



HOMOPHOBIA AMONG YOUTH: A STUDY OF LOVELY PROFESSIONAL UNIVERSITY

Anshu Kumari^{1*}, Farooja Jan², Munazah Mutharah³, Muskaan⁴, Vaibhavi⁵, Dr. Ganesh Digal⁶

Abstract

Homophobia is the prejudice against individuals who are attracted to same-sex people and is a broad term that refers to a variety of unfavorable attitudes and sentiments towards homosexuality or those who are seen or recognized as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. Homophobia can be seen in negative and aggressive actions like violence and bias against non-heterosexual sexual orientations.

Objective: The aim of this study is to know how youth perceive homosexuals, what their attitude is towards them, and how supportive they are towards this section of society. The survey has been conducted to ascertain what Indian youngsters take on homophobia and to measure the prevalence of homophobia in the youth, particularly in college-going students. This study also focuses on the various negative beliefs that youth might endure.

Method: A survey method was employed to collect the data and the participants are young students between the age of 18 to 26. The primary data for this survey has been taken from the research conducted, while the secondary data provided is taken from several books and other newspaper articles related to this survey.

Findings: The study concludes that there is a significant homophobic population under this age group. These results collectively imply that there are still certain myths about homosexuality that persist today, such as the idea that gays are perverts or that homosexuality is a mental disorder. We can assume that homophobia exists among young people.

Keywords: Homophobia, Behavioral attitude, Prejudice, Discrimination, Youth

^{1*,2,3,4,5} Student School of Humanities Lovely Professional University

⁶ Assistant Professor, School of Humanities Lovely Professional University

***Corresponding Author:** Anshu Kumari

*Student School of Humanities Lovely Professional University

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Introduction

Homophobia is the “dread of being in close quarters with homosexuals” and is an “irrational condemnation of homosexuals” (Herek, 1976). The term is often used to describe aversive or hostile reactions towards homosexual people. It is characterized as, a certain set of attitudes that are rigid and unidirectional in nature and are the by-products of irrational fears (Meyer, I. H., & Dean, L., 1998). Differences among groups have been prevalent since long ago during the times of primitive age and civilization. Usually, the largest and the dominant groups tend to impose their conceptions and arguments on minority groups, which is the case for homosexuality. The American Psychiatric Association and later, the World Health Organization were obliged to remove homosexuality from the category of mental disorders in 1974 and 1992, respectively, because of a lack of compelling scientific evidence and political pressure from social organizations defending sexual minorities. Homophobic behaviors and attitudes are subject to peer influence in the case of adolescents. Homophobic attitudes among adolescents are not consistent, they tend to change their point of view according to what their peers are thinking and the same applies to homophobic attitudes. (Roi, Dijkstra et al, 2020.)

A significant number of studies have been conducted regarding anti-homosexual attitudes to find the main cause, effects, and methods of prevention of this major societal issue. Studies conducted in the medical field have shown high levels of homophobia have been documented among physicians, nurses, and dentists (Cohen LA, Romberg E, Grace E) (Smith DM, Mathew C., 2007). These homophobic attitudes majorly influence the care and treatment delivered to homosexual, lesbian, or bisexual patients. The main and the most influential view for having homophobic attitudes is that we are somehow conditioned by our society into thinking that everyone in society should be heterosexual. In other words, there should be no orientations other than heterosexuality. Homophobia resulting from this thought advocates the view that the identities of non-heterosexual individuals should be destroyed or kept secret (Kaptan S, Yüksel S., 2014). Our education is being constructed in that way only and upon questioning this it is said that “they(children) won’t understand these things”. Instead of making children understand these things, society chooses not to tell them about them and keeps them hidden as much as possible. Even the literature that is claiming to spread knowledge about major social issues which need to be talked

out loud has homophobia and anti-homosexual attitudes out of the picture. Homophobia is a significant problem that has had far-reaching consequences for homosexuals and society. The bitter reality is no one is ready to talk about homosexuals or homophobia. People are advocating for homosexual rights all over the world, but the truth is the acceptance of homosexuals in society is still way behind what it is being shown. Nowadays young males use homophobia as a means of asserting their masculinity and separating themselves from femininity. This is frequently supported by wider societal messages that link homosexuality to depravity, frailty, and femininity (J. Pascoe, 2013). The media frequently portrays same-sex attraction as a threat to heterosexual masculinity, which serves to propagate the notion that it is deviant and inappropriate (Britton, D. M, 1990). Homophobia is a serious issue that not only impacts homosexuals but also the larger society. There is a need to confront homophobia in social work practice, contending that social workers have a duty to oppose homophobia and assist homosexual people. In general, there is a necessity for increased comprehension and awareness of homophobia as a social problem and the need to actively battle it to build an inclusive society (Peterson, T. L., 1986). According to the psychoanalytic viewpoint, homophobia is a coping technique used by people to shield themselves from their own suppressed gay impulses and concerns; it frequently stems from early experiences, such as guilt or shame related to one’s sexuality (Blechner, M. J., 2017). Cultural viewpoints and expectations around gender and sexuality can feed homophobia and make it challenging for people to face their own fears and wants.

There are different types of homophobias, and these can intersect and reinforce each other, leading to a particularly harmful experience for homosexual individuals (Lorde, 1984). Following are some basic types of homophobias:

- 1. Personal homophobia** refers to an individual’s negative attitudes and beliefs towards homosexual people.
- 2. Institutional homophobia** refers to the ways in which social institutions, such as laws, policies, and cultural norms, discriminate against homosexual people.
- 3. Internalized homophobia** refers to when homosexual individuals internalize negative messages and beliefs about their sexuality or gender identity and begin to feel shame, self-hatred, or low self-esteem.

4. Cultural homophobia refers to negative attitudes and beliefs towards homosexual people based on cultural traditions or practices.

Throughout history, it is being suggested that religious and secular teachings have a symbiotic relationship with same-sex sexuality. With one, both influencing and trying to justify the other. However, during classic Greek civilization, same-sex love and sex were accepted publicly. Freeborn males had the liberty to engage in sexual relationships with younger men or enslaved men. (Blumenfeld, 2021)

The first civil law specifically addressing same-sex sexuality was enacted in England in 1533. In that year, the English Parliament ordered 'buggery' (a term used to signify same-sex sexuality, savagery, and explicitly butt-centric intercourse) as a lawful offense. Punishments included loss of property and demise. Several dozen men were put to death by fire by the Spanish inquisition, 14 were burned to death in Mexico City in 1658, 60 were hanged in Holland in 1730 and 1731, 60 were hanged in the British navy from 1703 to 1829, and 77 were sentenced to death in France between 1565 and 1640. Many laws, particularly those pertaining to homosexuality and sodomy, were passed down from England to the United States. In 1624, ship's master Richard Cornish was the first person executed in the British colony of Virginia for allegedly having sex with one of his stewards of the same sex.

After the American Progressive Conflict, all states passed enemy of homosexuality regulations conveying different punishments with most endorsing detainment: such as five to ten years in Pennsylvania, ten years in New York, and twenty years in Massachusetts. Until the Supreme Court's decision in *Lawrence v. Texas* in 2003, which banned all remaining state so-called "sodomy" laws, individual states had enacted their own laws (Blumenfeld, 2021). Even though we still have a long way to go before we achieve complete, unequivocal sexual and gender liberation, we have certainly come a long way. However, there are still significant obstacles standing in our way of achieving financial security regardless of our sexual orientation or gender identities and expressions, having our history taught in our nation's classrooms, and securing equity, safety, and full equality for those of us who identify as homosexuals, transgender, gender non-conforming, gender fluid, or any other spectrum of gender identities and expressions.

Literature Review

Incidents of harassment of homosexuals are widespread. In a study at Pennsylvania State University, where Resident Assistant (RA) students were surveyed, it was found that all the RA students had somewhere heard anti-homosexual comments. Over half of the 103 respondents believed that harassment of homosexuals, whether it be verbal or physical, is likely to happen on campus. There was considerable support for the legal protection of homosexuals. It was also seen that the RA students had little knowledge of homosexuals (D'Augelli & L. Rose, 1990). There are people who find cross-dressing offensive or people acting like the opposite gender. In research, more than half of the respondents (53.6%) agreed with the statement, "I hate it when I see a man acting like a woman" (Varol et al., 2016). A survey of campus climate studies found few homophobic and hetero sexist behavior that were prevalent. A low prevalence of anti-gay prejudice could be a sign that, despite being more socially acceptable than the prejudice of other groups, political correctness is becoming more prevalent. This might lead to a shift towards being more circumspect when expressing anti-gay sentiments rather than a decrease in such behaviors. It seems to reason that verbal abuse, crude humor, and physical violence are typically reserved for individuals whom the offender perceives to be receptive to such attitudes and who are likely to engage in similar behavior. The mere fact that assaults and threats were reported, however, is troubling (Katherine & Elizabeth, 2001).

History of Homophobia in India

It is believed that Pre-Colonial Indian society had a sexually liberal culture and to back up this, evidence was found in ancient texts such as Vatsayayana's *Kamasutra* and Kalyanamalla's *Ananga Ranga* (Srivastava, 2004). Ancient Indian society acknowledged gender fluidity and third gender while the belief that only two genders exist was prevalent in European communities (Herdt, 1996; Peletz, 2006). In 1860, Lord Macaulay made the first draft of the Indian Penal Code and enacted it in the subsequent year, 1861 (Rao, K. C., 2015). Sections 375 to 377 are the sections that deal with sexual offenses. In Indian Penal Code (Hereinafter IPC), section 375 and 376 defines the punishment for rape and states the essential determining factors for the same. However, section 377 named 'unnatural offenses' had the major provisions of criminalization of same-sex acts. Between 1860 and 1992, only 30 cases were officially registered

in India's provincial High Courts and the Supreme Court.

In 2003 a petition was filed in Delhi High Court by an NGO related to HIV/AIDS issues named Naz Foundation. This petition was filed asking for the decriminalization of section 377. In September 2003, the Government insisted on retaining Section 377. In February 2006, the Supreme Court ordered the High Court to "reconsider the constitutional validity of Section 377". On November 7, 2008, when the verdict was reserved, the previous UPA government opposed the scrapping of section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. Confutation arose within the Government as the Home Ministry had opposed the scrapping of section 377 while the Ministry of Health came out openly in support of the gay rights activists. The Centre had said that homosexuals comprise only 0.3 percent of the population and the right of the rest 99.7 percent of the population to lead a decent and moral life in society would be violated if such behavior (gay sex) is legalized. After so many hearings and tough battles between Naz Foundation (India) Trust v. Government of NCT, Delhi, and Others, the ruling came out to be in Naz Foundation (India) Trust's favor (Bairagi, K. K., Kumar, S., & Murugan, M., 2010).

However, the court clarified that "the provisions of Section 377 will continue to govern non-consensual penile non-vaginal sex and penile non-vaginal sex involving minors." The judges also said that by adult they meant "everyone who is 18 years of age and above." According to them "A person below 18 would be presumed not to be able to consent to a sexual act," The Bench further said that "this clarification will hold till, of course, Parliament chooses to amend the law to effectuate the recommendation of the Law Commission of India in its 172nd Report which, which would remove a great deal of confusion." The judgment also made it clear that it would not result in the re-opening of criminal cases involving Section 377 that had already attained finality. Even after the decriminalization of Section 377 has allowed relations between same-sex individuals, homosexuality is still a topic that no one wants to discuss. Homophobic attitudes are still very much in power and influence in society already.

Current Scenario: This study aims to investigate the commonly observed homophobic behaviors and their prevalence. The main dimensions being measured are: "attitude", "belief", and "support". An "attitude" is a psychological tendency or predisposition to assess someone, something, or some circumstances favorably or unfavorably. It

refers to how a person's attitudes, feelings, and behaviors influence how they see the world and respond to various aspects of it. The creation of attitudes is influenced by a wide range of circumstances, such as personal experiences, societal issues, culture, values, and beliefs. Attitudes can be used to measure homophobia since they reflect a person's views, values, and beliefs regarding sexual orientation. "Belief" is a mental attitude or state that an individual holds to be true or valid, without necessarily having proof or evidence. It refers to an individual's acceptance that something is real or exists, or that a particular statement or proposition is true. Beliefs can be based on personal experiences, cultural or societal influences, religious or spiritual teachings, or a combination of these factors. "Support" refers to aiding, inspiring, or providing resources to someone who is in need. Depending on the requirements of the person receiving it and the circumstances, support may encompass many various forms. Family, friends, coworkers, and researchers like counselors or medical professionals can all be great sources of support. Since it can help to lessen stress, create adaptability, and foster a sense of connection and belonging, social support has been demonstrated to significantly affect a person's mental health and well-being.

Research Questions

What do youth know about Homophobia?

What are the attitudes of youth towards homosexuality?

How do youth perceive homosexuality?

Objectives of the study

To study Homophobia among youth

To understand the attitude towards Homosexuality among youth

Method

The present study is quantitative in nature. The data was collected from the sample gathered from the students between the age group of 18 to 26 at Lovely Professional University. The sample size was 159 participants. The sample used in this quantitative analysis consisted of the students at Lovely Professional University located in the Phagwara district of Punjab, a northern state of India. The Analysis of the data has been done by using Statistical methods such as the Mean, Standard Deviation, and Percentage method used. The diversity of the students at the University is heterogeneous as there are several international students from all over the world.

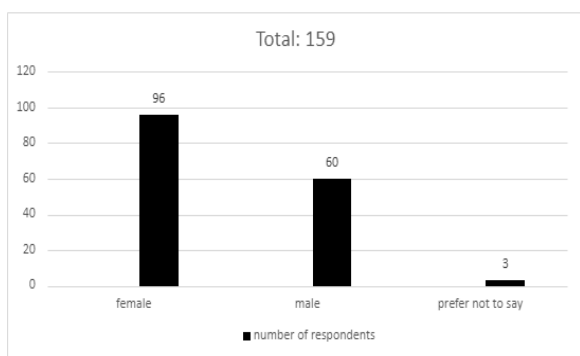


Figure 1 provides a sample overview of the age of the respondents.

Participants (N= 159, 60.3% females, 37.73% males) were of 18 to 26 years of age. The whole data was collected over a Google form in one wave in the second week of April 2023. The information about the study was provided while sharing the form. Questionnaires were filled out online by people responding to the questions on a Likert scale ranging from strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. The data was anonymized before the analyses and the questionnaire was completed on a voluntary basis.

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of each question

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q13	Q14	Q15
MEAN	3.3	3.8	3.4	3.1	3.7	3.0	3.6	3.7	3.6	3.8	2.0	2.5	2.5	1.9	2.3
SD	1.4	1.3	1.2	1.4	1.3	1.3	1.5	1.4	1.4	1.2	1.2	1.3	1.2	1.0	1.2

Table 2: Provides an overview of the responses received (in percentage)

Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. Do you feel uncomfortable/unsafe around someone who expresses their homosexuality in public?	15%	15%	19%	23%	28%
2. Would you mind having a homosexual friend/sibling?	11%	8%	15%	17%	49%
3. Do you find the thought of homosexual acts disgusting	9%	13%	23%	30%	25%
4. Do you believe homosexual people need to stop making a fuss about their sexuality? (Such as celebrating pride month, etc.)?	19%	21%	15%	21%	25%
5. Do you usually label people gay/lesbian while making fun of someone?	6%	19%	13%	21%	42%
6. Do you believe heterosexuality is more mature and certainly to be preferred?	15%	21%	28%	13%	23%
7. Do you believe Being homosexual is a sin?	17%	9%	11%	15%	47%
8. Do you think that Homosexuality is a mental disorder and can be treated by conversion therapies or such methods?	13%	9%	13%	15%	49%
9. Do you believe that Homosexual people should not be allowed to work with children as they can be a bad influence on the younger minds?	15%	8%	15%	26%	36%
10. Do you believe Homosexuals are perverts and more prone to criminal activities like sexual assault than heterosexual people?	8%	8%	25%	15%	45%
11. Do you think that there needs to be measures or laws to prevent discrimination and violence against homosexual people?	47%	21%	17%	8%	8%
12. Do you support the legalization of same-sex marriage in India?	28%	26%	21%	11%	13%
13. Do you think it's highly important to start treating homophobia as a major social issue?	17%	43%	19%	8%	13%
14. Do you think that the inherent dignity, worth and unique attributes of all individuals should be respected regardless of their sexual orientation?	43%	30%	19%	6%	2%
15. Would you be proud to openly advocate for full and equal inclusion of homosexual people at all levels of our society?	28%	38%	15%	8%	11%

Results and Discussion

Despite significant progress in advancing homosexual rights, discrimination, and social stigma continue to persist. This study aims to measure the level of support that a particular group shows to homosexuals, with the goal of understanding attitudes towards this population and identifying areas for potential intervention and education. 28% of the 159 respondents strongly disagreed that they feel unsafe or uncomfortable around people who publicly express their homosexuality. Although 15% strongly agreed and another 15% agreed to feel unsafe or uncomfortable around homosexual people. It can be said that there are moderate homophobic attitudes present.

It was seen that 49% of people do not mind having siblings or friends who are homosexual. An astounding number of people are okay with being friends or being associated with a homosexual person. 11% of participants reported being strongly opposed to the idea of having a homosexual friend or sibling.

Only 25% of people do not find the thoughts of homosexual acts disgusting. Another 9% of the respondents strongly agreed to homosexual acts are disgusting. Another 13% agreed to the idea of homosexual acts being revolting. Homophobic attitudes were found to be high in the majority of the students (75%) as they found “the homosexual acts to be disgusting”, in contrast with other similar studies in the literature which is roughly around 50% (Varol et al., 2016). 25% of individuals strongly think that homosexuals need to quit raising a ruckus over their sexuality, for example, celebrating pride month and so on. Another 21% reported having the same beliefs. Openly, 6% of people openly agreed to use labels as gay or lesbian to derogate others and make fun of them. Another 19% agreed to somewhat doing the same. There have been instances where people believe that homosexuality is immature and childish and something a person can “grow out of” from. In this study, 15% of the respondents strongly believe that heterosexuality is more mature and preferred. There are religious factors contributing to homophobia as well as 17% of people strongly agreed that being homosexual is a sin.

Some people also believe that homosexuality is a disease, 13% of respondents strongly agreed that homosexuality is a mental illness. Also, 15% emphatically concur that homosexuals ought not be permitted to work with youngsters as they can be a bad influence on the younger personalities. Another misconception is that homosexuals are sick in the head and are prone to criminal activity.

In this study, 8% of participants believed that homosexuals are perverts who are more likely than heterosexuals to commit crimes like sexual assault. Even after the decriminalization of Section 377 has allowed relations between same-sex individuals, homosexuality is still a topic that no one wants to discuss. It was found that 8 % of people do not believe that additional laws or regulations are required to stop discrimination and violence against homosexuals. In our study, it has been revealed that the youth still have misconceptions about homosexuality and homosexuals which contribute to their homophobia. Similar results were found in the study conducted on the RA students at Pennsylvania State University, 47% of the respondents believed that there needs to be added measures to protect homosexuals from harassment, similar to the RA students (D'Augelli & L. Rose, 1990). In our study, 13% of respondents don't uphold the legitimization of same-sex marriage in India. Another 28% of the participants strongly agreed that they will proudly advocate for the rights of homosexual people. Another 38% agreed that they will openly advocate. All humans deserve to be respected as we all have inherent dignity, worth and unique attributes, and 43% of the respondents believe in the same. Another 30% of the participants also believed in the same. Whereas, 2% have a prejudice against homosexual people and strongly disagree with everyone should be respected regardless of their sexual orientation. However, 13% of respondents agreed that it's not highly important to start treating homophobia as a major social issue. In other studies, higher academic classes scored less negatively on homophobia, proving that attitudes can change with time and education. It is possible for homophobic people to modify their homophobic beliefs if they are exposed to a liberal, open-minded atmosphere (Katherine & Elizabeth, 2001). Another study inferred that social contact with homosexuals can lead to more positive attitudes towards homosexuality among heterosexual individuals. Specifically, the study found that the frequency of social contact with homosexuals was positively correlated with more favorable attitudes towards homosexuality (Sakalli, N., & Uğurlu, O., 2001). In contrast to other studies, a study concluded that university students' homophobic opinions did not change with personal acquaintances (Gromer et al., 2013). In the present study, there is evidence of misconceptions being prevalent, and people having little knowledge about homosexuality, 13% of respondents strongly agree with the statement, “Homosexuality is a mental disorder”. Overall, 11.4 % of the participants hold negative beliefs

toward homosexual people. It was discovered that 21.2% of persons harbor anti-homophobia sentiments. From the data collected, we can also infer that 10.4% of youth show a lack of support for homosexual people.

Conclusion

Homophobia continues to be an enormous issue among youth. Homophobia, stereotypes or discrimination, and prejudice towards homosexual people is a harmful and damaging form of discrimination that has no place in a just and inclusive society. The aim of this study was to investigate the prevalence of homophobia among youth and to be more precise among college-going students. From the findings, it was seen that the perception and views of youth towards homosexuality vary widely. It was seen that youth are more likely to hold negative attitudes towards homosexuality. Findings from this study add to the growing body of literature that questions the existence of negative attitudes and behaviors shown toward homosexual people. Together these findings suggest that there are certain misconceptions that prevail to this date, such as homosexuals being perverts or that homosexuality is a mental illness. We can infer that there is homophobia present among the youth. Overall, combating homophobic attitudes among young people necessitates a multimodal strategy that includes education, awareness-raising, fostering diversity and inclusion, and opposing homophobic attitudes when it manifests.

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