



'Categorically underestimated and excluded'

Perceptions of and experiences with discrimination
at Bielefeld University 2019/2020

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The present study is the work of the cross-status working group *Uni ohne Vorurteile/University without Prejudice* (AG UoV). All authors involved are voluntary members of the working group.

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1. Main results of the study

The main aim of this study was to assess subjective experiences of discrimination—that is, individuals' own experiences of discrimination as well as their observations of other people being exposed to discrimination at Bielefeld University. This was addressed by inviting all staff and students at the university by e-mail to participate in an online survey in winter 2019/2020. A total of 1,231 members of the university completed this survey in full, and their responses form the data basis for the present report. The study does not claim to be fully representative of the experience of discrimination at Bielefeld University. It reflects the experiences and attitudes of those who were willing to share their experiences and views.

Perception of discrimination: Even just in terms of the general understanding of discrimination, irrespective of personal experience, the respondents' answers show discrepancies in the recognition of and awareness for different dimensions of discrimination and inequality. Whereas individual forms of discrimination on the basis of, for example, the appearance or social origin of those affected are recognized as such by the majority of respondents, significantly fewer respondents recognize and are aware of supposedly more subtle structural or institutional discrimination.

Social climate: The majority of respondents consider that Bielefeld University has a positive social climate, and they perceive it as a supposedly protective space. However, respondents who have experienced or observed discrimination themselves rate the social climate significantly less positively.

Personal experience of discrimination: One half of the respondents have personally experienced discrimination at Bielefeld University at least once (52%), and a similar number have observed at least one case of discrimination at the university (51%). Around one third report multiple to regular experiences or observations. Those affected most frequently report discrimination on the basis of their gender, their status group in the university, as well as their age, national origin, or migration background. However, the levels on which experiences of discrimination at Bielefeld University are reported are much more diverse. This diversity is also evident in terms of the structures and persons from which discrimination at the university emanates. The sometimes very detailed and frank descriptions of the respondents, which this report can present only in excerpts, reveal a wide variety of what are sometimes experiences and observations of serious discrimination. These make it clear how people experience discrimination on a daily basis even in the university context and how often these experiences are ignored. In addition to the emotional burden and the feeling of helplessness due to repeated experiences of devaluation, those affected describe the lack of certainty about how to deal with experienced discrimination as particularly challenging along with the structural dependencies and worries about the consequences of making discrimination an issue. Those respondents who have observed discrimination also report uncertainties about whether and how they can intervene adequately in these situations.

Dealing with discrimination: When it comes to actually dealing with experienced discrimination, those affected report above all that they try to talk to colleagues, friends, or family. Around one quarter (26%) report simply ignoring the incident afterwards. Only a few of those affected (10%) say that they turned to a professional body within or outside the university after experiencing discrimination. More than two thirds of all respondents (71%) answer the question about existing support services at Bielefeld University by saying that they do not know of any place to which they should go to report cases of discrimination.

Relations between discrimination and psychological stress: Although the present data do not permit causal conclusions, the results of the study indicate a possible connection between experienced discrimination and reported psychological stress. Although the majority of respondents (72%) deny any direct relation between their own mental state and their experience of discrimination, a comparison shows that respondents with personal experiences of discrimination are, on average, more mentally stressed than those without such experiences.

Call for further support services and prevention: The open-ended responses to the question what services respondents would like to see so that the issue of discrimination at Bielefeld University could be dealt with better reveal two demands: in addition to the demand for an improvement in the visibility of existing support services, there is a need for supplementary services both in terms of raising awareness of discrimination among all members of the university and specific services for those affected in the form of, for example, specific places to go in the event of experienced discrimination and workshops. The respondents' open-ended suggestions on ways to prevent discrimination reveal a wide range of approaches, some of which are low threshold, to make Bielefeld University a more discrimination-free space than it has been in the past.

Conclusion: In addition to the many possibilities for countering discrimination at Bielefeld University and providing better support for those exposed to it, the results of the present study clarify above all the persistence of a wide range of discrimination experiences on a great diversity of levels. At first glance, the fact that the problems of hostile attitudes, behaviours, and structures in society as a whole are also reflected in the university context does not seem surprising. However, if one wants to live up to the ideal of a *university without prejudice*, it is all the more necessary to act.

2. Introduction

The final stage of discrimination, the final stage of racism, is the destruction of human lives. This has become clear again in recent months. While the data for this study were being analysed and we were attempting to make the abstractness of statistically assessed discrimination legible, people around the world were demonstrating solidarity against racism. They are protesting against and remembering the death of George Floyd and countless other victims of racism. Loud and clear, perhaps even louder and clearer than before, everyday discrimination or microaggression(s) are being denounced on all levels. The cases of discrimination and violence that become public are mostly only the tip of an iceberg. Our view of the results reported below is not unaffected by this. Racist violence is not a problem unique to the USA, and there are repeated calls to also address institutional and structural racism in Germany. In many countries around the world, anti-liberal right-wing populist movements can be identified that frequently campaign to restrict immigrants' rights and discriminate against what are already disadvantaged groups (Freedom House, 2019). In Germany as well, an increasing number of acts of hate and violence against people on the basis of their group membership can be identified—be these sexist, racist, anti-Semitic, or due to other hostile motivations. Even institutions that actually have the task of protecting against such acts are not free from them. Examples of this are the cases of right-wing extremism in the police and authorities that are repeatedly unmasked in Germany. Even in university contexts, there are massive attacks, such as the recent installation of peepholes in women's toilets at Bielefeld University. However, it is not only the overt cases of violence and discrimination standing in the way of a plural society that threaten and hurt people, but also the small, everyday inequalities that are far too often perceived as 'normal'—whether they are overt or hidden, individual and thus interpersonal, inscribed in institutional processes, or to be found in the structures of entire societies. Therefore, it is particularly those who are affected by discrimination who demand that those who do not experience discrimination themselves become aware of their privilege and act accordingly.

The *Uni ohne Vorurteile (University without Prejudice)* working group (WG) was founded in 2013 with the aim of campaigning against racism, hostility, and discrimination at Bielefeld University and contributing to greater equality. The initial reason for this was the public presence of right-wing extremist students. The first goal at that time was to recognize that prejudice, discrimination, and anti-democratic ideologies can also be found in an institution dedicated decisively to education, research, and a free exchange of ideas. The university cannot free itself from these problems. Accordingly, the WG quickly started working on a whole range of issues that were addressed and discussed in a variety of formats at the university. Reports on personal experiences of discrimination reached the WG early on. This revealed two challenges in particular: (1) the question of how to deal with experiences of discrimination and how to support those affected (the mostly volunteer members of the WG have not been and still are not trained to provide professional counselling in cases of discrimination, and there is still no official anti-discrimination office at the university) and (2)

the question of the extent of the problem: were these just individual cases that were brought to our attention, or is discrimination a part of everyday life at the university? In order to see more than the tip of the iceberg, the WG conducted a first survey on the experience of discrimination in 2015/16, and its results were published and discussed in 2016. Since then, the university as an institution has also continued to address this issue, including the adoption of a *diversity policy*, in which Bielefeld University positions itself against discrimination and in favour of diversity. However, despite this, the WG continued to receive reports of experienced and observed discrimination in everyday life at the university.

To gain a comprehensive picture of the current extent of discrimination experienced at Bielefeld University, the WG conducted another survey of members of the university at the end of 2019. Respondents were now asked to give a more detailed account of their personal experiences of discrimination and their wishes and ideas regarding how to deal with the problem in better ways. The WG is therefore addressing the normative ideal of Bielefeld University and taking another look at it scientifically. The present study aims to provide answers to three basic questions: (1) What forms do current experiences of discrimination take at the university, (2) how do those who are personally affected or observe it deal with these experiences, and (3) how can the problems be addressed better in the university context? The study does not claim to fully depict the experiences of discrimination at Bielefeld University. Instead, we systematically summarize the personal accounts that the study participants were willing to share with us. Nonetheless, these results can contribute to clarifying problematic situations at the university and to counteracting them.

In the following, we first present the methodology of the study and explain the sampling and analysis methods. We also take a look at specific special features such as the challenge of assessing gender appropriately in empirical survey research. We then report the results on the experience of discrimination at Bielefeld University. This takes two forms in order to obtain a more comprehensive picture: (1) a descriptive quantitative analysis and (2) a qualitative analysis of the open-ended situation descriptions. Finally, we summarize the results and try to draw some implications from what are now seven years of *university without prejudice*.

3. Methodology and design of the study

3.1 Sample and survey method

The following casts light on the methodological procedure in the present study and describes the sample. The aim of the study was to survey and analyse subjective experiences of discrimination among staff and students at Bielefeld University.

In order to survey as representative a sample as possible and to give all members of the university an equal chance to participate in the study, the Rectorate sent out invitations to participate in the survey by email to all students and staff at the university. The first invitation email was sent on 09.12.2019 followed by a reminder email on 20.01.2020. The data-gathering period ended on 29.02.2020. The emails contained a short invitation text presenting the intention of the study and emphasizing its voluntary nature while pointing out that we wanted everybody to participate (not only those affected by discrimination but also those not affected). The online questionnaire was programmed in both English and German to enable as many members of the university as possible to participate. The invitation emails were accordingly formulated in both English and German and each contained a link to either an English or a German version of the questionnaire.

In part, the study follows the previous study on experiences of discrimination at Bielefeld University (Berghan, Preuß, & Dubbert, 2016). The aim was to establish a degree of comparability with the results from 2016, but, at the same time, adapt the questionnaire to current circumstances and research interests. Therefore, the survey window, the survey method, and especially the main measurement instruments were kept as unchanged as possible, whereas other questions were expanded or replaced completely. The English-language questionnaire was used for the first time in 2019/20. Relevant comparisons with the previous study are made clear at the respective points in the results section.

When analysing the results, we combined the data collected from the German and English questionnaires. A total of 1,583 people (1,483 in the German and 100 in the English questionnaire) opened the link to the survey and answered the first question—that is, they affirmed that they had read the participation conditions and consented to the storage of their data. In order to ensure that the results would be analysed as validly as possible, all persons who completed the survey in less than 120 seconds were excluded. It would not have been possible to answer the contents adequately in such a short period of time. This excluded 260 cases. In addition, we excluded those respondents who did not give a meaningful answer in a test on the understanding of discrimination at the beginning of the questionnaire ($n = 92$). This includes those respondents who rated the situation description ‘Someone does not get any credit points in the seminar because they did not do the necessary work’ as rather or very discriminatory (see Figure 2 for the other situation descriptions). This was to prevent distortions of data caused by people who just clicked through the questionnaire but did not give answers that could be evaluated validly. The net sample, to which the results of the

analyses reported below refer, is therefore $N = 1,231$. Because not all participants were able or willing to answer all questions (e.g., could not describe a discriminatory situation because they had not experienced one), the actual number of cases varies depending on the measuring instrument. When describing situations, respondents were asked to refer to the last discriminatory situation they had experienced. When interpreting the results, it should also be noted that those respondents who had experienced personal discrimination and were able to describe it with the detailed, fully structured measurement instruments were not subsequently asked to describe a situation they had observed using the same format again. Otherwise, the questionnaire would have taken too long to complete. Instead, these respondents had the opportunity to describe a situation they had observed in the form of an open-ended situation description. Accordingly, the descriptively evaluated descriptions of situations of observed discrimination contain only answers by respondents who have not experienced discrimination personally. The average time taken to complete the online questionnaire was 33.8 minutes.

To ensure the anonymity of the participants, their age was asked for in categories. Almost two thirds of the respondents were under 31 years old, but ages ranged up to over 70 years. Table 1 reports the age distribution. In order to avoid the reproduction of a binary gender understanding and resulting further exclusions, we surveyed participants' gender with the open-ended question 'Which gender do you feel you belong to?' The advantages and disadvantages of this method are discussed later in the report. It should be mentioned at this point that even after categorizing the answers, this variable was not suitable for including gender in the analyses as a socio-demographic structural category.

The majority of the sample were students (63.1%) and the second largest status group was academic staff (16.5%) followed by staff in the central (8.2%) and decentralized (6.6%) services and administration. The least represented status group was professors (2.6%). The differentiation according to faculty affiliation shows that members from all faculties participated in the survey. The most strongly represented were members of the Faculties of Linguistics and Literary Studies, Educational Science, and Sociology. A total of 65.6% of respondents classified themselves as belonging to at least one group that could potentially be exposed to discrimination—that is, regardless of whether or not they have actually experienced discrimination on the basis of this group membership (see Figure 1).

There are two reasons why it is not possible to make statements about the *objective* occurrence of discrimination at Bielefeld University on the basis of the available data. First, because participants were invited by email, the self-selection factor makes it impossible to quantify the actual occurrence of discrimination in a completely representative manner. Second, the assessments of what is discriminatory and what is experienced as discriminatory can differ greatly, and participants were asked to report their subjective experience of discrimination and their individual experiences and observations. We deliberately did not start the survey by giving a definition of discrimination.

Over the course of the survey, respondents were able to supplement the structured questions by answering a number of open-ended questions, thus adding their individual assessments or describing specific situations in more detail. Whereas the structured answers were evaluated descriptively with the help of quantitative statistical methods and relations were partly controlled with statistical tests, the open-ended answers were evaluated with the help of analytical methods from qualitative social research. The open-ended answers to selected questions were then evaluated qualitatively and systematized. In the following, the evaluations of these open-ended responses are reported partly anecdotally and by presenting examples, without claiming to be complete. This is because more differentiated analyses would go beyond the scope of this report. Methodologically, the evaluation and presentation of the open-ended responses is oriented towards qualitative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Mayring, 2020) and open-ended coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The data basis permits further analyses if necessary. When selecting the examples for the open-ended responses, we took care to ensure that the content did not allow any conclusions to be drawn about specific individuals. For better readability, we have corrected the quoted open-ended answers grammatically and translated them without changing their meaning. By combining quantitative and qualitative survey and analysis methods, the study attempts to collect, describe, and better understand the widest possible range of experiences of discrimination among members of the university.

Table 1*Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Sample*

		<i>n</i>	%
Age (in years)	Younger than 20	118	12.8
	21–25	293	31.9
	26–30	173	18.8
	31–35	82	8.9
	36–40	75	8.2
	41–45	49	5.3
	46–50	33	3.6
	51–55	34	3.7
	56–60	30	3.3
	61–65	21	2.3
	66–70	5	0.5
	71 and older	6	0.7
Group potentially affected by discrimination ¹	Confirmed	807	65.6
University status group	Students	576	63.1
	Scientific staff	151	16.5
	Central services & administration	75	8.2
	Decentralized services & administration	60	6.6
	Other	27	3.0
	Professors	24	2.6
Faculty affiliation	Linguistics & Literary Studies	173	22.0
	Educational Science	153	19.5
	Sociology	148	18.9
	History, Philosophy & Theology	95	12.1
	Psychology & Sports Science	84	10.7
	Biology	79	10.1
	Law	68	8.7
	'Don't want to say'	64	8.2
	Mathematics	61	7.8
	Technology	52	6.6
	Economics	32	4.1
	Physics	30	3.8
	Chemistry	29	3.7
	Health Sciences	25	3.2
Medicine	1	0.1	

Notes. *N* = 1,231, missing values here result from missing information from respondents.

¹ Self-identification by respondents of whether they would assign themselves to a group potentially affected by discrimination regardless of whether or not they have actually experienced discrimination. For the distribution across the individual groups, see Figure 1.

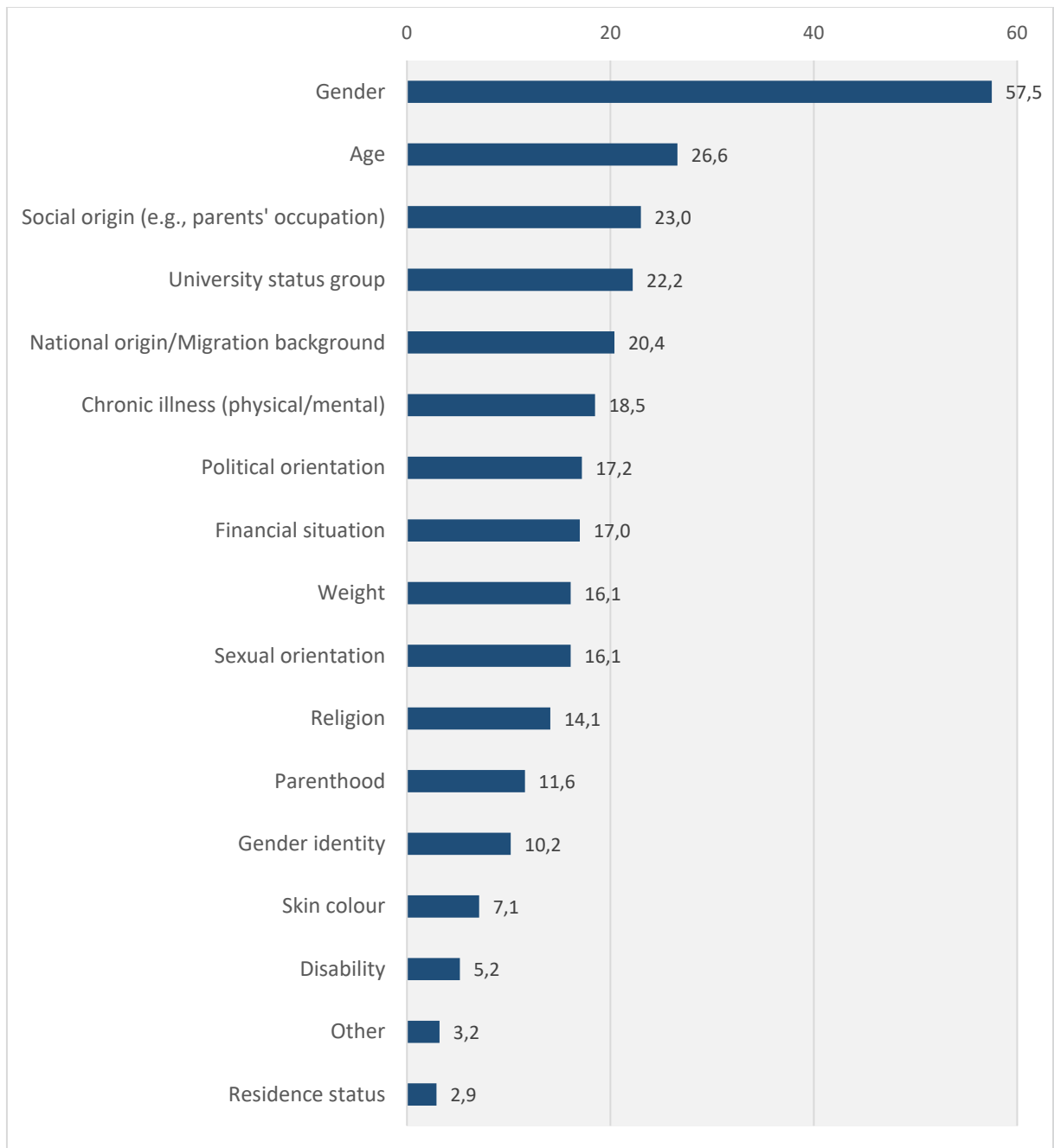


Figure 1. Self-reported membership of group potentially affected by discrimination; $n = 807$ (percentage of respondents who affiliated themselves with at least one of the groups).

3.2 Excursus: Surveying gender in quantitative designs

In general, it can be observed that qualitative research designs are being used increasingly for an empirical approach to gender (see Althoff et al., 2017). In contrast to quantitative designs, qualitative approaches seem to be more suitable for capturing what is such a complex subject. Essentially, the argument is that qualitative methods do better justice to the theoretical demands of gender research (ibid.). In addition, the previous quantitative method of surveying gender via a dummy variable is accused of producing measurement errors (Döring, 2013). Criticism of the binary-coded one-item variant focuses primarily on the fact that it does not reflect gender diversity, therefore produces exclusions, and does not meet the criteria of nominally scaled variables. Although there are efforts to revise previous survey methods (see Döring, 2013, for an overview), none of these alternatives seemed particularly suitable for our project. We feared that despite taking a sensitive approach to the assessment of gender, quantitative methods would produce further exclusions and could lead to a situation of discrimination within the survey. At the same time, we were aware that gender as a structural category (Aulenbacher, 2008) is decisively involved in relations of inequality. This is why we wanted to include gender as a variable in our survey despite existing concerns. In the end, we chose an open-ended question in which each person would be free to enter their gender positioning ('Which gender do you feel you belong to?').

The open-ended question on gender identification led to different responses among participants. In addition to binary classifications (male/female), there are also some answers in the data that might have fallen under the option 'diverse' in the context of a structured question. All in all, many respondents revealed a differentiated discussion and a sensitive approach to the category of gender. At the same time, we also observed negative reactions to this form of question. In the following, we give a brief insight into our experiences with the open-ended recording of gender in other ways than 'male' and 'female' in the context of the present study.

Analyses show that 19% of the respondents identify with the male gender and 44% with the female gender. However, 403 out of 1,231 people left the answer field blank.² In addition, we received answers that can be assigned to several categories: **non-binary**³/gender as a continuum, negative reactions, thematization of the phrase 'feel you belong to' and other. The latter contains few interpretable responses and will therefore not be considered further. In the following, we shall look at examples of the remaining categories.

The quantitatively most frequent category is 'non-binary/gender as a continuum' with 21 answers. This category includes answers such as 'non-binary', '**queer**', 'diverse', or '**genderfluid**', but also answers with additions such as 'rather female' or 'rather male' that do not see gender as a dichotomous category with the two characteristics male and female, but as a continuum on which one can position oneself. Respondents also use the space for

² However, missing data do not need to be related to the way gender is surveyed.

³ Highlighted terms are explained separately at the end of the side note.

specifications regarding their socialization ('non-binary, socialized more as female') or to refer to the difference between social and biological gender in terms of stereotypes ('I don't feel I belong to any socially stereotypical gender [biologically male]').

However, the open-ended gender category is also perceived negatively. Examples are answers such as 'Male—and why the hell is there a text box here?' and 'Male, a choice between two boxes would have sufficed here. More genders do not exist biologically!'. Here, we would like to emphasize that more than two genders exist both biologically and legally, which is made clear not least by the ruling of the Federal Constitutional Court in October 2017⁴ and the implementation of the third gender entry in 2019. A few respondents express what is possibly displeasure with the question through answers that ridicule the question ('toaster', 'Apache attack helicopter').

Some respondents refer directly to the wording of the question on felt belonging (category 'Thematising feeling belonging'). It seems they are particularly bothered by the word 'feel' ('male [I don't "feel" like that, I just am]', 'my primary and secondary sexual characteristics identify me as male; it doesn't matter what I feel like'). It seems as if the nature of the question leads some participants to feel challenged, and they use the open text box to clearly distance themselves from this wording.

At the same time, the answer '(Do I feel I belong?) I AM female (... even questions asked too carefully in order to avoid discriminating against, for example, transgender people, can be discriminatory. I would just like to comment on this briefly at this point)' also shows that an open-ended survey of gender can go hand in hand with different ways of understanding it, and that even open-ended questions that are intended to be inclusive can be perceived as discriminatory. On the one hand, they can give room for people who do not feel represented by structured questions and predefined response options, but it can also bear the risk that (trans) persons feel discriminated against because the question about perceived affiliation gives them the impression that their affiliation is not 'real' but 'only' felt and is thus denied or at least not fully recognized.

Overall, we can state that the open-ended question on gender offers both advantages and disadvantages. We see one disadvantage in the large proportion of missing values for this variable. A total of 403 people do not provide any information on their gender, so that the following quantitative analyses cannot consider gender systematically as a heterogeneity marker. However, an advantage of the rather explorative, open-ended question on gender lies in the possibility of providing room for differentiated answers and promoting a sensitive handling of the gender variable.

⁴ Press release no. 95/2017 of the Federal Constitutional Court:
<https://www.bundesverfassungsgericht.de/SharedDocs/Pressemitteilungen/DE/2017/bvg17-095.html>
(retrieved on 25.08.2020).

Non-binary refers to gender identities and describes people who situate themselves outside, between, or across the normative gender division into male and female.

Queer is often used as an umbrella term and includes all people who deviate from societal **cis** and/or hetero normativity because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. The term *queer* consequently describes people who are not heterosexual and/or not *cisgender*. It was originally used as a swear word in the English-speaking world, but over time, it has been appropriated positively by mainly lesbian, bisexual, and gay activists and has since been used as a self-designation.

Genderfluid also refers to gender identity; more specifically to people who move fluidly between different genders. Their gender can therefore differ at different temporal stages. In distinction to permanent gender identities, the term *genderfluid* emphasises the temporary nature of gender identity.

Cis comes from the word *cisgender*, which is intended to draw attention to social norms regarding gender. It describes a person who was assigned a binary biological sex at birth (i.e., male or female) and also identifies with this. This can be contrasted with the term *transgender* that describes a person who does not identify with their assigned gender.

4. Results: Experiencing discrimination at Bielefeld University

How far do people experience discrimination at Bielefeld University? The following sections attempt to quantify the observations and individual experiences of discrimination in a differentiated manner. This will be supplemented by qualitative analyses of the open-ended situation descriptions in order to obtain a more accurate picture. We are also interested in how those affected dealt with experienced discrimination, for example, whether they know where they can turn to and whom they can turn to. Moreover, we want to know about the relations between experienced discrimination and psychological stress in those affected. Finally, we report how far respondents see themselves as being personally responsible for dealing with prejudice and discrimination, for example, whether they get involved themselves; and the open-ended demands and concrete suggestions that respondents make on how to provide better support to those affected by discrimination at Bielefeld University and how to systematically prevent the problem.

4.1 Respondents' understanding of discrimination

First, we look at the main understanding of discrimination among respondents. This aspect was positioned before the other measurement instruments in the questionnaire and was intended to introduce the topic without giving the respondents a set definition of discrimination. We gave them a series of situations that could be characteristic for different forms and levels of discrimination and asked the members of the university surveyed to rate how discriminatory they considered them to be (Figure 2).

A large proportion of respondents perceive judging a female employee on the basis of her appearance (92.3%) and attributing weaker work performance to social origin (78.4%) to be clearly discriminatory. However, respondents do not interpret every situation described as being equally discriminatory. Although we selected theory-based statements that can be perceived as discriminatory on various dimensions (subjectively perceived discrimination; see El-Mafaalani, Waleciak, & Weitzel, 2017; direct and indirect as well as institutional and structural discrimination; see Gomolla, 2017), one third to one half of the respondents do not share these assessments. Only 37.5% of respondents consider it to be rather or very discriminatory when it is primarily people with a migration background who work in the cleaning services compared to 33.7% rather non-discriminatory or not discriminatory at all. And only just under one quarter (24.8%) are of the opinion that an overrepresentation of women among the staff in the cafeteria or canteen [Mensa] is a case of discrimination.

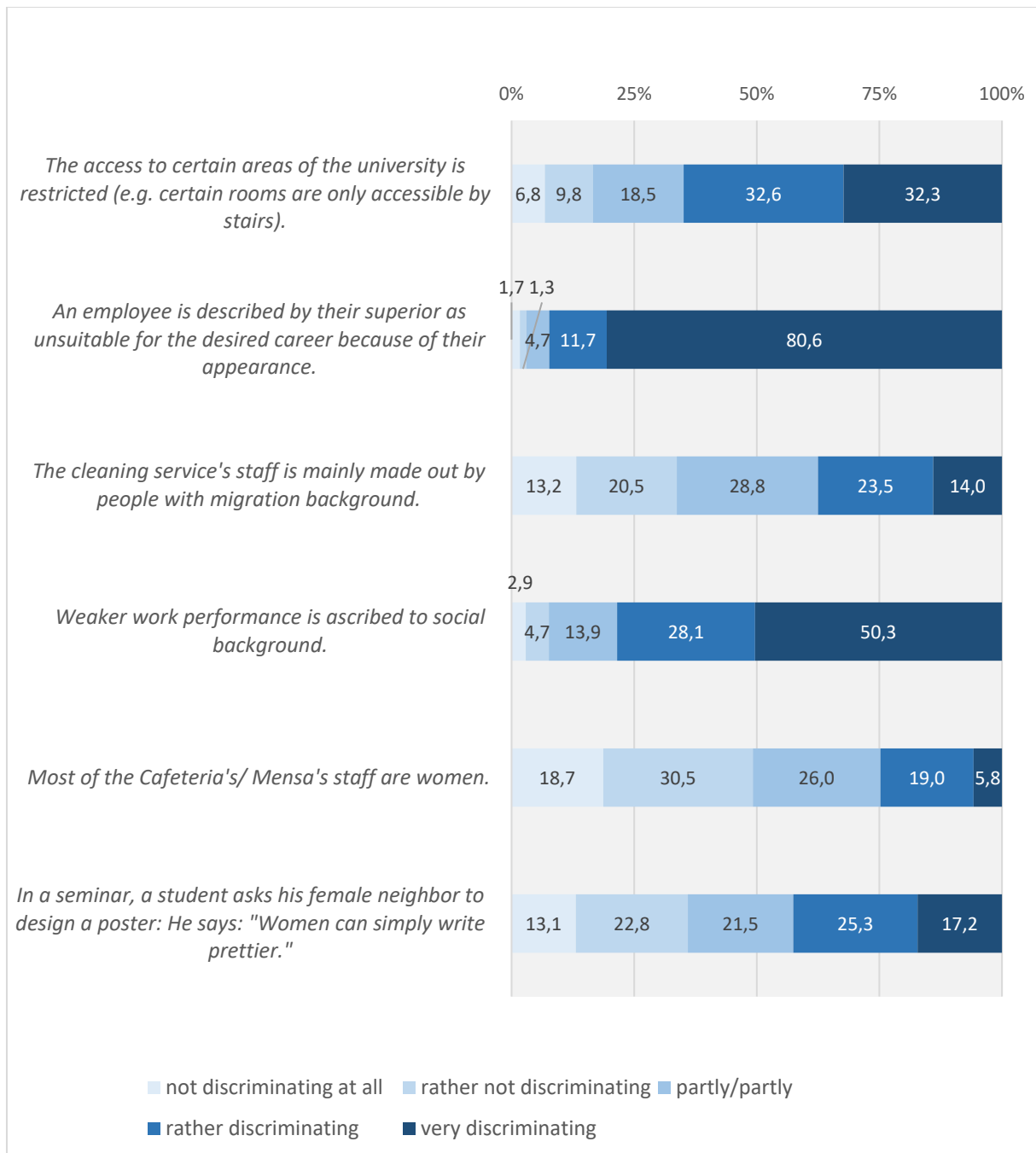


Figure 2: Understanding of discrimination: Rating of selected examples (percentage of respondents).

Although discrimination is recognized in principle, structural and thus societally anchored racist or sexist inequalities and disadvantages are perceived as an expression of discriminatory conditions to a much lesser extent than individual forms of discrimination. One potential explanation for this could be that in these cases, there is no recognizable individual responsibility, no perpetrator, from whom the discrimination originates. Even at a research and educational institution such as a university that calls itself a 'university without prejudice', it cannot be basically assumed that there is a sufficiently high awareness of various forms of discrimination. We see this as a first indicator of the need to increase awareness over discrimination among members of the university.

After rating the situations described, respondents were asked to name their own, further examples of discrimination at the university. The open-ended replies illustrate a wide range of areas of discrimination and point to the broadest variety of experiences. These were asked about in a differentiated manner in the further course of the study. Frequently mentioned forms of discrimination are racism, discrimination against women/sexism and families, discrimination due to spatial conditions, various discriminatory restrictions to participation and access at the university, discrimination due to language and queer hostility. Furthermore, anti-democratic attitudes, **classism**, age discrimination, discrimination against political attitudes and their expression, against religious affiliations and practice, and gender inequality are named as possible forms of discrimination.

Classism describes the devaluation of people based on their social origin but also their social position (e.g., homeless, long-term unemployed). Classist discrimination is often linked closely to racism and sexism.

The respondents describe situations in which discrimination occurs not only on an individual level but also on institutional and structural levels. The following examples are only an excerpt from the multitude of possible discrimination situations at Bielefeld University.

- *'A professor asks a student with a Turkish name who talks to him fluently in German if she can actually read texts in German properly?'*
- *'There are (in my faculty) almost exclusively white lecturers.'*
- *'Not being credited for one's abilities by German colleagues (systematically) because you are not white-German'*
- *'The majority of professorships are held by men; women are discriminated against in the science business because maternity leaves lead to fewer publications and this, in turn, leads to fewer opportunities for a higher research position.'*
- *'Female staff in the natural/technical sciences are seen as filling a quota, rather than being there based on ability.'*
- *'At and after faculty or institutional events, meetings, etc., it is generally the female staff who clean up.'*
- *'Sexual harassment in all forms, e.g., suggestive looks, repeatedly being "chatted up".'*
- *'When setting time plans . . . no attention is paid to the needs of people with children or with impairments, but decisions are simply made according to majority interest.'*
- *'Due to the outdated chairs in most of the lecture halls or the folding seats, it is difficult for pregnant women to participate in the seminars.'*
- *'Access to the university building is very inconvenient for wheelchair users. Sometimes it is necessary to make detours.'*
- *'Incorrect Braille designations of floors in lifts.'*
- *'Lecturers who do not respond to the needs of students with special needs and see no need to adapt their long-established teaching methods to today's standards and needs.'*

- *'There are language barriers to participating in university activities if one does not speak German.'*
- *'A lecturer/tutor refused to allow a trans person to be addressed with the pronouns/name [of that trans person] wanted.'*
- *'Students whose social gender does not match their biological gender are not allowed to change their name in official university documents, and are thus forced anew in every seminar to inform lecturers that their name (and thus recognizable gender) differs from the data in, for example, the eKVV.'*
- *'Trans and inter hostility (e.g., through lack of tick box options, forced outings, etc).'*
- *'The third gender is often spoken about in a derogatory way. They say "male, female or whatever" and on slides of courses you find only 2 genders (or only the male form).'*

Discrimination can therefore manifest in many different ways and on many different levels. Individual disadvantage, spatial conditions, access and participation restrictions, institutional hierarchies—all of these become clear as areas of discrimination. It is precisely because the respondents mention a number of structural examples that can also be used to demonstrate discrimination in everyday life that the comparatively low awareness of these forms of discrimination in the overall sample is all the more surprising.

4.2 Perceived social climate at Bielefeld University

Given such an initial basis, what is the general social climate at the university like? This question is important in the context of a survey on experiences with discrimination, because the individual perception of the social climate can already provide initial information about the well-being of members of the university and how they interact with each other. In 2019/20, as already established in 2015/16, it is evident that an educational and research institution such as Bielefeld University can be assigned a good social climate (Berghan et al., 2016, p. 14).

The majority of respondents consider the climate at the university to generally be good (73%). With regard to the subjective feeling of safety, around 85% of respondents agree or strongly agree with the statement that they feel very safe on campus. Almost three quarters (71.7%) feel comfortable as members of the university. Agreement on individual attachment to the university is somewhat more restrained. Nonetheless, two thirds of respondents (66.3%) still see opportunities for their own involvement at the university. However, less than one half (47.3%) agree or strongly agree that they feel a strong sense of belonging or that they feel very connected to the university (49%).

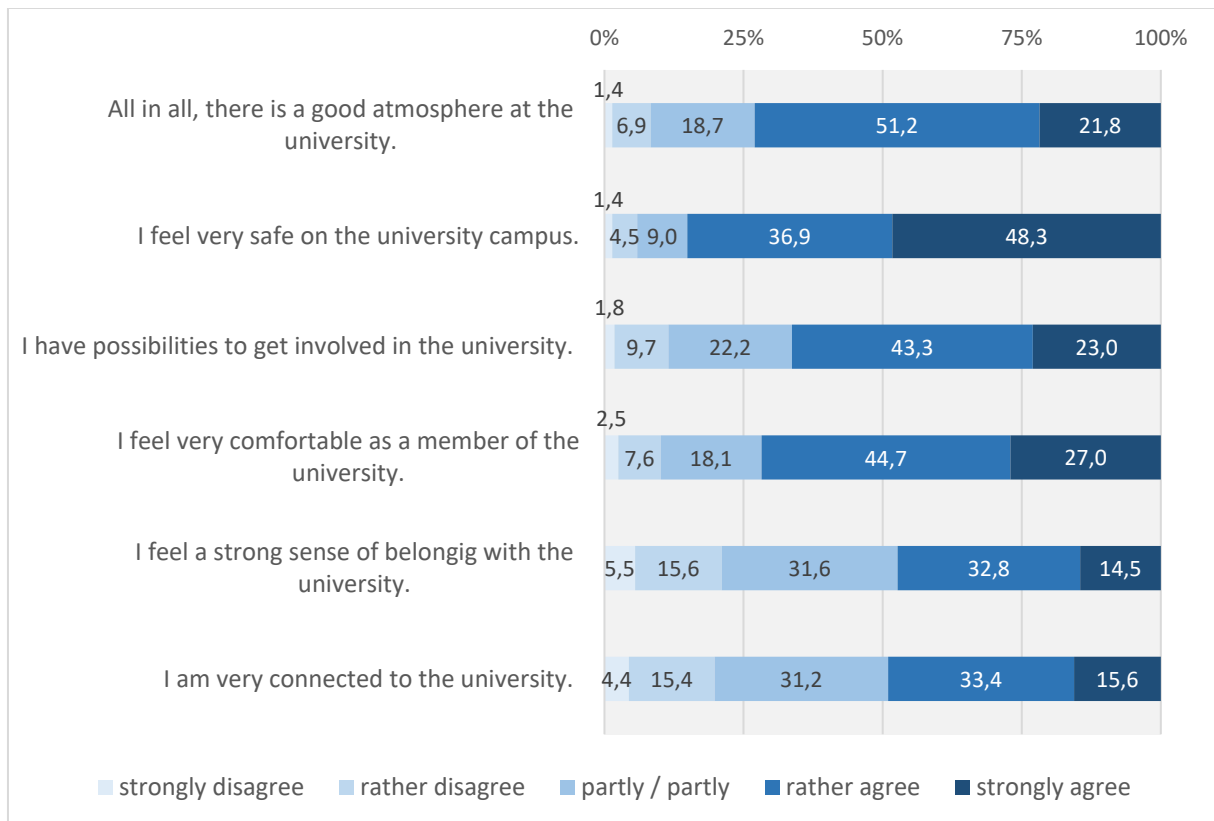


Figure 3: Perception of the social climate at Bielefeld University (percentage of respondents).

4.3 Perceptions of how discrimination has changed at Bielefeld University

Based on the present study, how has discrimination spread and how has discrimination changed at Bielefeld University?⁵ Results show that the majority of members of the university do not see any changes. Around three quarters state that discrimination has remained the same over the last 12 months. Descriptively, more respondents perceive a decrease in discrimination (16%) rather than an increase (10%).

⁵ It should be noted that this general assessment of discrimination must be distinguished from the actual individual experience of discrimination reported below.

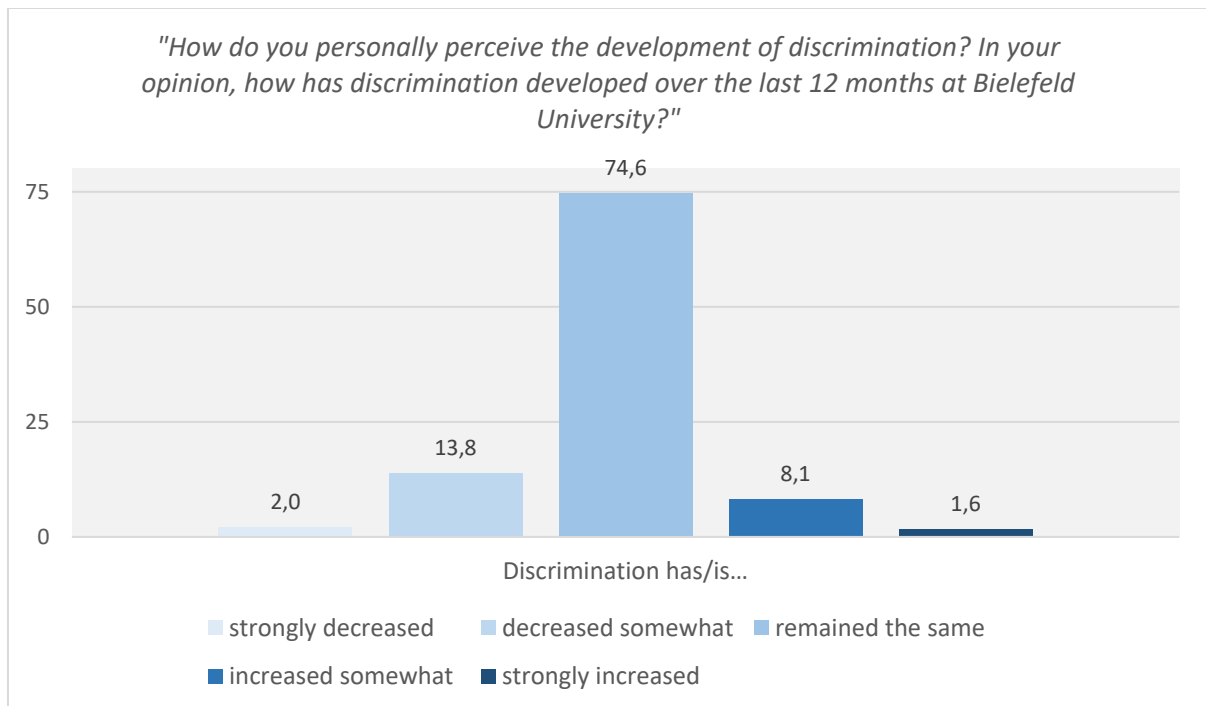


Figure 4. Perception of the general development of discrimination at Bielefeld University (percentage of respondents).

It is evident throughout that although discrimination is perceived as occurring at Bielefeld University, the university is nonetheless seen as a protective space compared to German society as a whole (see Figure 5). As in 2015/16, the subjective assessment of the prevalence of various forms of discrimination at the university is clearly below the level assessed for Germany as a whole. For some forms of discrimination, assessments are extremely divergent, particularly with regard to discrimination on the basis of national origin/migration background (31% in the university vs 83% in Germany). Understandably, 'university status group' is the only characteristic for which this discrepancy is not evident.

Overall, it should be noted at this point that the image of the university is largely positive. A similar result was found in the previous study from 2015/16. The majority of respondents assess the social climate at the university as good. Despite the intensification of right-wing extremist and right-wing populist discourse and its normalization in society as a whole, as well as a high number of prejudice-motivated or right-wing extremist acts of violence, most respondents do not perceive an increased incidence of discrimination at the university. Especially in comparison to the situation in Germany as a whole, the educational and research institution of Bielefeld University is considered to be significantly less discriminatory, although not entirely free of discrimination.

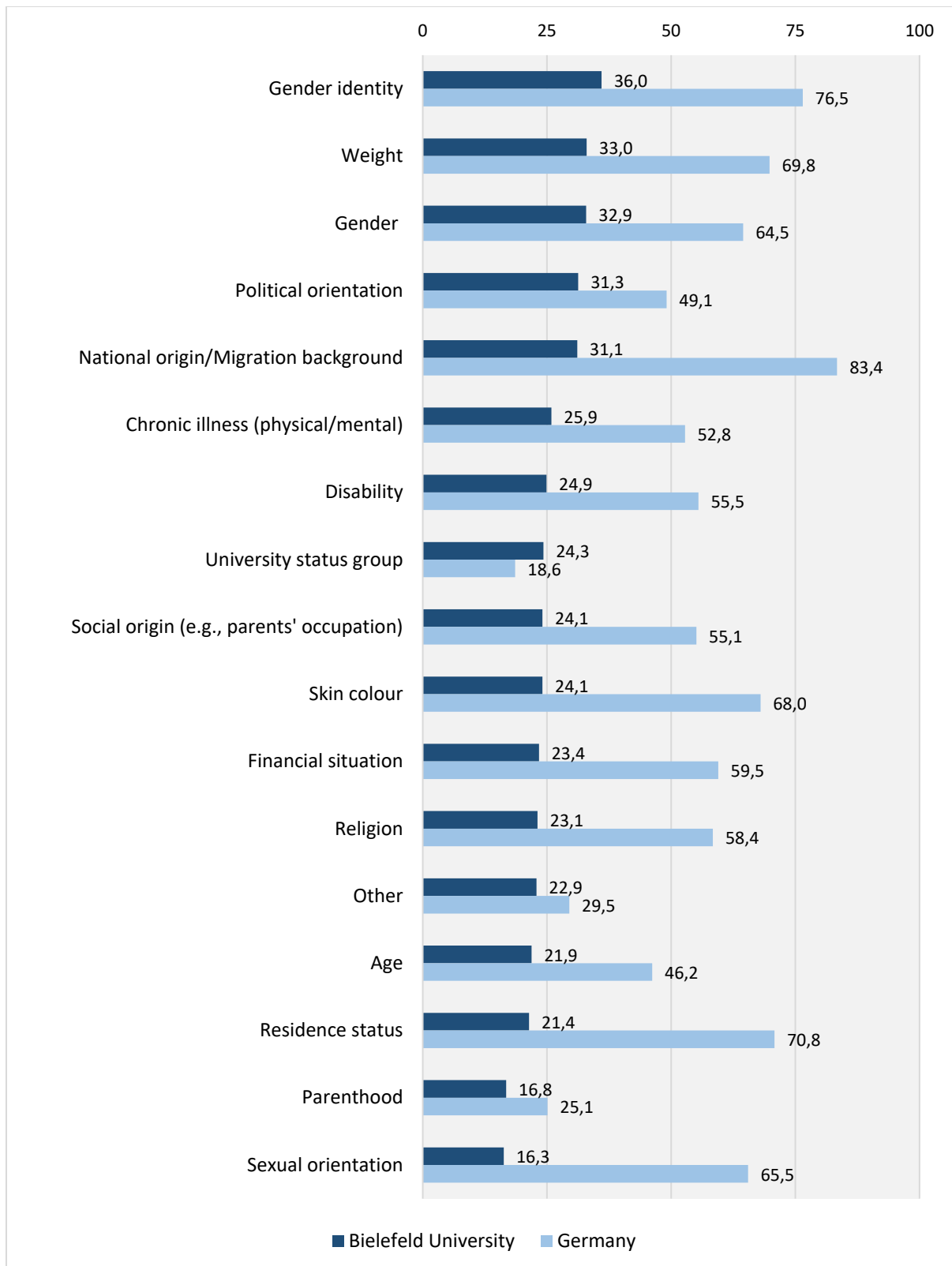


Figure 5. Perceived prevalence of discrimination based on various characteristics at Bielefeld University and in Germany (in percentages; the response options *rather prevalent* and *very prevalent* are combined).

4.4 Personal experience of discrimination

Results show that one half of the respondents at Bielefeld University report having personally experienced discrimination at least once (52%), and a similar proportion report having observed discrimination (51%). Around one third of respondents report having experienced or observed discrimination at the university on several or regular occasions. Compared to 2015/16 (Berghan et al., 2016), there are slightly more individual (especially multiple) experiences of discrimination in 2019/20, and slightly fewer observations of discrimination. Overall, however, results paint a very similar picture. This is in line with the previously reported subjective assessment at the university: three quarters of the respondents are of the opinion that the development of discrimination has remained unchanged in the last year.

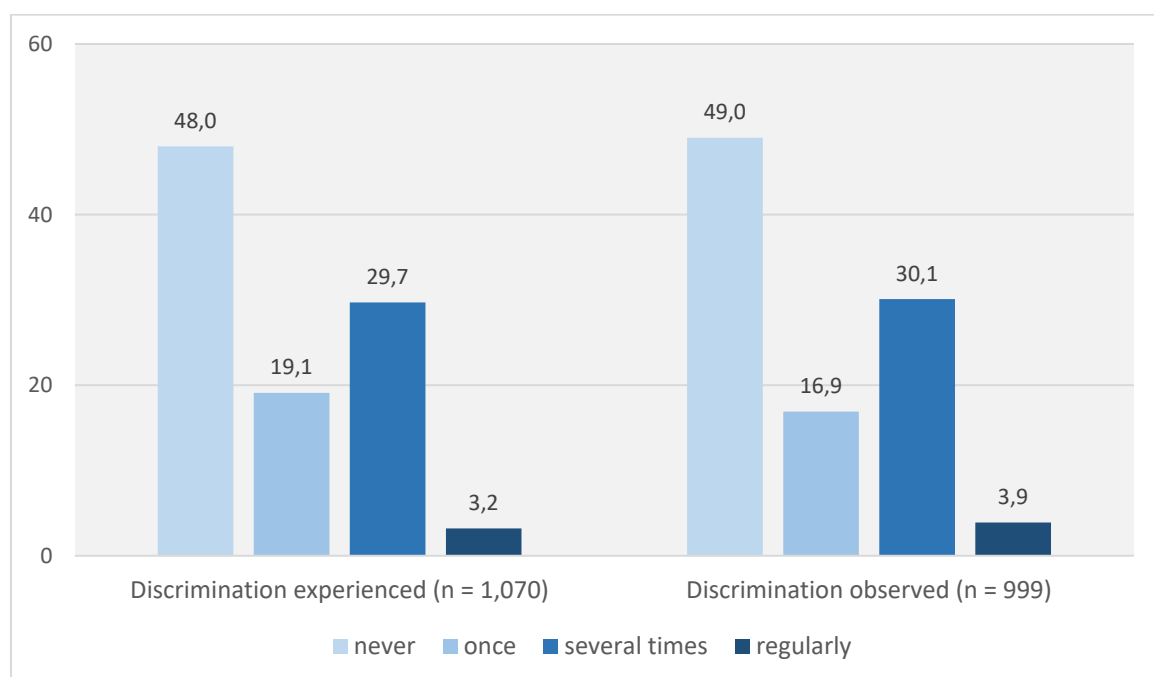


Figure 6. Personal experiences and observations of discrimination at Bielefeld University in 2019/20 (percentage of respondents).

Respondents who have personally experienced discrimination rate the social climate at the university differently from people who have not experienced discrimination themselves. We tested this by forming a scale from the six items assessing the social climate (Figure 3) and calculating mean differences between groups.⁶ There are significant differences between respondents who have and who have not experienced discrimination⁷ and between respondents who have and who have not observed discrimination⁸ in the perception of the social climate at the university.⁹ Respondents who have experienced discrimination rate the

⁶ An exploratory factor analysis shows that the items load on a common factor and that the scale on the social climate at the university has an internal consistency of $\alpha = .85$.

⁷ $F(1, 995) = 37.71, p = .000$

⁸ $F(1, 1065) = 66.34, p = .000$

⁹ This was calculated with analyses of variance. While homogeneity of variance was not given, the non-parametric Kruskal–Wallis rank variance analysis and the robust test procedures using Welch and Brown-Forsythe F statistics

social climate worse on average ($M = 3.6$) than those without this experience ($M = 3.9$). The same applies to respondents who have ($M = 3.6$) and have not ($M = 3.9$) observed discrimination. As expected, this differentiates the generally rather positive assessment across the entire sample.

Furthermore, as can be seen in Figure 4, respondents who have experienced discrimination also have different perceptions of the development of discrimination compared to those who have not experienced discrimination. Respondents who have experienced discrimination themselves are, on average, more likely to perceive an increase ($M = 3.0$) than respondents who have not experienced discrimination ($M = 2.8$). This difference is statistically significant.¹⁰ A comparison between respondents who state that they have or have not observed discrimination also shows a significant, but descriptively smaller difference ($M = 2.9$ vs. $M = 3.0$).¹¹ Overall, this shows that experiencing discrimination at the university—hardly surprisingly—influences how the presence of discrimination and the climate at the university are perceived. In particular, those respondents who actually experience discrimination in everyday life tend to report a worsening of the situation.

4.4.1 Characteristics and contexts of experienced discrimination

The analysis so far shows that discrimination is part of everyday university life for a significant proportion of respondents. However, which characteristics is this discrimination based on? Whom does it come from, where does it take place, and who is affected by it? We report answers to these questions in the following. We gave respondents who experienced discrimination the opportunity to describe the last situation they had experienced as discriminatory in more detail using a series of structured and open-ended questions.

Respondents who have experienced discrimination most often report¹² that it is related to their gender (36.9%). This is followed in second place by discrimination based on one's own university status group (22.8%). Age (14.7%) and national origin or a migration background (14%) are named third most frequently as characteristics of the last discriminatory situation. These frequencies correspond to the reports on the affiliations to groups potentially affected by discrimination to which respondents assigned themselves (see Figure 1). Residence status (1.4%), a disability (2.7%), or skin colour (3.8%) are mentioned least frequently as relevant characteristics for personally experienced discrimination. These are also the groups to which relatively few respondents classify themselves.

showed that the mean differences are significant. Therefore, to make full use of the information, the results of the parametric variance analyses are reported throughout.

¹⁰ $F(1, 990) = 30.06, p = .000$

¹¹ $F(1, 924) = 11.29, p = .001$

¹² We found that 6.3% of respondents with experience of discrimination and 8.6% of respondents who had observed it consistently gave no information on this.

A somewhat different picture emerges for the reported observations of discrimination. Discrimination is observed most frequently on the basis of a perceived migration background (28.9%). Gender follows in second place, with just under one quarter having already observed this form of discrimination (24.1%). Whereas relatively few respondents experience discrimination on the basis of disability themselves, more people observe it (16.6%). Likewise, discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation (4.3%) and parenthood (4.3%) are also mentioned, although less frequently.

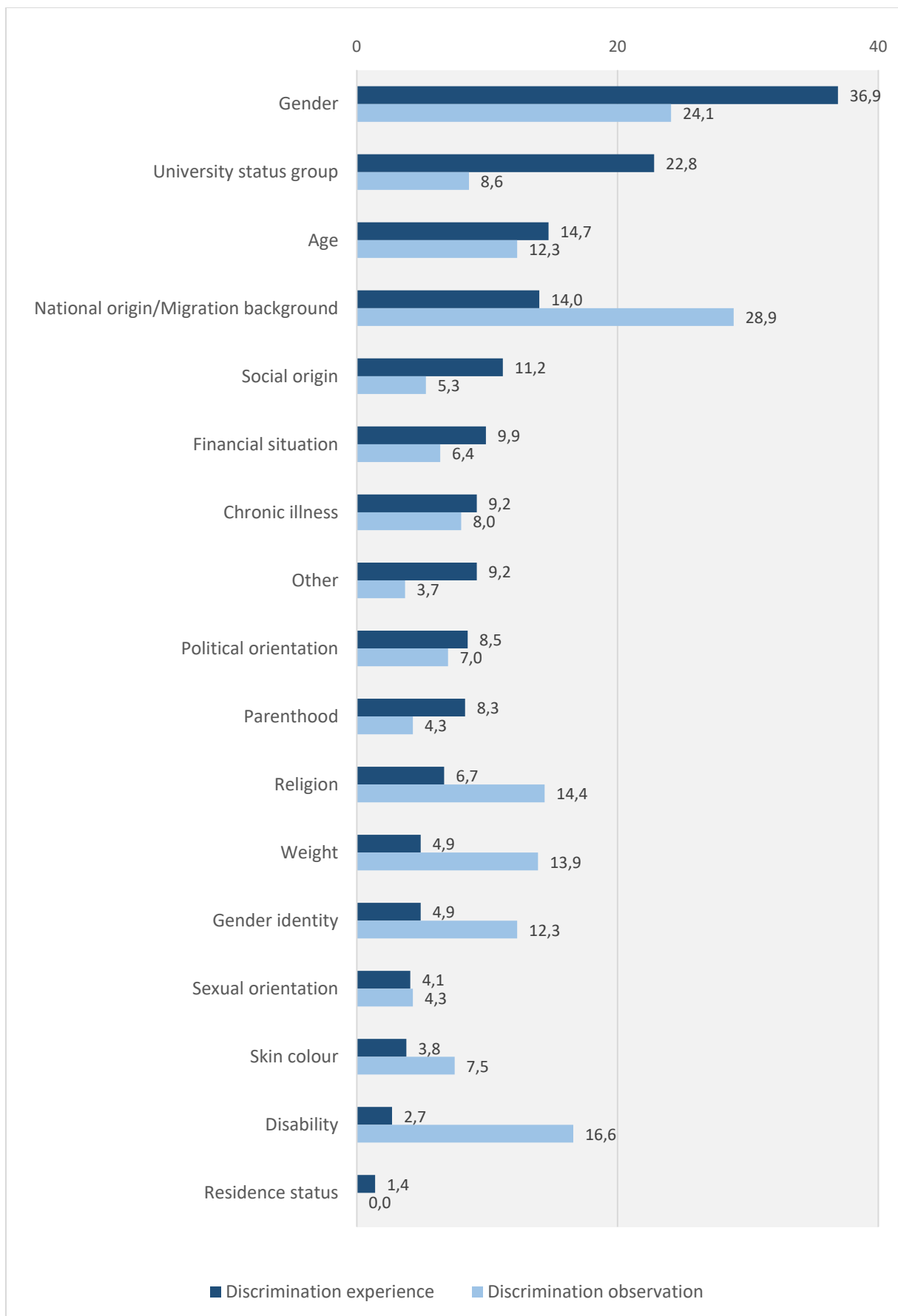


Figure 7: Characteristics on which experienced ($n = 556$) or observed discrimination ($n = 187$) is based (data as percentage of respondents; multiple responses possible).

The groups of people from whom the respondents say discrimination originates also reveal a discrepancy between self-experienced and observed discrimination (Figure 8).¹³ Those who have experienced discrimination most often report that it comes from lecturers and professors (39%) followed by discrimination from fellow students (31.7%). However, more than one quarter of respondents who have experienced discrimination (26.4%) also state that structural conditions at the university are discriminatory. Discrimination is also observed most frequently in the context of teaching and learning. Almost one half of the respondents who have observed discrimination say that it comes from colleagues (49.2%). The second most frequent group report having observed discrimination by lecturers or professors (23%). This suggests that discrimination occurs not only in lectures and seminars but also in the individual supervision of students.

However, discrimination is also experienced and observed in the work context at Bielefeld University. For example, 17.4% of respondents who have experienced discrimination report that it comes from their superiors. This form of discrimination is also observed less frequently than it is experienced—only 5.3% of respondents state that they have observed superiors discriminating against others. Results are similar for discrimination by colleagues and administrative staff. In both cases, there is a discrepancy in the frequency with which these forms of discrimination are either experienced or observed. This tendency is reversed with regard to the problem of lack of accessibility for people with physical handicaps. Here, more respondents report observing discrimination (12.3% vs 3.4%). This may be due not only to the comparatively small proportion of participants who may be affected by this but also the fact that lack of accessibility may also be more apparent to outsiders than, for example, interactional forms of discrimination.

¹³ A total of 6.5% of respondents who experienced discrimination and 9.6% of respondents who observed discrimination consistently gave no information on this.

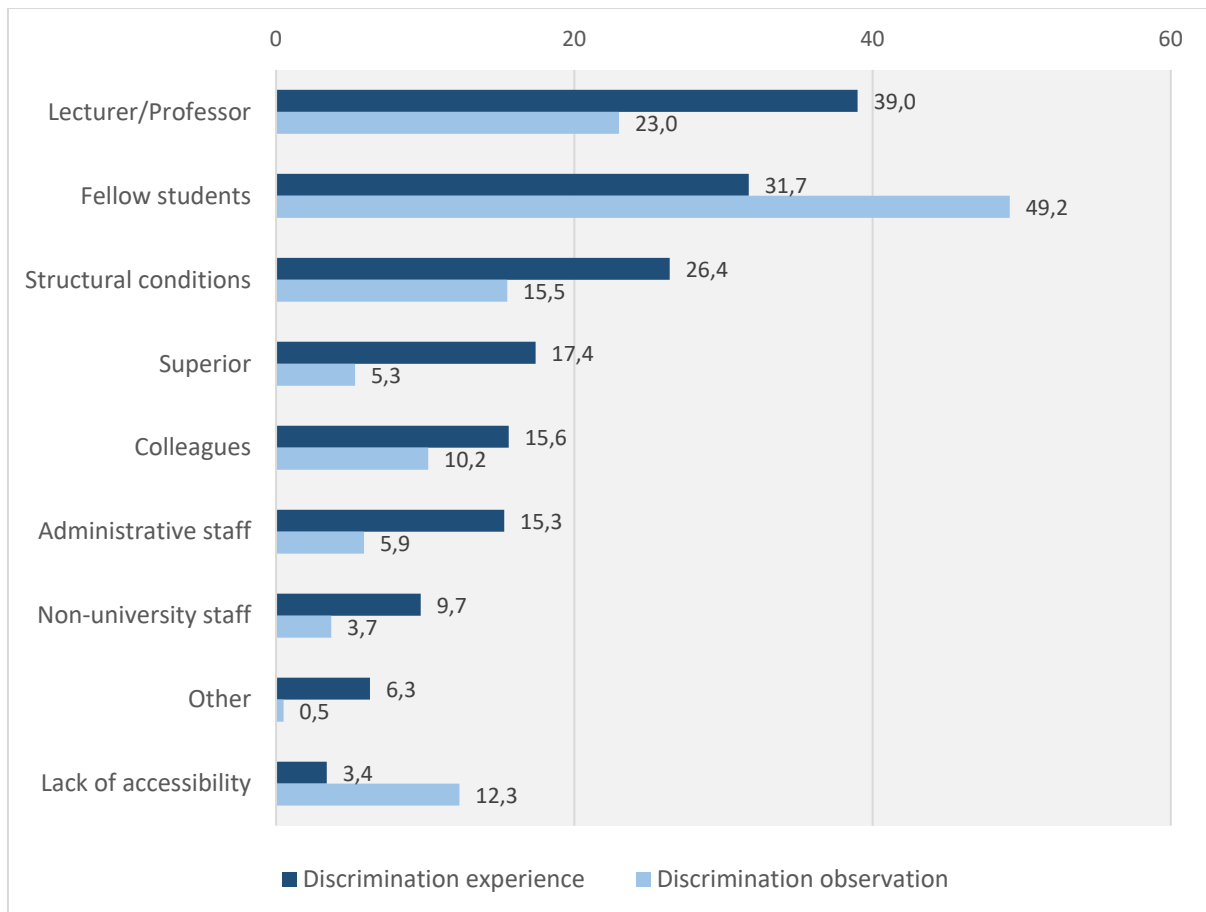


Figure 8: Proportions of discriminating groups of people and structures (percentage of respondents; multiple entries possible).

The answers to the questions about the contexts in which discrimination is experienced or observed correspond to the previous results (Figure 9). Most respondents state that they experienced (37.6%) or observed (44.4%) discrimination in teaching—that is, during lectures and seminars.¹⁴ This corresponds to the results indicating that lecturers and professors (along with fellow students) are perceived as the groups of people from whom discrimination emanates most frequently. In the broader teaching context and in administration, discrimination is experienced with similar frequency (20.3% and 21.4% respectively). In this context, discrimination is observed less frequently, but is more likely to be recognized by outsiders in the teaching context (15%) than in administration (8%). In other contexts, such as job allocation or working time regulations, in which those affected by discrimination are mostly single individuals, discrimination is rarely observed, but frequently experienced. In contrast, more discrimination is observed in contexts in which mostly several people are present (services, leisure and sports, and teaching). Overall, it can be seen that discrimination can occur in all university contexts. Studying, teaching, research, work, and life at Bielefeld University are not free from discrimination.

¹⁴ A total of 7.7% of respondents who experienced discrimination and 10.7% of respondents who observed discrimination consistently gave no information on this.

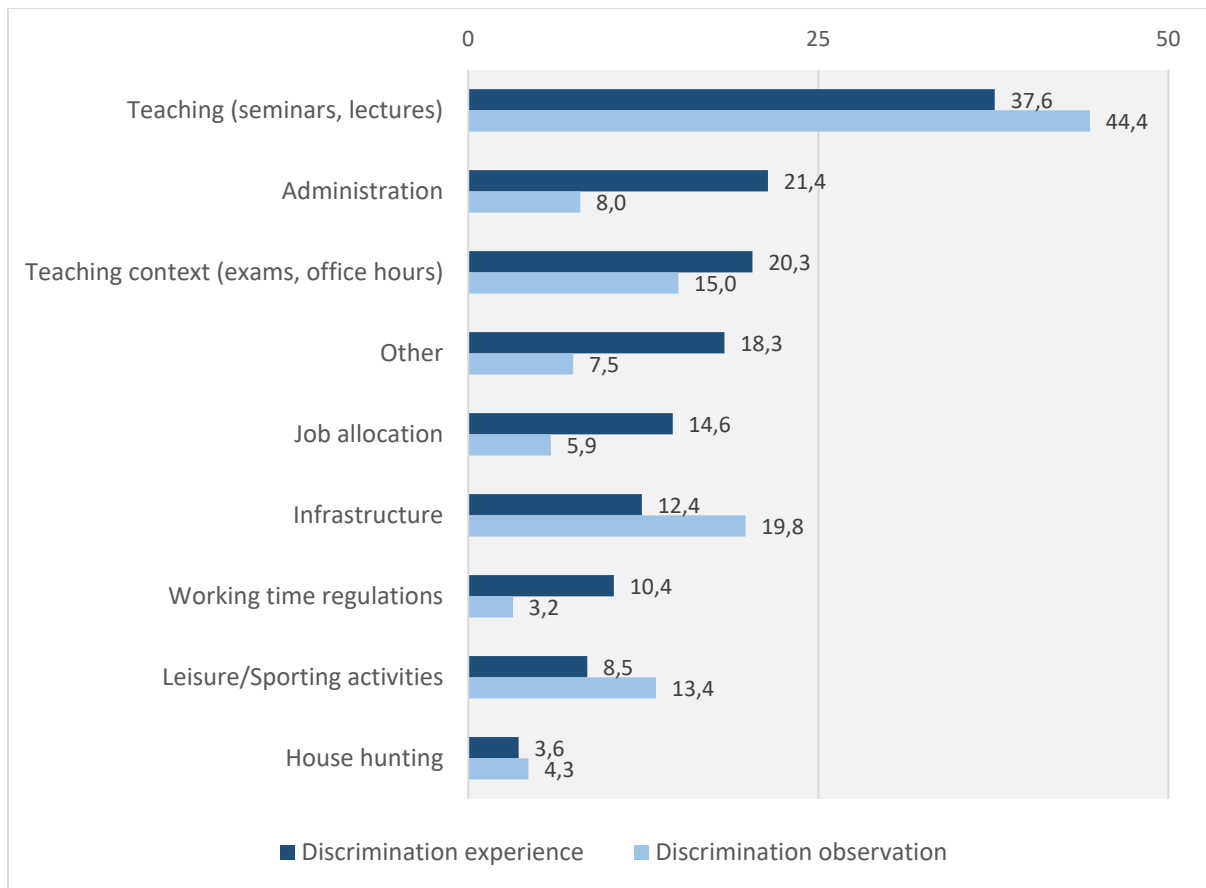


Figure 9: Contexts of discrimination at Bielefeld University (percentage of respondents, multiple entries were possible).

4.4.2 Open-ended descriptions of experienced discrimination

While carrying out the survey, those affected by discrimination had the opportunity to describe the situations they had experienced in more detail. These descriptions vary in scope and detail. Some descriptions indicate the characteristics for which the respondents experienced discrimination. Descriptions of **sexism** are particularly frequent:

- *‘Daily issues of the voice of women being ignored when the topic is “male-typed”. In the specific situation, my supervisor will directly voice the need to receive the opinion of one or two other male colleagues while talking about my own research project. The repetition of this situation makes me feel it is a discrimination.’*
- *‘A professor made condescending comments about female students in a lecture.’*
- *‘In my second situation I and a female friend were discriminated against because of our feminine style. Fellow students were talking about how this friend and I probably only got through studying mathematics because we had a female friend who just didn’t have that style and not because we could do it ourselves. They were sitting in the row behind us and they must have been aware that we were hearing this.’*

- *'In seminars the proportions of time when women and men speak are always very unequal, and this is not questioned or addressed. I have often been interrupted by men in seminars and that can also be related to the fact that they read me as female.'*

The responses also describe **discrimination against both people who are mentally ill and people with chronic illness/disability, discrimination on the basis of language, and discrimination in connection with pregnancy/maternity:**

- *'Mr ... made fun of mental illness in a lecture and particularly of self-harming behaviour.'*
- *'Due to my illnesses and disability, I am absent more often than healthy students. Almost all requests for substitute work that I could do are blocked by lecturers (also due to the feedback from fellow students). This is why I have not been able to complete some seminars and had to take them again. Especially in seminars where there was only one lecturer to choose from, I was often expelled from the seminar right at the beginning of the semester.'*
- *'It was about a phase of group work. A poster was being made. I could say almost nothing about the topic because I had difficulty following the lesson. This was due to my lack of knowledge of German, which was obvious. I was then forced by one of the fellow students to present the poster afterwards because I couldn't do anything in preparing the poster.'*
- *'When I announced my pregnancy, I had to give up a project management position with immediate effect. Colleagues now keep pregnancies a secret for as long as possible so as not to experience the same discrimination.'*

Respondents provide insights into very different experiences of discrimination that they have had to make at Bielefeld University. Some of these are concrete disadvantages, as in the case described above. Furthermore, some respondents report **discriminatory attributions,**

- *'I was given as an example of a low social background by the lecturer because of the way I dressed.'*

inappropriate and harassing behaviour,

- *'Flirting from fellow male students is often unpleasant and intrusive, with no boundaries and accepting of nos; lewd faces in the uni hall/catcalling.'*

othering processes,

- *'At the entrance checks before the exams, my foreign ID card was examined particularly "carefully" with the comments "what's that?" (situation 1, not just once).'*
- *'During the discussion of a course assignment, the lecturer went to the respective students during the seminar and gave feedback on the documents that the students had already submitted to her. When she came to me and asked me for my name to fish my document*

out of the pile, when my name was mentioned, she reacted very funnily, laughed, and said something like “what kind of name is that” and made some witty comments while pretending that my name was very exotic and “wrong”.’

as well as the stress through **barriers to name changes**.

- *‘I am trans and have been using a new name for 1.5 years. I ... wanted to align the name on the teaching page. Each of the first 3 offices forwarded me to a different place because they didn’t have access rights. Finally, I went to the Student Office. There, I was told that the data in the university system can only be changed after an official application for a name change has been submitted to the court. Because I am changing my name via another law, that didn’t work for me. Half a year passed before I could hand in the completed application, during which I still had to compile documents, obtain expert opinions, and wait for the name change to be processed. During this time, I was confronted with my dead name again and again, which was very stressful for me.’*

Some answers do not contain a concrete description but refer to a variety of situations or structural discrimination (*‘generally sexist undertone in discourse’, ‘discrimination or also devaluation due to gender is a very everyday problem in society. It happens (to me) daily and is unfortunately not always perceivable as such, let alone identifiable as such*).

Those who state that they have observed discrimination at Bielefeld University were also given the opportunity to describe the observed situation in more detail. Their descriptions include a range of forms of discrimination such as the devaluation of social origin and religious affiliation, sexism/misogyny, homophobia, right-wing extremism/right-wing populism, anti-Semitism, racism, and racist stereotypes as well as observations of discrimination due to lack of accessibility. As in the descriptions of situations by those experiencing discrimination, observers also report problems with university hierarchies. The most frequently mentioned observation is that of **sexist and/or misogynist remarks and behaviours**. This corresponds with the results of the previous study (Berghan et al., 2016), in which the category ‘gender’ was also named as the most frequent form of observed discrimination. What is striking about the descriptions is that they are often of very direct cases of discrimination in which there seems to be hardly any room for interpretation:

- *‘Not taking women’s contributions to committee meetings seriously.’*
- *‘In job interviews men are assumed to be more competent—for example, by interpreting their statements as indicating that they surely mean the “right thing” (whereas in the case of women, they don’t).’*
- *‘A lower grade was given compared to a male colleague because the woman would become a mother and the career was not so relevant.’*

In addition to discrimination through sexist or misogynistic statements and behaviours, the observers also describe many situations in which the **structures within the university** favour discrimination. Descriptions here, for example, address the treatment of employees in services and administration as well as in the *Studierendenwerk* in the cafeteria or the cleaning staff, but also the **hierarchies** that exist between status groups in general and here especially that between lecturers and students. What is striking about the descriptions here is that the students more often report discrimination made by male professors than by female professors. Even though the term ‘service and administrative staff’ has been used instead of ‘non-academic staff’ since the last survey, a **power imbalance** is reported between the group of (prospective) academics and the administration. This problem is also pointed out in the observations.

- *‘Due to their status in the “hierarchy”, non-academic staff are constantly discriminated against, especially in the flow of information.’*
- *‘Student assistant posts/internships are not advertised formally and allocated only through internal recommendations.’*
- *‘A female friend was insulted so personally by a female professor in the seminar that she had to cry.’*

Some observers also describe concrete cases of **discrimination based on social origin and the assumed educational level of the parents** (classism).

- *‘Student assistants [as applicants] are apparently rejected because of non-academic parents.’*
- *‘Some first-year students (“presumably working-class children”) were accused of not yet having any advanced knowledge of history. Social background should not play a role, especially at the beginning of a study course.’*

In the case of descriptions of a **lack of accessibility** or **discrimination against persons with disabilities or chronic illnesses**, respondents give very specific examples such as missing or defective lifts, poor accessibility of disabled toilets due to few or even out-of-service lifts, as well as a general lack of accessibility on campus—for example, due to out-of-service door openers or building work. However, language barriers are also mentioned repeatedly.

- *‘Parts of the rooms (especially in the main building) are not accessible by lift.’*
- *‘Some students have made fun of the behaviour of a person in need of care several times during lectures.’*
- *‘The automatic door openers don’t all work.’*
- *‘When contacts reveal language barriers, people quickly break off instead of investing more time in finding solutions.’*

Racist as well as **anti-Muslim behaviour and statements** are observed mainly in teaching situations:

- *'Young female lecturers of colour were exposed to extremely confrontational male students in the seminar.'*
- *'Multiple usage of the N word by lecturers in seminar, even after being informed that this is derogatory.'*
- *'A fellow student was accused of not having written her Bachelor's thesis herself because her use of German was very good.'*
- *'I have experienced several times how students with certain migration backgrounds (does not apply to all) were categorically underestimated and excluded.'*

Anti-Muslim statements mainly affect women who wear a hijab:

- *'A woman wearing a headscarf was unfairly and brusquely reprimanded by the lecturer during the lecture for no apparent reason.'*

4.4.3 Open-ended descriptions of the greatest challenges in experienced discrimination

A total of 304 of those affected (54.7%) answered the open-ended question on what was the 'most difficult' thing for them in the discrimination situation they had described. These open-ended answers were subsequently systematized with several codes being assigned to individual answers if those affected addressed different aspects in their answers.

Most often, affected persons describe the **emotional stress experienced** during discrimination as being the most difficult aspect of the experience for them. The range of reported emotions is wide—affected persons describe very concrete feelings of shame and humiliation, often paired with a feeling of helplessness and the attempt not to let the experienced injury show in the situation. Some describe being so hurt in the situation that they could no longer respond rationally to the discrimination they experienced. They also describe feelings of powerlessness and resignation when considering repeated experiences of discrimination in the past.

- *'Helplessness, person became VERY loud, the occasion was actually harmless; later reactions from superiors: I should grow a thicker skin and deal with it that way.'*
- *'To suppress the tears in order not to show the hurt in front of the one who has hurt, or not to show weakness.'*
- *'A feeling of insecurity and homelessness.'*

Those affected often describe an **inability to act** or **uncertainty about the appropriateness of reactions**. Some respondents describe not knowing how to react and defend themselves when they experience discrimination. Others describe being unsure about which reaction to the

experienced discrimination would have been most sensible or appropriate. Often this is coupled with the concern that their own reaction could make the situation worse or lead to new conflicts, or with the effort not to violate the other person's boundaries through their own reaction. Finally, those affected also describe doubts about whether what they experienced was serious enough to justify a reaction.

- *'Dealing with the discrimination; responding appropriately, making it clear that the behaviour was not okay, and still trying to communicate and explain why I felt something was discrimination.'*
- *'If you address the issue, the exclusion intensifies.'*
- *'To respond without crossing boundaries.'*
- *'Is my perception actually such that others would also find the situation discriminatory?'*

The third most common difficulty described by those affected is that of existing **hierarchies and structural dependencies** in the university context. This category includes the problem of existing status differences as well as the subjective and/or objective dependence on the discriminating person and the resulting feeling of powerlessness. People describe refraining from addressing the discrimination out of concern over the possible consequences. Repeatedly described constellations are the experienced dependence of students on lecturers and the dependence of employees on their superiors.

- *'The situation was hierarchically structured and I could not fight back.'*
- *'Being right but not getting it [one's right] because hierarchy rules.'*
- *'That you didn't want to say anything back to the lecturer in order not to jeopardize your participation and performance in the seminar.'*
- *'Knowing that you can't say anything because you're being graded by that person.'*

In addition, those affected report a lack of clear **solidarity and support from other people present** such as students or colleagues in the experienced discrimination situation (*'I was the only person of colour. The whole seminar plus the lecturer noticed, but were too paralysed to react'*), that there is a lack of **places to go and persons to report** experiences of discrimination to at the university (*'there was no one I could turn to'*) as well as, in some cases, **language barriers** in dealing with experienced discrimination (*'The first months of living in Germany I couldn't defend myself because of the language'*).

Respondents who have observed discriminatory situations were also asked what the most difficult thing was for them in the situation and how they might have helped the person concerned. Many responses indicate uncertainty about *whether* and *how to* intervene in cases of discrimination. Some respondents describe uncertainty about what words to choose or how to behave in the situation when, for example, they are in a hierarchical relationship with the discriminating person. A common thread running through all statements is the description of a lack of knowledge on how to intervene adequately in situations. The problem is also

exacerbated, according to some statements, as soon as the discrimination emanates from a lecturer and the students continue to be in contact with this person, be it in the seminar situation in which they may end up relying on the grading, or in the context of work as a student assistant.

- *'Should I intervene? If so, how?'*
- *'To continue working for the professor.'*
- *'To decide whether and how I should comment on the statements.'*

According to their reports, when observers intervene in a discrimination situation, this usually takes the form of supportive words or even directly addressing the discriminating person.

- *'Asked what the problem was.'*
- *'Attempts to bring wrong circumstances to the examiner's attention were ignored.'*

4.4.4 Dealing with experienced discrimination

When discrimination is part of everyday life for some members of the university, the question inevitably arises as to how they deal with the situations of discrimination they experience and observe. The quantitative results on this can be found in Figure 10. A large proportion report that they talk to fellow students or colleagues at work (44.1% for experiencing discrimination, 42.2% for observing discrimination).¹⁵ They often also talk about it with friends or acquaintances. About one half of respondents who have experienced discrimination (48.6%) and about one third of respondents who have observed discrimination (32.6%) report this. Respondents with personal experience of discrimination also turn to family members significantly more often (36% vs 13.9% when observed). Around one quarter of respondents ignore personally experienced discrimination (25.7%). Of those who observe discrimination, almost one fifth ignore it (18.2%). Discrimination is also rarely reported. Only 0.4% (experienced) and 0.5% (observed) of respondents have done so for the last situation experienced. And only a small proportion of respondents with personal experiences of discrimination turn to professional bodies with 2.2% of those affected saying they turned to a body outside the university and 7.4% to a body within the university.¹⁶

¹⁵ A total of 11% of respondents who experienced discrimination and 18.2% of respondents who observed discrimination consistently gave no information on this.

¹⁶ This once again shows the relevance of systematic (and in the best sense regular) monitoring of experiences of discrimination. In most cases, it is professional bodies that document the incidence of discrimination (in institutions). However, if only a very small proportion of those affected turn (or are able to turn) to these bodies, the majority of actual cases of discrimination remain hidden and the extent of discrimination is likely to be underestimated. If there are no professional bodies or they are not known, this problem is even greater.

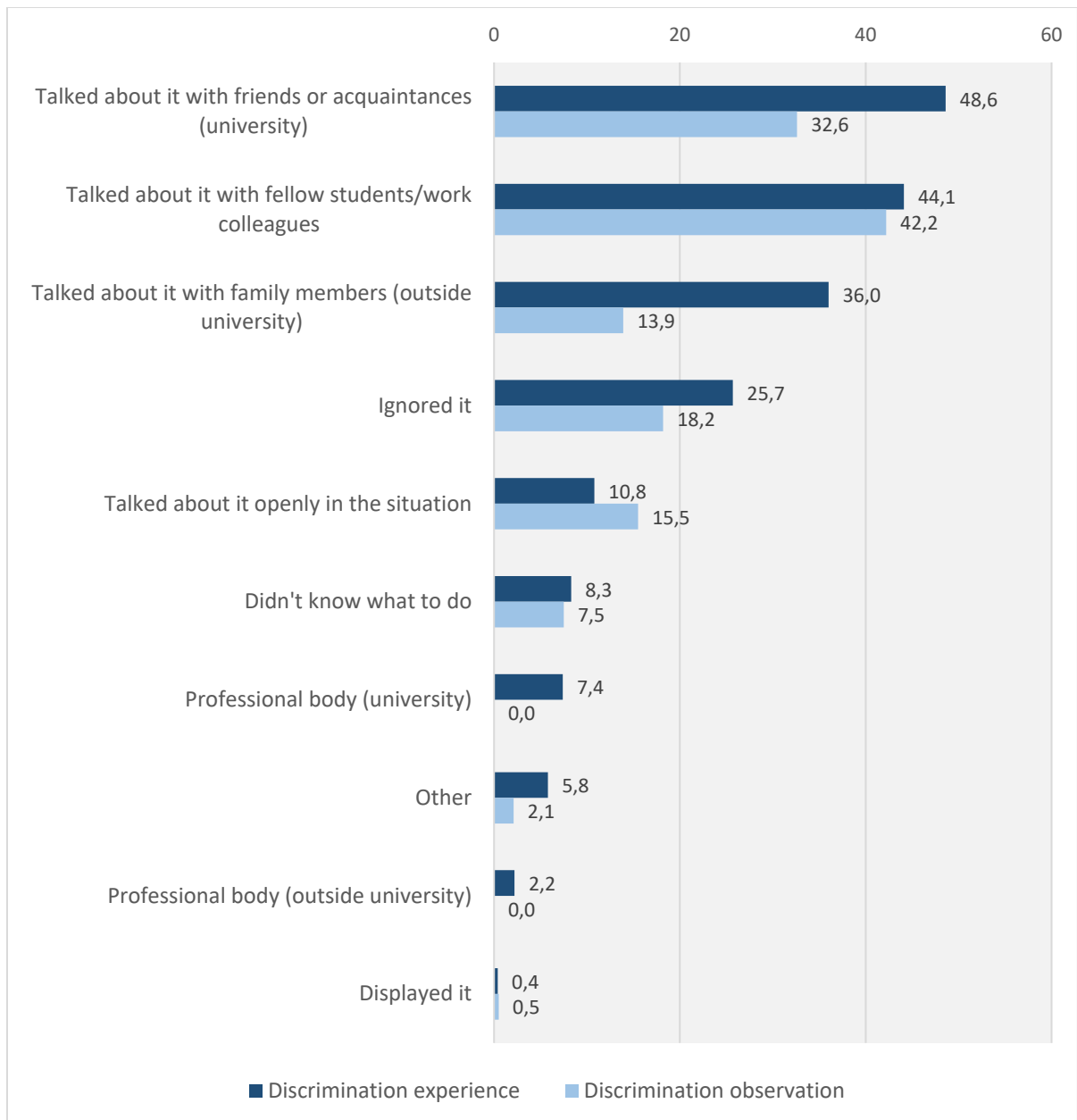


Figure 10: Dealing with situations of discrimination (percentage of respondents, multiple answers were possible).

4.4.5 Knowledge and use of counselling services

In addition, all study participants were asked about their knowledge and previous use of any counselling services or offices to deal with discrimination. It is striking that only a small percentage of the respondents have knowledge of such services. Around 71% of the respondents state that they do not know of any counselling centres or officers to whom they can turn in the event of discrimination. Only 14.8% say they know of *one* place to go and another 13.8% say they know of more than one support service. The Equal Opportunities Officers (with a total of 85 mentions) and the AstA (with a total of 39 mentions) are named most frequently as potential contacts. Hence, compared to the results from 2015/16, there is

no change in the knowledge of counselling centres. Here as well, around 70% said they did not know of any (Berghan et al., 2016, p. 42).

Even if support services are known, it is evident that only a small proportion of respondents actually make use of them. Only 32.2% of those who are aware of counselling services state that they had visited one or more counselling centres—however, this corresponds to only 7% of the entire sample. The reasons for this low percentage within our survey cannot be identified clearly because the relevant subsample is too small.¹⁷ A more detailed investigation is needed here. However, the survey shows that a large proportion of those who did make contact with the services seem satisfied with them. Indeed, 87.5% of those who state that they have visited one or more support services would visit a counselling centre again (however, this corresponds to only 2.8% of the entire sample). In addition, 87.5% of those who state that they have visited a counselling service would recommend it to their friends (also 2.8% of the total sample).

4.4.6 Relations between experienced discrimination and psychological stress

The analysis also raises the question whether and to what extent there are links between experienced discrimination and psychological stress among members of the university. Current systematic research and meta-analyses show a connection between experiences of discrimination and low psychological well-being (Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009; Schmitt et al., 2014). Therefore, we took this aspect into account in the current survey. To measure the respondents' psychological stress, we asked them about their lifespan prevalence of feelings or experiences of anhedonia (i.e., the inability to feel joy), hopelessness, tension, and brooding over a period of time lasting at least two weeks. What is striking here is that more than 20% of all respondents report having had feelings of anhedonia, hopelessness, or tension that lasted over a period of at least two weeks at least four times in their lives, and 17% of respondents report this for brooding.

When asked whether these feelings are related to experiences and/or observations of discrimination, 72% of the participants answer 'no', 12% 'yes', and 14% 'I don't know'. Here it is already clear in the subjective self-appraisal that experiences or observations of discrimination can relate to own psychological stress in at least some respondents. In the next step, we compared mean psychological stress ratings between participants with and without experienced or observed discrimination (see Table 2) in order to statistically test the objective difference. For this comparison, we formed a scale from the four items assessing psychological stress.¹⁸

¹⁷ We can report this only as a trend: only five respondents say that they have not heard anything good about the counselling services; one third of those who know about counselling services got help from friends or family instead; and one half exchanged information by talking to other persons who had experienced discrimination.

¹⁸ Screening of psychological stress based on the PHQ-4 (Löwe et al. 2010). An explorative factor analysis showed that the items load on a common factor and the internal consistency of the mental stress scale is $\alpha = .86$.

Table 2*Mean Values of Mental Stress Differentiated by Groups*

	Observed discrimination			
	Yes		No	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Anhedonia	3.01	1.49	2.58	1.49
Hopelessness	2.80	1.56	2.35	1.51
Tension	2.94	1.53	2.54	1.50
Brooding	2.50	1.61	2.15	1.47
Total mental stress	2.81	1.31	2.41	1.26
	Experienced discrimination			
	Yes		No	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Anhedonia	3.03	1.51	2.54	1.46
Hopelessness	2.90	1.58	2.24	1.45
Tension	3.02	1.58	2.46	1.43
Brooding	2.58	1.60	2.08	1.47
Total mental stress	2.88	1.31	2.33	1.22

The continuously higher mean values in all subcategories of psychological stress for participants who have observed and experienced discrimination are striking.¹⁹ One-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) reveal significant differences between groups. There are significant differences in the overall reported psychological stress both in the comparison between participants who have and have not observed discrimination²⁰ and between participants who have and have not experienced discrimination.²¹

¹⁹ This was calculated with analyses of variance. While homogeneity of variance was not given, the non-parametric Kruskal–Wallis rank variance analysis and the robust test procedures using Welch and Brown-Forsythe F statistics showed that the mean differences are significant. Therefore, to make full use of the information, the results of the parametric variance analyses are reported throughout.

²⁰ $F(1, 940) = 23.79, p = .000$

²¹ $F(1, 946) = 44.67, p = .000$

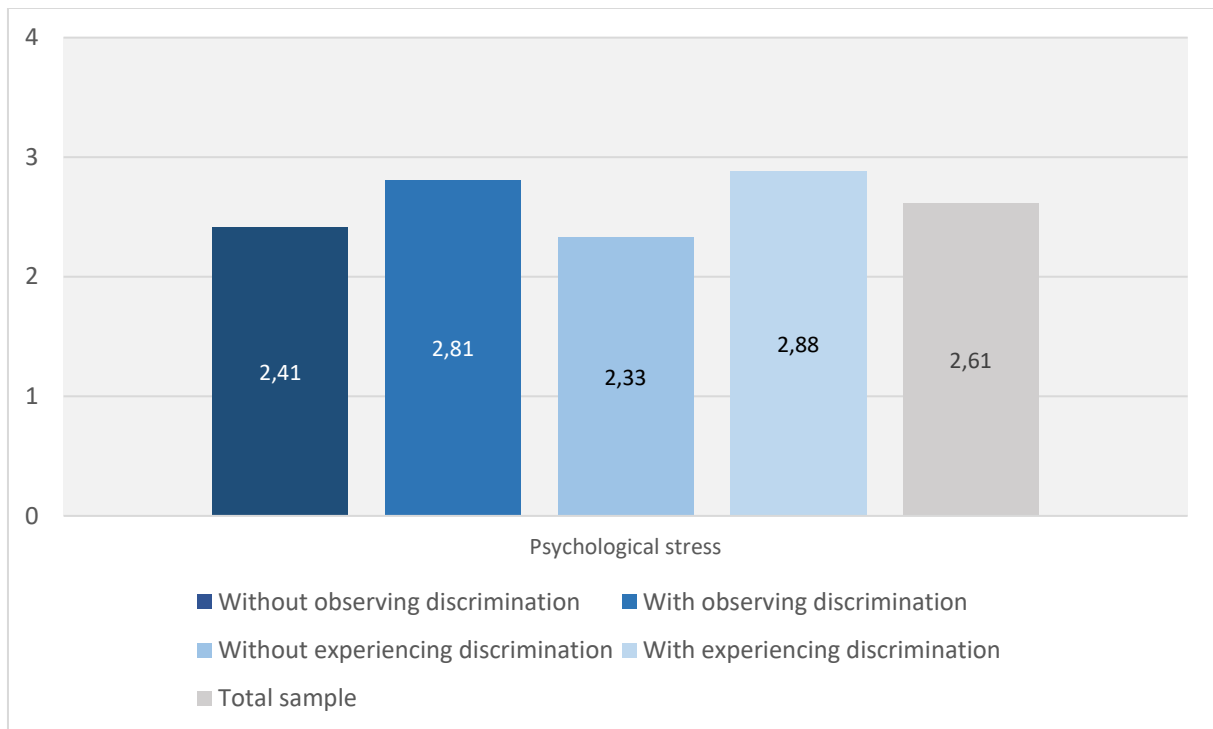


Figure 11. Mean mental stress scores in group comparisons.

These significant differences are also found between respondents with and without experience of discrimination in the psychological stress subcategories for anhedonia,²² hopelessness,²³ tension,²⁴ and brooding.²⁵ Likewise, there are significant differences between respondents with and without discrimination experience in all subcategories of psychological stress.^{26,27,28,29} In summary, results suggest that both witnessing and experiencing discrimination may relate negatively to mental health. Although these results are only correlative and do not allow causal inferences, it is evident that respondents who have experienced or observed discrimination show greater mental distress over their lifespans.

4.5 Need for further support services at the university

The survey also asked participants what additional services they would like to see in order to handle the issue of discrimination better at Bielefeld University. The 212 open-ended answers from respondents reflect a variety of suggestions on how discrimination problems could be better addressed in the university context. Some respondents point out that it is not necessarily more services that are needed, but that **the visibility of and access to existing**

²² $F(1, 945) = 19.65, p = .000$

²³ $F(1, 944) = 20.03, p = .000$

²⁴ $F(1, 945) = 16.28, p = .000$

²⁵ $F(1, 943) = 11.97, p = .001$

²⁶ $F(1, 951) = 25.69, p = .000$

²⁷ $F(1, 950) = 44.58, p = .000$

²⁸ $F(1, 951) = 33.37, p = .000$

²⁹ $F(1, 949) = 24.17, p = .001$

support services need to be improved through, for example, regular advertising online and offline. These wishes are reflected in statements such as:

- *'While not directly an offer of help, more publicity so that offers of help are better known.'*
- *'Much better, transparent, and accessible information about contact persons and procedures.'*
- *'Links on all university websites (e.g., in the footer), twice-yearly information letters on services, office hours, etc. In general, more public relations work for counselling services.'*

Furthermore, there is a call for a general **increase in awareness through workshops or training courses** in order to educate students as well as lecturers and managers, to point out their personal responsibility, and to enable them to deal with discrimination. At the same time, services for those affected themselves are suggested in order to convey **competencies in dealing with experienced discrimination**:

- *'At the university, workshops or more awareness about the topics of sexism, racism, anti-Semitism, and classism are needed for lecturers and students.'*
- *'Raising awareness for lecturers in seminar situations: Often they are not aware that there is inequality or they contribute to it. This includes something like gender-sensitive language, etc.'*
- *'Courses on how to deal with discriminatory situations (recognizing situations, appraising them, reacting appropriately).'*

Many respondents emphasize the need to **create specific contact offices for those affected by discrimination**. Various variants are suggested such as the appointment of ombudspersons within university departments and institutions who can act independently from existing hierarchies, expanding the Central Student Advice and Counselling Service (ZSB), as well as specific further training of employees in existing counselling centres in order to make them more aware of the issue of discrimination. Respondents most frequently express a general wish for the establishment of a concrete, trustworthy counselling and contact centre that functions explicitly as the place to go in cases of experienced discrimination. Some respondents express the wish for a possibility of filing complaints anonymously; others emphasize that such a centre should have the potential power to 'sanction' discriminators as well as counselling the affected persons. For example, respondents write:

- *'Establish ombudspersons on a more decentralized level—that is, for example in the department.'*
- *'Proper counselling centre for experiences of discrimination.'*
- *'More time resources and staff trained in anti-discrimination work at the known counselling centres.'*
- *'Is there a general contact point with an ombudsperson, where you have a direct contact person?'*

- ‘A counselling centre that could serve as the very first point of contact to refer people who feel unfairly treated and discriminated against to the specialized agencies and be able to give initial counselling. Orientation “What options do I have?”’
- ‘Support services that are actually supportive by actually sanctioning the people who discriminate or by changing the discriminatory structures so you don’t just feel like you’re complaining somewhere without anything really happening.’

4.6 Responsibilities and future treatment of discrimination

Who is responsible for the prevention of discrimination? The members of the university had the opportunity to give an answer to this. Around 14% of respondents feel little to no responsibility themselves. However, more than two thirds (65.1%) say they feel at least some responsibility for ensuring that discrimination at Bielefeld University decreases in the future.

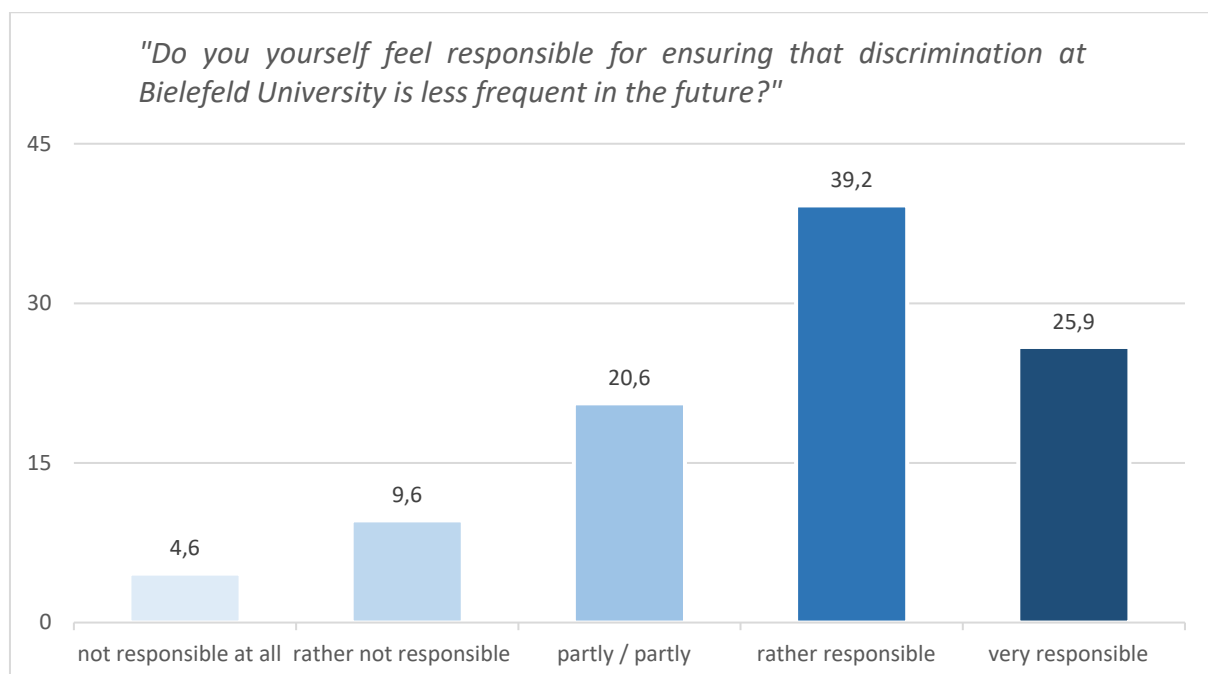


Figure 12: Responsibility for dealing with discrimination (percentage of respondents).

In addition, a structurally anchored responsibility becomes clear from the point of view of the respondents. Responsibility to do something against discrimination is assigned somewhat more to the institution than to individual members of the university. Thus, 93.9% agree rather or very that all levels of the university should be committed to freedom from prejudice and discrimination. The majority of respondents also see the work of the *University without Prejudice* project as relevant, with 84.3% considering the project important and 87.9% thinking that all levels of the university should support a *university without prejudice*. This does not seem to have changed much in recent years. Compared to 2015/16, there is a similarly high level of agreement with the idea of a *university without prejudice* as in 2019/20. With regard to the general feeling of responsibility, there is also only a slight change, but there

is a tendency for slightly more respondents to feel rather or very responsible than four years ago (Berghan et al., 2016, p. 30).

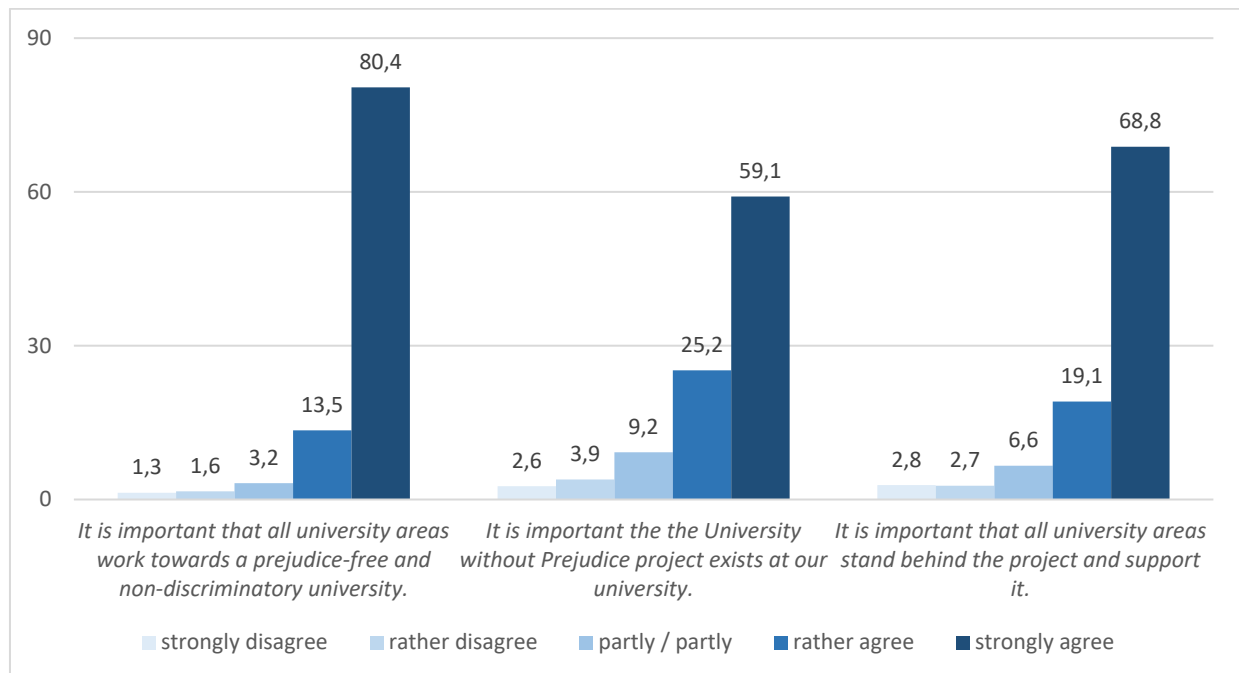


Figure 13. Relevance of university without prejudice (percentage of respondents).

4.7 Open-ended proposals for preventing discrimination at the university

The open-ended question on ways to prevent discrimination was answered by 392 respondents—a comparatively large proportion of all participants. Many of the answers are very detailed. They provide a rich data basis of suggestions and ideas on how discrimination could be prevented at Bielefeld University. These answers support the demands for additional support formulated in section 4.5, but go beyond this.

The most frequently assigned category is the code **sensitization/awareness raising for discrimination**. The answers mainly contain ideas and suggestions to make **discrimination** known as a **university-wide and cross-status problem**. Keywords such as ‘sensitization’ or ‘publicity’ appear again and again. Some answers remain largely unspecific and mention only individual key points, such as in the following:

- ‘Public relations’
- ‘Open discussion of the topic’
- ‘Raise more awareness, sensitize’

Other responses address specific points and make **concrete suggestions** to counter discrimination in a preventive way, as these examples underline:

- *'Sensitization in a range of forms: Gender sensitization of lecturers (role model function for new students), sensitization for dealing with disabled people—educational work: on the topic of migration.'*
- *'Raise the issue more often, if necessary, include evaluations in seminars to raise awareness about the existence of discrimination.'*
- *'Address more discrimination casually in courses so that people who don't inform themselves are made aware.'*
- *'It is good that the university administration is taking a clear position. It should take a much stronger public stance in this direction. I thought the rector's call for a demonstration against right-wing extremism was very good.'*

Measures for better education are mentioned second most frequently in the participants' answers. Specific key points are mentioned even more frequently than in the awareness-raising code just described. The term 'education' alone is mentioned 53 times in the open-ended answers. However, concrete suggestions are also formulated here. A whole range of suggestions are made that are located in the context of better education. Some of the suggestions are **practical ideas that would be easy to integrate into everyday university life**, such as posters and information boards or the publication of testimonials from those affected:

- *'Through posters/information boards similar to emergency routes/emergency numbers that are posted everywhere and can be read at any time, motivate . . . to report experiences of discrimination/to be able to turn to someone.'*
- *'Educate and raise awareness, e.g., publish anonymous testimonials from those affected on the university website.'*

Other proposals rather address **provisions for (self-)reflection** on behaviour or attitudes towards affected groups:

- *'Some people are not aware that their actions discriminate and exclude others. Therefore, more education is needed for all members of the university on discriminatory behaviour towards each other, as well as visible encouragement for victims to speak out.'*
- *'Educational work, e.g., about migration backgrounds, religion, etc., because where there is understanding, discrimination can hardly happen.'*

The category of the **role of lecturers and the university as an institution** can be roughly divided into two main aspects. The first is that **lecturers** should **handle the problem of discrimination more sensitively** and the focus or evaluation of seminars should be broadened to include it, as these examples underline:

- *'Lecturers should regularly point this out.'*

- *'I think that lecturers in particular should be advised to take a clear position in seminars when students make anti-Semitic, racist, or similar comments.'*
- *'Also ask about it [discrimination] in the course evaluations at the end of each semester.'*

On the other hand, the university itself is addressed as an institution that should actively combat discrimination. Here, **structural conditions of the university** are often addressed:

- *'The university is structurally conducive to discrimination because it is so extremely hierarchical and because the people with power (professors, administration) are not held accountable.'*
- *'Expose and address structural issues.'*

The aspect of **university-wide solidarity/social climate at the university** is addressed 54 times in the open-ended responses. Many of the suggestions formulated here relate to **social solidarity, well-being, and social interaction** in everyday university life, as these passages make clear:

- *'Strengthening solidarity: creating a group feeling (togetherness).'*
- *'Promote acceptance and convey a feeling of all participating together.'*
- *'Ensure a generally friendly and open-ended climate at the university.'*

Another essential aspect addressed in this context refers to the courage to intervene when discrimination is observed in everyday life. This **demand for civil courage** is articulated in these examples:

- *'Stronger solidarity and civil courage.'*
- *'Intervene when discrimination is observed.'*
- *'By each individual not looking away but intervening or getting help when he/she observes such a situation.'*

The answers in the context of **measures for people affected by discrimination** can be divided roughly into two categories. On the one hand, there are calls for further training, workshops, or events to make it easier for those affected to deal with experienced discrimination and at the same time to increase awareness among those not affected:

- *'Empowering trainings to respond self-confidently.'*
- *'Offer information events and workshops (possibly also as a regular series of events) every semester.'*
- *'Offer workshops for discussions and exchange of experiences.'*

On the other hand, simplified access to information and counselling services is mentioned in the open-ended responses, as these examples show:

- ‘Counselling for people with a migration background (anti-discrimination office) would be a good idea.’
- ‘Make contact points open/easy to access.’
- ‘Posters on how to contact counselling services.’

Demands for an **institutionalized reporting system and consequences** are also formulated. Some responses call for a central office in which cases of discrimination can be reported and collected anonymously:

- ‘Possibility to give anonymous feedback on experiences of discrimination.’
- ‘There must be a way to report incidents anonymously and factually. Especially when dealing with university administrative staff, it is difficult to complain about discriminatory incidents.’

In addition to a reporting system, there are also calls for harsher **consequences for ‘perpetrators’** and for **those affected to be taken more seriously**, as these examples clearly show:

- ‘Especially discrimination emanating from higher levels should [be] sanctioned more strongly.’
- ‘Clear vote of the university administration against any kind of exclusion—and also clear consequences in cases of non-compliance.’
- ‘The problem seems to be more that many cases of discrimination are seen as trivial offences.’

In addition to the general suggestions, we also asked the study participants about their personal commitment to countering discrimination. Around one half of the respondents (53.3%) state that they have not yet become involved within or outside of the university. Of these, around 14% say they cannot imagine becoming active against discrimination and prejudice themselves. More than half of the respondents (56.9%) show some uncertainty and say they do not know the answer to the question. Only 28.7% of those who have not been involved so far can imagine getting involved themselves.

Table 3

Engagement to Counter Discrimination or Prejudice

	<i>n</i>	% of cases
No	495	53.3
Yes, at the university	176	18.9
Yes, outside the university	358	38.5

Note: *n* = 929 (respondents who clicked at least one of the three categories).

Table 4*Future Engagement to Counter Discrimination or Prejudice*

	<i>n</i>	% of cases
No	69	14.4
Don't know	273	56.9
Yes	138	28.7

Note: *n* = 480 (respondents who previously stated that they were not engaged).

4.8 Hostile argumentation patterns in the open-ended responses

Within the survey, the open-ended response options were not used just to reveal personal experiences of discrimination. Some patterns of argumentation also emerged that can be classified less as equality-sensitive but far more as hostile. In some places, these also make use of new-right-wing arguments. We do not want to give these responses extensive space in the report. On the one hand, in order not to unnecessarily reproduce their content despite their scientific classification, but on the other hand, in particular, because this report wants to let the members of the university affected by discrimination have their say. Nevertheless, these perceptions in the university should also be taken seriously and addressed. For example, there are around 25 participants who perceive equality programmes, diversity promotion initiatives, and shelters for women as discriminatory. In some cases, there are also openly anti-feminist statements. The respondents perceive support programmes or shelters for women as discriminating against men. The fact that shelters always create an accusation and a perpetrator–victim dichotomy can certainly be seen as problematic, but they also point to the reality of minorities and disadvantaged groups that should not be covered up. Instead of criticizing shelters or equality programmes across the board, it would seem much more sensible to work to ensure that they no longer have to exist and that discrimination and barriers are dismantled. After all, the initiatives came into being for reasons that have not yet lost their relevance. This is also shown by the present results.

In addition, some respondents also feel restricted in their freedom of expression or political orientation at the university. The statements suggest that these are more likely to be those respondents who are politically oriented towards the right. A pejorative assessment of previous university policy and, in particular, a generalization of university groups as left-wing or extreme left-wing is evident. Among other things, the university is generalized as lacking political neutrality. In some cases, this is also accompanied by the implicit insinuation of an opinion dictatorship, as can be found in new-right-wing argumentation (Häusler & Küpper, 2019). To a lesser extent, there is also an acceptance of violence to combat anti-fascist policies in the university.

5. Appraisal and new impulses: A conclusion after seven years 'without prejudice'

'Categorically underestimated and excluded'—we quote one of the numerous answers to the question about personally perceived discrimination in the title of this report. The results of the systematic quantitative and qualitative empirical analysis show that this is exactly what happens. Devaluation, exclusion, and disadvantaging are part of everyday university life. Women's professional competencies are underestimated; students and staff are devalued on the basis of their social background; they are marginalized, or threatened and attacked directly because of an appearance that is marked as foreign. And the hierarchical structures and dependencies in these cases not infrequently convey feelings of powerlessness—to name just a few examples. Overall, members of Bielefeld University report multiple forms of discrimination on all levels of the university. This can be seen in the interactions of individual staff members and students as well as in institutional processes and structures.

For the second time, members of *University without Prejudice* working group present a study on the experience of discrimination at Bielefeld University. As in the first survey, it shows that around half of the members of the university surveyed have experienced discrimination themselves. This is perhaps the most central finding of the present report. In a publication on systematic protection against discrimination at universities, the Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency (ADS) comments that this finding in 2016 was strikingly high (Antidiskriminierungsstelle des Bundes, 2020, p. 9). Nonetheless, in our estimation, the current research situation or the available data can hardly be used to deduce whether Bielefeld University actually has a greater problem here than other universities and institutions. There is a lack of representative quantitative comparative studies on the experience of discrimination at universities in Germany. Reporting on discrimination also depends on the way in which discrimination is recorded, how aware the members of an institution are about discrimination, and whether and to what extent there is any pronounced awareness of the problem of unequal treatment. Whether certain situations are perceived and problematized as unequal treatment in the first place depends on the sensitivity to discrimination.

However, this central finding alone should clarify the need for action. Discrimination needs to be dealt with systematically, professionally, and permanently—also in a university. Both the *University without Prejudice* working group and the university itself, along with many other initiatives and groups within the university have been trying to do this for years—as self-organized working groups and initiatives working mostly on a voluntary basis. Particular mention should be given here to the work of the AStA. This important commitment requires in-depth support. The university itself has positioned itself as standing for a discrimination-free university with the campaign *Uni ohne Vorurteile (University without Prejudice)* that has been in place since 2013 along with the current *diversity policy*. Therefore, we find it all the more thought-provoking that at the end of the present analysis, we have to draw practically

the same conclusions as we did around four years ago (cf. Berghan et al., 2016). This is because the results also show that hardly anything has changed in the everyday experiences in recent years.

Recognition of discrimination

Not every member of the university is subject to discrimination. This is all the more reason for all members of the university to generally recognize that discrimination is taking place. And in particular, there is a need to listen to those affected when they report it and to take them seriously. Against the background that Bielefeld University is mostly perceived as a protective space, this challenge is even greater. The subjective perception of a relatively low incidence does not mean that discrimination is not a problem at the university. It is far more the case that Bielefeld University represents only a section of a society in which discrimination continues to be part of everyday life for many people. This is also shown by the findings. Therefore, it seems important to create a culture of togetherness that actively counteracts the hierarchies and dependencies reported by the respondents and does not play down discrimination as a slip-up (or absolute exception) perpetrated by only a few, but also takes it seriously in its institutional manifestations.

Raising awareness of discrimination

Results show that the majority of respondents are sensitive to discrimination. However, structural and institutional discrimination is far less frequently perceived as such. In addition to recognizing discrimination, it is also directly relevant for members of the university to be aware of discrimination. This must be promoted on all levels of the university. In addition to a basis for identifying it (*we want to be a university without discrimination, without prejudice*), this includes a willingness not only to criticize the discrimination of others, but also to reflect on where discrimination occurs in one's own surroundings, how discrimination comes from each and every person, and which colleagues, staff, and fellow students are in need of support that has not been forthcoming so far.

Institutionalization against discrimination

Bielefeld University positions itself as being openly and directly against discrimination. That is important and right. However, a comprehensive institutionalization of professional anti-discrimination work is also central. This includes establishing and promoting research into discrimination—for example, by supporting research proposals or carrying out regular monitoring within the institution. In addition, the widespread lack of knowledge about and use of support services continues to point to the urgent need to establish a comprehensive anti-discrimination office within the university. This is also particularly relevant, because experiences of discrimination can only be reported confidently in an independent and professional counselling centre—in which people do not need to fear having to face disadvantages or sanctions for pointing out grievances. Guidelines and recommendations for dealing with discrimination and regular workshops against discrimination at the university, which are accessible to all members of the university, also seem to be a meaningful and

conceivable approach. Overall, protection against discrimination can be implemented only through concrete action. And the results show that there are enough ideas from members of the university. However, responsible and reflective implementation is needed.

Bielefeld University has set itself the ideal of being a *university without prejudice*—in other words, a university that does not discriminate. However, this is not a state, but a process proceeding along a long path. A conclusion after seven years ‘without prejudice’? We still have to become even more true to our ideal.

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