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Lesbian-parent families in Greece: the experience of preschool and primary school teachers

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ABSTRACT

The article aims to explore Greek preschool and primary school teachers' experience regarding students coming from lesbian-parent families. In recent years, the composition of school classes in Greece has become more diverse. However, the inclusion of students and families from the LGBTQ+ community in the educational system and the teachers' role in creating inclusive schools has not been systematically investigated. Six primary school teachers who had had experience with students from lesbian-parent families were interviewed. Their narratives were analyzed using interpretative phenomenological analysis, a qualitative research method which allows the in-depth examination of the participants' experiences while simultaneously acknowledging the researcher's active role. The analysis of the interviews yielded four themes (the "uncanny," in the classroom, cooperation between teachers and lesbian parents, the broader educational context). The discussion highlights the need for teacher training on LGBTQ+ issues to lay robust foundations for inclusion in schools.

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Introduction

On an international level, the composition of students in general classes is becoming increasingly diverse (Savolainen et al., 2012). Likewise, schools in Greece nowadays accommodate numerous students who come from families with nontraditional composition and, although generally LGBTQ+ visibility in Greece remains limited (Rainbow Families, 2017), families with LGBTQ+ parents are slowly becoming more visible in schools.

Students from LGBTQ+ families and their parents rightfully claim their right for inclusive educational environments that do not allow for homophobia and/or transphobia. Within this context, the ability of teachers to take into account the needs of all members of the school community and to develop strategies and methods to overcome exclusion, both from and

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within education (Acedo et al., 2009), is considered particularly important (Goldstein, 2021a).

LGBTQ+ partnership and parenthood in Greece

The 2015 law for "Registered Partnership" (4356/2015) admits the registered partnership between two adults regardless of gender (Natsi & Papa, 2019). Same-sex couples in Greece have equal rights as heterosexual couples in employment, medical insurance, and inheritance, but do not have the right to adopt or to have children through surrogacy and/or assisted reproductive procedures (Theofilopoulos & Paganis, 2019). Even if one of the two partners parents a child, the other partner has no rights regarding his/her upbringing (Giannarou, 2016). Therefore, as legally "non-existent," there are no official statistics concerning LGBTQ+ families in Greece. Similarly, there seems to be no official or reliable statistics regarding LGBTQ+ Greek citizens (Committee for the National Strategy on LGBTQ+ Equality, 2021).

A 2022 survey (Gerakis, 2022) showed that 51% of Greeks are in favor of same-sex marriage (a percentage higher by 11 points than the last survey of 2019) and 42% are opposed to it (6% did not express opinion). Regarding same-sex couples right to adopt, 38.9% of Greeks are in favor, and 57% against. It seems that the percentage of people in favor of the same-sex couples' right to adopt is progressively increasing (23.2% in 2019, and only 18% in 2018), however the nuclear-heteronormative family still seems to be perceived as a "better" family composition by most Greeks.

Children of LGBTQ+ families in the educational system

International literature on the school experiences of children with LGBTQ+ parents and the experience of teachers with these children is still limited. The lack of extensive research can be concerning as LGBTQ+ families are vulnerable to marginalization and stigma from the wider communities, and this possibly extends to the school community (Goldberg & Byard, 2020).

As discrimination is not easily measurable, the debate concerning its perception is long (Magnusson & Stattin 2006; Verkuyten, 2002). However, research shows that children perceive discrimination already from early childhood (Brown & Bigler, 2005), and this seems to affect identity formation, academic performance, peer relationships, and overall psychosomatic health (Coll et al., 1996). Research on LGBTQ families (Goldstein, 2021b) and children and young people coming from LGBTQ+ families (Guasp et al., 2014) show that many experience (or had experienced in the past) homophobic attitudes in school, where the word "homosexual"

often has a negative connotation. The lack of LGBTQ+ references often makes them feel invisible, as they report that most schools do not adequately address LGBTQ+ issues, while several children comment that they wish other people were more accepting of their parents.

Foucault (1978) has argued that subjectivity is constituted based on the dominant discourse that endorses heterosexuality through everyday experiences and claims it as socially superior. This appears to be true for the educational system as well: it is argued that the dominant discourse is structured daily through institutional processes, what is linguistically present (or absent) within the school-book texts and the curriculum, and performances of gender and sexuality that reinforce the maintenance of the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1991; Sauntson, 2013). In addition, teachers' prejudices seem to play a key role in establishing attitudes and perceptions regarding LGBTQ+ issues in school, influencing the implementation of equality policies (Mayo, 2022). Teachers' training regarding LGBTQ+ issues appears to have a critical role in this respect (Moschovakou & Danis, 2018). However, when asked about students from LGBTQ+ families, teachers often refer to a lack of training (Meyer, 2008; Richard, 2015). Concurrently, regarding the use of LGBTQ+ terminology in the classroom, most teachers report that they are concerned about preserving the "innocence" of the children (Morgan & Taylor, 2019), while at the same time they fear that the use of such terminology might provoke reactions (DePalma & Jennett, 2010).

International literature demonstrates the importance of visibility and protection of children from LGBTQ+ families in schools, which is promoted when regulations do not allow gender discrimination, positive representations of LGBTQ+ identities are integrated into educational programs, and teacher training on LGBTQ+ issues is encouraged (Case & Meier, 2014; Kosciw et al., 2014; McGuire & Conover-Williams, 2010). Indeed, research has stressed the importance of employing the concept of an LGBTQ+ inclusive Community of Practice as early as in primary schools (Johnson, 2022).

Children of lesbian-parent families in Greek schools

Lesbian-parent families are not a new phenomenon; scientists have been collecting data on this type of families since the 1980s, studying the challenges faced by lesbian parents and their children in the United States and other western countries (e.g. Parks, 1998). A recent study on 25-year-old offspring raised in lesbian-parent families found no differences between them and peers raised in families with different composition, as regards mental health indicators, academic achievement, and the quality of

relationships with partners, friends and parents. However, the offspring of lesbian-parent families who were affected by homophobic discrimination had higher rates of behavioral and/or emotional problems (Koh et al., 2019).

Regarding school life, lesbian mothers appear to be concerned about the quality of their children's school experiences, particularly in relation to the recognition of diversity (Mercier & Harold, 2003). To tackle this challenge, they prefer schools and teachers who are known for openness to diversity, or alternatively they increase contact with the teachers to ensure the acceptance of their families as part of the school community.

As stated, in Greece there are no official statistics regarding LGBTQ+ families. However, as gay men do not have legal access to surrogate parenthood (while single women have access to assisted reproductive procedures), lesbian-parent families seem to be the most common type of LGBTQ+ families in Greece. Therefore, a need to explore this population emerges. Yet, to our knowledge, there are no studies on the school adjustment of children from lesbian-parent families or on their school experiences in the Greek educational system. Also, teacher's views, experiences or attitudes regarding children from lesbian-parent families have not been studied. The limited research concerning LGBTQ+ issues in Greek education indicates that teachers feel insecure to openly address issues such as homophobia/transphobia, while they seem to sidestep the responsibility of shaping children's attitudes and perceptions (Pateraki et al., 2018). When asked about how they would view working with children from LGBTQ+ families, teachers stated that relevant training, updated textbooks, and collaboration with experts could make their work more effective (Gerouki, 2011).

Aiming to contribute to the discussion on the inclusion of children from LGBTQ+ families in the Greek educational system, the present research set off to explore the lived experience of early education teachers (nursery, first and second grade primary school teachers[1]) with students from lesbian-parent families. We examined the experience of the teachers of a very specific group of students (regarding age and family composition) to be able to perform an in-depth analysis. The study adheres to the research ethics determined by the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens.

Methodology

Participants

The sample consisted of six preschool and primary school teachers. To recruit a homogenous sample as recommended for Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Larkin et al., 2019), the following inclusion

Table 1. Students' demographics.

N/A	Gender	Age (in years)	School Class	Family composition
1	Boy	5	Nursery	Two mothers, two sons
2	Boy	7	2nd Grade	Two mothers, one son
3	Boy	3	Nursery	Two mothers, one son and one daughter
4	Boy	6	1st Grade	Two mothers, two sons
5	Girl	3	Nursery	Two mothers, one son and one daughter
6	Boy	7	Class for non-native speakers (2nd Grade)	Two mothers, one son

Table 2. Teachers' demographics.

N/A	Gender	Age (in years)	School Class	Work experience (in years)
1	Female	45	Nursery	20
2	Female	47	2nd Grade	23
3	Female	42	Nursery	19
4	Female	52	1st Grade	21
5	Female	39	Nursery	15
6	Male	31	Class for non-native speakers (2nd Grade)	3

criterion was used: the participant is/had been the teacher of a student from a lesbian-parent family for a period of at least one academic year. The composition of the student's family was known to the participant.

As in Greece the visibility of LGBTQ+ families is limited, for ethical reasons, lesbian parents were approached first through the first author's social network. The parents gave information on the schools their offspring attended, and the teachers were then contacted. The students' demographics are detailed in Table 1.

Three teachers who met the criteria for inclusion declined participation without offering an explanation (see limitations of the research). The teachers' demographics are detailed in Table 2. All participants (5 women and 1 man) worked in schools in the broader Athens' area.

Data collection and analysis

The research sought to gain a rich understanding of the Greek teachers' experience with students from lesbian-parent families, hence a qualitative approach seemed appropriate. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was selected because it enables the in-depth exploration of lived experience and the examination of how people make sense of it (Smith et al., 2009). It includes a very detailed analysis of a small number of cases, grounded in the data itself, involving a constant interplay between observation and interpretation (Anagnostaki & Zaharia, 2020, 2022).

Phenomenological accounts were elicited through semi-structured interviews conducted online via Zoom due to COVID-19 restrictions (November 2021 to February 2022). Examples of the interview questions are shown in Appendix. As recommended for IPA, the interview schedule was not employed prescriptively, but instead adapted and adjusted to each interview accordingly. Before the interview, all participants provided informed consent. Confidentiality issues were discussed at the beginning and end of the interview. Participants were interviewed once. The interviews were held in Greek by the first author. The length of the participants' narratives varied from 56 to 77 min, with a mean of 66 min. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. They were translated into English by the second author. The transcripts were systematically read and analyzed in line with Smith et al. (2009) guidance. Once each individual transcript was analyzed, the patterns across interviews were established and the themes were integrated.

Results

Four themes emerged and are presented below in detail, supported by indicative verbatim interview extracts, following IPA's guidelines.

Theme 1: The "uncanny"

It was the first time for all participants to have in their classroom a child coming from a lesbian-parent family. They all described it as a novel, and rather unsettling experience (at least, in the beginning). Teacher 1: "*It's all a bit new in any case […], it was something special, an unusual relationship in any case.*" The words of Teacher 5 highlight the lack of familiarity with LGBTQ+ issues (remarkably, three out of the six participants heard the term "LGBTQ+" for the first time in the context of the present research): "*She [the student's mother] tells me 'we want to tell you we are a family', now I don't remember the term, how she told me… Not homo … she said something different. Homosexual? Sort of, that wasn't the word, I think. It boggles my mind. Anyways, she meant that they are a couple.*"

The way of handling this novel experience appeared to trouble the participants. Teacher 6 seemed to have ambivalent feelings: "*I thought 'what will I do', but ok, I wasn't taken aback. Okay, let's see how it goes, I said. […] Nervousness. Not so much regarding the child, but mostly regarding the parents. I had never met; it was the first time I met a same-sex couple with a child.*" Other teachers stated that they had concerns but were mostly related to other factors. For instance, Teacher 4 talked about the student's learning difficulties: "*I just was apprehensive […] because of the difficulties he had. The fact that he was from a lesbian-parent family didn't matter to me at all.*" However, later on she added: "*…and sometimes*

I also worried whether I would be able to…stand properly so that […] the other children have a, so to speak, correct attitude towards such issues."

Participants seemed to be somewhat perplexed by the family composition, while the way the family was created appeared to be an object of curiosity. Teachers 5 and 3, after finding out that in the class list there were two children with the same surname and a different mother's name, speculated: Teacher 5: "*It [that the family is a lesbian-parent family] didn't even cross my mind. […] I thought it was a dad and he just had children with two ladies, and they had hit it off and brought them both to the same nursery.*" Teacher 3: "*…that they are two moms and they live together with one dad […] I found it a bit strange. Way to go, I thought, he copes with both of them.*" *Teacher 6 pondered: "I would like to know if he is adopted or if something has happened, you know, something else. I don't know. I would like to know. But I don't know how."*

Theme 2: In the classroom

Participants talked about their observations on the lesbian-parented children's behavior in the classroom. It appeared that most teachers felt somewhat concerned. For instance, Teacher 1 reported that the student's stories about his imaginary father "*astonished*" her*:* "*I mean, for a while, every day he would talk to me about what he did with his dad. Obviously, he copied the other kids.*" These stories made her wonder: "*How difficult all of this is, generally speaking […] for the children.*" She also wondered if this is the reason the student was acting out in the classroom: "*Because he might not understand some things that are going on […] or he is jealous of the other children because the other children can actually say 'my dad'.*" Teacher 2 described how the student from the lesbian-parent family was different from the other boys: "*In comparison to the other boys in the class, he had a different look*" as he was wearing "*bright colors, pink colors […] colors that the kids would call 'girly'.*" Furthermore, he was quieter than the other boys: "*The boys were playing games more… they were chasing each other, they were playing 'war' […] and I could see that he preferred to go and play with the girls. Or he went and did something calmer.*" Conversely, Teacher 5 seemed to view the students from lesbian-parents in her class as exemplary: "*In the 15 years I have been working, I can say that I have never seen such balanced children.*"

Most participants seemed to avoid talking about the lesbian-parent families' composition in the classroom. For instance, Teacher 3 reported that the student once proudly told her that he has two moms, which went "*unnoticed*" by the other children. She did not say anything because she did not want to "*magnify things with no reason.*" Likewise, Teacher 5 did

not act on the student's communication regarding his family composition: "*He sometimes said 'I have two moms' […] and I treated this as normal […] I didn't pay any attention. […] I did not focus on it […] I treated the student like I treated all children."* Teacher 6 stated that "*Greek society cannot, it is very difficult, to accept it.*" Therefore, he hasn't asked the student to draw his family in the art class, even though the student talked a lot about his two mothers: "*I just don't want to embarrass him, maybe he's embarrassed, maybe he's scared. This is not what I want […] Maybe he understands, you know, because of the situation.*" Teacher 2 also did not talk about the student's family composition in the classroom because she "*didn't want to single him out.*" On the other hand, Teacher 4 has talked to her students about how "*there is no one form of family. I explained it to them not only in relation to LGBTQ families, but also talked about a mom who can't have a child […] and so she may use other methods […]. So why should it be different because it's two moms or two dads? It is the same thing.*"

In general, the participants reported that the children from the lesbian-parent families have adjusted well and valuated positively their own efforts for their inclusion in the classroom. For instance, Teacher 2 considered her attitude (explaining to the classmates that there are many ways of dressing) as helpful: "*Now they* [the classmates] *have stopped saying comments about it* [the student's appearance]. *In other words, they accepted it.*" Likewise, Teacher 4 reported: "*Difficulties were overcome. […] And he was able to perform his school duties. It went very well.*" Teacher 6 also talked about the student's gradual integration in the classroom: "*Very good cooperation […]. I think he likes the way we do the lesson.*"

Theme 3: Cooperation between teachers and lesbian parents

Five of out of the six teachers said that their relationship with the lesbian parents was good, the description ranging from "*good, polite communication*" to a "*very good cooperation.*" Teacher 3 stated: "*They were agreeable, polite and very nice […] they followed our instructions. […] In other words, they were someway trying to adapt to the other families as well.*" However, she was somehow concerned about the family's integration in the classroom community as "*they* [the lesbian parents] *hang out with people who may also have the same characteristic.*"

Still, the biological mother seemed to be attributed a more prominent role. For instance, Teacher 1 described how the relationship developed between her and the student's biological mother i.e. the legal guardian: "*I didn't have some kind of relationship with the other mother […] because it is also a matter of guardianship.*" Teacher 4 also raised the issue of legal

guardianship: "*I mean officially […] I shouldn't have informed her* [the second mother]*, because officially she was not the parent of the children.*"

Gradually, the relationship between some teachers and the lesbian parents appeared to broaden. For instance, Teacher 4 turned to the lesbian parents for directions on how to deal with the family's composition in the classroom: "*Yes, I mean, I always talked with them so that I knew how far I could go. I didn't want them… to feel that I, so to speak, raise issues that they didn't want to bring up.*" Moreover, Teachers 3 and 5 created a kind of alliance to protect the family from comments within the school community. Teacher 3: "*We did not inform others about the family composition. Basically, because we felt there was no reason… to avoid the comments a bit.*" Teacher 5: "*We said that we would not say anything because people would talk… We did it to protect them […] to protect the children as well […] not to expose them, after all.*"

Theme 4: The broader educational context

According to the participants, Greek schools are not open to diversity: five out of the 6 participants talked about their colleagues' difficulty to accept nontraditional forms of families. In the words of Teacher 1: "*You can see there is a real difficulty, regarding all nonconformities […] for other colleagues to discuss and accept it.*" Teacher 4 talked about her colleagues who "*even if they are not negative*" treated the lesbian-parent family as "*something different.*" She also expressed her discomfort about the school principal's persistently asking the biological mother for the father's name. Teacher 5 characterized the school environment as "*outrageous*": "*There was name calling: the 'lesbians', and so forth and so on.*" Because of that she concealed the family's lesbian identity: "*I didn't want to get into that conversation. It was not my business. It was no one's business. […] I think it is a personal matter and there was no reason to discuss it further.*" Teacher 6 wondered whether there was something behind his colleagues' questions: "*I mean, when the school principal asks me […] I don't think they ask because of… you know, because it is a same-sex family […] Okay, so maybe they do a little…*"

Furthermore, most participants were pessimistic about the possibility of inclusion of children from lesbian-parent families in the Greek educational system. Teacher 1 stated that "*there is a void there*" which she linked to the large number of children in the classroom: "*To be able to stand by a child, to be a little more by his side, you can't have that many children in a class.*" According to Teacher 2 the lack of inclusion relates to the small number of children from LGBTQ+ families in Greek schools: "*Because usually there are not children from such families in a classroom […] the educational system cannot provide any information….*"

Two teachers reported that there has been some progress in the recent years, but it is superficial. Teacher 4 argued that the educational system "*is in a completely wrong direction*": "*There is no inclusion in schools, there is not. And it also upsets me that they show fake interest. […] In my opinion, the identity of all these people should be reflected in the everyday life of the school.*"

On the other hand, Teacher 3 doubted that the children will face any problems in the future, because, at a higher educational level, teachers are not interested in the family composition: "*They don't care from which family* they *come from*." However, she swiftly added: "*Now, if they have a nasty teacher, or get stuck with certain types of children, then, I don't know.…*"

Regarding Greek teachers' in general, and their own knowledge on LGBTQ+ issues, all participants recognized a lack of training. However, most participants did not seem to take relevant action. Teacher 6 talked about his formal training: "*In the postgraduate course when we talked about inclusion, we said that we are all equal, regardless of educational needs, sexuality, gender and so on […].*" Teacher 3 said that because of her interaction with the student she looked up on the Internet information about the term LGBTQ+, stating that she did not know "*what more she could do.*" Teacher 5, trying to remember if she resorted to the internet, concluded: *"Usually I do it when I have a problem. These children did not cause me any problems. […] I think the answers to these questions are the same: love, understanding, effort.*" Conversely, Teacher 4 described her efforts to "*be more involved*": "*Because I had this child in my classroom and I came in contact, so to speak, and we developed a relationship with the mothers, I read some books.*" She also came in touch with collectives of LGBTQ+ educators.

Discussion

The study set off to investigate the experience of early education teachers in Greek schools with students from lesbian-parent families, a subject that has not been previously studied. Most findings are illustrative of findings from studies from other parts of the Western world, which demonstrate that many LGBTQ+ families have to deal with issues such as securing acceptance and support from teachers and school administrators (e.g., Goldstein et al., 2021). However, the findings are novel in the context of Greece, and seem to indicate that LGBTQ+ families' acceptance in the Greek educational system is still at an early stage.

Analyzing the participants narratives, it appears that their first contact with the lesbian-parent families could be described as an "uncanny" experience, that is, something in the class of the alarming, which leads back to something elusively known, arousing various phantasies (Freud, 1919).

Teachers talked about the novelty of this "unprecedented" experience and the concerns they had. As (inevitably) they interpreted the students' behavior based on their own experiences, expectations, and unconscious feelings (Anagnostaki et al., 2021)—and although they sometimes rationalized their concerns, linking them, for instance, to learning difficulties—their uneasiness was perceptible. As regards the creation of the family, their curiosity seemed aroused. Furthermore, in the case of two teachers denial seemed to initially prevail: they could not think of the possibility of a lesbian couple, therefore, the phantasy of the patriarchal "achievement" of a father with two partners arose.

Nonetheless, during the course of the school year, the cooperation between teachers and lesbian parents was smooth and gratifying. Most participants talked about the parents' being friendly and respectful toward them. Notably, following their instructions and trying to adapt to the other families was positively assessed. A question may be raised here regarding the possible attempt to minimize diversity by encouraging homonormativeness (Duggan, 2002).

Confirming the existence of a positive relationship, some teachers turned to the lesbian parents for guidelines and others seemed to form some kind of "protective" alliance with them. In early education, cooperation between teachers and parents is deemed especially important for children's adjustment (Casper & Schultz, 1999), and it is optimistic that the teachers in our sample worked closely with the lesbian parents. Furthermore, teacher allyship makes a difference in the lives of LGBTQ+ students and families (Goldstein et al., 2018). Previous research (Bliss & Harris, 1999) has shown that teachers have a more favorable attitude toward lesbian mothers, as compared to gay fathers. The present research investigated teachers' experiences with lesbian-parent families in Greece, therefore it cannot be determined whether the positive relationship between teachers and parents was influenced by the gender of the same-sex parents. Further research is needed to clarify this.

Issues raised by the Greek law's gap regarding the second parent's rights within a same-sex "registered partnership" seemed to influence teacher–parents cooperation. The relationship was mainly developed between the teachers and the biological mothers, who were the legal guardians. Since the Greek Law does not include any regulation for children of same-sex couples, they are legally treated as children of single-parent families (Natsi & Papa, 2019), and the teachers, together with the family members of the same-sex families, seem to be left in a state of uncertainty.

Some teachers favored hiding the family's identity in order to protect it. This seems a reasonable solution that also some LGBTQ+ parents opt for, feeling they must be silent and discreet so their children will not

endure discrimination at school (Kappus, 2016). However, it has been argued that concealment increases invisibility and undermines acceptance in school (Rainbow Families, 2017). Invisibility and "blindness" could also be related to the teachers' claim that they treated lesbian-parented children the same way as they do all children. The question arises whether this is a practice that involves indirect discrimination, which is implied when the same neutral practices are applied to the treatment of all individuals, regardless of color, origin, living conditions, etc. (Papathanasiou & Christidis, 2020).

All participants reported that by the end of the school year they were satisfied with the lesbian-parented students' adaptation and inclusion in their classroom. Indeed, continuous intragroup interaction is important to the creation of positive attitudes between group members (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). However, the teachers wondered about the general inclusive climate in the school. Fellow teachers' abusive behavior is described and there is concern for future integration.

All participants recognized a lack of training on LGBTQ+ issues, in line with the relevant literature which suggests that teachers in Greece lack the necessary knowledge, skills, and tools to discuss diverse family compositions, gender, and sexual diversity issues (Ioannou, 2018). It looks like the management of inclusion of the LGBTQ+ parented children is mostly left to the teachers' own devices. Some research participants resorted to the internet to look up information, and one teacher contacted a teachers' collective. These actions are important but remain within the framework of individual initiative, which sometimes, when not combined with appropriate training, may be regarded as naïve (Goldstein et al., 2021).

The feeling of unpreparedness reported by the participants in the research could be associated with the absence of an institutional framework within the Greek educational system regarding LGBTQ+ issues. After all, it seems that the reported homophobic comments made by fellow teachers were not addressed institutionally. On the other hand, one teacher attributed the shortcomings of the Greek educational system regarding LGBTQ+ issues to the very limited number of such families, a viewpoint that possibly reproduces the vicious cycle of silencing LGBTQ+ subjectivities.

At an international level the need for teacher training to avoid improvizations and personal preconceptions at school has been stressed in order to foster inclusion of non-heteronormative families within the school system (Watson & Russell, 2015). Such undertaking seems imperative for the Greek educational system. Along these lines, in 2021 a committee was established by the Greek government with the aim of drafting the National Strategy for the LGBTQ+ Equality. The committee's report asserted that the absence of guidelines and training programs for teachers intensifies the challenges for children and families who deviate from the dominant heteronormative

norms. Several proposals, such as introducing training programs for teachers and enriching the sex education lesson with topics related to the LGBTQ+ issues, have been put forward, but have not yet been realized.

Research limitations and directions for future research

Although the research findings are clear, there are also important limitations. The sample was small, as prescribed in idiographic research. However, this affects the generalizability of the results. Furthermore, as in all interview-based research, the sample was a self-selected group, comprised of people willing to talk about their experience. Notably, three teachers who met the criteria for inclusion declined participation. It is possible that mainly teachers who were in favor of the inclusion of LGBTQ+ parented children agreed to participate, while teachers who had more homophobic attitudes opted out. Finally, the online nature of the interviews, due to COVID-19 restrictions, was another limitation.

To our knowledge, the present research is the only one in Greece that studies the lived experience of teachers with members of lesbian families. Future research on a larger sample addressing the teachers' experience with other forms of LGBTQ+ families could be valuable in order to gain a fuller understanding of the teachers' experiences and views, which affect the creation and consolidation of an inclusive school environment.

Note

1. In Greece, nursery (from 5 years) followed by primary school (from 6 years) are part of compulsory education. By law, the maximum number of students in a classroom is 25.

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Appendix

Examples of interview questions

The student and his/her family

1. Tell me a little about your student from the LGBTQ+ family.
2. Tell me a little about the student's family.
3. How did you learn about the family composition?
4. What were your first thoughts about the child and the family he/she comes from?
5. How did you feel at first?

In the classroom

6. How would you describe your relationship with the child in the classroom?
7. How would you describe the child's relationship with other children?
8. How would you describe the child's academic performance?
9. Did something concern you in relation to the child's adjustment in the school?
10. Are there any actions you took to assist the student's adjustment?
11. Did you adapt your teaching material in any way?
12. Did you need to get information about LGBTQ+ issues?
13. Do you think the relationship you developed with the child and/or his family influence your thoughts and feelings about LGBTQ+ families?

The broader context

14. How would you describe the school principal's and your colleagues' stance regarding the student and his/her family?
15. What do you think about the concept of inclusion in the educational system?
16. How do you feel about your personal training regarding students from LGBTQ+ families?
17. Is there anything else you would you like to add?