

Sexual diversity in schools: a qualitative study with high school students in the Municipality of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Diversidade sexual na escola: estudo qualitativo com estudantes do Ensino Médio do Município do Rio de Janeiro, Brasil

Diversidad sexual en la escuela: estudio cualitativo con estudiantes de la enseñanza media del Municipio de Río de Janeiro, Brasil

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Abstract

LGBTphobia constitutes a context of vulnerability to the health of individuals whose sexuality is diverse from the heteronormative pattern, named sexual minorities, especially in adolescence, a period of sexual identities definition. The aim of this study was to analyze how did high school students perceive their peers of sexual minorities and how they understand the school's and educators' attitude regarding sexual diversity. The research used the qualitative method, with 13 focal groups comprising 132 students of both sexes, from public and private schools in the Municipality of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The data analysis was performed with the support of webQDA software in a comprehensive basis approach. Data were classified in two categories. In the first category, the students and sexual diversity, the participants perceived sexual diversity as normal because it is common and often present in their age. However, they confirmed homophobic attitudes against those whose gender behavior is not in accordance with what is expected for their biological sex. In the second category, the school and sexual diversity, the students recognized the adoption of discriminatory measures against same-sex couples by the school coordination and the absence of the theme of sexual diversity in educational activities. The outcomes indicate that sexual education policies are not sufficient to guarantee the human rights of sexual minorities and this represents greater health vulnerability of this population strata.

Homophobia; Sexuality; Adolescent; Students; Qualitative Research

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Introduction

Adolescence, the stage of life between 10 and 19 years of age according to the World Health Organization (WHO), is a period marked by the achievement of greater autonomy and independence in relation to the family and the experimentation of new behaviors, when it is common to occur the first love relationships and sexual experiences with genital involvement, homo or heterosexuals ¹.

Sexual practice transcends the biological sphere, for it involves psychological, cultural, and social aspects ². During adolescence, the individuals go through a definition of gender identity and sexual orientation. Those who perceive themselves as different from the society's heteronormative pattern often feel discomfort, oddness and anxiety. Occasionally these sensations, associated to discrimination, result in health problems ³.

Adolescents who have erotic desires for same-sex individuals or transgress gender and sexuality norms, i.e., heteronormativity, are often victims of prejudice ⁴. According to Borillo ⁵, homophobia is characterized by hostile and irrational attitudes against individuals with sexual orientation that is diverse from what the society considers "normal". However, discrimination is against not only those with diverse sexual orientation, but also against those with non-hegemonic gender identity and expression; hence the term LGBTphobia is more appropriate because it comprises all individuals belonging to sexual minorities ⁶.

The LGBTphobia rooted in society causes several damages to persons who do not fit into heteronormativity. Thus, adolescents of sexual minorities are most often less engaged in self-healthcare behavior, suffer more violence, and do not receive care in health services that take would into account their diversity ³. Many of them fight against their desires and this results in psychological disorder, guilt feeling, anxiety, shame, and depression. Moreover, there is the stereotype that these individuals are neither capable of having a fully developed affective life, nor a family and children, and this can lead to an unbearable feeling of solitude that culminates in suicide ⁷. Depression and suicidal behavior are more frequent among homosexuals than among heterosexuals ^{8,9,10}.

The school is the social setting in which adolescents spend a long part of their lives and therefore it is a crucial space for their wellbeing. Moreover, it is a privileged place for the education of citizens and teaching respect for human rights. However, it is known that this setting is hetero-standardizer, controller and disciplinarian of sexuality ¹¹. What is seen many times is that the school is hostile to those who do not fit into the pattern and are taken for being different. In this context, it is common that homosexual adolescents are victims of LGBTphobic bullying and suffer reprimand from their superiors. This discrimination has great impact on the self-esteem, which added to internalized homophobia can lead to school abandonment with the resulting damage to future life ¹².

The aim of this research was to analyze how do high school students of private and public establishments perceive those whose sexuality is diverse from the heteronormative pattern and their understanding of the educators' attitudes regarding sexual diversity. Though in Brazil there is some knowledge on the subject, research on the theme with a qualitative approach are still insufficient and involve mainly public establishments. By including private schools this study has gone a step forward.

Methods

This paper is part of a broader research on sexuality and violence among adolescents, conducted with a mixed approach, quantitative and qualitative, with students of both sexes of the second grade of high school, in public and private schools in the 9th Administrative Region of the Municipality of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The choice of this target-group was due to the greater probability of already having had sexual experience and still being in the age group of adolescence. The region was chosen out of convenience, due to the integration resulting from previous partnerships with schools located in the area. The schools were chosen by lot.

The study presented in this paper refers to the qualitative stage of the research. The chosen technique was the focal group, which comprises data collection by means of interactions between individuals and is useful for the comprehension of the process of construction of perceptions, attitudes and social representations of human groups ¹³.

Data were collected after contact with and permission of the schools and the responsible persons, during the school year of 2016. The research team held meetings with the students of the classes made available by the school, explained the contents of the research and the themes to be discussed; the first students who agreed to participate remained in the classroom, in the maximum of 12 and minimum of 6 participants. Thus, the groups were formed with individuals who were acquainted. Some groups were composed of students of both sexes and others were separated by sex to broaden the diversity of the discussion. A pact was made that the discussion did not include the exposure of participants' personal experiences. The necessary measures were taken to guarantee the balanced participation of all components, for example, when there was the polarization of the discussion by one member of the group, thus hindering the participation of the others. Also punctual interventions were made for the best development of the discussion, for example, when issues of private nature were invoked in the group.

We followed a script with questions related to sexuality, gender and sexual orientation, about how did the students perceive those who do not fit into the heterosexual pattern and the school's and educators' attitudes regarding sexual diversity. At the end of each meeting a self-administered questionnaire was distributed to the participants for data collection on sociodemographic and sexual experience issues. Each group was conducted by two professionals, with one moderator and one observer. The average duration of the meetings was 60 minutes and they were recorded and later transcribed.

The research team was composed of professionals of medicine, nursing, psychology, and social work; they alternated conducting and observing the groups. There was no type of previous relationship between researchers and researched. The meetings were interrupted after the 13th group due to the repetition of information, with no new data. The sample criteria, thus, was data saturation. The balance was guaranteed between the number of participants from public and private schools and of both sexes.

Data analysis was conducted with the support of the software webQDA (<https://www.webqda.net/>)¹⁴ according to the dialectical hermeneutics principles, using a theoretical framework based on authors as Denzin & Lincoln¹⁵ and Minayo¹³. It was conducted in the following steps: comprehensive reading and re-reading of data, searching for similarities and divergencies; codification of reports according to the understanding of them; identification of meanings attributed by the subjects to the questions raised; comparative dialogue with the literature; and elaboration of interpretative synthesis.

The term "sexual diversity" was used to characterize the expression of normal sexuality that does not follow the heteronormative pattern, related to sexual orientation as well as gender manifestation, and the term "sexual minorities" for those who adhere to sexual diversity, commonly referred to as population of lesbians, gays, bisexual, transsexual, transgender, and cross-dressers (LGBT). The term "trans persons" was referred to those who have a strong dissatisfaction or discomfort with the sex attributed at birth and desire to be treated as the sex with which she/he identifies her/himself¹⁶.

Ethical aspects

The study complies with the ethical norms comprised in *Resolution n. 510/2016* of the National Council of Health and was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the University of the State of Rio de Janeiro in September 18, 2015 (UERJ, CAAE n. 48107514.2.0000.5282), and was authorized by the Secretariat of Education of the State of Rio de Janeiro.

Results and discussion

From the total of 13 focal groups, seven were conducted in public schools and 6 in private schools, comprising 132 students, half of each segment. The female students were the majority, 55% of the total. Five groups were composed only of male participants, five of female participants, and three were mixed. Among the interviewees, 64.4% reported already having had sexual experiences, of which 4.7% informed having had it with same-sex persons.

The sociodemographic data compared per self-referred male or female sex showed that the male students were slightly older and predominantly of black race/color (57%, compared with 42% of the

female students). Regarding sexual activity, similar rates were found among students of both sexes who had already experienced it (63% of males and 65% of females). Homosexual experience was reported by three female students, whereas only one male student declared this position, indicating an equally reduced frequency of this type of activity (Table 1).

In relation to the type of school, in the private schools there was a predominance of younger students, between 15 and 17 years of age, and of white race/color representing 70%, while in the public schools this feature represented 23%. The higher age average among public schools students corresponds to higher rates of repetition and educational delay. Those who had sexual experience were in higher numbers in the public schools than in the private ones, with rates of 72% and 56% respectively. For the homosexual experience, there was no difference between the number of adolescents who reported the situation among public and private schools, two in each type of school. Private schools students presented parents with significantly higher income than public schools students (Table 2).

In the analysis of textual data, we did not observe relevant differences between the narratives of public and private schools students. For this reason, they were grouped and classified in two catego-

Table 1

Sociodemographic data distribution by sex. Municipality of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 2016.

Variable	Female		Male	
	n	%	n	%
Age range (years)				
15-17	53	73	41	68
18-21	17	23	19	32
> 21	1	2	0	0
Not informed	1	2	0	0
Total	72	100	60	100
Race/Color				
White	37	51	24	40
Black and brown	30	42	34	57
Indigenous, yellow and not informed	5	7	2	3
Total	72	100	60	100
First sexual intercourse				
Yes	47	65	38	63
No	25	35	22	37
Total	72	100	60	100
Age of the first sexual intercourse (years)				
≤ 14	14	30	13	34
15-17	31	66	25	66
≥ 18	2	4	0	0
Total	47	100	38	100
Homosexual experience				
Yes	3	7	1	2
No	44	93	37	98
Total	47	100	38	100
Family income (minimum wage)				
≤ 3	29	40	28	46
> 3	36	50	24	40
Not informed	7	10	8	14
Total	72	100	60	100
Grand total	72	100	60	100

Table 2

Sociodemographic data distribution by type of school. Municipality of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 2016.

Variable	Public schools		Private schools	
	n	%	n	%
Age range (years)				
15-17	36	54	58	88
18-21	29	44	7	10
> 21	1	2	0	0
Not informed	0	0	1	2
Total	66	100	66	100
Race/Color				
White	15	23	46	70
Black and brown	47	71	17	26
Indigenous, yellow and not informed	4	6	3	4
Total	66	100	66	100
First sexual intercourse				
Yes	48	72	37	56
No	18	28	29	44
Total	66	100	66	100
Age of the first sexual intercourse (years)				
≤ 14	16	33	11	30
15-17	31	65	25	68
≥ 18	1	2	1	2
Total	48	100	37	100
Homosexual experience				
Yes	2	4	2	5
No	46	96	35	95
Total	48	100	37	100
Family income (minimum wage)				
≤ 3	42	63	15	23
> 3	18	27	42	64
Not informed	6	10	9	13
Total	66	100	66	100
Grand total	66	100	66	100

ries, in accordance with the objectives of this study: (1) students and sexual diversity, referring to the participants' perception of their peers of sexual minorities; and (2) the school and sexual diversity, referring to the participants' perception of how the teachers and the pedagogical coordination deal with sexual diversity in the school.

Students and sexual diversity

The narratives of participants indicate that adolescents of sexual minorities are more visible and suffering less rejection from peers at school. In general, in their perception, the rejection rate in the school is lower than in the external social environment. Moreover, the number of students manifestly non-heterosexual is high, also because of the circumstance that the stage of life they are in is one of discoveries and definition of sexual identity. The fact that it is something common makes everyone become used to it and no longer have a feeling about diversity as something strange, different, hence reducing prejudice. The students state that nowadays homosexuality, transsexuality and other expres-

sions of sexuality and gender are more present on communication media, especially on the Internet, which also contributes to greater receptivity.

"There is a lot of conviviality, one gets used to it" (Female student, G1).

"I have several friends who are gays and lesbians, not one or two, but several" (Female student, G4).

"Nowadays it's normal" (Male student, G3).

Participants argued that presently the school broadens the youth's perception, especially with the study of certain disciplines in which there is greater dialogue with students. Before, in the generation of parents and grandparents, there was more discrimination.

"...Most of us, when we arrive here, it is like 'Oh, I'm against this, against that'. But here we kind of open our minds! We start to see things differently" (Female student, G11).

"Today there is a lot of information for us to open our mind" (Female student, G9)

However, the acceptance of sexual diversity is neither unanimous nor unconditional, and it happens for several reasons. For some, though homosexuality is not something "normal", non-heterosexual individuals must be respected. The nationally conducted research *Sexual Diversity and Homophobia in Brazil*¹⁷ highlighted that homophobia rates tend to decrease insofar as people have contact with the LGBT public.

Female students demonstrated a greater predisposition to accept diverse types of non-heteronormative sexual behavior than male students. They also showed greater participation and eloquence in the discussion on the theme. The male students were more economic with words, seeming fearful of confessing knowledge on the subject and being considered homosexuals or sympathizers. Among them there was a statement that could lead to the understanding that homosexuality is contagious:

"Could you give me cigarette? And he takes it and puts in my mouth. For me to smoke it, I don't accept it (...) Now, if he takes it from a package, it's one thing" (Male student, G6).

There were frequent narratives that it causes discomfort to see gay couples embracing or kissing and statements that everyone can do as it pleases, but only privately. There was a statement that there was uneasiness also when seeing caresses between heterosexual couples in public, that this should only be done in private, "between four walls". However, these statements appeared only to justify the rejection to public demonstration of affection between homosexuals, perhaps not to be seen as prejudiced persons.

The lesser acceptance of sexual diversity among male students became evident when they referred to members of sexual minorities who expose the way they feel about themselves. When mentioning gay men, our interlocutors demonstrated toleration only for those who act according to the traditional pattern of masculinity. Any deviation from this conduct is repelled by them. Males who wear female clothes are discriminated. In the male students' words, violence against homosexuals is most often justified in those cases.

"They have to dress normal. There are those who wear tight pants" (Male student, G2).

"A homosexual who goes around like this in the streets will be beaten" (Male student, G2).

The non-rejection to members of sexual minorities is thus selective, occurring when the individual behaves according to what is expected from the sex to which he/she belongs. Therefore, discrimination still exists.

The lesser acceptance among students to those who externalize their homosexuality through gestures or clothing configures violence, because it obliges the individual to conceal the sexual orientation. This invisibilization of sexual diversity is a mechanism of homophobia legitimation¹⁸. In a study with 2,159 high school students, Rondini et al.¹⁹ evidenced what was denominated cordial homophobia, i.e., when the individual accepts a male or female gay friend as long as they do not present manners of the other sex. In other words, homosexuality is admitted as long as it does not appear, that the homosexual does not "come out of the closet". This logic explains why trans persons are more vulnerable to violence.

Magnavita²⁰ points that selectivity in discrimination also occurs among gays. It is only possible to be a homosexual and not be discriminated, including by peers, if one follows the primer that presents an acceptable model of behavior, ruled by misogyny and machismo. This is evident with trans persons who in order to be accepted must follow a long path^{21,22}, recognized by our interlocutors as a very difficult and painful process.

The greater homophobia among men reported by participants is corroborated by other studies. Young men reject homosexuals and transsexuals more than young women and even older men. This behavior represents the affirmation of the masculine identity in this stage of life. Homophobia is directed not only to individuals belonging to sexual minorities, but also to those who do not behave in accordance with the hegemonic model of their respective gender. According to a study conducted in Mexico ²³, the most homophobic individuals are men, those most involved with religion, having no homosexual friends, and with conservative political stand. In the same direction, in a study with 30,000 students from 6 countries in Latin America, researchers ²⁴ found that homophobic attitudes were associated to the male sex and to religious practice, particularly non-Catholic Christians.

Another motive of rejection appears when the participants say that they accepted homosexuals as long as they “do not harm them”. The same type of discourse did not occur in relation to heterosexuals. In contraposition, some affirmed that the exchange of caresses in public between same-sex persons is a courageous attitude, for they are showing what they truly are, not repressing themselves because of others. Another form of prejudice debated between our interlocutors was the observation that homosexuals can influence children to become homosexuals. Discrimination was also manifested by them through exclusion, cursing, and making jokes like saying “you must become a man”, among others.

A relevant aspect to be highlighted is the apparent greater welcoming towards couples of women than of men. For this motive, female students in this situation expose themselves more at school than male students. According to reports, it is much more likely to occur a kiss in public between two women than between two men. We verified in the narratives that when explicitly prejudiced attitudes occur at school it is most frequently in relation to male homosexuals. This is the reason why female homosexuality, though much more visible at school than male homosexuality, appeared secondarily in the students’ speech. When asked about discrimination, students referred mostly to male gays.

Female homosexuality, on the other hand, is seen by some as something exciting, as fetish.

“I find it cool to see two women kissing, more than two men” (Male student, G3).

Less intense homophobia against women as perceived by our interlocutors converges with studies conducted by Leonel ²⁵ on lesbophobia. The author states that lesbians seem to suffer less discrimination than male gays and points as hypothesis for this difference women’s historical invisibility in public spaces, consequently with lesser exposure in the media, on the streets and in working spaces, intensified by greater social acceptancy of affection manifested between women. Therefore, Leonel supposes that if homosexual women are in fact less perceived by people around them, consequently they will be less discriminated.

Some participants stated that many women seek a relationship with other women due to having suffered violence from men with whom they had a relationship. This statement follows the same direction of that in which *“if a woman becomes a lesbian, it is because she has not met a real man”*, admitted by 31% of the population in the study conducted by Leonel ²⁵ (p. 91). Both socially disseminated conceptions and the fetishization of lesbians exemplify the intrinsic link between machismo and lesbophobia, in which a woman must subjugate her sexuality to the male and the desire for another woman would happen only in the impossibility of relating with a man.

The greater public exposure of caresses between women is in accordance with the stereotype of the female gender ²⁶. Being gentle, delicate and affectionate belongs to what is expected from the sexual orientation. On the other hand, in the process of men’s socialization, masculinity takes place in constant opposition to femininity. To be a macho, the man must be aggressive, strong, competitive, and heterosexual ⁵.

The school and sexual diversity

The narratives about the attitudes of educators regarding sexual diversity were varied. Some students report that there is no discrimination from teachers and pedagogical coordinators. Others declared that some institutions impose constraints to students who are not heterosexuals.

Sexual diversity did not appear as a theme that is present in school activities, because none of our interlocutors referred to initiatives of the school in this sense. Explicit discriminatory attitudes arising from teachers and/or coordinations of the institutions were seldom described, however some stu-

dents expressed the opinion that all schools are homophobic. There were reports about teachers who refuse to call a transexual female student by her social name and who make jokes about homosexuals.

In all the groups, the few discriminatory attitudes of the school mentioned by our interlocutors were the prohibition for female students who have a relationship to enter the restroom together and the repression to love relationships in public of same-sex students in the school's premises, or in the surroundings when wearing the school uniform. The same repression does not occur for a heterosexual couple.

"Then, a hetero couple, kissing in the corridor, the coordination goes by, does nothing... But if there are two homosexuals, they will complain" (Female student, G7).

"One [female] student cannot go to the restroom with another, because the coordination simply forbids it..." (Female student, G9).

According to Junqueira ⁶, school curricula are political and cultural production artifacts that can (re)produce the social gender norm, the heteronormativity, affecting not only those who do not fit into the norm. Therefore, the school should develop actions beyond those directed to the academic performance, because it is a privileged space that, depending on its conduct, may corroborate or not the crystallization of biased perceptions in relation to the behaviors that do not fit into the society's heteronormative pattern.

The early experiences with sex education in schools in the 1960s had a hygienist character. With the demands of the feminist movement in the 1970s this situation started to change, but only in the 1990s there were more effective educative proposals, motivated by the AIDS epidemic and the increase of pregnancy in adolescence. In 1995, in response to social movements and criticism to the educative programs as they were proposed, the Brazilian government included sexuality in the National Curricular Parameters as a transversal theme, articulated to other themes as ethics, health, gender, ecology, and cultural plurality ²⁷.

The theme of sexuality should be dealt with in a way that would be continuous, systematic and integrated with the educative work in schools. However, in the schools comprised in this study, this is not done; actually, some participants suggested that other groups should be created to continue the debate on the theme, inviting the school director to take part in the activity. Thus, it is perceived that after two decades the theme of sexual diversity is still not present in high school curricula ²⁸.

As from 2001, with the creation of the National Council for the Combat of Discrimination, sexual minorities were included in the agenda of public policies managers, and in 2004 there was the creation of the Program Brazil Without Homophobia, designed by the Special Secretariat of Human Rights. The *Project School Without Homophobia*, articulated with the Program Brazil Without Homophobia, created educational material, with the support of NGOs, that approached homophobia in a systematic way. However, this was considered an offense to Brazilian families and due to political pressure, its use was forbidden ²⁹. Therefore, the opportunity was wasted to support students in the uneasiness that is common among adolescents regarding sexual experimentation and to train educators with the skills on the theme, because as exteriorized by participants in this study they belong to another generation with other values and for them it is more difficult to accept different affective and sexual choices.

Some authors recommend the implementation of policies and programs in the sense of improving the school setting, including themes such as sexual orientation and diversity, combating LGBT-phobic bullying, and programs of alliances between gays and heterosexuals. They also affirm that the safer the students feel in the educational setting, the greater will be the probability of reducing risks to their mental health and school evasion ³⁰. The participants in this study externalized the concern with those who suffer LGBTphobic bullying and have no protection from the school. Omission and silence on the theme of diversity is a subtle way of agreeing with the society's heteronormative system. In order to combat homophobia, it is crucial to include sexual diversity as an educational theme ³¹. For a long time, the educator Louro ³² stresses that the invisibilization of homo- and transsexual students contributes to their marginalization. The fact that the school ignores the homosexual students authorizes peers to insult them and make offensive jokes. And according to Seffner ³³, besides the educative proposals on sexual diversity, it is necessary that heteronormativity is discussed in schools to explain its origin and the mechanisms of disciplinary order and control over the body of individuals and populations ¹¹.

The guidelines of the Brazilian Ministry of Health for the health care of adolescents preconize interventions of health promotion in the school context that include structuring themes such as patterns of conduct and historically constructed social values, and among other issues those that have influence on the differences of expectations and social roles with repercussions on the healthy growth and development of this populational group. The school is the social environment that concentrates a large number of adolescents; therefore, it has a strong influence on their health. Hence the importance of thinking health interventions in these spaces. In this perspective, in 2006 there was the creation of the *Policy of Health and Prevention in Schools* (SPE. <http://portal.mec.gov.br/projeto-saude-prevencao-nas-escolas-spe>) in a partnership between the Brazilian Ministries of Education and Health, aiming at reaching the specific public of school adolescents, and one of the main interventions was directed at the promotion of sexual and reproductive health of adolescents. However, in 2007 this governmental policy was replaced by the Program Health in Schools (PSE), which adopted the interventions but in a broader context that includes other age groups, not giving priority to the issues related to sexuality³⁴.

There are several hindrances to the implementation of a pedagogical proposal on the theme of sexuality, among them the lack of specific training of educators, which results in classroom interventions based on their own personal values. According to Nardi & Quartiero²⁷, many times the interventions take place in order to solve problems that occur at the school. By acting in a punctual manner and placing the intervention on an individual sphere, the school reinforces the homophobic and sexist culture, and does not promote the questioning of the discriminatory character of violent actions and insults, because those practices are naturalized. The educator ends up by also being an agent of normalization of sexual behaviors, seen by many as individual and private issues, and not as an issue of rights. The school acts by training students to control their senses and sexuality and making the school environment function free of ideological standpoints¹¹. On the other hand, it is observed that even when schools do not deal specifically with the theme of sexuality, the normative practices related to sexual and gender behavior are present and active in the schools' daily life. Therefore, educators training on the theme of sexuality and sexual diversity is of great importance, not only for them to be prepared to deal with frequent situations that pass by students' sexual life and inevitably traverse the school, but also for the reflection on their own convictions and biases that affect their educational practices. Also, the educative programs should take into account the contextual and historical specificities related to heteronormativity and sexual diversity.

Despite the apparent non-discriminatory attitudes of teachers, our interlocutors ponder that it depends on the school. Some are more open and accept changes more easily, e.g., *Colégio Pedro II* (Pedro II School) that allows the use of skirts by male students, something that would never happen at *Colégio Militar* (Military School). It was also argued by them that because teachers belong to other generations, they are more biased.

"I think their generation had a vision of this homosexual world that was not that open. So, for them it's not as easy to accept things as it is for us" (Female student, G7).

"The values, they received completely different values than what we are receiving now. There weren't so many homosexuals explicitly kissing" (Female student, G7).

About dealing with trans persons, participants commented that if a male student would wear the uniform designated to females, the direction would give a reprimand for that. The narratives made clear the omission of educators regarding themes related to sexual diversity; this was evidenced in the students requests to the research team to return to their school and perform other activities on the theme. Another omission commented was the non-repression to LGBTphobic bullying against non-heterosexual students.

In a study by Cassal & Zucco³⁵ on the perception of educators of public and private schools in the Metropolitan Region of Rio de Janeiro, the researchers verified that the school deals with sexuality from the viewpoint of heterosexuality and teachers expect from students a behavior that is "adequate" to their biological sex. Identities that did not fit heteronormativity were considered outside the school's reality.

"They... kind of exclude the person from things, they make bullying. Because the person can pretend it's nothing, you know? But for the person it's difficult, the person will cry, will be sad... And the teachers accept it. At least I have never seen any kind of repression..." (Female student, G1).

Teachers' acceptance sustains and strengthens the hierarchy of the masculine over the feminine. When students were questioned about whom they would refer to discuss contents on sexuality – in a broad perspective including relationship, violence, gender, and sexual diversity – teachers were rejected as an option, making explicit the distancing between school and students in this field. There was an opinion that it would be important to have the school director participating in the focal group.

In a critical study on homophobia, education and sexual diversity, Méndez-Tapia ³⁶ stresses that the society's codes and regulations on gender affect the spaces of formal education as well as other places of informal learning; they mold the types of socialization that strengthen the heterosexual regime and the symbolic and formal authorities in matters of morality, which not only define masculine and feminine behaviors but also establish what is expected from and is legitimate for students' conduct. Gender codes operate as a policy of truth inside educational spaces by establishing the normative bases of prescription and sanction that deify attitudes, behaviors and images according to pre-established models of masculinity and femininity. According to Spanish philosopher Preciado ³⁷, since the beginning of life the society uses pedagogical instruments that are not easily perceived as such, which monitor and control babies in order to transform them into heterosexual children.

Final considerations

This study, limited to the universe of high school students and natural groups of individuals who were acquainted, verified that LGBTphobia is fully manifested in school settings and is invisible to the school's sight, in the perception of our interlocutors. This suggests that the existing programs and public policies on education and health are not guaranteeing the sexual rights of this population, as well as their protection, which are needed because they are individuals who are in the process of development. In order to experience sexuality in a free, safe and healthy way it is necessary to offer them adequate conditions for the manifestation of their desires and inquietudes, and the school setting is the most indicated for this. However, it is worth stressing that there is greater acceptance of LGBT adolescents because students are more open to changes, equally in public and private schools, even in a heteronormative and discriminatory school setting, common to both types of school establishments.

Currently, besides the low effectivity of policies in this field, there are evidences of opposed movements, for example, the exclusion of the terms gender and sexual orientation from the text of the Brazilian National Plan for Education approved in 2014, as proposed and Municipality of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil approved at the Brazilian National Congress by the group of conservative religious-wing congresspersons. Another noteworthy movement is the School "Without" Party – *Bill n. 193/2016* (<https://www25.senado.leg.br/web/atividade/materias/-/materia/125666>), which represents a serious threat to an education that is emancipatory and that guarantees rights; the ideology of this movement, contrary to the alleged aim of neutrality, intends to prevent debates and pedagogical practices related, among other issues, to gender and sexuality.

Contributors

All authors contributed equally to the writing and final revision of the text.

Additional informations

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Resumo

A LGBTfobia se configura como contexto de vulnerabilidade à saúde das pessoas cuja sexualidade é diversa do padrão heteronormativo, denominadas minorias sexuais, principalmente na adolescência, período de definição das identidades sexuais. O objetivo deste estudo foi analisar como estudantes do Ensino Médio percebem seus pares das minorias sexuais e como entendem a atitude da escola e educadores frente à diversidade sexual. O método utilizado foi qualitativo por meio de 13 grupos focais com 132 estudantes de ambos os sexos, de escolas públicas e privadas de Município do Rio de Janeiro, Brasil. A análise dos dados foi realizada com apoio do software webQDA, em uma abordagem de base compreensiva, e os dados classificados em duas categorias. Na primeira, denominada “os estudantes e a diversidade sexual”, os participantes percebem a diversidade sexual como normal, pois é comum e se apresenta frequentemente na idade deles. Contudo, confirmaram atitudes homofóbicas contra aqueles cujo comportamento de gênero não está de acordo com o esperado para seu sexo biológico. Na segunda categoria, “a escola e a diversidade sexual”, os estudantes reconhecem a adoção de medidas discriminatórias contra casais homoafetivos por parte da coordenação escolar e a ausência do tema diversidade sexual nas atividades educativas. Os resultados indicam que as políticas de educação sexual são insuficientes para a garantia dos direitos humanos das minorias sexuais, o que representa maior vulnerabilidade à saúde desse estrato populacional.

Homofobia; Sexualidade; Adolescente; Estudantes; Pesquisa Qualitativa

Resumen

La LGBTfobia se conforma como un contexto de vulnerabilidad para la salud de las personas cuya sexualidad es diferente respecto al patrón heteronormativo, denominadas minorías sexuales, principalmente en la adolescencia, período de definición de las identidades sexuales. El objetivo de este estudio fue analizar cómo estudiantes de enseñanza media perciben a sus compañeros de minorías sexuales, y cómo entienden la actitud de la escuela, así como la de los educadores, frente a la diversidad sexual. El método utilizado fue cualitativo, mediante 13 grupos focales con 132 estudiantes de ambos sexos, de escuelas públicas y privadas del Municipio de Río de Janeiro, Brasil. El análisis de los datos se realizó con el apoyo del software webQDA, en un abordaje de base comprensivo y clasificados en dos categorías. En la primera, denominada estudiantes y diversidad sexual, los participantes perciben la diversidad sexual como normal, puesto que es común y se presenta frecuentemente en su edad. No obstante, confirmaron actitudes homofóbicas contra quienes cuyo comportamiento de género no está de acuerdo con lo esperado para su sexo biológico. En la segunda categoría, escuela y diversidad sexual, los estudiantes reconocen la adopción de medidas discriminatorias contra parejas homoafectivas por parte de la coordinación escolar y la ausencia del tema diversidad sexual en las actividades educativas. Los resultados indican que las políticas de educación sexual son insuficientes para la garantía de los derechos humanos de las minorías sexuales, lo que representa una mayor vulnerabilidad para la salud de ese estrato poblacional.

Homofobia; Sexualidad; Adolescente; Estudiantes; Investigación Cualitativa

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