

The negative psychological and social impacts of the ‘NO marriage equality’ campaign in Ireland: “It was everywhere”, and a “megaphone for hate and homophobia”

Irish LGBTI people felt very upset, angry and anxious during the referendum campaign.

Younger LGBTI people and the children of same-sex couples were worst affected.

Only 23% of Irish LGBTI people and families in the survey would be happy to have referendum again.

The ‘NO’ campaign in the Irish same-sex marriage referendum had a deeply negative impact on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people and their families according to a large-scale study released today.

The survey was conducted by researchers from The University of Queensland (Dr Sharon Dane) and Victoria University (Dr Liz Short), with associate researcher Dr Grainne Healy from Ireland.

The survey employed a multi-mode recruitment method used for the successful recruitment of minority groups. This method resulting in attracting a diverse sample of 1,657 LGBTI people and their family members, from all age groups and both rural and urban areas.

Respondents to the survey explained how they felt when confronted with materials and messages from the "no" campaign.

It found that a large majority of Irish LGBTI people and family members surveyed felt very upset, anxious and angry when exposed to the "No" campaign.

Young people were particularly affected: younger LGBTI people scored lower on psychological well-being and they were the group most likely to report negative psychological impacts of the campaign.

Nearly three-quarters of respondents said the "No" campaign had a highly detrimental impact on young LGBTI people and the children of LGBTI parents.

The family members of LGBTI people also reported being very negatively impacted by the ‘NO’ campaign.

Not surprisingly, only 23% of respondents said they would be happy to have a referendum again if they could go back in time.

Researcher, Dr Sharon Dane, said, "Our results show that the euphoria TV audiences saw after the referendum win hid the reality of the social and psychological impacts negative of the campaign on the daily lives LGBTI people and their families."

“What I found most disturbing about our results is that younger LGBTI people, who are already vulnerable, were the ones who reported feeling the most anxious and afraid in the lead up to the referendum."

“For example, the referendum gave community and family members who were not support of marriage equality a platform from which to express the hurtful views”

Dr Liz Short said, “This research provides very clear evidence that significant social and psychological detriment results from holding a nation-wide ‘debate’ and focus on families,

children and parents, and on whether all should have the same rights, recognition and options”.

"Many participants expressed that “under the guise of equal debate” and “balance”, the 'No equality' side was provided with a “megaphone” for “homophobia” and “hate”."

"Numerous reports of strained, damaged, and broken relationships and bonds were made, including within families, friendship groups, workplaces, schools, and neighbourhoods."

“They reported that the main focus of the NO campaign was to portray families headed by a married mother and father as “real”, “ideal”, “acceptable”, and “respectable” families, and others as less so. Following this, the dominant message was that children raised by other than heterosexual married parents are “damaged” and “disadvantaged”.

Dr Healy described the Irish ‘No equality’ campaign as “brutal, divisive and hurtful”.

Examples include:

"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..."

“...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”.

"Seeing your parents have to seek approval or beg for human rights scared children and made them insecure. If the basic rights of your parents can be questioned and voted upon the children feel it could be the same for them! "

"My son was upset by the NO posters and asked a lot of questions about people's homophobia - the whole experience of seeing NO campaign posters affected his sense of confidence and self”.

“The No campaign were ruthless in their use of images and language towards LGBTI parents and their children. The biggest hypocrisy of the whole experience was their utter disregard for both young LGBTI people, and the children of LGBTI people. It was so hateful."

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