

Knowledge & Perception of Medical Students Towards The LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender) Patients & Their Rights: A Cross Sectional Study

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Abstract

Diversity is a part of our everyday lives. Having good attitudes towards LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual & transgender) individuals is one of the ways of accepting and respecting human diversity. In this way, the quality of offered services will be same for all the people. Attitudes of medical professionals towards homosexuals can influence their willingness to provide these individuals with medical help. The study evaluates the medical students' knowledge about homosexuality and their attitudes towards it. The sample consisted of 200 participants (104 from second year & 96 from first year) who anonymously completed the preformed questionnaire. The study showed that the second year students have more knowledge than the first year students. Degree of knowledge had significant predictive effect on attitudes in the analyzed predictive model & is important tool in shaping the attitudes towards LGBT patients and reducing stigmatization.

Keywords: Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transgenders, attitude.

Introduction

A person's sexual orientation affects the attitudes of others toward him or her. In today's world, heterosexuality is the norm and most minority groups like LGBT people are subjected to stereotypes. Their population ranges from 4 to 17%¹. Homosexuality is thought to be "against the nature" by most of the religions in the world & has been a debatable issue since the ancient time. Perceptions toward LGBT people are various according to types of societies, cultural and moral development or political situation. According to Harry (1989)², homosexuality is not rare or unusual for people who have that kind of sexual orientation, but they often face the prejudice from multiple sources such as at home, school and work. Weinberg (1972)³

gives the first definition of homophobia that indicated it as irrational negative attitude towards people with homosexual orientation. Studies use different terms to indicate hostility, antipathy or discriminatory behaviour directed towards LGBT people. Homonegativity includes negative attitudes, values and beliefs of the heterosexual majority towards same-sex couples, along with the negative reactions towards them⁴. These negative feelings have been investigated more deeply & distinguished into variety of terms such as biphobia, transphobia etc⁵ each one depicting differences and the special problems that follow. Perception and knowledge towards LGBT patients in health care is an important but infrequently assessed issue in India. So an effort is made with our study to know the same in medical students at a medical college.

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Aim: To know the knowledge & perception of medical students towards the LGBT patients.

Objectives: To assess:

1. Awareness of medical students regarding LGBT people & discrimination faced by them.

2. Acceptance Level of medical students regarding LGBT people & ways to address the problem of discrimination.

3. Awareness of medical students regarding recent Supreme Court judgment regarding S. 377 IPC & its social impact.

4. Attitudes of medical students towards LGBT people.

Materials & Method

Participants: The study includes 200 randomly selected medical undergraduate students with gender distribution of 61.5% (N=123) females and 38.5% (N=77) males. 96 (48%) of the participants were from first year and 104 (52%) were from second year. The participants' ages ranged from 19 to 23 years. Majority of the participants (89.5%) were from urban setup.

Design and settings: Between April & June 2018, 200 medical undergraduates attending their first & second year were asked to participate in the survey to assess their knowledge, attitudes & perception pertaining to LGBT people & their healthcare.

Ethical issues: Permission from Institutional ethical committee was taken. All participants received verbal and written information on the study. Their participation was anonymous and voluntary, and their responses were confidential.

Data collection: We collected data from the students by using preformed anonymous questionnaire having six sections. It was designed by the authors to obtain information that was supposed to have effects on the scores of Knowledge, Attitudes and Perception towards LGBT patients in clinical practice. The survey took place in a large classroom with enough space per student to allow for privacy and it took approximately 30 minutes to complete in presence of authors.

Results

Table 1: Demographics of the Respondent:

Demographic parameter	First year	Second year	Total
Gender			
Male	42	35	77 (38.5%)
Female	54	69	123 (61.5%)
Age			
19	21	4	25 (12.5%)
20	51	16	67 (33.5%)
21	12	40	52 (26%)
22	12	29	41 (20.5%)
23	0	15	15 (7.5%)
Domicile			
Rural	6	15	21 (10.5%)
Urban	90	89	179 (89.5%)

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ranged from 19 to 23 years with majority (33.5%) are of 20 years of age. Majority of the participants (89.5%) were from urban setup.

Table 2: Awareness:

Awareness parameter	First year		Second year		Total (200)
	Yes	No	Yes	No	
Are you aware of the acronym LGBT & LGBT movement?	96	0	104	0	100%
Knowledge & understanding regarding following terms:					
Lesbian	96	0	104	0	100%
Gay	96	0	104	0	100%
Bisexual	96	0	104	0	100%
Transgender	70 (35%)	26 (13%)	104 (52%)	0 (0%)	100%
Queer	40 (20%)	56 (28%)	90 (45%)	14 (7%)	100%
Homosexual	96	0	104	0	100%
Heterosexual	96	0	104	0	100%
Homophobia	75 (37.5%)	21 (10.5%)	95 (47.5%)	9 (4.5%)	100%
Are LGBT people more likely to be infected with or carry sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)?	52 (26%)	44 (22%)	90 (45%)	14 (7%)	100%
Are LGBT people more likely to be involved in substance abuse?	50 (25%)	46 (23%)	76 (38%)	28 (14%)	100%
Are you aware of the Section 377 IPC & recent judgment regarding it by the Supreme Court of India?	36 (18%)	60 (30%)	102 (51%)	02 (1%)	100%
What is the principle source of information on LGBT?	Peers, Internet, Electronic media		Lectures, Peers, Internet, Electronic media, Print media.		

All the participants were aware of the acronym LGBT & regarding LGBT movement. All students were having knowledge & understanding regarding terms: lesbian, gay, bisexual, homosexual & heterosexual. 13% students (all from first year) were unaware of the term transgender. 42% students mostly from first year were unaware of the term queer. 30% students mostly from first year were unaware of the term homophobia. 71% students say that LGBT people are more likely to be infected with or carry STDs like AIDS, Gonorrhoea, Syphilis etc.

63% students say that LGBT people are more likely to be involved in substance abuse like alcohol, tobacco, cocaine, solvent abuse etc. 69% students mostly of second year were aware of the Section 377 IPC & recent judgment regarding it by the Supreme Court of India. Among the different sources of information regarding LGBT, lectures were principle source for second year students whereas peers were principle source for first year students. Internet, electronic media & print media are the other important sources of information.

Table 3: Acceptance Level: Will you accept or not accept the following situations?

Situations	Acceptable	Neutral	Unacceptable	Don't know/ no comment
Your family member is from LGBT group	108 (54%)	41 (20.5%)	38 (19%)	13 (6.5%)
Your friend is from LGBT group	138 (69%)	37 (18.5%)	22 (11%)	3 (1.5%)
Your neighbour at hostel is from LGBT group	157 (78.5%)	33 (16.5%)	5 (2.5%)	5 (2.5%)
Your teacher is from LGBT group	161 (80.5%)	25 (12.5%)	9 (4.5%)	5 (2.5%)
A LGBT person holds a senior position/ position of authority in the organization you work for.	151 (75.5%)	30 (15%)	10 (5%)	9 (4.5%)
You encounter LGBT patient during clinics	185 (92.5%)	9 (4.5%)	4 (2%)	2 (1%)
Your routine patient turns out to be from LGBT	168 (84%)	24 (12%)	2 (1%)	6 (3%)
Same sex marriages	117 (58.5%)	42 (21%)	34 (17%)	7 (3.5%)

While evaluating acceptance level, most of the students were acceptable to the LGBT person as a friend (69%), neighbor (78.5%), teacher (80.5%), senior/ authoritarian (75.5%) & patient (92.5%). But the acceptance level drops (54%) when this LGBT person is a family member & also same sex marriages are unacceptable to 41.5% students.

Table 4: Discrimination Faced: Following are some possible situations faced by LGBT people:

Situations	Serious	Average	No problem at all	Don't know/ no comment
A doctor discriminates LGBT patients & they receive lower quality care	183 (91.5%)	7 (3.5%)	2 (1%)	8 (4%)
An institute refuses to employ a doctor qualified for the job due to his/her sexual orientation	176 (88%)	19 (9.5%)	1 (0.5%)	4 (2%)
A medical club/ association/ organization refuses to accept him/ her as its member	158 (79%)	32 (16%)	6 (3%)	4 (2%)
A warden/ landlord refuses accommodation	124 (62%)	66 (33%)	0 (0%)	10 (5%)
A student is discriminated against at school/ college	179 (89.5%)	21 (10.5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Verbal/ physical/ cyber bullying of LGBT person at school/ college	177 (88.5%)	19 (9.5%)	0 (0%)	4 (2%)
Comparatively they have higher chances of developing anxiety & depression	149 (74.5%)	33 (16.5%)	9 (4.5%)	9 (4.5%)

Most of the participants find discrimination faced by LGBT people as serious issue in various situations like at medical practice (91.5%), employment (88%), clubs/ associations (79%), accommodation (62%), school/ college (89.5%), bullying (88.5%) & resulting anxiety & depression (74.5%).

Table 5: Ways to address the problem of discrimination faced by LGBT people:

Ways	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Don't know/ no comment
Society should ensure equal opportunities	192 (96%)	6 (3%)	0 (0%)	2 (1%)
Public education	187 (93.5%)	10 (5%)	1 (0.5%)	2 (1%)
Teaching scientific facts about LGBT as a part of sexuality education in schools	182 (91%)	16 (8%)	2 (1%)	0 (0%)
The government should introduce separate legislation to outlaw discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation (admission/ employment/ promotion/ public facilities etc)	132 (66%)	35 (17.5%)	33 (16.5%)	0 (0%)
There should be separate reservation for LGBT people in education & jobs	14 (7%)	37 (18.5%)	144 (72%)	5 (2.5%)

Most of the students are in agreement that equal opportunities (96%), public education (93.5%) & teaching scientific facts about LGBT as a part of sexuality education in schools (91%) are effective ways to address the problem of discrimination. 66% think that there should be separate legislation to outlaw discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation. But maximum students (72%) are against separate reservation for LGBT people in education & jobs.

Table 6: Attitudes towards LGBT people:

Attitudes	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Don't know/ no comment
Work ability is not directly related to sexual orientation	183 (91.5%)	7 (3.5%)	6 (3%)	4 (2%)
Promiscuity is not directly related to sexual orientation	115 (57.5%)	30 (15%)	19 (9.5%)	36 (18%)
LGBT are psychologically normal people	148 (74%)	28 (14%)	14 (7%)	10 (5%)
Sexual intercourse between them is against order of nature	53 (26.5%)	46 (23%)	82 (41%)	19 (9.5%)
Violence/ discrimination based on sexual orientation	17 (8.5%)	24 (12%)	147 (73.5%)	12 (6%)
Homophobia contributes to discrimination/ violence	98 (49%)	26 (13%)	35 (17.5%)	41 (20.5%)

91.5% participants think that LGBT people are equally competent at work. 74% think that LGBT people are having normal psychology. 57.5% students think that there is no relationship between sexual orientation & sexual promiscuity. 41% students think that sexual intercourse between two LGBT people is with the order of nature. Most of the students (73.5%) are against the violence or discrimination based on sexual orientation. Nearly half of the participants (49%) think that homophobia contributes to discrimination & violence.

Discussion

Supreme Court of India verdict (2018)⁶: Consensual adult gay sex is not a crime and article 14 (right to equality) & 21 (right to life & personal liberty) of Indian Constitution contradict the present view of Section 377. There is lack of Indian literature⁷ that has systematically investigated issues related to LGBT people & patients in medical practice and this is an effort to study the knowledge and attitude of medical students

towards the same in an Indian set up. Knowledge about homosexuality emerged as the strongest predictor of a positive attitude towards them. The Association of American Medical Colleges has recommended that “medical school curricula ensure that students master the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to provide excellent, comprehensive care for LGBT patients” by including “comprehensive content addressing the specific healthcare needs of LGBT patients” and “training in communication skills with patients and colleagues regarding issues of sexual orientation and gender identity.”⁸

First year students (10% - 28%) were unaware of the terms like transgender, queer & homophobia. 30% students (first year) were unaware of the Section 377 IPC & recent judgment regarding it by the Supreme Court of India. That’s the reason why 24% to 46% of the participants remained neutral when asked regarding social impact of recent Supreme Court judgment regarding Section 377 IPC. From the pattern of responses, our study proves beyond doubt that degree of knowledge had significant predictive effect on attitudes in the analyzed predictive model & is important tool in shaping the attitudes towards LGBT patients and reducing stigmatization.

Conclusion

Through this study the researcher found the following findings:

- The study showed that the second year students have more knowledge than the first year students. Degree of knowledge had significant predictive effect on attitudes.

- Academic lectures play vital role in understanding the different related terminologies, problems (medical, psychological & social) faced by LGBT people & different ways to address such problems.

- Most of the students were acceptable to LGBT person as a friend, neighbor, and teacher, senior / authoritarian & patient. But this acceptance level drops (54%) when this LGBT person is a family member.

- Most of the participants find discrimination faced by LGBT people as serious issue & 66% think that there should be separate legislation to outlaw discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation.

- Most of the participants think that LGBT people

are psychologically normal & their work ability is not directly related to their sexual orientation.

- Most of the participants also support the LGBT rights movement.

Recommendations:

- Public education
- Teaching scientific facts about LGBT as a part of sexuality education in schools.

- The government should introduce separate legislation to outlaw discrimination & Violence.

- Counsellors & counselling centres in medical colleges & schools.

- Accessibility to appropriate and accurate information regarding sexual orientation at early stages through library and Internet resources as well as workshops and forums.

- To change societal attitude media has to play a responsible role by reporting on LGBT issues and promoting a culture of tolerance and freedom for minorities.

- Legal funds need to be created that can take on Public Interest Litigation on LGBT issues.

- Training needs to be conducted for health professionals to increase their understanding of LGBT identity as potential risk factor for self-harm, suicidal behavior and depression.

- Respective authorities should ensure that health, mental health and social care services are provided in a way that is accessible and appropriate to LGBT people.

- National & state government should develop initiatives to support employers in making workplace and workplace culture more supportive and inclusive of LGBT people.

- Police force needs to be sensitized on LGBT issues and general principles of fundamental human rights.

- Stigmatizing or pathologizing language regarding LGBT persons should be avoided.

- Local authorities, policy makers, schools and families need more education on gender identity equally,

applying policies and programs in friendly manner

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