

Investigation article

## HOMOPHOBIA: A PRELIMINARY DIAGNOSIS OF A PENDING SUBJECT

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### ABSTRACT

IN CUBA, THERE ARE VERY FEW SCIENTIFIC STUDIES BASED ON HOW HOMOPHOBIA IS EXPRESSED. THE CURRENT RESEARCH AIMS TO DO A HOMOPHOBIA DIAGNOSIS AMONG 210 SELECTED PEOPLE IN ORDER TO KNOW, FIRSTLY, WHAT THEY UNDERSTAND BY HOMOPHOBIA; SECONDLY, HOW MANY OF THEM HAVE BEEN VICTIMS OR WITNESSES OF IT; AND LASTLY, IN WHICH WAY THEY HAVE EXPERIENCED IT (I.E., WHERE, WHEN, HOW, BY WHOM, THE EFFECTS AT PERSONAL LEVEL, AND THEIR REACTIONS). TO THIS EFFECT, A QUESTIONNAIRE, FROM A QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE PERSPECTIVE, TO MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITARIAN SOCIAL NETWORKS OF THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR SEXUAL EDUCATION AND SOME COLLABORATORS HAS BEEN CARRIED OUT. IT AIMS TO BE THE FIRST PART OF A WIDER RESEARCH PROCESS ALLOWING A PROPOSAL FOR A SYSTEM OF ACTIONS TO TRANSFORM THIS SOCIAL PHENOMENON, GIVEN THAT MORE THAN 80% QUESTIONED PEOPLE HAVE BEEN WITNESSES OF HOMOPHOBIC ACTIONS AND ALMOST 90% OF LESBIANS, GAYS, BISEXUALS AND TRANS PEOPLE (LGBT) HAVE EXPERIENCED IT. IN THIS SAMPLE, THE MAIN PROBLEM OF HOMOPHOBIA IS EXPRESSED BY MOCKERIES AND INSULTS FROM PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT ACQUAINTED WITH THE VICTIMS.

KEY WORDS: HOMOPHOBIA, SEXUAL ORIENTATION, GENDER IDENTITY

## INTRODUCTION

Since ancient times, discrimination due to sexual orientation has traversed a rough path. The mere expression of a non-heterosexual erotic-affective orientation in the search for pleasure and emotional fulfillment has brought about all kinds of reactions in different cultures and at different times, from deification to burning at the stake or lapidating. In this regard, Cuba has not been an exception.

The Cuban people, heirs of an ancient patriarchal culture like many other countries in the region, have experienced moments of blatant intolerance against non-heteronormative sexualities. However, for some years now, steps have been taken to work in favor of a free and responsible sexual orientation and gender identity. Therefore, since 2007, several Cuban Days against Homophobia and Trans-phobia have been celebrated to promote sexual diversity.

Despite the 8th Cuban Edition against Homophobia and Trans-phobia held this year, it is still not known for sure how homophobia is expressed among Cubans: What is understood as homophobia? How many people have been victims and/or witnesses of homophobic acts? Which are the most common acts? Who commits them? Where are they most frequently committed? Which are their consequences at individual level? How have the victims reacted?

Obviously, in order to answer these questions, a comprehensive research team is needed to tackle this problem with the required in-depth theory and methodology. This study is merely a preliminary approach to guide future scientific actions with more confidence. Its main objective is to diagnose what the studied homophobic

population understands by homophobia and their experience as victims or witnesses.

This research has been based on poor backgrounds. Among them, we must mention, first of all, the research conducted by the social research team of the *Juventud Rebelde* newspaper in 1994—submitted at the 7th Latin American Congress of Sexology and Sexual Education and the 1st Cuban Congress of Sexual Education, Orientation and Therapy—entitled “An approach to the homosexuality in Cuba (an initial examination)” (1). Likewise, the research made by Dr. Ada Alfonso Rodríguez, reported in her article “Violence, non-hegemonic sexual identities and coming out of the closet: Description of preliminary outcomes” (2), a study on violence against non-heteronormative identities basically—though not exclusively—when making them public, that is, when coming out of the closet. Other approaches can be found in the works by Alain Darcourt Rodríguez (3) and studies on homophobic bullying by Yoanka Rodney and Mirtha García (4).

At the end of the first decade of this century, the Cuban government began taking steps, at an international level, to acknowledge the rights of LGBT people by signing the declaration submitted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 18, 2008 stating that sexual diversity forms part of human rights and urging governments to take measures to eliminate penalties due to sexual orientation and gender identity, such as executions, detentions or arrests (5). On March 22, 2011, Cuba supported the Joint Declaration to put an end to acts of violence and related violence of human rights against people due to sexual orientation and gender identity, submitted to the Council of Human Rights in Geneva (6). One year after, on March 7, 2012, at the Council of Human Rights in Geneva, the Cuban delegate Juan Antonio Quintanilla Roman, made a statement—in view of the evident disagreement on this Declaration—against any kind of

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discrimination, including sexual orientation and gender identity and in favor of promoting international cooperation through dialogue, respect and awareness raising and not through confrontation (7).

Some months before, this position was politically and explicitly endorsed in the 57th Working Objective of the Communist Party of Cuba (CPC) during its 1st Conference held on January 29, 2012, stating the need to fight certain prejudices and discriminatory acts, including sexual orientation (8). Hence, in order to respond to the explicit political intentions of the Cuban State, it is of the outmost importance to conduct researches that could allow us to have a better understanding of its root cause and propose actions aimed at eradicating these problems. These actions should constitute a step forward in supporting the Montreal Declaration launched on July 29, 2006 aimed at achieving legal and social equality for the LGBT population (9).

But, what is homophobia? Though since the 1960s people already talked about homophobia, the first written testimony was that of K. T. Smith in "Homophobic: A tentative personality profile" (10). From the etymological point of view, the word derives from the Greek prefix homo (equal, the same) and phobia (that is, irrational fear, aversion). In the end, this is an ambiguous term since it could be considered as a specific kind of phobia, if understood as a "fear to or intense anxiety for a specific object or situation" (11). However, this concept—though not false despite its limitation—reduces homophobia to an individual level, and does not discover its real causes nor attempts to find immediate solutions based on personal change. Today, homophobia is frequently defined as the personal or institutional rejection of homosexuals and homosexuality. It is a psychologist idea only restricted to one aspect within a subjective dimension, without bearing in mind that this is merely an expression of a social and cultural hierarchy in which

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heterosexuality prevails and stigmatizes what is odd, that is, a deep-rooted heterosexism. In this regard, Louis-George Tin states: "In fact, the deep origin of homophobia must be found, obviously, in heterosexism which is the domain of compulsory heterosexuality . . ." (12). This original heterosexism is spread out through culture and social structures and is frequently materialized in state policies reinforcing and guaranteeing its existence.

Besides, homophobia is not homogeneous, since it is mainly expressed against different sexual orientations and gender identities. Thus, the rejection experienced by male homosexuals is different from the one experienced by lesbians, that is, they both stem out from this heterosexism that rejects any variant excluding it. But, while men showing an erotic and affective feeling for other men are stigmatized for not being the "males" they are expected to be, women who are not attracted to men are punished for not being "females." The difference of "non-compliant" roles results in a sort of different discrimination. For example, lesbophobia emphasizes the alleged maternity incapacity of lesbians, while homosexuals are stigmatized for being "weak" or histrionic.

In turn, the gender expression of transsexual persons, which is different to the socially expected one, leads to harsh mistreatment throughout their life and constitutes the cruelest manifestation of this heterosexism which in many places living a non-dichotomic gender is still scientifically pathologized. Bisexuality, scorned by heterosexuality and homosexuality and frequently considered an incomplete transition, as a larval and immature status, is doomed to silence or concealment so as to prevent condemnation. Therefore, every variant is judged on the basis of heterosexism and used to condemn others: it is usual to find a transphobic homosexual, a lesbophobic trans person, a biphobic lesbian or a homophobic bisexual thus reproducing and legitimizing such excluding behaviors.

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Homophobia—also including lesbophobia, biphobia and transphobia—is not an isolated social phenomenon. It is an organic and functional part of the unequal power relations imposed by a patriarchal culture in which the male supremacy is standardized in a gender binary distinction. Within this dichotomy—which also grants privilege to the external genitalia as the gender definition—the multiple human ways to feel fulfillment are stiffened: one can be either a woman if you were born with vulva and vagina or a man if you were born with penis and testicles. There are no other possibilities. And there can be no change from one status to the other. Besides, being a man—provided that the person complies with the script stating that he must dominate everything which is non-masculine—is a privilege; that is, the submission of women and all those who are not “men” enough (either because they sexually and affectively desire other men or because they show signs only attributed to women). Hence, the patriarchal power becomes a boomerang which turns into a heavy burden for masculinity, since it is legitimated by the violence of men against women, against other men and against themselves.

It would be naive to think that fighting the violence against women and girls could be possible without changing the homophobic attitudes or vice versa. The generating power is the same. The struggle against violence should be aimed at eliminating the patriarchal power in all its manifestations instead of hypertrophying it in one direction for otherwise it will reproduce continuously like the heads of the Hydra Lernaia.

Homophobia legitimates itself like other sexist domination mechanisms. Remember the incredibly well-known, and so much denounced, male chauvinism exerted against women. Pushing this issue to the background or openly excluding its victims prevents them to achieve their full development, attributing these restrictions not only to the disadvantaged position to which they have been condemned, but also to

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its essential characteristics. Transphobia is an example of this: it is difficult for trans persons to socialize at school and, therefore, they have a disadvantage in the labor market, thus affecting their economic possibilities. The foregoing, together with the discrimination they have endured throughout their life, make them emotionally unstable and complex in their social projection. However, what has been a long process of stigmatization has been presented as the cause by the sexist domination mechanisms; that is, these persons suffer from lack of affection and are asocial individuals so, consequently, they live their own way and, hence, are responsible for their own sufferings. On balance, there is no legal prohibition, since everything is subjective and hard to define. Thus, homophobia—and hypostasizing it does not exclude the homophobic role of both subjects and institutions—washes its hands and unfairly and deliberately holds society harmless as to these persons, transforming victims in “dangers,” thus reinforcing the existing stereotypes and prejudices. The sad truth of this vicious circle is that it is almost impossible to break it individually. An a priori declared second-class person must make great efforts and receive a lot of support to demonstrate his/her worth.

Besides, homophobia can become a criminal factor or, in any case, a security risk for LGBT persons, both physically and emotionally. The sixth principle of the Yogyakarta Principles clearly urges States to adopt every measure possible for the protection against violent acts due to sexual orientation or gender identity (13). In this regard, the main objective of this research was to provide, through a pilot study, a preliminary diagnosis of homophobia in Cuba.

#### CHARACTERIZATION OF THE SAMPLE

This research sample was intentionally based on a non-probabilistic selection since it selected individuals linked to several CENESEX community social networks (Youth for Sexual Rights Network, TransCuba, HxD and Oremi) as well as collaborators

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with different sexual orientations and gender identities. However, during the research, there were moments in which information associated with the LGBT population was processed in a differentiated manner—excluding information related to the heterosexual sample, since it was considered less prone to experience homophobia. Out of the 210 participants 70 accepted being gays (33.33%), 44 as lesbians (20.95%), 34 as trans (16.19%), 12 as bisexuals (5.71%) and 50 as heterosexuals (23.81%). Here, the only difficulty we faced was that some trans persons marked the trans and gay headings as the same, thus showing ignorance concerning the differentiation between sexual orientation and gender identity. In all these cases we considered them as trans, since we knew the group with which we were working and we previously knew that all trans persons included in the study were heterosexuals.

Several provinces were represented: first, Havana with 108 participants (51.43%); second, Ciego de Ávila with 35 (16.67%), followed by Las Tunas (national venue of the 8th Meeting against Homophobia) with 24 (11.43%); Villa Clara, 13 (6.19%); Camagüey, 11 (5.24%); Mayabeque, 6 (2.86%); Cienfuegos, 5 (2.38%); Sancti Spiritus, 3 (1.43%); Artemisa, 2 (0.95%); Granma, Matanzas and Pinar del Río with 1 each (0.48%, respectively).

Ages ranged between 17 and 64 years: below nineteen years, 34 (16.19%); from 20 to 29 years, which was the predominant age group, 86 individuals (40.95%); from 30 to 39 years, 42 persons (20%); from 40 to 49 years, 34 (16.19%); above 50 years, 13 (6.19%); and one case who did not specify the age (0.48%).

The prevailing educational level was the middle level with 127 persons (60.48%), followed by the higher education level with 58 (27.62%). There were 20 individuals with secondary education (9.52%), 3 in primary level (1.43%) and 2 persons who did not respond (0.95%).

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## METHODOLOGY

Due to this research perspective, using quantitative—mainly emphasized—and qualitative methodological elements, we carried out a survey with open and closed questions. The open questions were basically aimed at knowing the concepts of the studied population on homophobia, and their experiences on this issue so as to make a more comprehensive assessment—in accordance with the limits provided by the methodology used—of this phenomenon and collect information for a further in-depth study of individuals and groups alike. For classification purposes, we used the general answering pattern based on aspects more frequently repeated.

The closed questions comprised two variants, namely, dichotomic and optional selection. The dichotomic questions were very specific: to record the number of victims or witnesses of homophobic acts. The optional ones were aimed at recording more precise information based on whom, when and where these homophobic acts were manifested. Each question provided the option of adding items not included in the question itself.

Before the survey, there was a preliminary and individual meeting with the participating network facilitator and members of the sexuality departments to explain the survey objectives. In any case, we requested their opinions on the validity and relevance of the methodology and they all agreed on it. Results will be presented in a descriptive manner.

## RESULTS

On the whole, we confirmed that there is a general concept on what homophobia is, namely: irrational fear, unjustified hate or phobia against persons whose sexual orientation is different from the heterosexual. Manifestations: rejection, discrimination, isolation, disrespect, mockery, repression, physical and verbal aggression, mistreatment, violence, disdain, repudiation, anger, bullying, omission,

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obsessive aversion, negative feeling, exclusion, stigma, insensitivity, male chauvinism, disorders, prejudice, power unbalance, diseases and ignorance about sexuality. Some persons were unable to conceptually provide a definition of homophobia, though they really know about its concrete manifestations. Only 13 cases (6.19%) did not answer this question or provided vague answers which had almost nothing to do with this social phenomenon. However, they had no difficulty in answering the remaining questions.

The knowledge they have on what homophobia is cannot be considered as representative of the rest of the Cuban society since the studied sample was taken from the CENESEX social community networks or, in some way, associated with the Center meaning that they have already participated, in one way or another, in Meetings against Homophobia or in dialogues dealing with this issue. A more in-depth study should be conducted to find out what the Cuban society understands by homophobia.

One hundred and seventy three persons had been witnesses of homophobic acts, accounting for 82.38% of the total, revealing a very high percentage. We have not found any work clearly defining homophobic acts. Therefore, we have reformulated an implicit idea contained in the Yogyakarta Principles which, though not directly referring to the conceptualization of these acts, could be implemented as a temporary operational definition. Hence, homophobic acts are those acts manifesting violence, harassment, discrimination, exclusion, stigmatization and prejudices due to sexual orientation and gender identity undermining the integrity and dignity of persons subjected to these abuses (14). In this research, we center attention to insults, mockery, physical violence, exclusion and gestures. Of the total LGBT population included in the sample (160 individuals) 141 (88.13%) have been witnesses.

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The age, province and educational level variables showed no conclusive results. They were all within an 80% average. Following we describe this in more details. We should mention that the percentage of victims of homophobic acts results from the total LGBT population existing in each analyzed group divided in keeping with each category (since they are the ones usually suffering from these acts), while the percentage of witnesses was estimated from the general total—that is, including the heterosexual sample—in each group.

The sample was divided according to age in five conventional groups: 19 years or less, with the participation of 34 persons out of which 19 were witnesses (55.88%) and 15 were not (44.12%), accounting for the lowest percentage; out of them, only 6 were LGBT, five victims of homophobic acts (83.33%) and 1 not (16.67%). Of the 86 individuals between 20 and 29 years (the age group with most members in the sample), 76 were witnesses (88.37%) and 10 were not (11.63%): 68 were LGBT, 63 victims (92.65%) and 5 not (7.35%). Among the 42 included between 30 and 39 years, 36 (85.71%) were witnesses while 5 (11.90%) were not and 1 (2.38%) did not answer: 41 were LGBT, 35 victims (85.37%) and 6 non-victims (14.63%). The 40 to 49 year group included 34 individuals: 31 (91.18%) were witnesses and only 3 (8.82%) were not. There were 32 LGBT; 28 victims (87.5%) and 4 (12.5%) non-victims. The last group, 50 years and above, was the group with less representation with only 13 participants; 11 (84.61%) were witnesses and 2 (15.38%) were not: 12 were LGBT, 11 victims (91.67%) and 1 (8.53%) non-victim. Age was not provided by one person. As can be seen, age was not a measuring criterion to define homophobia.

As to their provincial origin, since there was no equitable distribution of participants by provinces, the sample was divided in three regions and Havana for this was the

province with more available information. The methodology did not foresee any differentiation among urban, suburban and rural areas.

The western region (Pinar del Río, Mayabeque, Artemisa, and Matanzas) reported 10 persons, 100% of them had been witnesses of homophobic acts; out of them, 7 were LGBT and 100% of them were also victims of homophobic acts.

One hundred and eight persons from Havana participated in the research. Ninety two (85.19%) of them were witnesses of the above-mentioned acts and 16 (14.81%) were not. There were 101 LGBT, 90 (89.11%) were victims and 11 (10.89%) were non-victims.

From the central region of the country (Villa Clara, Cienfuegos, Sancti Spíritus, and Ciego de Ávila) 56 individuals were included: 41 (73.21%) were witnesses of homophobic acts and 15 (26.79%) were not. The LGBT population in this area amounted to 25 persons, 22 (88%) of which have suffered some manifestations of these acts.

The eastern region (Camagüey, Las Tunas, and Granma) included 36 participants; 32 (88.89%) reported having witnessed these acts and only 4 (11.11%) did not. Of the 26 LGBT in this region, 24 (92.31%) had been targets of homophobia. Curiously, according to the regional analysis the western region reported the highest percentage of homophobia since, as commonly believed, the eastern region has the highest percentage. Nevertheless, these are not conclusive data due to the reduced sample of the research and the existing imbalance in the figure of individuals in each province, which makes a fair comparison difficult.

Concerning the educational level, the groups were established in accordance with the usual differentiation: 3 individuals from primary level, all of them LGBT, of which 2 (66.67%) had been victims of homophobic acts and only 1 (33.33%) witness. Twenty persons from secondary level were surveyed, all of them were

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LGBT and 19 (95%) of them had been victims of homophobic acts; and 18 of them (90%) witnesses. The middle-level educational group was the predominant one with 127 participants, 103 (81.10%) witnesses. The number of LGBT accounted for 85, of them 77 (90.59%) had been victims. The higher-level educational group included 58 persons, of them 52 (89.66%) witnessed this kind of behavior; among them 50 LGBT, 43 (86%) homophobic victims. Obviously, the educational level does not exclude them from being stigmatized due to their sexual orientation and gender identity.

From all the above-mentioned, we only considered elements associated with sexual orientation and gender identity. Though heterosexuals were excluded, it is worthwhile mentioning that one heterosexual woman considered herself as a homophobic victim because she works with the LGBT population so she has been occasionally excluded in her work and this has affected her. Despite the fact that this case is not statistically significant, it provides us with a hint: the extent to which homophobic acts also affect heterosexuals, why homophobic acts have been considered injurious only in persons living a sexuality different from the established one and why it has not been considered that this standard even imposes limitations on those complying with it. Evidently, these analyses are not the intention of this article, but undoubtedly they constitute an invitation for future reflections.

Of the surveyed LGBT population (160 as a whole), 142 (88.75%) have been victims of homophobic acts. Of them, 118 (83.10%) have been affected. Although in general terms there were no great differences in how these persons were affected for their sexual orientation and gender identity, we prefer to list the most frequent answers separately so as to provide more detailed information:

- Trans: depression, anxiety, fear, self-esteem problems, self-aggression, rejection feelings, anguish, lack of family support, anger, isolation, loss of job opportunities.
- Gays: self-esteem problems, exclusion feelings, guilt, loneliness and humiliation, shame, downgrading, depression, suicidal feelings, fear, suicidal attempts, stress, self-aggression, family rejection.
- Lesbians: exclusion, injustice and discrimination feelings, suicidal attempts, pain, fear, anger, depression, anxiety, lack of will to face the situation, low self-esteem, feelings of being a second-class citizen.
- Bisexuals: low self-esteem, isolation, introspection, fear, psychological and physical damages, problems with their partners.

As can be seen, self-esteem problems, fear, depression and other negative feelings are recurrent in all cases. Suicidal feelings and attempts, frequently observed in lesbians and gays, should be also taken into consideration in future researches.

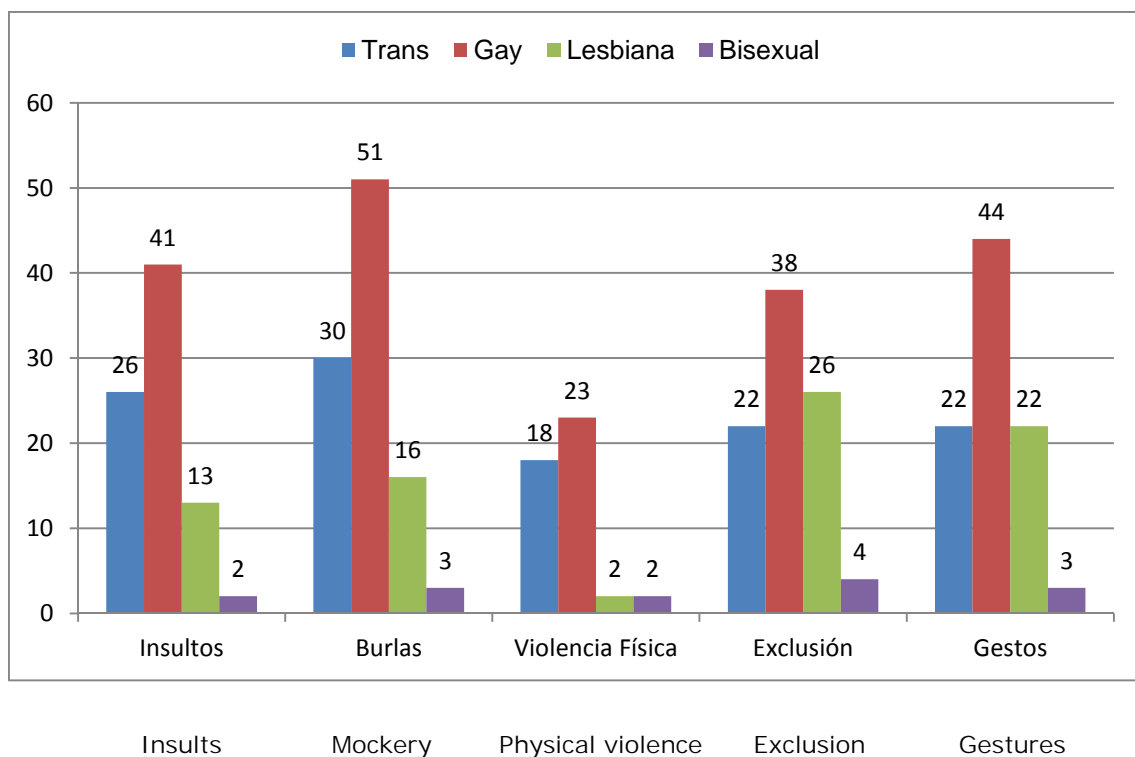
The way in which these persons, targets of homophobia, reacted to these injurious acts will be also listed below. Words in italics correspond to the most frequent answers:

- Trans: scandals with injuries to the other person, with violent reactions (verbally or physically), silence, evasion, search for professional help, self-aggression.
- Gays: submission, indifference, hiding sexual orientation, physical and verbal violence, seeking support and information, deviation of homophobia to other persons, isolation, silence.

- Lesbians: becoming stronger, isolation, physical and verbal aggression, coping with it, verbal reaction, seeking information, ignoring the attack, activism, seeking couple's support.
- Bisexuals: evasion, rebelliousness, verbal and physical reaction.

Violence is the main element, thus allowing us to state that homophobia produces, reproduces and increases violence in society. The most frequent homophobic acts are, above all, mockery, gestures and insults, though there is an important number of physical violence against trans and gays which constitutes a concern due to the resulting criminal potential they entail. Despite the fact that, in general, homophobia is a potential crime, as any other kind of discrimination, in this case it can even become a serious crime (see the following graph).

BAR GRAPH 1. TYPES OF HOMOPHOBIC ACTS



Perpetrators of these acts by the family include, first and foremost, the father (as revealed by 34 individuals: 23.94%), the mother (25 cases: 17.61%), brothers or

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sisters (21, accounting for 14.79%), uncles and aunts (15, accounting for 10.56%), cousins (11, accounting for 7.75%) and grandparents (4, accounting for 2.82%). Other relatives, such as stepmother, stepfather and brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law, had no significant relevance.

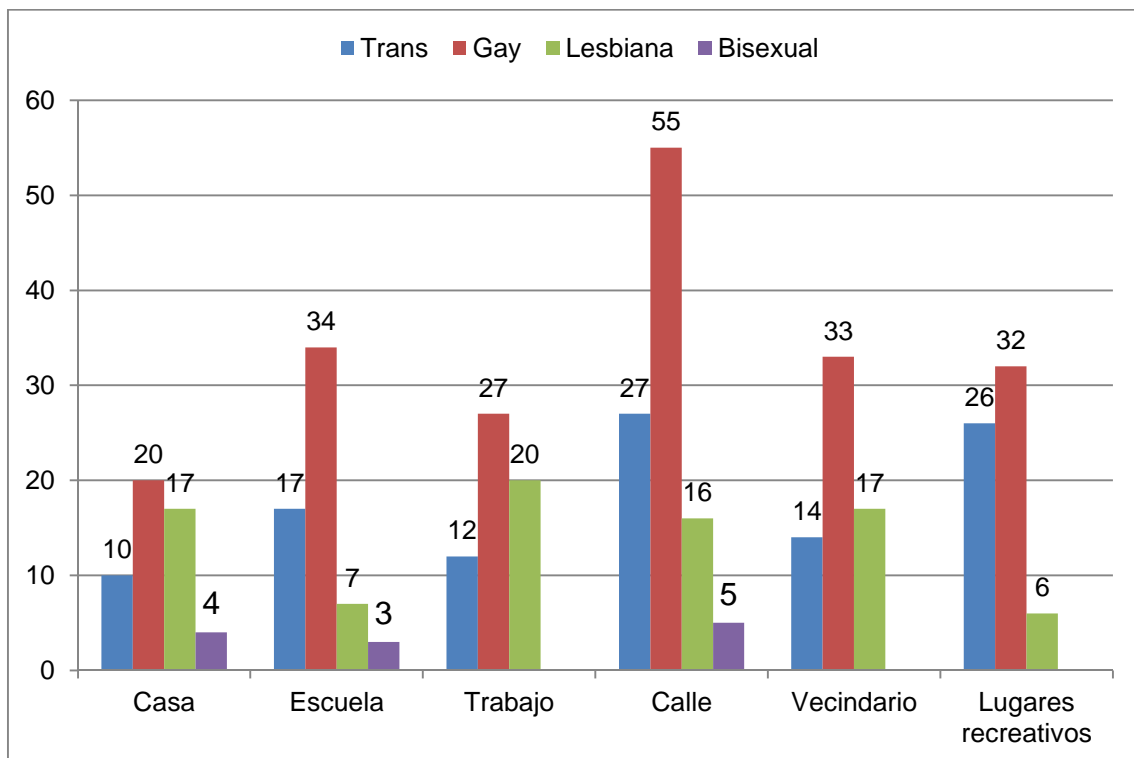
In general, the sample revealed that the family was not the focal point of homophobia. This was mainly manifested by outsiders (as mentioned in 97 cases representing 68.31%), neighbors (60 cases, 42.25%), friends (37 cases, 26.07%), police (13 cases, 9.15%), co-workers (12 cases, 8.45%), classmates (10 cases, 7.04%) and teachers (4 cases, 2.82%). Other perpetrators, as couples and acquaintances, were not significant.

These acts took place in youth (88 cases, 61.97%); adolescence (72 cases, 50.70%); childhood (44 cases, 30.99%), and 40 stated that these acts took place always (28.17%). It is worthwhile mentioning that these options were not mutually excluding, that is, the same person could have answered more than one.

The most frequent places were public spaces: first of all, in the street, 103 cases (72.54 %); neighborhood and recreational places, 64 each accounting for 45.07%, respectively; school, 61 (42.96 %); workplace, 59 (41.55%); and, finally, at home, 51 (35.91%), thus confirming the conclusion that it is not within the family where homophobia mainly takes place. Other places mentioned included hospitals, barbershops, gyms, buses, restaurants, agricultural markets, beaches, movie theaters and theaters, but not statistically significant. Following we include the graph of those spaces where these acts have taken place.

BAR GRAPH 2. SPACES WHERE HOMOPHOBIC ACTS TAKE PLACE





House      School      Workplace      Street      Neighborhood      Recreational places

These results are very high when compared with the already mentioned research conducted in 1994 by the social research team of the Juventud Rebelde newspaper with a sample of 85 homosexuals. In said research only 5.8% complaint about verbal aggression, rejection and isolation by the family, though 20% recognized hiding their sexual orientation and 27% “pretending” not being homosexuals, 30.6% said they felt rejected and disapproved by society. Likewise, they believe they have less development possibilities; 54.1% consider they are marginalized by institutions, agencies and political and mass organizations. The highest indicator was 54.3% of individuals who stated that they are highly mistreated by the police (15).

Of the population who said they were not homosexuals (300 individuals from Havana), 78% believed society marginalizes homosexuals, while 10% felt a

complete rejection, even physical or verbal aggression against homosexuality. All parents (accounting for 148) stated that they will try to prevent their children from being a homosexual. The authors observed a different assessment towards gays and lesbians: 76% consider lesbianism as incorrect and immoral against 52% who stated the same opinion on male homosexuality and 59.6% said they were more tolerant with male homosexuals than with lesbians (16). However, according to this research, lesbians referred and witnessed less homophobic acts.

The difference between these results derives, above all, from the fact that the previous research asked the questions in a synchronic fashion, while this research attempts to collect information from a diachronic perspective. Likewise, the size of the sample—exclusively gays in the case of the homosexual population—is different, bearing in mind that at that time openly living as homosexuals was very rare and non-heterosexuals were more careful in hiding. Besides, the sample was only limited to Havana. However, it is significantly interesting that institutional homophobia was markedly higher, now public spaces are more propitious. Is it possible that by reducing the institutional legitimacy of homophobia, a deeper subjective feeling of risk increases individual homophobic manifestations? Is it possible that living one's own sexual orientation and gender identity can trigger a latent homophobia? Available data are not enough to provide an accurate answer to these questions, but they should be taken into account in any further research.

An interesting data from that research is that 94.1% described lesbians as rude, unpleasant, vulgar and troubled persons, while 21% stated their rejection towards extremely "mannered" homosexuals (17). A more in-depth study is still needed to determine how the internalized homophobia of persons living each sexual orientation and gender identity manifest with respect to those who share theirs and those who do not.

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## CONCLUSIONS

In general we can conclude that almost all individuals under study have a clear-cut concept about homophobia, though not covering the Cuban population at large since they are persons who, in one way or another, have been acquainted with this issue. Age, province and educational level variables do not provide conclusive information but, seemingly, these are not determinants within the sample when measuring susceptibility and vulnerability to homophobia. Of the total population under study, 82.38% have witnessed homophobic acts; this figure accounts for a higher 88.13% if only LGBT population is considered.

Of the total LGBT population studied, 88.75% have been victims of homophobic acts, and 83.10% of them have been affected in one way or another. Those who felt affected clearly stated having self-esteem, depression, anxiety, rejection and fear problems. One of the most common answers concerning homophobic aggression was the verbal and physical violence, so this became a reproducing and boosting element of violence in the society.

The studied population stated being attacked mainly on the street, recreational places, neighborhood and school. The aggression was mainly perpetrated by unknown assailants and neighbors. Within the sample, homophobic problems, in general terms, are characterized by mockery and insults in public spaces by people having almost no relationship with the individual. However, this problem can be even deep-rooted in increasing problems of coexistence, inadequate behaviors and lack of civic-mindedness found in the current Cuban society.

Obviously, homophobia constitutes a problem for Cuban society, since even with such a superficial research as this one the percentages surpass, in general, four fifths of the sample in both victims and witnesses.

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The sample should be more encompassing and in-depth individual interviews are required to verify and extend these conclusions. Likewise, a study of the heterosexual population should be conducted to examine their attitude (and its causes) towards homosexuality and homosexuals. As expected, this information will allow us to take actions in order to transform this appalling situation and open a space for more encompassing researches in the future.

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