

JUST A BALL GAME?

THE SURVEY-2020
HOMOPHOBIA, BIPHOBIA and
TRANSPHOBIA IN SPORT

Lindsay England and Peter Millward

2020



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Foreward by: Neville Southall, Ex-Everton and Wales goalkeeper.

“To me sport has been something that should be inclusive for all people.”

“As an ally to the LGBTQ+ community I find it sad that they are still finding that sport still has many barriers for them.”

“This survey shows some hope in certain areas, but we still have a long way to go to make sport as inclusive as it should be.”

“Sporting bodies must look at this survey and work out a better way forward. They must give the same onus on homophobia, biphobia and transphobia as racism. All discrimination should always be challenged.”

“I want all people to feel safe and enjoy sport, and we also have to make reporting of any homophobia, biphobia and transphobia, and any other form of discrimination far easier and safer for participants. My hope is we get to a point where the LGBTQ+ community can mix with others without feeling threatened or get abused.”

“Sport must be about the enjoyment of the sport for the person, anything else is a disaster.”

Introduction.

The research published in this documentation was conducted by Lindsay England founder of “*Just a Ball Game?*” (JBG?) in partnership with Peter Millward (Professor of Contemporary Sociology, Liverpool John Moores University). This survey is a 10 year on follow up from the original piece of research which was conducted by *JBG? a decade ago*.

Although much of the content is already known to those involved in challenging homophobia biphobia and transphobia in sport, it was felt there was a need for hard factual evidence to be provided for reference.

Documented evidence is of vital importance when raising issues and concerns to those involved in sport at NGB’s (National Governing Bodies), International Sport Organisations, the Governments Equalities Office, press and media, education establishments, as well as grass roots and professional participants who identify as both LGBT+, and a wider public in general who have an interest in the industry and the issues raised in this survey.

1. Key summary

- a. Just over 73.30 percent of survey participants feel the need to participate in sport or leisure activities in a 'safe space' by being part of an LGBT+, or an LGBT+ friendly club or inclusive of all group.
- b. A quarter of the sample stated they had directly experienced homophobia, biphobia or transphobia in sport. This is likely to be an under report given that qualitative comments offered by those who reported they had not indicated the opposite.
- c. A quarter of survey participants to the survey reported any of the homophobia, biphobia or transphobia they witnessed to an appropriate body.
- d. Only 58 out of 133 who responded to the question "Do you feel satisfied with the responses you got when you reported the homophobia, biphobia or transphobia?" felt that the response they got after reporting the bigotry was satisfactory. This figure highlights the need for further sensitivity and improvements.
- e. Sadly some of those who took the survey didn't report the prejudice or discrimination as they did not recognise this as such.
- f. Findings underline those across the survey in highlighting modest improvements in the landscape but still much work to be carried out given that the prevalence of LGBT+ discrimination continues to be high.

2. Methodology

The research was conducted over 10 weeks during the summer of 2020, and therefore during Covid - 19 lockdown in many countries globally. There were over 250 respondents. Online responses made up 4/5th of the total content; the rest were completed by email response.

The on-line survey was anonymous, with the first 50 responses coming from people who identified as being LGBT+. Although the majority of those who took part were from the UK (around 83%), there were other contributions from Europe and from those who participated from further afield such as North America.

Qualitative and quantitative answers, and both summary and percentage responses are given in the report. It was pleasing to see that those who identify as both LGBT+ or non-LGBT+ were respondents to the survey. Also, it was important to have participants take part who were from both the grass roots and professional areas of sport.

3. Survey questions and responses received

Gender	Number	Percent (2 d.p)
<i>Trans</i>	9	4.25
<i>Male</i>	102	48.11
<i>Female</i>	99	46.70
<i>Other/not specified</i>	5	2.36
<i>Total (valid responses)</i>	212	100.00

Table 1. Participants' gender identity

Data in Table 1 illustrates a male/female gender split of 48.11 per cent and 46.70 per cent, accounting for the majority of the sample. Transpeople accounted for just 4.25 per cent of those that took part of the sample, with a further five people (2.36 per cent) of participants not specifying their gender. These figures broadly tally with those from the 2011 survey where 55.15 per cent of the sample identified as male and 45.88 per cent identified as female.

Sexual Orientation	Number	Percent (2 d.p)
<i>Bisexual</i>	25	11.79
<i>Gay Man/Women</i>	35	16.51
<i>Heterosexual/Straight</i>	123	58.02
<i>Lesbian</i>	21	9.91
<i>Queer</i>	8	3.77
<i>Other</i>	4	1.89
<i>Rather not say</i>	4	1.89
<i>Total (valid responses)</i>	212	100.00

Table 2. Participants' sexual identity

Participants' sexualities varied between the 2011 and 2020 surveys. In 2011, 85.5 per cent of those who took part identified as LGBTQI with just 15.5 per cent not identifying in this way. However the 2020 survey included 58.02 per cent of the population who identified as heterosexual/straight allies, potentially altering the responses that might be provided later in the survey (since they are less likely to be subjected to sexuality-themed prejudice and discrimination). The next largest group in the survey were those that identified as a gay man or women (16.51 per cent), bisexual (11.79 per cent) and lesbian (9.91 per cent).

Sport Participation	Number	Percent (2 d.p)
Currently play	192	91.00
Do not currently play	19	9.00
Total (valid responses)	211	100.00

Table 3. Participants' current sport participation

The vast majority of those that took part in the survey actively play sport (91 per cent). This figure is broadly consistent with 2011 data where 81 per cent actively played sport. From the 91 per cent of participants who reported that they currently played sport, the most popular form of physical activity was football accounting for 63.27 per cent of the sample, followed by swimming (29.08 per cent), cycling (25 per cent) but in total 29 types of sporting activity were undertaken (participants could make multiple choices). This highlighted a large spread of sporting leisure time pursuits. From the sample of participants that played sport, 34.68 per cent played team sports, 32.66 per cent played individual sports and 32.66 per cent played both.

Role in Sport	Number	Percent (2 d.p.)
<i>Player</i>	131	64.53
<i>Manager</i>	14	6.90
<i>Coach</i>	20	9.85
<i>Official</i>	11	5.42
<i>Administrator</i>	24	11.82
<i>None</i>	50	24.63
Total (valid responses)	203	100.00

Table 4. Participants' primary role in sport

Participants were most likely to describe their roles in sport as players, reflecting a national pattern. This marked a difference to the 2011 survey results when coaches and administrators were both more common responses than players.

Attendance at sport as a spectator

Number

Percent (2 d.p)

Yes	161	76.67
No	51	23.33
Total (valid responses)	210	100.00

Table 5. Does the participant attend sports matches as a spectator?

76.67 of participants also regularly attended sport as spectators, marking a rise from 61 per cent who reported similar in 2011. The 76.67 per cent of the sample that attended sports matches as a spectator mostly attended football matches (79.47 per cent), followed by tennis (17.89 per cent) and swimming events (16.84 per cent) however there was a wide spread of 20 types of sports consumed in this fashion. This highlighted a large spread of sporting spectator pursuits and echoes a similar spread from the 2011 data.

	2020		2011	
Team/club/group an LGBT+ club/group?	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent (2 d.p)</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent (2 d.p)</i>
Yes	33	16.02	62	34.00
No	79	38.35	119	66.00
LGBT+ friendly	48	23.30	N/A	N/A
Inclusive of all	70	33.98	N/A	N/A
Total (valid responses)	206	100.00	181	100.00

Table 6. Team/club/group participant belongs to an LGBT+ club/group?

Table 6 shows that both 2011 and 2020 participants' sports team/club/group are not highlighted as an LGBT+ club group, although new potential answers in the most recent survey highlight the popularity of 'inclusive of all' and 'LGBT+ friendly' teams and groups.

Geographical level of club/group membership **Number** **Percent (2 d.p)**

<i>International</i>	4	1.92
<i>National</i>	54	25.96
<i>Local</i>	141	67.46
<i>None</i>	7	3.37
<i>Not sure</i>	2	0.96
Total (valid responses)	208	100.00

Table 7. Geographical level of participant's club/group membership

Most participants' clubs/groups were registered at a local level, followed by those that were registered at national levels.

	2020		2011*	
Witnessed LGBT+ discrimination in sport	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent (2 d.p)</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent (2 d.p)</i>
Yes	118	55.92	132	68.00
No	89	42.18	63	32.00
Other	8	3.79	N/A	N/A
Total (valid responses)	211	100.00	195	100.00

Table 8. Witnessed LGBT+ discrimination in sport (*2011 survey asked only ‘homophobia’).

The most recent data suggests a small drop in the proportion of people who have witnessed LGBT+ discrimination in sport, from 68 per cent to 55.92 per cent of the population. This is positive news that should be treated with caution for two reasons. First, as highlighted in Table 2, more people in the 2020 survey identify as ‘straight/heterosexual’ which might bring about qualitatively different experiences and recognitions of what is LGBT+ discrimination and second, the ‘other’ category revealed responses that respondents did not declare to be LGBT+ discrimination but could reasonably be declared as such. These included: ‘I have heard lazy homophobic slurs on the pitch - whether these were intended to be homophobic, or were just ignorant, I’m not sure’, ‘transwoman attempting to invade the women’s changing rooms even though wasn’t playing sport and the Trans woman started to abuse another lesbian who plays at the same club. Very homophobic’ and ‘not personally but have seen it’.

	2020		2011*	
Experienced LGBT+ discrimination in sport	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent (2 d.p)</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent (2 d.p)</i>
Yes	51	24.52	63	32.50
No	154	74.04	131	67.50
Other	5	2.40	N/A	N/A
Total (valid responses)	208	100.00	194	100.00

Table 9. Experienced LGBT+ discrimination in sport (*2011 survey asked only ‘homophobia’).

Similarly, there are reasons for highly cautious optimism provided in Table 9. Although almost 25 per cent of the sample declared that they had experienced LGBT+ discrimination in sport, this had dropped from 32.5 per cent in 2011. Once more, the decreased percentage of the sample identifying as LGBTQI in 2020 must be woven into this analysis and the option of other threw up examples that could be reasonably considered discriminatory. These included: ‘two men shouted homophobic abuse at me but it was stopped by the rest of the team & spectators when they all went apeshit at them’, ‘homophobic jokes when I tell people I play football’ and ‘misgendering’.

Did abuse come from fellow team member, opposition player, coach/manager, official/administrator, or supporter?

	Number	Percent (2 d.p)
Yes	111	53.37
No	96	46.15
Other	1	0.47
Total (valid responses)	208	100.00

Table 10. Did the abuse come from fellow team member, opposition player, coach/manager, official/administrator, or supporter?

Table 10. shows that 53.37 per cent of those who had experienced or witnessed LGBT+ themed abuse saw this come from a fellow team member, opposition player, coach/manager, official/administrator, or supporter.

Homophobia, biphobia, or transphobia reported reported	2020		2011*	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent (2 d.p)</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent (2 d.p)</i>
Yes	38	24.84	41	26.00
No	115	75.16	118	74.00
Total (valid responses)	153	100.00	159	100.00

Table 11. Was the homophobia, biphobia, or transphobia reported? (*2011 survey asked only ‘homophobia’).

Results in Table 11 show little difference in whether homophobia, biphobia, or transphobia was reported with around three quarters of cases going unreported in both surveys. This is a very large under report on figures - and has remained static over the two periods.

Who was LGBT+ abuse reported to?	2020		2011	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent (2 d.p)</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent (2 d.p)</i>
League/association	20	20.41	13	22.03
Team/club	23	23.47	8	13.56
Official	4	4.08	7	11.86
Manager	26	26.53	3	5.08
Police	8	8.16	3	5.08
Steward	1	1.02	2	3.39
Other	17	17.35	1	1.69
Total (valid responses)	98	100.00	59	100.00

Table 12. Who was LGBT+ abuse reported to? (*2011 survey asked only ‘homophobia’).

In 2020 there was a less clear authority or person to report LGBT+ abuse to, with many respondents ticking 'other'. In a minority of cases, this reflected report mechanisms offered by NGOs such as 'Kick It Out'. In 2020 reporting cases to a team manager rather than a league or association appeared to be a more normal practice – this was not a common route to report in the 2011 figures.

	2020		2011*	
Satisfied with the response to report?	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent (2 d.p)</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent (2 d.p)</i>
Yes	58	43.61	8	19.51
No	75	56.39	33	80.49
Total (valid responses)	133	100.00	41	100.00

Table 13. Who was LGBT+ abuse reported to? (*2011 survey asked only 'homophobia').

In 2020 there was a less clear authority or person to report LGBT+ abuse to, with many respondents ticking 'other'. In a minority of cases, this reflected report mechanisms offered by NGOs such as 'Kick It Out'. In 2020 reporting cases to a team manager rather than a league or association appeared to be a more normal practice – this was not a common route to report in the 2011 figures.

4. Good practice/positive experience.

Sadly only a few of the answers and comments which accompanied them were of the positive nature. Findings on these are listed below.

- a. There are tentative findings in the survey, that will merit further exploration, that might suggest some modest improvements in LGBT+ inclusion in sport.
- b. There appears to be increased availability and use of LGBT+ teams/groups, LGBT+ friendly teams/groups and 'inclusive of all' groups.
- c. Participants' sexualities were varied in the 2020 survey compared to the 2011 survey, highlighting the potential for greater inclusion of LGBT+ people in sport.
- d. Slightly smaller proportions of the survey participants had witnessed and experienced LGBT+ discrimination when compared to 2011 data.
- e. While LGBT+ discrimination clearly exists the survey found some evidence that heterosexual and straight allies can help in 'challenging' such abuse.

5. Bad practice/negative experience.

- a. The proportion of those who felt confident in reporting LGBT+ discrimination held firm at around 25 per cent in both 2011 and 2020 data. In the most recent survey, participants continued to feel uncomfortable reporting such discrimination to those who were beyond their personal and good relationships (i.e. team managers etc.).
- b. LGBT+ discrimination and abuse continue to primarily come from fellow team members, opposition players, coach/managers and officials/administrators. Much work is needed to continue to challenge and change the nature of this abuse.
- c. An under report in LGBT+ discrimination continues. In this survey some participants did not always flag actions such as 'misgendering' and comments such as 'I have heard lazy homophobic slurs on the pitch - whether these were intended to be homophobic, or were just ignorant, I'm not sure' as necessarily LGBT+ discrimination.
- d. LGBT+ discrimination is not uniform, which needs to be recognised. While some might be 'everyday' (or 'banter') in nature it does not mean it is without harm for those receiving such comments.

e. LGBT+ discrimination can be institutional, showing the exclusion and the lack of LGBT+ people from progressing in CIS, heterosexual dominated sport. This needs to be addressed in the future.

f. Extreme forms of LGBT+ discrimination continue to exist in the form of bullying and other exclusionary practices. These do not only exist on social media platforms but also in offline personal relationships, highlighting the need for further attention to LGBT+ abuse and bullying.

5. Conclusions

a) Very few LGBT+ people (or those perceived to be LGBT+ who have faced discrimination) think they are safe enough to challenge any of the homophobia, biphobia or transphobia themselves at the time of it occurring. So, it's possible there will be numerous repeat offenders, who think what they are doing has no consequences for themselves or serving any lasting damage to others.

b) Most people don't see there is any point in reporting any of the homophobia, bi phobia or transphobia as sport with its officials and administrators and beyond don't think that this type of abuse needs to be addressed.

c) It seems that many still conceal their sexual orientation or gender identity while participating in sport, and fear discrimination if they are 'out' to anyone.

d) Many (over 76 per cent) of LGBT+ people surveyed stated they attend live sport on a regular basis despite the levels and amounts of existing homophobia biphobia or transphobia.

e) More LGBT+ people would feel comfortable to play in mainstream sports if there was much less or no homophobia, biphobia or transphobia experienced in sport along with other negative stereotypical behaviour.

6. Recommendations

a) Sport needs to step up its equality, inclusion and diversity training, both at the grass roots and professional levels. All Players, coaches/managers, administrators, league providers, agents, media, and support staff of recognised/affiliated sport should have to have some form of equality, inclusion and diversity training within the first 12 months of their role.

- b) Sport as a whole HAS to take a ZERO tolerance approach to homophobia, biphobia and transphobia in all its guises. This ZERO tolerance needs to have substance and perpetrators found accountable educated, fined and or banned as need be. Those making the reports have to be fully supported and without fear of recrimination.
- c) It could be that more LGBT+ people need to take more responsibility themselves (if they feel safe to do so) and make a stand to say 'enough is enough' and challenge the homophobia, biphobia or transphobia within sport.
- d) Better reporting systems and coordinated stats made available need to be introduced, with the reports handled in an appropriate manner and sanctions applied, even if this for a first offence which entails education or re-education. Repeat offenders could be given more severe punishment in proportion to the severity of the incident. It's very much TIME FOR ACTION.
- e) Various resources could be applied to highlight equality laws, and hate incidents/hate crimes, warning people of the consequences of their actions and the serious nature of their offence.
- f) Mainstream sport needs to recognize and promote athletes who are 'out' or be supportive of LGBT+ people to help provide a younger generation with LGBT+ role models.
- g) Information needs to be readily available to LGBT+ people which demonstrate that their chosen sport or leisure activity is inclusive of LGBT+ participation.

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