

Youth Engagement and Perceptions of the LGBTQ Community

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Abstract

This paper explores youth engagement and perceptions of the LGBTQ community. It delves into highlighting their attitudes toward LGBTQ rights and inclusion. The study has used a mixed-methods approach, where the data is collected from 30 participants aged 18-30 through online questionnaires, both quantitative and qualitative. The findings have been presented thematically. They indicate that while many young individuals support LGBTQ rights, there are gaps in awareness, especially regarding legal protections and policies. It was noted that social media is a dominant source of information for LGBTQ issues, while more structured educational resources were found to be less influential. Also the study reveals a significant level of ambivalence toward LGBTQ individuals, particularly within societal and cultural norms. Challenges faced by LGBTQ youth, including discrimination, mental health struggles, and social exclusion, were also identified.

Keywords: Youth, LGBTQ community, Awareness, Perceptions.

1. Introduction

In the past few years, there has been a change among the perspectives and attitudes of the youth towards the LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer) community. Young people are generally open to inclusion and this plays a very important role in shaping public views, thus contributing to bringing a social change. It is important sociologically, to understand how young people engage with and perceive the LGBTQ community for fostering greater acceptance and equality.

The engagement of the youth with issues of LGBTQ goes beyond the aspect of tolerance. Rather, it involves active participation in supporting inclusive policies, advocating for equal rights and challenging stereotypes. Different kinds of agencies like educational institutions, social media, cultural norms, peer network are important in shaping the minds of the young people to discuss LGBTQ rights. This promotes their visibility as well as increases the awareness.

The main objectives of the study are:

1. To investigate the attitudes of young people regarding LGBTQ individuals and their rights.
2. To understand the awareness of young people about rights and issues of LGBTQ communities.
3. To identify the problems faced by LGBTQ youth.
4. To understand and recognize the personal experiences and interactions of youth with LGBTQ individuals.

2. Review of Literature

There has been a good amount of scholarly work regarding youth and their engagement with the LGBTQ community. This indicates a societal transition towards recognizing and acceptance of gender and sexual minorities. In fact, research indicates that the younger generation has a more open perspective on LGBTQ issues than the older generation. This is mainly due to the heightened visibility and representation of LGBTQ individuals in media and education (Meyer & Schwartz, 2020). Also, social media platforms are instrumental in forming youth perceptions by offering platforms for LGBTQ youth to share their experiences and participate in advocacy (Craig et al., 2015).

Access to information through education and media is directly related with the awareness of LGBTQ rights among young people. Schools that implement inclusive curricula, such as those that address LGBTQ history or rights, have students who are more inclined to express supportive attitudes toward their LGBTQ peers (Kosciw et al., 2018). Poteat and Rivers (2021) emphasize the implication of localized interventions in conservative or rural regions, where youth may have more traditional perspectives and have less exposure to LGBTQ issues.

Personal beliefs, peer influence, and social norms also influence attitudes toward LGBTQ individuals. Russell and Fish (2016) have observed that youth from more inclusive and varied communities are more motivated to advocate for the rights of LGBTQ individuals and to show a greater acceptance of them.

The attitudes of adolescents toward LGBTQ individuals are influenced by their personal experiences. In general, individuals who have LGBTQ acquaintances or family members show higher levels of acceptance and understanding (Dunlap, 2020). Youth awareness and support for LGBTQ rights are also improved through participation in LGBTQ-related events, such as pride parades or activism (Russell et al., 2021). However, in communities where heteronormativity is the major social structure, acquaintance to discrimination against LGBTQ individuals can lead to conflict and distress (Katz-Wise et al., 2016). The obstacles met by LGBTQ youth, such as discrimination, abuse, and mental health issues, are extensively documented (Kosciw et al. (2018). Research emphasizes the importance of targeted involvements, like supportive school environments, conduction of anti-bullying programs, and access to mental health services, in order to promote greater acceptance and inclusion (Craig et al., 2015).

One of the most recent surveys, conducted by The Trevor Project in 2024, examines the mental health of LGBTQ adolescents. It provides valuable insights to the obstacles they encounter. For example, nearly 50% of LGBTQ adolescents stated a desire for mental health care but were incapable to obtain it. This lack of access, especially for transgender and nonbinary youths, is indicative of societal stigmas and barriers they face. Also, about 90% of LGBTQ youth stated that their mental health was adversely affected by anti-LGBTQ policies, underlining the extent of political and social exclusion that affects this group. (Trevor Project, 2024).

3. Methodology

A mixed-method research design has been used in the study, thus integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches in order to explore the perspectives of youth perspectives on the LGBTQ community. The sample size was 30 with respondents aged between 18-30 years, with both males and females. The data was collected using an online questionnaire which had both closed and open-ended questions. The quantitative aspect has been analysed with numbers and percentages. Measurable data has been gathered regarding awareness, attitudes, beliefs, and interactions with LGBTQ individuals. The qualitative aspect has been looked into by thematic analysis of open-ended responses, which gave the

respondents an opportunity to share their personal insights and experiences, further enriching the findings. Combining the qualitative and quantitative approaches has provided a comprehensive understanding of the views of the youth on LGBTQ issues.

4. Results and Discussion

Demographic Overview

Age Distribution

In the study, participants ranged from 18 to 33 and above, as shown in Fig 1 below:

Age Group	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Under 18	1	3.33
18 – 22	15	50
23 – 27	8	26.7
28 – 32	5	16.67
33 and above	1	3.3
Total	30	100

Figure 1. Age Distribution

Gender Distribution

Equal number of men and women were taken as a part of the study to understand the diversity of the views. It is shown with the table (Fig 2) given below:

Gender	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Male	15	50
Female	15	50
Total	30	100

Figure 2. Male-Female Distribution

Educational Background

The respondents of the study belonged from varied academic levels and occupations. They included undergraduates, postgraduates, and self-employed individuals. It is represented with the table (Fig 3) given below:

Educational Background	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Undergraduates	21	70
Postgraduates	8	26.7
Self-employed	1	3.3
Total	30	100

Figure 3. Educational Background

B. Awareness and Understanding

Knowledge of LGBTQ Issues

The respondents were asked to share their self-assessed knowledge regarding the LGBTQ issues. Their responses are given in the table (Figure 4) below:

Rate of Knowledge	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Very knowledgeable	4	13.33
Somewhat knowledgeable	15	50
Neutral	6	20
Not very knowledgeable	5	16.67
Not knowledgeable at all	0	0
Total	30	100

Figure 4. Knowledge of LGBTQ Issues

The responses suggest that while a majority of the respondents feel ‘somewhat knowledgeable’ about LGBTQ issues, there is still a significant portion (only about 6 respondents) who consider themselves less informed. Only a handful of them, identified themselves as ‘very knowledgeable.’ The absence of respondents who marked themselves as ‘not knowledgeable at all’ suggest that all participants have some level of awareness. However, the combined total of those who feel neutral or less knowledgeable (which is about 12 respondents) shows that a considerable number of youth may lack deeper understanding or confidence regarding LGBTQ issues. This suggests scope for improvement, especially with regard to education and outreach efforts that is aimed at increasing comprehensive knowledge of LGBTQ rights, challenges, and social inclusion.

Sources of LGBTQ Information

The respondents were asked as to where they receive information on LGBTQ issues from. These are presented in the table (Fig 5) below:

Source of Information	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Social media	23	76.67
News outlets	1	6.67
Friends and family	2	10
Academic courses	2	6.66
LGBTQ organizations and events	0	0
Total	30	100

Figure 5. Sources of LGBTQ Information

From the responses, it is clear that social media plays an important role in shaping youth perceptions of LGBTQ issues. Most consider it as their primary source of information. The traditional and formal sources, like news outlets and academic courses, are significantly less influential. The accuracy of the information that youth receive is influenced by this dependence on social media, thus underscoring the need for more structured educational resources.

Awareness of LGBTQ Policies/Laws

The respondents were asked if they were aware of laws protecting LGBTQ rights. Their responses are given in the table below (Fig 6):

Awareness of Laws/Policies	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	10	33.33
No	16	53.33
Not sure	4	13.33
Total	30	100

Figure 6. Awareness of LGBTQ Policies/Laws

The responses of the participants reveal that a lack of awareness regarding the laws for protection of LGBTQ communities. In fact, out of 31 respondents, only 10 were aware of such laws, while 16 reported being unaware and 4 were unsure. This suggests a significant knowledge gap, which may hinder youth advocacy for LGBTQ rights and contribute to misconceptions. The low awareness may also reflect insufficient education on legal protections within formal educational settings or a lack of focus in media discussions. Given the importance of understanding laws in promoting social inclusion, enhancing awareness through targeted campaigns or curriculum inclusion could be crucial for improving informed youth engagement on LGBTQ issues.

C. Attitudes and Beliefs

Importance of Supporting LGBTQ Rights

The respondents were asked to share their views on the importance of supporting the rights of LGBTQ communities. Their responses are presented below in Fig. 7:

Idea of Support	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Very important	13	43.33
Important	5	16.67
Neutral	8	26.7
Not important	4	10
Not important at all	1	3.3
Total	31	100

Figure 7. Importance of Support

From the findings, it is clear that most of the respondents consider supporting LGBTQ rights as important. This suggests the fact that a significant portion of youth acknowledges the value of LGBTQ rights and advocates for their protection and inclusion. However, some expressed neutrality or lower levels of support, indicating that there may still be some ambivalence or lack of strong commitment to these rights. This divided view highlights the need for further education and dialogue to develop a deeper understanding of LGBTQ issues and promote stronger advocacy for equality. It also suggests that while there is support, there may be hindrances to fully embracing LGBTQ rights, such as cultural or social norms, that require attention to overcome. This finding is in line with studies showing that youth attitudes toward LGBTQ issues can be shaped by their educational experiences, social media exposure, and personal interactions with the community (Jones et al., 2021).

Equality of Legal Rights

The respondents were share their views on legal rights being made available for LGBTQ communities. Their views are presented in the table given below (Fig)

Legal Rights	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Strongly agree	9	30
Agree	12	40
Disagree	8	23.33
Strongly disagree	2	6.67
Total	31	100

Figure 8. Legal Rights

The responses here show that the majority of respondents support the idea of legal equality for LGBTQ individuals. This reflects a general acceptance of the need for legal rights to be extended equally to the LGBTQ community. However, few of the respondents who disagreed or strongly disagreed suggest that there are still some individuals who hold reservations or opposing views regarding legal equality. This shows the ongoing societal debates about LGBTQ rights, with some holding traditional views that may resist changes in legal frameworks (Herek, 2020). It is assumed that the opposition emerges from cultural, religious, or political factors. It is noted that further education and engagement are required in order to address these gaps in understanding and promote greater legal and social acceptance of LGBTQ rights (D'Augelli & Grossman, 2021).

Comfort with LGBTQ Individuals as Friends

The participants were asked to share their views on their level of comfort with friends belonging from LGBTQ communities. Their responses have been presented below in Fig 9:

Comfort Level as Friends	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Very comfortable	7	23.33
Comfortable	12	40
Neutral	5	13.33
Uncomfortable	4	13.33
Very uncomfortable	3	10
Total	31	100

Figure 9. Comfortability as Friends

The data indicates that the majority of respondents feel comfortable with LGBTQ individuals as friends, with some being ‘very comfortable’ and ‘comfortable’. This suggests that most young people are open to forming friendships with LGBTQ individuals. However, few respondents expressed their discomfort, and were ‘very uncomfortable’. This highlights that some individuals have discomfort or resistance towards LGBTQ people in personal relationships. Such discomfort could be influenced by social or cultural norms, family beliefs, or a lack of exposure to diverse sexual orientations and gender identities (Budge, Adelson, & Howard, 2013). It is important to address these feelings through education and social interaction, as

greater familiarity and understanding have been shown to reduce discomfort and increase acceptance (Pachankis, 2015).

D. Societal Perception of LGBTQ Issues

Acceptance in the Community

The respondents were asked to share their views regarding acceptance of LGBTQ communities and their views are expressed in the table given below (Fig 10):

Community Acceptance	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Very accepting	3	10
Somewhat accepting	4	13.33
Neutral	6	20
Somewhat unaccepting	10	30
Very unaccepting	8	26.67
Total	31	100

Figure 10. Acceptance in the Community

Findings note that most of the respondents perceive that their community is unaccepting of LGBTQ individuals, with most respondents indicating it is ‘somewhat unaccepting’ and few marking as ‘very unaccepting.’ This suggests that there are barriers to inclusion of LGBTQ communities regarding their inclusion. It highlights the need for greater efforts to promote tolerance and acceptance at the community level. In contrast, only a few of them viewed their community as accepting. This further indicates that there is a cultural and societal resistance towards a complete acceptance of LGBTQ individuals. Prior studies have also shown that community acceptance is influenced by factors such as cultural norms, religious beliefs, and exposure to LGBTQ issues (Budge et al., 2013; Herek, 2009).

E. Key Challenges for LGBTQ Youth

The respondents were asked to cite the most significant challenges faced by LGBTQ youth. They mentioned the following problems:

- Discrimination
- Social rejection
- Mental health struggles
- Lack of legal protections
- Family and community exclusion

The responses noted the challenges identified by the youth show the various layers of adversity faced by LGBTQ youth. These are in line with the findings from previous studies, which show that LGBTQ individuals often experience marginalization in their personal and social lives, leading to higher risks of mental health problems, such as depression and anxiety (Budge et al., 2013; Toomey et al., 2012). The lack of legal protection and societal stigma increases their vulnerability, as many LGBTQ youth do not have proper recourses to address these challenges (Pachankis, 2015). The findings talk about the need for more comprehensive support systems, like legal reforms, better mental health services, and stronger community acceptance, in order to help reduce the risks faced by LGBTQ youth and promote their well-being.

5. Conclusion

The paper has explored youth engagement and perceptions of the LGBTQ community, revealing a generally positive trend toward support for LGBTQ rights and inclusion, yet with notable gaps in awareness and acceptance. The findings note that while many young individuals express comfort and support for LGBTQ individuals, there remain areas of ambivalence and resistance, particularly within societal and cultural norms. The majority of respondents acknowledged the importance of supporting LGBTQ rights, though awareness of specific legal protections was limited, indicating a need for enhanced educational outreach. Social media emerged as a dominant source of information, underscoring the influence of digital platforms in shaping youth perceptions.

There is much scope for further possibilities in the study. Educational institutions can play a vital role by integrating comprehensive LGBTQ rights and history into their curriculum, thereby promoting greater awareness and understanding. Also, initiatives focused on improving mental health services and legal protections for LGBTQ youth are important to mitigate the challenges of discrimination and social exclusion. Policymakers, educators, and LGBTQ advocacy groups can also collaborate to create inclusive environments, ensuring that young people are well-informed and empowered to advocate for equality and justice for all individuals, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

6. REFERENCES

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19. Dr Esha Chatterjee- She is currently working as an Assistant Professor in Sociology under Faculty of Arts and Humanities at Kalinga University Raipur. She holds a Ph.D. in Sociology from Jadavpur University, Kolkata, where she was awarded the prestigious RUSA Doctoral Fellowship. Dr Chatterjee has served in various academic roles, including Head of the Arts and Humanities at Anjaneya University, and has taught at several renowned institutions such as Rani Birla Girls' College, Muralidhar Girls College, Gurudas College, Jadavpur University and Amity University, Kolkata.
20. Her research interests encompass gender studies, media, and cultural sociology, with publications in respected academic journals and edited volumes. Dr Chatterjee has also co-edited the book *Media in Today's World: Exploring the Digital Landscape* and presented papers at national and international conferences. She is a life member of the Indian Sociological Society and has been recognized for her contributions to the field, including her role as a session chair and keynote speaker at academic events.