

## Perceived Discrimination and Problems Faced by Gender and Sexual Minorities in Kathmandu

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### ABSTRACT

Equality and freedom from discrimination are fundamental human right regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity. Despite a society that is moving forward in acceptance of differences, many young people still maintain uncomfortable and confused attitudes towards non-heterosexual lifestyles. Thus, this study was conducted to assess the perceived discrimination and problems faced by gender and sexual minorities in Kathmandu. Descriptive cross-sectional design and purposive sampling method was utilized to select sample. The study was conducted on Gender and sexual Minorities Forum Nepal, blue diamond society in Kathmandu from 17<sup>th</sup> July to 20 August 2018. Semi-structured self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data, followed by some qualitative interview with selected participants. Among 112 respondents, almost half were gay, one third were transgender women and few were transgender men, lesbians and bisexuals. In workplace more than half (69.1%) were verbally harassed, almost half (45.7%) were denied from job; one third (34.6%) were physically tortured. Majority of the respondents (80.5%) were verbally harassed in educational institutes, most of the respondents (91.7%) in public bathroom and public places, (84.6%) by police, almost half of all (49.4%) were physically tortured and (33.3%) were bullied in school. More than half (62.3%) were denied for house rent. Majority of the respondents (36.5%) accepted discrimination as a fact of life. Despite many supportive laws and provisions, LGBT people still face societal discrimination in Nepal. Thus, its humanitarian that sexual minorities are also a part of society and they have equal right to have dignified life.

**Key words:** bisexual, discrimination, LGBTI, harassment, transgender

### Introduction

Despite a society that is moving forward in acceptance of differences, many young people still maintain uncomfortable and confused attitudes towards non-heterosexual lifestyles (Adhikari, 2018). These attitudes lead to discrimination and oppression of the lesbian/gay/ bisexual/transgender<sup>1</sup> (LGBT) community (Bristowe, et al., 2018). Nepal LGBTI Survey 2013 has shown 4.196% LGBTI population in the country. Composition of the population includes Lesbian- 0.31%, Gay -1.35%, Bisexual- 2 0.1%, Transgender- 2.17%, and Intersex-0.05%. In 2016, they

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<sup>1</sup> Lesbian: Female having sexual relation with female.

Gay: Male having sexual relation with male.

Bisexual: Sexually attracted to both male and female.

Transgender: A person appearing or attending to be a member of the opposite sex, as transsexual or habitual cross-dresser.

were estimated to be about 900,000 (Chhetri, 2017). Whereas among all U.S. adults aged 18 and over, 96.6% identify as straight, 1.6% as gay or lesbian, 0.7% as bisexual, and the remaining 1.1% as “something else” (Jackson, et al., 2016). The government estimates that six per cent of the UK population, around 3.9 million people, identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual (Reed, 2016). In context to Nepal, it is one of the most progressive Asian countries in the matter of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersexual (LGBTI) right. In September 2015, Nepal became the first Asian nation to include anti-discrimination laws to protect the LGBTI community against abuse, violence and individuals who identify neither male nor female. Despite the laws in place to protect them, as well as to decrease their violence, LGBTI individuals still face discrimination and problems in education, housing and employment (Knight & Welton-Mitchell, 2013). Furthermore, the perceived discrimination accounted for increased depressive symptomatology among LGBT and accounted for an elevated risk of self-harm and suicidal ideation among LGBT (Almeida et al, 2009). The Nepalese societies still have negative attitude towards sexual and gender minorities and they face discrimination in different places. Thus, we believe that having study about sexual minorities helps to disclose the problem they have been facing and needs action to be done.

### Methods

Descriptive cross-sectional design and purposive sampling method was utilized to select sample. Semi-structured self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data, followed by some qualitative interview with selected participants. A five scale Likert scale was used for assessing the perceived discrimination by LGBTI. Before giving the question for data collection all the participants were oriented about the nature of question and their ability to understand the level of question. Data collector was available every time when they fill form, so that if they have any confusion, that can be easily addressed. The study was conducted on Gender and Sexual Minorities Forum Nepal, Blue diamond society in Kathmandu. There are four branches of blue diamond society in Kathmandu i.e. Baluwatar, Samakhushi, Balaju, and Dhumbarahi. In each organization, the average LGBTI employee is about 28. So the total population is 112. Approval from the blue diamond society authority was taken. Before collecting data, the permission from respondents was taken by using the developed consent form. Self-administered semi structured questionnaire was distributed. Code number was provided to maintain anonymity. Forty five minutes time was provided to answer the questions. The data was collected from 17<sup>th</sup> July to 20 August 2018.

### *The Findings of the study are as follows*

Table I

<i>Socio demographic characteristics of respondents</i>		<b>n=112</b>
Description	Frequency	Percent
<b>Age in years</b>		
15-19	26	23.2
20-24	32	28.6
25-29	31	27.7
30-34	13	11.6
35-40	5	4.5

41 and above	5	4.5
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	88	78.6
Female	24	21.4
<b>Represented Gender</b>		
Gay	46	41.1
Transgender Women	40	35.7
Transgender Men	17	15.2
Lesbian	6	5.4
Bisexual	3	2.7
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
Brahmin/ Chhetri	47	42
Janajati	57	50.9
Dalit	8	7.1
<b>Religion</b>		
Hindu	84	75
Buddhist	23	20.5
Christian	5	4.5
<b>Educational Status</b>		
Basic level (1-8)	23	20.5
Secondary level (9-12)	60	53.6
Higher education	19	17
Can read and write	10	8.9
<b>Occupation</b>		
Social worker	42	37.3
Sex worker	35	31.3
Student	21	18.8
Business	9	8
Others	1	0.9

Table I reveals the socio demographic data of respondents. Among 112, most of the respondents represented age group 32 (28.6%) on 21-25 age group and least 1 (0.9%) on 51-55 age group. The majority of the respondents were male 88 (78.6%) and female i.e. 24 (21.4%). The majority represented gender of the respondent were gay 46 (41.1%), transgender women 40 (35.7%), transgender men.17 (15.2%), lesbian 6 (5.4%) and bisexual 3 (2.7%). Half of the respondent 57 (50.9%) were Janajati, and Dalit 8 (7.1%). More than half of the respondents' education level was secondary 60 (53.6%) and those who can read and write were 10 (8.9%). The majority 42 (37.3%) of the respondent were social worker and sex workers 35 (31.3%).

Table 2

Discrimination and problems faced by gender and sexual minorities

Description	Frequency	Percent	Description	Frequency	Percent
Experience of discrimination in job (n=91)			Experience of discrimination in educational institute (n= 87)		
Verbally harassed	56	69.1	Verbally harassed	70	80.5
Denied from a job	37	45.7	Physically torture	43	49.4
Physically torture	28	34.6	Bullying	29	33.3
Been fired from job	25	30.9	Sexually harassed	26	29.9
Sexually harassed	25	30.9	Left school	18	20.7
Left job	18	22.2	Expelled or forced out from school	9	10.3
Experience of discrimination in rent (n=94)			Experience of discrimination by police (n=81)		
Denied to give rent	43	62.3	Verbally harassed	33	84.6
Evicted from rent	26	37.7	Assumed you as a sex worker	16	41
Homelessness	25	36.2	Physically harassed	12	30.8
Experience of discrimination in public bathrooms (n=83)			Sexually harassed	12	30.8
Verbally harassed	44	91.7	Forced you to engage in sexual activity to avoid arrest	8	20
Physically harassed	22	45.8			
Sexually harassed	17	35.4			

Note: Multiple response, percentage may exceed 100.

Table 2 shows that most of the respondents perceive discrimination as “verbal harassment”. 84 (75%) at home, the findings further explored by the respondents are

“during in my childhood compare to my sister I

“I don’t know, why every people see us as sex pot, we are also human we have also dignity, but most people either disrespect us or want to use us”. TG 28 years

we are not just for sex, we do have our feeling as well, why people call us *Bhalu*. we have our name”. TG. 25

used to get lots of scold from my parents and relatives” (a transgender female). Adding her another gay shared that he faced bullying at school and home many times because of his low pitch voice. Furthermore, half of the respondent 59 (52.7%) as sexual harassment at office/work place.

Table 3

*Perceived discrimination*

n=112

<b>Description</b>	<b>Almost always (%)</b>	<b>Sometime (%)</b>	<b>Every once in awhile (%)</b>	<b>Rarely (%)</b>	<b>Never (%)</b>	<b>Weighted mean±SD</b>
Treated with less courtesy than other people	32.1	32.1	3.6	10.7	21.4	3.50±1.530
Treated with less respect than other people	30.4	23.2	8	18.8	19.6	3.60±1.402
Received poorer service than other people at restaurants or stores	26.8	21.4	5.4	17.9	28.9	3.87±1.376
People acted as if they are afraid	27.7	17	14	8	33	3.91±1.400
Been called names or insulted	39.3	15.2	8.9	17.9	18.8	3.57±1.450
Been threatened or harassed	26.8	25.9	17	16.1	14.3	3.38±1.333
Been followed around in stores, the street or other places	20.5	29.5	4.5	17.9	27.7	3.82±1.365
Been made fun of	33.9	22.3	8	20.5	15.2	3.47±1.400
Been physically assaulted	20.5	27.7	9.8	17	25	3.74±1.349
People think that you were a sex worker	24.1	25.9	6.3	12.5	31.3	3.87±1.407
People think that you have a mental problem	21.4	26.8	6.3	18.8	26.8	3.81±1.349
People think that you abuse street drugs or alcohol	19.6	24.1	6.3	9.8	40.2	4.08±1.342
People think that you are HIV positive or have an STI	18.8	17.9	7.1	18.8	62.5	4.11±1.237
Thought people felt sorry for you	11.6	37.5	7.1	17	26.8	3.77±1.326
People around you are uncomfortable	14.3	40.2	8.9	8	28.6	3.70±1.147

The table 3 shows perceived discrimination by respondents. More than one fourth (32.1%) people were treated with less courtesy than other people. Most of the respondents (30.4%) were treated almost always with less respect than other people. Almost

*In Bada Dashain (a festival), I am always the last one who got tika from my parents and relatives. TG, 32 years.*

*My brother has inter-cast marriage, but he was easily accepted in family, when my parents knew that I am lesbian, they rejected me from the family. Lesbian, 29 years.*

always (26.8%) threatened or harassed. Nearly one fourth (20.5%) of the respondents perceived physically assaulted. Regarding people think that they are abuse street drugs or alcohol majority (40.2%) selected never. Nearly half of the respondents (40.2%) feel that people around

them are feeling uncomfortable.

Table 4

*Level of perception of discrimination of respondents*

Perceived level of discrimination	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Standard deviation
<sup>2</sup> Higher level of discrimination	33	29.5	43.9643	19.47876
Neutral of discrimination	47	42.0		
lower level of discrimination	32	28.6		

The table 4 shows that majority of the respondents 47 (42%) has neutral level of perceived discrimination, 33 (29.7%) has perceived higher level of discrimination and 32 (28.6%) has perceived lower level of discrimination.

Table 5

*Coping methods of discrimination by gender and sexual minorities*

Description	Frequency	Percent
<b>Response to discrimination</b>		
Accept it as a fact of life	35	36.5
Tried to do something about it	33	34.4
Expressed anger or got mad	24	25
Talked to someone about how you were feeling	21	21.9
Work harder to prove them wrong	14	14.6
Prayed about the situation	10	10.4

The table 5 reveals that majority of the respondent 35 (36.5%) accepted it as a fact of life and 10 (10.4%) prayed about the situation.

*Earlier when people talk about my sexuality, I used to get very angry, but these days I don't care for them. Gay, 26 years.*

<sup>2</sup> High Level -75% above  
Neutral level – 45 to 74%  
Low level – below 45%

## Result and Discussion

Regarding discrimination faced in school/colleges/educational institute, 29 (33%) were bullied, 70 (80.5%) were verbally harassed, 43 (49.4%) were physically harassed, 26 (29.9%) were sexually harassed, 18 (20.7%) left school because of mistreat and 9 (10.3%) were expelled from school. This finding is supported

*People see us like we don't belong to this planet. They see us like we are alien, or human from different world. TG, 30 years.*

by study conducted by Kosciw and Cullen (2001) at national school climate survey, 78% had experienced verbal harassment based on their sexual orientation at school, 58% had experienced verbal harassment based on their gender expression at school, 35% reported experiencing physical harassment based on their sexual orientation and 26% gender identity at school. In addition, 18% experienced physical assault at school because of their sexual orientation and 12% experienced physical assault because of their gender identity at school (CDCP, 2017). According to Jonson (2000), 77% of gay and lesbian college students had experienced verbal insults due to their sexual orientation. Furthermore, 27% experienced threats of physical violence. Similarly, a study by James and Herman dated 2015 at US about Transgender Survey showed that 30% of the respondents reported losing job because of their gender identity, 19% reported being fired, denied a promotion or not being hired for the job, 15% verbally harassed, physically attacked and sexually assaulted at work places, this finding is supported by our study as well. Furthermore, a study by Drydak (2009) shows that gay men faced a significantly lower chance of receiving an invitation for an interview compared to heterosexual male. Whereas, Singh (2010) study revealed a widespread discrimination that continues to shape LGBT people's lives in both subtle and significant ways in 2010, more than half of LGBT people reported being discriminated against by health care providers and more than 25 % of transgender respondents were reported being refused medical care outright. This finding is also supported by the study conducted by Knight and Mitchell (2013) on surveying Nepal's Sexual and Gender Minorities 23.1% were denied for treatment in health care setting.

## Conclusion

Most of the LGBTI accept the discrimination as a fact of life and feel inferior to them. Despite many supportive laws and provisions, LGBT people still face societal discrimination in Nepal.

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