase subsidised public housing from the state, next-of-kin rights and tax breaks for married couples.

While there are entrenched beliefs and societal conventions surrounding marriage, research indicates a shifting perspective among Singaporeans. According to the Ipsos Pride 2024 study, a majority of Singaporeans now express support for same-sex marriage or alternative forms of legal recognition.<sup>114</sup> This suggests a growing public recognition that the state narrative is out of sync with the realities of a diverse population and of the injustice of denying widespread rights and protections.

Policies that confer benefits based on marriage also exclude those who do not wish to marry (e.g. see our [next section on housing](#)). As much as family lives should be enabled for those who choose it, the state should not penalise those whose primary social ties do not hew to its narrow definition. Efforts to support nuclear families should not come at the expense of other bonds (e.g. friendships and extended kinship networks) which can provide support and stability throughout life.

<sup>114</sup>n 19, p 40.



# Homes for thee, but not for me

The state's exclusionary definition of marriage also prevents equal access to one of the most fundamental human needs: housing. Barriers to home ownership have consistently emerged as **the most urgent issue** facing the LGBTQ+ community in our research studies two years in a row.<sup>115</sup> When asked what they worried about for the future, 42% of LGBTQ+ respondents cited not having a home or access to affordable housing, compared to 39% of cisgender heterosexual respondents. This number was even higher amongst lesbian/gay (55%) and transgender respondents (56%).

In a city with one of the highest costs of private housing in the region,<sup>116</sup> 80% of our population rely on HDB flats, which provide long-term **financial security**.<sup>117</sup>

Access to independent home ownership is also **critical for the safety** of many LGBTQ+ individuals who may face violence or discrimination from family members (see the next section on family violence), or struggle to secure rental housing due to queerphobic landlords. However, Singapore's public housing policies systematically **delay and exclude** LGBTQ+ individuals from accessing this basic need and important marker of social inclusion.

To promote heteronormative nuclear families, the government's "Build to Order" (BTO) policy reserves the highest levels of housing grants for heterosexual married couples.

Homeownership  
is the most  
urgent issue  
according  
to LGBTQ+  
community

In contrast, LGBTQ+ individuals, categorised as "singles" even if they live together or identify as couples, are only eligible to own public housing when they turn 35<sup>118</sup> with fewer housing options and reduced government subsidies compared to their heterosexual peers. Under the BTO scheme, queer couples or "singles" are only eligible to buy the smallest two-room flexi flats, less than half the size of the four-room flat which is the most common BTO flat size. Many LGBTQ+ Singaporeans are forced to turn to resale flats<sup>119</sup> or even the private housing market, which can be several times more expensive.<sup>120</sup>

<sup>115</sup> Pink Dot SG, "Homeownership amongst most urgent issues facing LGBTQ+ community, according to youth survey," Press release, September 6, 2023, accessed October 20, 2024, <https://pinkdot.sg/2023/09/homeownership-amongst-most-urgent-issues-facing-lgbtq-community-according-to-youth-survey/>.

<sup>116</sup> Isabelle Liew, "Singapore private homes still most expensive in Asia-Pacific; HDB flats most attainable: Report," *The Straits Times*, May 21, 2024, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/housing/singapore-private-homes-still-most-expensive-in-asia-pacific-hdb-flats-most-attainable-report>.

<sup>117</sup> Department of Statistics Singapore, "Department of Statistics Singapore - Households," SingStat.gov.sg, 2023, accessed October 20, 2024, <https://www.singstat.gov.sg/find-data/search-by-theme/households/households/>.

<sup>118</sup> Compared to heterosexual married couples who can apply from age 21.

<sup>119</sup> Based on HDB's press statement in November 2022, comparable resale flats could cost between 25-179% more than a BTO flat of the same size in the same estate. HDB, "Almost 10,000 BTO flats across 10 projects offered in November 2022 BTO exercise," Press release, November 23, 2022, accessed October 20, 2024, <https://www.hdb.gov.sg/cs/infoweb/about-us/news-and-publications/press-releases/23112022-Almost-10000-BTO-flats-across-10-projects-offered-%20in-November-2022-BTO-exercise>.

<sup>120</sup> Given the income ceiling for BTO eligibility, LGBTQ+ people may end up being priced out of the BTO market by the time they reach 35 compared to their heterosexual peers, who can apply more than a decade earlier. And LGBTQ+ Singaporeans who buy 2-room flexi units may only ultimately own their own homes in their late thirties or forties, which significantly extends the period they are exposed to rental bleed or having to live in a potentially unsafe or abusive home environment.

It feels like my life, identity and space cannot begin until I am 35 when I can finally own a HDB or save up enough for a condo. It feels like I am living in a limbo.

A common sentiment is that in order to thrive as a queer person in Singapore, one has to be rich.

- Emma Lim



Those who cannot afford to buy (or to wait until they turn 35) are left to the mercy of the rental market. Given government incentives to encourage home ownership, long-term renting in Singapore is uncommon and generally considered a last resort for low income households.<sup>121</sup> Unfortunately, LGBTQ+ individuals seeking to rent are not protected by any anti-discrimination laws against SOGIE-based discrimination by landlords.

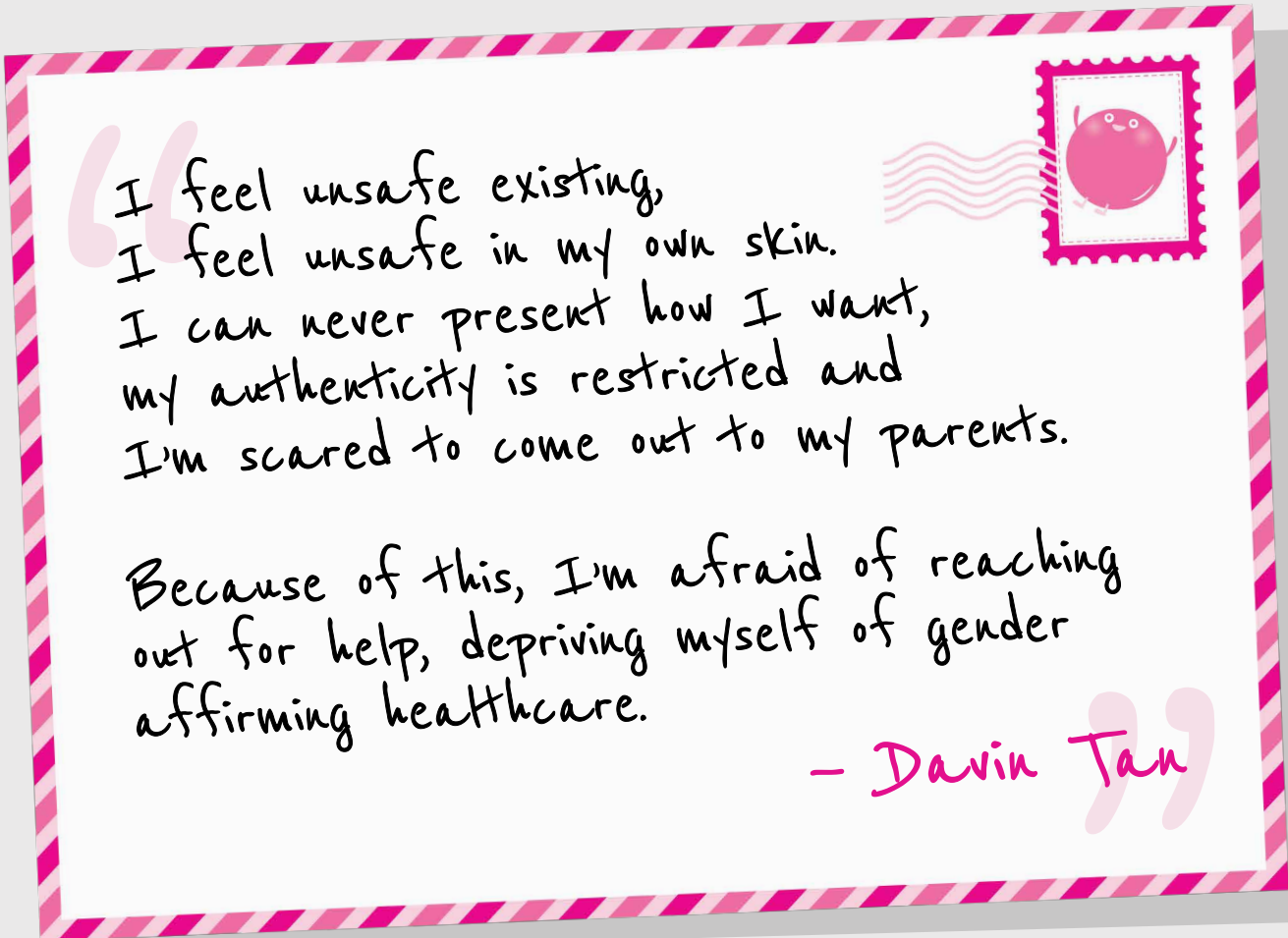
This issue can be especially pronounced for transgender or gender-nonconforming individuals who frequently have a harder time renting or finding flatmates. Inadequate access to stable and affordable housing deepens inequalities for LGBTQ individuals, frequently forcing them to remain with family. This predicament either keeps them closeted or exposes them to the risk of abuse and discrimination as they lack the resources to move out (see the next section on family violence).

<sup>121</sup> 89.7% of households in Singapore are owner-occupied. See n 117.

We welcome recent incremental changes<sup>122</sup> aimed at making the housing system more inclusive, such as the 2024 announcement that singles will soon be included in schemes that give priority to those applying for BTO flats with or near their parents. These updates offer much-needed relief to many unmarried Singaporeans, who often bear a disproportionate share of the responsibility for caring for elderly parents.

However, these changes still reinforce traditional notions of what constitutes a family unit, segregating “singles” from married couples and failing to recognize the diverse ways families might define themselves. The needs of LGBTQ+ couples and families are not specifically acknowledged; instead, they are only indirectly and imperfectly addressed through schemes for “singles.”

To move towards a truly inclusive and equitable housing system that serves all Singaporeans, regardless of their family structure, further reform is needed.



I feel unsafe existing,  
I feel unsafe in my own skin.  
I can never present how I want,  
my authenticity is restricted and  
I'm scared to come out to my parents.

Because of this, I'm afraid of reaching  
out for help, depriving myself of gender  
affirming healthcare.

- Davin Tan

<sup>122</sup> Other changes include the announcement at the National Day Rally 2023 that from mid-2024, singles will be allowed to apply for two-room flexi BTOs in all locations, and can also buy two-room Prime flexi resale flats, or Standard or Plus resale flats of any size except 3Gen flats.

# Family violence

Given the financial and other challenges of moving out, LGBTQ+ individuals are often forced to stay with their biological family, even though for many in the community this can mean facing daily **rejection and abuse**. Our research indicates that 13% of LGBTQ+ respondents reported being rejected by a family member or friend because of their SOGIE in the last 5 years, with the figure rising to 50% for transgender individuals.<sup>123</sup> Up to 31% of LGBTQ+ respondents feared rejection from family and close friends, with this concern rising to 50% among transgender individuals.

A social narrative which stigmatises LGBTQ+ identities fosters discrimination and violence, frequently at the hands of the very family members who should be providing care. The perpetuation of harmful stereotypes by the media (see [the chapter on Media and Public Discourse](#)) and educational institutions can create divisions within families and foster a hostile environment for LGBTQ+ children.

A 2018 qualitative study by Sayoni highlighted that LGBTQ+ individuals often endure abuse from their **immediate family members**, frequently beginning in **childhood**.<sup>124</sup> The study documented a range of psychological and physical violence, including punitive measures such as reparative therapy. Physical violence and deprivation were found to particularly impact children and transgender individuals. Needless to say, abuse inflicted during formative years by significant family members, especially when targeted at the child's identity, can have profound and enduring consequences.

LGBTQ+ individuals are also vulnerable to **intimate partner violence**, an issue exacerbated by the lack of comprehensive affirming sexuality education and support structures.<sup>125</sup> As same-sex partners are not recognized as family members, both their relationships and the violence within them often go unacknowledged by state agencies and other social support systems.

LGBTQ+ victims of abuse face **institutional barriers** to getting the help they need. Sayoni's research found that **low rates of reporting** and help-seeking were caused by the following factors: **stigma** and the fear of being outed; the culture of shame and victim-blaming; a lack of awareness of resources; the fear of retraumatization through the reporting process; or a belief that the reporting process would not be helpful because of **discriminatory laws and policies**.<sup>126</sup> Even when violence is reported, service providers and law enforcement lack the training to respond to it with sensitivity, while support services such as LGBTQ+ affirmative counselling remain severely lacking.

Family violence and abuse against LGBTQ+ individuals are not just personal issues but systemic ones. Support systems must move beyond viewing perpetrators merely as individual abusers and instead understand them in the broader context of anti-LGBTQ+ stigma. Tackling the root causes of discrimination and dismantling structural obstacles are essential for effectively supporting LGBTQ+ victims to escape abuse.

<sup>123</sup> Among LGBTQ+ individuals who are open about their identities, rates of family and social rejection could be even higher (for context, only 17% of our LGBTQ+ respondents reported being out to one or both parents).

<sup>124</sup> n 37, p 18.

<sup>125</sup> n 37, pp 28-37.

<sup>126</sup> n 37, pp 10-13.

# Forming families and raising children

In addition to overlooking the struggles of LGBTQ+ youth in abusive family situations, Singapore's policies are also actively hostile to LGBTQ+ people who want to form loving families of their own.

In 2022, the Adoption of Children Act was amended to expressly exclude same-sex couples from being eligible.<sup>127</sup> As if it were not already highly

difficult for same-sex couples to adopt children, the new act specifies that only couples whose marriages are recognised under Singapore law (i.e. heterosexual married couples) are allowed to jointly adopt. Notably, there is no prohibition against single unmarried applicants, though the courts have indicated they would not look favourably on unmarried applicants seeking

to violate the stated public policy against the formation of same-sex family units.<sup>128</sup> Similarly, in the area of assisted reproduction, women who wish to utilise their frozen eggs are required to be legally married, closing the door on lesbian couples or others who wish to exercise their right to have children.<sup>129</sup>

My partner and I are eagerly anticipating the birth of our daughter...

In the unfortunate event of my passing, I wish for my partner to be recognized as the official guardian of our daughter.

— Wong Foong Ying



<sup>127</sup> This legislative review was in response to *UKM v Attorney-General* [2018] SGHCF 18, a landmark gay adoption ruling in 2018 which allowed a father to adopt a child born outside Singapore via surrogacy.

<sup>128</sup> *ibid*, at paragraph [246].

<sup>129</sup> Minister for Social and Family Development Masagos Zulkifli said: "We do not support the use of assisted reproduction technology or surrogacy to conceive and then adopt a child. Our public policy encourages parenthood within marriage." MSF, "Opening Speech by Minister Masagos Zulkifli at the Second Reading of the Adoption of Children Bill," Press release, May 10, 2022, accessed October 20, 2024, <https://www.msf.gov.sg/media-room/article/opening-speech-by-minister-masagos-zulkifli-at-the-second-reading-of-the-adoption-of-children-bill>.

All LGBTQ families belong in Singapore. All their kids should have the opportunity to be Singaporean. Let us not split loving families just because of their sexual orientation or gender dysphoria.

It takes next to nothing for the state to afford this decency to all Singaporeans.

— Regulatedda Akshay

Due to the lack of legal recognition of same-sex partnerships, children of same-sex couples are treated as **illegitimate children** of single parents. They do not enjoy the same rights or benefits as children born within heterosexual marriages including those related to citizenship, residency and financial relief such as the parenthood tax rebate and working mother's child relief.

Transnational same-sex couples legally married in other jurisdictions struggle to stay in Singapore with their legal spouse, and children of the non-Singaporean spouse are not eligible for citizenship or long-term residency. Some have resorted to disruptive and costly visa runs — repeatedly exiting and entering the country on tourist visas to extend one's stay — and face persistent fears of separation and potential eviction from the country.<sup>130</sup>

Without parental rights, the non-legal parent in a same-sex partnership **is not legally authorised** to care for their child, denying them of every parent's right to protect their own children — even in potentially life-or-death situations. In medical emergencies, only the legal parent has access to information and decision-making authority. In the event of the legal or biological parent's death or separation of the couple, the non-legal parent has no parental rights. This institutional discrimination disrupts family unity, making it difficult for queer families to remain intact and secure.

<sup>130</sup> 16% of our LGBTQ+ respondents reported worrying about being forced to relocate against their will.

But the biggest and most innocent victims are of course, children. In a landmark adoption case in 2018, the High Court allowed a gay couple to adopt a child, citing a “statutory imperative to promote the welfare of the child, and, indeed, to regard his welfare as **first and paramount**”. It did so “with not insignificant difficulty” as it had to balance this against government policy against same-sex families.<sup>131</sup>

By failing to recognise diverse family structures, the state’s discriminatory policies **compromise the best interests of children** who thrive in loving, inclusive homes regardless of their parents’ sexual orientation.

A meta-study of available scientific research has shown that the children of sexual minority couples fare just as well, if not better, than those of heterosexual couples.<sup>132</sup> Indeed this is not something Singaporeans have trouble grasping.

The 2024 Ipsos survey showed that a majority (58%) of Singaporeans agree that same-sex couples are just as likely as other parents to successfully raise children.<sup>133</sup> 57% agreed that same-sex couples should have the same rights to adopt children as heterosexual couples do.

It pains me greatly to think about how I may never live in beautiful Singapore again... as I would not be allowed to sponsor a visiting visa for my partner.

Between my family and my country, I'd have to pick family - but the dream is to be able to come home to both.

- B Zhang



<sup>131</sup> *UKM v Attorney-General* [2018] SGHCF 18 at paragraph [248]. This case prompted a legislative review culminating in the Adoption of Children Act 2022 rendering adoptions by same-sex couples illegal.

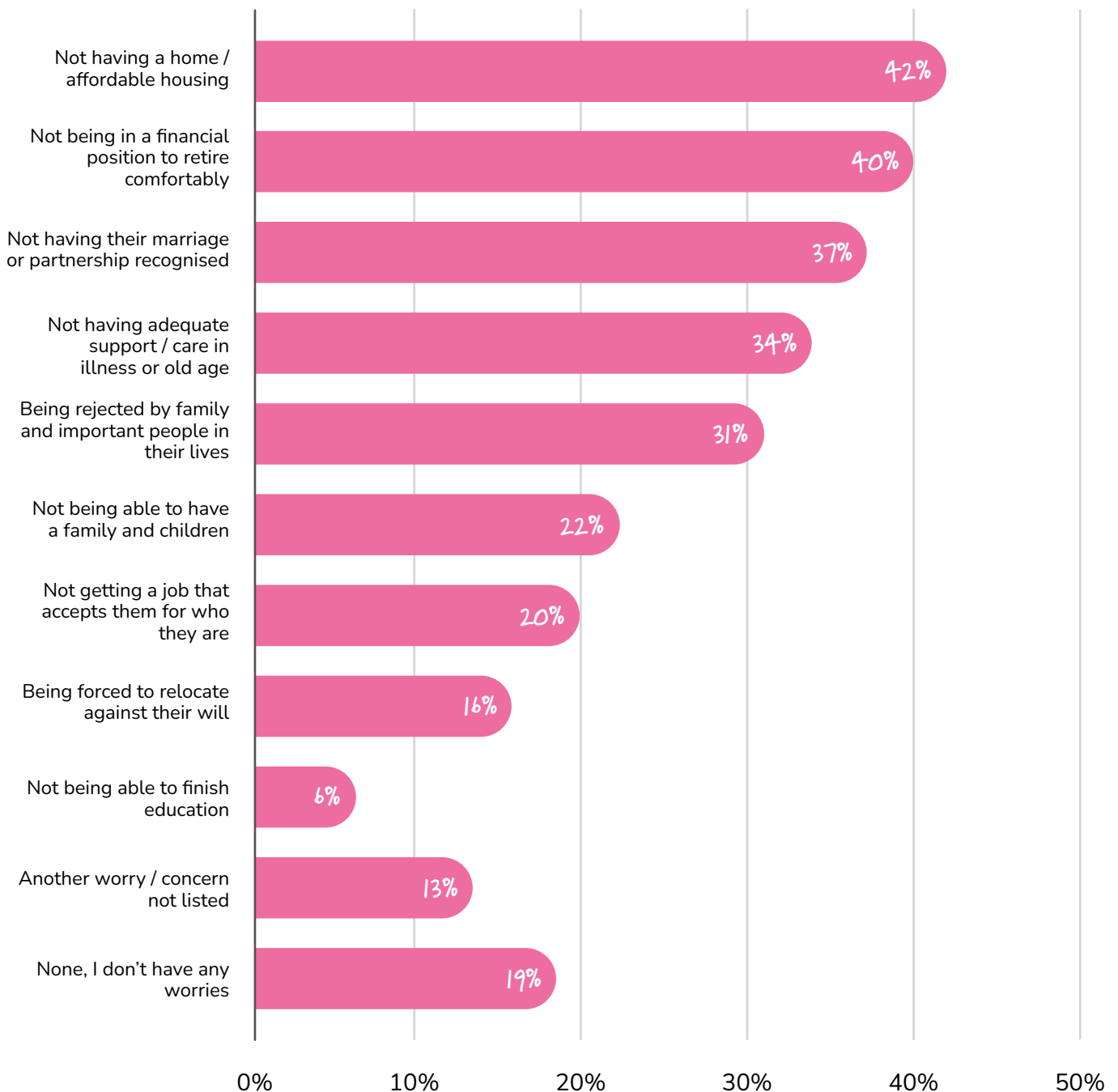
<sup>132</sup> Yun Zhang et al., “Family Outcome Disparities Between Sexual Minority and Heterosexual Families: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis,” *BMJ Global Health* 8, no. 3 (February 1, 2023): e010556, <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2022-010556>. It is noteworthy that where poor family outcomes exist, the research points to social risk factors such as stigma and discrimination, poor social support and marital status.

<sup>133</sup> p 19.

# Planning for the future

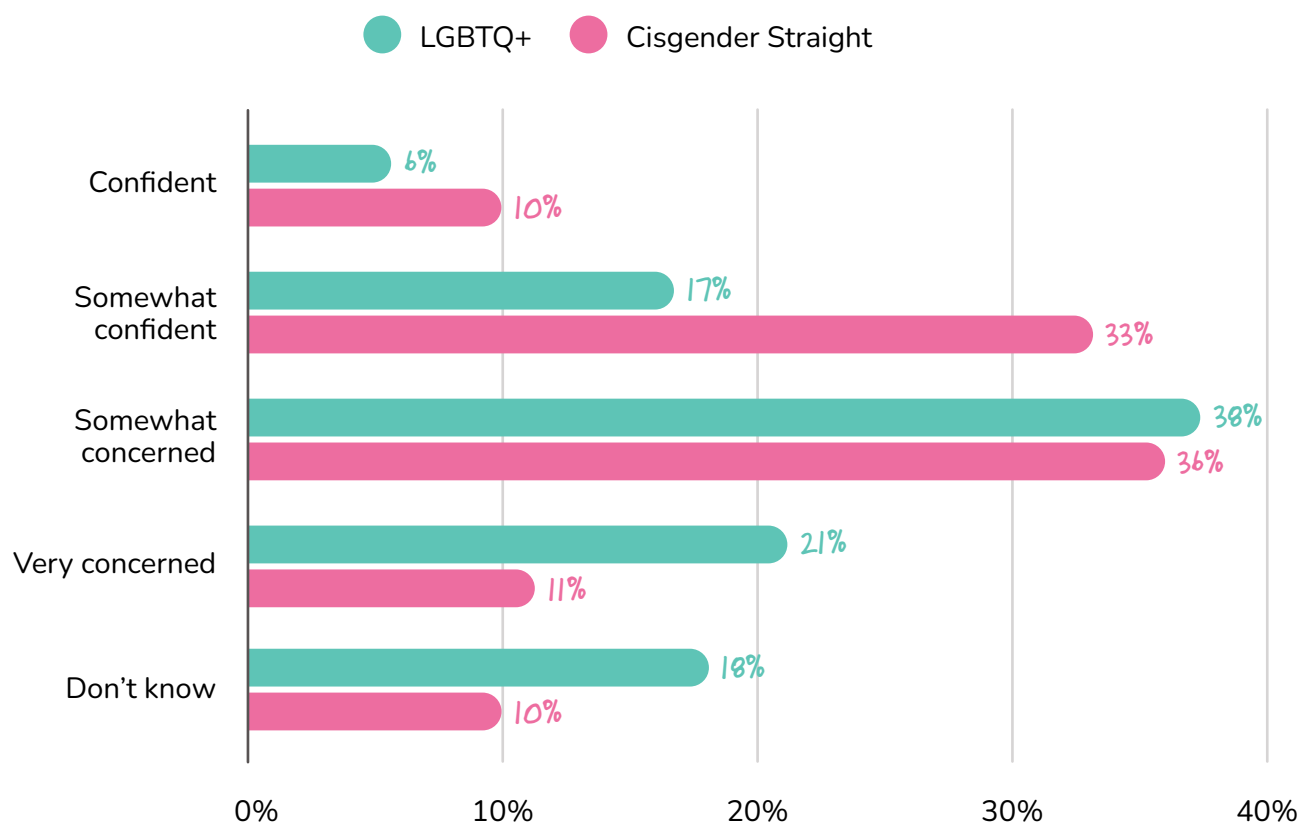
Faced with widespread systemic discrimination, it is no wonder that for many LGBTQ+ Singaporeans, the future remains shaky and uncertain. Our research underscores pervasive concerns within the LGBTQ+ community regarding the recognition of their relationships and the consequential impact on their ability to build a future in Singapore.

LGBTQ+ respondents' worries for the future



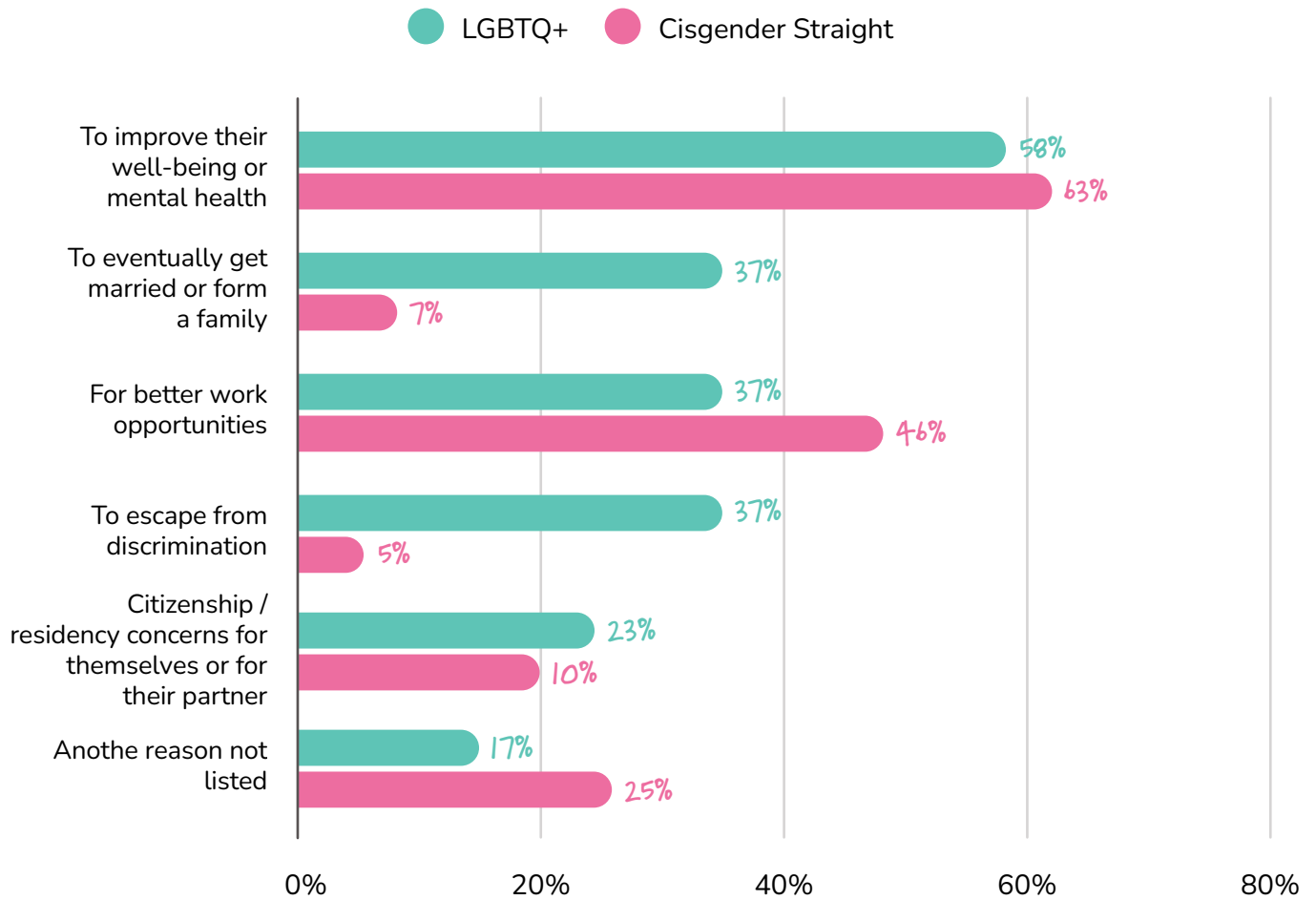
Compared to other Singaporeans, LGBTQ+ individuals are only **half as likely** to be confident about their ability to plan for and **build a future** in Singapore.

### LGBTQ+ vs Cisgender Straight Respondents' confidence in their ability to plan for and build a future in Singapore



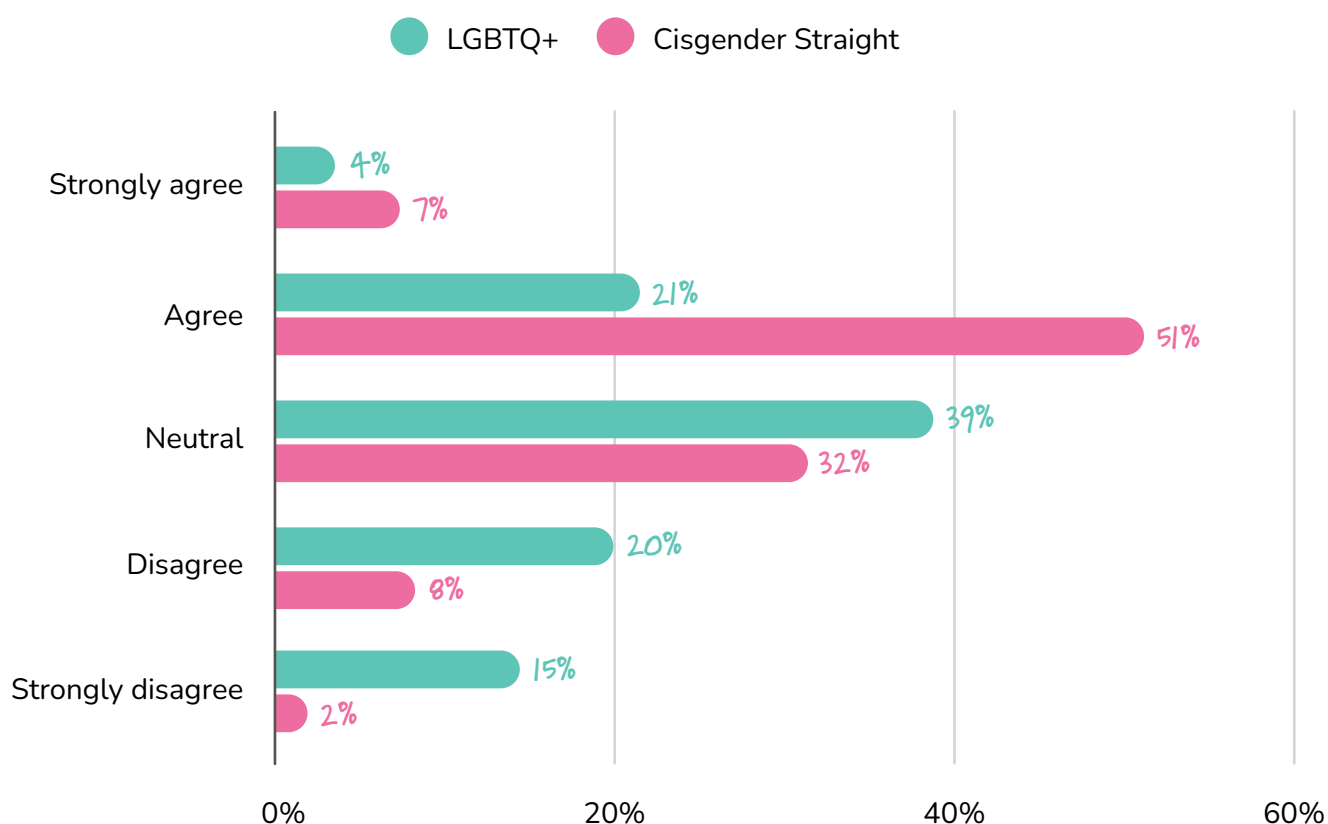
Many LGBTQ+ Singaporeans are leaving their home country due to ongoing inequalities and challenges related to their identities. Only 25% of LGBTQ+ Singaporeans were committed to building a life in Singapore compared to 39% of cisgender heterosexual Singaporeans. Those who want or are open to relocating to another country have cited reasons that include their well-being or mental health and to escape from discrimination.

### LGBTQ+ vs Cisgender Straight Respondents' reasons for wanting to relocate to another country or city



Additionally, factors such as delayed access to public housing, rental instability, workplace discrimination and other forms of bias contribute to a widening gap in economic security between LGBTQ+ individuals and their cisgender heterosexual counterparts. Our research showed that LGBTQ+ individuals are only **half as likely** to be confident of meeting their basic needs as other Singaporeans, suggesting greater struggles due to systemic disadvantages.

**To what extent do you agree/disagree with the statement: “As an LGBTQ+ Singaporean / a Singaporean, I am confident that my basic needs at every life stage will be met, including education, healthcare, housing and retirement.”**



LGBTQ+ Singaporeans also face extra layers of complexity and stress when planning for healthcare and retirement. For instance, insurance coverage frequently does not cover same-sex relationships. Central Provision Fund (CPF) regulations allow account holders to use their Ordinary Account to top up the CPF accounts of people related to them, including legally married (heterosexual) spouses. Similarly, MediSave funds, which can be used for specified medical expenses, are restricted to immediate family members, including spouses. However, same-sex couples do not benefit from these provisions, limiting their financial support options. Unsurprisingly, **40%** of LGBTQ+ Singaporeans worry about their financial readiness for retirement, with this being the second most cited worry after access to affordable housing.

## Not-So-Golden Years

A lifetime of systemic discrimination has compounding effects and takes its toll physically, psychologically, relationally and financially. In a society which prioritises the care and well-being of its ageing population, the challenges facing our queer seniors remain all but invisible. Due to discrimination and legal complexities, LGBTQ+ Singaporeans encounter heightened vulnerabilities as they face critical life events like serious illness, loss of mental capacity or the death of a spouse.

Faced with these hardships, many LGBTQ+ people may feel compelled to **uproot** themselves towards the end of life after years of contributing to Singapore society. This is particularly the case for those with non-Singaporean partners, whose right to remain may be tied to employment, forcing couples who wish to retire together to relocate to more queer-friendly jurisdictions.

“My boyfriend and life partner is my world to me.



My greatest fear is that I will not be able to be at my boyfriend's side and to hold him during our last moments.

— Luo Min Han”

If they do choose to stay, ageing LGBTQ+ Singaporeans are forced to navigate challenges around **end-of-life** care alone as they are not a demographic for which the government demonstrates active support. Elderly LGBTQ+ persons are more likely to encounter isolation and may feel compelled to go back into the closet, especially in environments such as aged care facilities where heteronormativity prevails as the norm. Addressing these issues is crucial for ensuring dignity and inclusion in later life.

LGBTQ+ individuals, regardless of age, have to take additional steps to retain authority over crucial **end-of-life decisions**. For those whose families do not accept their partners, there is a risk that at the end of their lives, their families may limit their partners' access to them. In the case of loss of mental capacity, such as due to dementia, serious illness or an accident, a deputy may need to be appointed to manage personal welfare and financial matters. While individuals can designate such roles in advance through a Lasting Power of Attorney (LPA), in the absence of an LPA the court typically prioritises immediate family members recognised under the law, excluding unmarried partners or those married in other jurisdictions.<sup>134,135</sup> This creates additional challenges for LGBTQ+ individuals who must navigate these legal barriers to ensure their loved ones are recognised and able to assist them.

Upon **death** the lack of the same natural guarantees under intestacy and family laws means additional steps like wills and testamentary guardianship need to be put in place to ensure that assets are bequeathed to their chosen beneficiaries and that child dependents are cared for.

<sup>134</sup> Paragraph 50 of the Family Justice Courts Practice Directions defines "Relevant Persons" (essentially individuals with priority in applying for deputyship) as individuals with an involvement in the patient's life or an interest in the deputyship application. This typically includes immediate family members such as the patient's spouse, children (aged 21 and above), parents or guardians, and siblings (aged 21 and above).

<sup>135</sup> For instance, in *WVG v WVH and anor* [2024] SGFC 14, a man had lost his mental capacity. The man's marriage was dissolved and he had been cohabitating with another (female) partner. The Family Justice Court stated at paragraph [13] that in this case, despite the willingness of the man's new partner to take on the duties of deputyship, "[t]he appointment of adult children as deputies for their parent(s) is desirable" and the court appointed the adult children over the man's partner.

# Policy recommendations

## 1 Legal recognition of LGBTQ+ partnerships and families

In the absence of marriage equality, some form of **legal recognition of partnerships** (e.g. through civil unions or the recognition of *de facto* relationships) is required to ensure that same-sex couples and their families can be accounted for in healthcare, housing, family and social security protections and support systems.

## 2 Enable equal access to public rights and benefits

A thorough review of government policies is needed to ensure that rights and benefits in housing, healthcare and social security are **equally accessible** to same-sex couples as contributing members of society.

- Review residency and citizenship laws and policies to equalise access for heterosexual and same-sex partners.
- Review housing policies to enable access to affordable public housing and financial subsidies.
- Enable queer spouses to support each other financially by ensuring they are recognised as family members and nominees under CPF and MediSave rules, and by insurance providers.
- Enable equal treatment in areas such as financial assistance, tax treatment and paid family leave.

## 3 Address the needs of LGBTQ+ victims of family abuse

LGBTQ individuals are vulnerable to unique forms of abuse and discrimination tied to their identity. Specific interventions are needed to address challenges like shame, isolation and targeted violence.

- Implement and enforce transparent protocols in state agencies to handle violations against LGBTQ+ individuals without discrimination.
- Investigate the prevalence and impact of abuse and harassment related to SOGIE to enhance intervention effectiveness, while ensuring that individuals' confidentiality and safety are rigorously protected.
- Conduct LGBTQ+-affirmative sensitivity training for police, social workers, and shelters to ensure effective support for LGBTQ+ victims, especially those who are young, transgender, or gender non-conforming.
- Promote LGBTQ+ inclusive reporting campaigns and comprehensive sexuality education in schools to encourage reporting of violence.
- Strengthen the capacity of shelters and NGOs offering LGBTQ+-affirmative support for victims of violence.
- Provide LGBTQ+ advocates in state-run institutions to assist with domestic violence reports.

## 4 Address the housing needs of the LGBTQ+ community

Access to housing is an urgent need for the LGBTQ+ community, and we need to recognise the diversity of needs within the group, just as there are diverse needs across Singaporean society as a whole.

- Make housing policies more inclusive so that LGBTQ+ individuals and singles can purchase public housing at an earlier age (e.g. 21 years old as with heterosexual couples).
- Recognise same-sex partnerships in housing policies and guidelines so that all couples in committed relationships have the same home ownership rights, with an equal amount of financial subsidy for joint flat purchases.
- Pass legislation that protects against rental or insurance discrimination on the basis of SOGIE and other relevant characteristics.
- Support and fund shelters for homeless LGBTQ+ and equip existing shelters to provide safe and affirming spaces for LGBTQ+ youth who are unable to stay at home.

## 5 Remove barriers to parenthood and family formation

Recognise the existence and validity of alternative family structures and remove discriminatory laws which cause real hardship to queer families and their children.

- Remove legal obstacles to the formation of queer families by updating adoption and artificial reproduction laws, including ensuring access to fertility treatments for all Singaporeans regardless of marital status.
- Enact legislation to recognise and protect the rights and duties of same-sex partners and households (e.g. in the event of loss of mental capacity, death or family dissolution).
- Enact legislation to recognise the legitimacy and protect the rights of children from same-sex households, ensuring that laws and support systems always prioritise the best interests of children (e.g. in adoption or guardianship applications) regardless of family structure.



### Address the needs of ageing LGBTQ+ Singaporeans

Treat LGBTQ+ seniors as a valid stakeholder group and conduct research around the healthcare and retirement needs of ageing LGBTQ+ Singaporeans.

- Ensure healthcare and elder care services are sensitive to LGBTQ+ needs, with trained professionals who understand LGBTQ+ issues and provide respectful, knowledgeable care.
- Implement and enforce policies to protect LGBTQ+ seniors from discrimination in housing, healthcare, and elder care, and ensure legal rights are upheld, including inheritance and end-of-life decisions.
- Support programs and community centres specifically for LGBTQ+ older adults to combat isolation, foster a sense of community, and provide social support networks.
- Offer specialised assistance to LGBTQ+ seniors including raising legal awareness of the need for retirement and estate planning for LGBTQ+ seniors.

# Transgender community

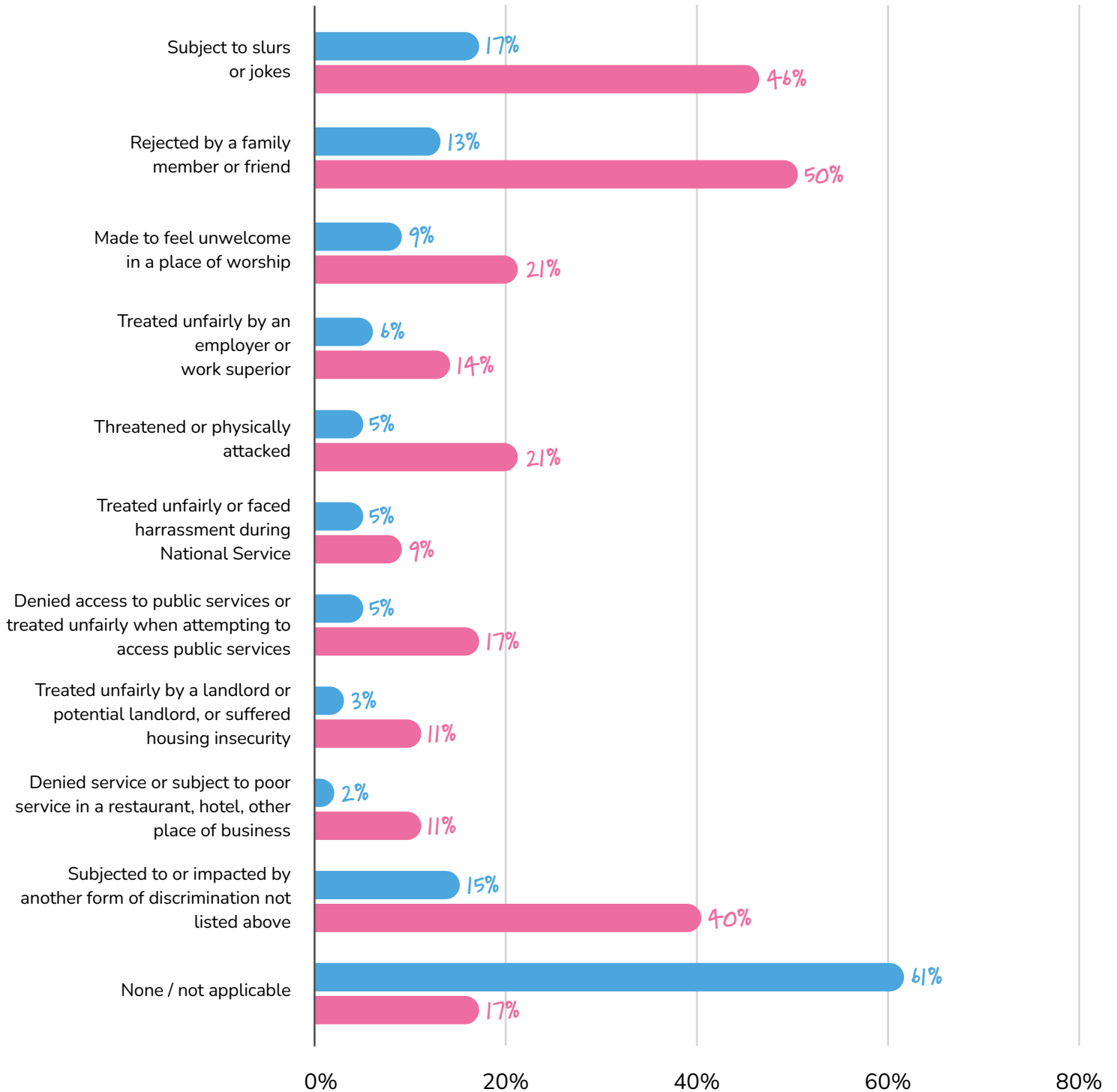
Within the marginalised LGBTQ+ community, the effects of structural discrimination differ across the spectrum of identities. Transgender people are among those **least supported by our society and systems**, with 8 in 10 experiencing discrimination in the last five years — the highest incidence of discrimination among the LGBTQ+ community in Singapore.

As previous sections of this report have highlighted, the trans community is most vulnerable to discrimination and violence, and most likely to have negative experiences surrounding education (see [the chapter on education and youth](#)), employment, and mental health.

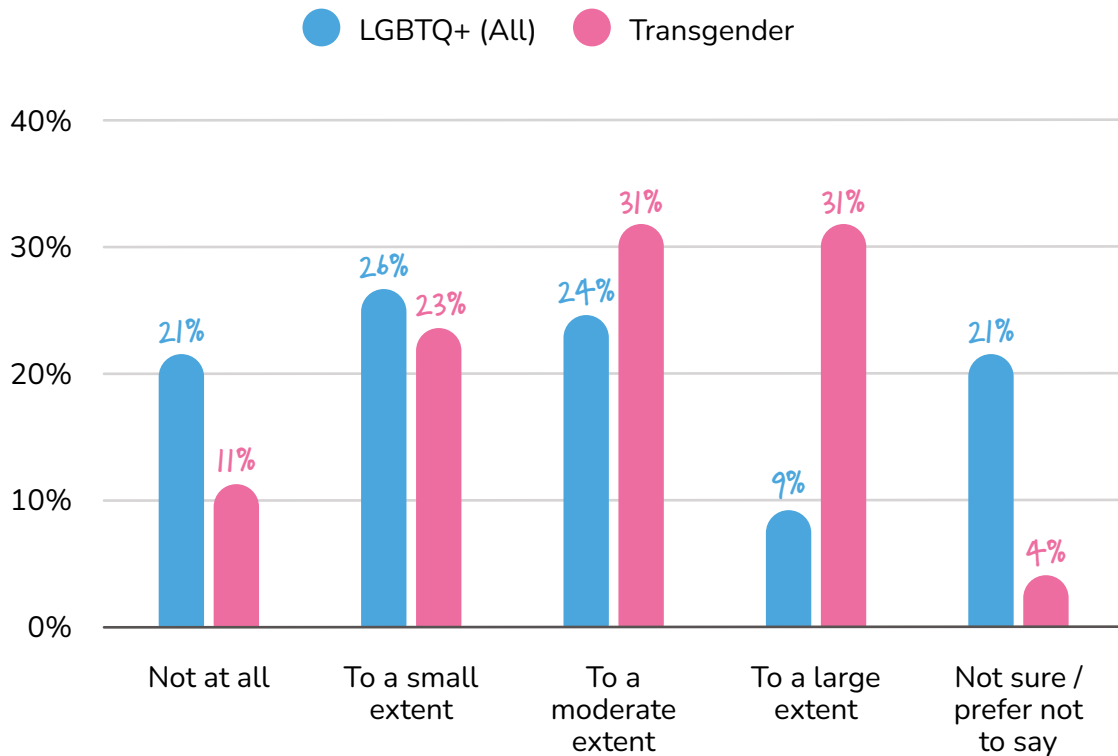
## 5. TRANSGENDER COMMUNITY

**In the last 5 years, because of my sexual orientation or gender identity, I have been...**

● LGBTQ+ (All) ● Transgender



**To what extent do you feel like discrimination on the basis of your sexual orientation or gender identity has negatively impacted your mental health?**



The compounded effects of lifelong structural discrimination creates unequal outcomes and an unstable living environment for trans people. Compared to other members of the LGBTQ+ community in Singapore, trans people are also the least confident of being able to plan for a future<sup>136</sup> or that their basic needs can be met<sup>137</sup> in Singapore.

<sup>136</sup> 15% of trans respondents are confident or somewhat confident of their ability to plan and build a future here, compared to 23% in the general LGBTQ+ community and 43% of the cisnet community.

<sup>137</sup> 17% of trans respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their basic needs at every stage of life would be met, compared to 25% in the general LGBTQ+ community and 58% of the cisnet community.

# Violence against transgender people

Globally, trans and gender diverse people face high rates of gender-based violence. This occurs in public life, but also in private spaces, including their homes, at the hands of family members and intimate partners.<sup>138</sup> Singapore, unfortunately, follows this global trend. Our research shows trans Singaporeans and PRs are the most likely among LGBTQ+ individuals facing discrimination to encounter violence, with **1 in 5** reporting threats or being physically assaulted on the basis of their identity — four times the rate of such incidents faced by the rest of the LGBTQ+ community.

This corroborates qualitative findings from a limited number of studies done by local community groups,<sup>139</sup> and cases reported in the mainstream media, including most recently the assault of drag performer Kira Moon at Marina Bay Sands earlier in 2024.<sup>140</sup> Violence faced by trans people is compounded by the other forms of discrimination that they face, often placing trans people in spaces or vulnerable situations where they are at higher risk of violence. One example is sex work, which a number of trans Singaporeans are forced to take up due to difficult circumstances.

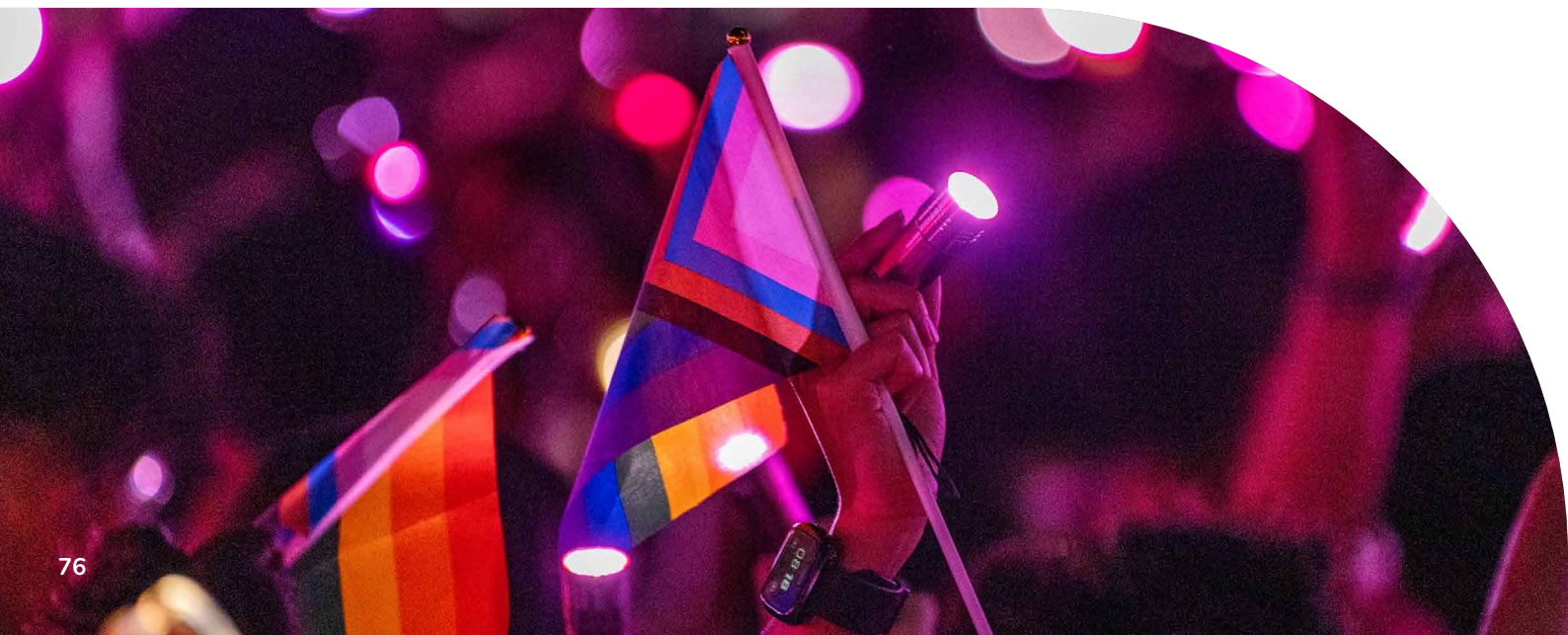
A 2015 study by Yale Law School and sex work non-profit organisation Project X described how discrimination in each life stage “paves the path” for the next instance of discrimination, starting with problems at home and with loved ones.<sup>141</sup> Our own research validates this, with **half** of trans respondents indicating they have faced rejection from a family member or friend, more than four times the average share of other queer identities.

<sup>138</sup> n 37, pp 28-37.

<sup>139</sup> We lack official statistics on crimes against transgender and gender non-conforming individuals in Singapore. See n 37, pp 77-79 for reports of violence against LGBTQ+ people in public spaces.

<sup>140</sup> Shynn Ong, “Police Probe Alleged Assault at Marina Bay Sands in Incident Where Drag Performer Tells of ‘homophobic’ Slur,” *TODAY*, March 12, 2024, <https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/police-probe-alleged-assault-mbs-homophobic-slur-2380816>.

<sup>141</sup> Project X and Allard K. Lowenstein International Human Rights Clinic, “They Only Do This to Transgender Girls’: Abuses of Transgender Sex Workers in Singapore,” May 2015, accessed October 20, 2024, <https://law.yale.edu/sites/default/files/area/center/schell/they-only-do-this-to-transgender-girls-singapore-report-final.pdf>, p 36.



Problems at home are then made worse by a disrupted education due to discrimination in school (see [the chapter on education and youth](#)) leading to low employability. Beyond employability, qualified trans persons also face discrimination in seeking employment. These factors force vulnerable trans women into sex work.<sup>142</sup> There, they face an increased risk of violence and abuse — not just from clients but also the police, according to first-person interviews conducted by Project X.<sup>143</sup> The fear of ill treatment by law enforcement and social services also means they are more likely to suffer in silence.

We welcome moves in past years to extend certain protections to LGBTQ+ people in legislation such as the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act (MRHA), and reassurances that laws including the Protection from Harassment Act apply equally to all.<sup>144</sup> But ongoing incidents underscore the pressing need to strengthen protections and provide tangible recourse to trans people facing violence — not just on paper, but in practice as well.

<sup>142</sup> *ibid*, p 4.

<sup>143</sup> n 141, pp 14-15.

<sup>144</sup> An explanatory note was included with the 2019 amendment to the MRHA — though not in the text of the legislation proper — to clarify that members of the LGBTQ+ community, as well as other minorities, were protected against violence incited by religious groups. Separately, the Home Affairs Minister has on a few occasions stated that POHA applies equally to [all Singaporeans, including LGBT people](#), though the law or additional notes do not specifically mention sexual minorities or trans people. MHA, "Written Reply to Parliamentary Question on Investigations into the Incident at the SMOL Salad Bar at Lau Pa Sat, by Mr K Shanmugam, Minister for Home Affairs and Minister for Law," Press release, July 6, 2021, accessed December 16, 2024, <https://www.mha.gov.sg/mediaroom/parliamentary/written-reply-to-pq-on-investigations-into-the-incident-at-the-smol-salad-bar-at-lau-pa-sat/> and Kasiviswanathan Shanmugam, "Facebook post by Kasiviswanathan Shanmugam," Facebook, June 27, 2017, accessed December 16, 2024, [https://www.facebook.com/k.shanmugam.page/posts/1407767735936419?ref=embed\\_post](https://www.facebook.com/k.shanmugam.page/posts/1407767735936419?ref=embed_post).

# Gender identity recognition

Gender identity is “integral to an individual’s personality, and is one of the most basic aspects of self-determination, dignity and freedom”.<sup>145</sup> After transitioning, having a sex or gender marker on official documents that does not match their gender identity subjects trans people to the risk of harassment and discrimination in healthcare, employment, housing, marriage and mobility. In Singapore, trans people can only have their gender legally recognised if they have undergone surgery to have their genitalia “completely” changed from male/female to female/male.<sup>146</sup> This imposes an unnecessarily high and potentially risky burden on trans people in order to legitimise their personal gender identity in the eyes of the state.

There is no one fixed transition path. Trans people have diverse transition journeys depending on their needs and circumstances, including those who do not necessarily wish to pursue medical interventions or are unable to do so. A survey conducted by TransgenderSG in 2020 highlights this diversity, with 55.8% of the 242 respondents (trans and non-binary persons) sharing that they had not taken any steps to medically transition at that point in time.<sup>147</sup> Of the remaining respondents who had sought gender-affirming treatment, only 16 had undergone genital reconstruction surgery.<sup>148</sup> The majority of the respondents who have received gender-affirming treatment had done so in the form of hormone replacement therapy.<sup>149</sup>

As with all medical procedures, not all trans persons may be suitable candidates for gender-affirming surgeries. In cases where surgery is possible, the costs and potential risks can still make going through with procedures prohibitive. The time taken from when a trans person begins to socially transition to when they complete gender-affirming surgery takes several years, sometimes decades. During this time, the inability to change one’s legal sex marker on official documents such as the national registration identity card leads to tense or hostile situations such as being **outed** at work or in official settings. This extends even to casual settings where identity verification is required, such as volunteering with organisations.

Being repeatedly misgendered extends **trauma**, stress, and anxiety for trans and gender non-conforming people. Gender-based national policies force trans people to out themselves to strangers, and entail other material and often negative consequences for not being able to identify as they wish. Many trans women, for example, would already have had to serve their national service (NS) by the time they can get access to gender-affirming surgeries; in our study, almost **1 in 10** transgender respondents reported ill treatment in NS.

<sup>145</sup> Yogyakarta Principles, “Principle 3,” YogyakartaPrinciples.org, 2006, accessed October 20, 2024, <http://yogyakartaprinciples.org/principle-3/>. The Yogyakarta Principles apply international human rights law to sexual orientation and gender identity and was adopted following an experts’ meeting held in Yogyakarta, Indonesia from 6-9 November 2006.

<sup>146</sup> Zhan Chiam, Sandra Duffy, and Matilda González Gil, “Trans Legal Mapping Support,” ILGA. Org, November 2017, accessed October 20, 2024, [https://ilga.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/ILGA\\_Trans\\_Legal\\_Mapping\\_Report\\_2017\\_ENG.pdf](https://ilga.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/ILGA_Trans_Legal_Mapping_Report_2017_ENG.pdf), pp 25 and 40-41. Singapore’s Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA) policy and its overarching National Registration Regulations, reg.10(2)(b) are outlined on page 41.

<sup>147</sup> n 45, p 26.

<sup>148</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> *ibid.*

Gender- and LGBTQ+-based discrimination are intrinsically linked. On a fundamental level, NS as an institution is premised on outdated gender norms. Other community groups have shown how this has created an environment that perpetuates toxic forms of masculinity, and in turn, gender-based and anti-queer violence (see [the chapter on employment and the workplace](#)).<sup>150</sup> Without addressing the discriminatory foundations on which NS is built, we cannot hope to uproot SOGIE-based discrimination of any kind.<sup>151</sup>

## Barriers to gender-affirming healthcare

International scientific literature provides overwhelming evidence on the benefits of gender transition, including medical treatments, on the overall well-being of trans people.<sup>152</sup> In addition, the literature also indicates that greater availability of medical and social support for gender transition contributes to better quality of life for trans people.<sup>42</sup> While there has been progress in accessibility and quality of gender-affirming healthcare in Singapore, there is still much room for improvement.

Misgendering and invasions of trans people's privacy stem from prejudice and a lack of understanding and sensitivity.<sup>153</sup> Examples of such inappropriate treatment in Singapore's healthcare settings include trans people being asked if they have had gender-affirming surgery done or being asked to have their body viewed or examined when it was unrelated to the medical issue being discussed.

These negative experiences within the healthcare system negatively affects their physical health as many of them end up avoiding seeking reproductive, sexual, and even general healthcare due to discomfort over how they will be treated, or fear of being harassed (see [the chapter on health and well-being](#)).

<sup>150</sup> Malavika Menon, "Review national service to weed out toxic masculinity: Aware chief," *The Straits Times*, May 24, 2021, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/review-national-service-to-weed-out-toxic-masculinity-aware-chief>.

<sup>151</sup> Other advocacy groups have highlighted this issue. On NS, Aware has stated that "men and women should have a choice in what they want to do—be it military service or other forms of community service. It should not be gender-determined." - Aware, "Policy and Position Statements," [Aware.org.sg](https://www.aware.org.sg/about/policy-and-position-statements/#:~:text=National%20Service%20should%20include%20more,should%20not%20be%20gender%2Determined), accessed October 21, 2024, <https://www.aware.org.sg/about/policy-and-position-statements/#:~:text=National%20Service%20should%20include%20more,should%20not%20be%20gender%2Determined>.

<sup>152</sup> The What We Know Project, "What does the scholarly research say about the effect of gender transition on transgender well-being? | What We Know," [Cornell.edu](https://whatweknow.inequality.cornell.edu/topics/lgbt-equality/what-does-the-scholarly-research-say-about-the-well-being-of-transgender-people/), accessed October 21, 2024, <https://whatweknow.inequality.cornell.edu/topics/lgbt-equality/what-does-the-scholarly-research-say-about-the-well-being-of-transgender-people/>.

<sup>153</sup> TransgenderSG, "Accessing Healthcare", <https://transgendergsg.com/health/>. Accessed November 20, 2024.

## 5. TRANSGENDER COMMUNITY

The majority of transgender persons are acutely reliant on healthcare providers for their transition. Many have had to navigate a complex system and lack of medical expertise from providers in order to obtain the gender-affirming healthcare that they need. The trans community is further penalised by our national healthcare financing schemes and private insurance policies. **Hormone replacement therapy (HRT)** can cost anywhere between \$15 - \$150 per month locally just for medication,<sup>154</sup> while the estimated costs for **genital reconstruction and sterilisation surgery** ranges from \$7,000 to upwards of \$150,000.<sup>155</sup>

Locally, the availability and quality of gender-affirming surgeries is limited, which means the majority of trans people resort to seeking such procedures overseas in countries such as Thailand or America, and incur additional costs of travelling and accommodation. Major surgeries such as genital reconstruction surgeries require weeks or months off work for recovery, requiring trans people to exit employment if their employers are not supportive.

<sup>154</sup> n 45, p 24.

<sup>155</sup> Masculinising genital reconstruction surgery is typically more expensive than the equivalent feminising surgery. See n 45, p 26.



# Employment discrimination

Up to **97%** of transgender respondents in our survey reported experiencing some form of work-related discrimination, compared to **69%** of all LGBTQ+ respondents. As we have discussed earlier, the difficulty of finding and maintaining stable employment sometimes means trans people are forced into work that places them at risk of violence and ill-treatment, or are pressured to stay in abusive work environments. Many trans people have difficulty finding inclusive workplaces which do not outrightly harass or discriminate against them.

While searching for jobs, transgender respondents reported experiencing a wide range of job search discrimination, including access to **fewer suitable job options** (38%), **losing a job opportunity** (36%), **intrusive questioning during interviews** (36%) and other discriminatory hiring processes such as having to provide details that might out them as trans (53%).<sup>156</sup> A recent audit of employment discrimination on the basis of gender identity in Singapore demonstrated that transgender people were far more likely than a cisgender person to receive a negative response to a job application despite having equivalent qualifications and experience.<sup>157</sup>

Once they have secured jobs, many trans people are still made to endure hostile work environments, including **obstacles to promotion and career advancement** (24%), **threats to personal safety** (33%) and a **lack of recourse for harms done** (27%). Examples of negative experiences in the workplace include being verbally abused in relation to their gender identity, having rumours being spread about their gender, sexual orientation, or sex life, and being forced to use bathrooms that matched their sex assigned at birth.<sup>158</sup> According to TransgenderSG's 2020 report, over a quarter of those currently working reported that they had not disclosed they were trans to anyone at work due to the negative consequences of doing so.<sup>159</sup>

The constant struggle to find and keep gainful employment means trans people are at high risk of entering a cycle of oppression and disenfranchisement.

<sup>156</sup> Results from TransgenderSG's 2020 survey support these findings. See n 45, pp 14-18.

<sup>157</sup> Asia Pacific Transgender Network, "Denied Work: An Audit of Employment Discrimination on the Basis of Gender Identity in Singapore," *Asia Pacific Transgender Network* (Asia Pacific Transgender Network, 2019), accessed December 16, 2024, <https://www.weareaptn.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/APTN-DeniedWork-Singapore.pdf>.

<sup>158</sup> n 45 p 18.

<sup>159</sup> *ibid.*

# Policy recommendations

## 1 Protect vulnerable gender and sexual minorities from violence

As gender and sexual minorities who have historically faced, and continue to face, high levels of **targeted abuse** and discrimination, LGBTQ+ individuals—particularly transgender people—are uniquely vulnerable to harm. The state has a responsibility to address years of discrimination and stigma by formally acknowledging and addressing the issue of hate-motivated violence towards the LGBTQ+ community.

- Introduce SOGIE as a protected characteristic in relevant legislation (such as the Protection from Harassment Act and the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act) to formally recognise the LGBTQ+ community as a marginalised minority worthy of legal protection.
- Introduce legislation expressly criminalising violence, harassment and hate speech motivated by victim's real or imputed SOGIE, and introduce enhanced penalties for offences aggravated by the victim's real or imputed SOGIE. Explicit hate crime legislation (similar to those which exist to protect racial and religious minorities) is crucial because generic laws often overlook the specific harms and complexities of crimes motivated by bias against gender and sexual minorities.
- Ensure law enforcement agencies are trained to recognise and respond to cases of violence against LGBTQ+ people in a professional and respectful manner, without discrimination.
- Increase funding and other support for shelters catering to survivors of violence and abuse, particularly those serving the trans community.

## 2 Create a public and legal environment that is gender-affirming

Gender is an integral part of selfhood, yet trans people in particular face barriers to having this part of their identity fully recognised by the state. Bureaucratic processes and interactions with government bodies become regularly exhausting confrontations because of the system's rejection of trans people's gender identities, while a number of national policies are still based on an individual's legal sex.

- Reduce the administrative barriers for those wishing to change their gender marker on legal documents, and enable exceptional case-handling, consulting with transgender organisations for best practices.
- Provide all individuals with the choice to not have their sex indicated on their NRICs.
- Work with community groups to develop and conduct sensitivity training for public servants on creating a gender-affirming environment, in particular front-facing service staff.
- In the longer-term, conduct a review of sex-based national policies such as national service to prevent SOGIE-based discrimination and hardship. For example, individuals could be allowed to take on roles that most suit their particular skills or work experience, regardless of whether the role is traditionally associated with their sex or gender expression.<sup>160</sup>

### 3 Improve access to gender-affirming healthcare services

Trans people who choose to medically transition do not do so lightly, and they should be able to access gender-affirming healthcare when needed. Unfortunately discrimination in the healthcare system and high costs present a high barrier to accessing these potentially life-saving procedures.

- Recognise the importance and benefits of gender-affirming medical treatments on health outcomes of trans people by fully including all gender-affirming procedures in national healthcare financing schemes (e.g. MediSave, MediShield).
- Incorporate gender-affirming healthcare as part of the training and education of both public and private healthcare providers, ensuring a “no wrong door” environment and reducing harm when seeking medical transition.
- Provide transparency in the routes to access gender-affirming care to reduce wasted time.
- Expand the availability of clinics that can provide affordable care for those undergoing medical transition, including ensuring sufficient trans-friendly counsellors and specialists (e.g. psychiatrists and endocrinologists).

See [the chapter on health and well-being](#) for more recommendations.

### 4

### Ensure workplaces are safe, welcoming, and supportive for people of all gender identities and expressions

Discrimination in hiring and at the workplace exacerbates the financial inequality faced by trans people, trapping them in a cycle of marginalisation.

- Provide education and sensitivity training for employers, starting with the civil and public service to set an example for the rest of the country.
- Establish guidelines for gender inclusive workplace practices, with regards to areas such as hiring, promoting, names and pronouns, restroom use and dress codes.

See [the chapter on employment and the workplace](#) for more recommendations.

<sup>160</sup> See n 34, p 69.

# Media and public discourse

Earlier in our report, we discussed how misinformation and erasure of LGBTQ+ identities in schools could harm youth, and how a national narrative of heteronormativity has harmed queer Singaporeans. These are two examples of an all-encompassing state-maintained national ecosystem that denies fair and positive representation to LGBTQ+ individuals, the focus of this chapter.

When asked about the most urgent issues faced by the LGBTQ+ community, 1 in 7 cited the media's **false or misleading portrayals** of LGBTQ+ people, or perpetuation of **stereotypes**. It is easy to understand why. If fair or positive depictions of LGBTQ+ people are absent, queer identities in Singapore will continue to be marginalised, while harmful stereotypes perpetuated by the government and media will fuel baseless prejudices portraying LGBTQ+ individuals as deviant or immoral. LGBTQ+ Singaporeans, who seek only to be treated equally, are denied normalisation.

# Pervasive media censorship

Underpinning this repressive landscape is our censorship regime, maintained by the Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA), a statutory board under the Ministry of Communications and Information. The regulations enforced by IMDA reveal a deeply outdated and misinformed view of LGBTQ+ people and pathologises LGBTQ+ identities, treating them as behaviours to be controlled or erased rather than a legitimate form of human diversity.

The agency's prejudiced assumptions about LGBTQ+ people are evident throughout its various content codes. For instance, under the Content Code for Nationwide Managed Transmission Linear Television Services, LGBTQ+ themes or content, even when featured as a subplot, are typically categorised as M18, while portrayals of same-sex marriage would receive an R21 rating.<sup>161</sup>

IMDA also mandates that radio programmes featuring content related to “lifestyles” such as homosexuality, lesbianism, bisexuality, transsexualism, transvestism, must be “treated with utmost caution”.<sup>162</sup> The guidelines specify that these topics should not be promoted, justified, or encouraged in any way. Additionally, explicit dialogue or information concerning these subjects is prohibited from being broadcast.

<sup>161</sup> “Films that depict alternative sexualities, e.g. homosexuality, should be sensitive to community values. Films that centre on alternative sexualities may be classified at highest rating of R21. Non-explicit depictions of sexual activity between persons of the same gender may be featured at R21 rating. ...[R21] Films that portray, as a main theme, same-sex marriage or parenting will be subject to strict review” - Infocomm Media Development Authority, “Content Code for Nationwide Managed Transmission Linear Television Services,” accessed October 20, 2024, <https://www.imda.gov.sg/-/media/imda/files/regulations-and-licensing/regulations/codes-of-practice/codes-of-practice-media/managed-linear-tv-services-content-code-updated-29-april-2019.pdf>, pp 16 and 21.

<sup>162</sup> Infocomm Media Development Authority, “Content Code for Radio Services,” accessed October 20, 2024, <https://www.imda.gov.sg/-/media/imda/files/regulation-licensing-and-consultations/codes-of-practice-and-guidelines/acts-codes/content-code-for-radio-services22072020.pdf>, p 3.



A similar approach has been taken for films, video and stage productions.<sup>163</sup> In film classification guidelines, IMDA has additionally included language placing same-sex marriage or parenting in the R21 category, warning that films portraying such subjects “as a main theme” would be “subject to strict review”.<sup>164</sup>

Here are some examples of censorship:

- In 2018, *Love, Simon*, a coming-of-age film with no sexual scenes, was rated R21 due to its “homosexual theme”.<sup>165</sup>
- In 2019, Disney cut a scene from *Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker* that depicted a brief same sex kiss to avoid a higher rating than PG13.<sup>166</sup>
- In 2021, Marvel film *Eternals* became the first film from the franchise to receive a M18 rating for its depiction of a gay main character.<sup>167</sup>
- In 2022, children were not allowed to watch Disney film *Lightyear* because it featured a lesbian couple.<sup>168</sup>

Censorship extends to even advertisements. Pink Dot itself has fallen afoul of this in past years when the Advertising Standards Authority of Singapore wanted to remove our signature tagline – “supporting the freedom to love” – from banners placed at Cathay Cineleisure Orchard, citing “public sensitivities” despite admitting the phrase “technically” did not flout rules on family values.<sup>169</sup> Apart from such restrictions, the regulations also dictate that advertisements “must not depict or promote homosexual intimacy, including images of same gender kissing”.<sup>170</sup>

Taken together, the practical effect of these regulations is a near-total blackout on LGBTQ+ representation in local mainstream media. Since programmes rated higher than PG13 are not allowed for broadcast on free-to-air TV, this effectively prevents any positive portrayal of LGBTQ+ identities from being shown on these channels.

These classifications indicate that such content is deemed suitable only for viewers above certain age thresholds, effectively limiting access to these narratives. IMDA has stated that even after the repeal of Section 377A, LGBTQ+ media content will continue to warrant higher age ratings.<sup>171</sup>

Why should something as joyful and universally human as love, when expressed in a consensual, non-explicit manner, be deemed unsuitable for general consumption, regardless of the genders of the people involved? Why can’t LGBTQ+ characters take up leading roles in works of entertainment? Such restrictions signal that there is something shameful about LGBTQ+ identities, or that the “rightful” place of queer people should always be in the margins — or perhaps even “better”, completely erased.

<sup>163</sup> Some theatre groups have also told Pink Dot that IMDA has in the past required them to put up content notices about “homosexual content” as opposed to more neutral language.

<sup>164</sup> “Films that depict a homosexual lifestyle should be sensitive to community values. They should not promote or justify a homosexual lifestyle. However, non-exploitative and non-explicit depictions of sexual activity between two persons of the same gender may be considered for R21.” - Infocomm Media Development Authority, “IMDA Film Classification Guidelines,” accessed October 21, 2024, [https://www.imda.gov.sg/-/media/imda/files/regulations-and-licensing/regulations/codes-of-practice/codes-of-practice-media/film-classification-guidelines-29\\_apr\\_2019.pdf](https://www.imda.gov.sg/-/media/imda/files/regulations-and-licensing/regulations/codes-of-practice/codes-of-practice-media/film-classification-guidelines-29_apr_2019.pdf), p 4 and 10.

<sup>165</sup> Shannon Connellan, “Thousands petition to change Singapore’s film rating for ‘Love, Simon,’” *Mashable*, April 3, 2018, [https://mashable.com/article/love-simon-singapore-classification?test\\_uuid=01i2GpryXngy77ulpA3Y4B&test\\_variant=b](https://mashable.com/article/love-simon-singapore-classification?test_uuid=01i2GpryXngy77ulpA3Y4B&test_variant=b).

<sup>166</sup> BBC News, “The Rise of Skywalker: Disney Cuts Star Wars Same-sex Kiss in Singapore,” BBC, December 24, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-50899836>.

<sup>167</sup> John Lui, “Superhero flick *Eternals* passed without cuts, but rated M18,” *The Straits Times*, November 3, 2021, <https://www.straitstimes.com/life/entertainment/superhero-flick-eternals-passed-without-cuts-but-rated-m18>.

<sup>168</sup> John Lui, “Disney-Pixar’s *Lightyear*, with same-sex kiss, will not play in 14 countries,” *The Straits Times*, June 14, 2022, <https://www.straitstimes.com/life/entertainment/pixars-new-movie-lightyear-with-same-sex-couple-will-not-play-in-14-countries>.

<sup>169</sup> Xing Hui Kok and Tam Mei Tan, “Advertising watchdog wants ‘supporting the freedom to love’ tag removed from Pink Dot ad,” *The Straits Times*, June 2, 2022, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/advertising-watchdog-wants-supporting-the-freedom-to-love-tag-removed-from-pink-dot-ad>.

<sup>170</sup> Infocomm Media Development Authority, “IMDA Guidelines on Promotional Materials for Films,” accessed October 21, 2024, [https://www.imda.gov.sg/-/media/imda/files/regulations-and-licensing/regulations/codes-of-practice/codes-of-practice-media/film-publicity-materials-guidelines-29\\_apr\\_2019.pdf](https://www.imda.gov.sg/-/media/imda/files/regulations-and-licensing/regulations/codes-of-practice/codes-of-practice-media/film-publicity-materials-guidelines-29_apr_2019.pdf).

<sup>171</sup> MCI, “Media Statement by MCI on Government Content Regulation Position,” Press release, August 22, 2022, accessed October 21, 2024, <https://www.mddi.gov.sg/media-centre/press-releases/media-statement-by-mci-on-govt-content-regulation-position/>.

# Negative and harmful portrayals

Even as the government effectively outlaws positive portrayals of LGBTQ+ individuals, it freely allows negative media portrayals of LGBTQ+ people. Large mainstream media outlets in Singapore — across news publishing and entertainment — have thus been careless in their portrayal of the community, perpetuating stereotypes and derogatory language that influence public perception. Though such incidents have been distressingly common over the decades, here are a few examples from more recent years:

- In 2020, the Mediacorp Channel 8 drama *My Guardian Angels* depicted a male paedophile with a sexually transmitted disease who targets boys. Mediacorp eventually apologised.<sup>172</sup>
- In 2023, Mediacorp drama *Silent Walls* featured a relationship between a gay couple with a large age gap. One of the characters later died from a sexually transmitted disease, leading his partner to commit suicide.<sup>173</sup>
- In 2023, Chinese-language news outlets Lianhe Zaobao and 8world used inappropriate language to describe transgender sex workers, using the terms ‘男扮女装’ (“men dressed as women”) or ‘打扮女性化的外籍男子’ (“foreign men dressed in a feminine way”). Shin Min Daily News repeatedly referred to the trans women as ‘人妖’, a derogatory term that describes them as monsters or freaks.<sup>174</sup>

It is difficult to expect Singapore’s government-linked mainstream media to improve when the government itself has not set a strong example. IMDA’s content codes problematically categorises LGBTQ+ identities alongside harmful behaviours such as incest and paedophilia,<sup>175</sup> reinforcing negative stereotypes.

Apart from such overtly offensive comparisons, the agency also mandates that content that depicts “alternative sexualities” should be “sensitive to community values”.<sup>176</sup> Elaborating on these values, the code stresses the “importance of the family as the basic unit of society” and states that “the institution of marriage should be respected”.<sup>177</sup>

This language positions LGBTQ+ identities as outside the norm and inherently incompatible with “family values”, echoing the problematic us-vs-them rhetoric from the Section 377A debates.<sup>178</sup> As we mentioned in our earlier section on family, this framing not only alienates LGBTQ+ individuals but also perpetuates the harmful and false narrative that their existence threatens the traditional family structure, ignoring the reality that LGBTQ+ people also have families and deeply value them.

<sup>172</sup> Jan Lee, “Mediacorp apologises for controversial paedophile character in Channel 8 drama *My Guardian Angels*,” *The Straits Times*, July 15, 2020, <https://www.straitstimes.com/lifestyle/entertainment/mediacorp-apologises-for-treatment-of-gay-character-in-channel-8-drama-my-guardian-angels>.

<sup>173</sup> Low Youjin, “Mediacorp, production firm respond to claims of ‘harmful gay stereotypes’ in TV drama *Silent Walls*,” *TODAY*, April 5, 2023, <https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/mediacorp-production-firm-address-claim-tv-series-gay-stereotypes-2145096>.

<sup>174</sup> Aces Going Places et al., “Language Matters: Towards Accurate Media Reporting on Trans People in Singapore,” Press release, December 28, 2023, accessed October 21, 2024, <https://pinkdot.sg/2023/12/language-matters-towards-accurate-media-reporting-on-trans-people-in-singapore/>.

<sup>175</sup> See n 161, p 16.

<sup>176</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>177</sup> *ibid*, p 5.

<sup>178</sup> CNA, “PAP MPs raise concerns about protecting family values and social policies as Parliament moves to decriminalise gay sex” - CNA.

We will never be seen as human when we can't be seen as normal in the media. Happy in the media. Flourishing in the media. Parents will continue to believe in and enforce queer stigma until we show them that there is another way that queer people can be.

That they can live happy, productive lives beyond pleasantries the government spouts that deny the realities of queer discrimination on the ground.

— Faith Sim Jia Rui



Under various guidelines, the regulator also warns content producers against “promoting” or “justifying” an LGBTQ+ “lifestyle”, suggesting these identities are inherently problematic.<sup>179</sup> The use of the term “lifestyle” is a tactic commonly employed by anti-LGBTQ groups to delegitimise and marginalise these identities. It also presumes that there is or can even be a homogenous, single “lifestyle” for the diverse queer identities in Singapore. If we rightfully find caricaturising a monolithic Malay or Chinese “lifestyle” offensive, then why should it be any different for LGBTQ+ Singaporeans?

In the absence of positive portrayals of LGBTQ+ characters, such negative depictions can shape public perception disproportionately. Audiences are left with a skewed understanding of LGBTQ identities, reinforcing bias and prejudice.

<sup>179</sup> “Unconventional manner of living atypical of the concept of the traditional family (e.g. homosexuality, bisexuality, and trans-sexuality)” - Infocomm Media Development Authority, “IMDA Content Guidelines for Local Lifestyle Magazines,” accessed October 21, 2024, <https://www.imda.gov.sg/-/media/imda/files/regulations-and-licensing/regulations/codes-of-practice/codes-of-practice-media/contentguidelinesforlocallifestylemagazines.pdf>, p 10.

# Suppressing public discourse

Worse still, attempts made to pierce this fog of repression and benightedness are often shut down. Beyond the media, many educational and public spaces in Singapore are also subject to censorship and pressure from conservative groups. These institutions often capitulate to such demands, reactively censoring or cancelling events, often with a lack of transparency in their decision-making.

- In June 2024, Science Centre Singapore cancelled a ticketed, adults-only event on sex and gender following pressure from a conservative group concerned about the content. The decision to cancel the event was made on the very same day it was publicised, highlighting the swift and reactive nature of the response to external pressure.<sup>180</sup>
- In 2019, singer Leon Markcus withdrew from a concert at SIM Global Education Institute after being allegedly asked to omit LGBTQ+ content from his performance.<sup>182</sup> That same year, radio DJ Joshua Simon was removed from a Singapore Polytechnic event after refusing to omit parts of his speech relating to his sexuality.<sup>183</sup>
- In 2014, the National Library Board announced it would pulp three children's books after an individual reported those books for containing "homosexual themes".<sup>185</sup> The books in question were "And Tango Makes Three", "The White Swan Express", and "Who's In My Family?". Following public backlash, the library relocated the books to the adult section instead of pulping them.
- In 2023, NTU said it would review its internal processes after a drag performance at the Nanyang Technological University Centre for Contemporary Art was criticised for being held publicly, citing "sensitivities".<sup>181</sup>
- In 2018, Rachel Yeo from the Inter-University LGBTQ Network was removed from a St Joseph's Institution event the night before her TED talk, reportedly due to Ministry of Education regulations, which the ministry later denied.<sup>184</sup>

<sup>180</sup> Sherlyn Sim, "Science Centre cancels talk discussing differences between sex and gender following public outcry," *The Straits Times*, June 3, 2024, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/science-centre-cancels-talk-discussing-differences-between-sex-and-gender-following-public-outcry>.

<sup>181</sup> Loraine Lee, "NTU to review internal processes after queer-themed performance that 'should not have been staged in public,'" *TODAY*, October 5, 2023, <https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/ntu-review-internal-processes-after-queer-themed-performance-should-not-have-been-staged-public-2274831>.

<sup>182</sup> Amelia Teng, "Parliament: Higher education institutions free to invite LGBTQ speakers but must respect societal norms, says Indranee," *The Straits Times*, November 5, 2019, <https://www.straitstimes.com/politics/parliament-higher-education-institutions-are-free-to-invite-lgbtq-speakers-and-performers>.

<sup>183</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>184</sup> Unknown writer, "Speaker from varsity LGBT group dropped by SJI for TED Talk," *TODAY*, July 22, 2018, <https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/speaker-varsity-lgbt-group-dropped-sji-ted-talk>.

<sup>185</sup> Tan Dawn Wei, "NLB saga: Two removed children's books will go into adult section at library," *The Straits Times*, July 18, 2014, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/nlb-saga-two-removed-childrens-books-will-go-into-adult-section-at-library>.

## 6. MEDIA AND PUBLIC DISCOURSE

Often the reasons cited have included “public sensitivities” (as was the case with Pink Dot’s ad in 2017) or feedback from “concerned citizens”, though how fully representative these views are of the Singaporean public is dubious. It is concerning that a small but vocal group with conservative views, determined to entrench discrimination in the country, are allowed to hold so much sway over official bodies.

Public bodies should cater to all Singaporeans, and perhaps even pay special attention to the interests and representation of marginalised minorities — not cave under pressure from those few who are privileged enough to make themselves heard loudly. While in some of these incidents the government has distanced itself from decisions to cancel events, many of these bodies are government-linked, and where they are not, take guidance from the government’s regulations or previous directions — and have often stated that they are doing so.

The knee-jerk reaction to shut down any conversation at the first sign of disagreement runs counter to Singapore’s vision of a diverse nation built through embracing our differences, in the words of our prime minister.<sup>186</sup> Reinforcing a narrow and exclusionary worldview limits the development of a well-rounded and informed society. It not only restricts the freedom of choice for individuals, but removes opportunities for mutual understanding, ultimately harming national unity.



The LGBTQ+ community is an integral part of our society. The community’s contribution to our nation should not be muted. A fair representation of the community in our media platforms is an important step to change a negatively skewed perspective of the community.

A lack of understanding of all things is often the root of discrimination, and discrimination negatively affects the mental health of its subjects. LGBTQ+ individuals are Singaporeans, they are our brothers, sisters, children, friends, neighbours, and colleagues. If no one should be left behind in Singapore, then the welfare of LGBTQ+ individuals must not be neglected.

— Wong Jie Bin

<sup>186</sup> “Singapore has always been a diverse country...and more so now than before. Yet we’ve strengthened our bonds as one people. We have achieved this not by denying our differences, but by embracing them.” Prime Minister’s Office, “PM Lawrence Wong at the Swearing-In Ceremony (May 2024),” Press release, May 15, 2024, accessed October 21, 2024, <https://www.pmo.gov.sg/Newsroom/PM-Lawrence-Wong-at-the-Swearing-In-Ceremony-May-2024>.

# Policy recommendations

## 1 Review and revise content codes

- Ensure parity in IMDA guidelines as LGBTQ+ content should not automatically receive higher ratings compared to other non-LGBTQ+ content.
- Allow balanced and factual discussions of LGBTQ+ issues, and non-sexually explicit and non-exploitative depictions of LGBTQ+ persons.
- Remove all discriminatory guidelines by deleting references to the LGBTQ+ community where it appears alongside or is compared to “paedophilia, bestiality or necrophilia”.<sup>187</sup>
- Permit public advertisements that promote the health and well-being of the LGBTQ+ community, ensuring these messages can reach a broader audience and foster greater understanding and acceptance.

## 2 Address negative and discriminatory portrayals

- Ensure that irresponsible and discriminatory portrayals or language that incites ill will or violence against LGBTQ+ individuals are subject to proportionate and transparent sanctions.
- Include sexual orientation and gender identity as protected characteristics in content regulations, prohibiting discrimination in programme content alongside existing protected characteristics.
- In doing the above, we must be mindful not to apply an overly paternalistic approach but to promote accountability and justice without restricting freedom of expression.

## 3 Promote transparency in censorship decisions

- Make the decision-making processes of government bodies that cancel official or public-facing events transparent.
- Ensure censorship bodies (e.g. Films Consultative Panel) are not under undue influence from discriminatory groups.
- Publish IMDA’s decisions on censorship to promote transparency and minimise unnecessary self-censorship by media platforms.

<sup>187</sup> See n 161, p 16.

# Conclusion: If not now, when?

When then Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced the long-overdue repeal of 377A in 2022, many members of Singapore's queer community let out a breath we had collectively been holding for decades.

But just moments after Mr Lee said repealing a discriminatory colonial-era law was the “right thing to do”, any hopes that LGBTQ+ Singaporeans had for more structural changes were crushed. Citing the numerous national policies that rely on the state's current definition of marriage to function, Mr Lee said the government had “no intention of changing the definition of marriage, nor these policies”.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Prime Minister's Office, “National Day Rally 2022,” Press release, August 21, 2022, accessed October 21, 2024, <https://www.pmo.gov.sg/Newsroom/National-Day-Rally-2022-English>.

In the weeks following the announcement, LGBTQ+ Singaporeans would get regular reminders that they were second-class citizens in their own country. Ministers reiterated the “status quo” stance.<sup>189</sup> MPs in parliamentary debates perpetuated a narrative that pitted LGBTQ+ Singaporeans against the idea of “family”<sup>190</sup> — as if we did not have or deserve families of our own.

As our report has submitted, this flawed narrative — championed by some politicians, broadcasted through the media, repeated in our schools — has helped maintain an actively hostile environment for LGBTQ+ Singaporeans and families. We have shown how building so many national policies on an inflexible adherence to a “one man, one woman” ideal of kinship, have failed to serve all Singaporeans equally.

We have also laid out the heavy price since paid, and still paid every day, by LGBTQ+ people for the government’s inaction: Bullying and mental health issues in schools. Physical violence against trans people. The chilling effect of repressive censorship. The injustice of being unfairly denied work or housing. The indignity of ageing and dying in a country that rejects one’s freedom to love.

Throughout all of this, LGBTQ+ Singaporeans have been patient and resilient, because we need to be. How else could we survive the pains and barriers of being LGBTQ+ in Singapore? Or to keep our faith in justice, equality and progress, words spoken proudly and swiftly in our national pledge, yet so timidly and slowly realised in our lives?

We are willing to work together. For each problem we have shone a light on, we have also submitted our recommendations for policy change, taking the government’s call to do so in good faith.<sup>191</sup> We call on our new prime minister to work with us to realise our shared vision: a society where “every Singaporean matters”.<sup>192</sup>

Pink Dot is not blind to the political challenges of doing the right thing. As we mentioned at the start of the report, in any society, there will always be those who defend inaction under the guise of protecting traditional values. But as one Pink Dot rally attendee who wrote to Mr Wong eloquently put it, “human rights are not a matter of public opinion”. Our political leaders themselves have often reminded us that “hard choices” are at times necessary for the good of Singapore, even if they prove unpopular or come with an immediate political cost.<sup>193</sup>

Creating a Singapore where no one is left behind is one of those hard choices — and the time to make that choice is now.

<sup>189</sup> Daryl Choo, “No change to marriage definition ‘under my watch’ as next PM if PAP wins next GE: DPM Lawrence Wong,” *TODAY*, August 22, 2022, <https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/lawrence-wong-no-change-marriage-under-my-watch-1974641>.

<sup>190</sup> Chin Soo Fang, “S377A repeal: Constitutional amendment will protect policies that promote heterosexual marriage, says Masagos,” *The Straits Times*, November 28, 2022, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/politics/s377a-repeal-constitutional-amendment-will-protect-policies-that-promote-heterosexual-marriage-says-masagos>.

<sup>191</sup> n 186.

<sup>192</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>193</sup> The Editorial Board, “In his own words: Make the right decisions, even if they are unpopular,” *The Straits Times*, March 27, 2015, <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/in-his-own-words-make-the-right-decisions-even-if-they-are-unpopular>.

Singapore is ready for progress. The percentage of people who think gay rights should be recognised will never be 100%, and we need to stop waiting for that.

The time is now.

- B Zhang



## Acknowledgements

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It would not have been possible without the generous contributions of the following individuals and community groups: Mandy Chng, Daryl Yam, Lin Jiasheng, Bozy Lu, Dr Rayner Tan, Prof Teo You Yenn, Jeanne Lim, Rachel Yeo, Bjorn Yeo, Momo Chan, Ching Sia, Alan Seah, Coen Teo, Clement Tan, Action For Aids (AfA Singapore), Same But Different, Queer Friendly Chers, TransgenderSG

# Appendix

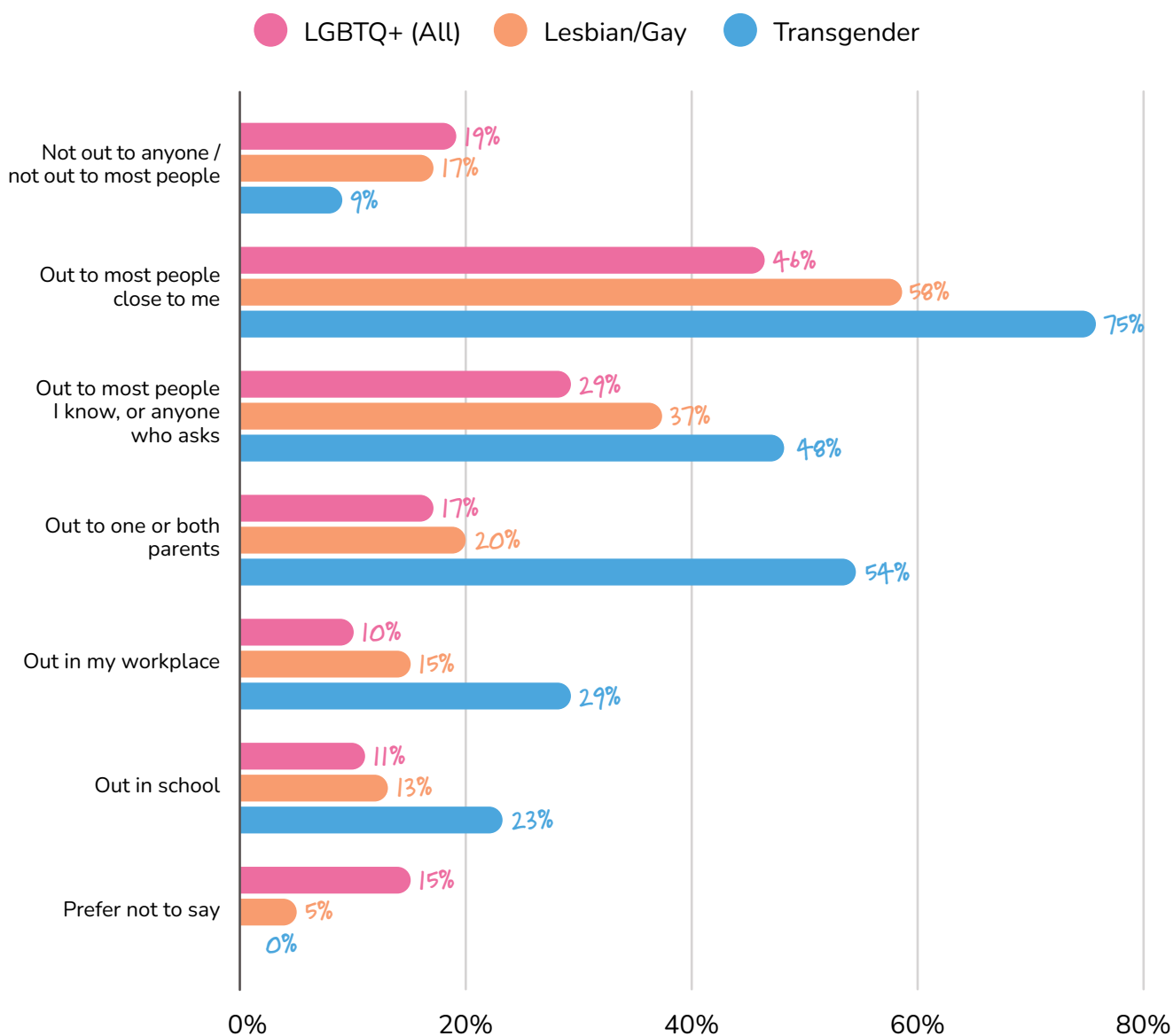
## Detailed survey results

### Milieu Insights x Pink Dot Survey, May-June 2024

This appendix provides a deeper dive into the survey results referenced in the main body of this report. Below are a few key notes to consider when interpreting the data:

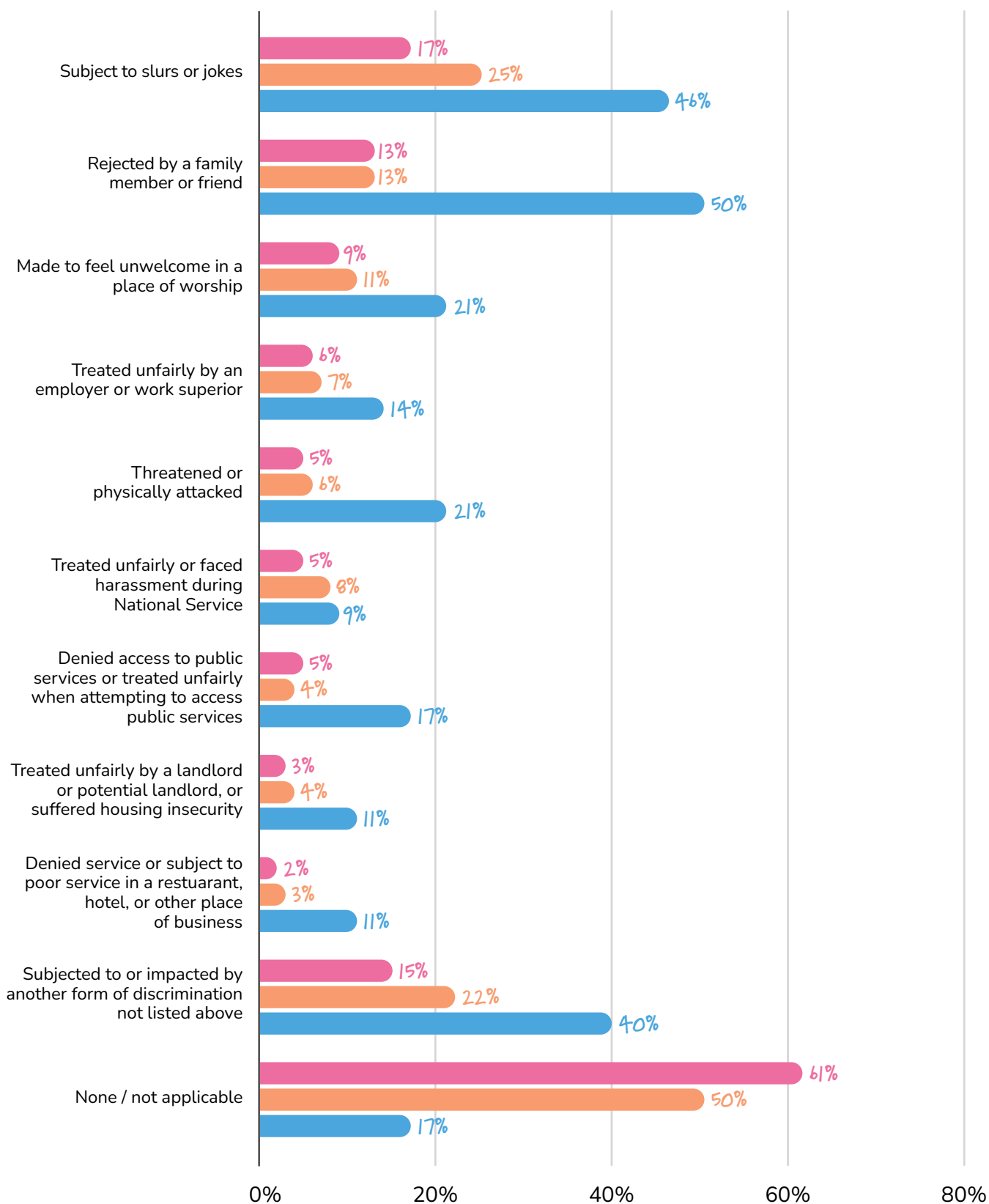
- 1 Demographic groups included:**  
For clarity and brevity, we have chosen to highlight results among a few major demographics within the LGBTQ+ community: LGBTQ+ (All), Lesbian/Gay and Transgender respondents. Nevertheless, we are mindful that the LGBTQ+ community encompasses a wider range of identities and experiences than those represented in these sub-groups highlighted here.
- 2 Comparisons to cishet population:**  
Where relevant, we have included comparisons to a cisgender and heterosexual control group. Please note that the cishet group was only asked a subset of questions where the context was applicable.

Please reach out to [media@pinkdot.sg](mailto:media@pinkdot.sg) for any clarifications.

**To what extent have you disclosed your sexual orientation or gender identity?**

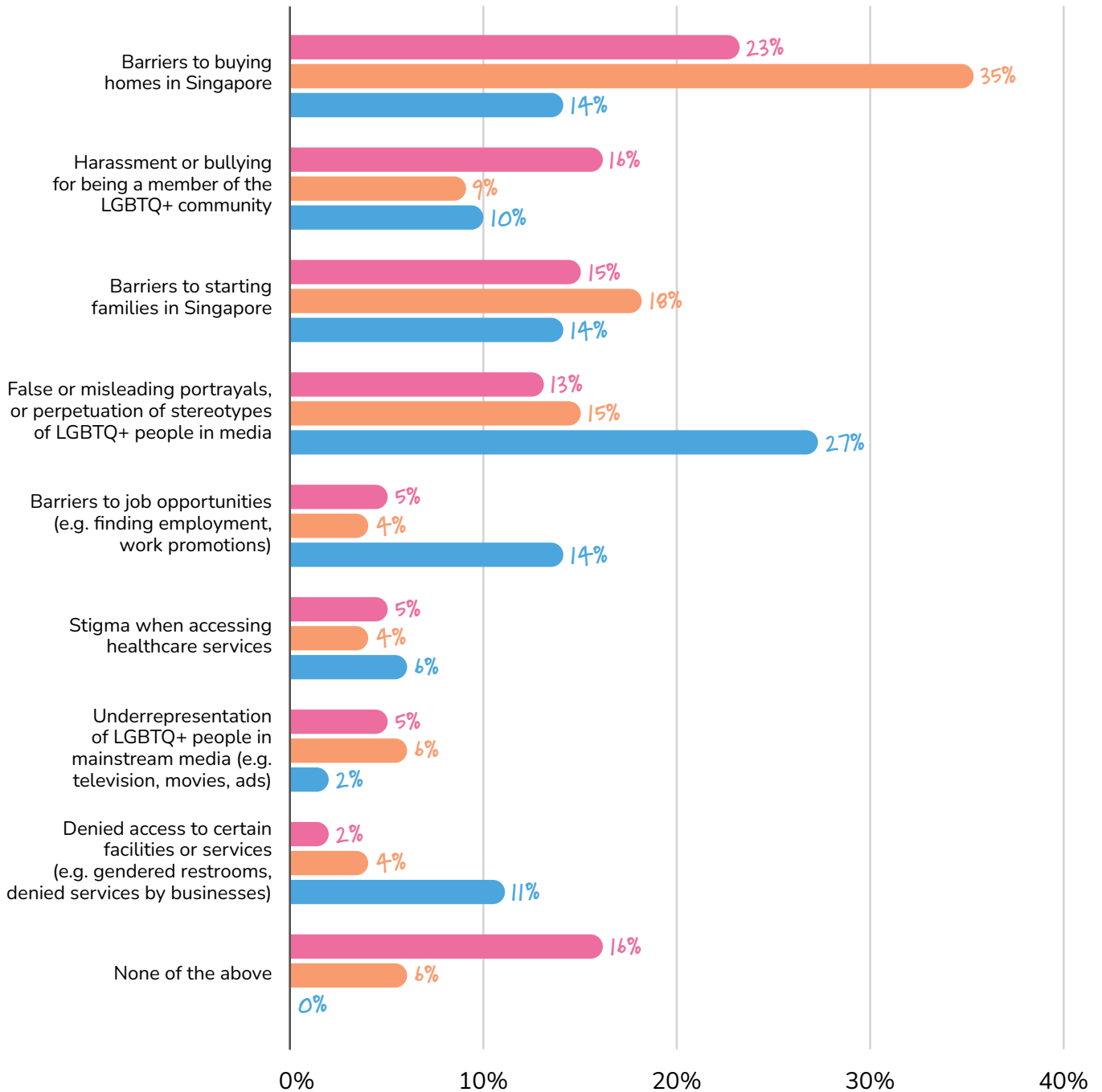
### In the last 5 years, because of my sexual orientation or gender identity, I have been...

● LGBTQ+ (All)
 ● Lesbian/Gay
 ● Transgender

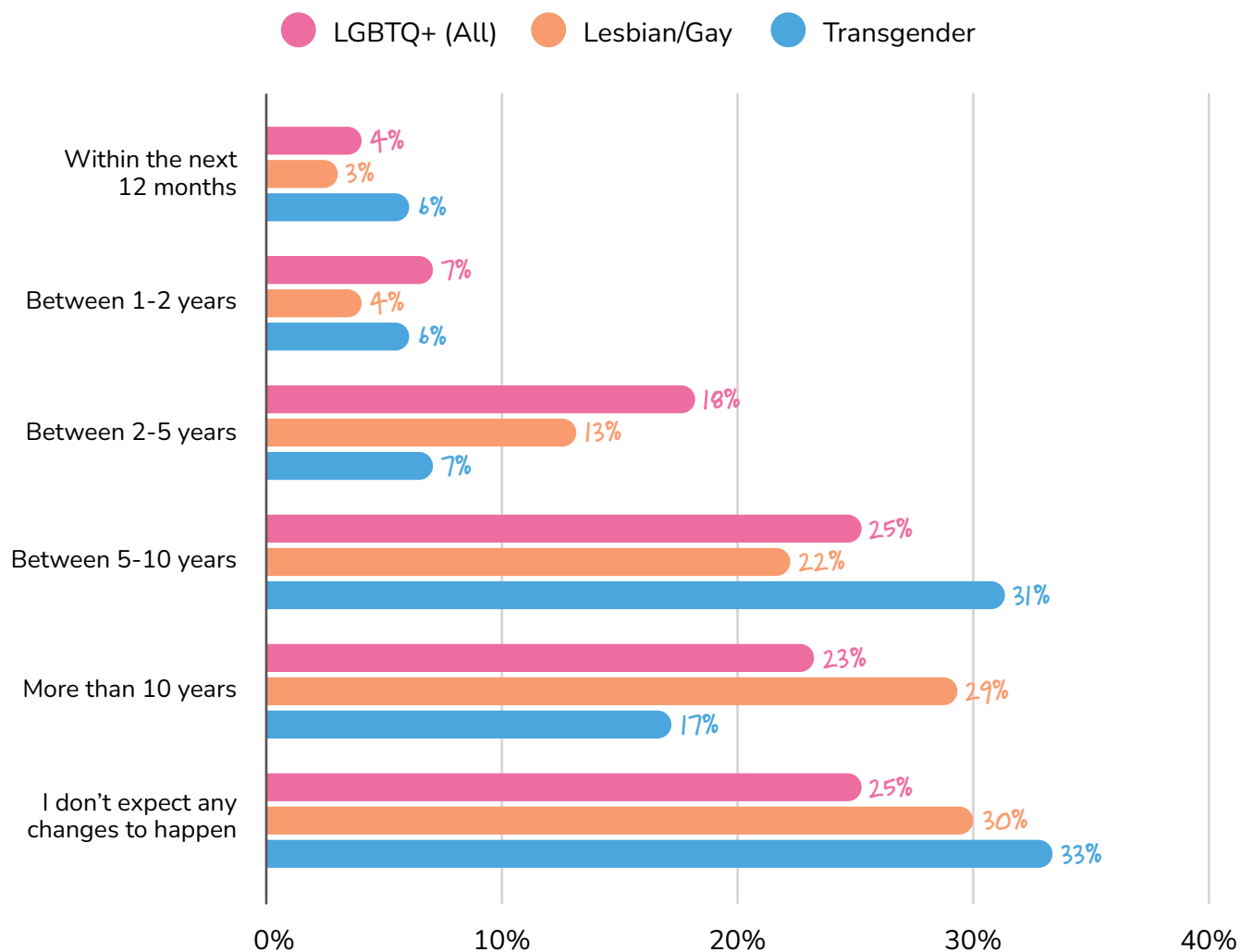


**Which do you think is the most urgent issue regarding discrimination against LGBTQ+ community in Singapore that should be tackled in the next 5 years?**

● LGBTQ+ (All) ● Lesbian/Gay ● Transgender

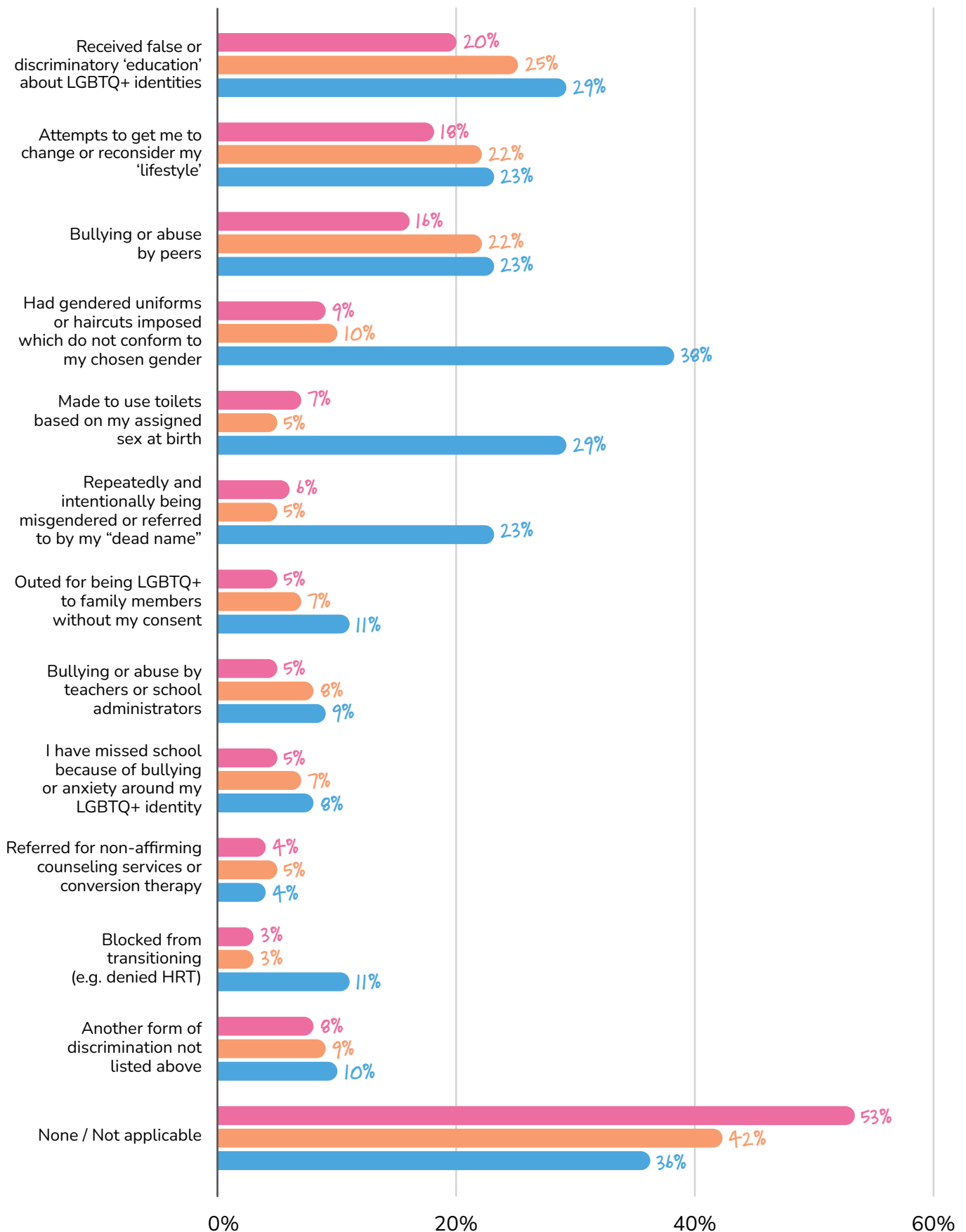


**Still thinking about the issue you chose in the previous question, how long do you think it will take before we see changes by lawmakers which would meaningfully impact the LGBTQ+ community on this issue?**

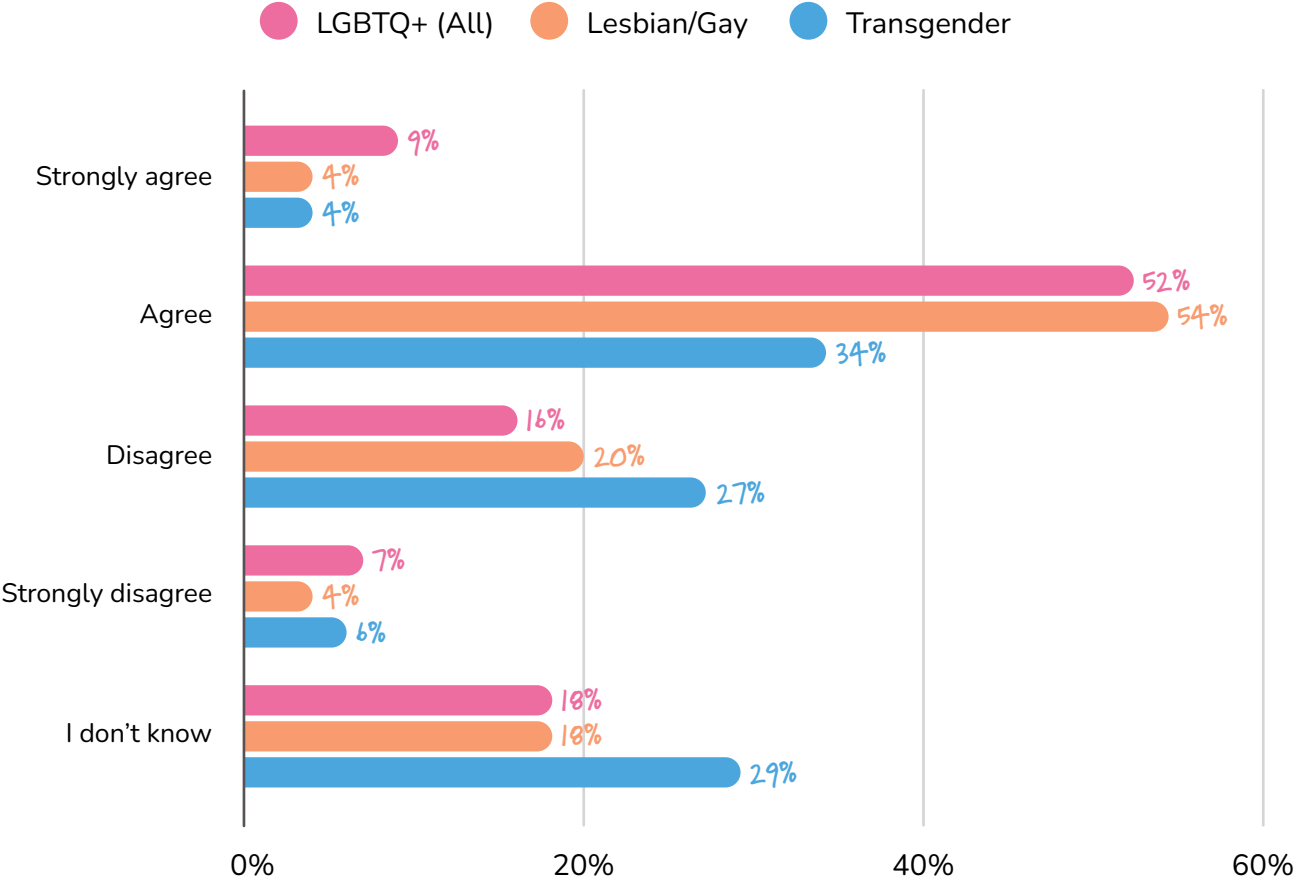


## Which (if any) have you experienced while attending a Singaporean educational institution?

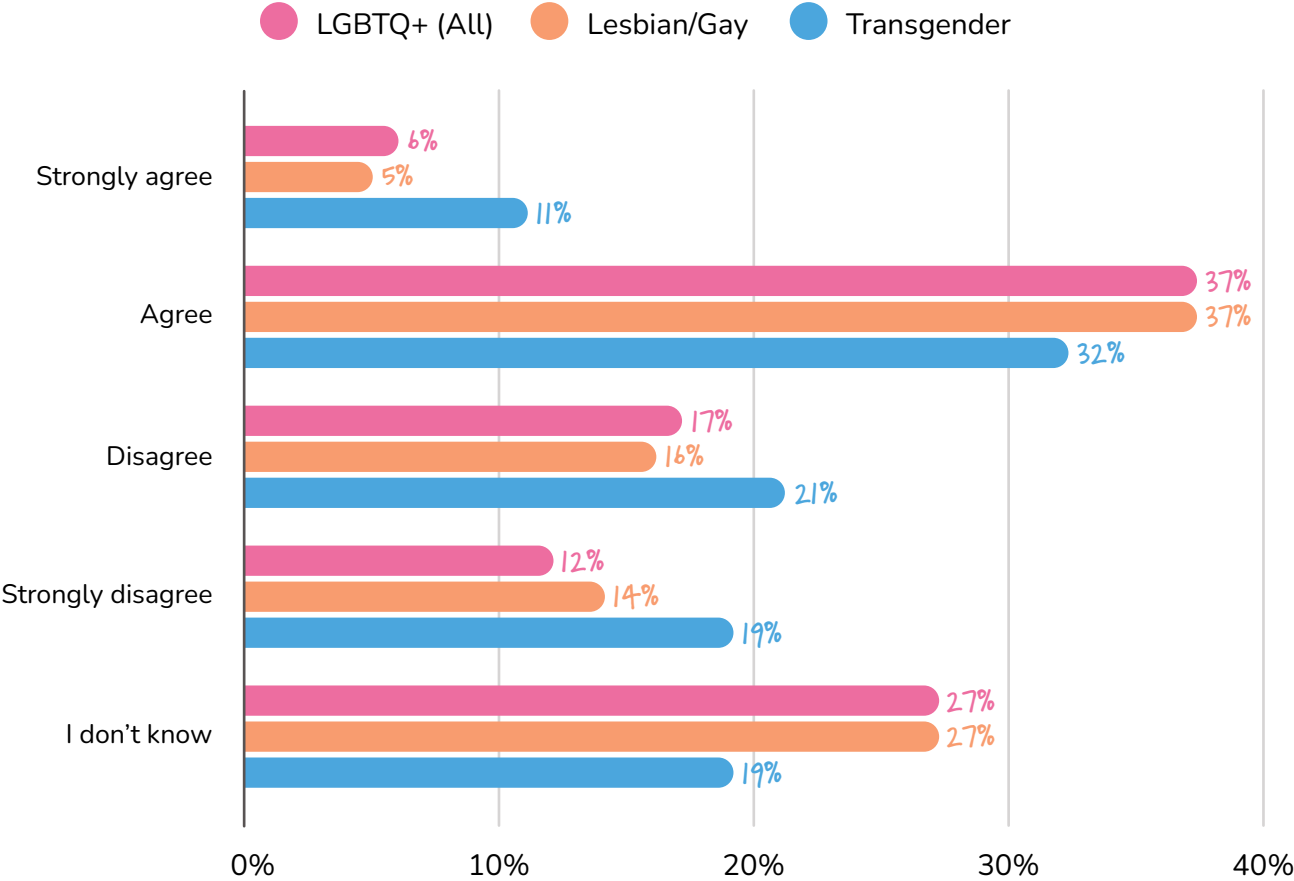
● LGBTQ+ (All)
 ● Lesbian/Gay
 ● Transgender



To what extent do you agree with the following statement:  
“I feel safe in school.”

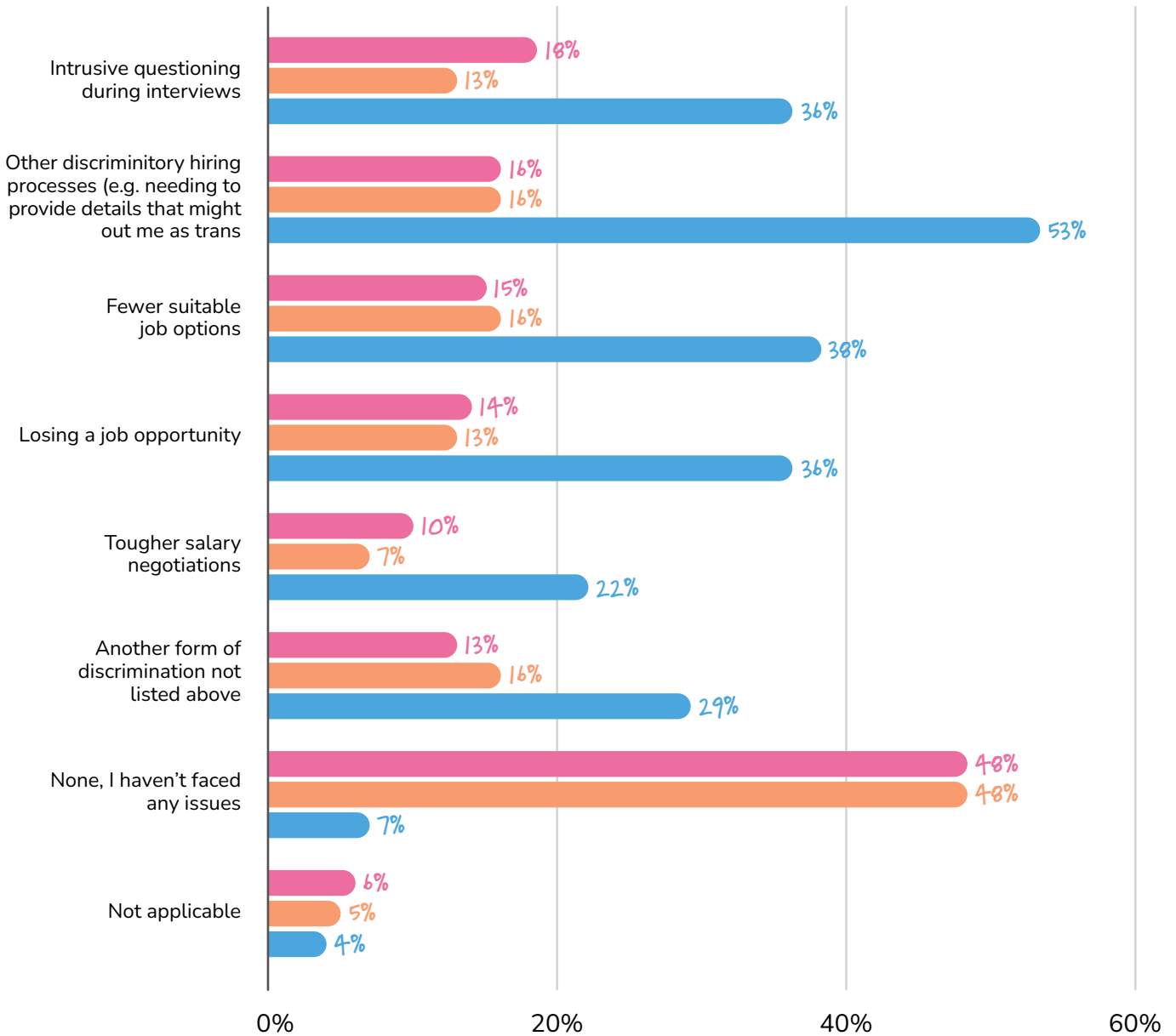


To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “I have a teacher, counsellor or other school staff whom I can go to for support in school.”



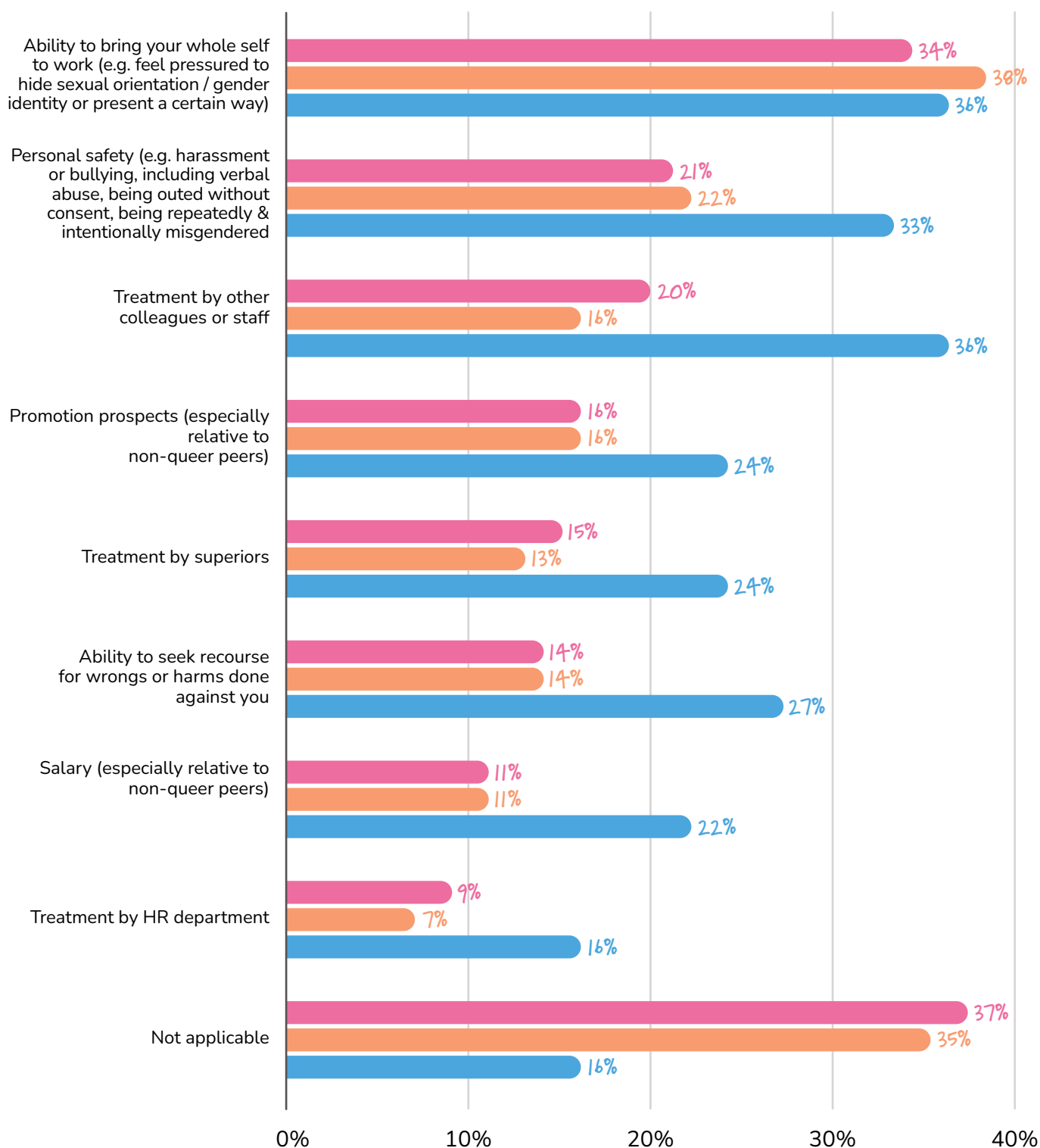
**While searching for jobs, have you faced the following issues, directly or indirectly, because of your sexual orientation or gender identity and expression?**

● LGBTQ+ (All) ● Lesbian/Gay ● Transgender

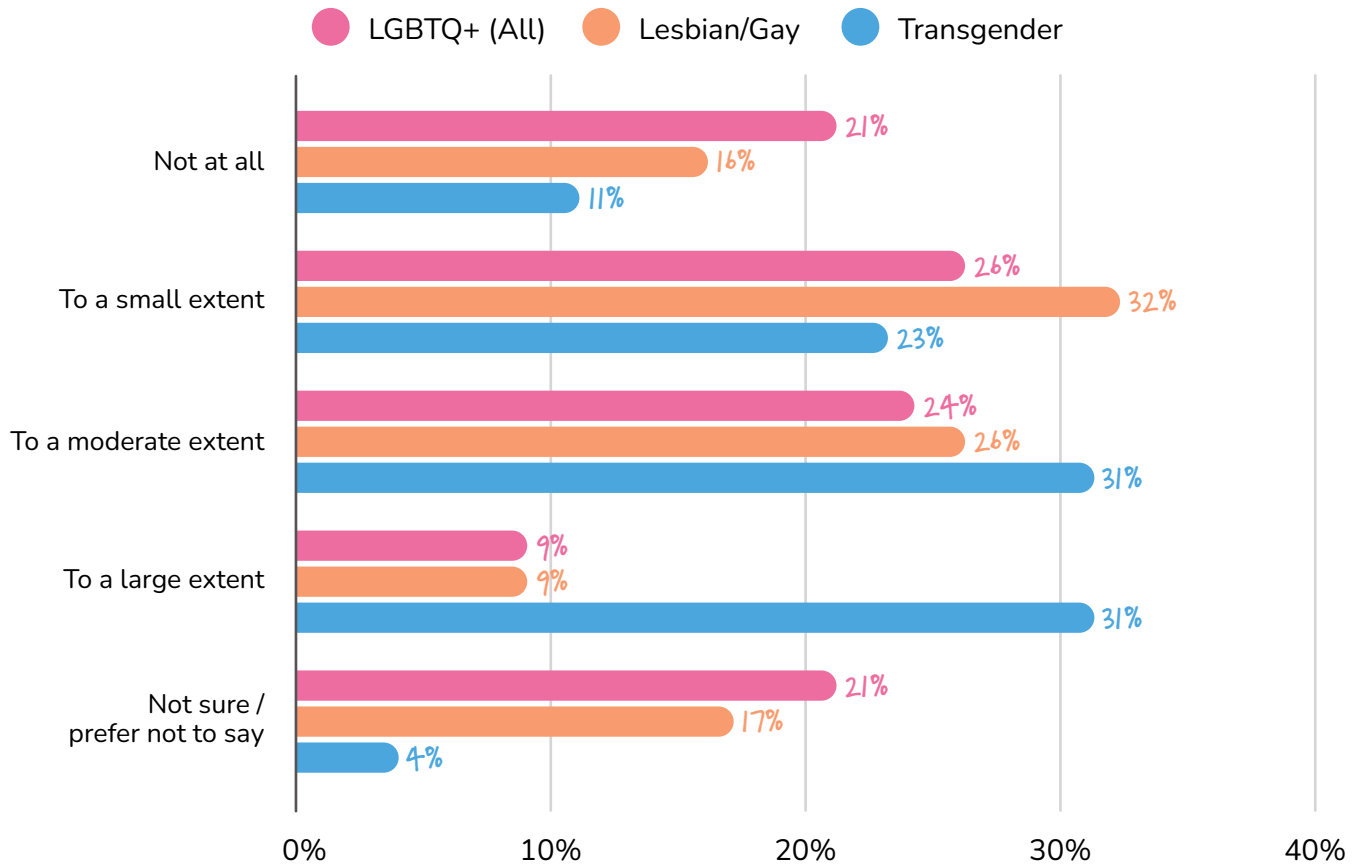


**In the workplace, do you feel your sexual orientation or gender identity has directly or indirectly negatively impacted your...?**

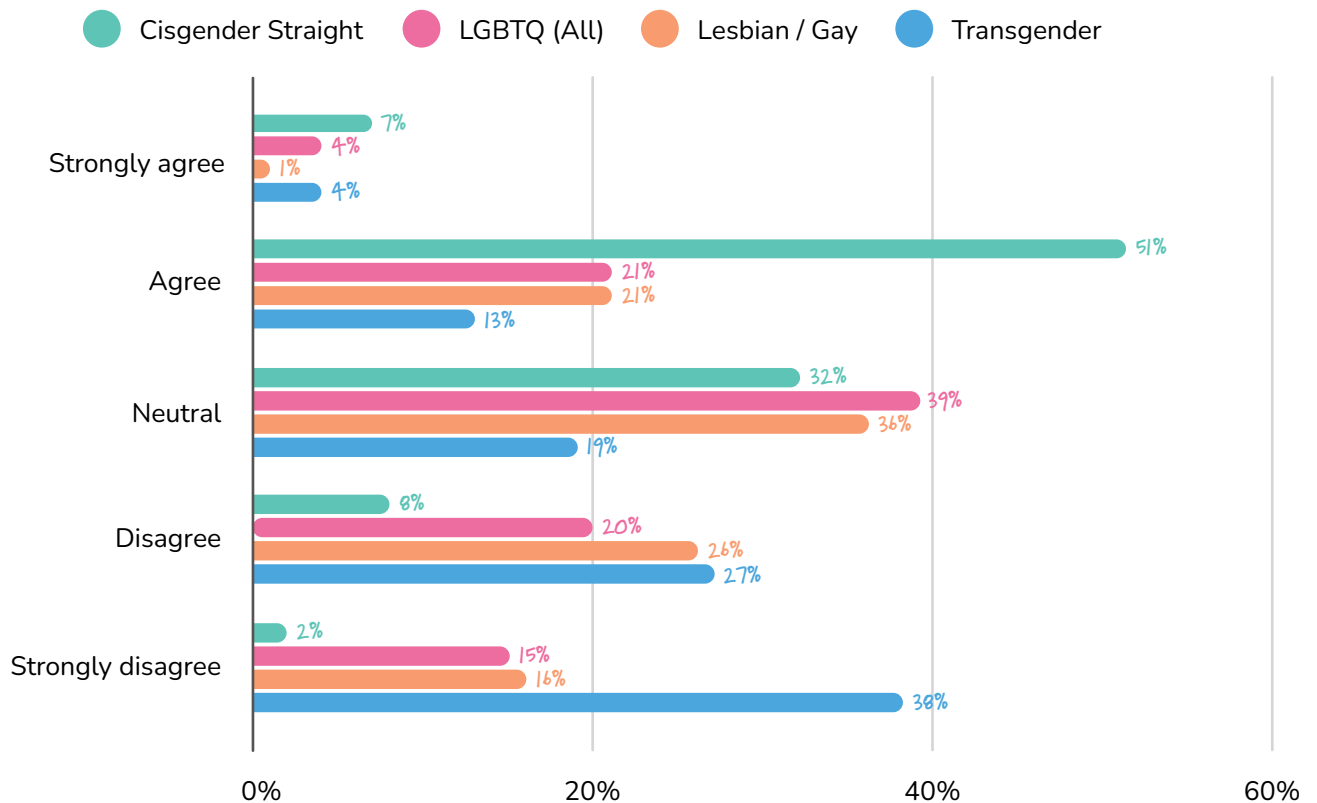
● LGBTQ+ (All) ● Lesbian/Gay ● Transgender



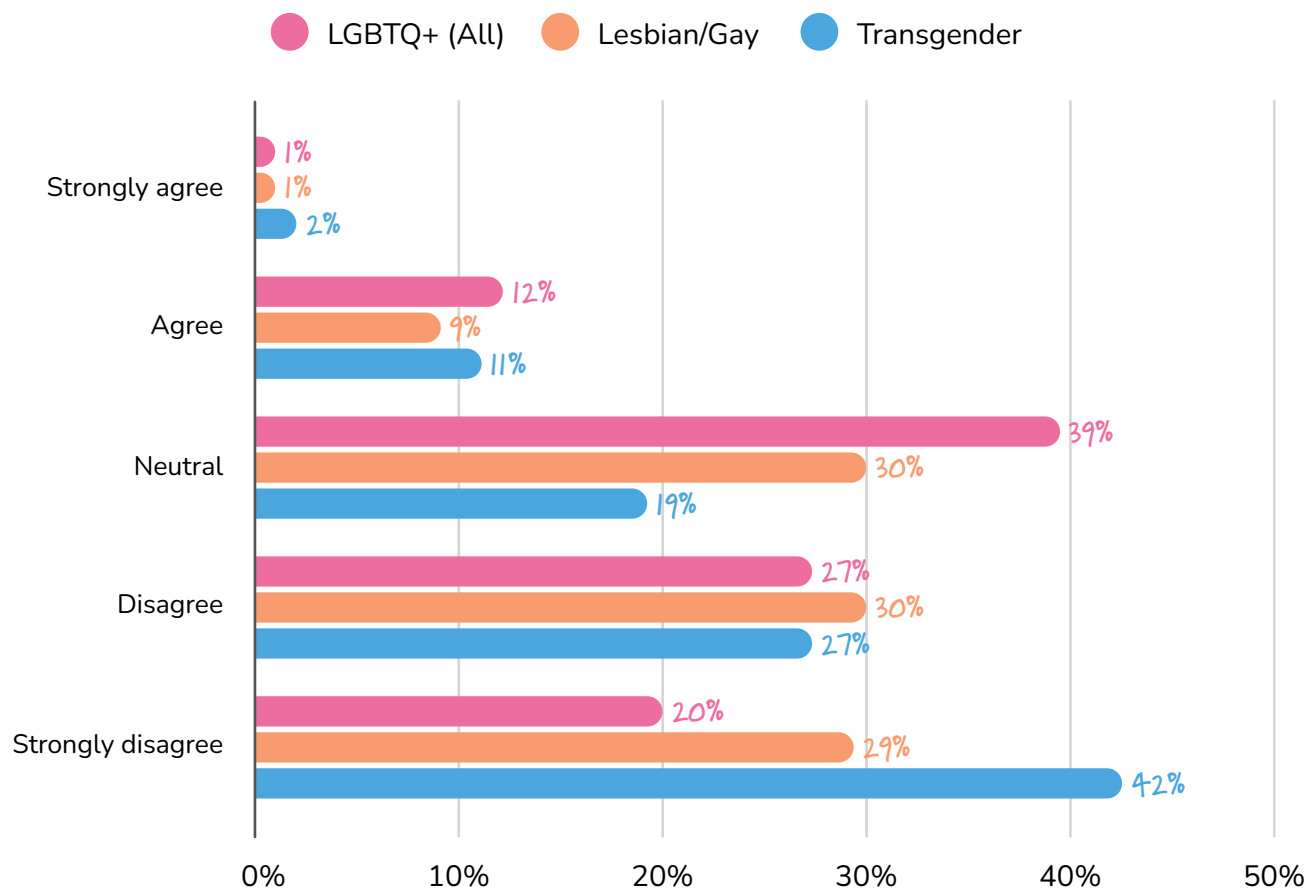
**To what extent do you feel like discrimination on the basis of your sexual orientation or gender identity has negatively impacted your mental health?**



**To what extent do you agree or disagree to this statement  
“As a Singaporean / an LGBTQ+ Singaporean, I am confident that my basic needs at every life stage will be met, including education, healthcare, housing and retirement.”**

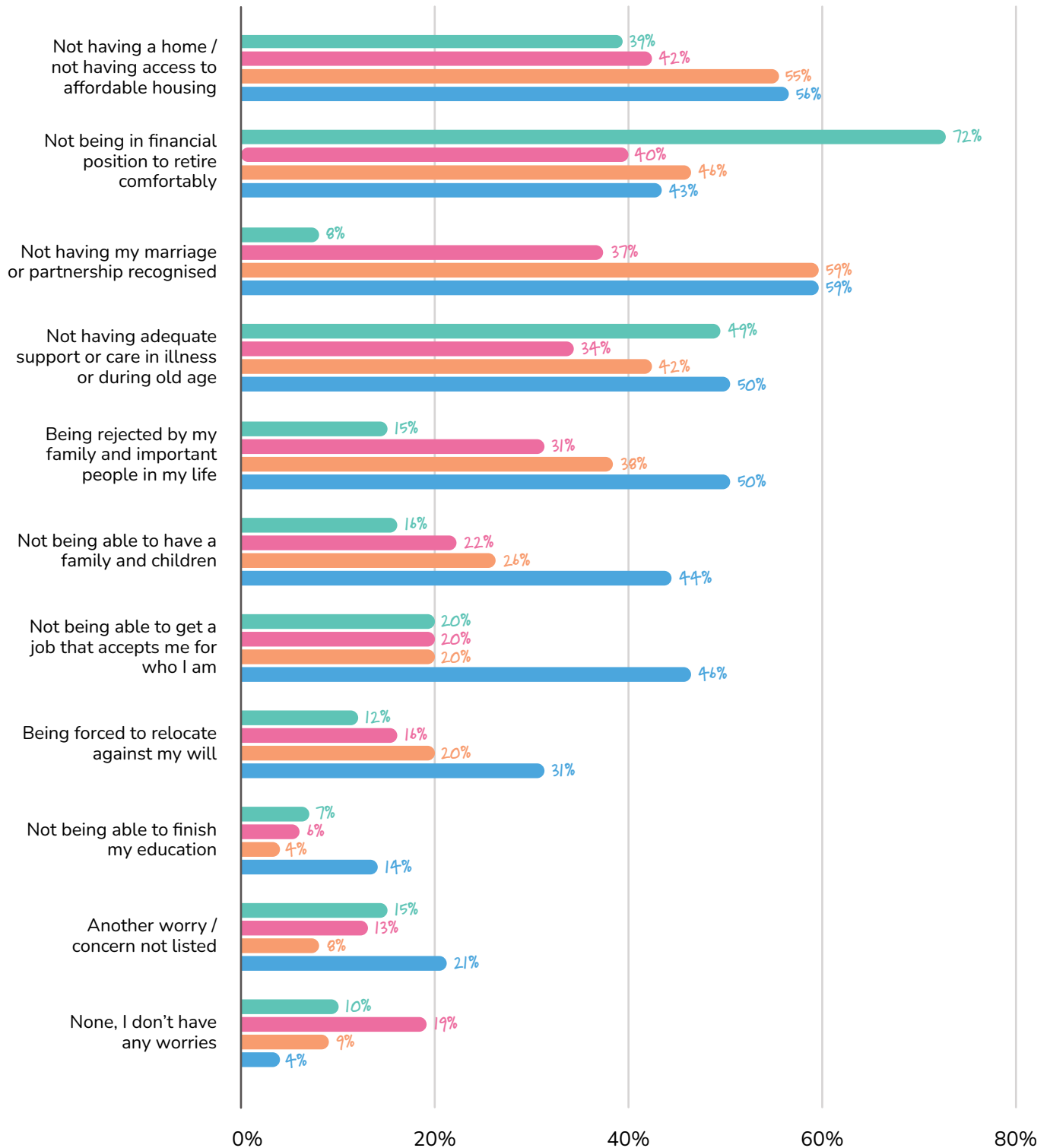


To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement:  
“The government cares about addressing discrimination against LGBTQ+ Singaporeans?”

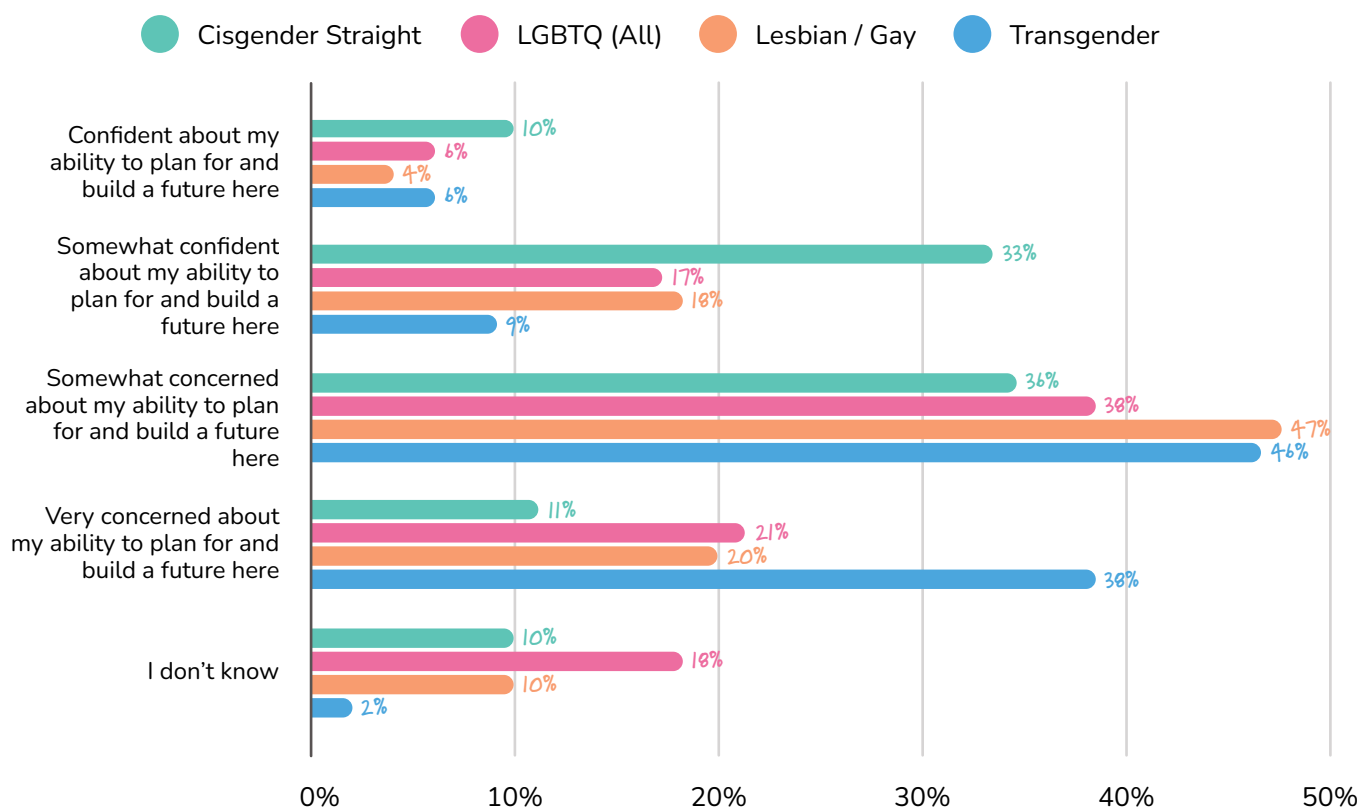


## When I think about my future, I worry about...

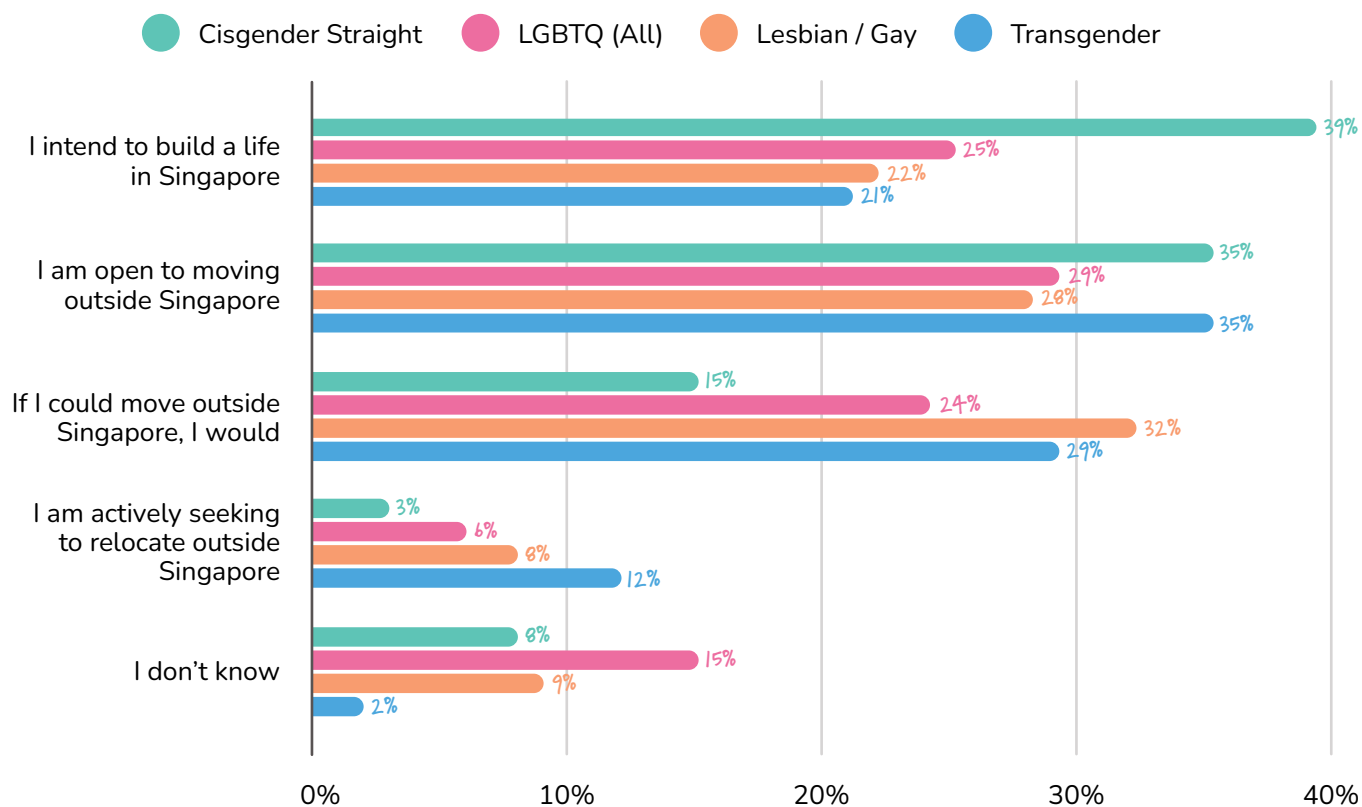
● Cisgender Straight 
 ● LGBTQ (All) 
 ● Lesbian / Gay 
 ● Transgender



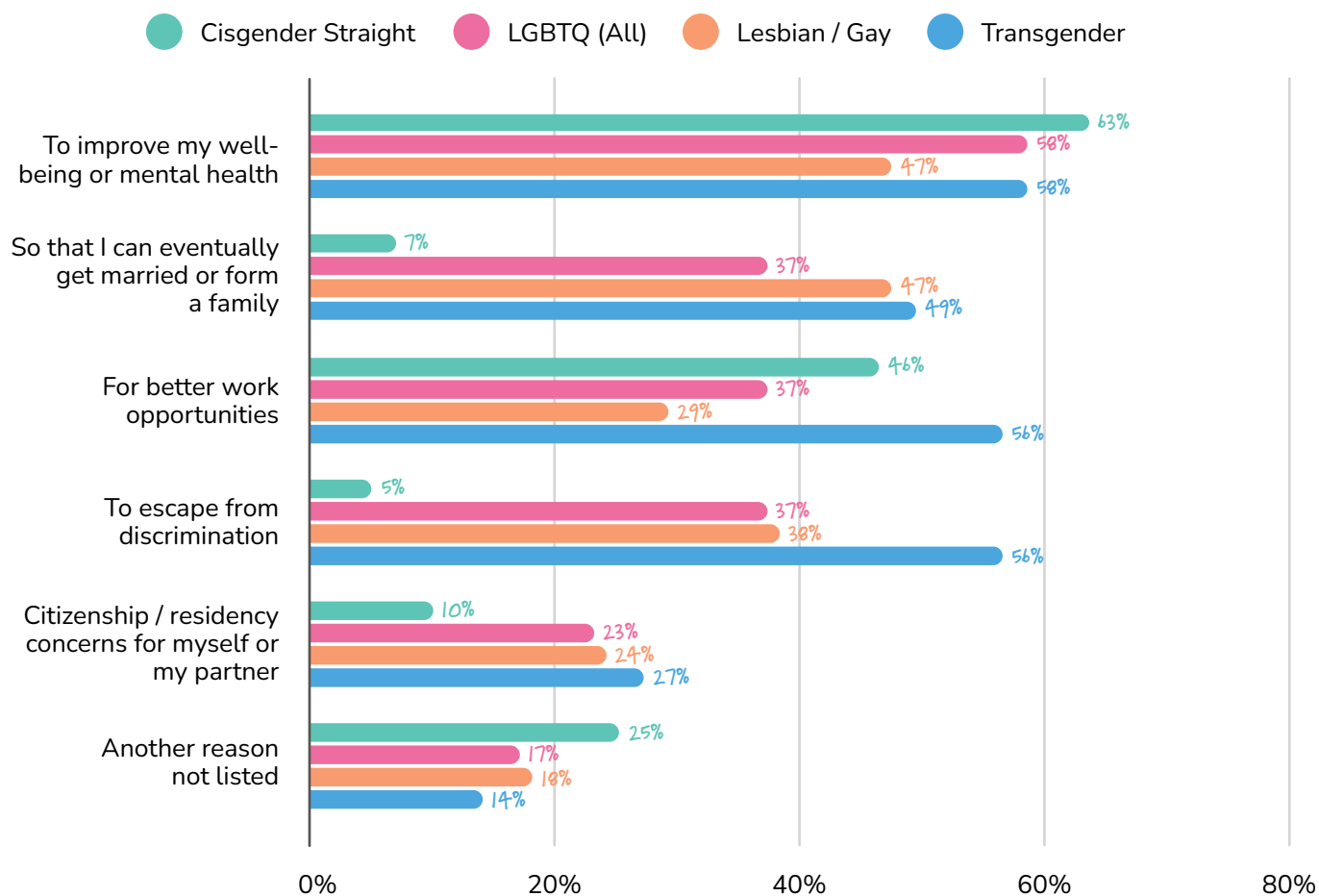
### When I think about my future in Singapore, I feel...



### To what extent would you consider Singapore a viable home for you?



### What are your reasons for wanting to relocate to another country or city?



A large crowd of people is gathered at night, many holding white umbrellas. In the foreground, a person is holding up a smartphone. A large flag is visible on the right side of the image. The background shows city buildings with lights.

*No one  
left behind*

