

Swimming with Sharks:

The negative social and psychological impacts of Ireland's marriage equality referendum 'NO' campaign



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A survey report
(7 October 2016)

This survey was conducted by Dr Sharon Dane (The University of Queensland, Australia) and Dr Liz Short (Victoria University, Australia), with associate researcher Dr Grainne Healy (LGBT and Social Justice Advocate, Ireland), in collaboration with National LGBT Federation (Ireland) and PFLAG (Australia), with support from BeLonG To (Ireland) and Rainbow Families Victoria (Australia).

Front cover artwork by Matt Davidson



Swimming with sharks

"...these people have made it their mission to ensure that I do not get to have the same rights and experiences as my parents, friends and siblings. I've always known this was the case, but these people are like sharks. You hear about them and shrug, until you encounter them. When you do, it is not a pleasant experience. And throughout the campaign, I felt like I was in shark infested waters. I spent half the time trying to block it out, but when the signs [posters] came up it became impossible to ignore. I felt like I did not belong in society".

Survey participant

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Executive Summary

When asked if they could go back in time

- only 23% reported that they would be happy to go through a referendum.

Emotions in relation to the 'NO' campaign events

- Participants reported how they felt in the months leading up to the referendum during the 'NO' side campaign. Of the total sample of 1,657 participants, 71% reported that they often or always felt negative, 63% that they often or always felt sad, and 57% that they rarely or never felt happy.
- Participants recalled a number of campaign events. For example, 97% recalled the 'NO' campaign posters placed on buildings and poles throughout the cities and countryside towns. Eighty percent reported being upset by these images and around two-thirds reported feeling anxious (66%) and distressed (64%).

The impact on younger LGBTI people

- While people of all ages reported high levels of negativity as a result of the 'NO' side campaign, this negativity was statistically significantly stronger for younger LGBTI people, who were also more likely to score lower on psychological well-being relative to their older counterparts. Further, 72% of participants, in general, felt that young LGBTI people experienced high levels of negativity during this time.
- Younger LGBTI people, relative to older, were also statistically significantly more likely to feel anxious and afraid when exposed to their own family members' negative comments. Several of these younger people, who had not 'come out' to their parents, were exposed to these comments in their own homes.

The impact on the children of LGBTI parents

- Although children were not surveyed for this research, 72% of participants in this sample felt children of LGBTI parents experienced high levels of negative feeling during the 'NO' campaign. In fact, it was clear from the stories these participants conveyed that these children were one of the most negatively impacted groups. As one parent explained *"It affected my daughter hugely, she would come home from school crying"*. Another explained *"It was nothing short of cruel, and every child of an LGBTI family that I know echoed that"*.

The impact on LGBTI people living in rural Ireland

- LGBTI people living in rural areas were statistically significantly more likely to recall feeling higher levels of negative emotions in relation to their family members' support of the 'NO' campaign, compared with those living in urban areas. Their stories also suggest that they felt more isolated and exposed to a higher presence of the 'NO' side messages. As one participant explained *"We only saw NO. We didn't see yes, we didn't feel yes, we didn't hear yes"*.

The impact on senior LGBTI people

- Although senior (55+ years) LGBTI participants did not report feeling the same degree of negativity as their younger counterparts, they were far from exempt from having these negative experiences. Of people in this older age group, 51% reported they often or always felt negative during the 'NO' campaign months leading up to referendum vote.

The impact on family members of LGBTI people

- Sixty-four percent of participants who were family members of LGBTI people reported feeling often to always negative during the lead up to the referendum. As one participant explained *"My elderly parents were constantly harassed by a neighbour who was fired up by the no campaign, who told them all sorts of lies about surrogacy and how gay marriage would affect children. It distressed my parents greatly because this woman is an old friend of the family..."*

Social impacts of the NO campaign

The NO campaign and its messages were encountered in all areas of life and social relationships, including : workplaces, churches, schools, universities, houses, neighbourhoods, streets, shops, bars, sports grounds, places of leisure, public transport, television, radio, posters, flyers, and on social media.

"It was impossible to shield yourself from the campaign"

The main negative messages from the NO campaign reported were that:

- **Families** headed by one married mother and father, with their biological children, are the "real", "ideal", "acceptable", "worthy", "respectable" and "adequate" family, and other families as less so
- **Parents** who are heterosexual and married are the most "acceptable", "worthy", "respectable" and "adequate", and others as less so
- **Children** raised by other than heterosexual married parents are "damaged", "disadvantaged", "missing out" and "at risk"

Under the guise of "respectful debate" and "balance" a "megaphone" and "platform" for homophobia and prejudice was provided

"The referendum seemed to inspire previously silent homophobes to come out of the woodwork to tell us what they had obviously been thinking all along."

Relationships and bonds were strained, damaged and broken

This included within families, friendships, workplaces, churches, schools, leisure and community groups.

"It caused a rift between my family, some aren't even on speaking terms anymore."

This resulted in some people leaving jobs, churches, community groups and activities, schools, and Ireland.

A very large number and range of negative emotions were reported, having ripple effects in society

These included feeling: Demeaned, degraded, invalidated, humiliated, violated, attacked, exhausted, devastated, traumatised, and suicidal

Objective

The aim of this project was to generate knowledge about the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people and their families during the 'YES' and 'NO' campaigns in the lead up to Ireland's marriage equality referendum, and after the outcome.

This first summary report focuses on the negative social and psychological experiences of these individuals during the months leading up to the referendum vote.

We hope the findings from this research will assist governments, health organisations, educators and community groups to better understand the effects of such campaigns on LGBTI people and their families, and contribute to the international body of research on this topic.

Methodology

The online survey commenced at **7 am, Thursday, 15th September**, Dublin time and closed **midnight (11:59 pm), Sunday, 25th September**, Dublin time. In order to obtain a diverse sample of LGBTI participants and their families, a multi-mode method used for the effective recruitment of minority groups was employed.

Content First, an Australian professional marketing strategy company, was contracted to advertise the survey on Facebook, targeting LGBTI people, of all ages, living Ireland. As not all individuals engage on Facebook, the survey was advertised through a number of well-established LGBTI organisations in Ireland (e.g., National LGBT Federation, BeLonG To) and through GCN, Ireland's longest running LGBT news publication. To ensure we reached an even broader segment of the LGBTI community, emails advertising the survey were sent to various LGBTI social and community networks.

The mixed methods online anonymous survey was provided through the Qualtrics Research platform and houses at The University of Queensland and Victoria University. Ethical approval for this research was given by the Human Research Ethics Committees of both Universities.

Parametric and non-parametric analyses were conducted for the quantitative data. The qualitative data was analyzed using Thematic Analysis, the most common qualitative method used for psychology and other social sciences.

Methodology

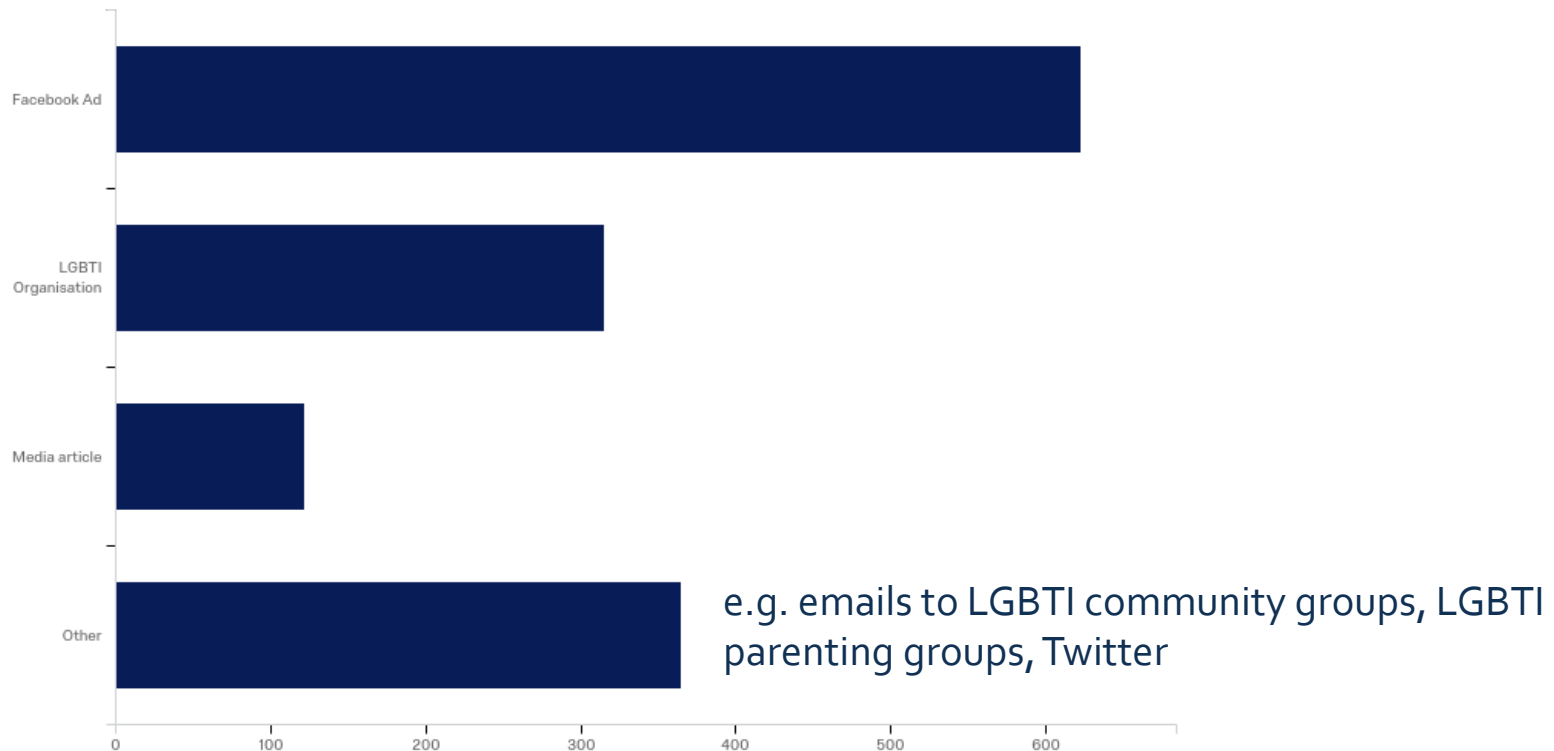


Fig 1 Method of survey access

Sample

The survey was advertised as being open to LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex) people in Ireland and their close family members. People accessing the survey were first presented with an eligibility questionnaire. Those who selected “yes” to being 1) an LGBTI person or a close family member of an LGBTI person 2) a citizen or resident of Ireland present in the lead up to the vote, 3) at least 18 years of age and 4) a supporter of marriage equality were directed to the information and participant consent page. Those who did not qualify were directed to a closing screen explaining the reasons for disqualification.

Of the 2133 people who qualified for participation, 1657 (77.7%) went on to start the survey questions, with a completion rate (those completing the last question) of 88.4%.

Of the total sample, 52.8% were male, 43.7% female and 3.5% non-binary (or ‘other’). Age groups range from 18-24 to 65-74. Just under twenty percent (19.9%) of the sample lived in rural areas (see Tables 1-4 in Demographics Section).

Memories of the 'NO' side campaign

Emotions during the 'NO' Campaign

Participants (1, 657) were first asked to think back to how they felt during the months before the referendum when people were exposed to the 'NO' side campaign.

- **70.79%** reported that they often or always felt **NEGATIVE**
- **62.95%** that they often or always felt **SAD**
- **75.47%** that they often or always felt **ANGRY**
- **59.87%** that they rarely or never felt **POSITIVE**
- **57.06%** that they rarely or never felt **HAPPY**

(See Table 5 in Data Section)

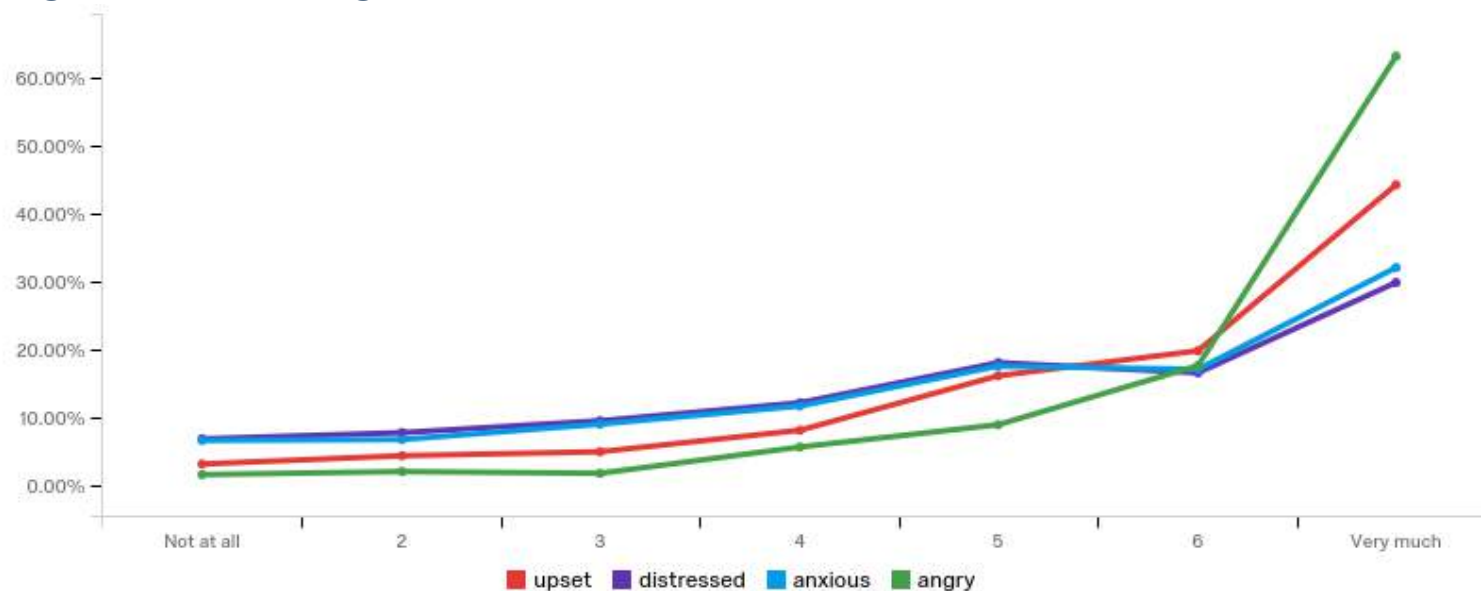
Memory of campaign related events

Participants were then asked which campaign events they remembered

Remembered	%	Count
Seeing the 'NO' campaign posters or flyers	96.77%	1590
Seeing or hearing radio or TV 'NO' campaign messages or arguments against marriage equality	85.64%	1407
Seeing or hearing negative reactions to the doorstep canvassing for the 'YES' side campaign	50.94%	837
Hearing comments in support of the 'NO' side from within my local community (e.g. neighbourhood, workplace, church)	56.36%	926
Hearing comments in support of the 'NO' side from my family members	30.37%	499

For each campaign event, participants were asked to what extent they had felt upset, distressed, anxious and angry (with this order randomised for each question).

Fig. 2 'NO' Campaign Posters or Flyers



Percentages of those who reported feeling moderately (5) to very much (7) the following emotions in relation to the NO campaign posters or flyers:

- 79.84% upset
- 64.16% distressed
- 66.37% anxious
- 89.37% angry

(see Table 6 in Data Section)

"Seeing No posters being erected all over the place you call home is like seeing posters that say you are not welcome. No to your life. No to relationships. No to your future. No to your happiness. No to you. There was several outside a local school. This was probably the angriest I've been during the referendum, what it must have been like for LGBTQI school kids in that High school who already feel so alone and isolated to see those posters day after day, it was cruel."

"Walking up Patrick St in Dublin every day on my way to work, back home for lunch, back to work and again back home in the evening. There were at least 15 NO posters each side of the road. I felt I was constantly being bombarded and then going home and turning on the radio, TV or scrolling through social media. There was no escaping it. If I went into a shop to buy milk- there it was again plastered on some newspaper or magazine. There was no escaping it".



Vote No or Vote Yes

Each has its consequences

No is characterised by reasonable, dignified principles that do not change.

Yes is characterised by personal desires and opinions that always change.

Consequences of No or Yes

1 No safeguards the meaning and purpose of marriage as the union of man and woman.
Yes destroys its true meaning and purpose, changing marriage to what any two persons say it is.

2 No honours fully the meaning of family as father, mother and children.
Yes degrades the meaning of family, changing it to what people decide they want it to be.

3 No protects the right of every child to a mother and a father.
Yes deprives many children of a natural mother or father or both, by design.

4 No provides children with natural family identity and emotional security into adulthood.
Yes puts desire for artificially created families above the natural needs and rights of children.

5 No secures the line of generations from grandparents to parents to children to grandchildren.
Yes eliminates extended family relationships by design, e.g. by removing grandparents.

6 No venerates true values and natural relationships.
Yes disdains true values, belittling husband, wife, father, mother, grandparent.

7 No upholds the good order and natural structure of society.
Yes subverts the fabric of society by imposing artificial structures of its own.

8 No ensures fairness, compassion, tolerance, equality, and inclusion for all.
Yes appears to champion these values, but in fact abuses and erodes them.

9 No protects the Constitution from falsehood and its detrimental consequences.
Yes ignores good sense, demanding constitutional authority regardless of the consequences.

The above consequences are stated in their ultimate form fully played out.

Radio or TV 'NO' Campaign Messages or Arguments Against Marriage Equality

A similar pattern was found for the many who experienced hearing or seeing radio and TV debates during the campaigns, although the numbers reporting that they felt 'distressed' was a little higher compared with exposure to the NO campaign posters/flyers (see page 15).

Percentages of those who reported feeling moderately (5) to very much (7) the following emotions in relation to the Radio and TV debates were:

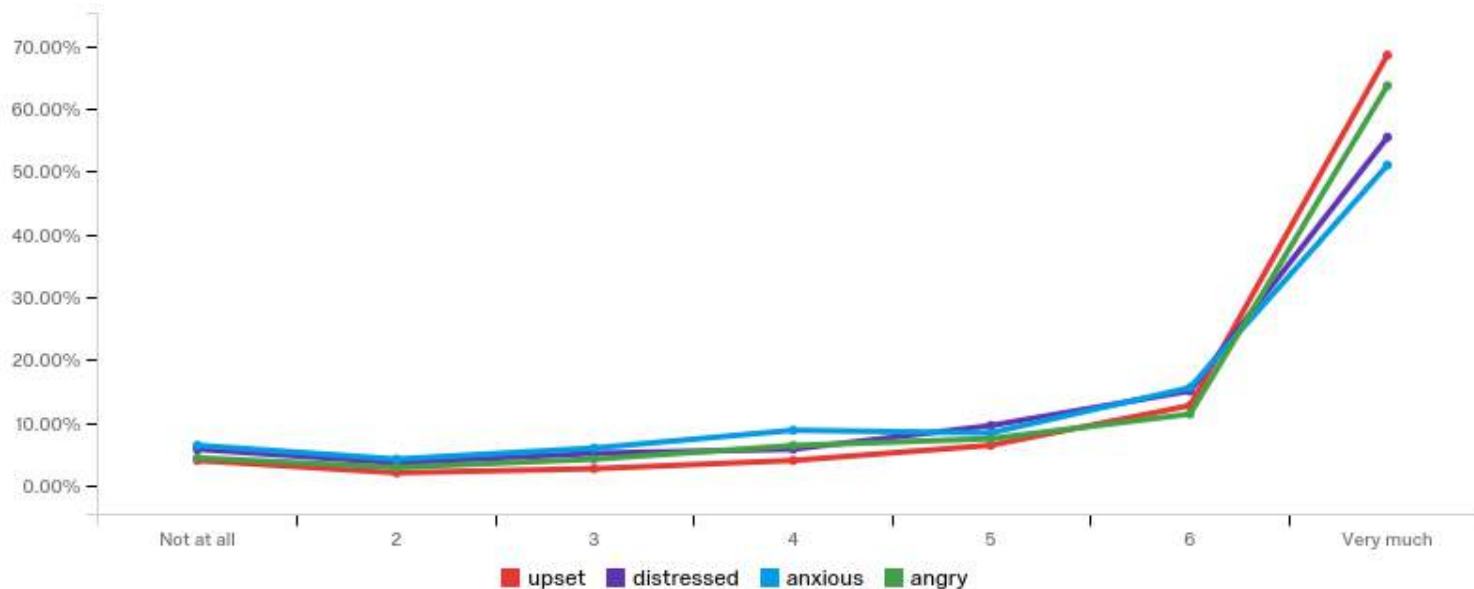
- 78.30% upset
- 67.29% distressed
- 66.91% anxious
- 88.31% angry

(see Table 7 in Data Section)

"It was distressing hearing such negative and hurtful comments. I had never heard negative comments before then and I was worried sick that the majority of people might feel the same as them and decide on my future"

The NO Campaign also gave permission for LGBTI people's own family members to speak out against marriage equality. Not surprisingly, the percentages for those who reported feeling **very much distressed, upset and anxious** in this case were much higher than for any of the other campaign related events (refer to Tables 6-9 in Data Section for comparisons).

Fig. 3 Anti-Marriage Equality Comments from Family Members



Percentages of those who reported feeling moderately (5) to very much (7) the following emotions in relation to family members comments:

- 87.53% upset (68.49% very much)
- 79.91% distressed (55.41% very much)
- 74.84% anxious (50.98% very much)
- 87.36% angry (68.62% very much)

(see Table 8 in Data Section)

Family members negative reactions

"I'm not out to most of my family members. Hearing them talk about how wrong it was for two people of the same sex to marry made me feel very distressed, upset and alone"

"It felt horrible knowing members of my own family didn't agree with me being equal to them"

"I was told my grandparents "were just like that" when told they would vote no, ignoring the fact that I'm "just like" the people they were voting against. I can feel my heart rate increasing just typing this... I do not wish to speak ill of [my grandfather] but knowing he was voting against me and my future was one of the most painful moments of my life..."

"i would get extremely irritated obviously as i hadn't come out to my family at the time and there were often cruel remarks saying that gay people turn their stomach, especially from my father, grandmother and one sister"

"Definitely the hardest part for me. My Dad was campaigning for the no vote. I had to just make peace with it in the end and realise that I couldn't change him and that he wasn't going to be who I needed him to be. It hurt a lot though and I still don't think I've fully processed or recovered from that"

"It was my partner's mother, she said our marriage would never be like her and her husband's ... that it wasn't real marriage"

Children and young LGBTI people

All participants were asked to what extent they thought the 'NO' campaign negatively impacted the **children of LGBTI parents**.

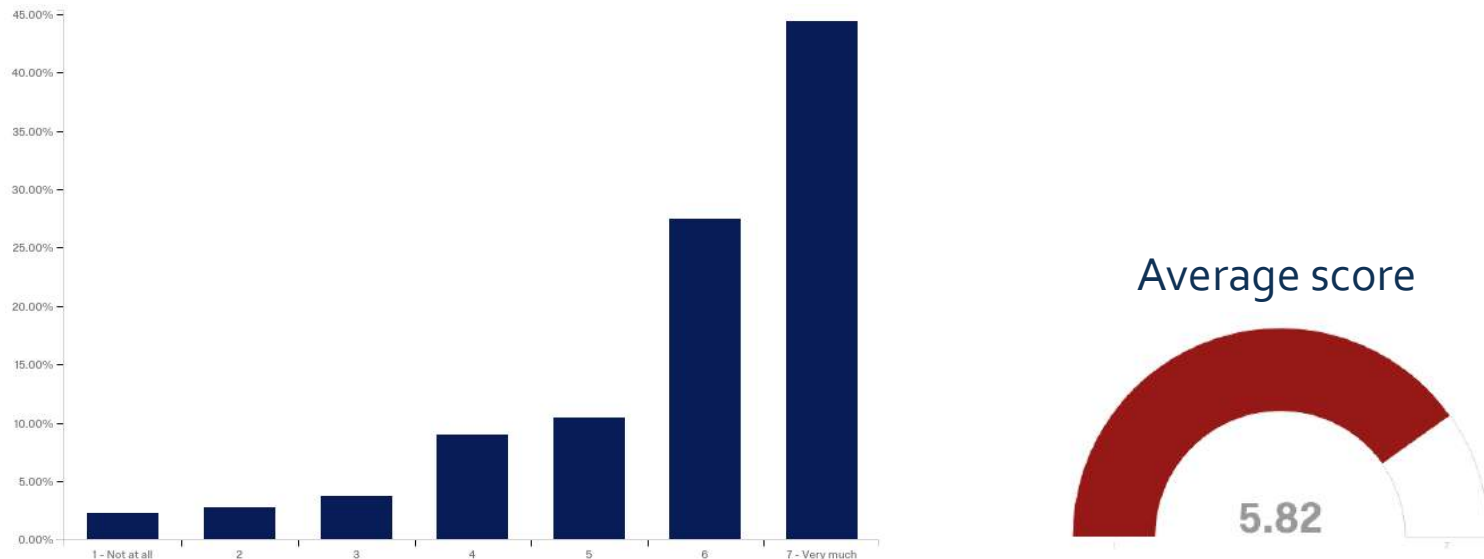


Fig 4 Perceived campaign impact on children of LGBTI parents

- **71.80%** of participants reported high levels of negativity (between 6 and 7) in relation to how they felt the NO campaign affected children from LGBTI families.
- This finding is consistent with results showing that LGBTI parents of younger children in this survey were statistically significantly more likely to recall higher levels of negativity around the campaign compared with LGBTI parents of older-aged adult children.

"This campaign told them their families were abnormal and that they had to 'prove' themselves in the eyes of the public, starting from a presupposition that their upbringing had in some way disadvantaged them. It was nothing short of cruel, and every child of an LGBTI family that I know echoed that."

"I was driving home and saw the posters for the first time. I came home & cried, it was the very first time I experienced public homophobia. My then 10 year old daughter questioned the posters & we had to forge an explanation trying to be diplomatic but overall my sense was it was very upsetting, particularly the posters as they were all over the place..."

"It affected my daughter hugely, she would come home from school crying. Her teacher stood up and spoke for 40mins how children that would be brought up by gay parent would be damaged without realising my daughter had same sex parents. It was a really tough time for her."

DON'T DENY A CHILD THE RIGHT TO A MOTHER & A FATHER



*Persons depicted in this image are models and contents for illustrative purposes only

VOTE NO ON MAY 22



"The no campaign never once took [the children] into consideration. Never asked their opinions or cared what impact the highly negative campaigning would have on them. It was like they just didn't exist"

"It was almost impossible to shield yourself from the campaign because it dominated the media morning, noon and night. I imagine with children it would've been near impossible to avoid encountering it, particularly the No posters in urban areas and many large towns. Children absorb the information in the world around them and being told that your family is 'wrong', 'unnatural' or that it simply doesn't measure up is very damaging."

"I think they were the people most negatively affected by no campaign. Ironically the NO campaign said it was on the side of children but actually hurt kids! I felt so sorry for the kids and really moved by their bravery, honesty and love for their parents. They should NEVER have had their families insulted in that way."

William Murphy



All participants were then asked to what extent they thought the 'NO' campaign negatively impacted **young LGBTI people**.

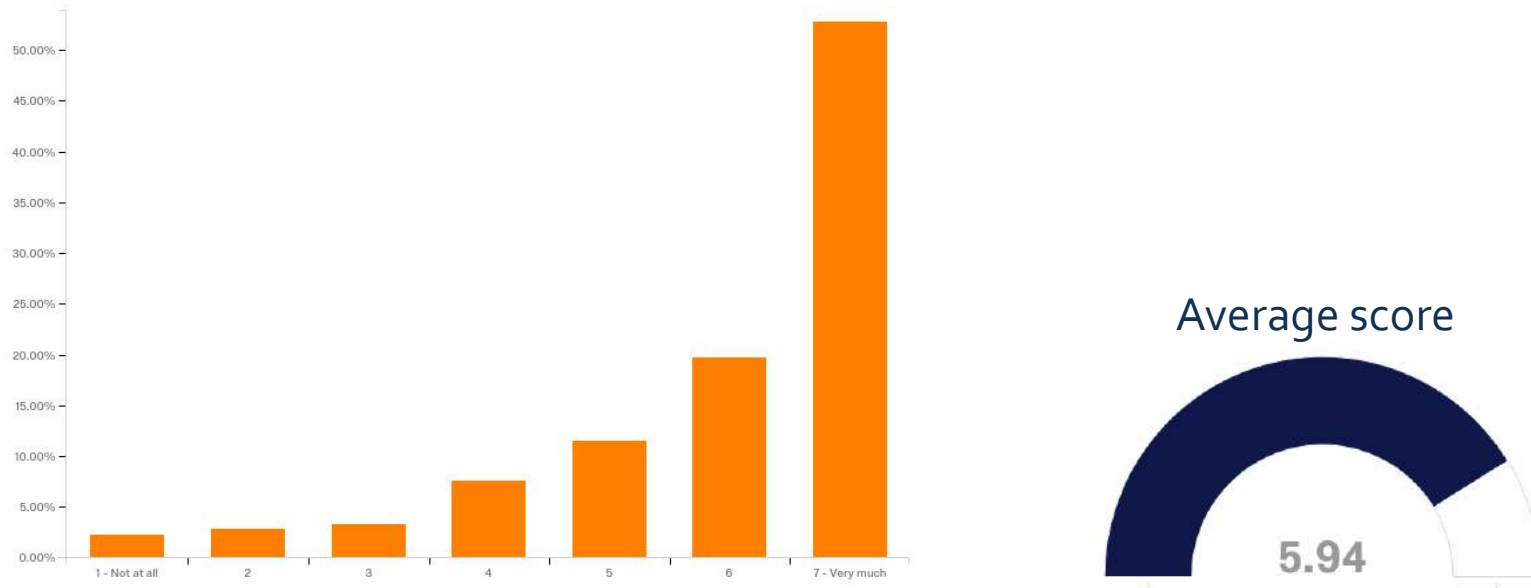


Fig 5 Perceived campaign impact on young LGBTI people

- **72.48%** of participants reported high levels of negativity (6 and 7) in relation to how they felt the NO campaign affected young LGBTI people.
- This finding is very much in keeping with the results showing that younger LGBTI people in this survey were statistically significantly more likely than older LGBTI people to recall higher levels of negative feelings in relation to a wide range of the 'NO' side campaign events (see following page).

Results for LGBTI young people

The following findings relate to statistically significant differences for younger LGBTI people relative to their older LGBTI counterparts.

- Younger LGBTI people scored **lower on psychological well-being** relative to those older.
- While people of all ages reported feeling high levels of negativity, as a result of the 'NO' side campaign, this was more so the case for younger LGBTI people. This included for their experiences of:
 - the 'NO' campaign period overall
 - the 'NO' side posters and flyers
 - radio and TV debates
 - community and family comments in support of the 'NO' side.
- Younger LGBTI people, relative to older, were more likely to feel **anxious and afraid** when exposed to their own family members' negative comments. It stands to reason that many of these younger people may have still be living with their parents.

Young (18-24 years old) LGBTI participants

"I was upset by the majority of my family negative reactions and feel now that I can not tell them I'm gay"

"My family are Catholic, and I got brought to a remembrance mass for a family member, and the bigotry the local priest read from the pew led to me leaving the sermon crying. My family were mad at me "embarrassing them" and "being naive enough to let a priest get to me", but they didn't see all the people in the congregation who were nodding along. That was the final straw for me so I broke down"

"I stopped leaving my home during the day as i was afraid of what i would get called in the street"

Participants recall the impact on young LGBTI people

"I personally know of a lot of young gay people who were very badly affected by the no campaign. My younger cousin is also gay and all of the messages the no campaign were sending really damaged his self esteem and his confidence. And he was in school at the time and he told me that people in his year would make jokes at him about it and reuse the slogans the no campaign had created to pick on him and upset him, and he had a really hard time making it through it all"

"As I run a local LGBT group I had many calls from people through out the campaign where people were upset. One particular call came from a young gay man 16 years of age who was watching one of the debates with his parents only to hear both of them discussing how disgusting it was that 'faggots' and 'dykes' wanted to be treated like 'normal' people when they clearly are not. It was a hugely distressing time"

LGBTI people living in rural Ireland

All participants were asked to what extent they thought the 'NO' campaign negatively impacted LGBTI people living in rural areas.

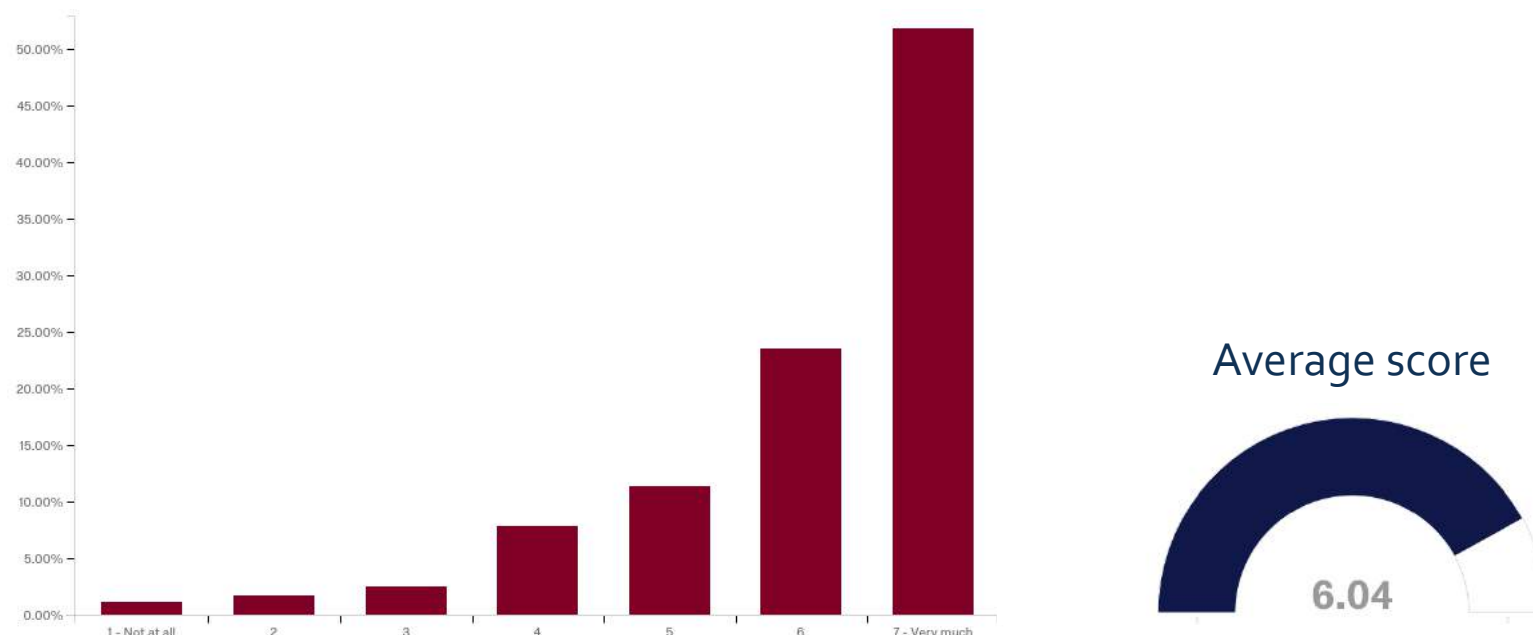


Fig 6 Perceived campaign impact on rural LGBTI people

- Consistent with their responses in relation to other vulnerable groups (children, and young LGBTI people), **75.25%** of participants reported high levels of negativity (between 6 and 7) in relation to how they felt the 'NO' campaign affected people living in rural areas.
- LGBTI people living in rural areas were statistically significantly more likely to recall feeling higher levels of negative emotions, in relation to their family members' comments in support of the 'NO' campaign, compared with those living in urban areas.

LGBTI participants living in rural areas

"As a rural resident one questioned every neighbours vote trying to second guess views on posters. Every telegraph pole had NO posters so self esteem took a hit"

"We only saw NO. We didn't see yes, we didn't feel yes, we didn't hear yes"

"It's bad enough living as gay in rural Ireland as I do. During the campaign you think people are always thinking of you when the issues pop up. U become more paranoid in your community".

Participants recall the impact on LGBTI people living in rural areas

"One of my best friends is from a very rural part of Ireland and he actually came up to stay with me for a couple of weeks because he was overwhelmed with the presence the no campaign had in his town, he said that there were no vote yes signs, posters or anything and that he felt really alone and isolated by all of the people he knew and grew up..."

"I know that those in rural areas felt even more marginalised and lonely during the campaign. I took calls on a helpline and spoke to many. There was bigger support for no side in rural areas and less supports in place for LGBT people"

"My friends in rural areas of the country have fallen out with their parents who were homophobic due the constant saturation of the media with debates and the no side being so vocal. if you have a homophobic parent who simply does not mention or discuss your sexuality, it can be incredibly tense when the arguments against your right to marry come on every time you get into the car with them or sit down to watch tv"

Senior LGBTI people

Although younger LGBTI people reported feeling more negative, upset and anxious by the 'NO' side campaign, relative to those older, over half of senior (55+ years) LGBTI participants still experienced high levels of negative emotions.

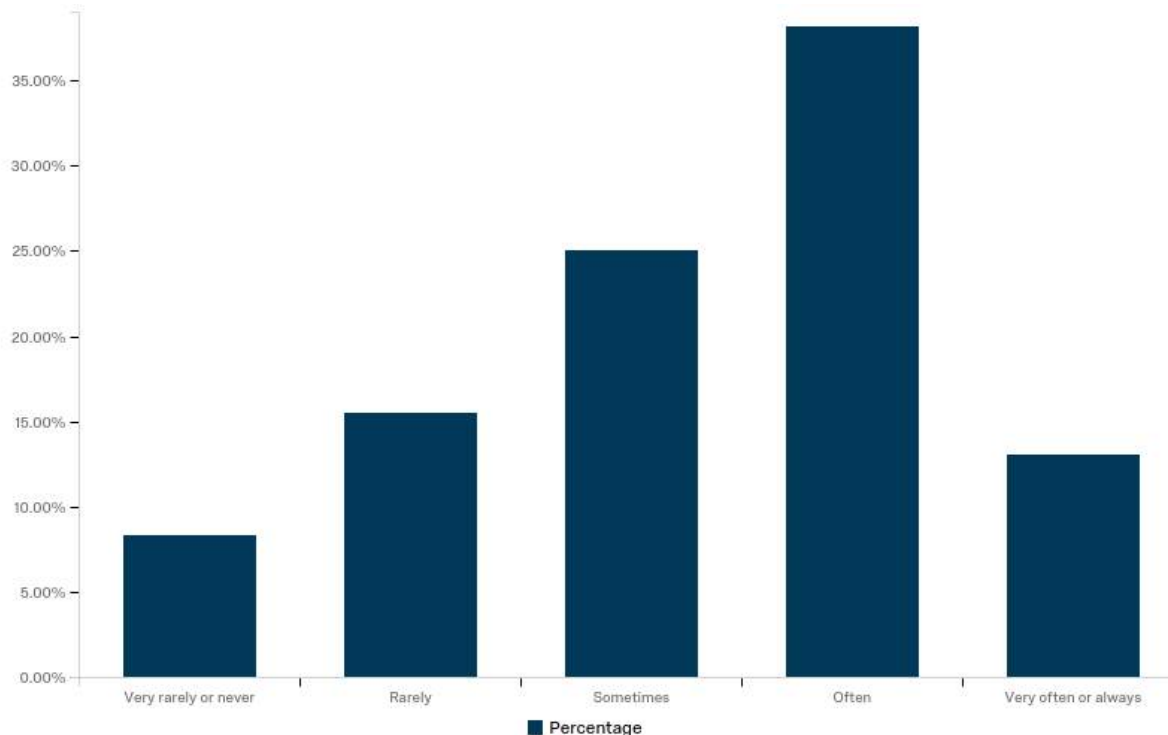


Fig 7 Senior (55+ yrs) LGBTI participants' experience of negative feelings during the 'NO' campaign period (N = 84)

- **51.20%** of senior (55+ yrs) LGBTI participants reported they often or very often to always felt negative during the 'NO' campaign months leading up to referendum vote

Senior (55+ years) LGBTI participants

"Some of the claims were so blatantly lies, yet presented in such "reasonable" rhetoric, they were very distressing and anxiety-ridden"

"I felt judged, less than & attacked"

"I felt as if I was a second class citizen and that people on the NO side could say whatever they liked, regardless of how untrue or hurtful the comments were"

Perceptions of the impact on LGBTI seniors

"The older you are, the more you've had to deal with the homophobia of the society you grew up in. I expect that many senior LGBT people struggle with that; they are perhaps more dependent on their peer group; and their peer group is demographically less likely to be supportive. I bet a lot of senior LGBT people suffered in silence"

"This is a generation that lived in entirely different times, times of fear and secrecy. I can only imagine that their mental health was at higher risk of depression and anxiety amongst other mental health disorders already, before the vote debate began. The no campaign, in reinforcing what had been the status quo all of their lives surely was extremely trying on them and quite possibly more so at ages of 65+"

Family members of LGBTI people

Non-LGBTI close family members were asked about the extent to which they experienced negative feelings when the arguments 'against' marriage equality were being presented to the public.

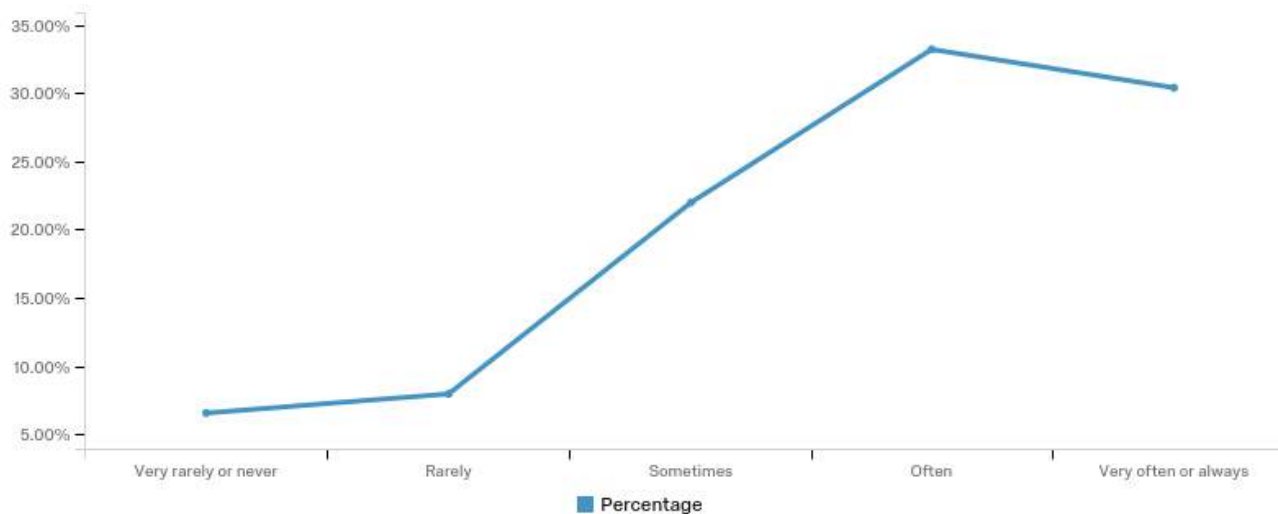


Fig 7 Experience of negative feelings by non-LGBTI close family members during the 'No' campaign

- Family members of LGBTI people reported feeling negatively impacted by their exposure to the 'NO' campaign. In this case, **63.55%** of participants reported that they often or very often to always felt this way.
- However, non-LGBTI family members were statistically significantly less likely to report being **afraid** during this period compared with LGBTI people.
- Further, unlike in the case of LGBTI people, age did not make a difference to their level of negative feeling.

Impact on Non-LGBTI family members

"My mum got quite upset that people were talking about her child's rights and discussing them and was distressed at the possibility that I could have been denied rights and opportunities my sister has"

"I was very fearful that a no vote would have serious impact on my 17 year old gay son who suffered from anxiety"

"Family members became upset when they realized other's opinions. It is hard to hear people that you know say things like "they shouldn't have children" when your family member has children"

"As a parent I love my daughter's equally, during this campaign I felt I needed to be even more protective of them. They were my girls free to love and marry who they wanted to"

"It's hard enough sometimes for parents of LGBT parents to come to terms with their son or daughters sexuality; just as they managed to get their head around it, the NO side basically shot this newfound harmony to pieces and frighten them with misinformation..."

"My elderly parents were constantly harassed by a neighbour who was fired up by the no campaign, who told them all sorts of lies about surrogacy and how gay marriage would affect children. It distressed my parents greatly because this woman is an old friend of the family, and they were confused by what she was saying"

"My mother lost friends and she cried a lot. She's very supportive and was so worried"

"My older brother (...straight man) came [doorstep] canvassing with me and was reduced to tears on several occasions"

The Referendum

Referendum

The referendum resulted in a win for marriage equality in Ireland. While this outcome was undeniably positive for those in support of equal marriage rights, many of the survey participants reported that they would rather not have had to go through that process.

When asked to what extent they would be happy to have a referendum, if they could take themselves back in time:



- less than a quarter (**23.11%**) reported that that they would be happy or very happy to do so, with only an additional **6.38%** moderately happy to do so.

(see Table 10 in Data Section)

Holding a referendum

"There should never have been a referendum. The no side got into the heads of the undecided with all their lies. People were tearing each other apart on facebook and by the end of it I was mentally and emotionally drained. I hope no other country has to go through that as it was a dark time to be a lgbt person and thankfully the yes side won but not without a lot of stress"

"I didn't like having to ask fellow citizens for rights. I thought it should have been done at government level without exposing people to the negative campaigning of the No side"

"It asked a significant proportion of the population to question themselves and their place in society. It was a very large burden to place on lgbti people"

"I honestly couldn't go through the heartbreak I saw on people's faces again, I don't know if I could knock on doors and bare my soul and life for all to see"

"It was a horrible horrible time in my life"

"If I didn't know the outcome but knew what the campaign would be like, I'd dread going back to do it all over again. More than a year later, the thought actually makes me queasy"

Other social impacts

Perceived main foci of the 'NO' campaign...

...was to portray

- **Families** headed by one married mother and father, with their biological children, as the “real”, “ideal”, “acceptable”, “worthy”, “respectable” and “adequate” family, and other families as less so
- **Parents** who are heterosexual and married as the most “acceptable”, “worthy”, “respectable” and “adequate”, and others as less so
- **Children** raised by other than heterosexual married parents as “damaged”, “disadvantaged”, “missing out” and “at risk”
- **Parents and children** in families other than the heterosexual nuclear married families as “lessor” or “lacking”, including: single parent families, step-families, blended families, families in which a parent has died.

"It was everywhere"

Participants gave examples of seeing, hearing and encountering negative messages from the NO campaign in numerous locations, including:

workplaces, churches, schools, universities, houses, neighbourhoods, streets, shops, bars, sports grounds, places of leisure, public transport, television, radio, posters, flyers, and on social media.

"Every part of your everyday life, the feeling that you just can't get away from it"

"People from all walks of life making judgemental comments about gay parents and their abilities...it felt like your family was being dissected"

"The campaign was debated hugely, even kids in the first classess in primary school were discussing the issus"

"It was impossible to shield yourself from the campaign"

Under the guise of “respectful debate” and “balance”

“There was people openly telling you that you don't deserve the same rights as every other human and could say hateful things under the guise of politics.”

A “megaphone” and “platform” for homophobia and prejudice

“The referendum seemed to inspire previously silent homophobes to come out of the woodwork to tell us what they had obviously been thinking all along.”

“...in a shopping centre and one of them asked my partner if she had a penis, and she said she would rather die than have a gay child. It was very upsetting.”

Strained, damaged and broken relationships

Families

"It caused a rift between my family, some aren't even on speaking terms anymore."

"There was a huge fight with myself & my parents on one side (YES!) and my grandparents on the other. Things will never be the same."

Neighbourhoods

"Hearing bigoted views in my town really upset me, these were people I grew up around saying they opposed who I was and did not think I had the right to marry the person I loved."

"I spent an hour talking to a neighbouring families, people I knew my whole life. They had so many questions. They really grilled me on it. I was patient but also upset that they couldn't just say YES. It felt unnecessarily invasive and truthfully, they don't know it but it hurt my relationship with them, even though they proudly voted yes on the day."

Schools

"[My son] heard homophobic remarks almost daily that went unchallenged. I have since removed him from the school."

"My friend's child was bullied and it was the first time he realised his family wasn't 'normal'. Teachers were afraid to do anything as it was "politics"

Workplaces

"Hearing people you work with 8 hours a day 5 days a week discussing you and your life in a negative or derogatory manner makes your worklife very unpleasant. There is no escape, you have to continue to work with them knowing they are actively working to suppress your rights and have you treated as a second class citizen."

"A work colleague said that under the eyes of God it was wrong for two women to raise a child. It felt like a stab in the back. As we had got on very well. It completely changed the work dynamic. In the end I left."

Leisure and community activities and groups were impacted by discomfort, division, conflict and some people leaving

"Well, I was a proud member of a [...] group and I respectfully approached the committee members to put a message of support on their social media website in support of YES campaign. I posted a polite email to the committee, they never responded in writing as is due process with clubs and societies. If they had formally responded to my email and said no and gave reasons, I might have accepted it, but these were my friends and [the activity group] is meant to be open and welcoming. I lost my interest in the group from that point forward. I was shunned, shunned, that's what it is, in a microcosm."

Tension, conflict and loss of faith, trust and comfort in the church and in faith communities

"In my local church during mass, the priest read out how everyone should vote NO. Then outside the church there were no campaigners canvassing every car in the church car park. My family and I felt exhausted and attacked."

"I was verbally attacked by people at a gathering of people from nearby parishes. I was caught completely off guard as the people in my church are supportive but there were others there on purpose to try to persuade them not to be supportive. It was the worst experience of the whole campaign for me. I cried for hours afterwards."

"I stopped going to the church."

Negative feelings and psychological impacts reported to have been experienced because of the NO equality campaign included:

Exposed Scrutinised Judged Belittled Demeaned Denigrated Degraded
Disrespected Disregarded Discredited Second best/rate/class Ignored Forgotten Insulted Affronted 'Treated as
lessor' Invalidated Humiliated Ridiculed Unwelcome Worthless Unvalued Unwanted Outcast Ostracised
Rejected Shunned Marginalised 'Other' Alone Isolated Unloved Withdrawn Upset Distressed Confused Sad
Hurt Pained Anxious Worried Concerned Apprehensive Panicked 'On-edge' Stressed 'An emotional wreck'
'On a knife's edge' Unsafe Fearful Scared Vulnerable Betrayed 'Let down' Disillusioned Shocked Disappointed
Ashamed Uncomfortable Embarrassed 'Not at home' Apologetic 'Like trash' 'Like shit' 'Like a monster'
'Not belong' 'Not valued' Insecure Anguished
Despairing Appalled Disgusted Angry Annoyed Irritated Frustrated Outraged
'Reduced confidence' 'Reduced Self-esteem' Oppressed 'Discriminated against' Violated Harassed Bombarded
'Picked on' Bullied Stung Stabbed Targeted
Attacked (verbal, physical, sexual) Sickened 'Sick to my stomach'
Crying: like a baby; for hours; almost every day; my heart out; uncontrollably
'Heart rate too fast' 'Blood pressure too high' 'Not able to sleep' 'Stomach in a knot'
Hated Exhausted Consumed Depleted Drained 'Not able to escape'
'The rug pulled out beneath my cold wet feet' Unravelling Unbearable
'Heart-breaking' Harrowing Soul-destroying Devastated Traumatized Hellish Suicidal

Conclusion

This brief report is on the negative psychological and social impacts of the NO campaign and the public vote on marriage which occurred in Ireland in 2015. These negative impacts exist and remain, despite the positive outcome for marriage equality in Ireland and some positive experiences of the YES campaign.

This world first and large scale study clearly indicates that widespread psychological and social detriment results from holding a nation-wide 'debate' and focus on families and children, and on whether all families and children should be treated the same in the marriage law. In particular, it indicates that the children of LGBTI parents and LGBT young people are negatively impacted. The numbers speak loud and clear. However, only the participants' own words were able to convey what these LGBTI people and their families had to endure for the sake of equality.

The fact that their stories were told with such detail and emotion, almost one and a half years since the date of the referendum, suggests that the impact of the 'NO' side campaign was more than a fleeting experience or something that could be simply undone through a win for marriage equality.

Demographics

Table 1 - Please select the category below that applies to you:

Answer	%	Count
I am an LGBTI person	87.09%	1443
I'm not an LGBTI person but I'm a close family member of an LGBTI person	12.91%	214
Total	100%	1657

Demographics

Table 2 – Gender for total sample:

Answer	%	Count
Male	52.8%	874
Female	43.7%	724
Non-Binary	2.5%	42
Other (e.g., Genderfluid)	1.0%	17
Total	100%	1657

For LGBTI females, most identified as **lesbian** (67.63%) followed by **bisexual** (28.39%)

For LGBTI males, the large majority identified as **gay** (92.91%)

For LGBTI Non-Binary and Other, most identified as **queer** (71.43% and 68.75%)

Demographics

Table 3 - To which age group do you belong?

Answer	%	Count
18-24	21.24%	352
25-34	32.35%	536
35-44	25.59%	424
45-54	14.12%	234
55-64	5.55%	92
65-74	1.15%	19
Total	100%	1657

Demographics

Table 4 - Which of the following best describes the area in which you lived during the marriage equality referendum 'YES' and 'NO' campaigns?

Answer	%	Count
Urban	77.91%	1291
Rural	19.86%	329
Other	2.23%	37
Total	100%	1657

Results Tables

Table 5 - Taking yourself back in time to the months before the referendum outcome, how would you describe your feelings THEN, when the arguments 'against' marriage equality were being presented to the public?

Question	Very rarely or never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often or always	Total
Positive	40.32%	19.55%	22.16%	13.48%	4.49%	1647
Negative	2.66%	5.91%	20.64%	37.24%	33.55%	1657
Happy	34.27%	22.79%	24.13%	14.54%	4.28%	1637
Sad	3.84%	7.50%	25.72%	35.34%	27.61%	1641
Angry	2.67%	4.74%	17.12%	32.06%	43.41%	1647

Results Tables

Table 6 - When thinking back to seeing the 'NO' campaign Posters or Flyers, to what extent did you feel the following? Please select a response on the scale for EACH feeling.

Question	Not at all	2	3	4	5	6	Very much	Total
upset	3.04%	4.26%	4.84%	8.01%	16.02%	19.70%	44.12%	1548
distressed	6.74%	7.65%	9.40%	12.05%	17.95%	16.46%	29.75%	1543
anxious	6.51%	6.64%	8.91%	11.58%	17.44%	16.98%	31.95%	1537
angry	1.48%	1.93%	1.67%	5.54%	8.82%	17.51%	63.04%	1553

Results Tables

Table 7 - When thinking back to seeing or hearing Radio or TV 'NO' campaign messages/arguments, to what extent did you feel the following? Please select a response on the scale for EACH feeling.

Question	Not at all	2	3	4	5	6	Very much	Total
upset	2.77%	3.89%	5.46%	9.58%	15.72%	20.21%	42.37%	1336
distressed	5.86%	6.47%	7.82%	12.56%	17.97%	18.42%	30.90%	1330
anxious	5.63%	7.65%	7.28%	12.53%	16.50%	19.58%	30.83%	1333
angry	1.42%	2.02%	2.40%	5.84%	9.44%	17.15%	61.72%	1335

Results Tables

Table 8 - Thinking back to when you heard comments in support of the 'NO' side from one or more of your family members, to what extent did you feel the following? Please select a response on the scale for EACH feeling.

Question	Not at all	2	3	4	5	6	Very much	Total
upset	3.94%	1.97%	2.63%	3.94%	6.35%	12.69%	68.49%	457
distressed	5.74%	3.53%	5.08%	5.74%	9.49%	15.01%	55.41%	453
anxious	6.35%	4.16%	5.91%	8.75%	8.32%	15.54%	50.98%	457
angry	4.36%	2.83%	4.14%	6.32%	7.41%	11.33%	63.62%	459

Results Tables

Table 9 - Thinking back to when you heard comments in support of the 'NO' side from within your local community (e.g. neighbourhood, workplace, church), to what extent did you feel the following? Please select a response on the scale for EACH feeling.

Question	Not at all	2	3	4	5	6	Very much	Total
upset	2.20%	2.32%	2.78%	6.49%	11.47%	20.05%	54.69%	863
distressed	4.16%	4.16%	5.09%	9.36%	14.68%	18.50%	44.05%	865
anxious	3.94%	4.87%	5.34%	9.74%	14.39%	17.29%	44.43%	862
angry	1.62%	2.42%	4.16%	5.08%	11.09%	18.24%	57.39%	866

Results Tables

Table 10 - If you could take yourself back in time, without knowing the outcome, how happy would you feel about going through the referendum campaign again?

Answer	%	Count
1 - Not at all happy to	35.93%	535
2	8.66%	129
3	9.81%	146
4	15.11%	225
5	6.38%	95
6	5.64%	84
7- Very happy to	18.47%	275
Total	100%	1489