

# Non-heteronormative women's views on motherhood

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Motherhood is one of the most significant roles for women and is most often associated with the traditional family model of a mother, father, and their children. However, with the growing visibility and emancipation of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, and other sexual orientations (LGBTQIA+) community in many countries, the presence of “homo-families” consisting of same-sex couples has become increasingly recognized. More frequently, female couples choose to become mothers together. Despite this progress, non-heteronormative women often encounter various challenges and anxieties when pursuing motherhood. The aim of this study was to explore the views of women with a non-heteronormative orientation on motherhood.

**Materials and methods:** The study involved 161 women who identified as having a non-heteronormative orientation. A diagnostic survey method was used, employing an original questionnaire that included 4 questions on sociodemographic data and 15 main questions. The survey was conducted in private Facebook groups. The collected data were statistically analyzed using StatView software (version 5.0).

**Results:** A significant majority of non-heteronormative women expressed a desire to start a family ( $p = 0.0069$ ), could imagine themselves as mothers ( $p = 0.0007$ ), and dreamed of having children ( $p = 0.0255$ ). Women in same-sex relationships wished to raise their potential children together ( $p = 0.005$ ). However, respondents were significantly more likely to fear social discrimination related to motherhood ( $p = 0.0187$ ) and would consider emigrating due to such discrimination ( $p = 0.0444$ ). In contrast, they did not express significant concerns about discrimination within their families, discrimination against their potential children, or discrimination during childbirth ( $p > 0.05$ ).

**Conclusions:** Non-heteronormative women, like heterosexual women, aspire to become mothers, form families with their partners, and raise children together. Unfortunately, this aspiration is overshadowed by concerns about social discrimination toward non-heteronormative motherhood, which may prompt some women to emigrate to more liberal countries.

**Keywords:** motherhood; non-heteronormativity; sexual orientation; LGBTQIA+ families.

## INTRODUCTION

The European Union (EU) considers the protection of fundamental human rights a priority and seeks to ensure their respect across its member states. The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), signed in Rome on November 4, 1950, is the primary legal document safeguarding the rights of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, and other sexual orientations (LGBTQIA+) community. This international treaty obliges member states to protect the fundamental civil and political rights of both their own citizens and all individuals residing within their territory. Article 14 stipulates non-discrimination in the enjoyment of the rights and freedoms outlined in the ECHR based on “sex, race, color, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth, or other status” [1]. According to a ruling by the European Court, this provision also applies to sexual minorities, despite the absence of an explicit reference to sexual orientation in Article 14 of the ECHR [1].

Like anyone else, members of the LGBTQIA+ community aspire to build fulfilling relationships and raise children. The process of legalizing same-sex relationships gained momentum in the late 1970s, beginning with the informal recognition of cohabiting couples as households and families. This recognition allowed same-sex couples to access certain social and property rights.

Subsequently, “quasi-marriages” or partnerships were introduced, granting partners many of the legal rights associated with marriage, with some exceptions, such as the right to adopt [2].

Various EU member states gradually introduced legislation to legalize same-sex unions, with Scandinavian countries leading the way. Upon Poland's accession to the EU in 2004, the Polish government was required to update anti-discrimination laws regarding sexual minorities. As a result, on January 1, 2004, an amendment to the Labor Code introduced a provision prohibiting workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation [3]. However, Polish legislation still lacks comprehensive legal instruments to protect the LGBTQIA+ community. In principle, the only applicable legal safeguard for sexual minorities is the principle of equal treatment enshrined in the Polish Constitution (Journal of Laws 1997 No. 78, item 483, as amended). Unfortunately, in practice, this principle is not always upheld. The prevalence of homophobia in Poland is closely linked to the country's cultural, social, and political context [4].

The most common acronym associated with the non-heteronormative community is LGBTQIA+. It came into widespread use in the 1980s and represents, in order: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, and other sexual orientations (+) [5].

Non-heteronormative women in relationships may identify with various orientations, including homosexuality, bisexuality, pansexuality, demisexuality, asexuality, homoromantic asexuality, and

lithosexuality. Homosexuality is characterized by sexual attraction to individuals of the same sex. Due to widespread discrimination, it is difficult to accurately estimate the global number of homosexual individuals. Bisexuality involves sexual attraction to both sexes, with the intensity of attraction to either sex varying over time [6].

Pansexuality refers to sexual attraction to all genders or attraction to individuals regardless of their gender identity. Asexuality, by contrast, is the absence of sexual attraction to any gender [7]. Asexuality is increasingly recognized as a fourth sexual orientation alongside heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality [8]. Homoromantic asexuality involves romantic attraction to individuals of the same sex without sexual attraction.

Demisexuality and lithosexuality are also distinct orientations. Demisexual individuals experience sexual attraction only after forming an emotional bond with a partner [9]. Lithosexual individuals, on the other hand, do not require their sexual or romantic attraction to be reciprocated [10].

Unfortunately, non-heteronormative women often face challenges and anxieties related to becoming mothers, as motherhood is less common among them than among heterosexual women. This may be due not only to a lack of desire for motherhood but also to internalized homophobia, which reinforces the perception that lesbians are unfit to raise children [11].

Studies have shown that the value placed on motherhood and having children is similar for both homosexual and heterosexual women. However, despite this, non-heteronormative women are less likely to pursue motherhood. This may be attributed to factors such as disagreements between partners about having children, difficulties in accessing medical and educational institutions, the instability caused by the lack of legal recognition of non-heteronormative relationships, and the broader socio-legal challenges these women face [12].

The aim of this study was to examine the perspectives of non-heteronormative women on motherhood in relation to their specific sexual orientations.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study involved 161 women who self-identified as having a non-heteronormative sexual orientation. Participants identified as: homosexual, bisexual, pansexual, demisexual, asexual, homoromantic asexual, or lithosexual. The inclusion criteria for the study were self-identification as female, a non-heteronormative sexual orientation, and consent to participate by completing an anonymous questionnaire. An additional selection criterion was age, with participants ranging 18–46 years, corresponding to the reproductive age recognized in Poland. The study was conducted from December 2020 to February 2021.

The research method used was a diagnostic survey with an original questionnaire, which included 4 questions on sociodemographic data (age, marital status, place, and country of residence) and 15 substantive questions. The questions were divided into 3 groups. The first group addressed the desire to start a family, aspirations for motherhood, perceptions of motherhood, and emotions associated with childbirth and parenting. The second

group focused on shared motherhood, including discussions with a partner about having children, conversations about co-parenting, and reasons why shared parenthood might not be possible. The final group examined societal discrimination against non-heteronormative women, covering concerns about disclosing the desire to have a child to family, fears of revealing their relationship in personal and their child's social environments (e.g., workplace, kindergarten, school), anxieties about motherhood in Poland, the desire to emigrate due to the inability to marry, and concerns about discrimination by medical personnel during childbirth.

The survey was conducted in private Facebook groups for non-heteronormative women, with permission obtained from the group administrators. The study was approved by the Bioethics Committee (KB-0012/73/10/2020Z). Statistical analysis of the results was performed using StatView software (version 5.0). The  $\chi^2$  test and ANOVA variance analysis were applied, with a significance level of  $p < 0.05$ .

## RESULTS

The study comprised 161 women with a non-heteronormative orientation. The average age was 23 years ( $\pm 5$  years), with the youngest respondent being 18 years old and the oldest 46 years old. The majority of participants identified as homosexual (55.9%), followed by bisexual (27.3%) and pansexual (11.2%). Additionally, 5 women (3.1%) identified as asexual, and 2 women (1.2%) as demisexual. Most of the respondents were in a relationship (52.2%) and lived in urban areas (91.3%), with the vast majority residing in Poland (97.0%) – Table 1.

TABLE 1. Features of the study group

Sexual orientation	n	%
Homosexual	90	55.9
Bisexual	44	27.3
Pansexual	18	11.2
Asexual	5	3.1
Demisexual	2	1.2
Homoromantic asexual	1	0.6
Lithosexual	1	0.6
<b>Marital status</b>		
In a relationship	84	52.0
Single	77	47.8
<b>Residence</b>		
Urban	147	91.3
Rural	14	8.7
<b>Country of residence</b>		
Poland	156	97.0
United States	2	1.2
United Kingdom	2	1.2
Austria	1	0.6

Analysis of the findings on non-heteronormative women's desire for motherhood showed that more than 40.0% of respondents intended to start a family in the future, while 28.6% either had concerns about starting a family or did not want to start one. Women identifying as homosexual (23.6%) and bisexual (15.5%) expressed a significantly higher desire to start a family ( $p = 0.069$ ). In contrast, a categorical "no" was given by respondents identifying as asexual (3.1%), demisexual (1.2%), and homoromantic asexual (0.6%) – Table 2.

Interestingly, the majority of respondents aspired to have their own children (59.0%) and could imagine themselves as mothers (71.0%). Homosexual (32.9%) and bisexual (19.9%) women were significantly more likely ( $p = 0.0255$ ) to dream of motherhood. The ability to imagine being a mother was also significantly more frequently reported ( $p = 0.007$ ) by homosexual (37.9%) and bisexual (23.6%) respondents. In contrast, most of the remaining participants did not feel a strong desire for motherhood. Among pansexual respondents, a notable proportion could imagine becoming parents (8.7%), yet responses regarding the desire for motherhood were nearly evenly split between rejection (6.2%) and affirmation (5.0%).

An analysis of women's emotions related to motherhood and childbirth revealed that nearly half of the respondents (46.0%) expressed positive feelings about motherhood, whereas the thought of childbirth elicited negative emotions in the majority (57.1%). Positive emotions about motherhood were

most frequently reported by homosexual (29.8%) and bisexual (13.7%) women. However, thoughts related to childbirth evoked negative emotions in most respondents, regardless of their sexual orientation (Tab. 3).

An important aspect of the survey was whether non-heteronormative women feel discriminated against in Polish society due to their desire to have children. Interestingly, the analysis of concerns regarding family reactions to shared motherhood showed an almost equal percentage of respondents answering affirmatively (28.6%) and negatively (29.8%). Homosexual women were the most apprehensive about their family's reaction (19.3%), while bisexual (7.5%) and pansexual (3.7%) women were the least concerned.

Respondents also expressed concerns about discrimination toward their children by Polish society (80.0%), particularly among women identifying as homosexual (44.7%), bisexual (23.6%), and pansexual (9.3%). Consequently, the majority of respondents were hesitant (41.0%) or unwilling (7.6%) to inform their child's preschool or school about their non-heteronormative family structure.

An analysis of respondents' emotions regarding childbirth revealed that most feared discrimination by medical personnel during childbirth (59.6%), with homosexual (37.3%) and bisexual (14.9%) women being the most likely to express this concern. Additionally, the majority feared discrimination from Polish men when starting a family (41.9%). Significantly more often ( $p = 0.0187$ ), this fear was reported by homosexual women

TABLE 2. Non-heteronormative women's views on motherhood

Question about motherhood	Answer	HO n = 90	BI n = 44	PA n = 18	AS n = 5	DE n = 2	ASH n = 1	LI n = 1	Total	p $\chi^2$
Desire to start a family	yes	38 (23.6%)	25 (15.5%)	6 (3.7%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	69 (42.8%)	$p = 0.0069$ $\chi^2 = 4.676$
	no	24 (14.9%)	8 (5.0%)	6 (3.7%)	5 (3.1%)	2 (1.2%)	1 (0.6%)	0 (0.0%)	46 (28.6%)	
	I have concerns	28 (17.4%)	11 (6.8%)	6 (3.7%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.6%)	46 (28.6%)	
Dream of having children	yes	53 (32.9%)	32 (19.9%)	8 (5.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.6%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.6%)	95 (59.0%)	$p = 0.0255$ $\chi^2 = 14.401$
	no	37 (23.0%)	12 (7.5%)	10 (6.2%)	5 (3.1%)	1 (0.6%)	1 (0.6%)	0 (0.0%)	66 (41.0%)	
Notions of motherhood	yes	61 (37.9%)	38 (23.6%)	14 (8.7%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.6%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	114 (71.0%)	$p = 0.0007$ $\chi^2 = 23.372$
	no	29 (18.0%)	6 (3.7%)	4 (2.5%)	5 (3.1%)	1 (0.6%)	1 (0.6%)	1 (0.6%)	47 (29.0%)	
Feelings towards motherhood	positive	48 (29.8%)	22 (13.7%)	4 (2.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	74 (46.0%)	$p = 0.147$ $\chi^2 = 24.25$
	none	7 (4.3%)	6 (3.7%)	4 (2.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	17 (10.6%)	
	I haven't thought about it	6 (3.7%)	5 (3.1%)	1 (0.6%)	1 (0.6%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	13 (8.1%)	
	negative	29 (18.0%)	11 (6.8%)	9 (5.6%)	4 (2.5%)	2 (1.2%)	1 (0.6%)	1 (0.6%)	57 (34.4%)	
Feelings towards childbirth	positive	5 (3.1%)	8 (5.0%)	1 (0.6%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	14 (8.7%)	$p = 0.7102$ $\chi^2 = 14.288$
	none	3 (1.9%)	1 (0.6%)	2 (1.2%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	6 (3.7%)	
	I haven't thought about it	31 (19.25%)	13 (8.1%)	4 (2.5%)	1 (0.6%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	49 (30.4%)	
	negative	51 (31.7%)	22 (13.7%)	11 (6.9%)	4 (2.5%)	2 (1.2%)	1 (0.6%)	1 (0.6%)	92 (57.1%)	

HO – homosexual; BI – bisexual; PA – pansexual; AS – asexual; DE – demisexual; ASH – homoromantic asexual; LI – lithosexual; p – level of statistical significance;  $\chi^2$  – result of Pearson's chi-square test

(32.9%), while it was less frequently expressed by bisexual (9.9%) and pansexual (5.0%) respondents.

As a result, the majority of respondents (80.1%) had considered or entertained the possibility of emigrating to marry and start a family. Notably, significantly more often ( $p = 0.0444$ ), homosexual (44.7%) and bisexual (24.8%) respondents considered emigration, whereas significantly fewer asexual (1.9%), homoromantic asexual (0.6%), and lithosexual (0.6%) women expressed such considerations (Tab. 4).

## DISCUSSION

Motherhood is a value highly regarded by most women around the world. It is often described as their purpose in life, their duty, or their vocation. When we talk about motherhood, we usually immediately associate it with marriage and family. As a consequence of instilled norms regarding marriage, motherhood, and family, parenthood is viewed by society as being reserved exclusively for the traditional family consisting of a woman, a man, and their children. However, studies conducted since the 1980s have clearly shown that there is no link between sexual orientation and the ability to be a parent. Despite this, there are still public beliefs that people with a different sexual orientation make worse parents [12].

According to Mizielińska et al., there are about 2 million non-heterosexual individuals in Poland, approximately half of whom live in intimate relationships. Many of these individuals form “families of choice”, choosing to live together and raise children despite social disapproval. These families are often formed by both non-heterosexual men and women [13]. Unfortunately, due to ignorance and the lack of official data, we are unable to ascertain the number of female couples in Poland.

Our own study showed that as many as 42.9% of non-heteronormative female respondents would like to start a family. A lower result was obtained in a study by Mizielińska et al., where only 24% of the women surveyed planned to start a family in the future [13].

Motherhood for non-heterosexual women is undoubtedly a challenge. Due to the social situation concerning the LGBTQIA+ community in Poland and the rise in crimes committed based on discrimination against sexual orientation, the situation of non-heterosexual female couples is precarious. In this age of prejudice against otherness, it is crucial to understand the concerns and expectations of non-heterosexual women. In public debates, the topic of LGBTQIA+ people and various aspects of their lives is often raised without taking into account their views, feelings, and concerns.

Our own research showed that as many as 59.0% of non-heteronormative women dream of having children, and 71.0% can imagine being a mother. This is especially true for homosexual and bisexual women ( $p < 0.05$ ). Different results were obtained by Cieślak et al., where bisexual respondents were significantly more likely to want a child than homosexual women, especially within the next 3 years ( $p < 0.05$ ) [14]. Similar results were reported by Turcan et al. in their study conducted in the Czech Republic, where as many as 77.5% of homosexual women in 2009–2013 and 84.4% in 2013–2020 had or wanted to have a child [15].

Our own research also identified reasons for the reluctance of female partners to raise children. The most frequently cited reasons were a lack of desire to have children, the absence of legal regulations, and a lack of social tolerance for such families. Similar results were reported by Mizielińska et al., whose study found that the most common reasons for not having children together included a lack of desire for children, the

TABLE 3. Non-heteronormative women's views on shared parenting

Question about shared parenting	Answer	HO n = 90	BI n = 44	PA n = 18	AS n = 5	DE n = 2	ASH n = 1	LI n = 1	Total	p $\chi^2$
Partners' conversations on parenting	yes	51 (32.3%)	13 (8.1%)	9 (5.6%)	2 (1.2%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.6%)	76 (47.8%)	$p = 0.2659$ $\chi^2 = 14.568$
	no	4 (2.5%)	3 (1.9%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	7 (4.4%)	
	I haven't thought about it	35 (21.1%)	28 (17.4%)	9 (5.6%)	3 (1.9%)	2 (1.2%)	1 (0.6%)	0 (0.0%)	78 (47.8%)	
Desire to raise a child with partner	yes	38 (23.6%)	11 (6.8%)	3 (1.9%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	52 (32.3%)	$p = 0.005$ $\chi^2 = 28.32$
	no	21 (13.0%)	7 (4.3%)	6 (3.7%)	4 (2.5%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.6%)	1 (0.6%)	40 (24.8%)	
	I haven't thought about it	31 (19.3%)	26 (16.1%)	9 (5.6%)	1 (0.6%)	2 (1.2%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	69 (42.9%)	
Reasons for reluctance to share parenting	I don't want children	38 (23.6%)	12 (7.4%)	14 (8.6%)	18 (11.2%)	6 (3.7%)	1 (0.6%)	1 (0.6%)	1 (0.6%)	
	my partner doesn't want children									
	lack of social tolerance									
	lack of legal regulations									
	I'm afraid of my family's reaction									
	the world is overpopulated									
	I wouldn't cope									
	I'll raise a child alone									
	I'm afraid to raise a child in Poland									

HO – homosexual; BI – bisexual; PA – pansexual; AS – asexual; DE – demisexual; ASH – homoromantic asexual; LI – lithosexual; p – level of statistical significance;  $\chi^2$  – result of Pearson's chi-square test

TABLE 4. Views of non-heteronormative women on social discrimination towards their motherhood

Question about motherhood	Answer	HO n = 90	BI n = 44	PA n = 18	AS n = 5	DE n = 2	ASH n = 1	LI n = 1	Total	p $\chi^2$
Fear of discrimination by family	yes	31 (19.3%)	10 (6.2%)	3 (1.9%)	1 (0.6%)	1 (0.6%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	46 (28.6%)	p = 0.6569 $\chi^2 = 9.532$
	no	27 (16.8%)	12 (7.5%)	6 (3.7%)	2 (1.2%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.6%)	48 (29.8%)	
	I haven't thought about it	32 (19.9%)	22 (13.7%)	9 (5.6%)	2 (1.2%)	1 (0.6%)	1 (0.6%)	0 (0.0%)	67 (41.6%)	
Fear of social discrimination towards children	yes	72 (44.7%)	38 (23.6%)	15 (9.3%)	3 (1.9%)	1 (0.6%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	129 (80.1%)	p = 0.0698 $\chi^2 = 11.667$
	no	18 (11.2%)	6 (3.7%)	3 (1.9%)	2 (1.2%)	1 (0.6%)	1 (0.6%)	1 (0.6%)	32 (19.9%)	
Notification of the workplace and the kindergarten facility about the single-sex relationship	yes	40 (24.8%)	19 (11.8%)	6 (3.7%)	1 (0.6%)	1 (0.6%)	1 (0.6%)	0 (0.0%)	68 (42.2%)	p = 0.476 $\chi^2 = 36.632$
	kindergarten	4 (2.5%)	1 (0.6%)	1 (0.6%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.6%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	7 (4.3%)	
	workplace	5 (3.1%)	3 (1.9%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	8 (5.0%)	
	I'm not sure	37 (23.0%)	18 (11.2%)	9 (5.6%)	2 (1.2%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	66 (41.0%)	
Fear of discrimination during childbirth	yes	60 (37.3%)	24 (14.9%)	8 (5.0%)	2 (1.2%)	1 (0.6%)	1 (0.6%)	0 (0.0%)	96 (59.6%)	p = 0.3136 $\chi^2 = 7.079$
	no	30 (18.6%)	20 (12.4%)	10 (6.2%)	3 (1.9%)	1 (0.6%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.6%)	65 (40.4%)	
Fear of social discrimination towards motherhood	yes	53 (32.9%)	16 (9.9%)	8 (5.0%)	1 (0.6%)	1 (0.6%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.6%)	79 (49.1%)	p = <b>0.0187</b> $\chi^2 = 24.272$
	no	5 (3.1%)	3 (1.9%)	1 (0.6%)	1 (0.6%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.6%)	11 (6.8%)	
	I haven't thought about it	32 (19.9%)	25 (15.5%)	9 (5.6%)	3 (1.9%)	1 (0.6%)	1 (0.6%)	0 (0.0%)	71 (44.1%)	
Emigration due to social discrimination	yes	40 (24.8%)	24 (14.9%)	6 (3.7%)	1 (0.6%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	71 (44.1%)	p = <b>0.0444</b> $\chi^2 = 21.432$
	no	18 (11.2%)	4 (2.5%)	5 (3.1%)	3 (1.9%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.6%)	1 (0.6%)	32 (19.9%)	
	I'm considering it	32 (19.9%)	16 (9.9%)	7 (4.3%)	1 (0.6%)	2 (1.2%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	58 (36.0%)	

HO – homosexual; BI – bisexual; PA – pansexual; AS – asexual; DE – demisexual; ASH – homoromantic asexual; LI – lithosexual; p – level of statistical significance;  $\chi^2$  – result of Pearson's chi-square test

women's young age, reasons related to their own sexual orientation, and inadequate conditions [13].

Gregg demonstrated in his study that many homosexual women feel a very strong desire to become mothers. The women surveyed expressed a wish to go through the process of pregnancy and childbirth. In contrast, other respondents indicated a strong desire to have their own biological offspring [16]. Our own research did not examine the reasons why women dream of becoming mothers, but it confirmed that a significant number of non-heterosexual women (46.0%) feel positive emotions toward motherhood and would like to raise a child with their partner (32.3%).

On the other hand, Hayman and Wilkes demonstrated that female respondents had conversations with each other about how to conceive a child or who would be the biological mother before deciding to start a family [17]. This was also confirmed in our own study, as only 4.4% of non-heteronormative women in same-sex relationships had never had such a conversation, while as many as 47.8% of respondents had already discussed it.

Does sexual orientation matter to medical personnel? The answer is obvious and not up for debate. Yet, sexual minority individuals continue to face numerous obstacles in accessing medical care. Marques et al., in their study conducted in Portugal, examined women's experiences interacting with medical personnel in various situations. Many participants reported experiencing discrimination. Some described hiding their sexual orientation for fear of prejudice from medical staff. For example, when asked if they were sexually active, they would answer "no", despite being in same-sex relationships. Respondents frequently noted that medical staff assumed they were heterosexual and misidentified their female partners as sisters or friends [18].

Fear of discrimination by medical personnel was also reported in our study. As many as 59.6% of women admitted to fearing discrimination from medical professionals during childbirth. Meanwhile, Sabin et al. investigated the relationship between gender, sexual orientation, and race among medical personnel regarding lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) patients. Their findings showed that heterosexual healthcare

workers displayed an unconscious preference for heterosexual patients. This bias was stronger among heterosexual men than heterosexual women [19]. In Poland, there is a lack of research assessing the verbal or physical violence experienced by LGBTQIA+ patients from healthcare professionals. However, reports from the Center for the Study of Prejudice indicate that LGBT individuals in Poland experience physical violence and threats at twice the rate of the general population [20].

Homoparenting refers to same-sex parenting. It is important to recognize that the presence of a child, a shared household, or a binary division of gender roles no longer defines a family. Therefore, same-sex families must develop their own relationship and parenting models, as well as strategies for functioning in a heteronormative socio-cultural environment. A study by Shechner et al. in Israel examined the emotional and social development of children in 4 different models of lesbian families. The analysis, based on mothers' and children's self-reports, assessed the children's adjustment to peer relationships and self-acceptance. The findings showed that children of lesbian mothers exhibited more prosocial behavior and reported lower levels of loneliness compared to children from heterosexual families. The researchers concluded that a mother's sexual orientation does not negatively affect child development [21].

The results of the present study indicate that the majority of non-heteronormative women considering parenthood feared discrimination from the Polish general public (49.1%), with homosexual women expressing the highest levels of concern ( $p < 0.05$ ). Only 6.8% of respondents reported having no such fears. Wang et al. conducted the first survey in China assessing social discrimination and acceptance of the LGBT community. Interestingly, only 11.1% of heterosexual participants reported being unable to accept LGBT family members [22]. A similarly insightful qualitative study on prejudice and discrimination against same-sex couples raising children was conducted by Tombolato et al. in Brazil. Participants reported experiencing biases related to their lifestyle and parental status, which challenged traditional social norms and gender stereotypes. However, persistence in advocating for their rights served as a protective measure against prejudice and social intolerance [23].

Our own research on concerns regarding discrimination against children raised by non-heteronormative women also yielded noteworthy results. Only 19.9% of respondents had no such concerns. The majority expressed doubts and were hesitant to disclose their same-sex relationship to their child's preschool or school. An important study on the adjustment of children in LGBTQIA+ families was conducted by Patterson, who found no significant differences between children of same-sex parents and those of heterosexual parents in terms of school performance, academic achievement, physical health, emotional and behavioral difficulties, peer relationships, or gender role behavior. Moreover, research has shown that gay and lesbian families tend to devote greater attention to their children [24]. Similarly, studies by Calzo et al. and Farr et al. demonstrated that children raised in same-sex families achieve comparable health, behavioral, and educational outcomes to those raised in heterosexual families [25, 26].

It is probably no surprise that non-heteronormative women fear discrimination from their families regarding their decision to become mothers. Our research showed that female respondents had similar percentages of fear (28.6%) and no fear (29.8%) of family discrimination over their choice to have a child. This may stem from a lack of acceptance by family members toward their sexual identity. This finding is supported by Alonzo and Buttitta and Watson et al., who observed a decrease in parental support and increased conflict when children "came out" to their parents [27, 28]. Equally insightful research on attachment, support, and parental acceptance of LGBTQIA+ children was conducted by Panganiban et al., showing that for non-heteronormative individuals, parental support and acceptance of their orientation and partner were crucial. Respondents who received full acceptance from their parents expressed pride in their gender identity, which, in turn, reinforced their sense of self-worth [29].

Our research also revealed respondents' concerns about disclosing their same-sex relationships to co-workers. Most of the women surveyed (41.0%) were unsure, while 7.6% stated that they would not disclose their relationship at work. A study on social distance toward LGBT individuals by Stefaniak and Witkowska similarly found that the majority of women were hesitant, and 7.6% preferred not to inform their workplace about their relationship [30].

In recent years, the institutionalization of non-heteronormative relationships has become increasingly widespread in many countries. In Poland, despite years of discussions on legal recognition, no concrete arrangements have been made for these couples. Consequently, 49.1% of female respondents in our study expressed concerns about discrimination from Polish society regarding their decision to start a family. Furthermore, 44.1% of respondents considered emigrating to enter into a civil partnership and build a family, while 36.0% had seriously contemplated such a possibility.

Our research provided a broader perspective on motherhood among non-heteronormative women by analyzing different sexual orientations. The results, to some extent, challenge stereotypes about motherhood among women with non-heterosexual orientations. However, due to the small sample size, the findings cannot be generalized. Nevertheless, the results suggest that sexual orientation may influence the attitudes of non-heteronormative women toward motherhood.

A large-scale study on this subject would be valuable for both academia and the LGBTQIA+ community. To date, no extensive quantitative research has been conducted on motherhood among non-heteronormative women. In an era of increasing emancipation of sexual minorities, such a study would provide critical insights into the concerns of non-heterosexual women regarding widespread discrimination in society.

## CONCLUSIONS

Just like heterosexual women, non-heteronormative women aspire to become mothers, create a family with their partners, and raise children together. Unfortunately, this desire is

often overshadowed by fears of social discrimination against non-heteronormative motherhood, leading some respondents to consider emigrating to countries with more liberal policies in this regard. Given the evolving public attitudes toward the LGBTQIA+ community, this topic requires further research.

A limitation of this study is the relatively small sample size, particularly in the classification of women into orientations rarely described in scientific literature, such as pansexuality, demisexuality, and lithosexuality. Additionally, the lack of recent literature on the aspirations and concerns regarding motherhood among non-heteronormative women posed challenges in the preparation of this study.

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