



AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON THE LGBT COMMUNITY OF KOLKATA

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Abstract:

The emergence of LGBT activism is seen in terms of the emergence of new sexual orientation and identities which were earlier not so much highlighted due to the traditionalistic and rigid attitude of the heterosexual norms and values. Though in western countries, the debate and discussion regarding the issue to homosexuality was started sometime early, but there is a long way left for India. Very recently, due to the emergence of certain active NGOs, the spread of LGBT movement was noticed in the country. The purpose of the present paper was to highlight the socio-economic conditions of the homosexuals (Gay and Lesbians) in Kolkata and their perception about the issue of homosexuality. The researcher deliberately restricted her study among male and female homosexuals' only keeping time and place constraint in mind. Role of Professional social work practice was also discussed while concluding the study findings.

Key Words: Adjustment level of the respondents, Homosexuality, Professional social work, Positive roles of NGOs, Section 377.

Homosexuality is mostly a taboo subject in [Indian](#) civil society and for the [government](#). [Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code](#) makes sex with persons of the same gender punishable by law. On 2 July 2009, in [Naz Foundation v. Govt. of NCT of Delhi](#), the [Delhi High Court](#) held that provision to be unconstitutional with respect to sex between consenting adults, but the [Supreme Court of India](#) overturned that ruling on 11 December 2013, stating that the court was instead deferring to Indian legislators to provide the sought-after clarity. On 2 February 2016, however, the Supreme Court agreed to reconsider its judgment, stating it would refer petitions to abolish Section 377 to a five-member constitutional bench, which would conduct a comprehensive hearing of the issue.



There are no official demographics for the LGBT population in India, but the government of India submitted figures to the [Supreme Court](#) in 2012, according to which, there were about 2.5 million gay people recorded in India. These figures are only based on those individuals who have self declared to the Ministry of Health. There may be much higher statistics for individuals who have concealed their identity, since a number of homosexual Indians are living in the closet due to fear of discrimination.

There are many websites in India which cater to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender communities and many people are registered and actively communicate, interact, and counsel each other through these sites. According to a popular gay dating website, which has about 1.8 million men registered from around the world, India has about 140,000 individual males registered, a figure more than Western countries like the USA (46,645) and the UK (41,021) and ranks 3rd on the list of people registered from a country; nearly 80% of them are in the 15-30 age range with the highest numbers registered in states of Maharashtra (25,564), Tamil Nadu (16,380), Karnataka (14,763) and Delhi (13,441), while cities with the highest numbers are New Delhi (13,391), Mumbai (11,001), Hyderabad (10,273) and Bangalore (8,000).

An important question has been arose, though, is if homosexuality constitutes pathological behavior. Is it an illness? Gay rights groups continually assert that homosexuals are as “normal” as heterosexuals, that homosexuality is not an illness or psychological disorder. Peri Jude Radecic, a member of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF), asserted on the ABC news show *Nightline*: “Homosexuality is not an illness; it is not something that needs to be cured. We are normal, natural and healthy people.” 69% said they (LGBT people) believed ‘homosexuality is usually a pathological adaptation, as opposed to a normal variation,’ 18% disagreed and 13% were uncertain. Similarly, sizable majorities said that homosexuals are generally less happy than heterosexuals (73%) and less capable of mature, loving relationships (60%). A total of 70% said that homosexuals’ problems have more to do with their own inner conflicts than with stigmatization by society at large. Nonetheless; it is a misconception to think that homosexuals are born gay, but it has been seen that homosexuality arises from various environmental factor; homosexuality’s root causes are psychological, not biological. Most homosexuals believe that they were born that way



and had no choice (conscious or subliminal) in the matter. Homosexuality is not inherited; negative early childhood experiences are the one common factor behind it. Homosexuals are made because homosexuality is a *learned* response to early painful experiences.

Statement of the problem:

Public discussion of homosexuality in India has been inhibited by the fact that sexuality in any form is rarely discussed openly and another fact is that the LGBT group is challenging the conventional nature of sexuality, i.e. man to women dichotomy. In recent years, however, attitudes towards homosexuality have shifted slightly. In particular, there have been more depictions and discussions of homosexuality in the Indian news media and in [Bollywood](#). Several organisations, including the [Naz Foundation \(India\) Trust](#), the [National AIDS Control Organisation](#), [Law Commission of India](#), [Union Health Ministry](#), [National Human Rights Commission of India](#) and the [Planning Commission](#) of India have expressed support for decriminalising [homosexuality](#) in India, and pushed for tolerance and social equality for [lesbian](#), gay, [bisexual](#), and [transgender](#) people. India is among countries with a social element of a [third gender](#). But mental, physical, emotional and [economic violence](#) against LGBT community in India prevails. Lacking support from family and society aggravates the unstable situation of them. Most of the people of our traditional Indian families are annoyed and hate to discuss the issue of homosexuality.

The researcher will concise her study by restricting the type of respondents. LGBT is a huge diversified unit of population, so for the sake of the precise analysis, only male and female homosexuals (i.e. gay for males and lesbians for females).

Objectives of the study:

- To chalk out the socio-economic status of the respondents
- To know the level of adjustment of the LGBT people within the society.
- To study the perception of the LGBT people about homosexuality.
- To notice the awareness level of them about HIV/AIDS.

Methodology:



As the actual size of the universe is unknown, this particular study is based on the total number of 'Queer' or 'Sexual Minority', who has come forward and participated in various "Pride March" and associated with various NGOs, who work with "Gender Rights" or 'Equality'. The researcher has chosen 35 numbers of respondents but the study findings was restricted to gay and lesbian people only.

The areas chosen are as follows: **South Kolkata, South city mall, Dhakuria lake, Nandan in Rabindra Sadan, Academy of Fine Arts, Rabindra Sarobar, Madox Square (during Durga Puja), Southern Avenue** etc places at Kolkata and certain areas of Santiketan at Birbhum. The researcher also took help from two reputed NGOs working for the rights of LGBT population. They are THE PRATYAY GENDER TRUST AND BIRBHUM SAMPORKO.

Due to inadequate number of respondents, the researcher used Snowball sampling method for selecting required number of sample from the universe of the study. The above mentioned NGOs also helped the researcher a lot during data collection.

Interview method was adopted to collect relevant information from the respondents. Very precise semi-structured interview schedule consisting of purposeful questions are administered. Apart from interviewing method, observation method is used for observing attitudes and behavioral pattern of the respondents while data collection was resumed through interviewing process.

Data Analysis: Distribution of Respondent by Age:

AGE GROUPS (IN YEARS)	RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE (%)
Up to 20	5	14.3
21-30	13	37.1
31-40	9	25.7
41-50	5	14.3
51 Above	3	08.6
TOTAL	35	100



Levels of education of the respondents:

LEVELS OF EDUCATION	RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE (%)
Illiterate	5	14.3
Primary	3	08.6
Secondary	9	25.7
Higher Secondary	7	20.0
Graduation & Above	11	31.4
TOTAL	35	100

Marital status:

MARITAL STATUS	RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE (%)
Married	8	22.9
Un-married	21	60.0
Divorced	4	11.4
Separated	2	05.7
TOTAL	35	100

Home adjustment level of the respondents:

HOME ADJUSTMENT LEVEL	RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE (%)
Good	5	14.3
Average	21	60.0
Un-satisfactory	9	25.7
TOTAL	35	100



Adjustment level of the respondents at work place:

ADJUSTMENT LEVEL IN WORK PLACES	RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE (%)
Good	4	11.4
Average	8	22.9
Un-satisfactory	23	65.7
TOTAL	35	100

Adjustment level of the respondents in Society:

ADJUSTMENT LEVEL IN SOCIETY	RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE (%)
Good	1	02.8
Average	3	08.6
Un-satisfactory	31	88.6
TOTAL	35	100

Perception of the LGBT population about homosexual behavior:

a. Is Homosexuals 'born' or 'made'?

HOMOSEXUAL 'Born' or 'Made'	RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE (%)
Born	12	34.3
Made	17	48.6
Both the above	6	17.1
TOTAL	35	100

b. Is Homosexual behavior is a mental disorder?

HOMOSEXUAL A MENTAL DISORDER	RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE (%)
Yes	2	05.7
No	29	82.9
May be	4	11.4
TOTAL	35	100



c. Is being Gay or Lesbian “natural”?

IS BEING GAY AND LESBIAN NATURAL	RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE (%)
Yes	31	88.6
No	1	02.8
May be	3	08.6
TOTAL	35	100

d. Is the spread of HIV/AIDS is more among Homosexuals?

HOMOSEXUAL SPREAD HIV/AIDS	RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE (%)
Yes	33	94.3
No	2	05.7
TOTAL	35	100

Findings and discussions:

It is being observed that respondents are from different socio-economic background like different age groups but mostly they are youth section which signifies the fact that young people are showing more proneness towards homosexuality (i.e. 51.4%). Apart from several age group populations, most of the respondents are educated population and unmarried. The respondents also said that their home adjustment level was average but their adjustment level in the work place and in the broader society was very poor (65.7% and 88.6% respectively).

When asked about their perception, the respondents said they are homosexuals by birth so they opted to change their attitude slowly from heterosexual to homosexuals (82.9%). They also denied the fact that they are suffering from any mental problem. (82.9%). They stick on their opinion that homosexuals are having normal behavior. They also asserted that it is neither a physical nor a mental problem; else they are of the opinion that it is quite natural of having homosexual behavior (88.6%), but they also opined that homosexuals spreads HIV/AIDS more in comparison to straight people (94.3%).



During this exploratory study it has been observed that most of the LGBT people do not get much care from their family members because still they are not accepted as human being with a normal trait, because they cannot deny the role of social norms and values. It has also been observed that LGBT peoples are much more deprived from the care and affection from their (homosexual people) parents by going against social norms and values. Their (LGBT people) parents forces themselves as behave like “normal” human being.

Limitations of the study:

In this research work has several limitations. This study was primarily limited by its small sample size. An earlier start in data collection would have increased the time needed to survey more respondents. More contact with target sample may have increase participation of the respondents. A larger sample with more diversity would have benefited the result of this exploratory study.

The use of a small sample size in a study decreases the statistical power of the research design to detect group differences in the larger population from which the samples were drawn. This means that significant group differences that exist in the larger population are likely not to be detected by studies with small sample sizes.

Sampling bias is one of the common problems occurring when using “Snowball” sampling method because in this sampling method, the researcher begins the research with the few respondents who are known and available him.

In this exploratory study, some respondents were unwilling to provide the answer of the interview schedule because most of them thought that their problems will be used in a bad way. The hidden reason of unwillingness of providing of information, is most of the respondents are engaged in some sexual relationship which is a way of their earnings.

Conclusion and suggestions for future action:

The emergence of LGBT activism is seen in terms of the emergence of new sexual identities which were earlier suppressed by the heterosexual social norms and values and ‘straight’ legal frameworks. Explosion of mass media and trans-cultural contacts have led to the spread of LGBT activism in the country, though it has a long way to go. The legal framework of Section 377 of IPC looms large on the LGBT movement.



Since 2000, the public sphere has been captured by the LGBT community through gay pride walks across the country. These walks attest to the fact that, in India, the LGBT community is slowly and steadily gaining momentum and strength. In this context, it has been argued,

“The current landscape of LG activism in India therefore reveals both challenges and opportunities. While there is evidence that gays and lesbians are finding increasing visibility and support, there are major threats, mainly from religious right-wing groups and a continued widespread social marginalization and stigmatization of non-normative sexual identities.”

Earlier the State had not taken the LGBT activism in a positive and supportive manner; rather, more often it has taken recourse to archaic laws and brutal police force so as to threaten and oppress the LGBT community. The harassment and oppression of this community by the state as well as its marginalization by the society has often led to tragic incidents of attempted suicides by lesbians.

It was only due to sustained initiatives taken by the Naz Foundation (Trust) India and others that the judgments regarding Section 377 of IPC to be ‘read down’ was pronounced on 2nd July, 2009, which however, was quashed by the Supreme Court on 11th December, 2013. The former was a historic decision which gave wider space for LGBT activism. This decision of the Apex Court in this regard has left the LGBT community once again at the margins of the society, both socially as well as legally with limited rights and entitlements.

Very recently on 1st July, 2016 in a local Newspaper, the apex Court has categorically mentioned about the legal sanctity of “third gender” reservation for the Eunuch and the converted people in the verdict given by it. But the Gay and Lesbians will not enjoy the fruits of this verdict. It is clearly stated by the Supreme Court of India.

These measures have created a climate that is more supportive of LGBT people in our country than any other time in history.

All the same, in India, the LGBT activism has come a long way. The researcher also found out that during literature survey, most of the documents are available in Western countries, whereas India is having very less first hand data source.

Providing economic stability and a daily environment free from harassment and discrimination for transgender people needs to become the next priority for the LGBT rights



movement. Building a culture that celebrates transgender people through enforceable work-place protections via ENDA and social work advocacy is a beginning step. With social work's historical roots focused on a thick version of social justice, social workers should be the primary players in the 21st century that will advocate for these critical protections for transgender people

As a social worker, below are several, while not inclusive, suggestions for challenging heterosexist cultures in our agencies:

Confront heterosexist agency policies:

For example, in an agency providing family therapy, the term “family” should be expanded to include significant others, including friends, intimate partners, and other informal forms of support.

Advocate for LGBT clients:

Agencies wishing to support an atmosphere of inclusiveness may choose to make formal statements advocating for LGBT clients, who could include newspaper letters to the editor, or sending formal letters to policymakers considering LGBT interest legislation, such as constitutional amendments defining marriage as the union between one man and one woman.

Use gender-free language:

If your agency uses assessment tools that are heterosexist in nature, advocate for gender-neutral language. Consider using the term “spouse” or “partner” to replace “husband” or “wife,” regardless of the client’s sexual orientation. You may choose to add “transgender” or an open blank to your traditional male/female gender fields, as well as add a sexual orientation field. Even more, assessment tools should refrain from using the term “marital status,” with preference for “relationship status,” which would include single, married, divorce, partnered, and perhaps an open blank.

Display LGBT inclusive literature in the lobby.

The agency may consider subscribing to LGBT inclusive magazine. Further, the agency could display a small rainbow flag, which is a symbol of LGBT pride and would be an outward display of respect for the LGBT reality.



Keep an open mind.

When speaking to your clients, remember to keep an open mind. Recognize that your LGBT clients may be assessing whether or not you're a "safe" party. As always, recognize that your client's reality may be very different from your own.

Educate yourself.

There are many professional books and journals that address LGBT content, available at your local bookseller or library.

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- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homosexuality_in_India