

NO MORE CLOSETS

*Experiences of discrimination among
the LGBTQ immigrant community*

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United We Dream®

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among the LGBTQ immigrant community*

Credit and Acknowledgements

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Introduction and executive summary

In November 2015, voters in the city of Houston, Texas voted down the city-council-approved Houston Equal Rights Ordinance (HERO) by a margin of 60.9 percent to 30.1 percent.¹ The defeat of the ordinance, meant to protect city residents from discrimination in employment and other services based on factors including sexual orientation and gender identity, proved to be a stunning defeat for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) advocates and organizations nationwide.² The ordinance was defeated following a carefully orchestrated transphobic campaign to scare voters about “men in women’s bathrooms.”³

The defeat of the ordinance continues to leave Houston residents open to legal discrimination based on their sexual orientation and gender identity as the state of Texas, nor the federal government, explicitly enumerate these identities from protection against discrimination in all areas of life.⁴ This is especially harrowing for the city’s LGBTQ immigrant population, one of the largest and most diverse in the country.⁵

The same month that HERO was struck down by voters, United We Dream (UWD) launched a national survey to better understand the needs, experiences, and challenges faced by the LGBTQ immigrant community nationwide. The survey was launched in response to the dire need to increase the amount of information and knowledge regarding this community, which remains “in the shadows” due to the intersection of marginalized identities.

About the Survey

This United We Dream survey called the “No More Closets survey” was conducted using the online service Qualtrix in November 2015 and through in-person surveys conducted in 8 different cities across the country in both English and Spanish by volunteers and organizers with the Queer Undocumented Immigrant Project (QUIP). In total, 536 responses were recorded. The survey included some checks to make sure that the responses were not duplicates. UWD also included validation questions about a respondent’s immigration history. Each of the responses was checked to make sure that they were valid and had internal consistency based on the validation questions asked. In addition, the online platform used to conduct the survey also prevented multiple responses from any single internet protocol address to prevent “ballot stuffing.”

Of the total responses, we can be confident that 461 responses met our criteria for inclusion. The survey was sent out using United We Dream’s email list and was augmented using Facebook and Twitter posts as well as a peer-to-peer sharing strategy. This report presents some of the findings from the survey. To request complete results, please contact UWD.

For the purposes of this survey, UWD defines an LGBTQ immigrant as an individual that self identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer and is either foreign-born or U.S.-born citizen with foreign-born parents.

The results of this survey add to the growing body of research about LGBTQ immigrants that will help UWD and other organizations better understand the lives of individuals in this community. This will help bridge the gaps between the LGBTQ and immigration advocacy communities and help guide effective policymaking and advocacy.

Some of the findings of the survey indicate that the LGBTQ immigrant community is:

- A young population living with diverse sexual orientation and gender identities as well as immigration statuses.
- Experiencing high levels of discrimination and harassment in multiple areas of life including employment, education, health care, and housing.
- Facing deep mistrust of law enforcement.
- Still facing difficulties navigating the constellation of different LGBTQ and immigrant serving organizations.

The LGBTQ immigrant community has been at the forefront of challenging systemic injustices against both the LGBTQ and immigrant community. However, there is still much left to be uncovered to highlight the challenges individuals living in both communities continue to face. UWD's survey and previous research will hopefully spark even more investigation and help guide advocacy and organizing at the local and national level.

The current research groundwork on the LGBTQ immigrant community

Over the past few years, research has come to shed light on the LGBTQ immigrant community. This community very often lives “in the shadows” and LGBTQ immigrants all too regularly face a double edged sword of discrimination for their sexual orientation or gender identity as well as a broken and outdated immigration system that has left many families, chosen or otherwise, separated. The efforts to uncover stories, information, and other lived experiences serve to bring attention to the challenges this community faces.

In the first of its kind analysis, the Williams Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles found that there are over 904,000 LGBT-identified immigrants living in the U.S.⁶ Of these, 267,000 are also undocumented, representing approximately 2.7 percent of undocumented adults in the country.⁷ In addition to these numbers, evidence also shows that a significant number of beneficiaries of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program also identify as LGBTQ.⁸ In a recent survey done by United We Dream, nearly 9 percent of DACA beneficiaries identified as LGBTQ – higher than the national average for the general population in the same age group.⁹ Anecdotally, several immigrant rights organizations have also noted the high proportion of LGBTQ advocates and organizers among their ranks – which have helped to transform the immigrants’ rights movement in enormous ways.¹⁰

Despite the growing body of research and understanding of the LGBTQ immigrant community, there is still much more information left to uncover. Previous surveys and analyses did not collect information on the particular experiences the LGBTQ immigrant community faces in their different areas of life. Specifically, the research did not capture experiences with discrimination – which evidence continues to show high levels among LGBTQ and immigrant communities generally.

The Queer Undocumented Immigrant Project¹¹

A program of United We Dream, the Queer Undocumented Immigrant Project (QUIP), founded in 2012, aims to build bridges between the immigration and the LGBTQ advocacy communities with the goal of securing equality on both fronts. The program seeks to organize and empower LGBTQ immigrants and allies to address social and systemic barriers by building and developing youth leaders.

Since its founding, QUIP has engaged in campaigns and initiatives to achieve the end of the Defense of Marriage Act, deportation relief for immigrant youth, comprehensive immigration reform, and address the abuse faced by LGBTQ immigrants in detention.

This knowledge gap prevents advocates, policymakers, and community members from creating the response plans they need to address serious challenges in the community. For example, the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (NCAVP), found in 2014 that LGBT undocumented immigrants face a high risk of hate violence.¹² However, LGBT immigrants hold some reluctance to report to police because of fear of discrimination and harassment.¹³ This makes it difficult to create effective response plans and leaves advocates with difficulty putting numbers and statistics to the stories they hear every day.¹⁴

This UWD survey and report seeks to grow the body of research and evidence to help support better policymaking and advocacy for the LGBTQ immigrant community. Along with the findings of the survey, this report also highlights stories and experiences of LGBTQ immigrants and how they live their lives. In doing so, the report can spark even more research and investigation into this critical area.

“I have to come out as both queer and undocumented, and each time people are only interested in one part of that struggle. They also expect me to be able to build up another border, this time between my identities. When I point this out they say I’m being too sensitive, but they can’t cut me in half and expect me not to bleed. I’ve decided to take control of the narrative to talk about my identity as a whole and not let other’s decided how to define me. I am a queer latinx, I am undocumented, a survivor, and I’m no longer afraid to say it.”

Dulce Gutierrez-Vasquez
Wenatchee, Washington



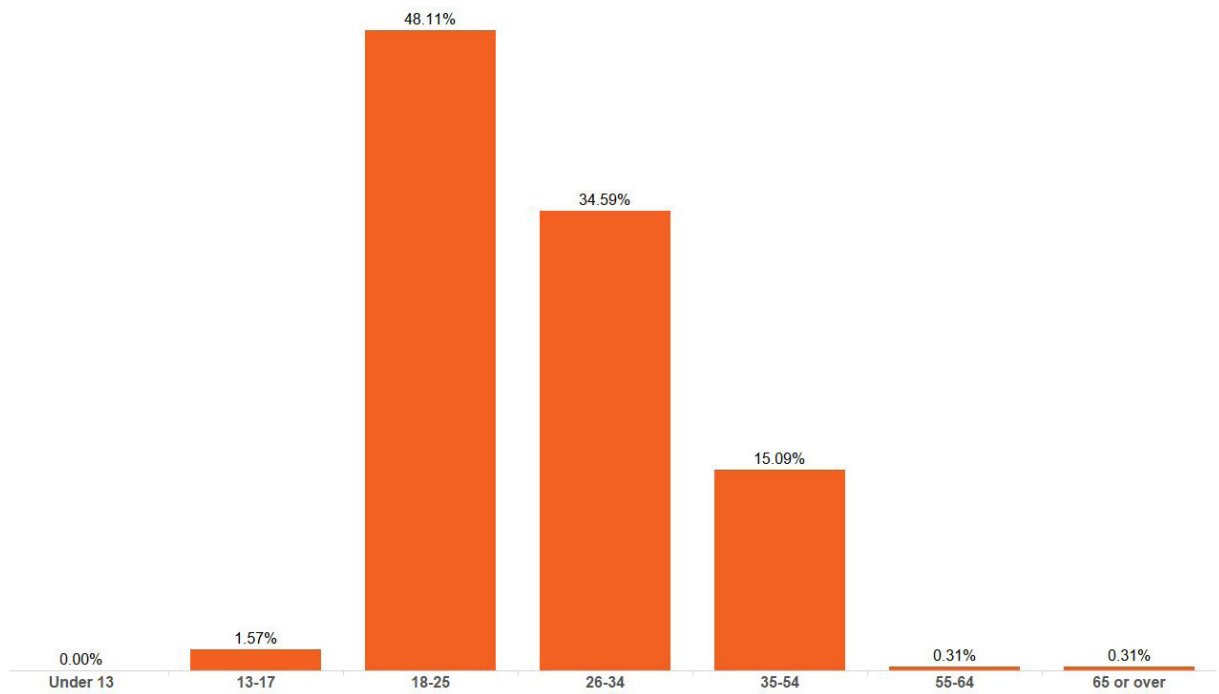
A snapshot of the LGBTQ immigrant community

The following section of this report describes some of the findings of UWD’s national No More Closets survey of the LGBTQ immigrant community. This survey is the largest conducted of this population to date and can help provide a better understanding of this community for LGBTQ and immigration advocacy organizations.

Age

The survey indicates that the LGBTQ immigrant community is young. Nearly half (48 percent) of all respondents are between the ages of 18 to 25 years old while a further 35 percent are between 26 to 34 years old. A similar analysis by the Williams Institute had previously showed that LGBTQ undocumented immigrants are younger than the broader undocumented population.¹⁵ Nearly half (49 percent) of LGBTQ undocumented immigrants are estimated to be under age 30 compared to 30 percent of all undocumented immigrants.¹⁶

FIGURE 1
Respondents by age



Source: UWD No More Closets Survey, January 2016

State of residence

Like the general undocumented immigrant population, the LGBTQ immigrant community is concentrated in a few key states. The survey found significant representation from Texas (22 percent) and California (17 percent). The large Texas population remains particularly vulnerable as the state currently does not have any statutes at the state level protecting individuals from discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity.¹⁷

FIGURE 2
Respondents by state of residence

Texas	22.04%
California	16.93%
New York	10.54%
District of Columbia	9.90%
Washington	6.39%
Massachusetts	5.11%
Virginia	4.15%
Arizona	3.19%
Maryland	3.19%
Arkansas	2.56%
Florida	2.56%
Illinois	1.60%

UWD No More Closets Survey, January 2016
Note: Other states not listed in this list had less than one percent of total respondents

“Coming out for me was not about visibility, it was about survival and about being able to share my strength with other youth who continue to remain in the shadows and in fear as undocumented and LGBTQ. As a transgender immigrant woman, being out and counted is a critical step so other people in my community can feel safe.”

Bianey Garcia
New York City, New York



Country of birth & race/ethnicity

A significant number of survey respondents were born in Latin America. The largest representation is among Mexicans at 40 percent of survey respondents. The next largest group of foreign-born individuals came from El Salvador. The survey also considered U.S. born LGBTQ individuals as part of the immigrant community if they had foreign-born parents – in this survey, this population represented a quarter of respondents.

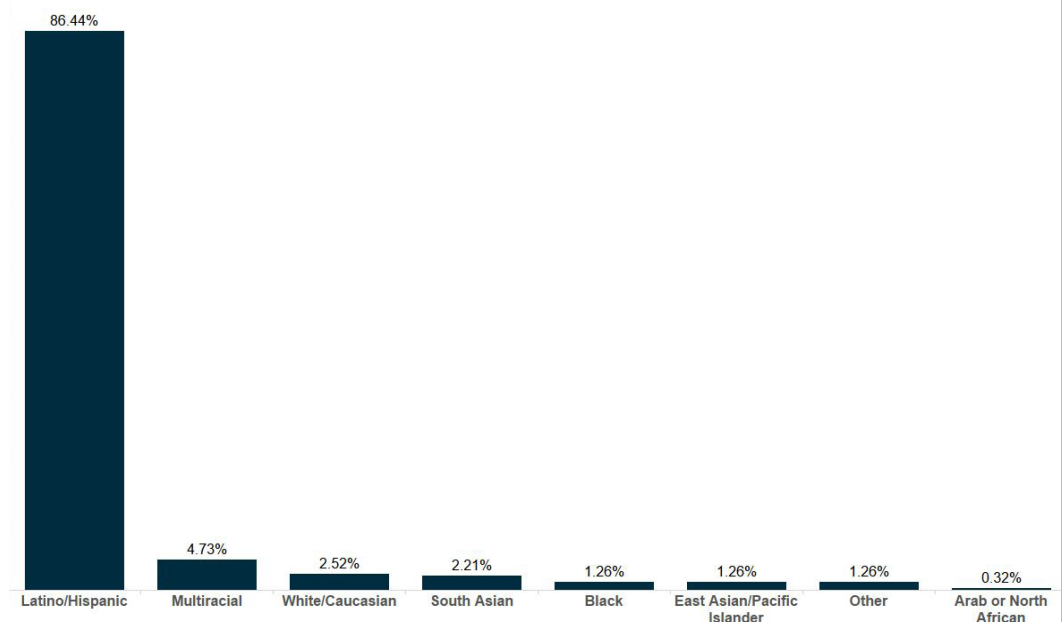
The No More Closets survey and other research indicate a significantly large community of LGBTQ immigrants of Latin American heritage – 86 percent. The Williams Institute analysis found that 71 percent of undocumented LGBTQ adults were Hispanic while 15 percent were Asian or Pacific Islander.¹⁸ However, among documented LGBTQ adults, 30 percent were Hispanic and 35 percent were Asian or Pacific Islander.¹⁹

FIGURE 3
Country of Birth

Mexico	40.32%
United States of America	24.52%
El Salvador	11.94%
Colombia	3.55%
Brazil	1.94%
Bolivia	1.29%
Nicaragua	0.97%
Andorra	0.65%
Dominican Republic	0.65%
Ecuador	0.65%
Nigeria	0.65%
Trinidad and Tobago	0.65%
Venezuela, Bolivarian Republic of...	0.65%
Argentina	0.32%
Bangladesh	0.32%
Canada	0.32%
Chad	0.32%
China	0.32%
Mauritius	0.32%
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	0.32%

UWD No More Closets Survey, January 2016

FIGURE 4
Race/ethnicity of respondents



UWD No More Closets Survey, January 2016

Immigration status

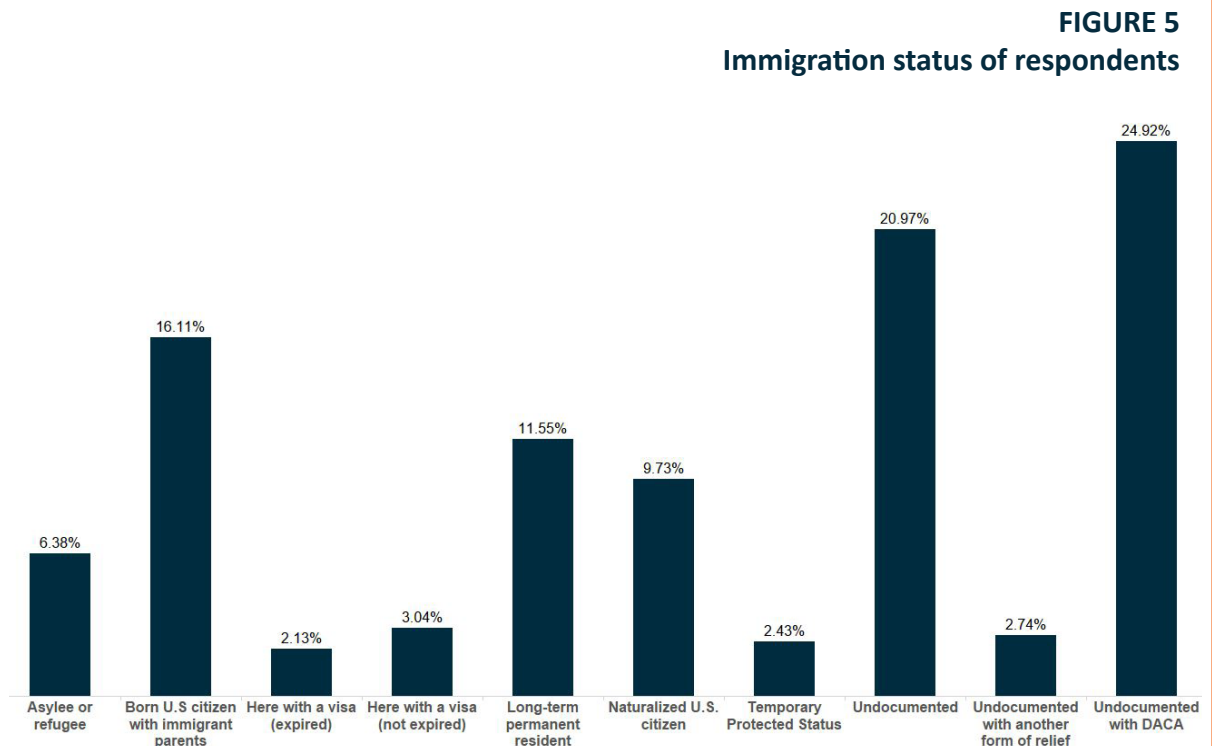
The LGBTQ immigrant community reflects a wide diversity of immigration experiences. In this survey, a quarter of respondents said they are beneficiaries of the DACA program. The next largest group is undocumented without any other form of relief or visa. A significant number of respondents are also on their way to citizenship or have naturalized - 1 in 10 respondents have naturalized as U.S. citizens and 12 percent of respondents are currently Long-Term Permanent Residents.

The survey indicates that the LGBTQ immigrant community cannot be split into a binary of documented and undocumented. Indeed, in carrying out the survey, many individuals reported confusion about the question or did not know their current immigration status.

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals

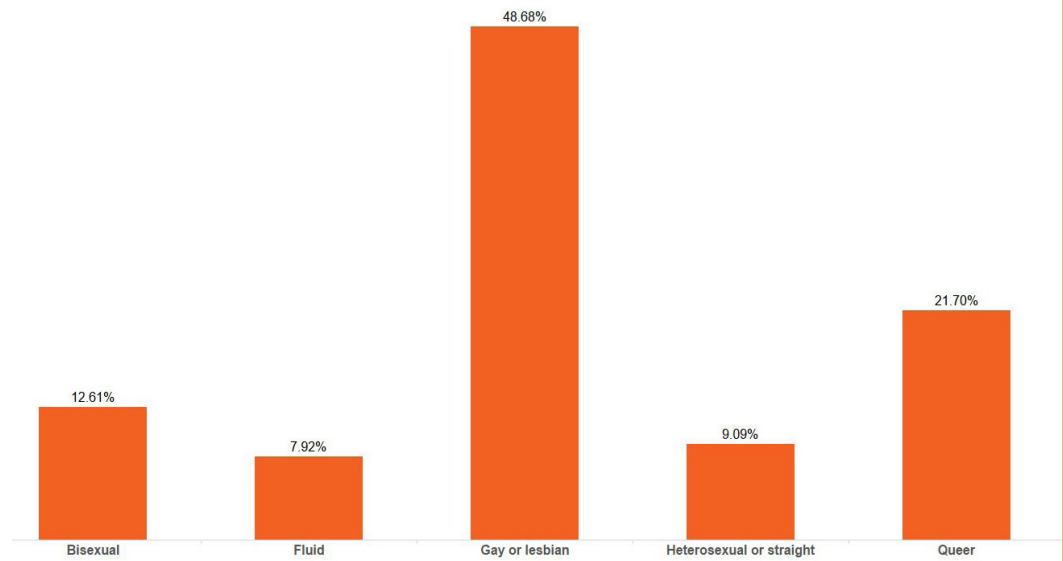
To be eligible for DACA, an undocumented immigrant must have:

- Passed a background check
- Been born on or after June 16, 1981
- Come to the United States before their 16th birthday
- Not have lawful immigration status and be at least 15 years old
- Continuously lived in the United States since June 15, 2007
- Been present in the country on June 15, 2012, and on every day since August 15, 2012
- Graduated high school or obtained a GED certificate. Otherwise, he or she must be an honorably discharged veteran of the Coast Guard or armed forces or currently attend school on the date he or she submits the application for deferred action
- Not been convicted of a felony offense
- Not been convicted of a significant misdemeanor offense or three or more misdemeanor offenses
- Not posed or pose a threat to national security or public safety



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FIGURE 6
Sexual orientation of Respondent



UWD No More Closets Survey, January 2016

Sexual orientation

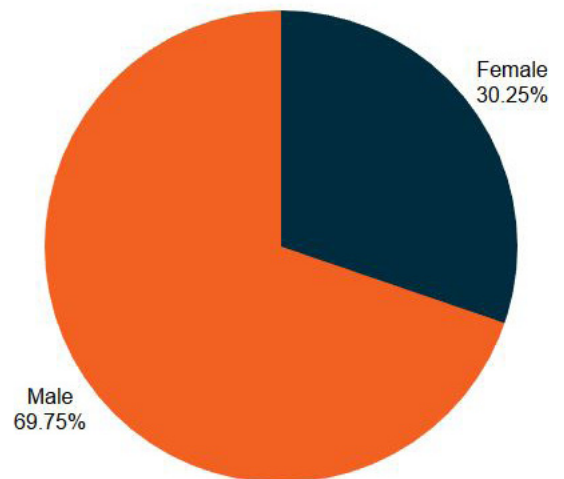
In addition to representing diverse countries of origin and states of residence, survey respondents also illustrated a wide range of varying sexual orientation identifications. Nearly half of survey respondents (49 percent) identify as either gay or lesbian. The next largest group is queer at 22 percent followed by bisexual at 13 percent.

Sex assigned at birth and current gender identity

In order to more accurately capture gender identity in the data, the survey first asked about sex assigned at birth and then followed with a question about the respondent's current gender identity. Like previous reports showing similar results, men make up a significant number of respondents and a large proportion (70 percent) were assigned male at birth.²⁰

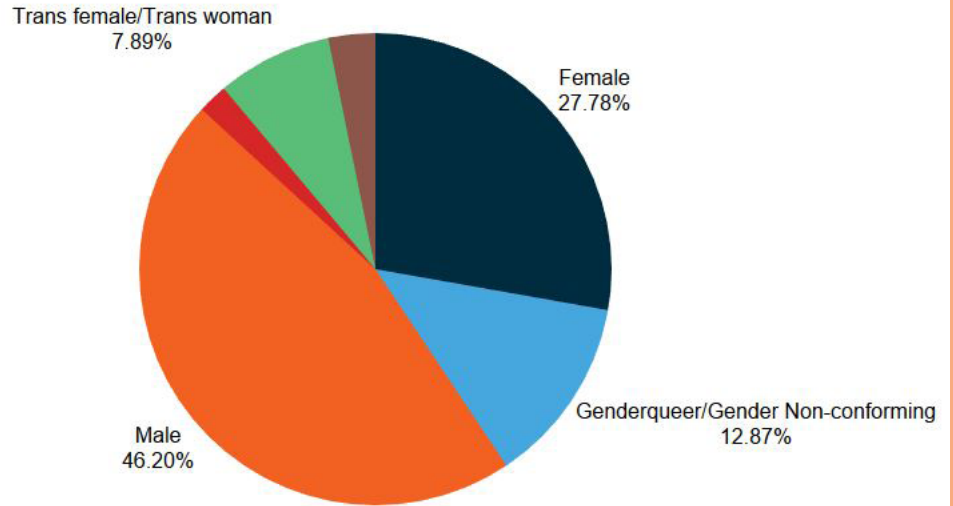
However, a shrinking proportion of respondents identify as male later on in life indicating that LGBTQ immigrants shift their gender identity to more accurately represent their true selves - nearly a quarter of respondents (24 percent) identify as either transgender including genderqueer.

FIGURE 7
Respondent's sex assigned at birth



UWD No More Closets Survey, January 2016

FIGURE 8
Respondent's current gender identity

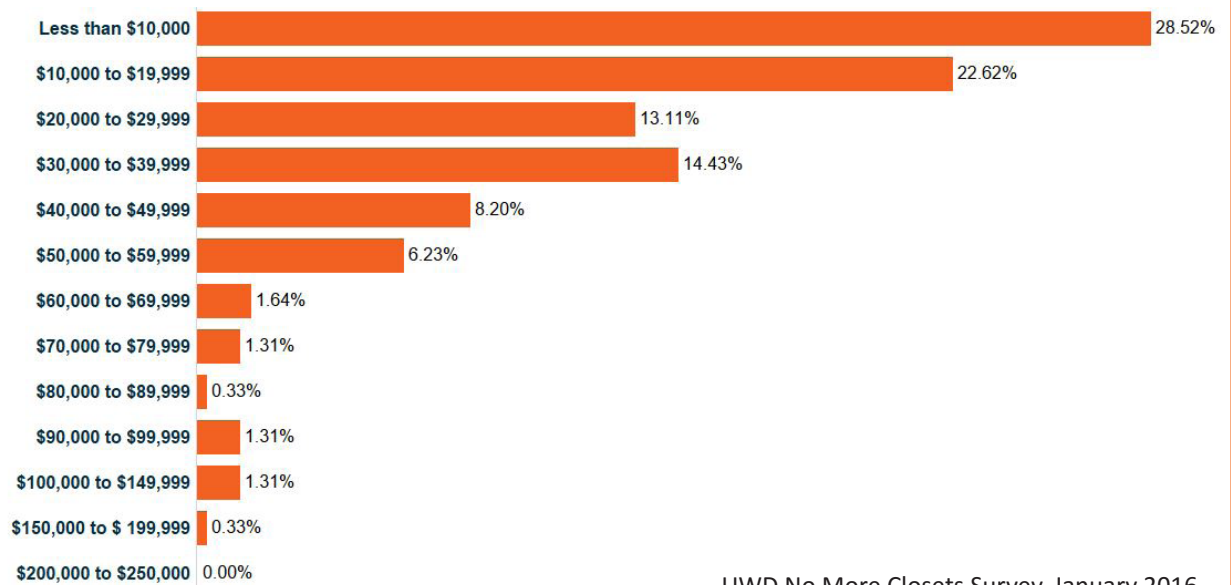


UWD No More Closets Survey, January 2016

Income and financial stability

Survey respondents reported a significant amount of financial instability and low annual household income. Nearly 30 percent of respondents said they make less than \$10,000 a year while another 23 percent take in \$10,000 to \$19,999 a year. This low amount of income leads to significant financial difficulties for the LGBTQ immigrant community. Nearly three-quarters (75 percent) of respondents do not have or just barely have enough income to meet their monthly expenses.

FIGURE 9
Respondent's gross annual household income

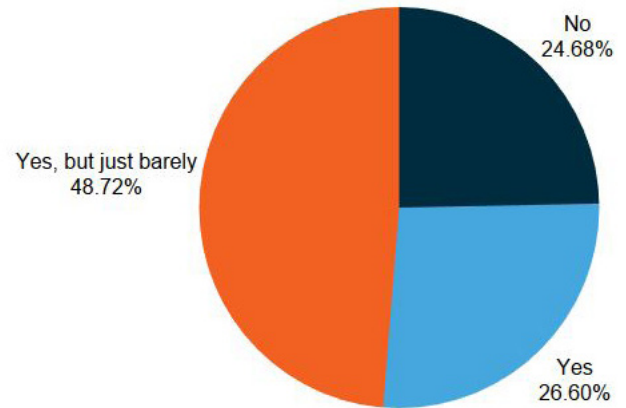


UWD No More Closets Survey, January 2016

Openness with family and friends

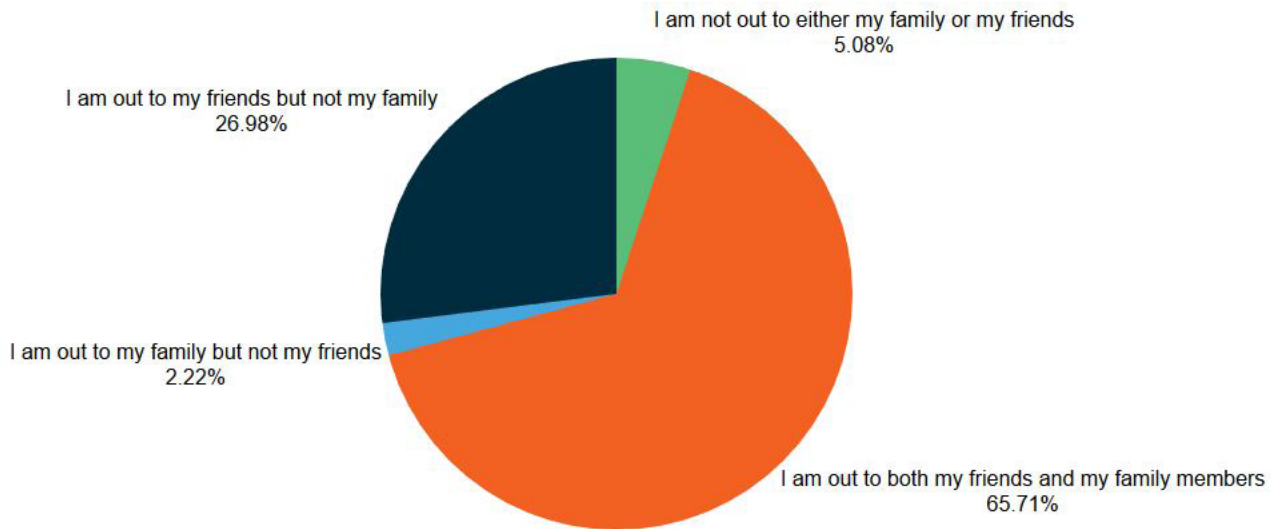
LGBTQ immigrants often describe the double coming out process they must undergo in regards to their sexual orientation or gender identity as well as their immigration status.²¹ Previous research of LGBTQ undocumented youth has shown that many people consider coming out as LGBTQ more difficult than coming out as undocumented.²² Indeed, the survey showed that a significant number of respondents (27 percent) are only out to their friends and not their family about their sexual orientation or gender identity.

FIGURE 10
Is your current income enough to meet your monthly expenses?



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FIGURE 11
Respondent's degree of openness

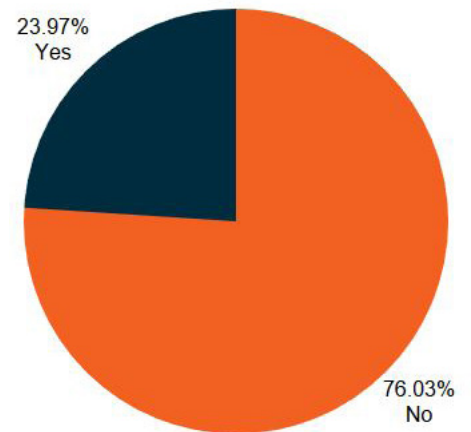


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Experiences with discrimination in employment

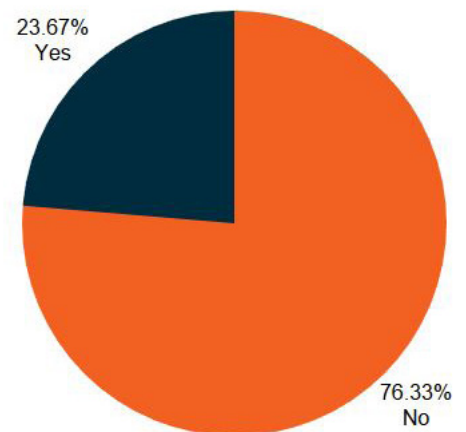
Across the country, LGBTQ workers continue to lack enumerated protections against discrimination in most states and high levels of harassment in the workplace. This makes it difficult for many LGBTQ individuals to secure and sustain the basic necessities they need for their lives. In particular, 10 percent of LGB workers currently report having been fired from a job in the previous five years because of their sexual orientation and between 11 percent and 28 percent have been denied or passed over for a promotion for the same reason.²³ For transgender individuals, the experience is worse. As many as 47 percent of transgender people reported being fired, not hired, or denied a promotion because of their gender identity.²⁴

FIGURE 12
Discriminated against at work due to sexual orientation or gender identity



UWD No More Closets Survey, January 2016

FIGURE 13
Passed over for job due to sexual orientation or gender identity

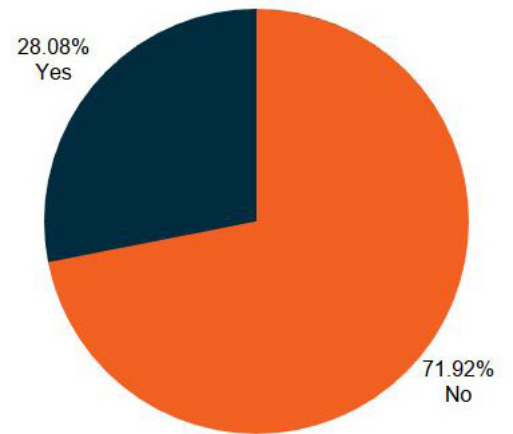


UWD No More Closets Survey, January 2016

This high level of discrimination also affects LGBTQ immigrants. Only 39 percent of survey respondents reported having a full time job while 10 percent of respondents said they were unemployed. Additionally, nearly a quarter of respondents (24 percent) said they have been discriminated against for their sexual orientation or gender identity and the same number report being passed over for a job for the same reason.

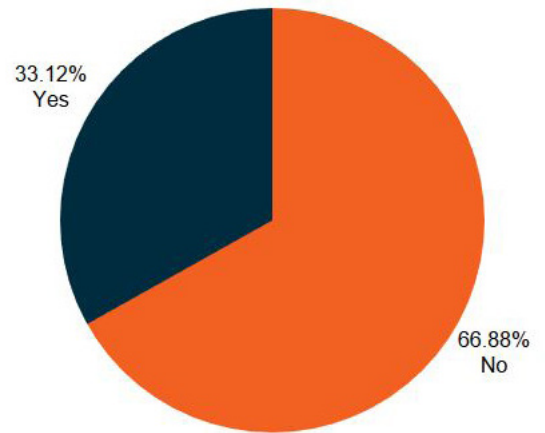
In addition to the discrimination they face for their sexual orientation or gender identity, LGBTQ immigrants face an added hurdle due to their immigration status. Over a quarter (28 percent) of respondents report having faced discrimination in the workplace due to their immigration status and many have been passed over for a job or promotion as well. This added layer of discrimination makes it difficult for LGBTQ immigrants to sustain a steady, livable wage.

FIGURE 14
Discriminated against at work due to immigration status



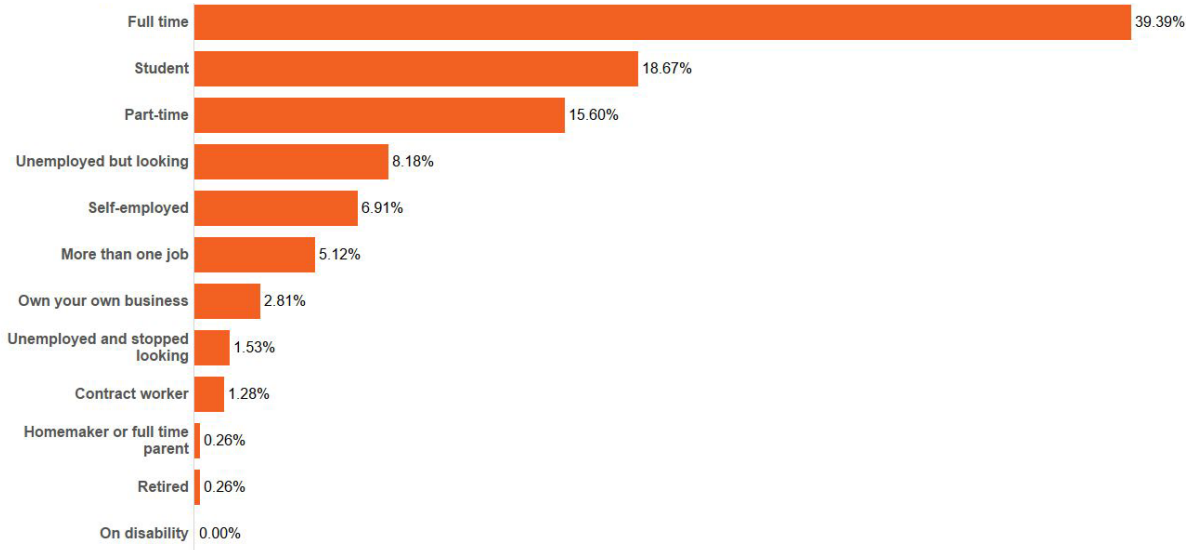
UWD No More Closets Survey, January 2016

FIGURE 15
Passed over for job due to immigration status



UWD No More Closets Survey, January 2016

FIGURE 16
Respondent's employment status



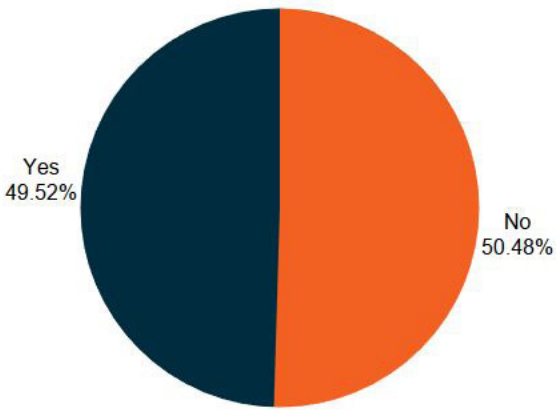
UWD No More Closets Survey, January 2016

Experiences with discrimination in education

Unfortunately, the discrimination and harassment faced by LGBTQ individuals in the workplace can also extend into the learning space. Discrimination against LGBTQ students occurs at all ages, from preschool through elementary and secondary school and into higher education. Currently the lack of explicit protections at the federal level leaves LGBTQ students with limited recourse when facing discrimination and unfair or unsafe treatment in school.²⁵

Currently, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 protect LGBTQ students from discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, and ability when attending a school that receives public funding.²⁶

FIGURE 17
Discriminated against at school due to sexual orientation or gender identity



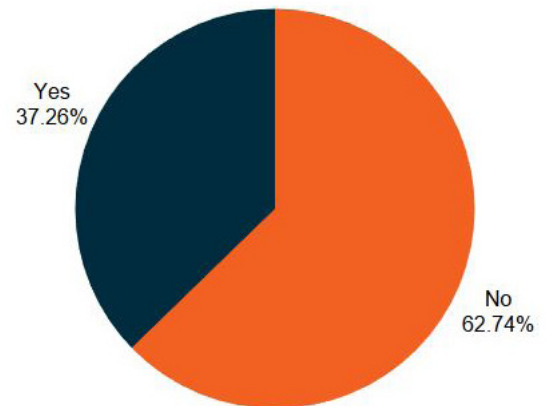
UWD No More Closets Survey, January 2016

Additionally, the Department of Education has recently interpreted that discrimination on the basis of a student's gender identity or nonconformity with gender stereotypes constitutes sex discrimination.²⁷ However, there are no federal laws that explicitly protect students on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity.²⁸ At the state level, only 13 states and the District of Columbia have nondiscrimination laws that specifically extend to LGBTQ students.²⁹

These protections are vital for LGBTQ students that still face unacceptably high levels of discrimination and harassment. In one survey, more than half LGBTQ students reported feeling unsafe at school due to their sexual orientation and more than one-third feel unsafe expressing their gender.³⁰ This can have detrimental effects on academic performance and attendance. UWD's survey respondents also reported facing difficult climates at school.³¹ Half of respondents reported being a target for harassment, discrimination, or violence at school due to their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Additionally, many LGBTQ immigrants also faced similar attitudes in school due to their immigration status. Nearly 4 in 10 respondents indicated being a target for harassment, discrimination or violence at school due to their immigration status. Previous research also points to extremely large levels of discrimination for immigrant students. In a study of Mexican immigrant children in elementary school by the Foundation for Child Development, more than 60 percent of students reported facing at least one instance of discrimination, including verbal abuse, from peers.³² The double burden of discrimination falls heavily on LGBTQ immigrant students and can have serious repercussions on their ability to access a high-quality education.

FIGURE 18
**Discriminated against at school
due to immigration status**



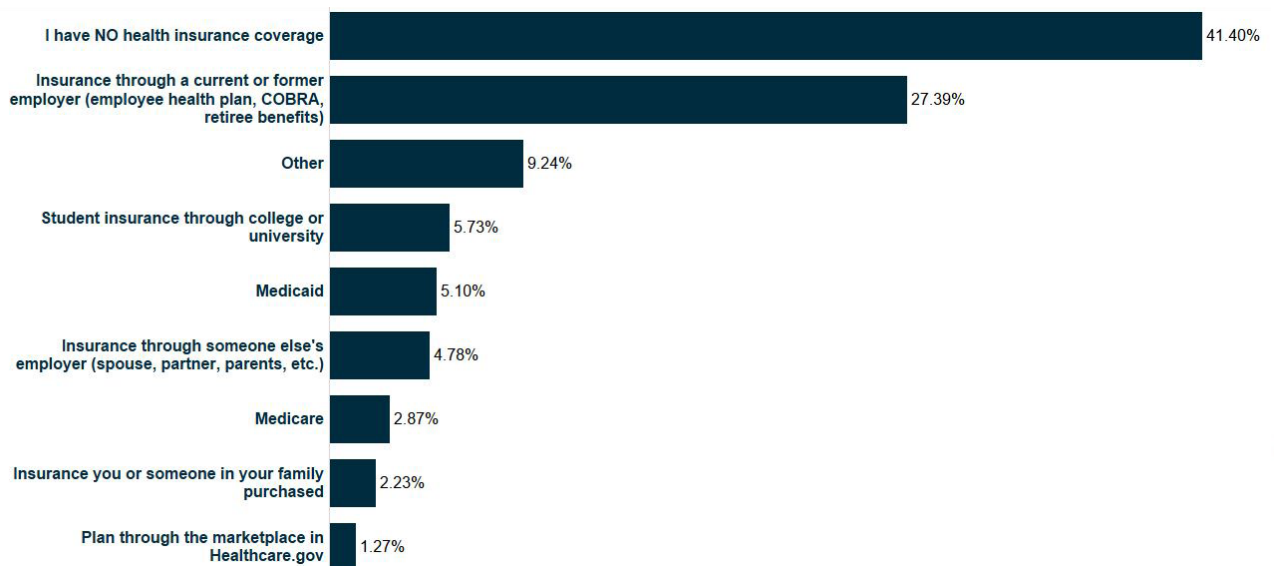
UWD No More Closets Survey, January 2016

Source: UWD Survey of DACA Recipients, June 2015

Experiences with discrimination in health care

For many people, navigating the health care system, from getting insurance to finding a quality provider, can be a challenge. LGBTQ people still encounter discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity as well as a high rate of uninsurance. In 2014, despite marked improvement stemming from the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA), uninsurance among LGBTQ people with incomes less than 400 percent of the federal poverty line stood at 26 percent.³³

FIGURE 19
Respondent's health care coverage



UWD No More Closets Survey, January 2016

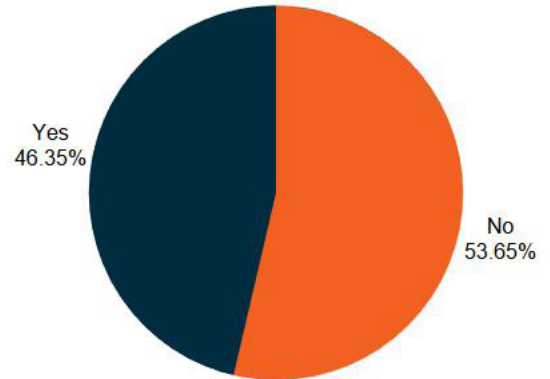
In the No More Closets survey, however, over 40 percent of respondents said they did not have insurance coverage. Indeed, while the ACA has led to more coverage for millions of people, immigrants in general – especially undocumented immigrants – still face restrictions from enrolling in health insurance plans.³⁴

In addition to problems regarding health insurance enrollment, numerous studies and reports have documented the widespread extent of the discrimination experienced by LGBTQ individuals in the health system. A nationwide study by Lambda Legal assessing the health care experiences of LGBTQ people found that almost half of all respondents experienced discrimination when seeking care – including incidents such as health care providers using harsh or abusive language and being physically rough with patients.³⁵ Additionally, the same study found that 10 percent of LGB respondents and 25 percent of transgender respondents have been refused needed medical care outright.³⁶

In the No More Closets survey, nearly half of respondents (46 percent) said they have hid or lied about their sexual orientation or gender identity to a health care provider because of fear. Respondents also expressed a fear of revealing their immigration status to a health care provider for the same reason.

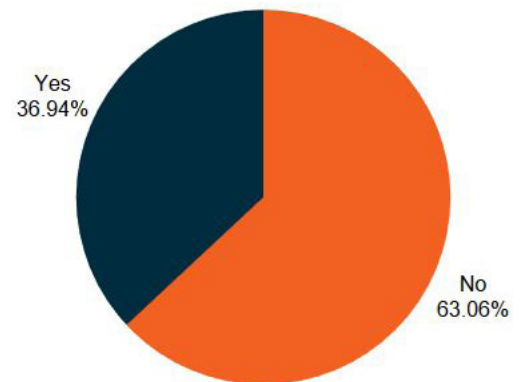
In addition to asking respondents about their experiences with the health care system, the survey also asked about HIV status. Nearly 1 in 5 respondents did not know their HIV status while 8 percent of respondents are HIV positive.

FIGURE 20
Hid or lied about sexual orientation or gender identity to health care provider due to fear



UWD No More Closets Survey, January 2016

FIGURE 21
Hid or lied about immigration status to health care provider due to fear



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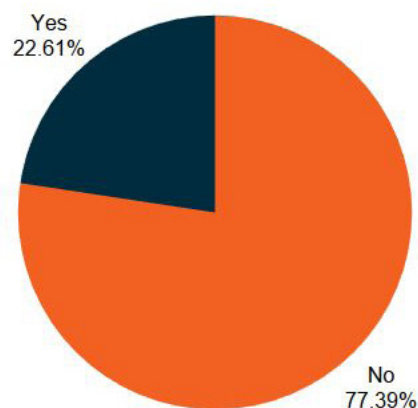
Experiences with discrimination in housing

A stable place to return home and build a life is of vital importance for everyone. Unfortunately, in 29 states, it is still legal to deny and restrict access to housing to LGBTQ individuals solely because of their sexual orientation or their gender identity.³⁷ Under current federal law, the Fair Housing Act does not explicitly protect against discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity.³⁸

The experiences of discrimination for LGBTQ people are all too real when it comes to housing. A study by the National Center for Transgender Equality and the National LGBTQ Task Force found that 19 percent of transgender respondents were refused a home or apartment and 11 percent had been evicted because of their gender identity.³⁹

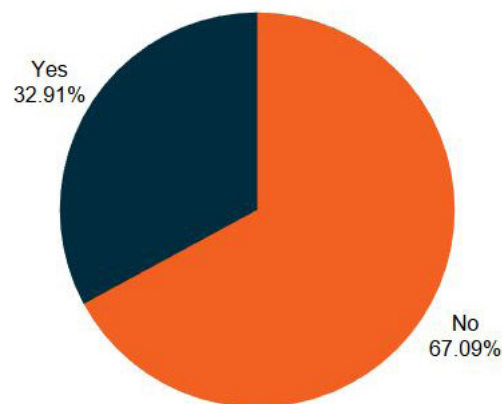
UWD's No More Closets survey found similar results for LGBTQ immigrants. Nearly a quarter of respondents (23 percent) said they faced discrimination when seeking a place to live because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Additionally, however, respondents also expressed severe levels of discrimination when seeking housing due to their immigration status – 33 percent of said they faced discrimination.

FIGURE 22
Discriminated against when seeking housing due to sexual orientation or gender identity



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FIGURE 23
Discriminated against when seeking housing due to immigration status



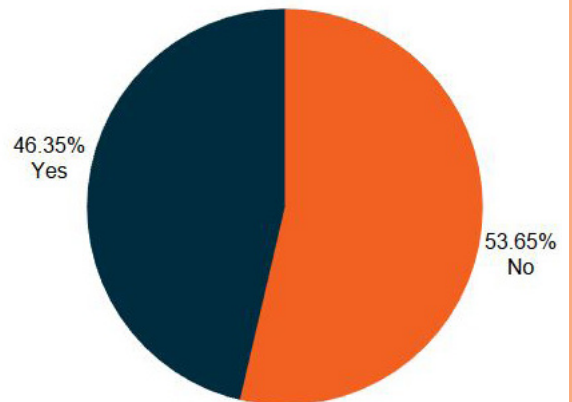
UWD No More Closets Survey, January 2016

Experiences with law enforcement

Historic and current tensions between law enforcement and LGBTQ and immigrant communities have reached higher levels of attention in the last couple years.⁴⁰ These tensions have led to deep mistrust and fear of law enforcement in these communities.⁴²

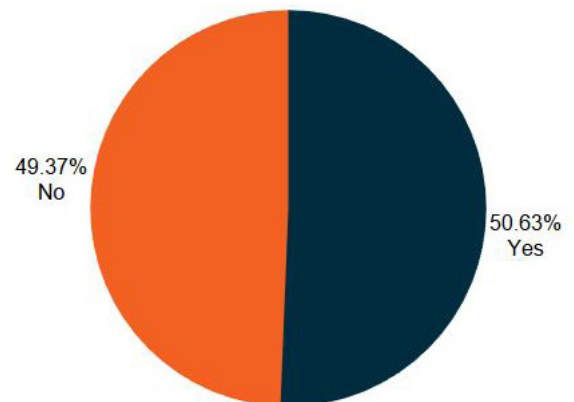
UWD's survey found that over half (53 percent) of respondents felt somewhat uncomfortable or very uncomfortable seeking help from police. Additionally, 46 percent of respondents said they are nervous or afraid of interacting with the police because of their sexual orientation or gender identity and 51 percent said they feel the same fear due to their immigration status. The responses to the survey about trust in law enforcement indicate that there is still much to do to make sure that LGBTQ and immigrant communities feel safe and secure.

FIGURE 24
Nervous or afraid of interacting with the police because of sexual orientation or gender identity



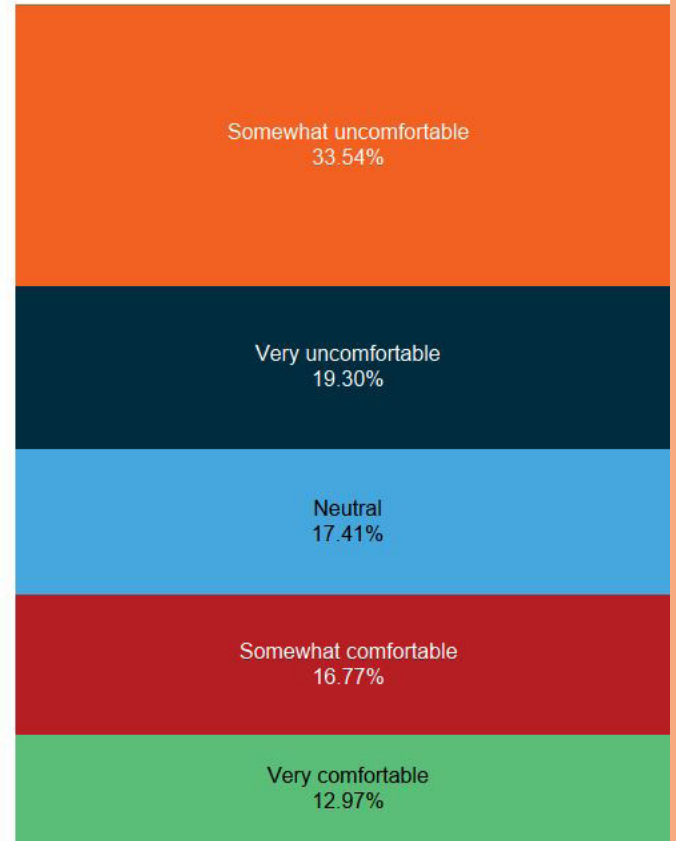
UWD No More Closets Survey, January 2016

FIGURE 25
Nervous or afraid of interacting with the police because of immigration status



UWD No More Closets Survey, January 2016

FIGURE 26
Respondent's comfort level with police



UWD No More Closets Survey, January 2016

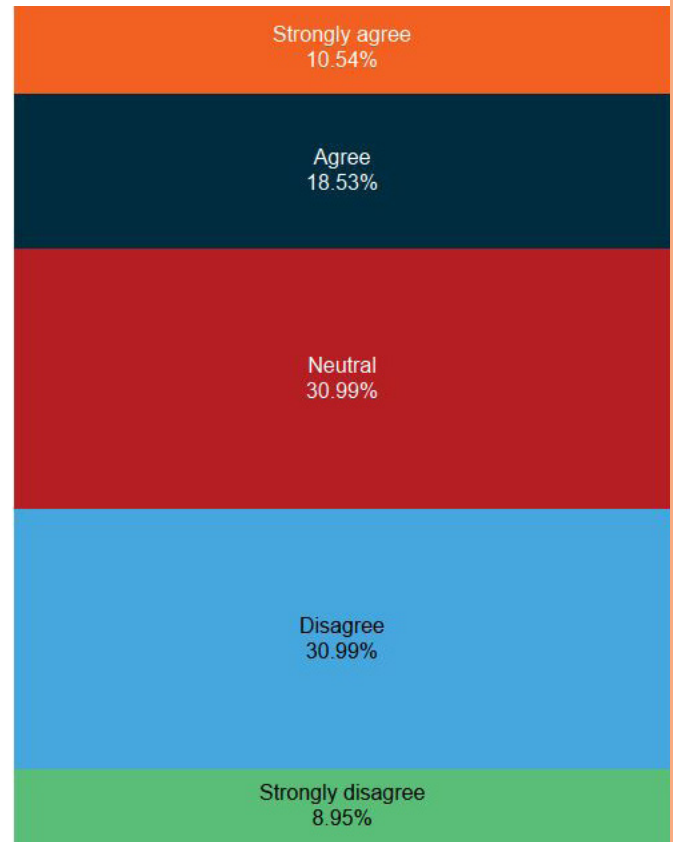
Experiences with community serving organizations

LGBTQ immigrants living at the intersection of marginalized identities often report having to hide or conceal part of their lives when seeking support or services from community serving institutions. Although much work has been done to bridge the gap between LGBTQ and immigrant serving organizations, the findings of the No More Closets survey still indicate that there is still much more work to be done.

In regards to LGBTQ serving organizations, 42 percent of survey respondents said they disagree or strongly disagree that these organizations address the needs of LGBTQ immigrants – while 37 percent said they strongly agree or agree. For immigrant serving organizations, 40 percent said they disagree or strongly disagree that these organizations address the needs of LGBTQ immigrants – while 30 percent said they strongly agree or agree.

Additionally, the survey also asked respondents their opinion on the top concern facing LGBTQ immigrants. The top three responses included health access, employment, and discrimination.

FIGURE 27
Immigrant serving organizations address the needs of LGBTQ immigrants.



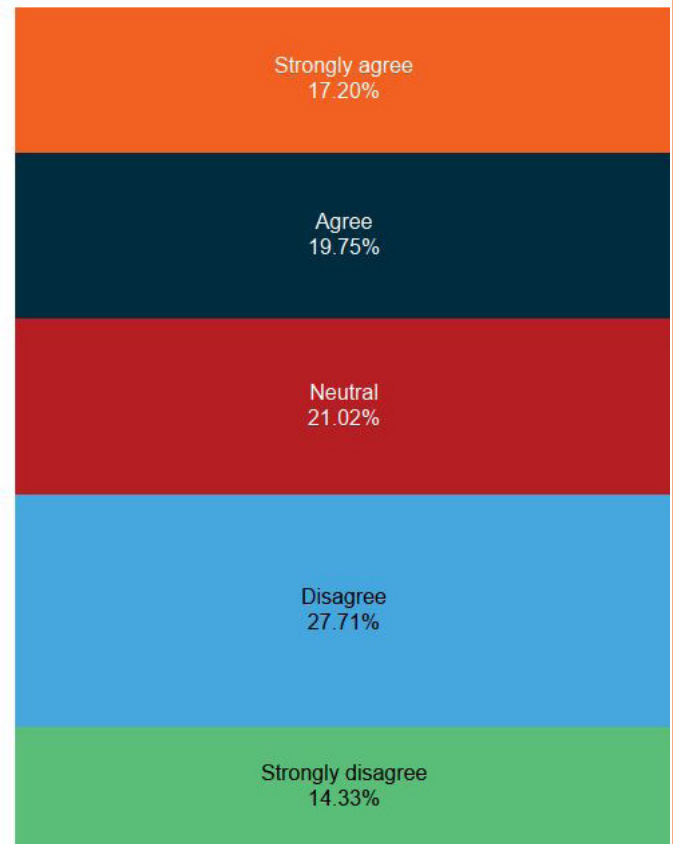
UWD No More Closets Survey, January 2016

“When I tell people I am bi they automatically think that I must be confused, greedy, experimental, or they just hypersexualize me. What people don’t realize is that I’ve dealt with this my entire life. Society has always wanted to put me in a box, to force me to say straight or lesbian and as an adolescent growing up I felt so torn in my identity. Growing up I used to think, “I must be the worst lesbian in the world because I’m still really attracted to men”. Now, I realize bisexuality is not about who I’m sleeping with or in a relationship with- it’s about me and who I am attracted to.”

Ana Cristina Temu
Longmont, Colorado



FIGURE 28
LGBTQ serving organizations
address the needs of LGBTQ immigrants.



UWD No More Closets Survey, January 2016

Conclusion

Although more research and investigation has increased the visibility of the LGBTQ immigrant community, more still needs to be done. LGBTQ immigrants have been at the forefront of changing both immigration and LGBTQ advocacy and policy spaces. However, beyond simply knowing the number of people in this community, more research is needed both in terms of the types of obstacles and hardships they experience.

The No More Closets survey should not be the last opportunity to shed light on the critical needs of the LGBTQ immigrant community. The survey indicates that this community faces real challenges in regard to discrimination, poverty, and violence that must be addressed.

While these research needs are met, this survey can help guide the work of both LGBTQ and immigration advocacy organizations as they set a path forward together.

Historical and ongoing advocacy has already proved to be fruitful in many areas of work including, immigration reform, detention, and family acceptance. This work can continue and become deeper with a real commitment to understand and highlight the experiences of the LGBTQ immigrant community.

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