

KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE LGBTQIA+ COMMUNITY AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Background: The LGBTQIA+ community is an increasingly open, acknowledged, and visible part of society, which is still facing harassment, discrimination, and threats of violence because of their sexual orientation. The major crises faced by the LGBTQIA+ community are low annual income, lack of money for food or health care, being unemployed, bullying, family rejection, and homelessness.

Objectives: The primary objective of the study was to determine the knowledge and attitude of college students towards the LGBTQIA+ community. **Materials and Methods:** A quantitative descriptive survey was conducted on 300 subjects. The tools used were structured questionnaires to assess sociodemographic variables, knowledge of the LGBTQIA+ community, and a modified Likert scale to assess the attitude. **Results:** More than half of the subjects 59% (177) belonged to the age group of 18-20 years, and were females 78.7% (236). A moderate to high level of knowledge was found in 63.3% of the

subjects. More than one-third of the sample (36.7%) had low knowledge of the LGBTQIA+ community. A positive attitude was reported by 83% of college students towards the

LGBTQIA+ community. However, 16% of them did not have any opinion and 1% had a negative attitude. The correlation between knowledge and attitude regarding the LGBTQIA+ community was found to be weakly positive (0.095). **Conclusion:** Research on issues related to LGBTQIA+ persons in society especially on college campuses will enhance knowledge and societal attitudes to neutralize discrimination based on sexual orientation. The positive knowledge and attitude found among the arts college students in the study cannot be generalized to the students of a rural area. More wide studies across the country are required to identify, educate, and erase the social stigma towards the LGBTQIA+ community.

KEYWORDS: LGBTQIA+, Community, Knowledge, Attitude, College students.

INTRODUCTION

LGBTQIA+ is a term that collectively represents people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or those questioning their gender identity or sexual orientation, intersex and asexual.^[1] It alludes to a substantial alliance of groups that are diverse in terms of gender, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, and the socioeconomic level of the individual.^[2] It is estimated that less than five percent of this population lives in both the Western and non-Western worlds.^[3] Homosexuality was regarded as a mental illness before to the 1960s. The idea of homosexuality has changed from being viewed as a problematic sexual variation to being seen as a normal variance. It is no longer thought that homosexuality constitutes a mental illness.^[4] The Indian Supreme Court abolished Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) on September 6, 2018, decriminalizing homosexuality.^[5] Despite this action, a considerable portion of the Indian populace still harbors homophobia.

Even though society is becoming more accepting of diversity, a lot of young people still have uneasy and perplexing beliefs about non-heterosexual lives.^[6] The LGBTQIA+ community is subjected to discrimination and oppression as a result of these sentiments.^[7] In his survey, Burn (2000) found that 77% of homosexual and lesbian college students had been the target of verbal abuse because of their sexual orientation. In addition, 27% claimed having been the target of violent threats, and 22% said they had been followed or chased.^[8] Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ) students rarely feel comfortable in educational institutions they regularly encounter unfavourable school environments, such as bullying and discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation. LGBTQ students' well-being may be threatened by discriminatory encounters and unfavourable school environments.^[9] This Study is designed to assess the Knowledge and Attitude towards

LGBTQIA+ community among College students at selected Arts College, Kochi with objectives to, associate relationship of knowledge and attitude regarding LGBTQIA+ community among college students with selected socio demographic variables and to find the correlation between knowledge and attitude regarding LGBTQIA+ community among college students.

The previous decade has been crucial for the LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/ questioning, intersex, asexual, and others) community in India. Since 2009, following the Delhi High Court's initial verdict and the Supreme Court's final verdict in 2018 with respect to section 377 of the Constitution, as well as the national legal services authority (NALSA) judgment and debate with respect to the Trans Rights Bill, the legal discourse is being accompanied by much more societal conversation about the LGBTQIA+ community. Justice Chandrachud in the verdict about section 377 outlined the role of mental health professionals to provide responsible mental health care and advocacy.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A quantitative research approach with a descriptive survey design was adopted to find the knowledge and attitude toward the LGBTQIA+ community. This cross-sectional descriptive study included 300 college graduates (undergraduates and postgraduates), from a selected arts college. Permission for conducting the study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board. After explaining the aims and objectives of the study, written informed consent was taken from all the subjects, and data was collected. The setting of the study was selected Arts College, Kochi.

Tools and Techniques

The minimum sample size was estimated statistically based on a previous study. A total of 300 samples were recruited into the study using a nonprobability convenient sampling considering the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Instruments used to collect data were structured questionnaires to assess demographic data and the knowledge of the LGBTQIA+ community among college students. The knowledge questionnaire had 20 multiple-choice questions. The college students' attitudes were assessed using a 5-point modified Likert scale with strongly agree-5, agree-4, neutral-3, disagree-2, and strongly disagree-1. The questions 2,6,7,9,13,14,15,17,19,20 were scored reversely.

RESULTS**Table 1: Sociodemographic Variables n=300.**

Socio-demographic Variables		Frequency	Percentage
Age in years	18-20	177	59.0
	21-25	122	40.7
	>25	1	0.3
Gender	Male	64	21.3
	Female	236	78.7
Religion	Hindu	180	60.0
	Islam	89	29.7
	Christian	31	10.3
Marital status	Married	11	3.7
	Unmarried	288	96.0
	Divorced	1	0.3
Type of family	Nuclear	264	88.0
	Joint	35	11.7
	Extended	1	0.3
Current living area	Hostel	110	36.7
	Home	171	57.0
	paying guest	19	6.3
Source of information	Friends and family	96	32.0
	Teachers	81	27.0
	Media	123	41.0
Educational level	Diploma	180	60.0
	Degree	113	37.7
	Post-graduation	7	2.3
Year of Study	First-year	135	45.0
	Second year	110	36.7
	Third year	55	18.3
Stream of study	Arts	196	65.3
	Science	100	33.3
	Commerce	4	1.3

Table -1 depicts that more than half of the subjects 59% (177) belong to the age group of 18-20 years, and were females 78.7% (236). The majority, 96% (288) were unmarried. 41%(123) of the subjects pointed the main source of their information about LGBTQ+ was from media. Regarding their educational background, 60% (180) of the subjects were pursuing diplomas with Art as their mainstream 65.3% (196).

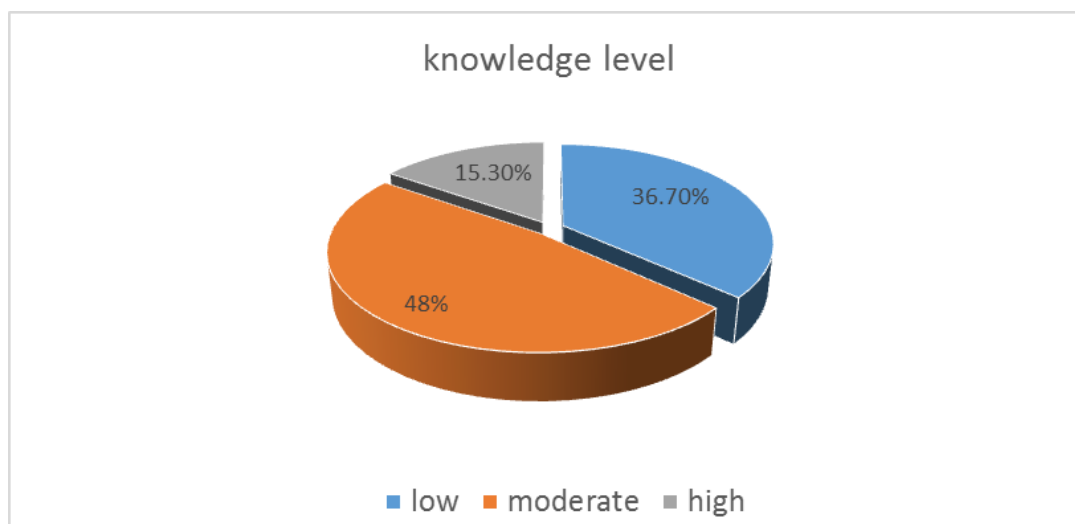


Fig 1: Knowledge of College students regarding LGBTQIA + Community.

Figure 1 shows that nearly half of the subjects (48%) had a moderate and 15.30% had a high level of knowledge regarding the LGBTQIA+ community whereas 36.70% had a low level of knowledge.

Table 2: Association of Knowledge about LGBTQIA + Community with Selected Demographic Variables.

Age in years	Low	Moderate	High	Chi square	P - value
18-20	72	84	21	7.393	0.116
21-25	37	60	25		
>25	1	0	0		
Gender					
Male	30	27	7	3.910	0.142
Female	80	117	39		
Marital status					
Married	6	4	1	2.677	0.613
Unmarried	104	139	45		
divorced	0	1	0		
Type of family					
Nuclear	93	130	41	3.561	0.469
Joint	17	13	5		
extended	0	1	0		
Current living condition					
Hostel	36	58	16	1.659	0.798
Home	67	77	27		
Paying guest	7	9	3		
Source of information					
Friends and family	45	41	10	8.831	0.065

Teachers	28	42	11		
Media	37	61	25		
Educational level					
Diploma	68	91	21	5.502	0.240
Degree	39	51	23		
Post-graduation	3	2	2		
Religion					
Hindu	66	90	24	7.031	0.134
Islam	37	39	13		
Christian	7	15	9		
Year of study					
First year	53	56	26	17.143	0.002*
Second year	46	57	7		
Third year	11	31	13		
Name of stream					
Arts	83	85	28	13.586	0.009*
science	24	59	17		
Commerce	3	0	1		

*Significant

Table 2 depicts that only two sociodemographic variables (year of study and name of stream) had a statistically significant association with the knowledge of subjects about the LGBTQIA + community (p-value 0.002 and 0.009 respectively).

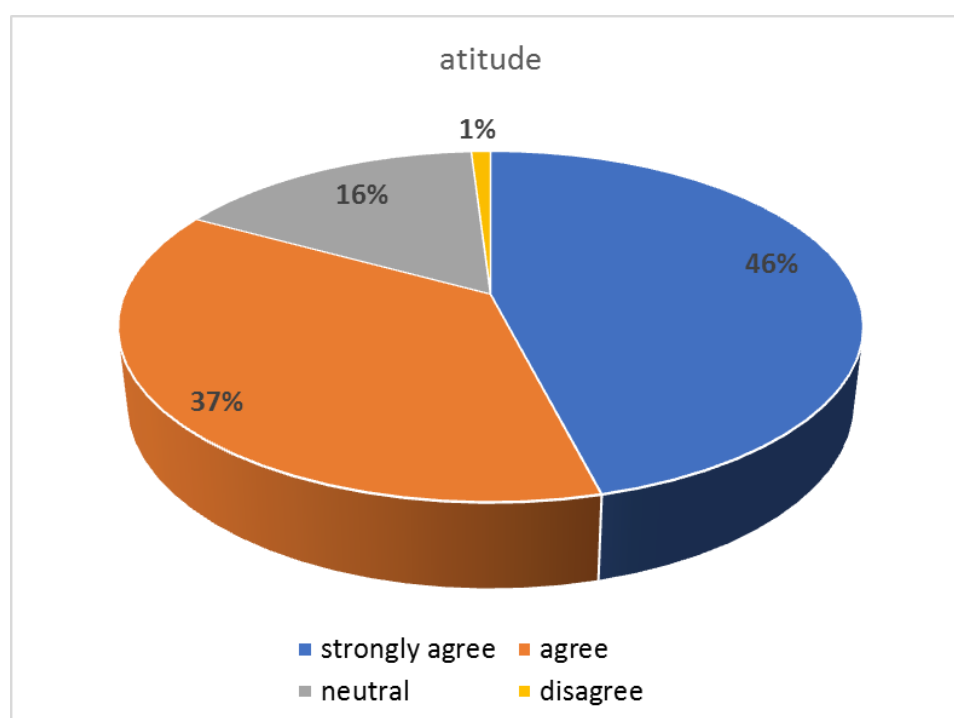


Figure 2: Attitude of College students towards LGBTQIA+ Community.

Figure 2 depicts that 83% of college students had a positive attitude (strongly agree and agree) towards the LGBTQIA+ Community. A neutral attitude was shown by 16% of them.

Table 3: Association of attitude towards the LGBTQIA+ Community with significant Socio-Demographic Variables.

Age in years	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Chi square Value	P value
18-20	2	32	68	75	4.364	0.628
21-25	0	17	44	61		
>25	0	0	0	1		
Gender						
Male	2	17	26	19	17.372	0.001*
Female	0	32	86	118		
Marital status						
Married	0	1	5	5	21.841	0.001*
Unmarried	2	48	106	132		
divorced	0	0	1	0		
Type of family						
Nuclear	2	44	96	122	2.483	0.870
Joint	0	5	15	15		
extended	0	0	1	0		
Current living condition						
Hostel	2	15	47	46	7.017	0.319
Home	0	31	60	80		
Paying guest	0	3	5	11		
Source of information						
Friends and family	2	18	30	46	19.243	0.004*
Teachers	0	18	21	42		
Media	0	13	61	49		
Educational level						
Diploma	2	33	72	73	10.564	0.103
Degree	0	16	35	62		
Post-graduation	0	0	5	2		
Religion						
Hindu	2	22	58	98	21.841	0.001*
Islam	0	23	42	24		
Christian	0	4	12	15		
Year of study						
First year	0	28	44	63	7.920	0.244
Second year	2	14	45	49		
Third year	0	7	23	25		
Name of stream						

Arts	0	37	74	85	7.463	0.280
science	2	12	36	50		
Commerce	0	0	2	2		

**Statistically significant*

Table 3 shows a statistically significant association between attitude toward the LGBTQIA+ community and four sociodemographic variables such as gender, marital status, religion, and source of information.

Table 4: Correlation between Knowledge and Attitude of College Students regarding the LGBTQIA+ Community.

Knowledge	Attitude				df	Chi square	R value
	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree			
Low	2	24	41	43	6	10.778	0.095
Moderate	0	19	58	67			
High level	0	6	13	27			

It is very clear from Table 4 that only a weak positive correlation between knowledge and attitude of college students toward the LGBTQIA+ community.

DISCUSSION

The present study was undertaken with the primary objective of assessing the knowledge and attitude of college students toward the LGBTQIA+ community. The results revealed that 63.3% of the subjects had a moderate to a high level of knowledge (48% moderate and 15.3 % high). More than one-third of the sample (36.7%) had low knowledge of the LGBTQIA+ community. A positive attitude was reported by 83% of college students towards the LGBTQIA+ community. However, 16% of them did not have any opinion and 1 % had a negative attitude. In a survey among 50 university students from different disciplines, it was found that in disciplines where males were more, had a more heterosexist attitude.^[10,11] According to Herek (1988), heterosexual males manifest more anti-gay hostility on average than do heterosexual females.^[12] But, in the present study 78.7% were females and their knowledge and attitude were reported fairly better probably due to the current access of students to social media. Besides, the Arts school was located in an urban area.

In yet another study among medical students, majority showed a non-rejecting attitude towards LGBT people and demonstrated some knowledge about this population.^[13] The

higher knowledge of medical students about the LGBT community was also shown in a 2018 study in Kolkata.^[14]

The positive attitude in students may be related to the acceptance of transgender in our society, awareness, improved education and tolerance of LGBT right from the increasing use of social media. This was found to be proved by a study in the University of California by Kelly et al.^[15]

A similar study on the Evaluation of Knowledge and Attitude toward the LGBTQ Community, and the Effect of Education on Knowledge and Attitude in Medical Undergraduates concludes that though there is positive knowledge and attitude among medical undergraduates, discomfort among them is still a major issue that might lead to poor communication with and improper treatment of LGBT community people.^[16,17] A cross-sectional survey conducted among 299 final MBBS students and Interns in 2022 found awareness about the LGBTQIA+ community in 98.33% of the sample. Despite good knowledge and a positive attitude toward LGBTQIA+ people, pockets of ignorance and discomfort reside among medical undergraduates and interns.^[18]

Contradictory finding was evidenced in a study among Chinese university students who had a negative attitude toward LGBT people. A total of 2,644 Chinese university students (49.7% male, mean age = 20.27 years) indicated generally negative attitudes toward same-sex attraction and behaviour, with males reporting more negative attitudes than females.^[19]

Only two sociodemographic variables (year of study and stream of study) had a statistically significant association with the knowledge of subjects about the LGBTQIA + community (p-value 0.002 and 0.009 respectively). A statistically significant association between the attitude of the college students towards the LGBTQIA+ community and four sociodemographic variables such as gender, marital status, religion, and source of information was also seen. However, the correlation between knowledge and attitude regarding LGBTQIA+ community among college was found to be weak positive.(0.095) On the contrary, a correlation between positive attitudes toward homosexuals and knowledge about these individuals was seen in a stud by Kim et al., 1998.^[20]

CONCLUSION

Researches on issues related to LGBTQIA+ persons in the society especially in the college campuses will enhance knowledge and societal attitudes in an effort to neutralize discrimination based on sexual orientation. The positive knowledge and attitude found among the arts college students in the study cannot be generalized for the students of a rural area. More wide studies across the country are required to identify, educate and erase the social stigma towards the LGBTQIA+ community.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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