

**DISCRIMINATION,  
VIOLENCE, AND BULLYING BASED  
ON SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND  
GENDER IDENTITY**

**RESEARCH REPORT**

# **DISCRIMINATION, VIOLENCE, AND BULLYING BASED ON SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY**

Skopje, April 2016

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

Dear reader,

It is our great honor and pleasure to present you the report from the *Survey on discrimination, violence and bullying based on sexual orientation and gender identity among youth in Skopje*. This is the first research study in Macedonia of this type, that addresses the psychological and physical bullying based on sexual orientation and gender identity among the youth in Skopje, and the first research study conducted by the association for a critical approach to gender and sexuality SUBVERSIVE FRONT Skopje.

This report contains the findings of the survey of the perceptions and attitudes of youth from Skopje related to discrimination, violence and bullying based on sexual orientation and gender identity, which was conducted from September to December 2015. The findings of this survey map the situation with the discrimination, violence and bullying of young LGBTQI persons in the area of Skopje, and indicate the need for this problem to be recognized and addressed by the competent authorities and other stakeholders.

This research study was conducted by our research consultant Kristefer Stojanovski who developed the research methodology, completed the processing and analysis of collected data and wrote this research report. Jovana Gjorgjiovaska, Monica Bozhinoska, Sanja Bozhovikj and Martina Ilievska from Youth Educational Forum are to be highly credited for their cooperation in part of the research methodology design, and data collection, which showed crucial in the successful completion of this research study. I express deep gratitude to my colleague Daniel Mitkovski whose suggestions, ideas and efforts were invaluable for the technical and administrative aspects of the implementation of this comprehensive project. I would also like to thank Ana Mishkovska Kajevska whose contribution in the very beginning of the research project planning was inspiring.

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*Antonio Mihajlov  
President of  
Subversive Front*

## **1. BACKGROUND**

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI) persons, due to the prevailing sexism and homophobia in the societies in which they reside, are victims of discrimination, maltreatment and reduced access to services, particularly in conservative societies and countries (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR] United Nations, 2011). Violence against sexual minorities and those with differing gender expressions and identities is seen across all regions of the world (OHCHR, 2011). Sexism, including homophobia and transphobia, that exist in some regions and countries negatively influence LGBTQI persons identities, attitudes toward themselves and others, their mental health, and overall wellbeing.

In Southeastern Europe (SEE), politics, society and culture continue to have extremely homophobic and negative views and perceptions towards LGBTQI persons. Media and human rights organizations across ex -Yugoslav countries, such as Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and Macedonia, have reported violence against LGBTQI persons particularly at LGBTQI-related events (Hoare, 2014; Nielsen, 2013, Human Rights Watch, 2013).

However, data are scarce in regards to the LGBTQI community, particularly in relation to discrimination and the influences on mental health and wellbeing. A 2006 study by the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association Europe (Europe) shows that majority of participants across CEE countries are not out to family and friends. In Macedonia, specifically, only 26% reported being out, which may influence their social wellbeing, health, and agency (Quinn, 2006). Furthermore, the European Men Who Have Sex With Men Internet Survey (EMIS) noted that approximately 50% of MSM across the Balkan region are sexually unhappy (EMIS Network, 2010).

In order to add to the scant literature, we conducted a research study on the discrimination of LGBTQI youth in Macedonia, focusing particularly on how it may influence psychosocial outcomes.

## 2. METHODS

Subversive Front and Youth Educational Forum, in collaboration, conducted a sexual orientation and gender identity study. Subversive Front and Youth Educational Forum developed the research to measure discrimination and bullying among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI) and non-LGBTQI youth (18-30 years of age) living in Skopje, Macedonia as well as how important one's identity influenced psychosocial outcomes. The research encompassed a mixed methods strategy that included a quantitative survey and focus groups. Below we outline the survey and focus group tools used with the research.

## 3. PURPOSE OF SURVEY AND FOCUS GROUPS

### 3.1. SURVEY

As collaborating organizations, Subversive Front, and the Youth Educational Forum developed the survey to measure basic demographic items such as gender identity and sexual orientation, as well as ethnicity, age, education, and sources of income. The survey also measured the level of discrimination and bullying faced by respondents. Furthermore, the survey included numerous validated psychosocial and discrimination scales, in order to examine how discrimination and one's sexual orientation and gender identity influenced psychosocial outcomes. The scales used are described below:

- **Experiences of Everyday Discrimination** is a scale used to measure the level of discrimination persons face in their everyday lives. The tool was developed to measure racial discrimination among African Americans living in the US and has been validated in other contexts such as among Romani women in Serbia and Macedonia. The scales ask questions related to the person's experience of discrimination in everyday activities such as shopping at a store, in public, etc, and the frequency of this discrimination. The questions are then summed across all measures within the scale to gather evidence for the extent of discrimination experienced. Higher scores are indicative of higher levels of discrimination.
- **Social Interaction Anxiety Scale**, a 20-question scale measured from zero to four that is used to measure the level of social interaction anxiety one may experience. The scale asks questions related to personal behaviors of persons in social environments. The questions within the scale are summed to measure the level of anxiety one experiences in social interactions and social situations. Higher scores are indicative of higher levels of anxiety.

- **Self-Concealment Scale**, a 10-question scale measured from one to five that measures the tendency to conceal from others personal information that one perceives as distressing or negative. The scale asks questions related to whether persons share personal and secretive information with others they interact with. The scale is summed to examine the level of self-concealment, with higher scores indicating more concealment.
- **Ruminative Response Scale** is a 22-question scale measured from one to four that measures the compulsive focus and attention of the symptoms of one's distress. The scale asks questions related to feelings and attention paid to negative feelings (e.g. "Think why can't I get going?" Or "Why do I always react this way?"). Higher scores mean more compulsive tendencies toward depression.
- **Connections to LGBT Community Scale**, an 8-question scale measured from one to five used among LGBT persons to explore their level of connectedness to the greater LGBT community. This scale acts as a proxy for the level of social cohesiveness within the community. The scale asks questions such as being "LGBT makes me part of the community" or "It is important that I have LGBT friends". Higher scores are indicative of higher levels of social cohesion.
- **Perceptions of LGBT Community Scale**, an 18-question scale measured from one to five that is asked to non-LGBT persons, and examines their views and feelings regarding the LGBT community. This scale identifies the level of discrimination and stigma that non-LGBT persons have toward LGBT persons. The scale includes questions such as "I have LGBT friends", "LGBT persons should have the right to marry" etc. Higher scores mean more positive perceptions of the LGBT community.

### **3.2.FOCUS GROUPS**

In addition to the quantitative survey, Subversive Front and the Youth Educational Forum included in the research a qualitative component using focus groups. The focus groups helped to provide additional contextual and more nuanced information about discrimination and its influence on the lives of LGBTQI persons living in Skopje, Macedonia. We used focus group guides to structure the discussions with participants, although they also allowed for organic conversations to form depending on the discussions taking place during the groups. This semi-structured nature allowed us to probe upon additional information during the focus groups that may not have been identified in the initial focus group guides. Both survey and focus group guides were developed in English and translated into local languages used by the study population (i.e. Macedonian and Albanian).

### **3.3.SURVEY ADMINISTRATION**

Subversive Front and the Youth Educational Forum, with guidance from their consultant, implemented the survey using two strategies. The first was a face-to-face, paper-based survey with youth living in all neighborhoods of Skopje, Macedonia to assess whether this strategy would elicit a diverse enough sample of both LGBTQI and non-LGBTQI youth. The paper-based survey was pilot tested to assess comprehension and readability. Questions were updated if clarification was needed. The paper-based face-to-face survey took approximately 35-40 minutes to complete with participants. The other strategy used was an online version of the survey. We uploaded the survey into Survey Monkey and pilot tested to ensure the accuracy of all skip patterns and logic. Subversive Front and Youth Educational Forum (YEF) then used existing contact lists, social media networking, website content publishing and paid internet media advertising to ask both LGBTQI and non-LGBTQI youth to participate. It took participants approximately 30-40 minutes to complete the online survey. Data was later compared to the data received via the field survey.

### **3.4.SAMPLING**

Due to the sensitive nature of the research and the fact that sexual and gender identity minorities are hard-to-reach populations, we utilized two different sampling strategies to invite individuals to participate in the survey.

### **3.5.RANDOM MULTI-CLUSTER SAMPLING**

The first strategy was a random multi-cluster sampling strategy of households/apartment buildings in various neighborhoods of Skopje, Macedonia. Subversive Front and Youth Educational Forum used data from State Statistics Office's to estimate municipal populations. Using these numbers, we estimated how many participants were needed from each municipality and identified the total sample size to be achieved at 260-285. Table 1 below provides the municipal sample size estimations.

As sampling frames, we used the lists of streets in each municipality published on the website of the Public Service Streets & Roads. Using a random number generator, we chose 10-15 streets according to the municipalities' size and the needed number of participants. In the municipalities of Aerodrom, Gazi Baba, Karpoš, Saraj and Centar, the interviewers were told to begin with the house/building with the smallest even number on the street and then to try in every second house/building with an even number. For example, if the smallest number on the street is 4, the interviewers should ring on the doors of the buildings/houses with number 4, 8, 12, 16 etc. In the municipalities of Ğorce Petrov, Butel, Ćair, Őuto Orizari and Kisela Voda, the interviewers were given the same instructions but in regards to houses/buildings that have odd numbers.

Municipality	Sample Size Estimate	Achieved Sample Size
Gazi Baba	34-36	34
Āorĉe Petrov	18-20	20
Karpoř	24-26	19
Saraj	24-26	28
Butel	20-23	14
Āair	35-38	32
řuto Orizari	8-10	11
Aerodrom	40-43	45
Kisela Voda	30-33	33
Centar	25-28	27
Sopiřte	2-3	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>260-285</b>	<b>267</b>

*Table 1. Estimated and achieved sample size for the field survey, categorized by municipalities*

In the case of buildings, the interviewers were told to climb on the highest floor and ring the bell of the last apartment in the building, i.e. the one with the highest number. After that, they were instructed to continue with ringing on the doors of every third apartment in the building. If there is an apartment/house in which more than 2 young people (18-30 years) lived, the interviewers were told to survey maximum two of them, in order to preserve the diversity of participants and answers.

### 3.6. CONVENIENCE AND SNOWBALL SAMPLING

In addition to the random multi-cluster sampling strategy, we also employed a separate convenience and snowball sample of LGBTQI and non-LGBTQI youth. Subversive Front and Youth Educational Forum (YEF) utilized existing contact lists, social media networking, website content publishing and paid internet media advertising to recruit participants for the online version of the survey. Data was later compared to the data received via the field survey. YEF emailed a link to the online survey that also provided context about the survey asking youth to complete it. The youth that were recruited through this strategy were then also asked to pass along the link to others who might be eligible and interested in participating. This strategy was used until the estimated sample size of 200 was achieved (the achieved sample was n=267).

## **4. ANALYSIS**

### **4.1. QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS**

We used the quantitative data to elicit background and socio-demographic information about study participants. Basic frequencies are presented, and medians and ranges for non-normally distributed continuous variables, and means and standard deviations for normally distributed continuous variables are presented. We scored the psychosocial scales described earlier using pre-established scoring criteria for each of the scales. Depending on the scale and the wording of questions, the scales were scored from lowest to highest or recoded in the reverse. For example, in the Social Interaction Anxiety three of the questions (i.e. questions 5, 9, 11) are scored in reverse to assess for response validity. We then summed the scales and a total aggregate score was calculated for each participant in the research study. Within each scale, we measured the level of internal consistency in both the LGBTQI and non-LGBTQI populations to see if each of the questions accurately measured the desired construct (i.e. do the questions in the Social Interaction Anxiety Scale all accurately measure social anxiety in LGBTQI and non-LGBTQI persons). We report a Cronbach's alpha to measure internal consistency.

After consistency was confirmed, we then analyzed the total aggregate scores of each scale to assess whether differences existed between LGBTQI and non-LGBTQI participants. We present means and their respective p-values for LGBTQI and non-LGBTQI persons by each scale using independent sample t-tests.

### **4.2. QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS**

Subversive Front and Youth Educational Forum used qualitative methods to analyze focus group transcripts to contextualize and examine the role of society and discrimination on the situation of youth identifying as LGBTQI living in Skopje, Macedonia. Subversive Front transcribed the focus group transcripts using the recording during the interviews. The consultant read the transcripts to familiarize themselves with the discussion, questions, and responses. Using content theme analysis, the consultant re-read the transcripts and coded them to analyze for similar themes. Content analysis is a research method that has wide use in a variety of settings including health, anthropology, and social policy. It is a method for analyzing **textual** data and describes a family of analytic approaches that range from impressionistic, intuitive, interpretive analysis to strict textual and systematic analysis. The specific type of content analysis approach will vary with the theoretical and substantive interest of the research and examination of the problem studied. Initially, content analysis was used primarily as a quantitative method to group text data into explicit categories and to describe those using statistics. As applied to qualitative data,

the content analysis focuses on language as communication with **attention to the content or contextual meaning**. It is used to summarize text into an efficient number of categories that represent **similar meaning**. Content analysis is used to systematically process data for the identification of themes and patterns. In the following section of the report, we discuss the findings from the research.

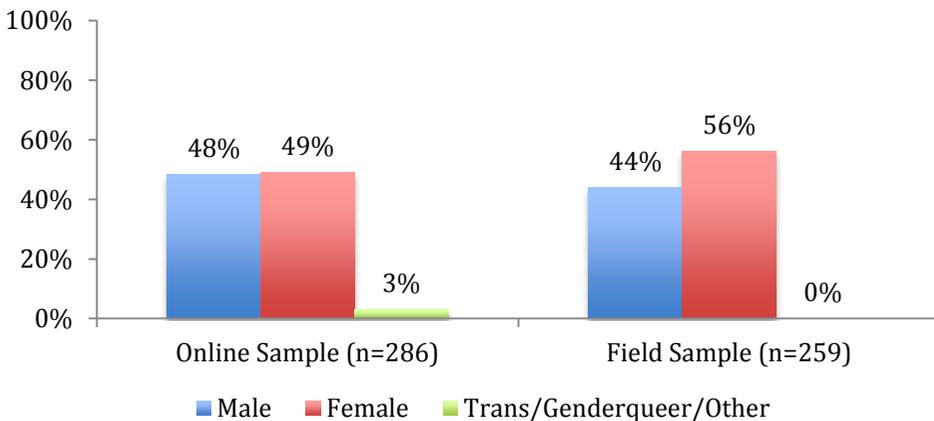
## 5. FINDINGS

This section of the report represents the findings from the online and field-based surveys and also includes the themes and corresponding quotes from the focus groups. First, we describe the study population, including their demographics and sexual orientation and gender identity. After we have described the population who participated, we then present findings on bullying, violence, and discrimination to explore the extent of the issue among LGBTQI youth in Skopje, Macedonia. Then, we examine the psychosocial outcomes comparing LGBTQI and non-LGBTQI youth. Throughout the findings section, we also incorporate findings from the qualitative data.

### 5.1. DEMOGRAPHICS

There was a total of 287 persons that met eligibility criteria and completed the online survey and 265 that met eligibility and completed the field-based survey. The demographic make-up of the research participants did vary depending on the type of sampling and survey methodology employed although some similarities did exist.

In both the online and field-based survey, participants were on average 23 years of age, ranging with a standard deviation ranging from 3.5 (online survey) to 3.8 (field-based survey). Most participants identified themselves in the gender binary as seen in Figure 1.



**Figure 1. Gender Distribution of Online and Field Samples**

However, across all other demographic variables, including ethnicity, education, sexual orientation, and LGBTQI identification wide variation existed between the online and field-based samples. Figure 2 shows persons identifying as Macedonian made up the greatest proportion of individuals in both the online and field samples. The field sample elicited more Albanians (28%) than the

online sample (1%). Furthermore, more Roma participated in the field survey than on the online survey (5% vs. 0.4%).

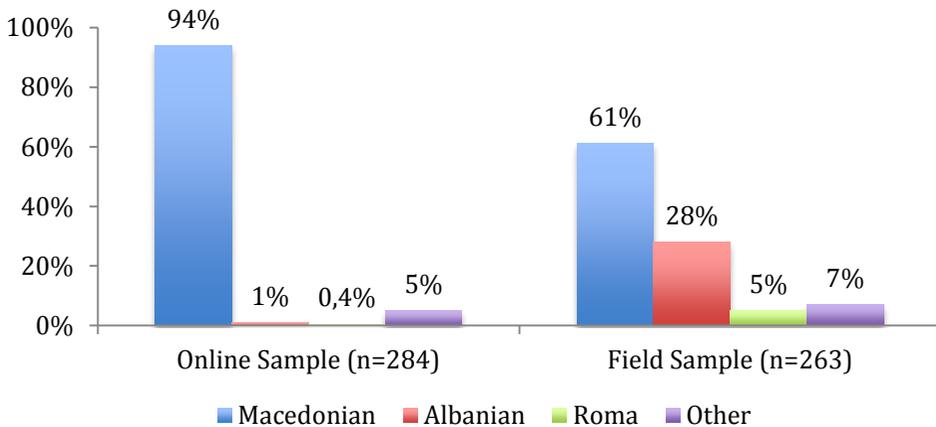


Figure 2. Ethnic Distribution of Online and Field Samples

There was also variation in education levels between the online and field samples, although most persons had a university degree or higher in both samples. Figure 3 shows that majority of persons in the online sample had a university degree (46%) or higher (43%) while in the field sample 30% of persons had secondary schooling, 47% university, and 19% a graduate degree.

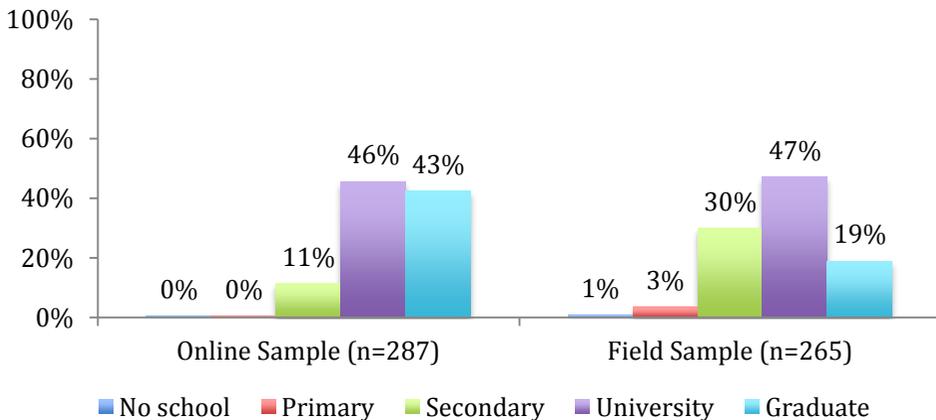
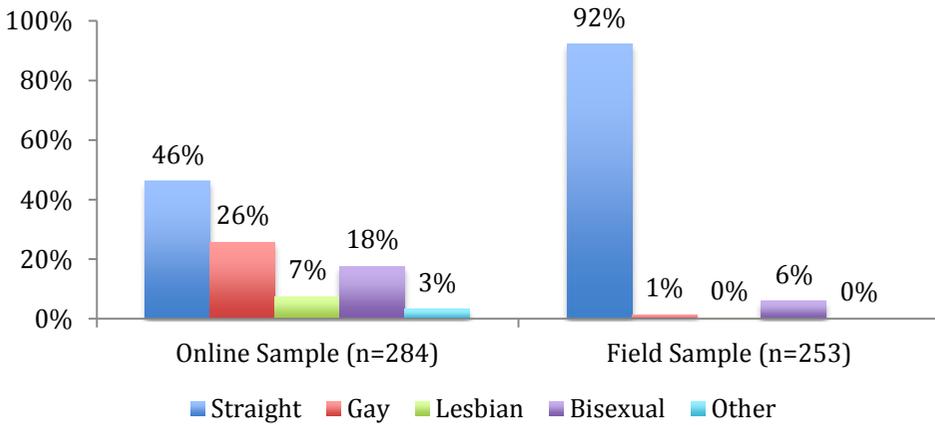


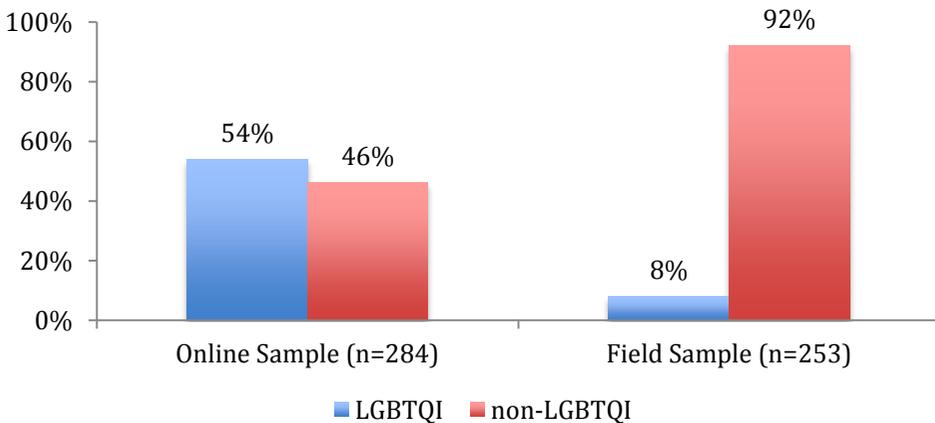
Figure 3. Highest Level of Education Received in Online and Field Samples

Regarding self-identified sexual orientation, there was the widest variation in responses between the online and field samples. Error! Reference source not found. depicts this wide variation; in the online sample 46% of respondents identified as straight, 26% gay, 7% lesbian, 18% bisexual, and 3% as other. However, in the field sample 92% of individuals identified as straight, 1% as gay, 0% as lesbian, 6% as bisexual and 0% as other.



**Figure 4. Self-Identified Sexual Orientation in Online and Field Samples**

Using the self-reported gender identity and sexual orientation questions of the survey, we then combined the data to examine the total persons who would fall within the definition of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI). Once more, there were major differences between the two sampling methods. As seen in Figure 5, LGBTQI persons comprised 54% of the online sample but comprised only 8% of the field sample; where 92% were identified as non-LGBTQI.



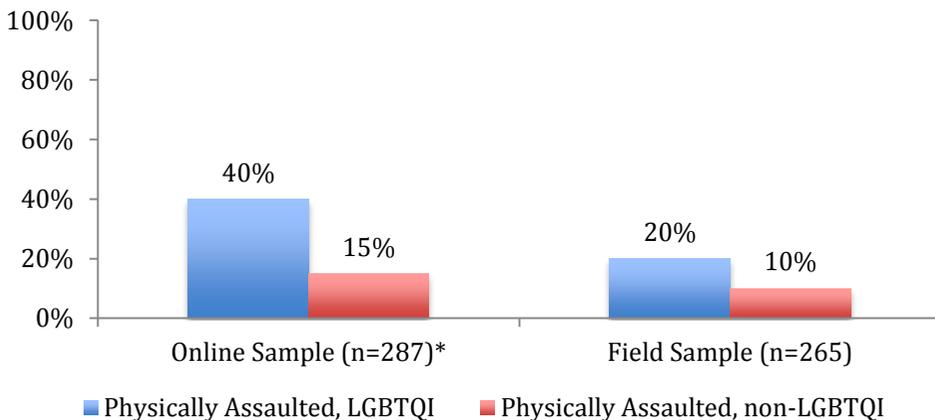
**Figure 5. Distribution of Persons Identified as LGBTQI in Online and Field Samples**

## 5.2. DISCRIMINATION AND BULLYING

In the following section, we report on the level of discrimination and bullying experienced by LGBTQI and non-LGBTQI youth in the online and field samples. The purpose is to examine the extent of the issue and to examine differences between the LGBTQI and non-LGBTQI populations.

### 5.2.1. PHYSICAL VIOLENCE AND ASSAULT

As seen in Figure 6, LGBTQI persons experienced physical violence at much higher frequency than non-LGBTQI persons. In the online sample, 40% of persons identified as LGBTQI had been physically assaulted, as compared to 15% in non-LGBTQI persons ( $p$ -value=0.000). There was also an approximately 10% difference in the field sample, although this was not statistically significant ( $p$ -value>0.05).



**Figure 6. Frequency of Individuals Physically Assaulted in Online and Field Samples**

\* Statistically significant different between LGBTQI and non-LGBTQI in Online Sample ( $p$ -value=0.000)

The reason behind the physical attacks can be attributed to many reasons. However, one major reason as identified by the youth in focus groups was related to lack of exposure to LGBTQI persons. Because of this lack of interaction with LGBTQI persons and the limited understanding of the LGBTQI community, youth stated during focus groups that many people “fear what they don’t know.” As described by one youth,

***„And just because of this fact, they haven’t had a close encounter with this issue...so from my point of view, all of these people...are not familiar with this question [topic of LGBTQI] or haven’t had the opportunity to discuss it.”***

This lack of exposure and discrimination manifests itself in numerous ways, but some of the most worrisome is in violence toward LGBTQI persons in Macedonia. Youth during the focus groups described how they lived with and experienced physical violence, which was discussed as regular occurrence in Macedonia,

***“...we were a little drunk and while we were walking to the [city] center, three other guys were walking behind us and one of them spat [on] me...”***

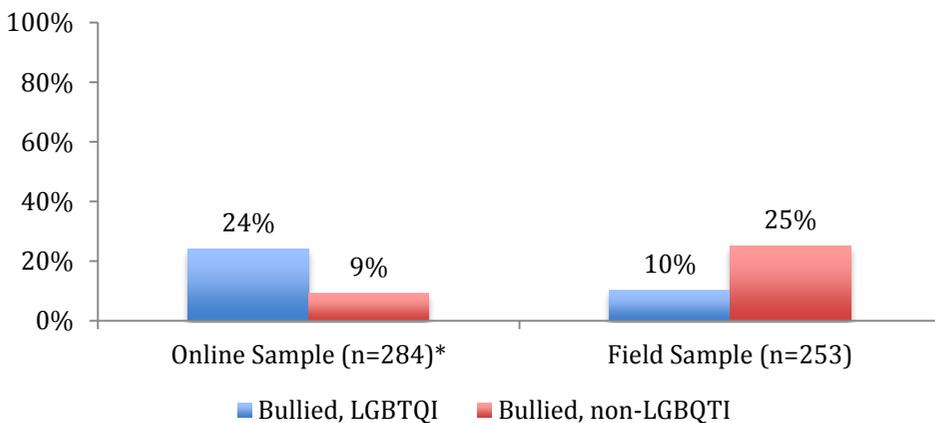
and another participant discussed her experience,

**“...16-year-old children beating an 8-year-old girl, taking all my money because I was a “butch” girl, it has happened many times when I am walking with a girl or to hear threats.”**

In addition to the physical violence experienced by youth, bullying was also a topic that youth experience regularly. In the following section, we describe the findings related to experiences of bullying.

### 5.2.2. BULLYING

Similar to the findings on physical assault, LGBTQI persons in the online sample experience more bullying than non-LGBTQI persons (Figure 7). Twenty-four percent of LGBTQI persons in the online sample had been bullied, while only 9% of non-LGBTQI persons had been bullied (p-value<0.01). In the field sample, the opposite was true in that 25% of non-LGBTQI persons experienced bullying and only 10% of LGBTQI persons. However, this may be indicative of the fact that only a total of 20 persons identified as LGBTQI in the field sample, which would skew the information.



**Figure 7. Frequency of Bullying Experienced in Online and Field Samples**

\* Statistically significant different between LGBTQI and non-LGBTQI in Online Sample (p-value<0.01)

Bullying was identified as a concern in Macedonia according to LGBTQI youth during the focus groups. Cyberbullying was also of particular concern, given that social media is used by LGBTQI persons to connect with similar others and where many LGBTQI persons feel comfortable to share who they are, such as on social media sites like Facebook. One youth described his experience with cyberbullying,

**“When my book came out, I received some negative comments. I got attention from this guy who was a psychopath. The Facebook has a good option, block, but he found me by my name and pictures and managed to penetrate in my circle. I was constantly under verbal attack through**

**messages, fake profiles; he would preach how my book was an abomination.”**

This same youth proceeded to explain how this cyber-bullying continued to progress and turned into physical violence.

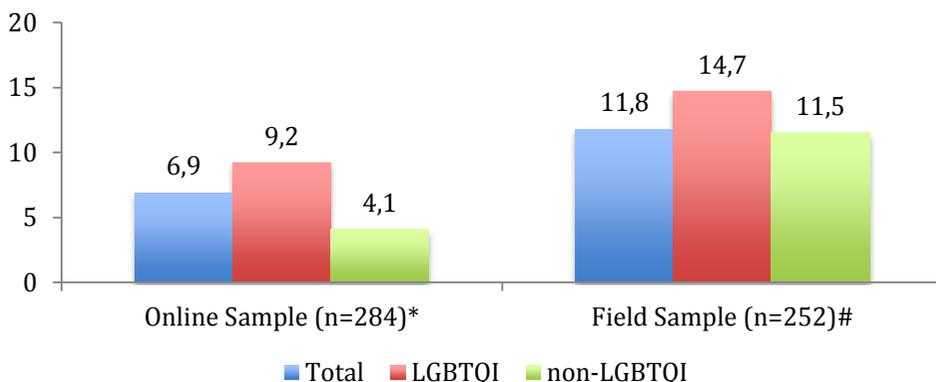
**„This one night, when it happened, luckily I am very good with words and managed to evade the hits, managed to run away and knew I had to turn to the police...they issued a restriction order [but] he appeared again with the threats, citing the Quran and everything else...”**

An additional issue faced by LGBTQI youth are the high levels of discrimination in their everyday lives and in the following section, we examine the discrimination findings.

### 5.2.3. DISCRIMINATION

Continuing to add to the complexity and issues LGBTQI youth face in Macedonia, LGBTQI youth in Macedonia experience constant, everyday discrimination from all aspects of society. As seen in Figure 8, individuals in the online and field samples experienced different levels of everyday discrimination. In the online sample, the average discrimination score was 6.9, while in the field sample it was 11.8.

More importantly, LGBTQI persons in both samples experienced higher levels of everyday discrimination as compared to their non-LGBTQI counterparts. In the online sample, LGBTQI persons experience more than double the level of discrimination than non-LGBTQI persons (9.2 versus 4.1) (p-value=0.000). In the field sample the disparity between LGBTQI and non-LGBTQI persons was less, however, LGBTQI persons still had higher levels of discrimination (14.7 versus 11.5) (p-value=0.004). These experiences were across various sectors and parts of society in Macedonia, which shall be described further below.



**Figure 8. Levels of Discrimination Experienced by LGBTQI and non-LGBTQI Persons in Online and Field Samples**

\* Statistically significant different between LGBTQI and non-LGBTQI in Online Sample (p-value=0.000)

# Statistically significant different between LGBTQI and non-LGBTQI in Field Sample (p-value=0.004)

***“It won’t make any difference if we first change the law, because the political climate in the State is specific and the government through its institutions will find a way to impose their own beliefs.”***

During focus groups, LGBTQI youth were asked to describe their experiences with discrimination in different sectors of their lives such as school, by law enforcement, national institutions, and in everyday society. Many LGBTQI youth felt discouraged and hopeless about the momentum and political will to improve the living situation of LGBTQI identifying persons in Macedonia.

In addition, government pressure and control of media also continue to add and exacerbate the level of discrimination experienced by LGBTQI youth.

***“We are not visible anywhere. Not even 5 minutes on TV. We are endangered as activists as well. There is no legal framework, the State won’t guarantee safety, not only that, it encourages violence. And given all these circumstances, how can we exist? There has to be support, so we don’t fear for our lives.”***

In addition, to the State level discrimination and negative pressures, youth also spoke about the high level of discrimination they experienced in the education system. As places of education where the majority of youth spend their time, the education system including the teachers and administrators should be attuned and sensitive to the needs of LGBTQI youth. However, as seen above, the exact opposite is occurring, which continues to exacerbate the negative and hostile environment in which LGBTQI youth live.

***“My math teacher didn’t want to fix my grade because she didn’t like me, I wasn’t looking like a girl. My class director gave me a two, even though my grades were all fives, just to motivate me to become [more like] a girl. On top of that when I was in another class, visiting a friend, the class director asked, “Where is that boy?” and the class replied she is a girl. She responded, “I pity those parents, they gave birth to a hermaphrodite, she should kill herself”***

Furthermore, youth also discussed how it was perceived that gays, as compared to lesbians, were victims of more discrimination or physical violence.

***“I believe in our society it is more accepted to be lesbian than gay.”***

However, as another youth pointed out, this may not, in fact, be true acceptance,

***“It is more of a fetish than real acceptance.”***

Because of the very misogynist and chauvinistic society, the fetishes of men in their views about women somehow make it “ok” that a woman is a lesbian as long as it feeds into their fetish. This misogynistic attitude is highly prevalent all over Macedonia and as one female youth reported it is even present within the educational system.

***“Once when we were discussing on the Academy about throat irritation, one of my professors was explaining about how you can calm your throat with a thumb and said, “For you girls, this shouldn’t be a problem.”***

In a sense, a woman’s gender may provide some protection when it comes to her sexual orientation due to the fact it falls within the society’s current chauvinistic and misogynistic nature. However, because gay men don’t fall into that fetish and are counter the accepted environment, it is deemed immoral, disgusting, and because of this gay men are more likely to experience violence.

***“I have a friend and he says, “It’s really cute when you see lesbians making out.” On the other hand, he goes after gays and beats them!”***

The combined issues of discrimination, bullying, and violence can have serious negative ramifications on LGBTQI youth’s mental health and psychosocial outcomes. In the following section, we examine differences in these outcomes between LGBTQI and non-LGBTQI youth.

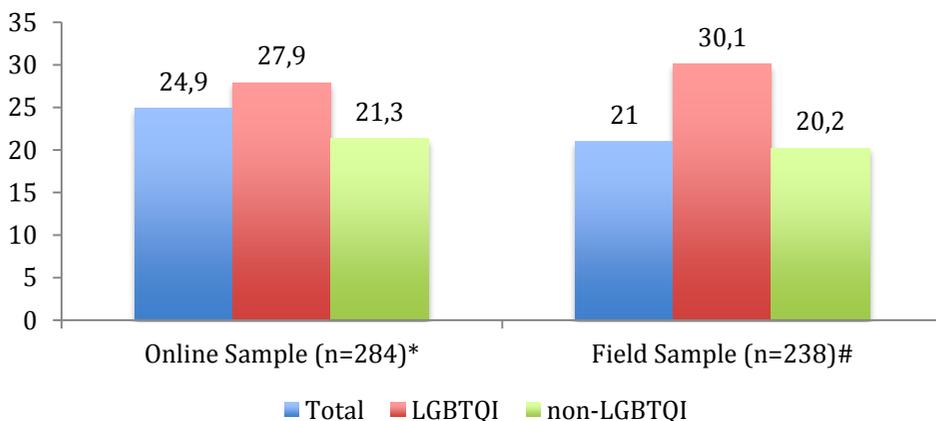
## 6. PSYCHOSOCIAL OUTCOMES

### 4.1. SOCIAL INTERACTION ANXIETY

LGBTQI persons, as well as other vulnerable populations, tend to suffer from negative psychosocial outcomes of which social interaction anxiety is one of them. Due to the discrimination, violence, and bullying that LGBTQI persons face, many times they exclude themselves from social situations. In addition, when in social situations they may experience higher levels of anxiety.

As seen in Figure 9, this is exactly the case; LGBTQI persons in the online sample had higher scores on the Social Interaction Anxiety scale, as compared to their non-LGBTQI counterparts. For this scale, a score close to 30 or higher is an indicator that persons suffer a mild form of social anxiety.

In the online sample, LGBTQI persons scored 30% higher than non-LGBTQI persons (p-value=0.000). This difference was even greater among LGBTQI persons in the field sample. In the field sample, LGBTQI persons had, on average, a score of 30; while non-LGBTQI persons average score was 20, which is 50% higher (p-value=0.000). Both these findings indicate that LGBTQI persons in Macedonia experience higher levels of anxiety when in social interactions and situations.



**Figure 9. Social Interaction Anxiety Among LGBTQI and non-LGBTQI in Online and Field Sample**

\* Statistically significant different between LGBTQI and non-LGBTQI in Online Sample (p-value=0.000)

# Statistically significant different between LGBTQI and non-LGBTQI in Field Sample (p-value=0.000)

During the focus groups, these findings were corroborated by LGBTQI youth where many of them felt uncomfortable being out in public and that they also felt more comfortable when in a social setting with other LGBTQI persons.

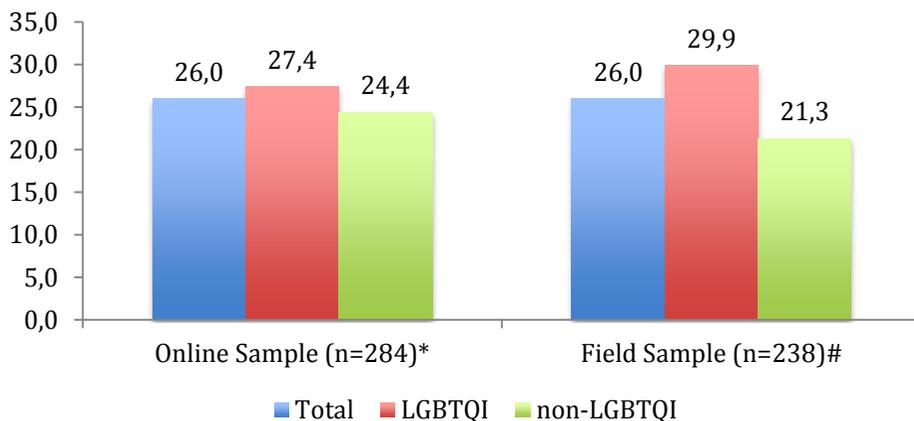
***“I have a problem with shame. My parents know about me, but none of the extended family knows. I thought it wouldn’t bother me, but it does. I don’t have a desire to interact with [them] since they don’t know me ...”***

This shows that in fact, youth do experience anxiety and lack the desire to interact with those who may not know about their sexual orientation or gender identity. This negatively impacts their ability to lead authentic lives and could have further negative mental health outcomes.

## 4.2.SELF-CONCEALMENT

In addition, to experiences of anxiety, many LGBTQI persons also have issues in the ability to lead open and authentic lives. There is a tendency to conceal one’s identity, particularly in countries and contexts with negative perceptions and conservative values.

Among the youth sampled in Macedonia, we found higher scores of self-concealment on the self-concealment scale (Figure 10). The highest potential score on this scale is 50 and as can be seen below, most youth score above the 50th percentile on the scale.



**Figure 10. Self-Concealment Among LGBTQI and non-LGBTQI in Online and Field Sample**

\* Statistically significant different between LGBTQI and non-LGBTQI in Online Sample (p-value=0.016)

# Statistically significant different between LGBTQI and non-LGBTQI in Field Sample (p-value=0.001)

LGBTQI youth in the online sample had, on average, a score of 27.4, while it was 24.4 for non-LGBTQI youth, accounting for a 12% difference (p-value=0.016). A greater disparity existed in the field-based sample. Youth in the field sample reported on average a score of 30 while non-LGBTQI youth had an average score of 21.3, a 40% difference (p-value=0.001).

Youth used self-concealment as a protective mechanism, especially in relation to their parents and family. Although youth described being open to their friends, particularly close ones, many reported not being “out” to their parents and family. Those who did share their sexual orientation or gender identity with their parents typically reported it being a negative sharing experience, which may shape their future decisions in “coming out” to others.

***“The moment is until you fit in my comfort zone and don’t stand out. So as long as we stay in that comfort zone, we don’t stand out and continue to work on our professional development and we are good and accepted.”***

There is also a lack of disclosure about sexual orientation and gender identity in the workplace due to the fear that one may suffer negative repercussions.

***“Hopeless. It affects the LGBTQI population in terms of not wanting to come out because they feel they can’t be protected. They don’t feel safe. And that is why people hide their true identity, to prevent this kind of [violent] situation.”***

In addition due to the lack of safety, high levels of discrimination, and violence experienced by LGBTQI many youths stated that they do not feel safe “coming out”.

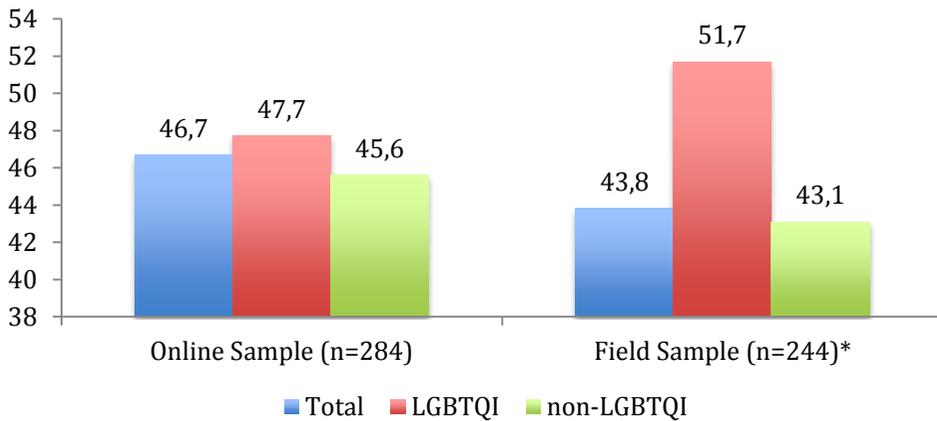
#### 4.3. RUMINATIVE RESPONSE

The ramifications of having to deal with bullying, discrimination, violence, self-concealment, and anxiety can be extremely negative on the mental health of those experiencing these things on a daily basis.

***“The psychological violence is much worse than the physical violence...the psychological will stay for the rest of the life, especially during the critical stages of development where the personality is formed. The violence doesn’t have to be physical in order to be scary.”***

In examining mental health outcomes through the ruminative response scale, a measure of coping and depression, we found that in fact LGBTQI youth had worse mental health outcomes, as compared to non-LGBTQI youth (Figure 11). The highest possible score on this scale is 88 and once more most LGBTQI youth had scores that put them above the 50th percentile.

In the online sample, LGBTQI youth scored 47.7 on the scale and non-LGBTQI youth scored 45.6, which is a 5%. However, this difference was not statistically significant ( $p$ -value $>0.05$ ). In the field-based sample, LGBTQI youth fared far worse. LGBTQI youth in the field sample had on average a score of 51.7 and non-LGBTQI youth had an average score of 43.1 ( $p$ -value=0.000). These differences accounted for a 20% difference indicating a higher percentage of LGBTQI youth having worse outcomes for depression and coping.



**Figure 11. Ruminative Response Scale Scores Among LGBTQI and non-LGBTQI in Online and Field Samples**

As the results show, LGBTQI youth face far worse depressive and coping outcomes than non-LGBTQI youth due to the discrimination and bullying they face on a daily basis, and as one youth described,

***“Every day you go to work, people would yell or comment, every day. If it happens from time to time it is not bad, but on a daily basis, it is really uncomfortable.”***

As seen in the findings above, LGBTQI youth living in Skopje, Macedonia experience tremendous amounts of negative societal pressure, discrimination, bullying, and violence. Living in this type of environment on a daily basis has negatively influenced their mental health outcomes. However, when one has social support, particularly among similar others, some of these negative outcomes can be softened. In the following section of the report, we explore the level of social cohesion among the LGBTQI population in order to examine levels of support within the community.

#### 4.4. CONNECTIONS TO LGBTQI COMMUNITY

The Connections to the LGBTQI Community Scale has a total possible score of 40 and measures the level of social cohesion and connected among those in the community.

As shown below, on average, LGBTQI youth scored 22.8 (online sample) and 22.0 (field sample), which falls slightly above the 50th percentile (Table 2). There was variation among the LGBTQI subgroups, with youth who identified as gay or lesbian having higher scores, and bisexual youth having the lowest scores.

Population	Online Sample (n=156)		Field Sample (n=27)	
	N	Mean	N	Mean
LGBTQI	156	22.8	17	22.0
Gay	73	23.3	4	25.8
Lesbian	21	24.9	1	22.0
Bisexual	50	21.4	10	21.8
Transgender	11	24.0	1	22.0

*Table 2. LGBTQI Community Connection Scale Scores by LGBTQI Subgroup in Online and Field Sample*

Although the average score on the connections to LGBTQI community scale was above the 50th percentile, during the focus groups many youths spoke negatively about the community in Macedonia. In addition, youth did not agree about ways to improve and advance LGBTQI rights in the country. It seems that LGBTQI youth have internalized the greater societal sentiment toward LGBTQI persons in the country.

*“Another question is the Gay Parade. I think that here, gay parades serve only to poke one’s eye. The name itself denotes celebrate, a celebration of something that has been already accepted like it is the case in other countries. We are not at that level of acceptance yet. And what happens at the parades, it reflects only a piece on some micro level of how we present ourselves.”*

As the quote above shows, youth themselves are not comfortable with the Gay Parade, which globally has been used as a tool in advocacy and advancing the rights of LGBTQI persons. However, youth in Macedonia do not feel comfortable with this and, in fact, feel that it is a provocative gesture toward the general population and does not help to support their cause. As noted earlier, LGBTQI youth tend to self-conceal more than non-LGBTQI youth and a consequence of this may be discomfort with public displays of community and identification with the community, which can be seen below:

*“I have more problem within the LGBT circles. I don’t know; LGBT people are weird. When you say you are gay, for an example, they like to know more and more about you, or they gossip a lot.”*

#### 4.5. PERCEPTIONS OF LGBTQI COMMUNITY

During the research, the team also examined the perceptions of LGBTQI persons among those who do not identify with the community (i.e. straight or non-LGBTQI persons). Using the Perceptions of LGBTQI Community Scale, an 18-question scale with a total score of 90 points, we examined how straight people perceived the LGBTQI community in Macedonia.

In the online sample, only ten persons completed the Perceptions of LGBTQI Community Scale and therefore we will not report on those findings here, as they would not be appropriate and representative of the greater Macedonia population. However, in the random field-based sample a total of 219 persons completed this scale. Among the field-based sample, the average score was 57.3, which is around the 60th percentile. This may show that there is some tolerance toward the LGBTQI community in Skopje, but not necessarily indicative of acceptance.

## **5. DISCUSSION**

Overall this research study is important and identifies that LGBTQI youth living in Macedonia face high levels of discrimination and bullying and that they also face high levels of physical violence and lack the ability to feel safe. Due to these factors, these youth face negative psychosocial outcomes such as increased depressive sentiments, higher levels of self-concealment, and anxiety. To date, little research in this area has been completed in East and Southeastern Europe. These findings overall show that programs to help support the community, including improving their mental health and psychosocial wellbeing are important.

As seen on the discrimination scale, LGBTQI youth experienced higher levels of everyday discrimination as compared to their non-LGBTQI counterparts that was 28% higher in the field-based sample and two times higher in the online sample. In addition, LGBTQI youth has higher scores on the Self-Concealment and Social Interaction Anxiety Scales as compared to non-LGBTQI youth. Furthermore, on the Ruminative Response Scale, a measure of depressive symptomology LGBTQI had higher average scores. LGBTQI youth's perceptions from the focus groups also provided support to the quantitative findings. Youth described how they did not feel safe in Macedonia and was under constant threats of discrimination and violence, which negatively influenced their ability to lead authentic lives, and negatively influences their mental health and overall wellbeing.

In addition, the findings also showed that use of a random field-based sampling strategy yielded small samples of LGBTQI youth, a target group that is typically hard to reach. This supports the fact that different sampling strategies such as snowball sampling, convenience sampling, and respondent driven sampling are needed in order to elucidate hard-to-reach populations. The online sampling strategy used a convenience and snowball sampling strategy in order to reach LGBTQI youth and receive their perspectives, which otherwise would not have been included.

However, the randomized field-based sampling strategy among non-LGBTQI persons indicated that there are some positive perceptions toward LGBTQI youth in Skopje, but that there may not necessarily be acceptance of

the community. Findings from the online survey could not be used in assessing this measure because only ten persons completed the Perceptions of the LGBTQI Community scale.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

LGBTQI youth living in Skopje, Macedonia face discrimination, bullying, and violence on a daily basis. These constant barrages of physical and psychological violence and abuse have severe negative consequences on their mental health and overall wellbeing.

## **7. RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Recommendation 1: Identify ways to increase social cohesion within the LGBTQI youth community living in Skopje, Macedonia.** In order to allow youth to feel comfortable with their sexual orientation and gender identify support systems are needed. By improving social cohesion among similar others, LGBTQI youth may be able to combat the internalization of societal discrimination.

**Recommendation 2: Explore ways to improve mental health services for LGBTQI youth living in Skopje, Macedonia.** As noted earlier, we discovered that LGBTQI youth had worse psychosocial outcomes such as depressive symptomology and coping. LGBTQI civic society organizations should identify psychologists and therapists who are LGBTQI friendly and may be able to provide mental health services to youth who need them.

**Recommendation 3: Continue to advocate for anti-discrimination laws to include protection against discrimination and violence against LGBTQI persons.** As seen earlier, LGBTQI youth experienced higher levels of discrimination and violence as compared to non-LGBTQI youth. Youth also stated that they do not feel that the government wants to protect them against such discrimination and violence. Advocate and human rights groups should continue to lobby for legal protections against discrimination and hate crimes due to sexual orientation and gender identity.

**Recommendation 4: Conduct educational campaigns with the general public and teachers about sexual orientation and gender identity, using up to date information and literature.** Youth stated that because many people have never interacted with LGBTQI youth, they do not fully understand the community, the issues they face, nor their needs. In order to help address this issue, civil society organizations should explore using public education campaigns about the issues LGBTQI persons face. Special education for teachers

should be conducted to help them in supporting their students and teaching information that is up to date and correct.

## 8. GLOSSARY

**Bisexual** - A person who is sexually and emotionally attracted from persons from the both sexes.

**Discrimination** - Any distinction, exclusion, restriction and every form of putting a person or group of persons at a disadvantage on some basis. Bases or characteristics on which a person or group of persons is put in unfavorable position are varied and can include: sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, gender, age, race, ethnicity and / or nationality, religion, political affiliation, etc. Discrimination can be direct or indirect, institutionalized discrimination, and discrimination on multiple grounds. Bullying, sexual harassment, mobbing, and segregation are also forms of discrimination.

**Gay man** - A man who is sexually and emotionally attracted exclusively to a person of the same sex - another man. Due to the historical burden of the term *homosexual*, the use of this neutral term is recommended.

**Gender** - As a social construct of sex, gender is a category that refers to economic, social and cultural attributes which the biologically born bodies acquire. As an individual construct of one's own identity / expression, the gender confirms, denies and / or exceeds the socially assigned and formed sex and gender roles of men and women, as well as the whole binary basis of *male* and *female*.

**Gender identity** - It refers to the personal feeling and personal perception of gender, which may or may not necessarily correspond with the sex assigned at birth. This includes the personal experience of the body and other gender expressions such as clothing, speech, gestures, and mannerisms.

**Heteronormativity** - The assumption that all people are heterosexual, i.e. that heterosexuality is perfect and superior to homosexuality and bisexuality. Heteronormativity is an opposition towards homosexuality and bisexuality, which is practiced at a systematic level (political and economic system, culture, society) and results in systematic rejection, exclusion, and oppression of non-heterosexual identities and sexual behaviors.

**Heterosexual** - A person who is sexually and emotionally attracted to a person of the opposite sex.

**Homophobia** - Irrational fear, intolerance, hatred, prejudice and / or discrimination against gays and lesbians. Homophobia manifests itself as undisputed belief in the superiority of heterosexuality which is promoted by the cultural and institutional social practices. This belief begets violence toward

non-heterosexual persons which in turn, is reflected in the physical and verbal attacks on them, discrimination in employment, paying taxes, retirement, etc.

**Homosexual** - Outdated clinical term for those who are sexually and / or emotionally attracted to people of the same sex. The term is inappropriate and offensive to many gay men and lesbians.

**Intersex** - A person born with chromosomal, hormonal or genital characteristics that do not correspond to the set standards of *male* and *female* categories due to their sexual and reproductive anatomy. This term has replaced the term *hermaphrodite* which today is considered inaccurate and insulting. Intersexuality may receive various forms and include various positions of intersex people.

**Lesbian** - A woman who is sexually and emotionally attracted by a person of the same sex. *Lesbian* is one of the oldest and most positive terms for homosexual women, which in the lesbian feminist theory does not only mean a sexual identity that resists conventional gender expectations of women, but also a social and political identity built in opposition to male chauvinism, patriarchy, heterosexism, and phallocentrism.

**LGBT** - Umbrella term used to denote the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons. It can be extended to include queer and intersex people (LGBTQ).

**Misogyny** - Hatred towards women or the female gender in general.

**Patriarchy** - Social system in which men have a dominant role in relation to women. The patriarchal system of values and social norms creates the basis which the existing system of relations of power and privilege that are continually assigned to men is built upon.

**Queer** - This term primarily relates to everything that differs from conventional in a certain unusual way (synonymous for strange, eccentric). Initially, the term had offensive meaning for non-heterosexual people and today is used for subversive denouncing of existing almost fixed models, and by that rejecting the differences and the identities. With this, all LGBTI persons, without distinction, are covered by this term, and none of LGBT identities enjoys the preferential and privileged position. This term denotes defiance to heteropatriarchal norms.

**Sexism** - Discrimination and/or attitudes and behavior that promote the stereotypes and repressive social roles and norms based on somebody's sex/gender. и однесување кои ги промовираат стереотипите и репресивните општествени улоги и норми засновани на нечиј пол/род.

**Sexual orientation** - Emotional and/or sexual attractedness сексуална привлечност кон, како и способност за интимни и сексуални односи со лица од ист пол, различен пол или повеќе од два пола.

**Straight** - It means something *straight*, *without deviation*, something *non-mixed* but something *conventional*, which does not deviate from the norms which are accepted as *usual*, *normal* and *natural*. It is also a neutral term for heterosexuals people.

**Transgender people** - General term that refers to people whose gender identity and / or gender expression differ from the sex they are assigned at birth. The term can include transgender and intersex people, transvestites and people with other gender variants, but is not limited only to them.

**Transphobia** - Irrational fear, intolerance, hatred, prejudice and / or discrimination against transgender people.

## 9. ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Kristefer Stojanovski** has focused his career at the intersection of health and human rights, examining how systems and programs could be improved to meet the needs of marginalized populations, particularly in an international context. In his work with Subversive Front, he provide technical assistance on research methodology and analyzed data for the SOGI bullying and discrimination project. He does much of his research examining health outcomes of sexual and racial minorities, particularly in Southeastern Europe. Kristefer spent time living in Macedonia as a the United States, Department of State Fulbright fellow where he worked with the country's vulnerable LGBTQ population. He has also worked as a consultant with the World Bank, the World Health Organization, Rutgers University, and other non-governmental organizations in the Balkans. Kristefer holds master degrees in epidemiology and health management and policy from the University of Michigan. He is also an Associate Member of the European Academic Network on Roma Studies, and has presented and published his work in international conferences and peer-reviewed journals.

**Jovana Gjorgjiovska** is an undergraduate student of Psychology at the University of "St. Cyril and Methodius" in Skopje, Macedonia. Currently, she is involved in several international research projects, on topics spanning from emotional intelligence to trends in statistical methods in psychological research studies. Apart from her commitment to academic and professional excellence, she is an active member of Youth Educational Forum.

**Antonio Mihajlov** is one of the founders of the association for a critical approach to gender and sexuality Subversive Front Skopje, and its current president. Before he became LGBTI activist in 2012, Antonio, who is an e-business specialist, worked in the software industry in Norway, and Internet marketing in Belgium and Finland. He is currently enrolled at the master's degree program in gender studies at the Institute for social sciences and humanities - Skopje. His interests cover advocacy for the rights of LGBTI, training and education on LGBTI, and research on issues related to LGBTI.

## 10. ABOUT SUBVERSIVE FRONT

The association for critical approach to gender and sexuality SUBVERSIVE FRONT Skopje, established in June 2013, works on promotion of critical, non-patriarchal approach to gender and sexuality, to opening non-homophobic debate for the rights of the people who do not identify with the dominant heteronormative values, on policies and strategies for creating favourable social and political climate for these people, as well as on creating an organic and organized queer and LGBTI community that would be motivated to actively participate in the campaign for equal rights.

Subversive Front works in 5 strategic areas:

- Advocacy for the rights of the LGBTI
- Research and policies for LGBTI
- Training and education for LGBTI
- Provision of free services of legal counseling, and psychosocial support and counseling for LGBTI
- Fundraising for LGBTI projects and initiatives

More information about Subversive Front can be found at:

**Web:** [www.s-front.org.mk](http://www.s-front.org.mk) **Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/SubversiveFront](http://www.facebook.com/SubversiveFront)

**Twitter:** @SubversiveFront