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Original Research Article

Assessment of Medical Students' Perspective towards LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, And Transgender) Community

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Abstract

Background: The LGBT community is at increased risk of experiencing hostile environments at home and in wider society, being subjected to direct and indirect discrimination, still fighting for equal rights and acceptance in the society. The present study was planned to assess the perspective of medical students towards LGBT people. **Material and Method:** A cross-sectional online questionnaire based study was carried out in medical students. The data analysis was done for number and percentage. **Result:** 92.6% students were aware about the LGBT community, 46.8% felt that they were educated enough about LGBT, 86.2% supported the fact of same sex marriage, 60.1% students were aware about recent judgment regarding Section 377 IPC by the Supreme Court of India. Majority participants (90.1%) were in support to incorporate the LGBT and their related issues in detail in medical curriculum. **Conclusion:** Overall medical students' perspective towards LGBT community is encouraging. LGBT issues can be incorporated in the curriculum. This could help to reduce practicing doctors' prejudice faced by LGBT patients. It further helps to improve approach and the quality of health care offered to such patients.

1. Introduction

The LGBT community (also known as the LGBTQ+ community) is a loosely defined group of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender. People of this community are fighting for equal rights and acceptance in the society. Although LGBT represents only a small proportion of the total youth population, they are at increased risk, compared to heterosexual youth, of experiencing hostile environments at home and in wider society, being subjected to direct and indirect discrimination, harassment, disadvantage and inequality. Trans people, especially, face a lot of difficulty in finding acceptance; they in particular are vulnerable to social isolation in the face of

rejection by family and other ecological supports. Reasons for their exclusion include geographic distance, unawareness of the subculture's existence, fear of social stigma, or personal preference to remain unidentified with sexuality- or gender-based subcultures or communities.¹⁻³

We all know that there is no freedom for choosing one's sexual orientation though the attitude of Indians towards homosexuality is can be hurtful. It is seen as a sin to be a LGBT. India has been a secular country with so many religious faiths but none with the acceptance to LGBT. Protesters slander them with picket signs reading anti-national, anti-social, unnatural, un-cultural, etc.³⁻⁵

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Today, Indian youths accept homosexuality and queer identities. But, the acceptability within the boundaries of homes and schools, families are still remaining a struggle for LGBT people. If sexual and gender minority youth feel accepted and valued as individuals, there is an increased likelihood to disclose non-heteronormative status to society and being able to openly express LGBT orientation. The scenario exists from decades but now with world modernizing and annulment of section 377 IPC, the perspectives might be changed. So, for the acceptance and for good times of LGBT people the views of the youths are necessary. Last year in India, Supreme Court legalized same sex marriage which may be a milestone in the history of LGBT community and may increase their acceptance in mainstream society and would change the perception of society towards LGBT.⁶

As this may affect patient care, it is important to understand the medical students' perspective towards LGBT community. Till date, very few studies of this kind have been carried out in this region. Hence, the present study was planned to assess the perspective of medical students towards LGBT people.

2. Material and Methodology:

2.1 Study Type: It is a cross-sectional study of descriptive nature.

2.2 Study Design: After obtaining permission from Institutional Ethics Committee, a questionnaire-based study was carried out to assess the perspective of medical students towards LGBT community.

2.3 Study Population: The study was carried out from June 2021 to July 2021 at NKP Salve Institute of Medical Sciences and Research Centre and Lata Mangeshkar Hospital, Nagpur among medical students of different batches selected by universal sampling method. The validated questionnaire was used to analyze the perspective of medical students towards LGBT community.

2.4 Study Plan: First, the purpose of the study was explained to the students and consent was sought. After obtaining consent, the questionnaires were distributed among students through Google form. Questions were graded on a scale from 1 to 5 according to the Likert scale (1-strongly disagree, 2-disagree, 3-not sure, 4-agree and 5-strongly agree). Scores 1 and 2 were put together to show disagreement, scores 4 and 5 were put together for agreement and score 3 showed that student was uncertain of statements' response.

2.5 Inclusion Criteria: The students who consented to participate were included.

2.6 Exclusion Criteria: The students who did not consent to participate were excluded.

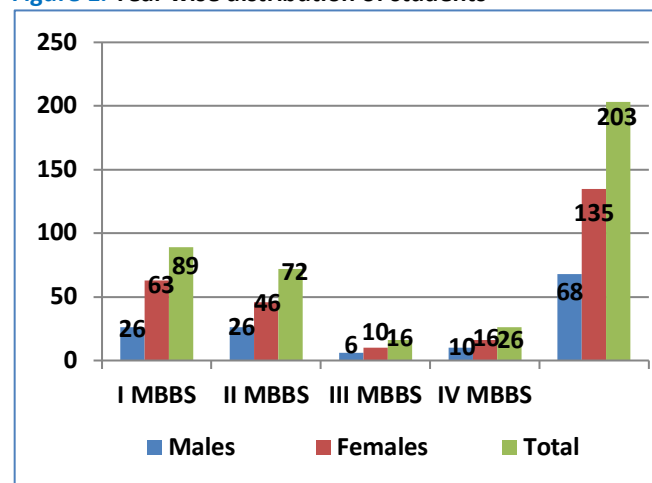
2.7 Data Collection: Link was shared with students via WhatsApp and email. The data was collected by using questionnaire through Google form.

2.8 Study Analysis: The online data was tabulated and analysed for number and percentage.

3. Results:

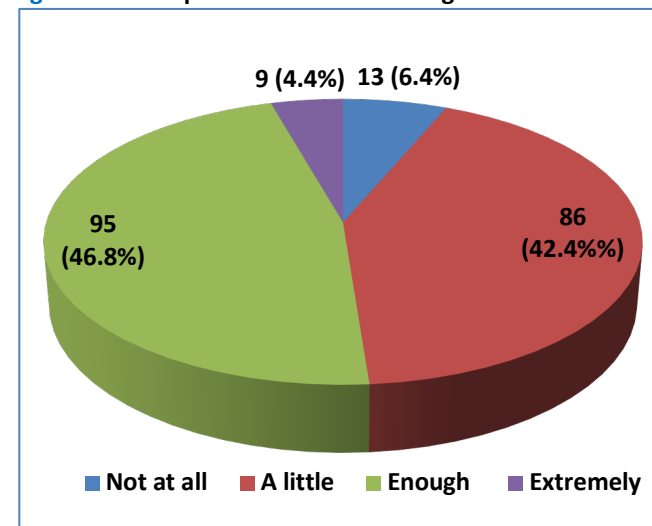
The questionnaire was sent to all medical students via Google form. Out of which, 203 students [Males = 68 (33.5%) and Females = 135 (66.5%)] consented to be the part of study (Fig. 1).

Figure 1: Year wise distribution of students



We observed that 188 (92.6%) students were aware about the LGBT community and 95 (46.8%) felt that they were educated enough about LGBT (Fig. 2).

Figure 2: Participants' level of knowledge about LGBT



The questions were graded on a scale from 1 to 5 according to the Likert scale (1-strongly disagree, 2-disagree, 3-not sure, 4-agree and 5-strongly agree). Scores 1 and 2 were put together to show disagreement, scores 4 and 5 were put together for

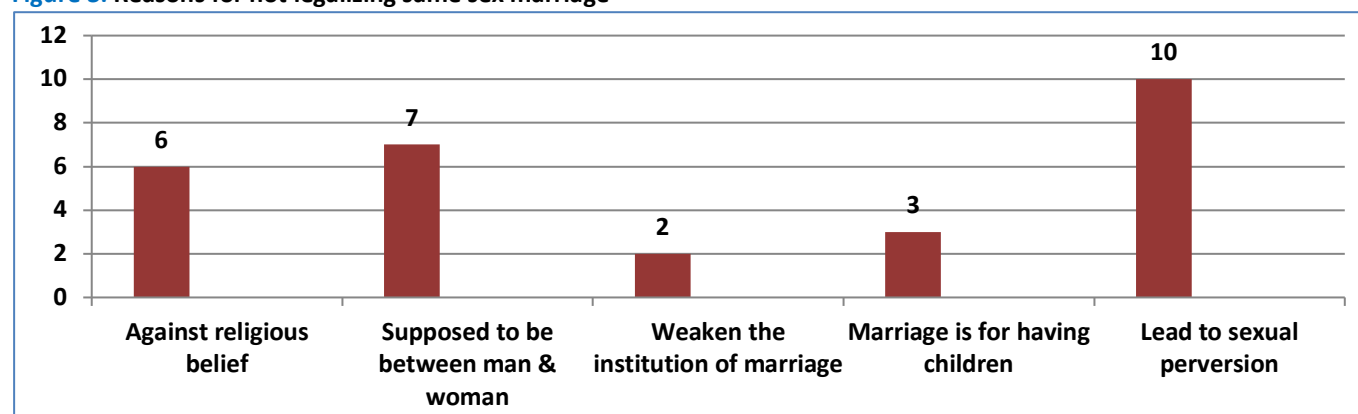
agreement and score 3 showed that student was uncertain of statements' response (Table 1). When inquired whether same sex marriage should be

legalized in India or not, 175 (86.2%) supported the fact of same sex marriage, however 28 (13.8%) were not of same opinion and the reasons are listed in Fig. 3.

Table 1: Perception of students regarding LGBT.

Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly agree
Sexual orientation is a choice or something you are born with	08 (3.9%)	16 (7.8%)	32 (15.7%)	60(29.5%)	87(42.8%)
Being LGBT is a psychological disorder	128(63.1%)	38(18.7%)	22(10.8%)	13(6.4%)	02(0.9%)
LGBT community has same rights and liberties like other citizens	05(2.4%)	26(12.8%)	19(9.3%)	36(17.7%)	117 (57.6%)
LGBT citizens are discriminated in the society	08(3.9%)	01(0.4%)	16(7.8%)	98(48.2%)	80(39.4%)
LGBT relationship morally / ethically wrong	122(60.1%)	45(22.1%)	23(11.3%)	08(3.9%)	05(2.4%)
LGBT people are unnatural	126(62.1%)	44(21.6%)	23(11.3%)	07(3.4%)	03(1.4%)
LGBT people are mentally sick or never grew up to be mature heterosexual men and women	136(66.9%)	33(16.2%)	23(11.3%)	07(3.4%)	04(1.9%)
LGBT people are sexual and gender perverts	123(60.5%)	35(17.2%)	30(14.7%)	10(4.9%)	05(2.4%)
LGBT people should have right to marry whomever they want	04(1.9%)	01(0.4%)	13(6.4%)	34(16.7%)	151 (74.3%)
LGBT is a result of too much freedom in a country that is losing traditional family values	126(62.1%)	41(20.1%)	23(11.3%)	10(4.9%)	03(1.4%)
Teaching about LGBT is a positive light	07(3.4%)	04(1.9%)	13(6.4%)	57(28.1%)	122 (60.1%)
Decision of supreme court for LGBT is right	08(3.9%)	11(5.4%)	56(27.5%)	57(28.1%)	71(34.9%)

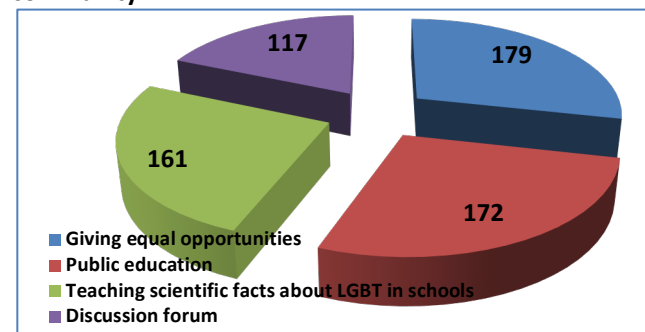
Figure 3: Reasons for not legalizing same sex marriage



When asked about the level of acceptance of friend would change towards the person if that person opens to them about the sexuality as LGBT, 152 (74.8%) students opined that their behavior would change towards the person. 122 (60.1%) students were aware about Section 377 IPC and recent judgment regarding it by the Supreme Court of India. Majority of the participants were of opinion that by certain ways like giving them equal opportunities, public education, teaching scientific facts about LGBT in schools, arranging various discussion forums, the problem of discrimination against LGBT community can be curtailed (Fig. 4). Furthermore majority 183 (90.1%)

were in support to incorporate the LGBT and their related issues in detail in medical curriculum.

Fig. 4: Ways to curtail discrimination against LGBT community



4. Discussion:

There are very few studies that have systematically studied the issues relating to LGBT persons, which is why this study of medical students' perspectives toward the LGBT population was undertaken. In our research, we observed a female preponderance, which is similar with findings of Vijayalakshmi V et al⁷ and Nagrale N et al⁸, however a study by Banwari G et al⁹ observed male preponderance. 92.6 % were aware of the LGBT community.

Majority of the participants of the current study disagreed the fact that being LGBT is a psychological disorder which is in accordance with the findings of Nagrale N et al⁸. Maximum students believed that the LGBT people are being discriminated in the society. In the earlier study⁷, all the students believed that the homosexuals are being discriminated in our society. Our results followed a similar pattern as by a study by Nama N et al¹⁰ in which the majority of students (79.6%) believed LGBT individuals are born this way in regards to sexual orientation. Previous studies^{7, 11} showed that about 56.6% participants think that if someone opens up to them about his/her sexuality their behavior will change towards that person which is in agreement with our findings, but in a study by Nagrale N et al⁸ most of the students were acceptable to the LGBT person as a friend.

When questioned whether same sex marriage should be legalized in India or not, 86.2% supported the fact of same sex marriage and the participants who were against it thought that it will lead to sexual perversions such as polygamy, bestiality, pedophilia. In a study by Poushter J et al¹², about 51.5% people agreed on same-sex marriage and same sex marriages were unacceptable to 41.5% students in a study by Nagrale N et al⁸. 60.1% students were aware about the recent judgment regarding Section 377 IPC by the Supreme Court of India which is similar with findings by Nagrale N et al⁸.

Apart from the other social matters, LGBT is an undermined topic for discussion and majority of the respondents accounting for it feel the necessity of having a debate on this matter. To curtail the discrimination against LGBT community few measures like giving them equal opportunities, public education, teaching scientific facts about LGBT in schools, incorporation in medical education, arranging various discussion forums / platforms were suggested by the participants. Similar suggestions were also noted by

previous researcher⁸. Also, in a study carried out in Chennai, 19.3% respondents believed that homosexuality is an important topic for discussion⁷.

To improve doctors' knowledge and awareness of issues related to homosexuality, it is necessary to include alternate sexuality education in medical education programme. As a result, their professionalism may improve, allowing them to provide better health care to their LGBT patients with minimal or no discrimination.¹³ Earlier researches show that practicing physicians and medical students alike have expressed the need to include such training at undergraduate and postgraduate levels¹⁴⁻¹⁶ Medical curricula in Canada and the United States were found to devote little time to impart formal training about LGBT related topics to in-the-making clinicians.¹⁷⁻¹⁸ Regarding incorporation of LGBT in the medical curriculum, most of the participants were in favour. Also, in a study by Lee SR et al¹⁹, majority of the participants demonstrated that including lectures on transgenderism in medical school curricula would have a positive impact on students' attitudes. Pandey RA et al²⁰, Wahlen R et al²¹ had also recommended in their study to include sexuality, gender issues and LGBT patients' health needs in the medical curriculum to spread awareness regarding LGBT issues is the positive first step to combat negative attitude and reduce prejudice faced by LGBT patients.

5. Conclusion:

The overall perception of medical students towards LGBT community is encouraging. LGBT issues can be incorporated in the curriculum. This could help to reduce practicing doctors' prejudice faced by LGBT patients.

It further helps to improve approach and the quality of health care offered to such patients. Clinical vignettes, seminars, workshops, or testimonials that generate an emotional response from students may be more beneficial in fostering change in attitudes, judgments, and knowledge.

6. Implications:

The study is useful as we get to know the views of medical students about LGBT community. This will definitely help us to spread awareness accordingly among them to change the times for LGBT community. This will help discrimination towards this community to come down and to develop a positive and rational attitude towards them which will be of great help in patient care and thus impact their future clinical practice.

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Ethical Clearance: Yes.

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