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Gender and Sexuality Diversity in Schools: Parental Experiences and Schooling Responses

Australian Capital Territory Snapshot Report

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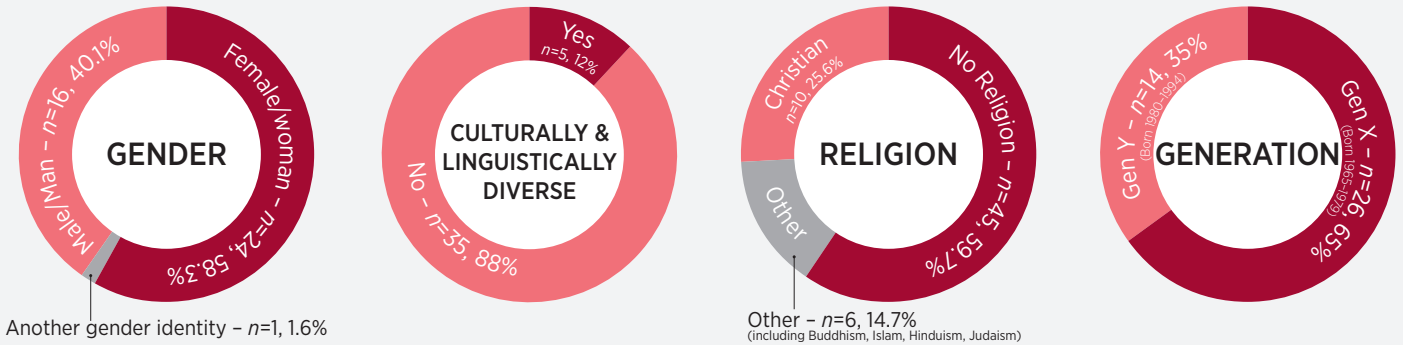
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This Australian Research Council (ARC) funded project (DP180101676) examined parents' perspectives on the in/exclusion of gender and sexuality diversity (GSD) in public school curriculum¹. Findings from the GSDS² national survey of Australian parents³ of K-12 government school students were isolated to the 40 (1.9%) parents who resided in the Australian Capital Territory (hereafter, ACT).

ACT Participant Demographics

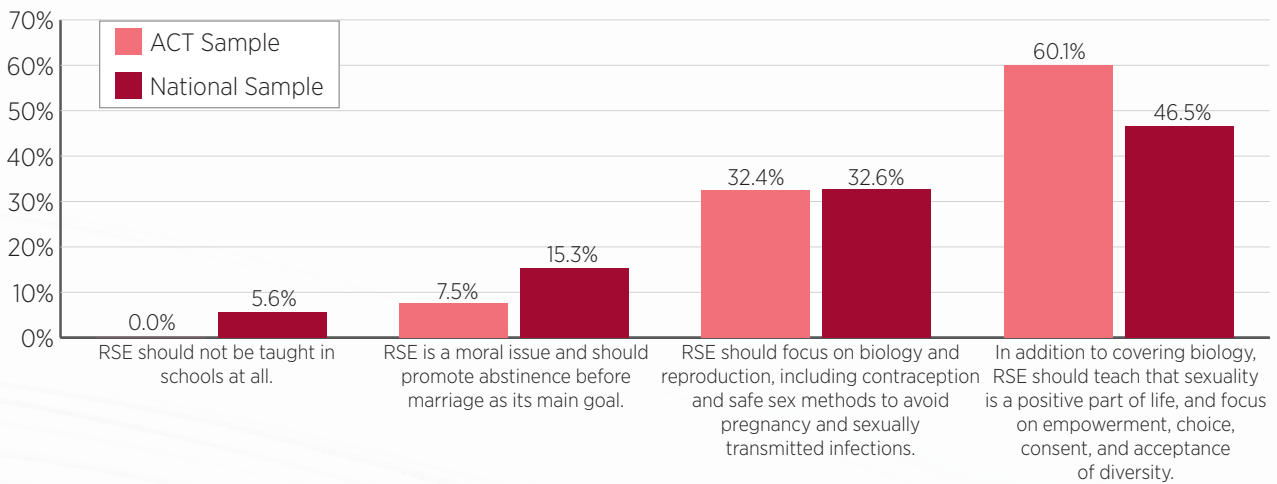


FINDING

ACT parents want Relationships and Sexual Health Education (RSE) to be delivered in government schools (100%). The most endorsed version of RSE (60.1%) was comprehensive and inclusive of diversity (Figure 1).

The majority of ACT parents (60.1%) endorsed the most expansive purpose of RSE in government schools, believing that “RSE should teach that sexuality is a positive part of life and focus on empowerment, choice, consent, and acceptance of diversity”. ACT parents were more supportive than the national sample of Australian parents (46.5%) of this diversity-inclusive version of RSE. As compared to the 5.6% of the national sample of Australian parents who did not want RSE taught at all in schools, no participating ACT parents selected this option; 100% of participating ACT parents wanted RSE delivered in government schools.

Figure 1: Purpose of RSE for ACT parents and the national sample of Australian parents



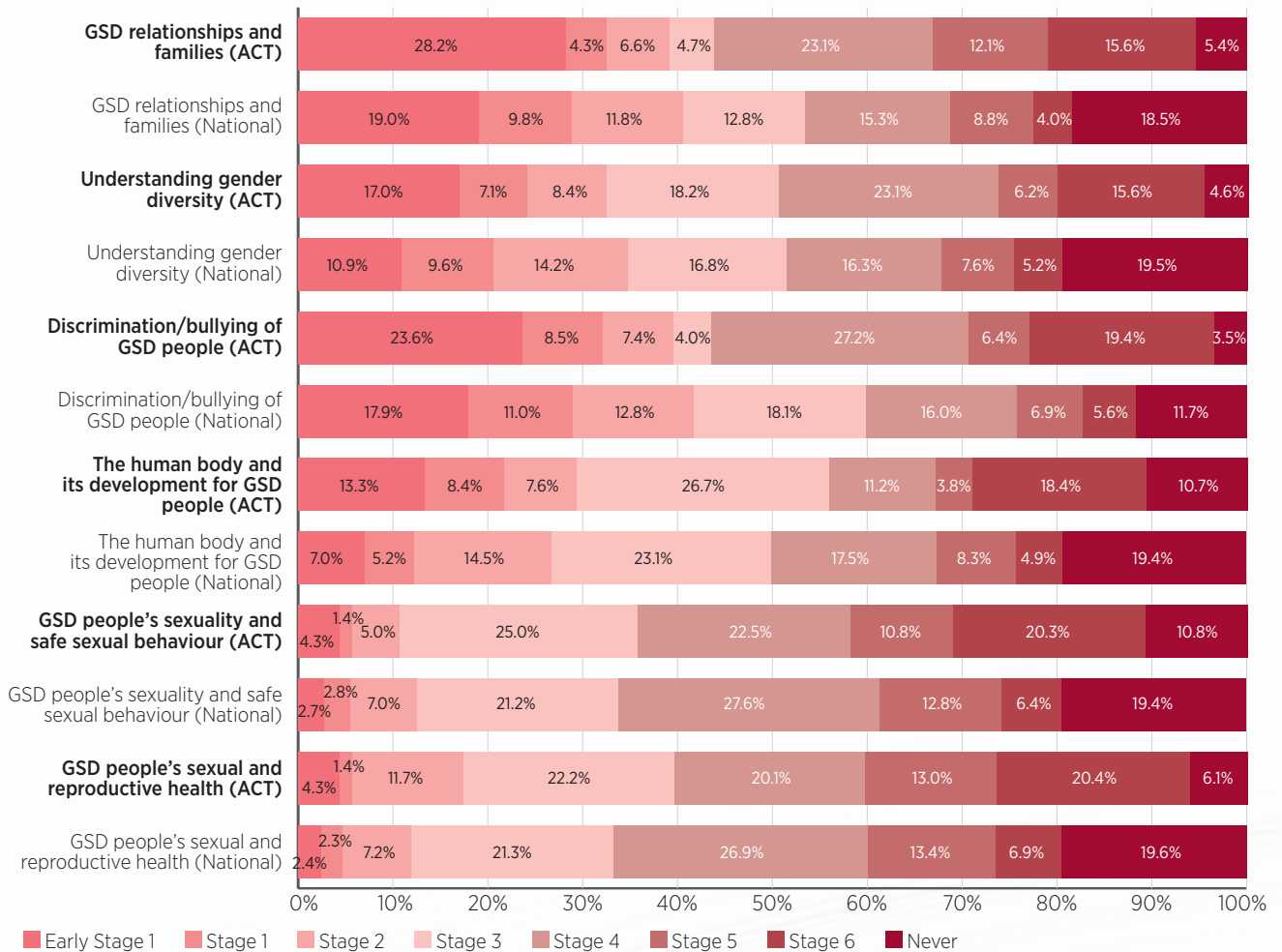
FINDING

The majority of ACT parents support the teaching of six gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive RSE broad content domains in government schools overall (89 – 97%), with most topics to be introduced by the end of Stage 3 and Stage 4 (Figure 2).

89.2% to 96.5% of ACT parents want gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive RSE content delivered nationally in government schools overall. Specifically, the majority of ACT parents endorsed the discussion of each of the six diversity topics to begin by the following stages:

1. GSD relationships and families – 66.9% by Stage 4 (Year 7 and 8), increasing to 94.6% by the end of schooling in Stage 6
2. Understanding gender diversity – 50.7% by Stage 3 (Year 5 and 6), increasing to 95.4% by the end of schooling in Stage 6
3. Discrimination/bullying of GSD people – 70.7% by Stage 4 (Year 7 and 8), increasing to 96.5% by the end of schooling in Stage 6
4. The human body and its development for GSD people – 56% by Stage 3 (Year 5 and 6), increasing to 89.3% by the end of schooling in Stage 6
5. GSD people’s sexuality and safe sexual behaviour – 58.2% by Stage 4 (Year 7 and 8), increasing to 89.2% by the end of schooling in Stage 6
6. GSD people’s sexual and reproductive health – 59.7% by Stage 4 (Year 7 and 8), increasing to 93.9% by the end of schooling in Stage 6

Figure 2: Schooling stage for introduction of six gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive RSE broad content domains for ACT parents and the national sample of Australian parents



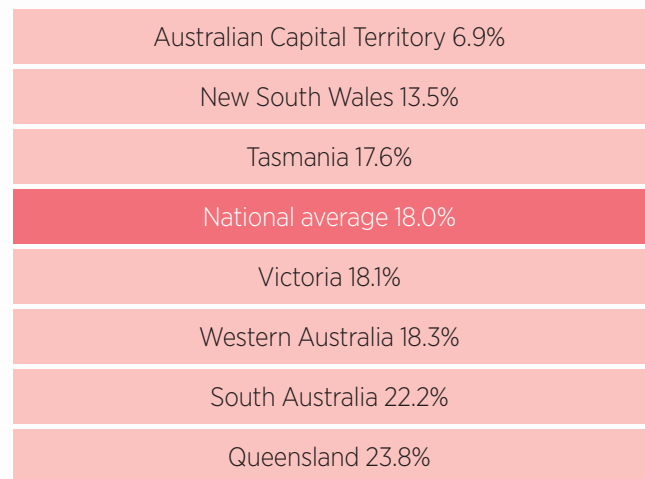
FINDING

ACT parents ranked as the most supportive cohort of gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive RSE compared to parents from other Australian states/territories (Figure 3).

For each Australian state and territory, an average was taken across the “never – it should not be discussed at any stage” categories for each of the six gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive RSE broad content domains presented in Figure 2. The state/territory averages were then ranked, alongside the national average, from the lowest average level to the highest average level of parental preference for total exclusion of gender and sexuality diversity from RSE within government schools (Figure 3). Out of the included Australian states/territories, ACT was the most supportive of gender and sexuality diversity inclusions within RSE, with 6.9% of ACT parents reporting that they would never want diversity included in the RSE curriculum.

For all of the Australian states/territories, the broad content domain “Discrimination and bullying of GSD people” faced the least opposition to inclusion in the RSE curriculum in comparison to the five other broad content domains.

Figure 3: Australian state, territory, and national averages of parental preference for total exclusion of gender and sexuality diversity from RSE



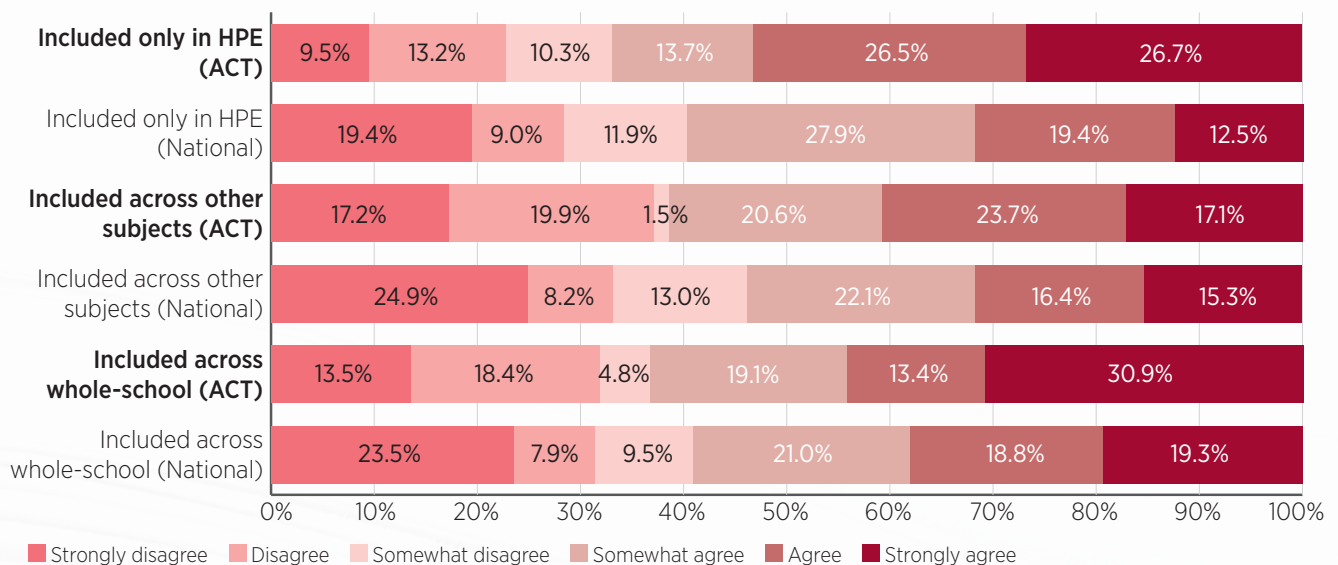
Note. ACT *n* = 40; NSW *n* = 616; TAS *n* = 45; National average *n* = 2093; VIC *n* = 604; WA *n* = 174; SA *n* = 140; QLD *n* = 461. Results for the NT were excluded due to the small sample size (*n* = 13).

FINDING

Approximately 67% of ACT parents reported that gender and sexuality diversity content should be included at a whole-school level (Figure 4).

66.9% of ACT parents somewhat to strongly agreed that gender and sexuality diversity should at least be included within the Health and Physical Education (HPE) Curriculum. Furthermore, 61.4% of ACT parents agreed with the statement “GSD content, including the contributions of GSD people, should be included across other subjects (e.g., English, Art, History)” and this was higher than the national average of 53.8%. ACT parents reported the highest level of support (63.4%) for the idea that “GSD content should be included at a whole-school level, reflected in school policies, practices, ethos, events, and community” and this was higher than the national average of 59.1%

Figure 4: Gender and sexuality diversity inclusions across the curriculum for ACT parents and the national sample of Australian parents



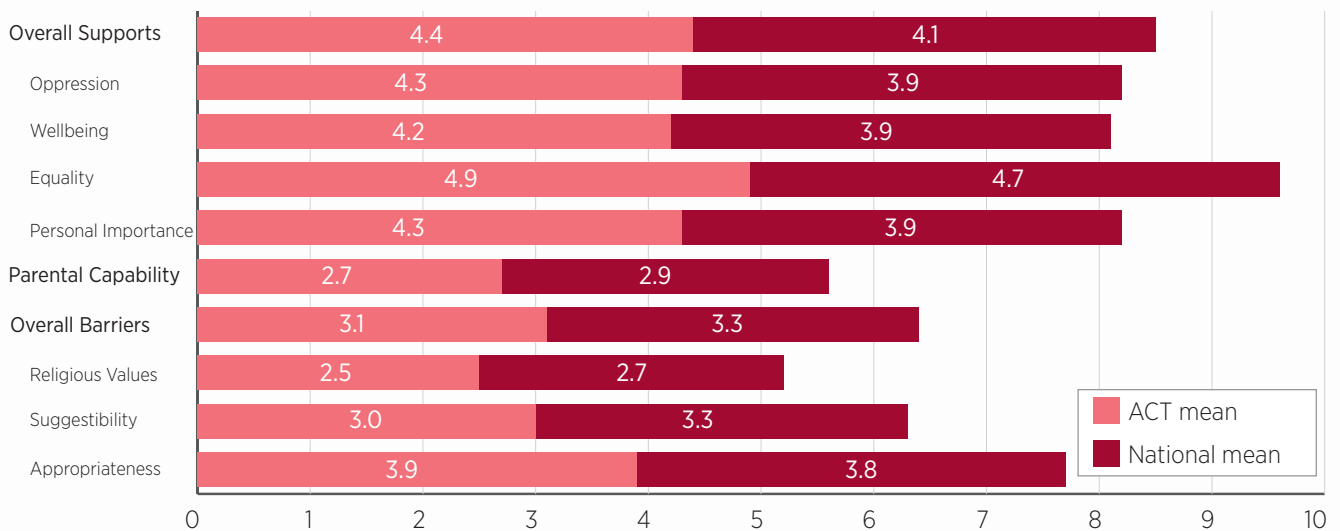
FINDING

ACT parents were more supportive of, than oppositional to, a national gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive curriculum for the primary reason of supporting equality for all students (Figure 5).

The Parental Attitudes Towards Inclusiveness Instrument (PATII)⁴ was used to gauge parental support for, and opposition to, a national gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive curriculum, which refers to “school curriculum, teaching, and learning which supports and values gender and sexuality diversity”. The PATII has five Supports factors: (a) Oppression, (b) Equality, (c) Wellbeing, (d) Personal Importance, and (e) Parental Capability and three Barriers factors: (a) Religious Values, (b) Suggestibility, and (c) Appropriateness. Each factor is represented by six items, and items were averaged within each factor to produce eight factor mean scores. Furthermore, the Supports factors (except for Parental Capability) were combined to create an overall Supports mean, and the Barriers factors were combined to create an overall Barriers mean. All means ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree).

ACT parents were significantly more supportive of ($M = 4.4$, $SD = 1.1$) than opposed to ($M = 3.1$, $SD = 1.6$) a national gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive schooling curriculum. In line with the national sample of Australian parents, ACT parents most supported an inclusive curriculum for reasons of Equality ($M = 4.9$, $SD = 0.9$), which focused on parents’ sense that schools have legal and social obligations to ensure that they are equitable for, and representative of, GSD people. Similar to the Australian national sample of parents, ACT parents who were most likely to oppose an inclusive curriculum did so on the basis of perceived Appropriateness ($M = 3.9$, $SD = 1.9$), which assessed parental concerns about the alignment of gender and sexuality diversity content to the developmental stages of students.

Figure 5: Average levels of support for, and opposition to, a gender and sexuality diversity-inclusive curriculum for the ACT sample and national sample of Australian parents



- 1 See the following for a full overview of national results: Ullman, J., Ferfolja T., & Hobby, L. (2021). Parents’ Perspectives on the Inclusion of Gender and Sexuality Diversity in K-12 Schooling: Results from an Australian National Study. *Sex Education*. Online pre-print. [Available here](#).
- 2 The full title of this project is “Gender and sexuality diversity in schools: Parental experiences and schooling responses”.
- 3 The term parent/parents is used throughout this snapshot to encapsulate all caregivers of children.
- 4 See the following for more information on the development and validation of this measure: Hobby, L., Ullman, J., & Ferfolja, T. (2021), Parental Attitudes Towards Inclusiveness Instrument (PATII): Psychometric Evaluation of a New Instrument Measuring Parental Beliefs About Gender and Sexuality Diversity Inclusions in Schools. *Journal of School Psychology*, 86, 222–242. [Available here](#).