



GREEK PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARD SEXUALITY EDUCATION AND SEXUAL DIVERSITY

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Abstract:

This study explores Greek parents' perceptions and attitudes towards homosexual and transgender children, as well as sexuality education. The sample consisted of 52 parents, recruited based on availability. The findings indicate that most parents believe that children should begin learning about diverse sexualities until the age of 15, preferably between 12 and 13 years old. Over half of the participants reported frequently engaging in discussions with their children about both their own sexuality and the sexuality of others. Additionally, nearly all parents expressed a desire to know what their children are taught about sexual diversity at school. Almost half of the parents reported a lack of awareness about where young people struggling with LGBT+ issues can find support and expressed a willingness to learn more about LGBT+ issues. Interestingly, about half of the parents stated that they would feel more comfortable around other homosexual and transgender children rather than with their own children if they identified as homosexual or transgender. This study offers valuable insights into sexuality education and sexual diversity from the perspectives of parents.

Keywords: parents, sexuality education, sexual diversity, Greece

1. Introduction

Greece's ancient past is closely associated with same-sex relationships. However, the concept of homosexuality and its accompanying practices did not carry the same meaning as they do in contemporary societies (Chiou & Sideri, 2022). As Foucault argues

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in *The History of Sexuality* (1976), homosexuality is a modern construct that emerged in the 19th century, shaped by the scientific and social discourse of the time.

The establishment of the Greek nation-state in the 1830's "*required the de-sexing of the ancient Greek past in the process of crafting a sanitized, heteronormative and patriarchal polity in line with its Victorian-era counterparts in Europe*" (Papadopoulos, 2002, p. 910). Within this framework, the Greek society of the 19th and 20th centuries was characterized by the dominance of patriarchy, an emphasis on masculinity, and the control of female and effeminate sexuality, as well as by hostility against different sexual identities, perceiving them to be a threat within an environment of established normativity and legalized heterosexuality (Chiou & Sideri, 2022). It is not surprising, thus, that LGBT+ activism didn't emerge in Greece until the 1970s, and legal rights, such as cohabitation legal agreements, same-sex marriage, children's adoption, and legal recognition of gender identity without medical surgery, were only granted to LGBT+ people within the past fifteen years. Despite the Greek legislation alterations against discrimination and hate speech, homophobia and transphobia persist in contemporary Greek society.

Regarding sexuality education, it was first incorporated into the non-compulsory Health Education Programs in 1995 (Gerouki, 2011) and subsequently in the major educational reform of 2003 (Government Gazette of the Hellenic Republic, 2003). The Health Education Programs introduced interdisciplinary learning activities organized across nine thematic axes, one of which specifically addressed "Sexuality Education–Gender Relationships." In addition, elements of sexuality education-related issues are also integrated into primary education textbooks of "Environmental Studies" and of "Science," and into "Biology" and "Home Economics" courses of lower secondary education curricula and textbooks. Textbook analysis showed that in these textbooks, the content related to sexuality education remains notably limited, with a predominant emphasis on the biological aspects of sexuality. Issues, such as gender and sexual diversity, are largely overlooked. Consequently, the curriculum does not support students' awareness of diverse gender identities and sexualities, nor does it encourage inclusive behaviors that would promote respect for sexual diversity both within the school community and in society at large (Chiou & Sideri, 2022). Further advancements occurred in the educational reform of 2020, when the Ministry of Education launched sexuality education as a compulsory element of the national school curricula within the framework of Skills Workshops.

2. Literature review

The concept of heteronormativity, along with historically prevalent health views that classified homosexuality as a mental or pathological disorder, has likely influenced societal and individuals' perceptions and behaviour towards homosexual and transgender people. This might have affected the various roles we perform in our everyday life as parents, relatives, friends, teachers, employers and so on. In this frame, despite the increasing trends in acceptance of homosexuality and LGBT+ issues in

contemporary society, it appears to be still difficult for parents who have grown up and socialised in a heterosexist and homophobic culture to avoid being influenced by some of the negative messages about diverse sexualities.

Research has demonstrated that parents, upon realising that their child is gay, lesbian, or bisexual, often go through a series of emotional and cognitive processes (Chrisler, 2025), expressing positive, negative, and/or mixed feelings (Clark *et al.*, 2022). Among these diverse feelings, parents often exhibit a wide range of emotional responses, including shock, fear, shame, anger, and sadness (D'Augelli *et al.*, 2010; Graftsky, 2014). Moreover, a range of factors is likely to influence parents' reactions to their child coming out, including their personal values (Chrisler, 2025), religious values (Rosenkrantz, 2018; Rosenkrantz *et al.*, 2019), geographical location of residence (e.g., characterized by conservatism), and cultural context, as well as homophobic legislation (Estep & Mirman, 2022).

However, it is important to note that studies in this field indicate that many parents acknowledge the importance and relevance of sexuality education in their children's lives, and, consequently, they agree that it should be part of the educational programs in schools. Van Leent and Moran (2023) emphasised that a segment of parents in the Australian primary education context expressed an expectation for the normalization of gender and sexual diversity through relationships and sexuality education (RSE). In a related study, Moran & Van Leent (2021) found that parents expressed uncertainty about the content of the RSE that their children were receiving at school, while they acknowledged that they were unaware of the available resources to them on sexuality-related issues. Within the same educational landscape, Robinson *et al.* (2017) reported that a majority of parents endorsed the incorporation of sexuality education in the primary school curriculum, suggesting the potential for collaboration between schools and families in this area.

Looking beyond Australia, Rashikj-Canevska *et al.* (2023), examining the perspectives of parents of children with disabilities in the Republic of North Macedonia, found that 57% of respondents supported the integration of sexuality education in schools. However, some of them appeared unsure about the appropriate age at which such education should begin. In the Ghanaian context, Oti-Boandi *et al.* (2023) reported that parents of children with developmental disabilities, despite lacking training on how to educate their children on sexuality-related issues, exhibited a positive attitude toward sexuality education for their children.

A systematic review of European parents' experiences concerning their children's sexuality education highlighted that parents perceived schools as important institutions for supporting their children's sexuality education. However, the same study suggested that parents would likely benefit from additional support to effectively communicate about sexuality-related issues with their children (Noorman *et al.*, 2022). Parental unpreparedness, along with feelings of embarrassment and discomfort, was found to affect parents' communication with their children in regard to sexuality education issues (Turnbull *et al.*, 2008).

Following the first integration of a comprehensive sexuality education module in the Croatian education context, Igor *et al.* (2015) revealed that a majority of parents, particularly those with children in primary education, younger parents and mothers, showed a positive attitude toward sexuality education. Similarly, in the Irish context, Kelleher *et al.* (2013) highlighted that women tend to show more involvement in their children's sexuality education compared to men.

In Greece, Kakavoulis (2010) reported that parents expressed support for the introduction of sexuality education from an early age and underscored the need for good training for people involved in their children's sexuality education. This study also noted that Greek families generally lack the adequate resources to support their children's sexuality education. Likewise, Kirana *et al.* (2007) found that most Greek parents endorsed the idea that sexuality education should start before adolescence, with a majority of them believing that school is not adequate for providing it. Despite acknowledging their discomfort in discussing sexuality-related issues with their children, the majority of parents admitted that they do so. Interestingly, the same study revealed that a majority of school coordinators believed that parents were slightly sensitized toward the sexuality education of their children.

3. Methodology

3.1 The focus of this study

This study was part of a wider cross-national research conducted in the frame of the KA2 Erasmus+ Project entitled "All Inc! Building LGBT+ friendly schools across Europe" (<https://allinc.eu/>) in Belgium, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Poland, the Netherlands, Spain and the United Kingdom. The aim of the All Inc! Project (2020-2023) was to promote inclusive education in secondary schools by engaging the members of school communities in co-creating a vision for more friendly LGBT+ schools in cooperation with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the partner countries (Holz & Geunis, 2021).

The aforementioned research aimed to investigate the views and attitudes of pupils, teachers, and parents as well as pre-service teachers and lecturers at the university on LGBT+ issues through structured questionnaires designed separately for each target group.

In this paper, we present the views and attitudes of Greek parents on LGBT+ issues and sexuality education. Thereby, this study aims to address the following research questions:

- What are parents' views and attitude toward sexuality diversity?
- What are parents' views and attitude toward sexuality education?

3.2 Research tool

For research purposes, a structured questionnaire, consisting of three sections, was distributed to parents, using a 5-point Likert scale, and one multiple-choice question with

a single correct answer. It aimed at exploring parents' views and attitudes on diverse sexualities and sexuality education.

The first section of the questionnaire included demographic questions regarding parents' gender, age, level of studies, number of children, and civil status. The second section consisted of nine items regarding parents' views on LGBT+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender plus other identities or expressions of sexualities not covered by these terms). The third section consisted of ten items, exploring parenting and LGBT+ issues.

3.3 Procedure

Parents were recruited through the students' schools participating in the All Inc! Project, as well as via social media platforms and personal contacts. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed about the confidentiality and anonymity of their data prior to completing the questionnaire.

3.4 Participants

A total of fifty-two (52) parents participated in the study. The first section of the questionnaire collected demographic information, including gender, age, level of studies, number of children, and civil status. Of the total sample, 15 identified as men and 37 as women. In terms of age, 3.8% of parents were aged 30-39 years, 76.9% were aged 40-49 years, and 19.2% were aged 50 years or older. The majority of parents had completed tertiary-level studies, with 30.8% holding a bachelor's degree, 40.4% holding a master's degree, and 5.8% possessing a Ph.D. In contrast, 21.2% of parents had completed secondary school or vocational training, and only 1.9% had attended primary education. Regarding the number of children, most parents (74.5%) had two children, 15.4% had one child, and 9.6% had three children, while one participant did not provide a response. With respect to civil status, 73.1% of participants were married, 25% were divorced, and 1.9% reported being in a civil partnership.

4. Results

This section presents the findings regarding parents' views and attitudes toward sexuality diversity and sexuality education. Specifically, the second section of the questionnaire explored parents' views on LGBT+ issues and included eight statements, along with one multiple-choice question with a single correct answer.

The multiple-choice question addressed the appropriate age at which children should begin learning about diverse sexualities. As illustrated in Table 1, nearly half of the parents (57.7%) indicated that children should learn about different sexualities during adolescence, preferably between the ages of 12 and 13. The remaining parents supported the introduction of learning about sexual diversity at a younger ages. Notably, 21.2% of the parents believed that learning about diverse sexualities should start before the age of 8.

Table 1: Parents' views on the age of learning about different sexualities

	N	%
Under age 8	11	21,2
8-9	3	5,8
10-11	8	15,4
12-13	16	30,8
14-15	8	15,4
>16	6	11,5
Total	52	100,0

Table 2 presents the results concerning parents' views on LGBT+ issues, including gender-based variations. One aspect examined was parents' comfort level with LGBT+ individuals. Participants were asked to indicate their comfort with seeing two women and two men kissing on the lips in the street, as well as their comfort with homosexual and transgender boys and girls. The findings revealed that, overall, parents expressed lower levels of comfort with same-sex public displays of affection. Specifically, only a cumulative 30.8% of participants reported feeling comfortable or very comfortable with two women kissing on the lips, while 32.7% of them expressed a neutral stance, indicating neither agreement nor disagreement. When asked about their comfort with two men kissing on the lips in public, an even smaller cumulative percentage of respondents (28.8%) reported feeling comfortable or very comfortable. Moreover, fewer respondents (23.1%) expressed a neutral opinion in this case compared to the scenario involving two women kissing.

The results concerning participants' comfort with homosexual boys and girls indicate that a cumulative 56.8% expressed agreement or strong agreement with the statement, suggesting a generally positive level of comfort. In contrast, a lower cumulative percentage (46.2%) reported similar levels of comfort with transgender boys and girls. Additionally, 21.6% of participants selected "neither disagree nor agree" in relation to homosexual boys and girls, compared to 26.9% for transgender boys and girls. Participants were also asked to share their views regarding children's learning about diverse sexualities at school. The majority of participants (73.1%) agreed or strongly agreed that children should learn about different sexualities at school, while approximately 10% chose a neutral response, selecting "neither disagree nor agree."

The findings further revealed that only 25% of parents reported being aware of where a young person struggling with LGBT+ issues can turn for support. In contrast, nearly half of the parents (44.2%) indicated disagreement or strong disagreement with this statement, suggesting a notable lack of awareness of resources, organizations, or people who support LGBT+ individuals. To better support young LGBT+ individuals, a cumulative 51.9% expressed their desire to learn more about LGBT+ issues. However, a cumulative 30.8% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

Regarding participation in school activities related to LGBT+ topics, only 36.6% of parents expressed interest. In contrast, 30.8% reported no interest, while 32.7% selected a neutral response ("neither disagree nor agree").

Finally, mean estimates calculated by gender criteria showed that, across all statements, male participants reported lower average levels of agreement than female participants.

Table 2: Parents' views on LGBT+

	1	2	3	4	5	Mean (men)	Mean (women)
1. I would feel comfortable seeing two women kissing on the lips in the street	9.6%	26.9%	32.7%	17.3%	13.5%	2.67	3.11
2. I would feel comfortable seeing two men kissing on the lips in the street.	15.4%	32.7%	23.1%	17.3%	11.5%	2.13	3.03
3. I think children should learn about different sexualities (heterosexuals, homosexuals, bisexuals, transgender people and others) in school.	5.8%	11.5%	9.6%	23.1%	50%	3.67	4.14
4. I feel comfortable with homosexual boys and girls	5.9%	15.7%	21.6%	17.6%	39.2%	3.53	3.75
5. I feel comfortable with transgender boys and girls.	9.6%	17.3%	26.9%	23.1%	23.1%	3.20	3.38
6. When I think a young person is struggling with LGBT+ issues, I know where they can turn for support.	17.3%	26.9%	30.6%	17.3%	7.7%	2.87	3.62
7. I would like to learn more about LGBT+ issues myself, so that I can better support young LGBT+ people.	9.6%	21.2%	17.3%	23.1%	28.8%	2.4	2.84
8. If the school organises activities around LGBT+ issues (storytelling evenings, theatre, student debates, info evenings) I would be interested in participating	15.4%	15.4%	32.7%	13.5%	23.1%	2.6	3.35

The third section of the questionnaire examined parents' views on parenting in relation to LGBT+ and included ten statements. The findings indicate that a significant majority of parents (a cumulative 90.2%) stated that they want to know what their children are taught about different sexualities in school. However, only 35.3% of the participants believed that schools should ask their permission before teaching their children about sexuality diversity.

The results also showed that a cumulative 58.8% of participants reported that they often or very often talk about other people's sexuality with their children. This percentage decreases slightly to 56.8% when the focus shifts to discussions about their children's own sexuality. It is somewhat surprising that many parents appear willing to discuss freely sexuality issues with their children, while simultaneously expressing discomfort with the possibility of their own children being homosexual or transgender.

Parents were also asked about their level of comfort regarding their child having a homosexual, heterosexual and transgender friend as well as their comfort with their child identifying as heterosexual, homosexual or transgender. By estimating cumulative

percentages of varying degrees of agreement or disagreement, the results indicate that the majority of participants (60.8%) were either comfortable or very comfortable with the idea of their child having a homosexual friend. This percentage increased significantly when the friend was heterosexual (86.3%) but decreased notably in the case of a transgender friend (43.2%), suggesting that attitudes towards transgender individuals remain cautious.

However, when parents were asked about their comfort with their child's own sexual identity, the results were much different with the exception of a heterosexual child. In this case, 82.4% of parents expressed comfort with their child identifying as heterosexual. In contrast, only 41.2% expressed their agreement and strong agreement in regard to their comfort with their child identifying as homosexual, while an even smaller percentage (27.5%) expressed comfort with the possibility of their child identifying as transgender. These findings suggest that while parents may express a degree of comfort toward the sexual identities of their children's peers, they are less accepting of diverse sexualities within their own families.

The mean estimate shows how parents' views on parenting and LGBT+ issues vary by gender. The results indicate that, in nine out of ten statements, the average mean for men is lower than that of women. The only exception was the statement "I think the school should ask my permission before teaching my child about different sexualities", where the mean score for men was higher than for women.

Table 3: Parents' views on parenting and LGBT+ issues

	1	2	3	4	5	Mean (men)	Mean (women)
1. I want to know what my child is taught about different sexualities in school	2%	2%	5.9%	19.6%	70.6%	4.33	4.64
2. I think the school should ask my permission before teaching my child about different sexualities.	19.6%	21.6%	23.5%	21.6%	13.7%	3.07	2.81
3. I talk to my children about their sexuality.	2%	13.7%	27.5%	33.3%	23.5%	3.00	3.86
4. I talk to my child about other people's sexuality.	5.9%	11.8%	23.5%	33.3%	25.5%	3.27	3.78
5. I would be comfortable with my child having a homosexual friend.	7.8%	11.8%	19.6%	21.6%	39.2%	3.47	3.83
6. I would be comfortable with my child having a heterosexual friend.	0%	5.9%	7.8%	15.7%	70%	4.40	4.56
7. I would be comfortable with my child having a transgender friend.	13.7%	19.6%	23.5%	15.7%	27.5%	2.73	3.44
8. I would be comfortable with my child being homosexual	17.6%	21.6%	19.6%	21.6%	19.6%	2.53	3.25
9. I would be comfortable with my child being transgender	25.5%	25.5%	21.6%	15.7%	11.8%	2.27	2.78
10. I would be comfortable with my child being heterosexual	2%	7.8%	7.8%	11.8%	70.6%	4.20	4.50

5. Discussion

This paper explores Greek parents' views and attitudes toward sexuality diversity as well as sexuality education. The findings revealed that most of the parents, to varying degrees, agreed that children should learn about diverse sexualities at school, an indication that parents acknowledge the important role that schools play in sexuality education. This result is consistent with the findings of similar studies (Igor *et al.*, 2015; Noorman *et al.*, 2022; Rashikj-Canevska *et al.*, 2023; Robinson *et al.*, 2017; Van Leent & Moran, 2023). However, a significant majority of parents also expressed a desire to be informed about what their children are being taught about different sexualities in school. Interestingly, 35.3% of the participants believed that schools should ask their permission before teaching their child about diverse sexualities.

Regarding the age for learning about sexualities, approximately half of the parents stated that children should start learning about diverse sexualities during their teenage years, preferably between the ages of 12 and 13. A smaller group of parents supported the idea of learning about diverse sexualities before the age of 8. Similar findings have been reported in other studies, which show parental support for the integration of sexuality education at early ages (Igor *et al.*, 2015; Kakavoulis, 2010; Kirana *et al.*, 2007; Robinson *et al.*, 2017).

The results also revealed that nearly half of the participants were unaware of where a young person struggling with LGBT+ issues could turn for support. This finding probably explains why almost half of the parents were supportive of the idea to learn more about LGBT+ issues. Similarly, Kakavoulis (2010) found that parents in his study believed Greek families often lack the requirements to support their children's sexuality education. However, it is noteworthy in our study that only 36.6% of the parents were interested in participating in school activities related to LGBT+ issues, which may suggest that some parents separate their role from the school's role or that they feel uncomfortable engaging in such school activities. Nevertheless, more than half of the parents reported that they often talk to their children about their own sexuality or other people's sexuality. These results align with those of Kirana *et al.* (2007), who noted that, despite their discomfort, Greek parents discuss sexuality-related issues with their children. In the same study, school coordinators also observed that Greek parents were generally slightly sensitized toward the sexuality education of their children.

The results regarding parents' comfort levels are also of particular interest. When asked about their comfort with seeing two women or two men kissing on the lips in the street, only about one-third of them reported feeling comfortable. A difference was observed in parental comfort with same-sex displays of affection, expressing slightly more acceptance toward women than men. Notably, although fewer participants reported feeling comfortable with public displays of same-sex affection, a higher percentage expressed comfort with homosexual and transgender boys and girls broadly. This discrepancy suggests that while many parents may accept homosexual and

transgender individuals, they feel less comfortable with the public expression of affection by same-sex couples.

The majority of participants reported feeling comfortable with their child having a heterosexual friend, but fewer expressed comfort if the friend was homosexual and even fewer if the friend was transgender. This finding suggests that there is still at least a skepticism regarding LGBT+ individuals. This skepticism becomes stronger when it concerns their own child. While 82.4% of parents stated they would be comfortable with their child identifying as heterosexual, this percentage dropped significantly for a homosexual child (41.2%) and even further for a transgender child (27.5%). These findings reveal that while parents are somewhat accepting of sexuality diversity, including the different sexuality of their children's friends, they are far less accepting when it comes to their children and their own family. This may be due to the lack of control and security that parents expect to "feel as their life moves in a direction they had not anticipated and did not feel prepared for" (Horton, 2023, p. 241). Similarly, previous research has shown that it is a common phenomenon for parents to have a generally positive relationship with their child but systematically avoid thinking or talking about their child's same-sex orientation (Kibrik *et al.*, 2019).

It is also noteworthy that, throughout the questionnaire, women-mothers' views and attitudes were more positive than those of men-fathers. This is consistent with prior research showing women to be more involved in their children's sexuality education compared to men (Kelleher *et al.*, 2013).

6. Limitations

The findings of the present study offer valuable insights into Greek parents' perceptions of sexuality education and sexuality diversity. However, the results cannot be generalized due to methodological constraints and the small sample size. We suggest that future research include a larger, more representative sample to enhance the sample's power when analyzing patterns and correlations. Additionally, it is possible that the participants in this study were supportive of the creation of LGBT+ friendly schools in Greece.

We further recommend that future studies exploring parental attitudes toward diverse sexualities and sexuality education employ qualitative methodologies as a tool for in-depth analysis of the factors that might influence parents' attitudes in this domain.

Conflict of Interest Statement

This study was part of a wider cross-national research conducted in the frame of the KA2 Erasmus+ Project entitled "All Inc! Building LGBT+ friendly schools across Europe" (<https://allinc.eu/>)

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