

**Perceptions of Sexual and Gender
Minorities Regarding Others'
Attitudes towards their
Sexuality in Nepal :
Exploring the Lived Experiences
of LGBTIQ Individuals in
Kathmandu Valley**

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This study explores the perceptions of sexual and gender minorities in Nepal, specifically within the Kathmandu Valley, regarding others' attitudes towards their sexuality. Through informal face-to-face interviews with eight LGBTIQ individuals, the study delves into their experiences of societal attitudes, acceptance, and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. The findings reveal that while progress has been made, challenges and negative attitudes persist, leading to discrimination and

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disparities. However, there are positive developments driven by LGBTQ+ organizations and activists. The research underscores the importance of education, awareness programs, and inclusive environments in fostering acceptance and understanding. It highlights the generational gap in attitudes and the role of media and advocacy efforts. The study advocates for the rights, well-being, and social integration of sexual and gender minorities in Nepal, emphasizing the need for continuous efforts to raise awareness and create a more inclusive society for all.

[**Keywords :** LGBTIQ, Sexual and gender minorities, Perceptions, Sexuality, Nepal]

1. Introduction

Sexual and gender minorities, commonly referred to as LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and others), encompass individuals whose sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression deviate from societal norms of cisgender and heterosexual expectations. This diverse community comprises people with a wide range of identities, experiences, and challenges. Throughout history, sexual and gender minorities have encountered significant social, legal, and cultural obstacles, which have given rise to movements and advocacy efforts aimed at securing their rights and recognition.

One crucial aspect of sexual and gender minorities is sexual orientation. Sexual orientation pertains to an individual's enduring pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attractions, encompassing attractions to men, women, both genders, or neither gender. The American Psychological Association (APA) recognizes and affirms that homosexuality and bisexuality are normal variations of human sexuality, and it supports the understanding that sexual orientation is not a choice but rather an inherent aspect of an individual's identity (APA, 2019).

Gender identity is another key aspect within sexual and gender minorities. It refers to an individual's deeply held sense of being male, female, or a gender different from the sex assigned at birth. Transgender people, for instance, have a gender identity that differs from societal expectations based on their assigned sex. The American Medical Association (AMA) asserts that gender identity is a fundamental aspect of an individual's self-concept and should be respected and affirmed (AMA, 2017).

Unfortunately, sexual and gender minorities have long faced discrimination and health disparities. Discrimination against

LGBTQ+ individuals can manifest in various forms, including social exclusion, stigma, prejudice, and legal barriers. These adversities can have a detrimental impact on their mental health, leading to higher rates of anxiety, depression, and suicide. Moreover, sexual and gender minorities often experience health disparities, such as limited access to healthcare, lower rates of health insurance coverage, and higher rates of substance abuse and HIV/AIDS (Lambda Legal, n.d.).

In response to these challenges, numerous organizations and activists have emerged to advocate for the rights and well-being of sexual and gender minorities. Their efforts have led to significant advancements in LGBTQ+ rights, including the recognition of same-sex marriage, anti-discrimination protections, and increased visibility and acceptance in society. However, there is still much work to be done to ensure full equality and inclusion for sexual and gender minorities in all aspects of life. Sexual and gender minorities encompass individuals whose sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression deviate from societal norms. These diverse communities face discrimination and health disparities, highlighting the need for continued advocacy and support. By recognizing and affirming the rights and identities of sexual and gender minorities, we can strive for a more inclusive and equitable society.

Perceptions of sexual and gender minorities regarding others' attitudes towards their sexuality play a significant role in shaping their experiences and well-being. The reactions and acceptance from family, friends, colleagues, and society at large can have a profound impact on the mental health and overall quality of life of LGBTQ+ individuals. Research has explored these perceptions and their consequences, shedding light on the importance of fostering supportive environments for sexual and gender minorities.

Studies have consistently shown that negative attitudes and discrimination towards sexual and gender minorities can have detrimental effects on their well-being. For example, Hatzenbuehler, McLaughlin, and Nolen-Hoeksema (2008) found that sexual minority youth who experienced higher levels of anti-gay victimization had increased risk of depressive symptoms and suicidality. Similarly, a meta-analysis by Meyer (2003) demonstrated that sexual minority individuals who encountered more prejudice, stigma, and discrimination had higher rates of mental health disorders and substance abuse.

Conversely, positive attitudes and acceptance from others can contribute to better mental health outcomes and overall life satisfaction for sexual and gender minorities. Frost, Meyer, and Schwartz (2016) revealed that family acceptance of sexual minority youth was associated with lower rates of depression, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation. Moreover, Hatzenbuehler (2009) found that supportive social networks and inclusive communities were linked to higher levels of self-esteem, resilience, and overall well-being among LGBTQ+ individuals.

It is crucial to note that perceptions of others' attitudes towards sexual and gender minorities are not uniform. Attitudes can vary depending on factors such as cultural, religious, and generational differences. Some individuals and communities may hold more accepting and affirming views, while others may hold prejudiced or discriminatory beliefs. These attitudes can influence the level of acceptance and support sexual and gender minorities receive in different contexts. The perceptions of sexual and gender minorities regarding others' attitudes towards their sexuality have a significant impact on their well-being. Negative attitudes and discrimination can contribute to mental health disparities and negative outcomes, while positive attitudes and acceptance can foster resilience and better overall life satisfaction. It is important for society to cultivate inclusive and supportive environments that affirm the identities and experiences of sexual and gender minorities.

Research on perceptions of sexual and gender minorities regarding others' attitudes towards their sexuality in Nepal is limited. However, it is crucial to recognize that Nepal is a country with diverse cultural, social, and religious contexts, which can influence attitudes towards sexual and gender minorities. In general, Nepal has made significant progress in recognizing the rights of sexual and gender minorities. In 2007, the Supreme Court of Nepal issued a landmark decision recognizing the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals and directing the government to establish policies and laws ensuring their rights and protections (Supreme Court of Nepal, 2007).

Despite legal advancements, there are still challenges and negative attitudes towards sexual and gender minorities in Nepal. Traditional cultural norms and conservative religious beliefs can contribute to stigmatization and discrimination. LGBTQ+ individuals may face social exclusion, rejection from family and

friends, and limited access to healthcare and employment opportunities (All about Human Rights, 2018). The limited research available suggests that negative attitudes and discrimination towards sexual and gender minorities can have detrimental effects on their well-being in Nepal. A study by Bhatta and Simkhada (2017) examined the experiences of sexual and gender minority individuals in Nepal and found that many faced discrimination, violence, and psychological distress due to societal attitudes.

Another study by Bista (2015) highlighted the challenges faced by transgender individuals, including societal rejection and lack of support. However, there have also been positive developments in Nepal, with increasing acceptance and support for sexual and gender minorities. LGBTQ+ organizations and activists have been working to raise awareness, advocate for rights, and create safe spaces for the community. The annual Kathmandu Pride Parade, initiated in 2002, has become a significant event for LGBTQ+ visibility and community building in Nepal.

In conclusion, perceptions of sexual and gender minorities regarding others' attitudes towards their sexuality in Nepal are shaped by cultural, social, and religious factors. While legal progress has been made, negative attitudes and discrimination persist, leading to challenges and disparities for sexual and gender minorities. However, there are also positive developments and increasing acceptance in the country, driven by the efforts of LGBTQ+ organizations and activists.

This study aimed to examine the perceptions and responses of sexual and gender minorities in Nepal, specifically within the Kathmandu Valley, regarding others' attitudes towards their sexuality. The main objective was to gain insights into the experiences of LGBTIQ individuals in relation to societal attitudes, acceptance, and discrimination based on their sexual orientation and gender identity. The research encompassed various aspects of their lives, including family dynamics, relationships, education, employment, healthcare, and social interactions. By delving into their lived experiences, the study sought to increase awareness, foster empathy, and promote acceptance and inclusivity for sexual and gender minorities in Nepalese society. Ultimately, the study advocates for the rights, well-being, and social integration of sexual and gender minorities in Nepal.

2. Sociology of Sexuality : Literature Review

The Sociology of sexuality is a field of study within Sociology that explores the cultural, social, and historical dimensions of human sexuality. It examines how sexual behaviors, identities, and attitudes are shaped by various cultural, social, and environmental factors. This review aims to provide an overview of key themes and contributions in the Sociology of sexuality, highlighting relevant research and theoretical perspectives.

One of the central aspects of the Sociology of sexuality is the recognition that sexuality is a socially and culturally constructed phenomenon. Anthropologists have shown that sexual norms, practices, and identities vary across different societies and historical periods. For instance, the work of Mead (1928) on the cultural variations in sexual attitudes and behaviors in Samoa challenged prevailing Western notions of sexual morality. Similarly, Gilbert Herdt's research among the Sambia people of Papua New Guinea explored cultural understandings of masculinity, initiation rituals, and homosexuality.

Sociologists studying sexuality also emphasize the importance of considering intersecting categories of identity, such as gender, race, class, and ethnicity, in the analysis of sexual practices and experiences. The concept of intersectionality, developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), highlights how these various dimensions of identity intersect and shape individuals' experiences of sexuality and the power dynamics at play. Anthropologists have applied this framework to study topics such as queer identities in non-Western societies (Roscoe, 1991) and the experiences of sexual minorities in postcolonial contexts (Puar, 2007).

The Sociology of sexuality has also explored the impacts of globalization on sexual practices, identities, and politics. Globalization has facilitated the circulation of ideas, media, and identities, challenging traditional norms and reshaping sexual landscapes. For example, studies by Tom Boellstorff (2004) on digital queer cultures in Indonesia demonstrate how the internet and technology have provided new spaces for LGBTQ+ individuals to express themselves and build communities. Similarly, the work of Josephine Ho (2009) on the commoditization of sex in Taiwan examines the intersections of global capitalism, migration, and sexuality.

Sociologists have been instrumental in documenting and advocating for sexual diversity and the rights of sexual minorities. Their research has shed light on marginalized sexual communities and highlighted the importance of inclusivity and social change. For instance, the ethnographic work of Gayle Rubin (1984) on the subculture of BDSM challenged societal stigma and provided a nuanced understanding of alternative sexual practices. Additionally, the activism-oriented research by Kamala Kempadoo (1998) examined the experiences of sex workers and advocated for their rights and dignity.

The Sociology of sexuality offers valuable insights into the cultural, social, and historical dimensions of human sexuality. By examining the diverse ways in which sexual practices, identities, and attitudes are constructed and experienced, anthropologists contribute to a broader understanding of sexuality and challenge normative assumptions. Through their research, they advocate for inclusivity, social justice, and the recognition of sexual diversity.

Michel Foucault's "History of Sexuality" is a groundbreaking work that revolutionized the field of sexuality studies. This review provides an overview and evaluation of Foucault's influential ideas and contributions to understanding the history of sexuality. Discourse and Power : Foucault's central thesis in the "History of Sexuality" series is the notion that sexuality is not a repressed and hidden aspect of human existence, but rather a product of discursive practices and power relations. He argues that knowledge about sexuality is constructed through various discourses, such as medicine, psychology, and law, which are influenced by broader power structures in society. Foucault's analysis emphasizes how power operates through the regulation and normalization of sexual behaviours and identities.

One of the key concepts introduced by Foucault is the critique of the "repressive hypothesis". He challenges the common belief that Western societies have historically repressed sexuality, arguing instead that sexuality has been subject to intense scrutiny, regulation, and surveillance. Foucault suggests that the discourse of repression actually serves to intensify the power and control exerted over individuals' sexual lives.

Foucault introduces the concept of "bio-power" to explain the mechanisms through which power is exercised over populations. He

argues that the management of sexuality became a key element of modern forms of governance. In this context, he examines how scientific and medical discourses played a crucial role in producing knowledge about sexuality, classifying individuals based on sexual behaviours, and pathologizing certain sexual practices.

Foucault's analysis of the history of sexuality emphasizes the changing attitudes and practices towards sexuality throughout different historical periods. He explores how moral codes and social norms have shaped sexual behaviours and identities, highlighting the role of institutions such as confession, discipline, and education in the construction of sexual subjectivities. Foucault argues that individuals have become subjects of self-surveillance and self-regulation, internalizing societal norms and exercising control over their own desires and behaviours.

Foucault's "History of Sexuality" has garnered both praise and criticism within academia. Critics argue that Foucault's analysis neglects the agency of individuals and overlooks the potential for resistance and subversion. However, his work has also sparked significant contributions and debates within the field of sexuality studies, encouraging scholars to question prevailing assumptions about sexuality, power, and social control.

Michel Foucault's "History of Sexuality" is a seminal work that has profoundly influenced the understanding of sexuality as a historically and socially constructed phenomenon. His analysis of power, discourse, and the regulation of sexuality has prompted critical reflections on the complexities of sexual identities, practices, and norms. Despite ongoing debates, Foucault's ideas continue to shape the field of sexuality studies and provide valuable insights into the relationship between power, knowledge, and the production of sexuality.

3. LGBTIQ Movement : Global and Nepalese Contexts

The global LGBTIQ movement has been a powerful force in promoting the rights of sexual and gender minorities (Angelo et al., 2021). Throughout history, significant milestones have been achieved in the pursuit of equal rights for the LGBTIQ community. For instance, France became the first nation to decriminalize homosexuality in 1791, while the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee, founded by Magnus Hirschfeld in 1897, conducted pioneering work

on transgender identity (Angelo et al., 2021). However, under Nazi rule, LGBTQ individuals faced severe persecution, imprisonment, and even extermination (Angelo et al., 2021).

In the United States, notable developments occurred with the establishment of organizations like the Mattachine Society in 1950 and the Daughters of Bilitis in 1955, which fought for the rights of gay and lesbian individuals (Angelo et al., 2021). The Lavender Scare, enforced through Executive Order 10450 in 1953, led to the discrimination and dismissal of gay and lesbian federal employees (Angelo et al., 2021). The turning point came with the Stonewall Riots in 1969, a pivotal moment that sparked the world's first major protest for LGBTQ equality and paved the way for the organization of the first gay pride event a year later (Angelo et al., 2021).

Progress continued globally, with significant achievements such as the American Psychiatric Association removing homosexuality from its list of mental disorders in 1973 and the World Health Organization depathologizing homosexuality in 1990 (Angelo et al., 2021). The iconic rainbow flag, symbolizing pride and liberation, was first unfurled in San Francisco in 1978. The devastating impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the 1980s disproportionately affected the LGBTQ populations (Angelo et al., 2021). It wasn't until 1989 that Denmark recognized same-sex civil unions (Angelo et al., 2021).

The Netherlands made history by becoming the first country to legalize same-sex marriage in 2001, while in 1994, the United States recognized persecution based on sexual orientation as grounds for asylum (Angelo et al., 2021). Notably, in 1999, James Hormel became the first openly gay U.S. ambassador (Angelo et al., 2021). Additionally, abuses against LGBTQ individuals were included in the U.S. Department of State's annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices starting in 2005. Other milestones include Iceland electing the world's first openly gay head of state in 2009, Argentina recognizing same-sex unions in 2010, and the U.S. Supreme Court extending marriage benefits and acknowledging marriage equality (Angelo et al., 2021).

Tragic incidents like the 2018 Pulse nightclub shooting in Florida, targeting the LGBTQ community, have underscored the ongoing challenges faced by sexual and gender minorities. Nevertheless, positive developments have also occurred, such as

India's Supreme Court decriminalizing homosexuality in 2018 and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights ruling in favor of same-sex marriage and transgender rights in Latin American countries (Angelo et al., 2021). Taiwan became the first country in East Asia to legalize marriage equality in 2019, while Russia passed a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage in 2020 (Angelo et al., 2021).

Turning to the LGBTIQ movement in Nepal, it has gained momentum in advocating for the rights of sexual and gender minorities (Pant, 2013). A significant breakthrough came in 2007 when the Supreme Court of Nepal recognized the rights of LGBTIQ individuals and called for an end to discrimination (Pant, 2013). Furthermore, Nepal legally acknowledged a third gender category in 2015, demonstrating the country's recognition of transgender and non-binary identities (United Nations Development Programme, 2019).

In Nepal, the LGBTIQ movement has actively organized Pride marches and events to raise awareness and create safe spaces for the community (United Nations Development Programme, 2019). Nonetheless, discrimination and violence against sexual and gender minorities persist, particularly in rural areas (United Nations Development Programme, 2019). Ongoing advocacy and education remain crucial to combat prejudice and ensure the full inclusion and protection of LGBTIQ rights (Pant, 2013). The efforts of the LGBTIQ movement in Nepal have contributed to changing societal attitudes and policies, working towards a more inclusive and diverse society (United Nations Development Programme, 2019).

4. Methodology

I conducted an exploratory research study to delve into the perceptions of sexual and gender minorities in Nepal regarding their sexuality, with a specific focus on the experiences of LGBTIQ individuals in the Kathmandu Valley. I employed a qualitative research design, utilizing informal face-to-face interviews to collect data and gain a comprehensive understanding of people's perceptions and awareness. For the study, I purposively selected a sample of 8 LGBTIQ individuals. To ensure confidentiality and privacy, I used pseudonyms to protect the identity of the individuals involved.

5. Perception of Sexual and Gender Minorities' towards People regarding their Sexuality : Major Finding and Discussion

The perception of society towards sexual and gender minorities is influenced by cultural, normative, and traditional factors, which are embedded within the framework of societal rules and regulations. Historically, heterosexual relationships have been regarded as the norm, leading to the stigmatization of same-sex relationships or homosexuality as abnormal or deviant. These perceptions arise from misconceptions and fears that such relationships may disrupt cultural and traditional norms, potentially causing disorder or undermining societal stability. It is important to recognize that these perceptions can vary across different societies and undergo transformation over time as attitudes and understanding evolve. Kesari Waiba, a 36-year-old lesbian, shared her experience, stating :

During my teenage years, while everyone around me seemed attracted to the opposite sex, I constantly questioned why I didn't feel that way towards boys. It was a confusing time for me, and I searched everywhere to understand why I was different. There was no easy access to the internet back then, so I felt lost. Then, one day, I stumbled upon an article in a newspaper that mentioned being attracted to the same gender as 'lesbian'. I cried a lot that day because it was the moment I realized I wasn't abnormal, but rather a lesbian. It took time for me to come to terms with my sexual orientation, but now I'm happy and comfortable with whom I am. Society is changing, but it takes time for people's perspective to change. People treat us as if we are from another planet. I've noticed that the younger generation is generally more aware and accepting of the LGBTIQ+ community. They treat me equally and with respect. However, I've encountered a different mindset among the older generation who tend to view homosexuality as a choice. This shows a clear generational gap in awareness and understanding.

It is a common experience for many LGBTIQ individuals to go through confusion and self-discovery when they first realize they are different from the heterosexual norm. They often struggle to understand their sexual orientation and gender identity, which can feel isolating and challenging. The lack of readily available information and support, especially in the past without internet access, further adds to the confusion and sense of being abnormal.

It is crucial for LGBTIQ children to receive guidance and support during this crucial phase of self-discovery. Education and awareness are essential in helping them understand that same-sex attraction and non-conforming gender identities are natural and valid. By providing accurate information and fostering an inclusive environment, we can assist these individuals in embracing their identities and promoting self-acceptance. Kesari statement emphasizes the urgent need for a shift in perspective. The LGBTIQ community often faces treatment as outsiders, hindering their ability to openly discuss their gender identity and sexual orientation. Similarly, Juna Dahal, a 28-year-old transgender woman, expressed her frustration, stating :

I used to wear my sister clothes since child and I enjoy that but most of my friends and relatives use to talk and gossip about me. I felt really bad later I came to know about my gender identity. It was full of mixed feelings and emotions. People think we are *hijras*. We are not *hijras*. I know that *hijras* have existed in the Terai region of Nepal and India for thousands of years, representing a specific cultural group. They claim a sacred space within society due to their third gender status, known as *pingala*, and symbolically embody both male and female qualities as they are associated with Shiva Shakti. Due to such perspectives, we are mentally and psychologically tortured. People are generally unaware of our community. They often view being transgender as a choice or associate it with Western influence aiming to disrupt society.

Kesari and Juna both highlight the need for a fundamental change in society's perception and understanding. They address the erroneous perception that all transgender individuals are hijras, emphasizing the importance of correcting this misunderstanding within society. It is essential for people to acquire knowledge and understanding about the diverse experiences and identities within the LGBTIQ community, acknowledging that gender identity is innate and not dependent on conforming to any specific cultural context. Likewise, Rudra Gole, a 27-year-old gay man, shared his experience, stating :

My friends used to call me Hijra just because I was feminine in nature as a kid. They used to tease me by saying people like you stay in Chahabel. I started going there to see Trans woman in Chahabel. I was very curious so I started talking with them. I

used to think that they have two sexual organs; I am not one of them. I don't belong to that community. But after having conversation I became friends with them. I realized that I am a gay. People call me *chakka* and *hijra*. I've noticed that people are more aware of the LGBTIQ+ community due to platforms like TikTok and media exposure. However, there is a downside to this awareness as some individuals with homophobic tendencies use social media platforms to bully and leave negative comments. Despite people being aware of our community, the presence of homophobia hinders acceptance and leads to online harassment.

Even LGBTIQ people deny their own gender identity at first because it is not common. Coping with reality is very hard at first but with time LGBTIQ people accept and open up their gender identity. At the end, it is the only thing that makes happy. Rudra's statement emphasizes that people's perceptions have not yet changed. This is due to the misconception that all transgender individuals are *hijras*, when in reality, *hijras* represent a specific cultural group. It is crucial to correct this misunderstanding within society regarding the LGBTIQ community. Rudra highlights the importance of recognizing that transgender individuals are born with their gender identity, and it is not a matter of conforming to any specific culture. Society needs to acquire knowledge and understanding about the diverse experiences and identities within the LGBTIQ community. Moreover, Rupak D.C., a 30-year-old transgender man, shared his perspective, stating :

I was always a tomboy, displaying masculine traits and preferring to dress like a boy. My classmates from other sections used to call me a lesbian because I mainly interacted with girls. While all the other girls were interested in having boyfriends, I didn't feel attracted to boys at all. I had strong feelings for girls. I was in a state of confusion, so I started hiding my true identity and tried to act more feminine. However, my masculine walk gave me away, and I became a target of teasing. I used to think it was just a phase and that I would change as I grew up. In the Kathmandu area, I've found that people are more aware and knowledgeable about the LGBTIQ+ community. This is largely due to the access to education and awareness programs available in the city. However, in rural areas, there is a lack of central programs focused on raising awareness about sexual

and gender minorities. As a result, social acceptance is significantly lower in rural communities. During my field visits, it became evident that people are only aware where awareness campaigns have been conducted. It's quite fascinating, isn't it? Mainstream media has played a significant role in altering people's perceptions compared to how things used to be.

Rupak's story reflects the challenges and internal struggles that many transgender individuals face. Society's limited understanding of gender identity and the pressure to conform to societal norms can lead to confusion and self-doubt. Rupak's experience highlights the importance of acceptance and support for individuals exploring and embracing their gender identity, allowing them to express themselves authentically and find happiness in their true identities. Rupak acknowledges the positive influence of mainstream media in changing societal perceptions. He mentions the Menstruation Health Organization, which educates people about the fact that transgender men also experience menstruation.

Additionally, Rupak notes that the government has taken initiatives to support the LGBTIQ community, leading to increased representation of LGBTIQ individuals in the media. These factors have contributed to a gradual change in how their family, friends, and relatives perceive them. However, Rupak also acknowledges that attitudes and behaviours have not fully transformed, estimating about a 50% shift in society's perspective. He emphasizes that further work is needed to foster understanding and acceptance.

These respondent perspectives highlight the ongoing journey of changing societal perceptions. Rudra's experience reflects the persistence of misconceptions, particularly regarding the association of all transgender individuals with *hijras*. Rupak's perspective highlights the role of media and government initiatives in gradually altering societal perceptions, while acknowledging that complete transformation takes time. Both respondents stress the importance of education, understanding, and acceptance to create a more inclusive society for the LGBTIQ community. In a similar fashion, Rupawoti Gole, a 26-year-old transgender woman, shared her experience, stating :

I realized I was different when I was around 10 years old, but it took me a long time to understand that I was transgender. It wasn't until I reached the age of 20 and came to Blue Diamond Society that I fully recognized my gender identity. Initially, it

felt strange and unfamiliar, but as time passed, I started feeling more comfortable and happy. Nowadays, I no longer feel any hesitation about going anywhere. This process made me realize that from a young age, many of us are aware that we are different, but due to a lack of awareness and understanding, we may not fully comprehend our gender identity. It's a journey of self-discovery, and with the right support and resources, we can find acceptance and embrace who we truly are.

Although there is awareness among organizations working with us, my own parents were not aware of the LGBTIQ+ community when I disclosed my gender identity. The absence of a curriculum in schools to address these issues is a serious problem. If parents and teachers were more knowledgeable about sexual and gender minorities, it would be easier for children to openly share their identities. Even my relatives, friends, and family were not supportive at first, but after seeing me advocating for our rights in various media platforms, they have become more supportive, and their perception has undergone a positive change.

Rupawoti's experience highlights the importance of awareness and education surrounding gender identity. By providing the necessary information and creating a supportive environment, individuals like Rupawoti can come to understand and accept their true selves. Over time, they can find happiness and confidence in living authentically. Rupawoti emphasizes the power of setting an example in society to bring about changes in perceptions. She also acknowledges that people's level of understanding plays a significant role in shaping their attitudes. Rupawoti's statement highlights the transformative impact of advocacy efforts and increased awareness through media platforms. Furthermore, Reena Joshi, a 44-year-old transgender woman, expressed her viewpoint, saying :

When I was child I used my mom's makeup and dress up like a girl. My dad used to beat me a lot because of my behaviour; I used to cry a lot. Compared to the past, people are more aware of our community. However, it is crucial for every individual to be educated and informed about sexual and gender minorities for true acceptance. Unfortunately, there is still a lack of awareness among parents and teachers, as there is no curriculum in schools dedicated to educating about the

LGBTIQ+ community. This lack of education poses challenges for children to disclose their gender identity to their families.

Reena experience was so heartbreaking, as a child who is not aware about her gender identity and sexuality, as a parent they need to support. By beating her just because she was dressing up like girl, such behaviour will affect and destroy her mentally. Such incident is just one of the examples; there are so many such incidents which are kept hidden in the society. Parents are afraid that they will be disgrace and insulted in the society just because their child are different. Similar sentiments, noting that people's perceptions have significantly changed compared to the past due to advocacy efforts. This further reinforces the notion that societal perceptions towards sexual and gender minorities are evolving. Similarly, Hari Newa, a 23-year-old intersex individual, shared their personal experience, stating :

I knew I was different around the age 15 but I came to know about my gender identity after listening to radio programs and BDS counseling. I felt so good to see people belong to community. People are still not aware of the issues surrounding sexual and gender minorities. There is a lack of understanding and awareness among the general population. My interview findings indicate that awareness is primarily limited to organizations directly connected to the LGBTIQ+ community. It is essential to conduct more awareness programs in rural areas to educate people about our community. From 2011 to 2016, I personally experienced a negative perception from people towards sexual and gender minorities. However, since 2019, I have noticed a significant change in society's perception.

Hari attributes this shift to tireless advocacy efforts and increased awareness through media platforms. They highlight the increasing recognition of terms like "LGBTIQ" among the general population as a reflection of changing attitudes and understanding within society. Likewise, Karna Buda, a 30-year-old transgender man, expressed a contrasting viewpoint, stating :

When I was at teenage I realized that I was different but I don't knew I am transgender man. But through, my sister I got connected to BDS after realizing my gender identity, it was like new birth. I felt so glad and happy to see my community, it felt like I met my family. I got positive vibes. I've noticed that people's awareness about the LGBTIQ+ community is not as widespread as it should be. While many young individuals are

familiar with and aware of these issues, a significant portion of the population in rural areas remains unaware and uninformed. In these areas, the term 'LGBTIQ' is not well-known, and there is a lack of understanding. This lack of awareness contributes to the lack of social acceptance, especially in rural communities. I have encountered a different perspective from society. People tend to perceive individuals like me in a negative light, considering us morally wrong and viewing us as a bad influence and undesirable company within society.

Karna highlights the challenges faced by transgender individuals, including moral judgments, negative stereotypes, and objectification. His statement underscores the biases and difficulties that persist in society's perception of sexual and gender minorities. After knowing about gender identity getting connected as to people like him exist in the society made him so happy. His expression after knowing that he is a transgender man was different he was happy and felt like a new birth with his family.

These respondent perspectives provide insights into the varying experiences within the LGBTIQ community. While Rupawoti, Reena, and Hari observe positive changes in societal perceptions and increased recognition, Karna's perspective highlights the persistent negative attitudes and stereotypes that transgender individuals may encounter. These diverse experiences emphasize the need for ongoing education, advocacy, and understanding to foster a more inclusive and accepting society for sexual and gender minorities.

LGBTIQ people try to hide their identity when they are teased and pointed out as if they don't belong there. They try to act like hetero which is considered as normal. Most of the community members tries to hide their identity when people notice and point different things. But it is very difficult for a person to hide their gender identity and live like other gender. It suffocates them and makes them so depressed. The judgments passed by people like be more feminine, be more masculine, why are you behaving like a girl, and why are you behaving like a boy such things mentally destroy the LGBTIQ people.

6. Conclusion

The perception of society towards sexual and gender minorities is deeply influenced by cultural, normative, and traditional factors.

Historically, same-sex relationships and non-conforming gender identities have been stigmatized as abnormal or deviant due to misconceptions and fears surrounding their potential impact on cultural and traditional norms. However, the perspectives and attitudes towards sexual and gender minorities are gradually evolving. The experiences shared by individuals within the LGBTIQ community reflect the challenges they face in understanding and accepting their own identities. Many respondents expressed confusion, isolation, and a sense of being abnormal during their self-discovery process. Limited access to information and support exacerbates these difficulties, emphasizing the importance of education and awareness programs.

The impact of societal perceptions varies across generations, with the younger generation generally demonstrating greater awareness and acceptance of the LGBTIQ community compared to the older generation. This generational gap highlights the importance of time and evolving attitudes for societal transformation. Media platforms and advocacy efforts have played a significant role in shaping societal perceptions towards sexual and gender minorities. Increased visibility and representation have contributed to a gradual change in attitudes. However, challenges persist, such as the misconception that all transgender individuals are *hijras* or the lack of awareness and education in rural areas. These obstacles underscore the need for continuous efforts to raise awareness and foster understanding across society.

Supportive environments, inclusive education, and open discussions about gender identity and sexuality are crucial for creating an inclusive society where individuals can openly express their true selves. It is important to recognize that gender identity is innate and not dependent on conforming to specific cultural contexts or societal norms. Overall, the perspectives shared by individuals within the LGBTIQ community highlight the ongoing journey of changing societal perceptions. While progress has been made, there is still work to be done to combat misconceptions, promote understanding, and create a more inclusive and accepting society for all sexual and gender minorities.

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