

GAY DAD, LESBIAN MOM: BABY BOOM AMONG ITALIAN HOMOSEXUALS

According to the most extensive survey ever carried out on the country's homo-bisexual population, 20.5% of Italian lesbians and 17.7% of Italian gays over the age of 40 have at least one child. The health and the relationships of a statistical sample composed of 10,000 people were considered. The results will be presented tomorrow during a conference in Florence

Gay dad, lesbian mom. In Italy 17.7% of gays and 20.5% of lesbians over the age of 40 have at least one child. The percentages decrease when all age groups are considered, but they are still significant. One gay or lesbian out of twenty is a parent: specifically, 5% of the former (4.7% are biological fathers) and 4.9% of the latter (4.5% are biological mothers). This was revealed by "Modi-di", the most extensive statistical survey ever carried out on the homosexual and bisexual population. It was conducted by Arcigay in collaboration with the Higher Health Institute, and it is also the first survey that has also considered women. The results of the survey, which involved about 10,000 people over the past few months, were presented during a conference in Florence, on Friday, 16 December, at 9 am, at the Conference Palace at 1 Adua Square.

Sergio Lo Giudice, national president of Arcigay, commented, "The high number of homosexual parents is the most striking fact, even though it confirms similar data registered in other countries. These figures refer to at least 100,000 Italian children who have a gay or a lesbian parent. Eliminating social prejudice towards them and their parents is a primary objective for society as a whole."

The first analyses of the survey were conducted on a selected sample of 6774 individuals (4690 males and 2084 females) who define themselves as gays or lesbians or have recently had sexual intercourse with individuals of the same sex. The resulting picture shows several contrasts. If in regard to the most intimate aspects, such as being parents, the reality seems to be more advanced than expected, other aspects of the public sphere, such as the freedom of not hiding oneself, testify to a backward social situation.

Coming out: only 16.5% do it.

Only 16.5% of males and 15% of females in the

examined sample are fully "visible", i.e. they don't hide their sexual orientation in any social arena: with friends, at home, with colleagues or schoolmates. Instead, nearly one man out of 10 (9.7%) and 4.1% of women have never talked about it with anyone.

Most homosexuals experience an intermediate situation, meaning that they avoid letting some of the people they usually mix with know about their homosexuality. The circle where it is easier to "come out", i.e. not to conceal one's own homosexuality, is that of friends, all of whom know about it in 48.9% of cases. Nonetheless, it is meaningful that half of gays and lesbians hide their sexuality from some of them too. The situation at home is even more difficult. Only 38.6% of interviewees have talked about their own homosexuality with all or most of their closest relatives, while 34% have never talked about it with anyone. The environment where it is most difficult to come out is the workplace, where only a minority – 24.1% – of interviewees do not hide their own homosexuality, as opposed to 37.3% who have never mentioned it. In all three social arenas and for both gays and lesbians it seems to be easier not to hide oneself in northern and central Italy than it is in the south.

The sociologist and director of the survey, **Raffaele Lelleri**, remarks, "Generally, in our society sexual orientation, having a stable relationship, being married or having a partner are public aspects of everyone's identity and sexuality, shared with the closest persons. The fact that 84% of gays and lesbians avoid speaking about this in certain environments, e.g. at home, or among friends or colleagues, shows that they don't perceive their living environment as sufficiently comfortable."

Living as couples: women more than men
Women tend to have stable relationships more frequently than men: 60.7% of women live as couples (8.7% with a man) versus 45.7% of men (5.5% with a woman). The research also involves the bisexual population. Men increasingly live as couples when they get older, representing more than half of the sample of those over the age of 31. Among women, this trend peaks between the ages 26 and 30 and then levels off, decreasing slightly in later years. The exception is represented by the couples formed by a woman and a man, which decrease during adulthood and old age.

New partners: gays on-line, lesbians through friends

The main meeting places are very different between

men and women. Among gays the Internet takes the lion's share. Thanks to the web, 51.6% of the sample recently met new partners, followed by 32% who met their partners at public homosexual spots such as bars, discos and pubs, 20.7% in saunas, 20.5% at outdoor meeting places (but only 9.4% of them are under the age of 25), 16.1% at friends' home, 14.9% at the beach and 7.2% in gay and lesbian associations. The situation is completely different for lesbians. They meet each other at friends' home (18.6%) more than through the Internet; 17.8% meet at homosexual clubs and 6% in gay and lesbian associations. In the south males have a harder time meeting at clubs, which are much less widespread than in the rest of the country.

Religion: 41% are Catholic

A total of 48.2% of the interviewees are believers, with an evident difference between gays (50.5%) and lesbians (42.9%); 35.4% of males and 41.4% of females are not believers, while 14.6% of the sample was not interested or could not answer the question. Only 41% of gays and 39.1% of lesbians define themselves as Catholic. The number of Buddhists is considerable, especially among men. A large majority of believers is non-practising or rarely practising.

Gay, lesbian or bisexual?

Among the males who were interviewed a large majority define themselves as "gay" (62.1%) or "homosexual" (9%). However, one out of four chose between "bisexual" (10.6%) or "usually I don't use definitions" (13.6%). The remaining 4.7% was divided among "other", "I don't know" and "heterosexual". Females don't use a term that is as widely shared as "gay". Those who define themselves as "lesbian" account for less than half of the interviewees (40.7%). Among the others, 6.5% chose "homosexual" and 4.5% "gay", but 28.2% generally don't use definitions (more than twice the number of males); 13.3% are bisexual, 4.2% chose "other", and the remaining 2.6% was divided between "I don't know" and "heterosexual".

Characteristics of the sample

The sample involved 6774 people (4690 males, 2084 females). Italian citizens represent the overwhelming majority (97.7%); 31.6% live in the northeast, 29.2% in the northwest, 22.3% in the centre, and 17% in the south and the islands. Distribution by age favours the younger generations. Interviewees under 40 represented 84.9% of the total. In particular, those

under 25 years of age reach 32.7%, those between 26 and 30 years of age 20.9%, 31.3% are between 31 and 40, 12.2% between 41 and 50, and 2.8% over 50. The percentage of questionnaires filled in online is 78.6%, as opposed to 21.4% on paper. The collection of data was coordinated by a scientific team of sociologists, psychologists and statisticians, and was carried out with the help of dozens of volunteers throughout the country. More information is available at the official website of the research: www.modidi.net.

ARCIGAY
ITALIAN LESBIAN GAY ASSOCIATION
VIA DON MINZONI 18 - 40121 BOLOGNA - ITALY
PH. +39.051.6493055 - FAX +39.051.5282226
info@arcigay.it - WEB www.arcigay.it