FOCO

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SEXUAL HEALTH AND DIVERSITY

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FOCO Survey Implementation and Evaluation Report

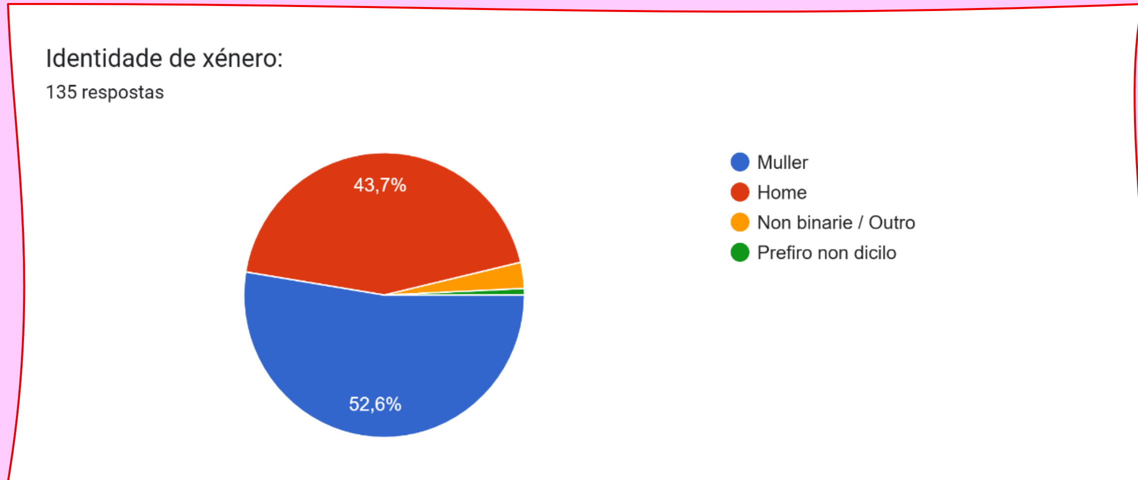
The survey collected responses from 135 young people (90,5 % aged 13–18). 52.6% identify as female, 43,7% as male, and 3,7% as non-binary/other. Most respondents (92%) reported having received some form of sexual education, mainly from school, and they prefer school settings and health professionals and for learning.

Key topics of interest include prevention of sexual violence, emotional aspects of relationships, contraception and safe sex, pregnancy, consent, and body image. A significant minority (19,9%) have felt pressured in relationships, and 4,4% would rather not say, signaling the need for consent-focused, feminist-informed education.

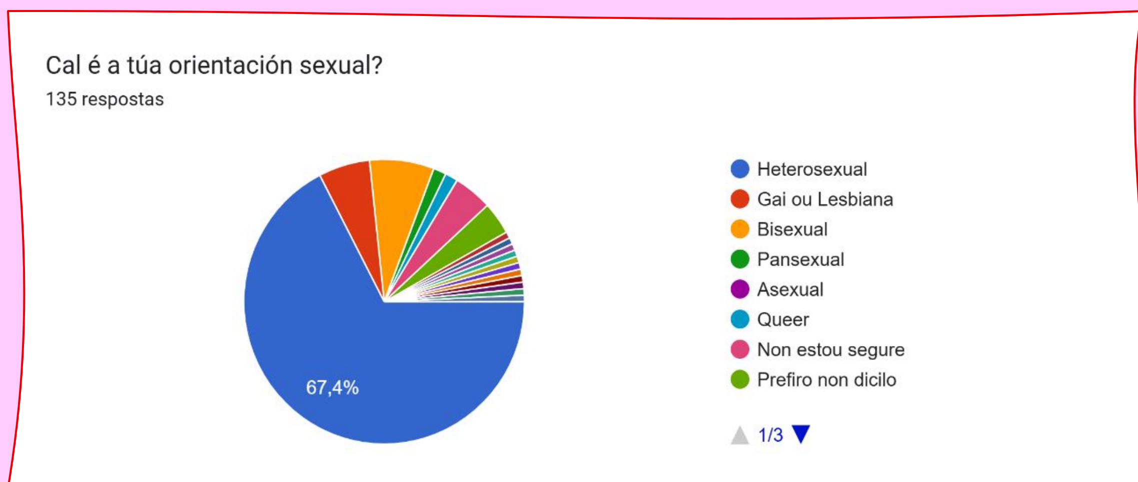
General Info

- 90,5% aged 13–18
- 52,6% female, 43,7% male, 3,7% non-binary/other
- Majority heterosexual; small representation of LGBTQ+ youth.

Interestingly, we could see a lack of vocabulary to refer to one's sexual orientation. They felt the need to explain or clarify: many said "I'm normal", "I like girls", "I don't know what this means"... This reflects a lack of basic knowledge on the younger segment of the survey, which needs to be tackled during the workshops.



Most of the participants are cisgender, and although some 10,3% marked "not" or 7,4% "I'd rather not say", we can check through their handwritten comments or other parts of the survey that just one person unequivocally identified as a trans man, whilst most of the other respondents are just unaware of what trans or cis means. **Again, this reflects a lack of basic vocabulary that will be tackled in the workshops.**



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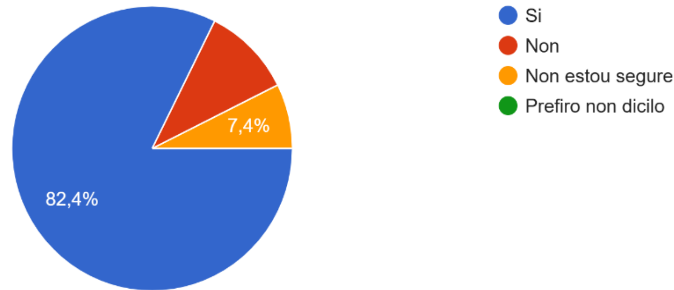
Identifícaste co sexo que che asignaron ao nacer?

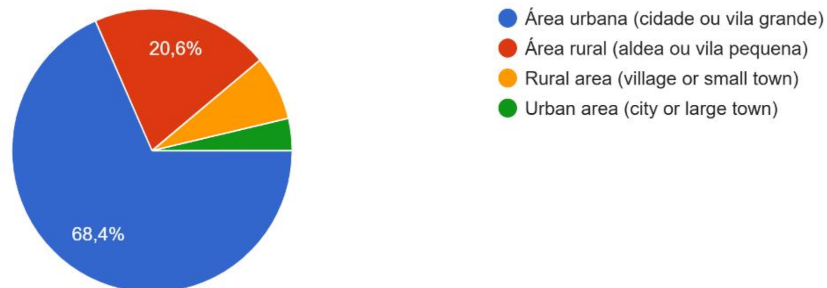
136 respostas



The axis rural/urban area is not representative in our context, as most participant live in villages of 10,000 people or less.

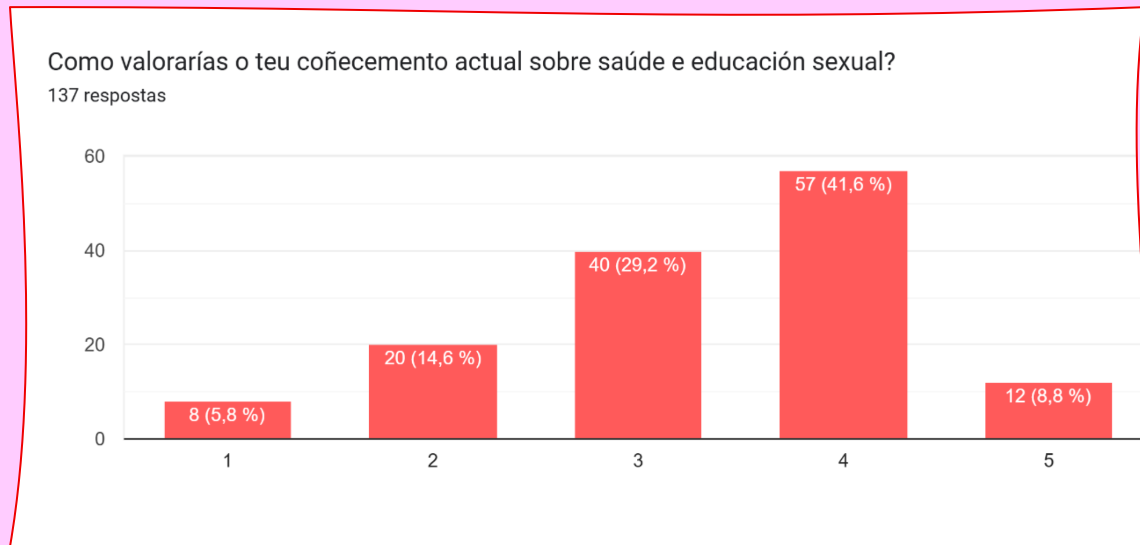
Onde vives actualmente?

136 respostas



Knowledge and experience

Most participants feel like their knowledge about sex ed is “somewhat good” (4 in a 1-5 Lickert scale).

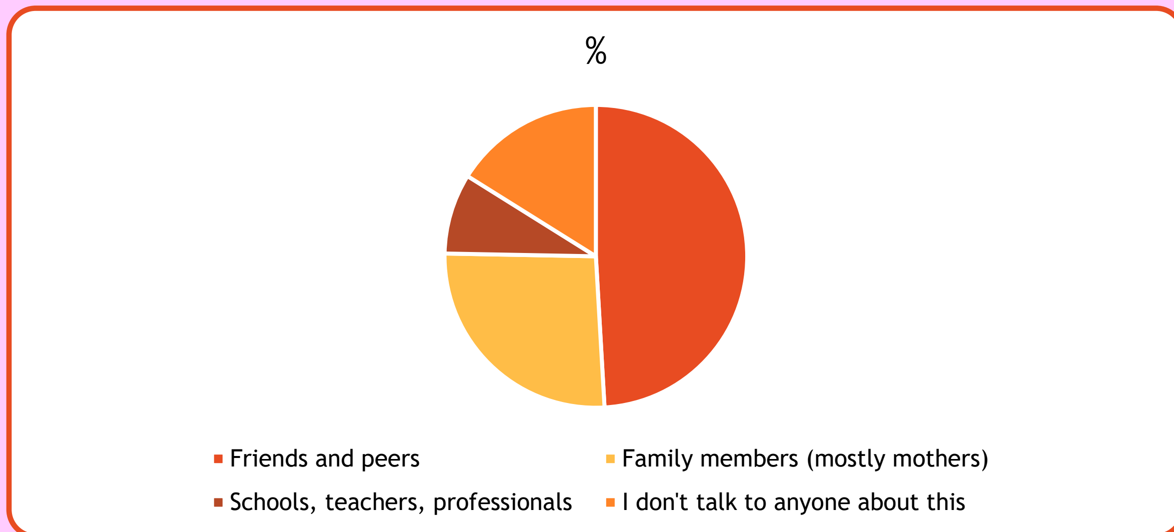


Through the rest of the survey, their self-assessment shows a mix of confidence and gaps, particularly in practical areas like consent, contraception, and how to access services. Their self-assessments may overestimate general awareness while underestimating practical skill gaps: **workshops should pair factual input with practice-focused activities.**

Talking about sex

When asked about who can they talk to, who are they comfortable talking with, if we read the total numbers friends and peers are the main preferred option. This tendency reflects a strong peer-based culture in which young people seek information, advice, and emotional validation from those who share similar experiences and speak their same language: this can be great if they have a strong Sex Ed background, but counterproductive when acting as an echo chamber for misogyny or misinformation.

Across all responses, **friends and peers represent around 45,7% of all valid answers**, while **family members (mostly mothers)** account for approximately **25%**. A smaller proportion mentions **schools, teachers, or professionals** (around 8%), while **15% admit feeling too embarrassed to talk to anyone**. Mothers are mentioned much more frequently than fathers, suggesting that maternal figures are perceived as **more emotionally available and approachable**, while paternal figures are less often associated with open or supportive communication.



Gender disaggregation

Boys (59 total responses, 51 valid): 10.7% did not answer. The main themes were **friends/peers (39,2%)**, **family/parents (15,7%)**, and a range of **miscellaneous answers (24%).** Typical quotes include: *"Co meu pai porque sabe máis"* ("With my dad because he knows more") and *"Amigos. Me siento más cómodo y entendido por mis amigos"* ("Friends. I feel more comfortable and understood by my friends"). This split between family and peers suggests that some boys still rely on an **adult or expert figure (often the father)** for guidance, perhaps reflecting traditional gendered roles around authority and knowledge. It also hints that **male socialization may limit emotional openness among peers**, making intergenerational or hierarchical relationships a more comfortable space for them to express doubts.

Girls (71 total responses, 69 valid). The main themes were **friends/peers (52,2%)**, **family/parents (30%)**, and **other answers (18%)**. Common responses include: *“Coas miñas amigas”* (“With my friends”) and *“Con alguén que me escoite e me responda sen xuízos”* (“With someone who listens and responds without judgment”).

Girls express a clear preference for talking with **friends and peers**, identifying their social circles as **safe, trusting, and non-judgmental spaces**. These peer networks function as **mutual support environments**, compensating for the lack of institutional or adult spaces where open dialogue about sexuality feels possible. Mothers also appear often as reliable sources of information and allies, both in boys and girls.

Non-binary youth (4 total responses). Their answers combine references to **friends/peers** and **diverse or LGBTQI+ spaces**. One participant wrote: *“Coes miñes amigues LGBTIQ+, pois son con quen teño máis achego”* (“With my LGBTQI+ friends, because I feel closest to them”). This highlights how **community and identity-based belonging** play a crucial role in creating comfort and safety for discussing topics like sexuality and relationships.

These patterns reveal how **emotional safety, trust, and empathy are gendered experiences**:

- *Girls construct their peer groups as relational and affective spaces, emphasizing mutual listening and care.*
- *Boys show a mixed reliance on family authority and peer comfort, reflecting both the persistence of patriarchal structures of knowledge (father as “the one who knows”) and the difficulty of expressing vulnerability among male peers.*

Non-binary youth articulate a distinct experience, locating safety within LGBTIQ+ and chosen communities, where they feel seen and understood beyond heteronormative expectations

Overall, these findings underscore the importance of peer-based, participatory approaches in sexual education. Strengthening horizontal, trust-based communication (especially through workshops, peer mentoring, and intergroup dialogue) may be key to making sexual education more inclusive, relevant, and emotionally safe for all genders.

Parents remain important (collectively ~24%). Mothers and fathers are both referenced, mothers slightly more often across genders, as individual referent; but fathers are also present. This suggests families are still a meaningful resource, but not the main one.

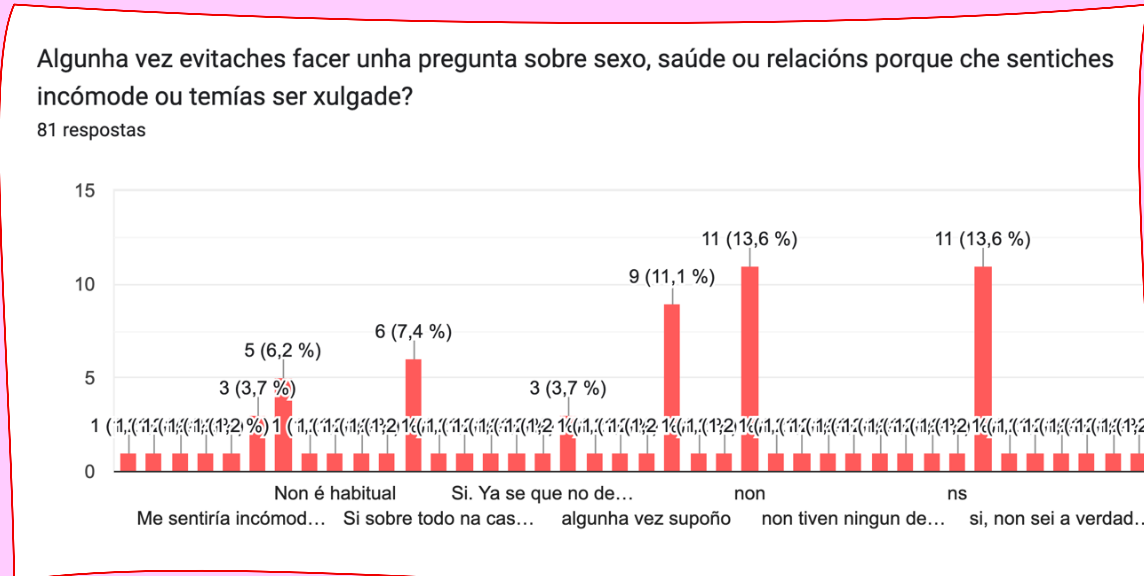
Institutional spaces are weak in this dataset. Very low mentions of school/teachers (0.8%) and few references to professionals; suggesting formal school-based sexual education may be absent, perceived as unhelpful, or not trusted.

Embarrassment is non-trivial. 15% say they wouldn't talk to anyone (too embarrassed), indicating emotional barriers to disclosure and learning. Gendered emotional norms persist. Women emphasize relational, listening, non-judgmental spaces; men show a mixed pattern combining peer comfort with deference to parental knowledge roles; non-binary youth locate safety in identity-affirming communities. Young males are particularly tricky and need special attention and nuanced approaches.

Avoiding talking about sex

When asked whether they had ever avoided asking a question about sex, health, or relationships because they felt uncomfortable or feared being judged, a significant portion of respondents **(roughly 42% of the total sample) answered "yes."** Their

explanations centered on feelings of **shame, embarrassment, and fear of judgment, with several explicitly mentioning the stigma surrounding same-sex relationships.**



Among those who answered **"no", some clarified that they felt too young (under 14 years old) to have such questions**, suggesting that age and developmental stage also mediate how comfortable they feel engaging with sexual topics.

<u>Gender dissagregation</u>

Boys: There is a near balance between those who said "yes" (≈44%) and those who said "no" (≈48%), while a small remainder gave unclear answers. Many of those who admitted avoiding questions did so because of **shame or insecurity, often linked to social expectations of masculinity that discourage vulnerability.** Representative quotes include:

- *"Sí, muchas veces."*
- *"Fai uns anos dábame vergoña preguntarlle algunhas cousas á miña nai."*

This ambivalence points to how **male socialization may suppress open communication**, teaching boys that asking questions about sexuality is embarrassing or unmanly. The fact that some still turn to parents (particularly mothers) also reflects the persistence of gendered care dynamics, where emotional safety is associated with maternal rather than paternal figures.

Girls: Only 1 did not answer. Around **40% openly stated "yes"**, admitting that they had avoided asking questions due to **shame, fear of judgment, or discomfort**, while the majority said "no."
Typical expressions include:

- *"Si, en especial no que fai referencia ás ITS debido ao estigma..."*
- *"Fai uns anos tiña vergoña de preguntar sobre iso."*

For girls, shame appears deeply tied to **social taboos and sexual double standards**, pointing to the persistent idea that curiosity about sexuality can be judged more harshly in women. The emotional tone of their responses highlights the **weight of social control over female sexuality**, reinforcing the need to create safer, nonjudgmental learning spaces where young women can voice questions without fear of ridicule or labeling.

Non-binary youth: answers split between "yes" and "no." Their explanations reveal **specific forms of discomfort linked to stigma toward LGBTIQ+ identities and sexual practices**, particularly around topics such as STIs or same-sex attraction.

> *Shame functions as a disciplinary emotion: it regulates what can be said, asked, or even felt about sexuality. This shame is not neutral: it is shaped by gendered, heteronormative, and age-based expectations that mark certain curiosities or experiences as inappropriate or deviant.*

Girls' and non-binary respondents' answers reflect how patriarchal and heteronormative taboos restrict access to knowledge and produce silence. Boys, in turn, are limited by masculinity norms that discourage emotional openness. For LGBTIQ+ youth, stigma adds another layer of vulnerability, as asking questions can expose them to judgment or outing.

Overall, the data suggest that nearly half of the young people experience emotional or social barriers when it comes to seeking information about sexuality. A feminist and intersectional approach to sexual education must therefore prioritize:

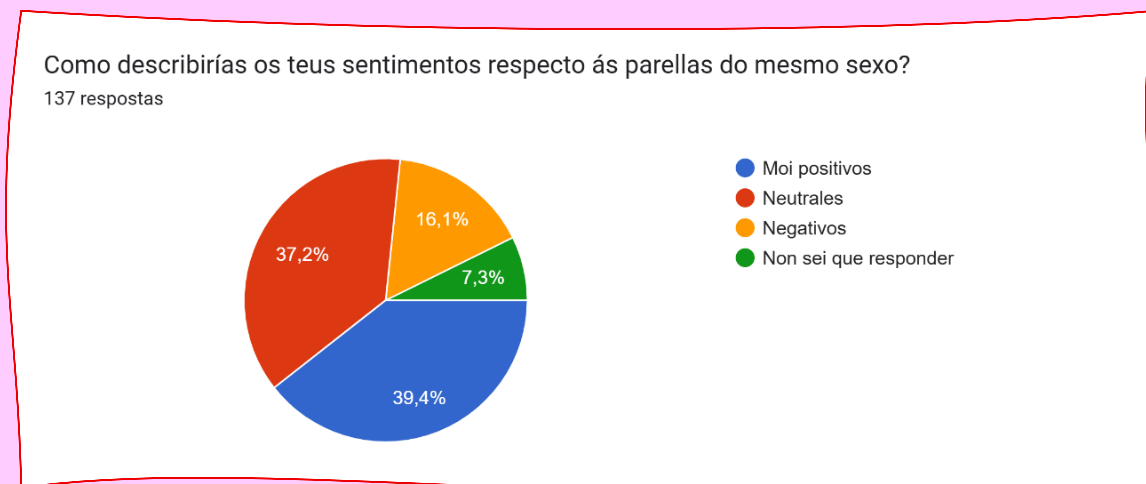
- **Anonymity and psychological safety** (so that questions can be asked without fear).
- **Representation of diverse identities and experiences**, to dismantle stigma.

- **Pedagogical spaces grounded in empathy and care**, not shame or moralization.

In short, these findings underscore that comprehensive sexual education must not only transmit information but also **transform the affective and cultural conditions** that make asking questions an act of courage.

Feelings and perceptions about LGBTQI+ people

The survey results reveal a mixed landscape of acceptance and normalization of same-sex relationships among young people aged 13 to 18. Less than half of respondents (39,4%) expressed *very positive* feelings toward same-sex couples, and another third (37.62%) reported *neutral* attitudes. That said, 16.1% expressed negative opinions, and 7.3% said they *didn't know*.



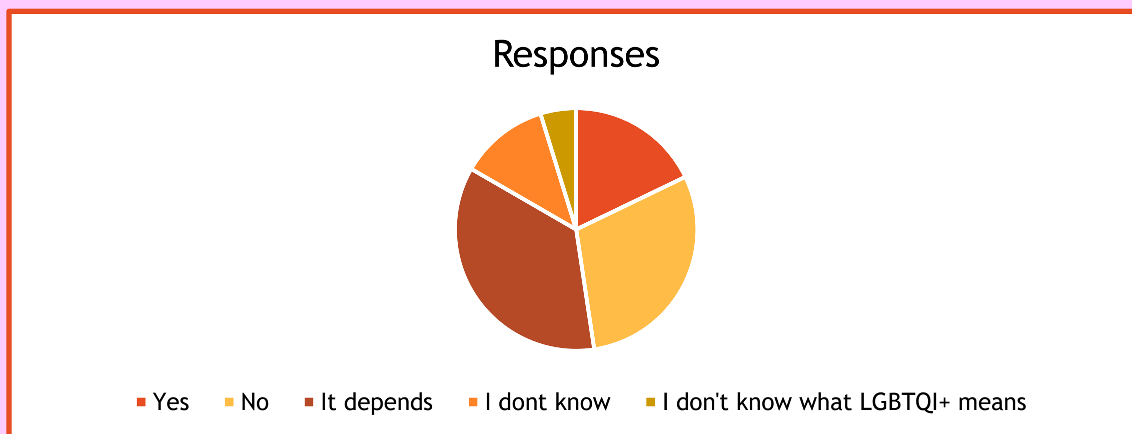
Again, we find a lack of vocabulary that needs to be tackled in the workshops. It's unclear if all 22 people who said they had "negative" feelings towards LGBTQI+ people meant that they are LGBTphobic, but judging by their handwritten comments that's a real possibility that needs our attention and intervention.

> *Young people are growing up in social environments where diverse sexualities are increasingly recognized and normalized, but there's still a long road ahead. The expressions of uncertainty ("I don't know what this is"), mockery or negativity show that stigma still exists.*

From a gender perspective, the pattern is consistent: most boys, girls, and non-binary youth express positive or neutral feelings. Among girls, acceptance and normalization predominate; among boys, there is a majority of positive or neutral responses, though more of them report "negative" feelings, some of them going as far as adding homophobic comments; and all four non-binary participants reported *very positive* attitudes.

> ***When asked whether their school or youth space is a safe place for LGBTQI+ people****, the responses were more ambivalent and nuanced. Only 15 participants answered yes, often citing respect, protection, and positive examples. There were a number of jokes from male respondants, trivializing comments, or even veiled threats such as "yes, we're not going to kill them", "it won't be safe while I'm here", "let's send them to burn"... revealing unseriousness and aggression predispositions.*

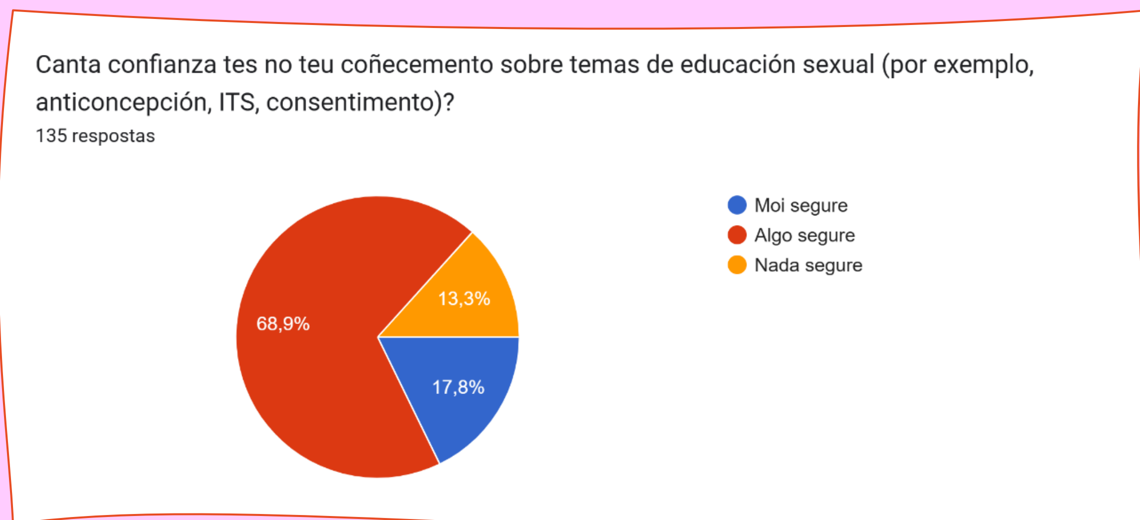
Over twenty respondents said *no*, mentioning bullying, mockery, and persistent disrespect. **Some even emphasizing that school "will never be a safe place for them."** The largest group (over 30) answered *"it depends"*, noting that safety varies between classrooms, teachers, or peer groups. Most differentiate the school as a safe institution but their peers as "unsafe", saying that students are disrespectful and insulting. Ten said *"I don't know"*, and again, **four admitted not knowing what LGBTQI+ means or not knowing anyone from the community.**



Safety is not a fixed state but a *relational and contextual process*. Saying that a space "depends" on the group or teacher underscores that inclusion relies on the everyday micro-politics of interaction, institutional culture, and the presence (or absence) of explicit support structures. A school is not automatically safe simply because overt violence is rare; safety requires active commitment.

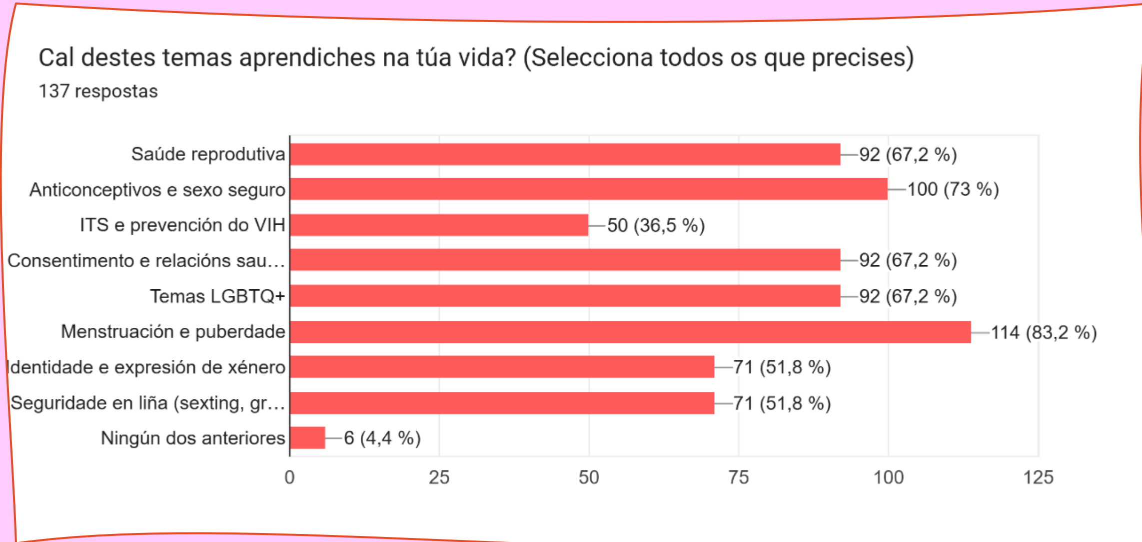
Confidence about own knowledge

There's a gap between self-perceived knowledge and real knowledge, although most respondents said they were "somewhat confident". Young people show some baseline awareness but lack practical skills and confidence: condom use, access to testing, and refusal/assertion in pressured situations.



- 72,3% correctly understood that pregnancy is possible even when using condoms.
- 6,6% believe the withdrawal method is reliable.
- 19,9% felt pressured to do something in a relationship they were uncomfortable with.
- 25,7% think jealousy is a sign of love; 38,2% are unsure.

There's inconsistency about the topics they claimed they've studied in school, even inside the same classroom, although most topics seem familiar to them.



Healthy relationships

The responses to the question *"What is a healthy relationship for you?"* show a complex, evolving understanding among young people aged 13–18. Across the sample, the dominant language is one of **respect, communication, and mutual care**. Yet, disaggregating the data by gender reveals **important nuances** in how girls, boys, and non-binary youth conceptualize love, care, and power within relationships.

Across all genders, most respondents describe a healthy relationship through a shared cluster of values: **mutual respect, trust, communication, and consent**. These are framed as essential for emotional wellbeing and mutual growth.

- **Girls** most frequently mention *listening*, *communication*, *respect*, and *mutual support*. Their answers often emphasize **emotional balance and reciprocity**, such as "a relationship where both respect each other" or "where there is communication, consent, understanding, and love." Many explicitly reference **emotional responsibility**, an idea that reflects their exposure to feminist and equality discourses in schools and online spaces.

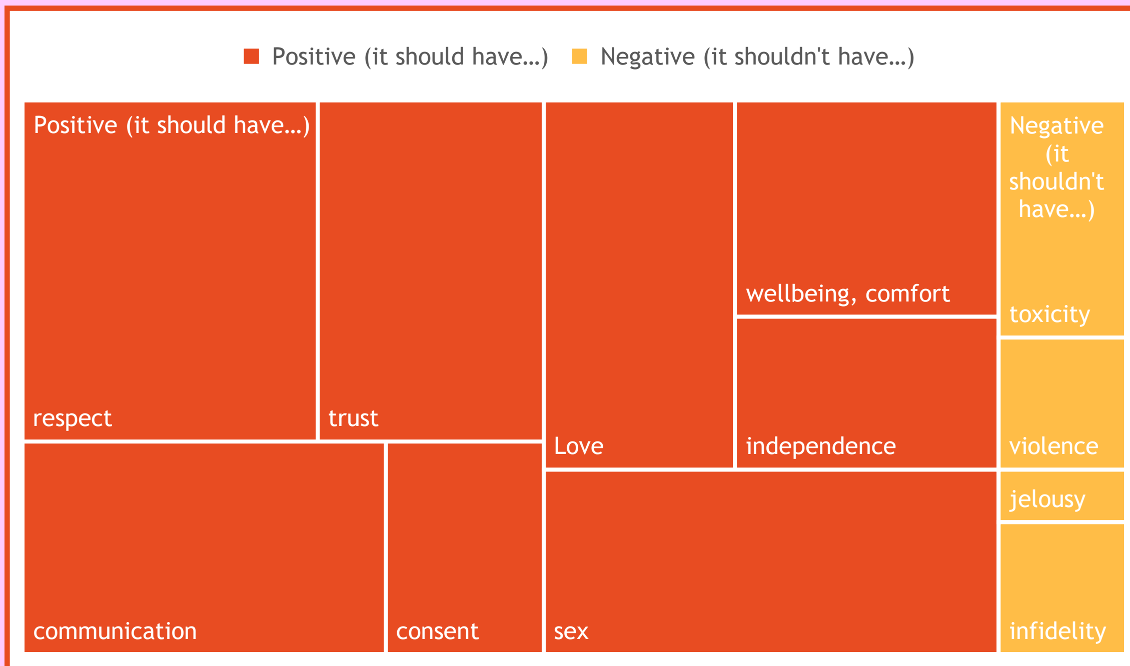
- **Boys** also mention respect and communication, but their responses tend to be **less elaborated** and more individualistic: e.g., "respect," "trust," "understanding each other." Some show a pragmatic orientation toward coexistence ("being honest," "not arguing all the time"), suggesting that emotional reflection and feminist language are still less internalized. Ome of them mention "not mistreating each other", "no violence"… which suggest

an oversimplified understanding of healthy: not violent doesn't have to equal "healthy".

- **Non-binary youth**, though a smaller group, articulate the **most relationally mature discourse**, highlighting *consent*, *boundaries*, *communication*, and *autonomy*. They describe relationships as spaces of "mutual care" and "freedom without fear," aligning closely with feminist ethics of care.

Overall, this convergence around respect and equality signals a generational shift away from romanticized notions of control or dependence. The feminist influence is clear, especially among girls and non-binary participants, but remains unevenly distributed across genders.

Most frequently used words about a healthy relationship:



The idea that each person in a relationship should "maintain their individuality" or "not depend emotionally" appears prominently, especially among **girls** and **non-binary respondents**. They tend to articulate autonomy as a feminist value: love as *freedom rather than fusion*.

By contrast, **some boys** express uncertainty or ambivalence about independence, sometimes equating emotional closeness with dependence. A few define healthy relationships as "when you agree on everything" or "when you are always together,"

suggesting traces of the traditional romantic ideal that merges love with control or exclusivity.

This gender gap points to the persistence of **gendered emotional socialization**: **girls are increasingly taught to value independence and care ethics, while boys often remain caught between the old ideal of dominance and the new demand for emotional equality.**

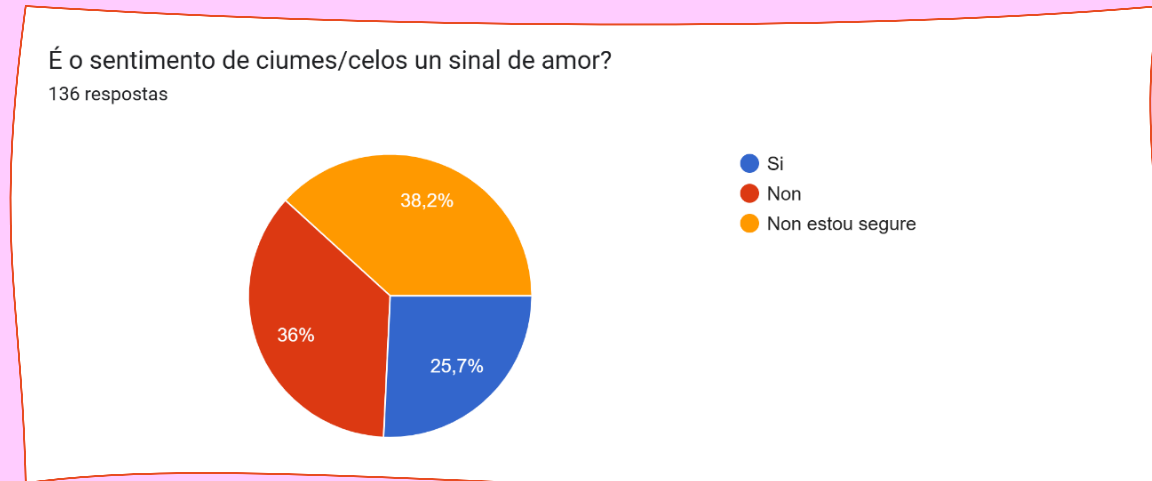
Two intertwined discourses emerge: a **language of care** (positive values like respect, empathy, equality) and a **language of prevention** (negative formulations like "not toxic," "not jealous," "not controlling").

- *Girls' responses more frequently use the language of care, centering on cooperation, active listening, and empathy. They express an understanding of affective responsibility and relational ethics, showing that feminist messages about care and boundaries have taken root.*
- *Boys, however, are more likely to use preventive or defensive language: "not being toxic," "not fighting," "not being jealous." Even "not being aggressive". Their framing often defines love by what it is not, reflecting a more reactive than proactive internalization of equality discourses.*
- *Non-binary youth integrate both languages fluidly, describing relationships that "avoid control and cultivate care." Their answers are the most reflective about emotional labor and freedom, signaling a high degree of feminist literacy.*

The contrast suggests that while all genders are aware of what constitutes *unhealthy* dynamics, girls and non-binary participants articulate more constructive, affirmative understandings of what healthy relationships can be. The word "toxic", as in "not being toxic", appears quite often.

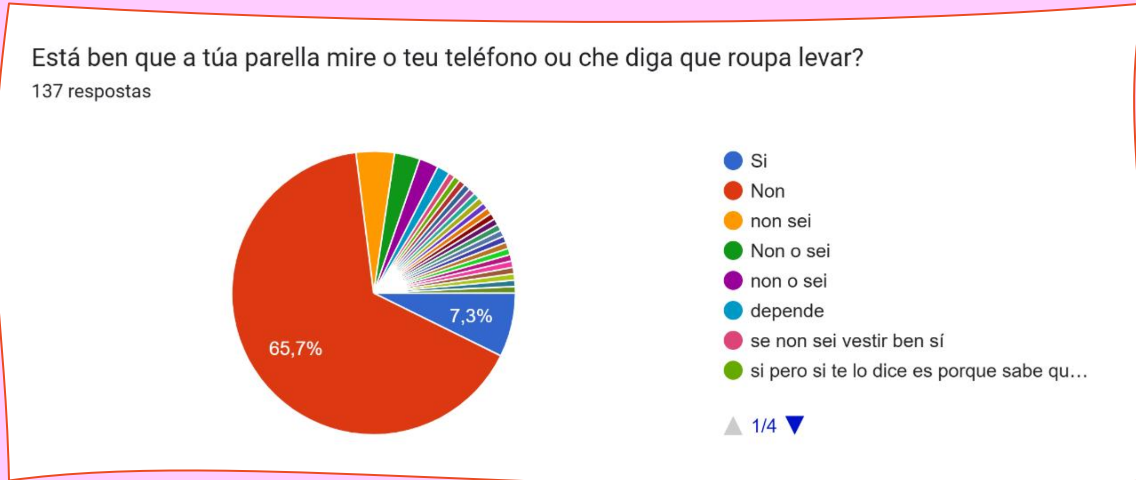
Jealousy and control

When asked *"Are feelings of jealousy a sign of love?"*, most respondents (especially girls and non-binary youth) reject the idea that jealousy equals affection, but there's a lot of doubts.



- **Girls** largely identify jealousy as **a symptom of insecurity or control**. Many explicitly say "no," explaining that jealousy "has nothing to do with love."
- **Boys** are more divided: some repeat that view, but others maintain that "a little jealousy is normal" or "shows interest." This reflects lingering cultural messages that link masculinity with possessiveness and the right to monitor a partner.
- **Non-binary respondents** consistently reject jealousy as love, describing it as an *emotional warning sign* rather than a romantic one.

These differences show that feminist critiques of jealousy and control have penetrated more deeply among girls and gender-diverse youth, while boys are still negotiating the transition between old and new emotional norms.



Responses to *"Is it okay for your partner to check your phone or tell you what to wear?"* reveal a clear consensus across genders that **such actions are not acceptable**, but the reasoning differs.

- **Girls** overwhelmingly describe these behaviors as **forms of control**, not love. Some qualify that it might be acceptable "only if consensual," but even then they express concern about privacy and autonomy. Their answers often link these issues to **gendered power dynamics**, echoing feminist language from awareness campaigns.

- **Boys** show more ambivalence. While many say "no," others justify it through **trust or agreement**, such as "it depends on the level of trust." This conditional framing suggests that the line between care and control is less clearly defined for them.

- **Non-binary respondents** explicitly discuss **boundaries, privacy, and emotional safety**, rejecting any form of control and emphasizing mutual respect.

Across all genders, there is a notable silence about sexuality, pleasure, and desire. Few respondents mention physical intimacy or mutual enjoyment as part of a healthy relationship.

This absence is more pronounced among **boys**, whose responses remain affectively minimal ("respect," "love," "trust") and rarely touch on emotional or bodily vulnerability. This could be linked to the young age of the respondents.

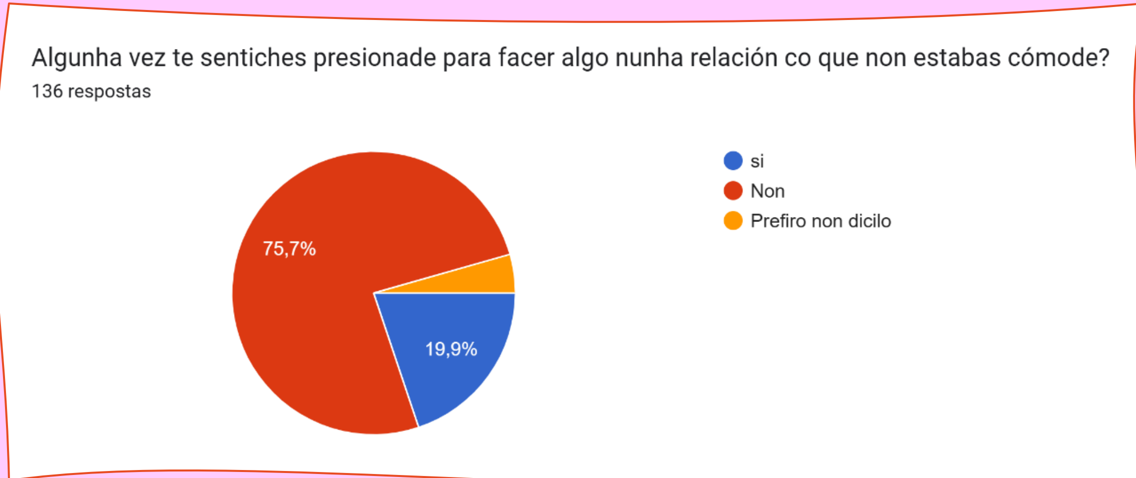
Consent and boundaries

The data shows that **19,9% of participants** acknowledged having felt pressured at some point to do something they were not comfortable with. Another **4.4% preferred not to answer**, while **75.7%** said they had not experienced such a situation. These percentages, interpreted carefully, reveal two complementary realities.

On one hand, a large majority perceive their relationships as spaces where they feel **respected and capable of making their own decisions**. On the other, **one in five young people** admits to having felt pressured, which is not a minor finding, and supports the data recently presented by the Spanish Ministry of Youth (2024 report).

From a feminist perspective, that 19,9% cannot be understood as a mere statistical minority, but rather as a **dangerous sign**. Emotional pressure, insistence, or subtle coercion belong to a continuum of gendered violence that often remains invisible. The fact that almost a fifth of young people recognize this experience indicates that **the culture of insistence, the fear of disappointing, and the idea that one must give in to preserve the relationship** remain present.

Furthermore, the 4.4% who preferred not to answer reinforce this interpretation: **silence can also signal discomfort or experiences that are difficult to express**.



Understanding Consent

The open-ended responses to the question *"What does consent mean to you?"* offer a valuable insight into the participants' level of affective-sexual literacy and the **gender differences in how consent is understood**. **Women speak of giving permission, while men speak of receiving it.**

Most girls provide **mature and detailed definitions**. They tend to associate consent with **free, conscious, and voluntary agreement** between the parties and emphasize that it must be **explicit, informed, and reversible**. Many use vocabulary drawn from educational or media contexts:

- "setting and respecting boundaries,"
- "giving free and conscious permission,"
- "asking before doing something,"
- "knowing when to stop if someone feels uncomfortable."

They also frequently highlight that **consent is not a one-time act but a continuous process** that must be present "at every moment."

This body of responses shows that many young women have internalized a **feminist understanding of consent**: a dynamic, communicative process grounded in mutual responsibility. They mention both **verbal and bodily language**, a sign that public discourse around *"only yes means yes"* and the idea of *enthusiastic consent* has permeated their imagination. **However, some responses remain more ambiguous**

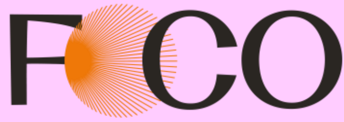
or formal, such as "giving permission" or "allowing someone to do something." While not dominant, these reveal a residual notion of passive consent, in which permission is *granted* rather than co-created: a linguistic echo of the patriarchal framing of consent as something women "give." There are also occasional answers transferring the concept to other contexts, e.g. *"having my parents' consent to have a relationship."* This suggests that **not all participants clearly distinguish the meaning of sexual consent.**

Among boys, responses are **much more dispersed**. A small group shows an understanding similar to that of the girls, defining consent as *"free and mutual agreement"* or *"doing only what all parties want."* **However, most reduce the term to a form of authorization or permission, without mention of freedom, communication, or reciprocity.** Phrases such as *"when she lets you do what you asked"* or *"giving permission to do something"* reflect a more **unidirectional perspective**, in which consent depends on one party's approval, usually linked to the female body. **Evasive answers like *"I don't know," "it depends,"* or *"no idea"* are also common, exposing a clear gap in affective and sexual education.**

This gender difference is significant: while many girls have incorporated consent as part of an ethical and relational practice, a portion of boys still conceive it in terms of permission, not agreement. This reveals both the uneven effects of sexual education and the persistence of male privilege in defining relational norms. Many boys are not required to reflect on consent because they are rarely interpellated as potential agents of harm, nor as subjects of emotional responsibility.

When analyzed alongside the quantitative data on pressure, a clear picture emerges. Young people have **absorbed the word "consent,"** but not always its **conceptual and ethical depth**. A **shared feminist vocabulary** exists, but its meanings differ by gender and lived experience.

- **Many girls** describe consent as a **mutual, communicative process**.
- **Many boys** understand it as **individual permission**.
- **Non-binary youth** define it as an **ethical agreement grounded in care and respect**.



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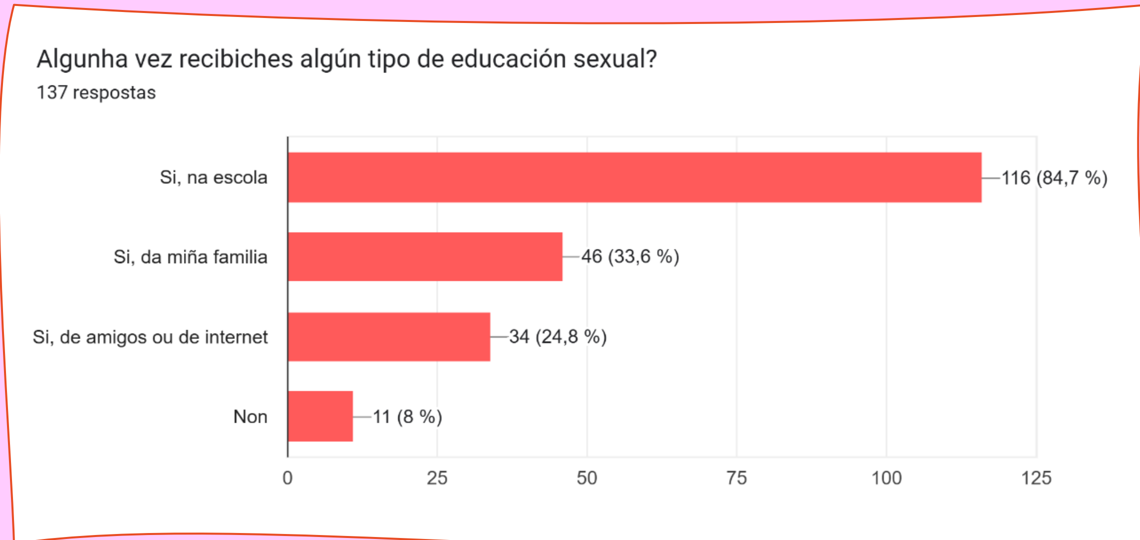
This distribution reflects the effects of patriarchal emotional socialization: girls are trained to manage boundaries, boys to assume desire as natural, and non-binary youth develop heightened awareness of vulnerability and negotiation. This highlights the urgency of reinforcing comprehensive affective-sexual education, not only through factual content but also through language, emotional literacy, and ethical values. Consent must not be presented as a word uttered before an act, but as a form of relationship that requires listening, empathy, and shared responsibility.

The data depict a society in transition. The proportion of young people who have felt pressured remains troubling, yet the language used to define consent suggests a deeper cultural shift. Youth increasingly speak in terms of freedom, mutuality, and the right not only to say “no,” but also to say “yes” without fear.

Nevertheless, gender imbalances and conceptual confusion persist, underscoring the need for a more integrated feminist education. The experience of pressure and the definition of consent are two sides of the same coin: the former marks the current limits of affective freedom, while the latter signals the path toward a culture of mutual care.

The responses of girls and non-binary youth point to the possibility of a new relational model: based on communication, respect, and ethical responsibility; while the more confused answers from boys remind us that this model is not yet universally shared.

Needs and interests



When asked what topics they most wish to learn about, young people's responses reveal a clear demand for a **holistic, affective, and ethical sexual education**. The most frequently mentioned areas were **prevention of sexual violence and abuse (63 mentions)**, **contraception and safe sex (60)**, and **pregnancy, parenting, and care (58)**. Close behind appear **emotional aspects of relationships (56 mentions)**, showing that young people are not only preoccupied with the biological or risk-related aspects of sexuality, but also with its **emotional, ethical, and relational dimensions**.

The prominence of **violence prevention** and **emotional well-being** points to an emerging **feminist and relational consciousness** among youth: they are seeking tools to navigate relationships safely, respectfully, and with emotional literacy. These are not defensive or fear-driven priorities, but rather affirmations of care and self-knowledge. They suggest that for many adolescents, sexuality is less about prohibition or risk avoidance than about **learning to relate**, how to express desire, set boundaries, and recognize harmful dynamics.

The high number of mentions for **contraception (60)** and **pregnancy (58)** underscores a desire for **comprehensive and realistic information**, one that connects sexuality with **responsibility, care, and life planning**. Youth appear to want clear, factual, and non-judgmental knowledge about their bodies and

reproductive choices, resisting the fragmented or moralizing narratives they often encounter at school or at home.

Consent and personal boundaries (51 mentions) and **sexually transmitted infections (51)** occupy a strong middle position in the list. While slightly less mentioned than contraception or violence prevention, their parity suggests that **youth conceptualize safety in both physical and ethical terms**: protection from infection and pregnancy goes hand in hand with the capacity to communicate limits and respect others. In other words, they want to understand both "how to protect themselves" and "how to relate ethically."

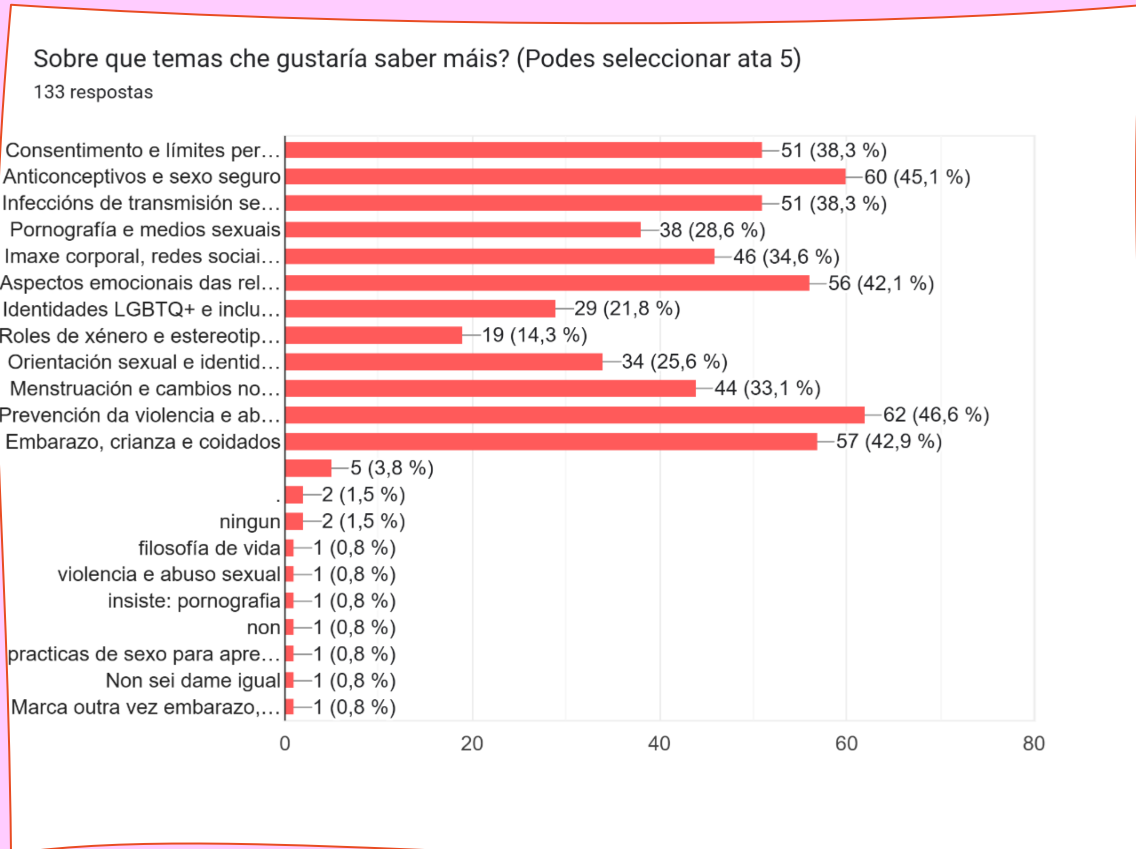
Topics such as **body image (46)** and **menstruation and bodily processes (44)** appear prominently as well, revealing concern about **self-perception, appearance, and embodiment**. These answers, often linked to feelings of shame or insecurity, expose the deep influence of **digital culture and beauty norms** on sexual subjectivity. Mentions of **gender roles (19)** and **sexual orientation (34)** reinforce the presence of questions about identity and representation, showing that young people are increasingly attuned to the **social scripts** that define what is considered desirable, normal, or acceptable.

Although **pornography (39 mentions)** does not top the list, its frequency is still significant. Participants expressed curiosity, discomfort, and critical awareness toward it; it's worth highlighting that although they wouldn't mention it out loud, they would inquire about it anonymously during the in-person workshops. We identify the need for spaces where they can **deconstruct digital messages** and build alternative imaginaries of pleasure, consent, and reciprocity.

Mentions of **LGBT+ topics (29)** and **sexual orientation (34)** indicate that youth are more familiar with this topics, or at least less intererested. It's still prevalent enought to denote an interest in seeking **language and frameworks to understand diversity and representation**. This interest often appears intertwined with references to jokes, **shame**, **body image**, or **the desire for in-person workshops**, suggesting that these conversations feel safer and more meaningful in face-to-face, trust-based environments rather than in abstract classroom lectures.

Finally, the repeated appearance of **in-person learning** (though sometimes accompanied by the admission that "it would be embarrassing") reveals a paradox: **young people want to talk, but they still fear being seen talking about it**. Shame

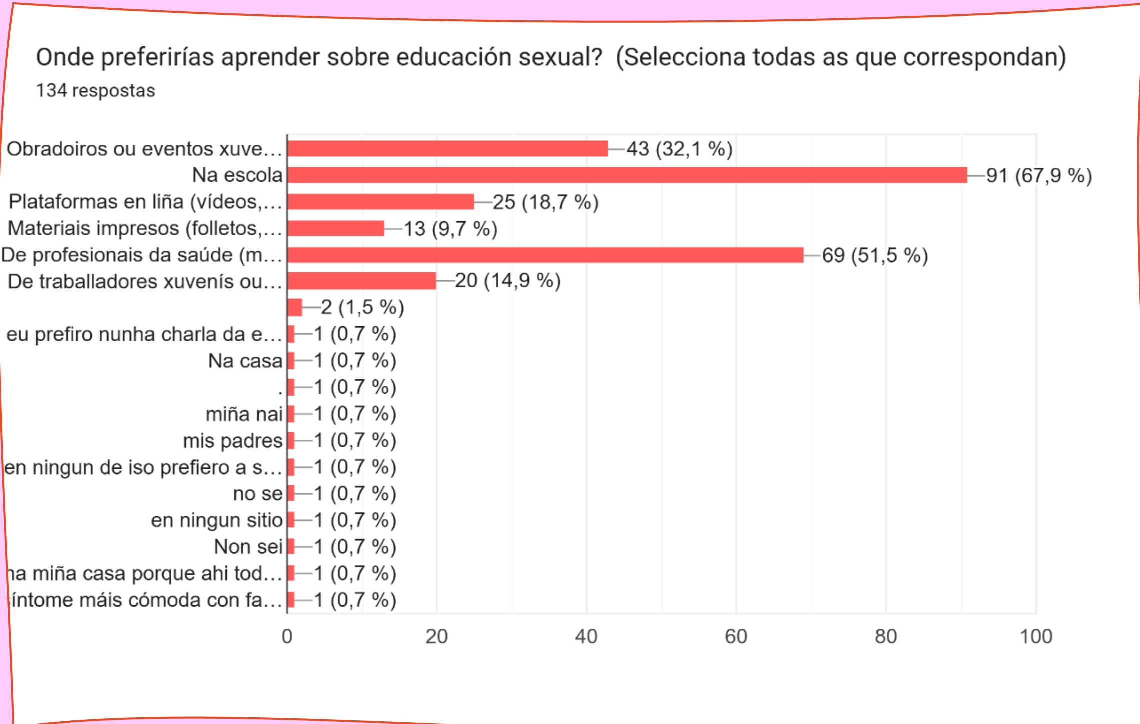
remains a regulating force, but one that coexists with genuine curiosity and the wish to learn collectively.



Overall, this distribution of topics outlines a generation searching for **tools for autonomy, consent, and care**. They are not simply asking “how to protect themselves,” but **how to feel, how to relate, and how to do so ethically**. Their priorities invite us to design sexual education that is not only informational, but also **affective, embodied, and socially transformative**, one that connects knowledge with empathy, and prevention with freedom.

Preferred Learning Settings and Formats

Young people expressed a clear preference for **interactive and participatory learning formats**. They favor **workshops**, **small group discussions**, games and **peer-led sessions**, which allow them to engage openly, share experiences, and learn through dialogue rather than passive instruction. Schools, health professionals and youth workers are the preferred sources of information.



They also mentioned **short videos and printed content** as preferred tools for **anonymous, accessible learning**, suggesting that they value discretion and the ability to explore sensitive topics privately. From a feminist pedagogical standpoint, these preferences underline the importance of **safe, dialogical, and plural spaces**: environments that validate lived experiences and center young people's voices, particularly those of girls, LGBTQI+ and non-binary youth, and those from rural or marginalized contexts.

Perceived Importance of Comprehensive Sexual Education

When asked how important it is to receive quality sexual education (on a 1–5 scale), **36.3% rated it 5**, **28,1% rated it 4**, and **24.4% chose 3**. Only **12,1 % rated it 1 or 2**. This overwhelming majority reflects a **broad social consensus among youth**: sexual education is not a marginal or optional topic, but a central component of their well-being and personal development.. For many, learning about consent, boundaries, and care is as essential as learning about anatomy or contraception.

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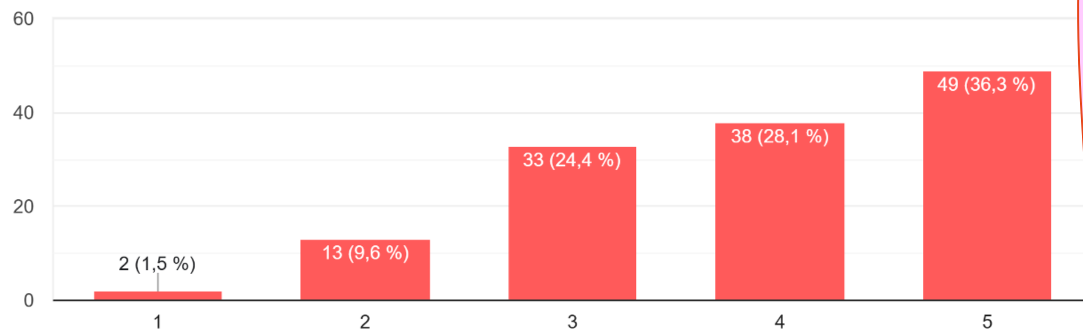

Personal Voices

Across the three open questions, the young people's words reveal much more than isolated opinions, they uncover how gendered socialization shapes the way youth experience, interpret, and value sexual education. The contrasts are sharp, but the underlying message is shared: young people feel unprepared, underinformed, and often silenced when it comes to sexuality, relationships, and emotions.

Interestingly, a few boys used the slang term "boque". " The expression "ser un boque" or "un boquerón" is a colloquial expression used by Generation Z that refers to someone who has never kissed anyone. Being a "boque" carries a derogatory connotation, describing a person's lack of experience in romantic relationships.
When asked what would make sexual education more useful, their focus remains practical and surface-level: it should be "dynamic," "fun," or "easy to understand." There is little engagement with the affective, ethical, or political aspects of sexuality. Their relationship to the topic appears mediated by embarrassment and detachment: something external to them, not integrated into their emotional or social life. In the final question, when invited to suggest how a project could help, the few who answer again refer to "workshops with drawings" or "fun activities." This absence of deeper reflection mirrors the cultural pressures of masculinity to remain emotionally guarded, to perform confidence without introspection.

Among boys, silence is almost the dominant response. In each question, nearly half either left the space blank or answered "I don't know." This silence itself is telling: a reflection of masculine socialization that discourages emotional openness, vulnerability, or self-questioning. When boys do respond, they describe the problem mainly as "lack of information" or "disinformation," often caused by pornography or by the absence of trustworthy sources. They recognize machismo and homophobia as social problems but speak of them in distant, abstract terms, not as dynamics that shape their own relationships or identities. Very few mention emotions, consent, or mutual respect; many just think about Sex Ed as "avoiding pregnancy".

Girls, in contrast, write more and feel more through their responses. Only about a quarter left questions blank. Their voices are more detailed, emotional, and self-aware. In the first question, they identify desinformation and taboo as key problems, but they go further, naming the specific consequences: early sexualization, pressure to have sex at 14 or 15, difficulties setting limits, and emotional dependency. Their language reveals awareness of structural gendered violence and the emotional toll it carries. They speak about consent, about not knowing how to say no, and about the need for emotional education as much as sexual education.

When asked what would make sexual education more useful, girls consistently call for normalization and openness: "that it could be spoken about without taboos," "that it be like talking with friends but with someone who knows how to answer." They want relational learning about respect, communication, and affection, not fear-based messages about disease or pregnancy. They also value participatory and creative formats, language that feels close to them, and spaces that promote self-esteem and empowerment. Their words make clear that sexual education is not only about the body, but about dignity, equality, and emotional safety.

Non-binary youth, though few in number, bring some of the most politically lucid and forward-thinking reflections. They highlight how almost all current approaches to sexual education exclude them: there is "a complete lack of information about non-cisheteronormative sexualities," and an "absence of diverse, inclusive perspectives." They also name the stigma still attached to queer sexualities and HIV, showing how sexuality continues to be moralized and pathologized. Their answers insist that education should not center only on reproduction or heterosexual intercourse but embrace the plurality of bodies, desires, and experiences.

In their suggestions for improvement, non-binary participants are explicit about the need for feminist and queer-informed educators, as well as for careful, inclusive language. Their reflections are both personal and political: they frame sexual education as a practice of recognition, where visibility and representation are not symbolic gestures but conditions for safety and belonging.

Across all genders, the differences are striking. But so are the intersections. Everyone identifies misinformation, taboo, and silence as obstacles. Yet these obstacles manifest differently: for boys, as detachment; for girls, as vulnerability

and pressure; for non-binary youth, as invisibility. The themes that young people themselves demand (emotional aspects of relationships, prevention of abuse, contraception, parenting and care, consent, body image, and sexuality online) mirror these lived realities.

Ultimately, their voices converge around a call for a new kind of sexual education: one that is inclusive, honest, emotionally intelligent, and grounded in equality. They are not asking merely for facts or anatomy lessons, but for spaces where they can talk without fear, learn without judgment, and understand sexuality as part of who they are, not just what they do. The personal voices collected here make one thing unmistakably clear: to reach young people, sexual education must first listen to them.

Conclusions

The results of the *Safe and Sound* survey in Galicia portray a generation that is both informed and emotionally aware, yet still navigating the weight of silence, shame, and social contradiction. Young people express a clear desire for comprehensive, affective, and ethical sexual education, one that goes beyond biological knowledge to include emotions, consent, and care. At the same time, gendered socialization, heteronormative norms, and the lingering influence of patriarchal culture continue to shape how they talk, learn, and feel about sexuality.

1. A generation eager to learn, but constrained by shame and silence

Across all questions, young people show genuine curiosity and a will to engage in conversations about sexuality, relationships, and identity. However, this openness coexists with embarrassment and fear of being judged. Almost half have avoided asking questions about sex or relationships at some point, and 15% admit feeling too ashamed to talk to anyone about it. Shame functions as a disciplinary emotion, particularly among girls and non-binary youth, regulating what can be said or asked, while masculinity norms constrain boys' capacity for emotional expression.

This ambivalence (wanting to learn but fearing exposure) defines the emotional landscape in which sexual education operates. It demands pedagogical approaches that ensure anonymity, trust, and non-judgment, allowing questions to be asked safely and voices to emerge freely.

2. Gendered patterns persist, but feminist language is gaining ground

Gender differences are striking across the dataset.

- **Girls** articulate sexuality through relational and ethical vocabularies: respect, consent, empathy, and communication. They show strong affective literacy and awareness of emotional labor and boundaries.
- **Boys** often use defensive or minimalistic formulations ("not toxic," "not jealous," "not violent") indicating awareness of problematic behaviors but less capacity to define healthy dynamics affirmatively. Their answers also reveal discomfort and detachment, mirroring masculinity norms that discourage vulnerability.
- **Non-binary youth**, though few, demonstrate the most reflective and politically conscious understanding. Their emphasis on care, freedom, and safety shows how queer and feminist frameworks offer more inclusive languages for relationships and ethics.

This uneven distribution of emotional vocabulary confirms that feminist education has begun to influence youth discourse, especially among girls, but has not yet transformed male subjectivities. The coexistence of empathy and silence, awareness and mockery, signals an ongoing cultural transition, one that requires sustained and gender-sensitive pedagogical attention.

- Gender dissagregated analysis provides a way more nuanced understanding of young people's feelings, needs and interests.
- This difference is more prominent in topics such as consent (men talk about asking for permission, women talk about giving permission); acceptance of LGBTQI+ people (men joke, mock, say they are uninterested or even write threats; women are usually in favor); or understanding sexual education.

3. Peer networks matter more than institutions

Friends and peers are the primary source of information and emotional support (≈46%), far ahead of schools or professionals (≈8%). Mothers remain significant figures of trust, while fathers appear marginal in these conversations. Institutional spaces (schools, teachers, counselors) remain largely absent, distrusted, or perceived as irrelevant. This gap highlights the need to build **horizontal, participatory learning environments**, where peer-based discussion is not merely tolerated but harnessed as a tool for mutual education. Nevertheless, the preferred sources of information are health professionals, which means that youth are aware of the importance of clear, fact-based data. Although this could be positive, it could entail to some extent that they are distancing themselves from the topic, not feeling it as "their own issue".

In rural and semi-rural contexts, where most respondents live, the weakness of institutional spaces makes community and peer initiatives even more essential.

4. Sexual education must confront stigma, not just fill knowledge gaps

Although 92% of participants report having received some form of sexual education, their comments reveal persistent **gaps in affective, ethical, and inclusive dimensions**. Many confuse "sex education" with anatomical or risk-prevention lessons, leaving unaddressed the emotional and political aspects of sexuality. The lack of vocabulary around sexual orientation and gender identity, visible in phrases like "I'm normal" or "I don't know what this means", signals

that many youth have not yet been offered inclusive frameworks for understanding diversity.

LGBTQI+ acceptance is high overall, but not universal. While most participants express positive or neutral feelings toward same-sex couples, around 16% express openly negative opinions, and several boys include mocking or violent remarks. Many claim their schools are "safe spaces," yet their comments suggest the opposite: that safety is conditional, relational, and precarious. This tension reveals the coexistence of normalization and backlash: inclusion is visible, but still contested.

- Many men said that their feelings towards same-gender couples are negative, and immediately after said that their educational institutions were safe spaces for them. When added to some of their written comments, we can infer that they are displeased with "how safe" their school is, as they would like it to be less safe for queer people. These comments and attitudes are worrying and invite deeper reflection.

5. Affective education and feminist literacy as tools for transformation

The responses around **healthy relationships**, **jealousy**, and **consent** show that feminist messages are reshaping youth imaginaries, even if unevenly. Girls and non-binary youth frequently mention autonomy, equality, and communication; boys tend to focus on behavior control ("not being toxic") or define love through dependency. Around 20% have felt pressured to do something they didn't want to, showing that coercion and affective inequality remain present in early relationships.

Consent is widely mentioned but differently understood: girls describe it as a continuous, mutual process; boys as a one-time act of permission. This linguistic and conceptual gap mirrors broader social asymmetries. While feminist campaigns have succeeded in popularizing the language of consent, their ethical and emotional depth still needs reinforcement through education that teaches **care, empathy, and shared responsibility**.

- Gen Z language emerges in their responses: consent is quite well understood and mentioned quite often, being "toxic" is a common negative accusation, and being a "boque" (some who has never kissed anyone) is shameful.

6. Learning priorities: from risk prevention to relational ethics

The ranking of learning priorities: **violence prevention (63)**, **contraception (60)**, **pregnancy and care (58)**, **emotional aspects (56)**, **consent (51)**, **STIs (51)**, **body image (46)**, **menstruation (44)**, **pornography (39)**, **sexual orientation (34)**, **LGBT+ topics (29)**, and **gender roles (19)**; reflects an integrated and deeply ethical understanding of sexuality. Young people want to learn not only "how to protect themselves," but also **how to relate ethically and feel safe**. Their repeated demand for in-person, participatory workshops (even if "embarrassing") underscores the importance of creating safe, embodied, and dialogical educational spaces.

- We found an unexpected interest across genders in pregnancy and care, which may reflect curiosity about "the adult world" beyond what is usually assumed.
- A few boys didn't dare mention it out loud but asked anonymously about pornography: this reveals a preoccupation that should be tackled.

7. Pedagogical implications

The data outlines clear pedagogical directions for future interventions:

- **Build trust-based, interactive environments** that value experience, dialogue, and care over top-down instruction.
- **Integrate feminist, queer, and intersectional perspectives**, ensuring that non-binary and LGBTQI+ realities are visible and affirmed.
- **Address shame directly**, framing it not as personal weakness but as a social product of gendered and moral regulation.
- **Combine knowledge with practice** (games, role-play, debates, artistic expresión) to turn concepts like consent and equality into lived skills.
- **Empower boys to engage emotionally**, breaking the silence imposed by masculinity norms and encouraging vulnerability and reflection.
- **Recognize the emotional labor of girls**, offering spaces where care and self-protection are valued without overburdening them with responsibility.

8. Toward an ethics of care, autonomy, and collective responsibility

Overall, the results of the *Safe and Sound* survey confirm that today's youth are not indifferent or uninformed: they are **curious, critical, and eager to learn**,

but still constrained by cultural shame and gendered scripts. Their answers weave together a shared call for **safety, empathy, and equality**. They want to understand their bodies, emotions, and relationships not through fear or prohibition, but through **care, respect, and freedom**.

Comprehensive sexual education must therefore move beyond the transmission of facts. It must become a transformative practice that questions power, dismantles stigma, and cultivates ethical and emotional intelligence. Only then can sexual education fulfill its true potential: not just preventing harm, but enabling young people to live, love, and relate with freedom and care.