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Between Support and Silence: A Mixed-Methods Study on LGBTQ+ Perceptions in Urban India

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Abstract - *This research delves into popular understandings of LGBTQ+ inclusion in India, examining how citizens encounter queer lives in education, healthcare, law, and media. While legal advancements have come via judgments such as NALSA and Navtej Johar, day-to-day acceptance is still unequal and superficial at times. The study examines how demographic indicators like gender, age, and religion influence individuals' ease, knowledge, and acceptance of LGBTQ+ inclusion. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the study examines over 100 participants' answers using both statistical measures and qualitative thematic findings. Principal findings indicate the strong theoretical support for equal rights, but there is ongoing personal discomfort, particularly in intimate or private contexts. Female interviewees expressed more optimism and acquaintance with LGBTQ+ individuals compared to male interviewees. The research underlines ongoing language, representation, and civic access disparities and emphasizes more targeted education, mental health services, and policy design reforms. These findings seek to inform more inclusive, evidence-based interventions within India's increasingly dynamic sociopolitical landscape.*

Keywords - *Gender identity, Intersectionality, LGBTQ+ inclusion, Queer rights, Sexual orientation, Social acceptance.*

1. Introduction

India has also seen landmark legal advancements in LGBTQ+ rights in the last ten years. The NALSA v. Union of India (2014) judgment gave legal recognition to the identities of transgender people, and the Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India (2018) judgment criminalized homosexuality. Although these rulings are fundamental steps forward, their advantages tend to be symbolic, as practical obstacles still limit LGBTQ+ individuals from accessing the rights and services they need (Sudha, 2024; SCC Online, 2023). Structural inequality remains in health care, education, employment, housing, and public policy. These exclusions are especially brutal for LGBTQ+ individuals whose identities converge with marginalized caste, class, regional, or religious positions. Social stigma, desensitization, and institutional abandonment lead to restricted access to goods and services and a lack of adequate protection against discrimination (Gupta, 2023). Menstruation discourse, school curricula, healthcare systems, and labour markets tend to function in binary gender templates. This type of framing erases the lived realities of trans and non-binary people, adding to feelings of invisibility, dysphoria, and exclusion (Frank, 2020; Rittenberg et al., 2022).

This paper employs a mixed methods design, integrating primary surveys, in-depth interviews, and secondary sources, including journal articles, policy reports, and legal commentaries, to examine the exclusionary barriers the LGBTQ+ community experiences in India. It uncovers patterns of exclusion and resilience across language, education, healthcare, work, and governance at the regional level. Particular focus is placed on inclusive language, regional policy variations, and international best practices. Through an analysis of how literature portrays institutional reactions to LGBTQ+ identities, the paper emphasizes the continued disjuncture between legal recognition and lived equality, and the necessity for structurally inclusive reforms.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Education and Queer Youth Inclusion

Learning is typically conceived as a transformative arena, where adolescents discover their voice, forge an identity, and are socialized into the principles of belonging. But for LGBTQ+ youth in India, schooling is far too commonly a daily regimen of silence, stigma, and institutional disappearance. Despite constitutional guarantees such as Article 15, prohibiting discrimination based on sex, the practice within classrooms is profoundly unequal. Queer identities are hardly found in the Indian curriculum, making them invisible at an age when young minds are developing their sense of self. This silence, as innocent as it seems, sends a clear message that some identities are too deviant or controversial to discuss. A 2023 study by Bhattacharya

establishes that more than 85% of Indian textbooks for high school for prominent boards do not mention anything about LGBTQ+ themes, further establishing exclusion as the rule instead of the exception.

Government initiatives such as the Adolescence Education Programme (AEP), which previously sought to teach gender and sexual health in schools, have been diluted or put on hold in all states due to political and parental demands (Chakraborty, 2021). This has resulted in students having negligible to zero formal exposure to central ideas about identity, consent, or civic membership.

The centre of this erasure is the teacher. Whereas teachers can act as bridges to belonging, the overwhelming majority are not trained to facilitate queer students. UNESCO (2022) discovered that more than 56% of Indian educators were not familiar with fundamental LGBTQ+ terminology, and less than 20% had been provided with any type of inclusivity training.

The result is evident in classroom life day-to-day, where misgendering, ostracism, and mockery have no consequences. For trans students, the prohibition against using gender-affirming restrooms or uniforms is not merely inconvenient; it is traumatic, and in many cases, contributes to absenteeism, anxiety, or school dropout (Rittenberg et al., 2022).

Peer cultures tend to reflect institutional disregard. A countrywide Humsafar Trust (2023) survey found 73% of queer students affirmed that they had been verbally bullied in school, while a mere 8% were aware of any formal support system. Matters are worse in rural and low-income urban schools where overpopulation and underfinancing leave it nearly impossible to have trained counsellors, grievance redressal mechanisms, or affirming spaces for students (Chawla, 2023).

In the last decade, certain high-end, English-medium private schools in big cities have collaborated with NGOs to organize sensitization workshops. Though a good start, such initiatives are rare and, for the most part, symbolic, as they do not attack basic norms such as binary dress codes, gendered classes, or exclusionary practices like forms with options of only "male/female" (Gupta, 2023). The ambit of these reforms is also narrow, missing out on most public schools altogether.

Around the world, however, some nations provide authentic models for inclusion. In Ontario, Canada, LGBTQ+ voices are integrated through subjects and grades, with mandatory inclusivity training for teachers (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2022). Sweden and the Netherlands make inclusive education a human rights commitment according to child rights, and they document considerably lower levels of queerphobic bullying and mental health concerns (Girls' Globe, 2022).

India could take inspiration, not merely in form, but in practice. As Saha and Rao (2021) recommend in their work, there is a need for national educational reform that should feature queer histories, literature, legal milestones, and civic identities in the curriculum. Physical space needs to change as well, including gender-neutral toilets, nonbinary dress codes, and signage that celebrates diversity. Most importantly, teacher training programs need to integrate LGBTQ+ sensitivity modules and experiential learning to prepare teachers with the skills to facilitate inclusive classrooms.

Education inclusion is not just about avoiding harm. It is about recognizing all students' right to be heard, seen, and valued. Until queer kids feel not only safe but valued in schools, India's education system will only continue to perpetuate the very inequalities that it seeks to eliminate.

2.2. Employment and Economic Inclusion

Work provides a wage and gives purpose, dignity, and integration into society. But for India's queer population, particularly those from lower socioeconomic strata, entry into meaningful and secure employment is dramatically limited. All this despite legal successes like the Navtej Singh Johar judgment (2018), which legalized homosexuality. Structural discrimination still bars entry into the mainstream labour market (Mehta, 2023).

Exclusion is especially glaring for trans people. A 2018 report by the National Human Rights Commission found that more than 90% of India's trans population was either out of work or employed in informal areas like sex work and begging. The obstacles they encounter are not solely social but also bureaucratic, including prejudiced hiring, absence of legal protection, and difficulties in acquiring identity documents that signify their gender (Gupta, 2023). While the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 officially recognises trans identity, it demands a government-issued certificate to legally confirm one's gender, a requirement that goes against the very spirit of the NALSA judgment of self-identification (Narrain, 2020). Consequently, the majority of trans individuals are either unwilling or unable to go through this gatekeeping procedure, precluding them from fields that require formal proof of identity.

Workplace discrimination goes far beyond recruitment. As per the Humsafar Trust (2023), 67% of queer workers in corporate settings felt unsafe coming out. While some organizations visibly rejoice in diversity through pride events and social media celebrations, these cover up greater issues: microaggressions, exclusion from leadership roles, prejudiced reviews, and absence of inclusive benefits (Chawla, 2023). Absent institutional mechanisms for mentorship or redressal, "inclusion" is largely cosmetic.

Beyond city centres, the obstacles multiply. In Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities, queer persons have been reported to experience

exclusion from employment and social isolation that interferes with informal economic activity. Most are denied access to housing, workspace, or transportation based on their appearance alone or gender presentation (JETIR, 2024). In small and medium-sized businesses that employ most of India, human resource practices stick to traditional social norms, and the lack of legal protection places queer workers in a particularly vulnerable position.

Other countries provide prescriptive policy examples. Argentina has tax incentives for companies that hire trans workers; Brazil has established quotas in the public sector; and Thailand has launched LGBTQ+-targeted job fairs (Amnesty International, 2021). Such targeted interventions illustrate that economic inclusion is not a theory; it can be planned, incentivized, and tracked.

There has been some progress in India through efforts led by communities. Social enterprises such as PeriFerry and the Keshav Suri Foundation offer entrepreneurial incubation, job placement, and training for queer youth. Trans-run cafes and salons in Delhi and Chennai provide employment, community, and visibility (Gupta, 2023). However, these interventions are limited in size, confined to the metros, and based on philanthropy.

Government schemes such as the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana still fail to identify LGBTQ+ individuals as a separate beneficiary category. They also fail to include training in essentials such as legal literacy, digital identity, or work rights (Bhattacharya, 2023). Adding queer persons to these programmes could initiate not just financial autonomy but greater social acceptance.

Real economic inclusion requires more than the passive non-discrimination of what has been called "toleration" on unequal terms; it requires active structural change. This involves comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation, affirmative action in the public sector, equitable corporate HR practices, and custom-tailored skilling programs. Until queer people can engage fully in the economy without fear or obstacle, equality will be an artefact on paper, not a lived experience.

2.3. Healthcare and Menstrual Inclusivity

Health is traditionally seen as a universal right; yet, for so many queer people in India, it becomes a space of exclusion rather than care. While legal recognition and media visibility of queer identities have widened, healthcare systems remain trapped in heteronormative and cisnormative presumptions, regularly marginalizing queer and trans experiences (Law and Society Review, 2022).

For transgender people, access to healthcare is influenced by logistical as well as emotional barriers. Government hospitals resist or delay treatment for those whose gender is different from the one indicated on paper. Trans patients consistently report misgendering, verbal abuse, and withholding of everyday care (Rittenberg et al., 2022). Getting gender-affirming care, like hormone therapy, surgery, or therapy, is also limited by bureaucratic inefficiencies and institutional unreadiness. While the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 makes these services legally obligatory in the state, its enforcement is patchy and under-funded (SCC Online, 2023). The majority of facilities are incapable of providing gender-affirming care, and specialists in queer health are a rarity even in cities (Gupta, 2023).

Mental health care raises similar issues. Queer people suffer from overproportionally high levels of depression, anxiety, and trauma, but therapy services are yet to systematically include their needs. Most mental health practitioners receive no training in gender and sexuality diversity.

Conversion therapy, banned by the National Medical Commission in 2022, continues openly in non-regulated environments; LGBTQ+ clients may find themselves most often subject to pathologizing beliefs, spiritual "correctives," or family blame in therapy environments (Drishti IAS, 2024; Chawla, 2023). In the absence of queer-affirmative models within psychology training, care-seeking itself becomes traumatic.

Menstrual care is another ignored aspect of LGBTQ+ inclusion. State distribution programs and school health education still run on the binary premise that "only girls menstruate," excluding trans men, non-binary, and intersex people who menstruate but do not fit into that category (Gupta, 2023). Menstruation is generally framed through the window of cis girlhood, further solidifying stigma and erasure.

In rural communities, these exclusions are compounded by Anganwadi- and ASHA-dependent delivery systems. ASHAs, female community health workers hired under the National Rural Health Mission, may be the only health resource available in backwater areas. But their training guidelines, outreach programs, and reporting forms are entirely based on binary gender frameworks, making queer people either invisible or misrecognized in public health data (Chakraborty, 2021). National surveys such as the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) also fail to break down data by sexual orientation or gender identity, which makes it more difficult to develop inclusive policies.

In contrast, some nations have successfully integrated LGBTQ+ inclusion into their public health systems. In Canada, medical students are required to take LGBTQ+ sensitivity training, and Argentina provides free, state-funded gender-affirming care as part of its public health system (Amnesty International, 2021). These examples illustrate that inclusion

is not a question of ideology but of political will and institutional commitment.

To move towards health equity, India's healthcare system needs to be structural and long-term. Gender and sexuality diversity needs to be incorporated into public health curricula, and medical and psychological residency programs need to embrace inclusive, affirmative practice. Indicators of inclusion need to be included in national health audits, but insurance programs have to acknowledge queer relationships and cover gender-affirming treatments. What is most critical, though, is a health system that affirms, rather than erases, queer life so that the dignity and well-being of all citizens can be preserved.

2.4. Public Spaces, Community, Media, and Political Visibility

LGBTQ+ visibility in India goes far beyond representation; visibility is a question of safety, citizenship, and belonging. Although going out may appear to be a sign of advancement, it typically happens at the expense of one's personal life. Streets, transportation systems, residential areas, and public offices continue to be places where openly queer people, particularly trans individuals, are watched, harassed, or excluded outright. Access to fundamental services like sanitation, safe shelter, and identification is still limited by a combination of state indifference and deep-rooted social stigma (NHRC, 2018; Gupta, 2023).

This vulnerability is particularly stark in public transport. Trans women describe experiences of harassment from ticket inspectors and passengers, especially when travelling alone or late at night. Infrastructure is itself exclusionary: gender-neutral toilets are conspicuously absent, and most transit systems lack recognition of third-gender identities in their records (Chawla, 2023). In housing as well, moral policing is a normal occurrence that makes landlords refuse to lease space to queer couples or individuals. The consequence is an epidemic of unstable or temporary housing that is unsecured by law and accelerates precarity (Bhattacharya, 2023).

Virtual spaces are not as safe as they provide an illusion of safety. Most queer men and women undergo cyberbullying, online harassment, or even targeted violence. Gay men have reported being blackmailed or attacked using dating websites by groups of vigilantes. While the internet has emerged as an indispensable platform for expression and mobilization, it also poses a danger, especially in an environment where enforcement of cybercrime legislation is weak (Humsafar Trust, 2023).

Representation of queer identities in the media has certainly increased. Web series, movies, and advertisements are now starting to include LGBTQ+ characters. Yet, their depictions continue to be stuck in simplified tropes: the campy comic relief, the tragic love, or the hypersexed trans character.

Although some more recent productions, such as *Made in Heaven* and *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan*, present more complex portrayals, these instances are few. Substantive, desirable queer characters are still far and few between in popular media narratives (Saha & Rao, 2021).

The news media serve a dual purpose, reflecting and shaping public opinion. Reporting of Pride parades, court wins, and individual triumphs has led to a gradual normalization of queer visibility in the public imagination. However, that visibility is precarious. Sensationalist journalism tends to pathologize queer lives, especially in violence or protest cases, simplifying lives to "aberrant behaviour" instead of acknowledging systemic oppression (Law and Society Review, 2022). Second, media reporting remains urban-biased, covering very little of the ordinary lives of queers in rural or conservative areas.

Political representation of the LGBTQ+ community in India continues to be tokenistic and symbolic. Hardly any queer people hold elected office or high-ranking bureaucratic positions, and their virtual exclusion from policymaking spaces guarantees their issues are consistently marginalized. The promulgation of the Transgender Persons Act without effective consultation with the community is a testament to this disconnection, an effort at inclusion that most activists perceive as insufficient and condescending (Narrain, 2020).

Other nations have shown what institutional inclusion can be. National office has been held by openly queer leaders in New Zealand and Germany, and San Francisco has established LGBTQ+ cultural districts that are endorsed by the government. India, on the other hand, does not have these institutionalized queer spaces. Community centers, publicly funded arts programs, or even queer shelters safe from violence are either non-existent or woefully under-resourced (Amnesty International, 2021).

Authentic queer visibility in India cannot be quantified by legal change or going viral only. It takes robust public infrastructure, diverse media, safeguarding laws, and political visibility. When queer lives are seen as banal aspects of public life, not exceptions to it, only then can their safety, dignity, and participation be ensured.

2.5. Intersectionality and Legal Representation

India has taken great legal leaps towards acknowledging LGBTQ+ rights in recent years. The decriminalization of homosexuality came through the Navtej Singh Johar judgment in 2018, and the 2014 NALSA judgment ensured a right to self-identify for transgender individuals. Yet, these advances seldom deal with the stacked exclusions that queer individuals face at the intersection of caste, class, religion, ability, and place (Narrain, 2020; SCC Online, 2023). Legal advances, though symbolically potent, are still disproportionately

available, excluding too many whose identities overlap with other axes of marginalization.

Dalit queers, for example, tend to be double-bound, subject to both caste discrimination and queerphobia. They can be excluded not just from mainstream queer environments, which are structured along upper-caste norms, but also from their own caste communities, where conformity is mandatory. Concomitantly, queer Muslims face both community monitoring and state scrutiny, a situation that is already amplified in a sociopolitical environment that aims to target religious minorities. These intersectional aspects are seldom addressed in mainstream policy discussions and media outlets, which rather isolate queerness from other social struggles to come up with solutions that are at best partial (Gupta, 2023).

Legal processes of recognition often perpetuate these disparities. Transgender people in rural and semi-urban areas frequently do not have the bureaucratic access, literacy, or institutional resources needed to secure new identification documents. The process requires medical certification, digital infrastructure, and knowledge of legal procedures, obstacles that primarily burden the economically and socially marginal (Chakraborty, 2021). For Adivasi or migrant trans individuals, the absence of birth certificates or school records means that legal identity is never even obtained. In the absence of official documents, access to healthcare, housing, education, or work is practically denied.

The 2023 Supreme Court decision regarding marriage equality further revealed the limitations of existing legal frameworks. Although the court highlighted the state's obligation to provide welfare provisions for queer couples, it left the determination of same-sex marriage to Parliament, effectively denying actual marital rights.

This has relegated queer couples, particularly those who fall outside urban, upper-middle-class, cis gay and lesbian circles, into a state of legal limbo, with no ability to transfer property, adopt children, or enjoy spousal benefits like hospital visitation rights (Law and Society Review, 2023). The limited focus of marriage debates has disregarded the more varied familial and relational arrangements that exist among working-class, intersex, and trans communities.

The judiciary itself reflects these gaps. There are no openly queer judges in India's courts and hardly any LGBTQ+ lawyers in positions of leadership. This absence is what keeps the judiciary from being inclusive, in that it is sometimes progressive in individual decisions, but does not have an in-depth understanding of queer realities. Legal literacy is similarly low in queer youth, especially outside cities, where it remains unusual to find queer-friendly legal advice. In the absence of such support, the majority of victims of discrimination or violence cannot even lodge complaints (Drishti IAS, 2024).

Comparative international models provide a more expansive understanding of legal recognition. The South African constitution, for instance, bans discrimination on both grounds of sexual orientation and race, acknowledging the intersection of social oppressions. Argentina and Malta have enacted gender identity legislation without medical necessity, which has made the legal transition easier for marginalized trans individuals. These systems show that legal inclusion needs to be rooted not only in the language of rights but in the lived realities of queer diversity (Amnesty International, 2021).

For India, a truly intersectional approach to legal reform requires removing bureaucratic gatekeeping, building awareness among legal professionals about caste, gender, and sexuality, and ensuring that queer voices, especially those from underrepresented groups, are present in legislative deliberations. One-size-fits-all reforms cannot address layered exclusions. Only when legal frameworks account for how identities compound and interact will justice be meaningfully extended to all.

2.6. Mental Health and Emotional Safety

Mental well-being is a foundation of inclusion, and for queer individuals in India, the battle for emotional security begins in childhood and continues unremittingly into adulthood. Despite greater legal protections and cultural visibility, mental health care continues to be underfunded, disproportionately allocated, and often unfriendly to LGBTQ+ individuals, especially those with intersecting marginalizations based on caste, class, or location (Gupta, 2023).

A study conducted by A Humsafar Trust (2023) revealed that almost 60% of queer adolescents were subjected to verbal harassment, threats, or efforts to alter their identity by family members upon coming out. Rejection often progresses to eviction, "honour-based" violence, or forced institutionalization for trans individuals. These experiences can have serious mental health implications, such as depression, anxiety, drug use, and the suicide rate of trans people is estimated to be nearly ten times the national average (Drishti IAS, 2024).

Schools can scale up this distress. A UNESCO (2022) survey reveals that 71% of queer students in India reported facing bullying, misgendering, or exclusion, and the majority of schools have no counsellors trained in queer-affirmative care. Absent supportive services in the critical adolescence period of identity formation, students remain open to long-term emotional damage and poor academic performance.

These pressures accompany students into university and the workforce. Most queer people remain closeted to prevent backlash or loss of employment, producing chronic stress, burnout, and recurring anxiety attacks (Saha & Rao, 2021).

While there are mental health apps and online support groups, they are usually unavailable to those lacking internet, privacy, or digital literacy, especially in low-income urban or rural settings, where stigma further restricts outreach.

The therapy space itself provides only a scant haven. Even with the National Medical Commission's 2022 prohibition of conversion therapy, so-called religious or psychological "corrective" treatments continue under other names. Therapists who pathologize queer selves or engage in shaming even perpetuate mental anguish, particularly because rigorous training in queer-affirmative therapy is still rare in India's professional psychology curricula (Chakraborty, 2021).

Community-driven interventions are point disruptors. Programs like the Mariwala Health Initiative, Yaariyan, and iCall provide peer support that is non-judgmental, queer-informed referrals, and locally language content that is culturally responsive. These services facilitate emotional anchoring, access to resources, and a place to reinterpret pain as communal and political. Yet they exist largely in the city, operate on shoestring budgets, and lack regular institutional support or rural extension (Bhattacharya, 2023).

Globally speaking, New Zealand and Canada require LGBTQ+ sensitivity training for mental health professionals. The UK's NHS, on the other hand, offers specialized queer mental health streams, and Australia pays for LGBTQ+-dedicated clinics within the public health system (Amnesty International, 2021). These models showcase how emotional safety is made possible when services are not only government-funded but also structurally integrated into the national system.

In India, queer mental health mainstreaming needs to be backed by some real policy action: the inclusion of gender and sexuality in medical, psychology, and social work courses; funding for diverse region-wise, language-friendly community mental health centres; integrating support services in schools, colleges, and workplaces; and broadening anti-discrimination legislation to cover mental healthcare centres. Emotional safety should be seen not as a right but as an enabling platform for dignity, resilience, and the complete exercise of rights. It is only when this is ensured that inclusion can be experienced and not merely legislated.

3. Analysis
3.1. Research Question
To guide this investigation, the study focused on three key research questions:

a) How familiar are individuals with the concept of LGBTQ+ rights, and how does this relate to their comfort levels in discussing these topics within familial and social settings?

b) In what ways do people perceive discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals across public services, healthcare, and social spaces, and how do these perceptions influence awareness and support?

c) What factors, such as age, gender, education, and exposure to digital communities, affect levels of optimism regarding the future of LGBTQ+ inclusion in India?

3.2. Research Method
This research aimed to realize how Indians think and feel regarding, engage with, and reflect on the LGBTQ+ community behind headlines or jurisprudential changes. It sought to hear directly from public opinion: To what extent are individuals aware of LGBTQ+ rights? How are they at ease talking about these matters in families or among communities? What are their thoughts concerning the discrimination, optimism, and support in both physical and virtual spaces?

In order to find answers to these questions, the research utilized a mixed-methods design, mixing quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis to get not just what people believe, but why. A semi-structured questionnaire was given to 93 respondents in India via an online survey created using Google Forms. The survey was structured around five themes: Familiarity and Awareness, Comfort, Perceived Discrimination, Support and Belonging, and Optimism. Each question utilized a 5-point Likert scale, facilitating comparative analysis.

To enhance social and geographic coverage, the study employed a non-probability snowball sampling approach. The early participants were invited to share the survey within their networks. Further, to complement qualitative understanding, 15 in-depth interviews were also administered with men and women from various socio-cultural backgrounds. These interviews gave context to the survey results and shed light on experiences that response structuring alone could not reveal.

This method permitted a richer and textured understanding of public attitudes towards LGBTQ+ people in India, integrating statistical information with personal accounts (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

3.3. Sample Description
This subsection presents the demographic profile of the 93 participants in the survey. Gender, age, education, and income variations are essential backgrounds for understanding the results in the broader social context of India.

Most said they were female (69.1%), then male (28.7%), with the remainder opting not to say anything or identifying as non-binary. This bias can be explained by a greater willingness among women to talk about identity, which has been shown in gendered empathy studies (Basow and Johnson, 2000).

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Survey Respondents

Category	Distribution	Frequency	Sample Share (%)
Gender	Male	27	28.7
	Female	65	69.1
	Non-binary	1	1.1
Age	Under 18	13	14
	18-25	10	10.8
	26-35	10	10.8
	36-45	21	22.6
	46-60	30	32.3
Education	Completed Class 12	16	17.1
	Completed Graduation	21	22.3
	Completed Postgrad	38	40.4
	Above Postgrad	16	17
	No Formal Education	2	2.1
Income	₹5L - ₹10L	6	6.7
	₹10L - ₹15L	9	10
	₹15L - ₹20L	8	8.9
	₹20L - ₹25L	8	8.9
	Above ₹25L	60	66.7

The most significant proportion of the respondents was in the 46 to 60 age bracket (32.3%), followed by 36 to 45 years (22.6%). Although this created room for cross-generational examination, the voice of younger people, particularly those 18 to 25 years old, was smaller, perhaps skewing conclusions related to optimism and online experience (Mishra, 2020). Most of the respondents were highly educated. Some 40.4% had postgraduate qualifications, and 17% had proceeded beyond that level. This indicates the depth of analysis but constrains generalizability to less formally educated or rural populations (UNESCO, 2023). Two-thirds of the respondents had incomes of over ₹25 lakhs in their households. This financially affluent sample can influence perceptions of comfort and inclusion, particularly in areas such as employment, housing, and health care, where economic status can insulate against discrimination (Bauman and Bittner, 2020).

4. Research Findings

The following section presents important trends of the survey, including public awareness, level of comfort, discrimination reported, and future expectations towards LGBTQ+ inclusion in India.

4.1. Public Awareness and Attitudes

Most respondents reported being only slightly or moderately knowledgeable about LGBTQ+ rights, with only 12% reporting being fully informed. Awareness was slightly higher among younger and better-educated respondents, though the relationship was not consistent, indicating that education alone is insufficient to guarantee sensitivity to LGBTQ+ concerns.

Regardless of low awareness, more than half of the participants concurred that LGBTQ+ people should be treated equally in public places.

However, this openness appeared more aspirational than active, with few respondents having taken tangible action to support inclusion.

4.2. Comfort and Perceived Discrimination

Comfort with LGBTQ+ individuals varied by context:
- High comfort was reported for working in teams, classroom interaction, and eating or travelling together.
- More intimate situations, like sharing a room, saw noticeably lower comfort levels.

At the same time, two-thirds of respondents reported witnessing some form of discrimination, with accommodation access and government offices flagged as the most likely domains of exclusion. Public utilities and transportation fared slightly better, but were far from equitable.

Table 2. Mean Comfort Scores Across Social Contexts

Situation	Mean Comfort Score	Std. Deviation	Setting Type
Sharing a room with an LGBTQ+ member	2.9	1.1	Intimate
Eating with an LGBTQ+ member	3.7	0.9	Intimate
Travelling with an LGBTQ+ member	3.6	0.8	Intimate
Attending a party with an LGBTQ+ member	4.1	0.7	Public
Working in a team with LGBTQ+ colleagues	4.5	0.6	Public
Having an LGBTQ+ teacher or professor	4.4	0.7	Public
Sharing a classroom with an LGBTQ+ student	4.3	0.8	Public

4.3. Optimism and Outlook

Encouragingly, nearly 70% of respondents expressed optimism about future improvements in LGBTQ+ rights. This hopeful sentiment was strongest among younger and female-identifying participants, aligning with broader cultural shifts noted in contemporary research.

5. Data Analysis and Interpretation
5.1. Familiarity with LGBTQ+ Terminology

Respondents rated their familiarity with LGBTQ+ terms on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Not familiar at all) to 5 (Very familiar), with most responses clustering around 4 and 5. The mean score was 3.64 (SD = 1.05), suggesting moderate to high awareness.

The following chart shows that over 70% of respondents rated themselves as either familiar or very familiar with the meaning of LGBTQ+ content, which aligns with findings from Tandon (2021), who noted that there is increased exposure to such matters through social media and popular culture.

Table 3. Familiarity with LGBTQ+ Terminology

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Familiarity with LGBTQ+ terminology	95	3.64	1.05	1	5

Still, when asked to expand on the acronym LGBTQ+, respondents displayed only adequate knowledge at best, which indicates that there remains a considerable subset without basic knowledge. This backs Chakravarti and Sen's (2020) call for mainstreaming LGBTQ+ education in formal schools to guarantee equal awareness.
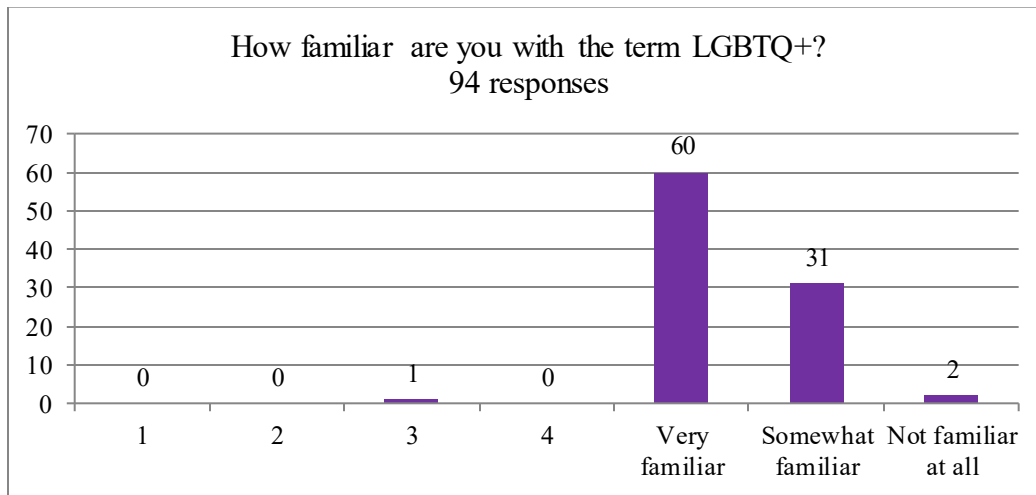

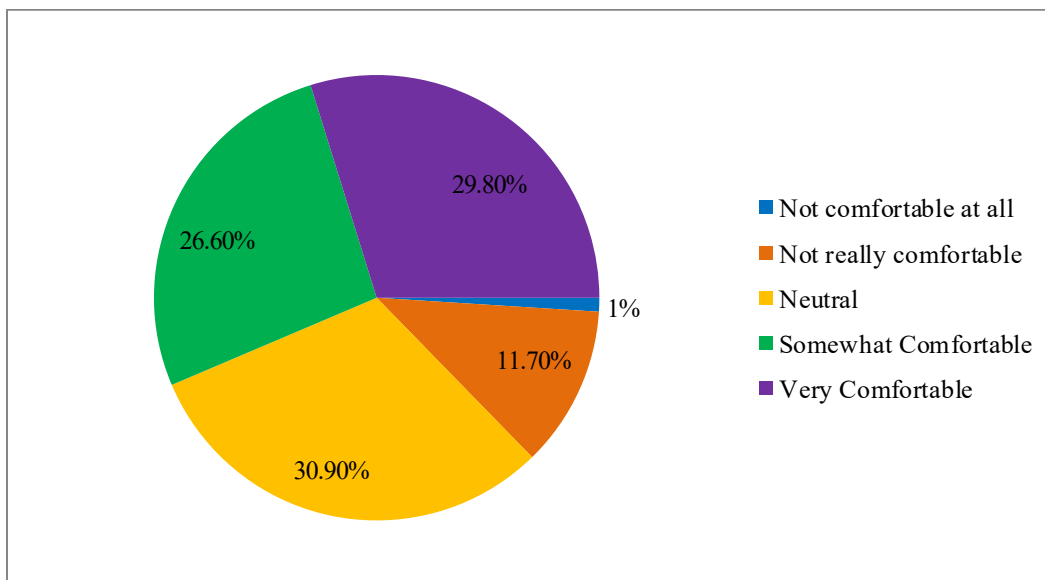**Fig. 1 Distribution of Familiarity with LGBTQ+ Terminology**

Fig. 2 Distribution of Comfort Discussing LGBTQ+ Topics at Home

5.1.1. Comfort Discussing LGBTQ+ Topics at Home

When questioned regarding how comfortable they were talking about LGBTQ+ issues with their families, answers ranged but trended towards positivity. Though a small minority selected "Not comfortable at all," close to 57% chose "Somewhat Comfortable" or "Very Comfortable," demonstrating a trend toward conversation in personal space, particularly prevalent in traditionally conservative Indian families.

Statistically speaking, the question gave rise to the following:

Table 4. Comfort Discussing LGBTQ+ Topics Within Family Settings

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Comfort discussing LGBTQ+ topics with family	94	3.8	0.98	1	5

Responses clustered around the "Somewhat Comfortable" mark, with room for upward movement. This fact highlights the way influences such as family values, education, and exposure determine such attitudes. Kent et al. (2001) contend that psychological safety in the family is central to facilitating LGBTQ+ expression and building long-term changes in perception.

5.1.2. Perceived Social Comfort with LGBTQ+ People

The above two graphs illustrate the comfort level of respondents with LGBTQ+ people in their daily social and workplace life. Respondents rated responses such as: "I would be comfortable having a queer person in my class.", "I would be comfortable having a queer co-worker.", "I would be comfortable being friends with an LGBTQ+ person."

Responses (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree) resulted in a composite mean comfort score of 4.38 (SD = 0.79), with 76% of participants choosing "Agree" or "Strongly Agree," indicating high overall comfort, particularly in academic and workplace situations.

A one-way ANOVA was used to analyze comfort means between the three education groups.

Table 5. Comfort Score by Education Level

Educational Level	N	Mean Comfort Score	Standard Deviation	Minimum
School	15	4.07	0.80	2.40
Undergraduate	43	4.36	0.78	2.80
Postgraduate	37	4.58	0.65	3.20

The p-value of 0.0079 indicates a statistically significant difference in comfort across education levels, with postgraduates reporting the highest mean (M = 4.58). This

supports the findings by Sharma and Rao (2021) and Kent et al. (2001), which associate higher education with increased social acceptance and reduced prejudice due to exposure to diverse narratives and critical discourse.

Table 6. ANOVA Results

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p-value
Between groups	3.579	2	1.789	3.150	0.0079
Within Groups	52.314	92	0.569		
Total	55.893	94			

5.1.3. Observed Discrimination and Support for Legal Reform

This section explores whether perceptions of discrimination influence public support for LGBTQ+ rights, particularly the right to marry. In this, we assess two kinds of perceptions - discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals in India, and support for their legal right to marry.

The average discrimination score was 4.31 (SD = 0.73), and support for marriage rights was similarly high at 4.23 (SD = 0.81), suggesting a strong consensus around both issues. A Pearson correlation test found a moderate, statistically significant positive relationship between the two variables (r = 0.43, p < 0.01)

Table 7. Pearson correlation matrix

	Perceived Discrimination	Support for Marriage Rights
Perceived Discrimination	1.00	0.43
Support for Marriage Rights	0.43	1.00

This suggests that stronger awareness of discrimination predicts greater allyship and reformist attitudes, supporting Ghosh et al. (2020) and Kent et al. (2001), who emphasize the role of perceived injustice in catalyzing civic action.
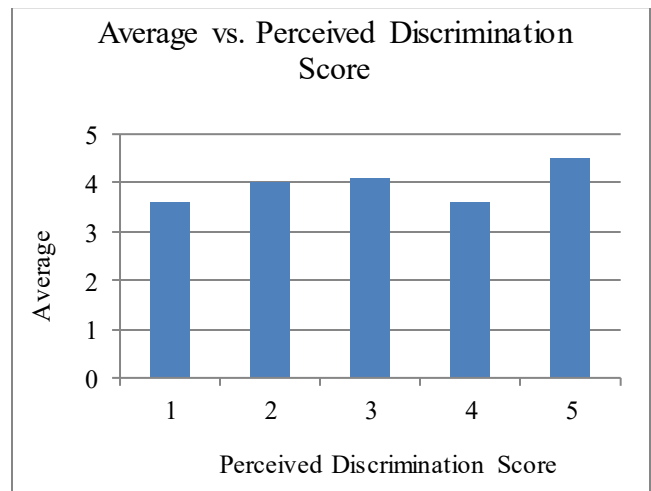

Fig. 3 Support for Marriage Equality by Perceived Discrimination

This graph further illustrates that respondents who "strongly agreed" that discrimination exists also showed the highest average support (≈ 4.3) for marriage equality, while those with lower recognition showed noticeably less support. In sum, perceiving discrimination appears to not only reflect awareness but also predict action. Recognizing injustice often inspires stronger advocacy for LGBTQ+ rights.

5.1.4. Awareness of Legal Rights and Protections
This section examines how familiar respondents are with LGBTQ+ legal rights, especially post the Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India (2018) judgement, which decriminalized homosexuality. Respondents rated their awareness on a 6-point scale, from Not aware at all to Fully informed.

The mean awareness score was 3.29 (SD = 1.05), indicating a moderate understanding with noticeable variation. Only 27% of respondents were "Quite aware," "Very aware," or "Fully informed," while 32% reported low or no awareness. The remaining 41% were neutral or slightly aware, highlighting a knowledge gap, particularly when contrasted with the higher awareness of discrimination noted in Section 5.1.4.
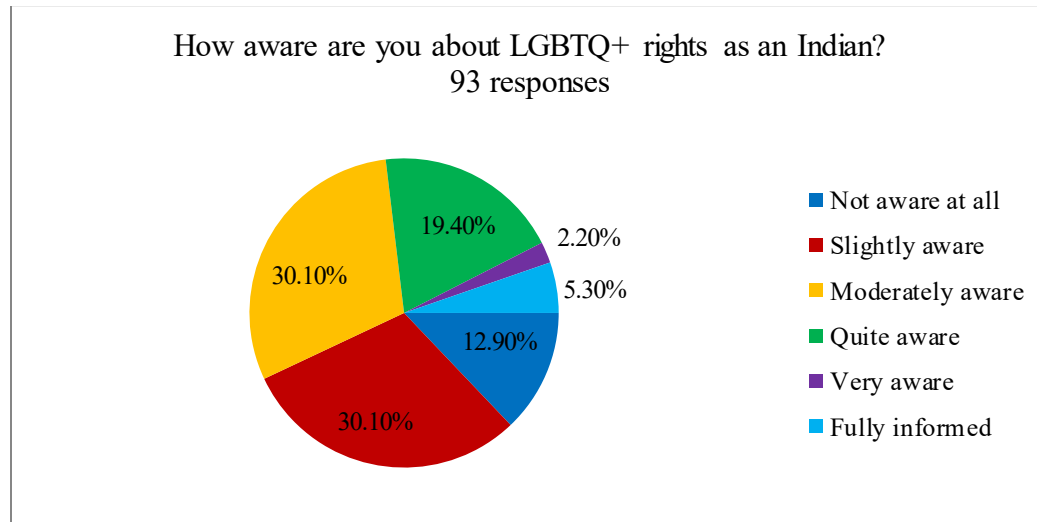

Fig. 4 Distribution of Awareness About LGBTQ+ Legal Rights

A one-way ANOVA tested variation in legal awareness by education level (School, Undergraduate, Postgraduate), revealing a statistically significant difference.

Table 8. ANOVA: Legal Awareness by Education Level

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p-value
Between groups	5.624	2	2.812	4.88	0.0093
Within Groups	52.854	92	0.574		
Total	58.478	94			

Post-hoc analysis showed significantly higher scores among Postgraduate and Undergraduate respondents compared to those who only completed school. However, even the most educated group averaged below 3.7/6, indicating that legal knowledge is not deeply embedded within formal education.

This aligns with Singh (2023) and Kent et al. (2001), who emphasize that legal literacy remains underdeveloped, especially in urban youth. While people may recognize injustice, fewer know how to redress it through institutional means. Bridging this awareness-action gap will require targeted civic education that empowers individuals to navigate and demand their rights.

5.1.5. Openness to LGBTQ+ Inclusion in Public Life
To critically examine the nature of exclusion-inclusion, this study evaluates support for LGBTQ+ inclusion across public institutions like workplaces, schools, and healthcare. Openness was measured through Likert-scale items assessing acceptance of equal treatment and participation in public life.

The mean openness score was 3.74 out of 5 (*SD* = 0.89), reflecting generally positive attitudes. While 52% agreed with inclusive statements, 16% opposed them, and 32% remained neutral, revealing a moderate but uneven pattern of public support. To assess generational differences, a t-test compared responses from participants under 25 and those 25 and older:

Table 9. T-test: Openness Score by Age Group

Age Group	Mean Openness Score	N
Under 25	3.35	23
25 and Older	2.44	68
t-value	3.09	
p-value	0.0027	

The statistically significant p-value of 0.0027 indicates that younger respondents were significantly more open to

LGBTQ+ inclusion. With a moderate effect size (Cohen's *d* = 0.51), this supports findings by Shah & Banerjee (2021), who describe Gen Z in India as more accepting of diverse identities, even if social structures lag behind. Therefore, while support is rising, especially among youth, a tangible gap remains between ideological progress and real-world inclusion.

5.1.6. *Optimism About LGBTQ+ Inclusion in the Future*

This section explores how hopeful respondents feel about future improvements in LGBTQ+ rights in India. On a 5-point scale, the mean optimism score was 2.74 (SD = 1.08),

reflecting cautious hope. While few respondents expressed outright pessimism, many were uncertain about the pace and depth of change.

The most common response was 3, indicating a neutral to slightly hopeful stance. Nearly 48% of the sample selected 1 or 2, reflecting moderate to low optimism. Only 15 respondents chose 4 or 5, showing limited strong confidence in future improvements.
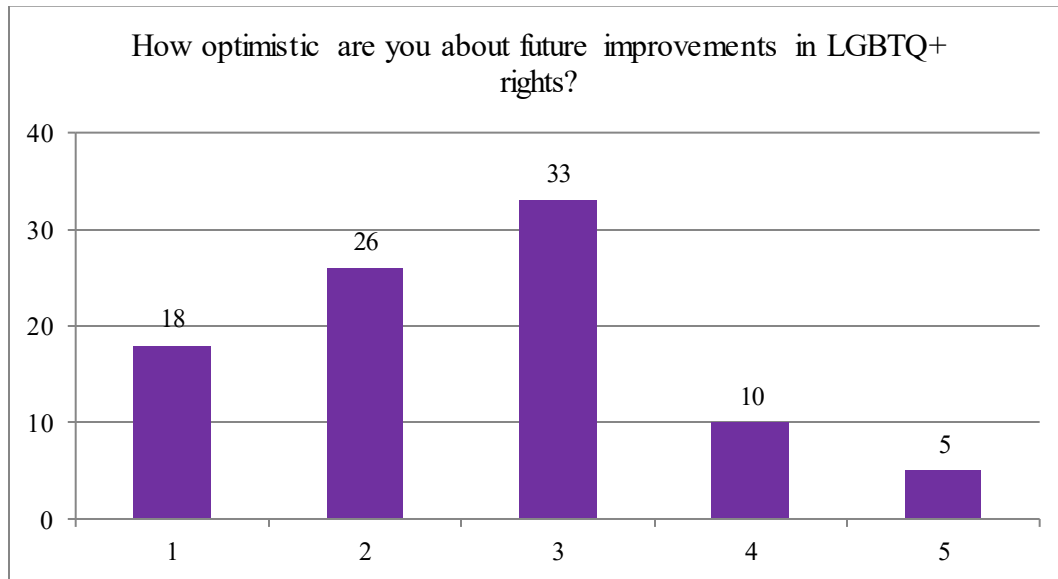

Fig. 5 Levels of Optimism About LGBTQ+ Inclusion in the Future

This pattern suggests that although respondents broadly believe in the possibility of progress, they remain sceptical about whether structural reforms will materialize. Many qualitative responses emphasized that legal changes like the Section 377 ruling are symbolic but insufficient without deeper cultural shifts and accountability.

Thus, while optimism exists, it is guarded. Respondents want more than promises; they seek visible action and inclusive governance.

6. Gender-Based Perceptual Differences

To further explore perceptions, this subsection evaluates whether gender correlates with differences in comfort, familiarity, and optimism regarding LGBTQ+ inclusion using independent t-tests.

For comfort, females reported slightly higher mean scores than males, but the difference was not statistically significant (t(87) = 1.27, p = 0.207, Cohen's d = 0.26), suggesting that while some directional trends exist, they are modest. Similarly, for familiarity with LGBTQ+ identities and terms, females performed slightly better, yet the difference

remained statistically non-significant (t(88) = 1.54, p = 0.127, d = 0.32). This suggests a generally low conceptual literacy across all genders. A significant gender gap was observed in optimism scores. Female respondents were notably more hopeful about future LGBTQ+ inclusion than their male counterparts (t(93) = -2.44, p = 0.017, Cohen's d = 0.49), indicating a moderate effect. This disparity may reflect increased emotional identification with social justice movements or greater exposure to progressive narratives among women.

Table 10. Gender-Based Differences in LGBTQ+ Comfort, Familiarity, and Optimism

Variable	t-value	p-value	Cohen's d
Comfort	1.27	0.207	0.26
Familiarity	1.54	0.127	0.32
Optimism	-2.44	0.017	0.49

These findings suggest that while comfort and familiarity do not differ greatly by gender, optimism is the most pronounced perceptual gap, possibly due to deeper civic engagement or gendered empathy narratives among women (Singh, 2023).

6.1. Structural Effects: Age, Education, Income (ANOVA)

A one-way ANOVA revealed a statistically significant difference in legal awareness based on education level (F(3,91) = 4.88, p < 0.01). Post-hoc tests indicated that graduates and postgraduates scored significantly higher than those with only school-level education. However, no group averaged above 3.7/5, pointing to systemic shortcomings in civic instruction.

For comfort, education level had no significant effect (F(3,91) = 1.62, p = 0.189), indicating that knowledge does not necessarily lead to emotional openness or social inclusion. Income level showed a marginal relationship with optimism (F(3,91) = 2.71, p = 0.051), with wealthier respondents tending to be more optimistic, albeit some expressed scepticism due to elitism or perceived inaction.

Age significantly impacted the frequency of observed discrimination (F(4,91) = 5.42, p < 0.001). Younger respondents (under 25) reported seeing more instances of bullying, likely due to greater social media exposure and empathy-based generational norms. Conversely, older interviewees (over 45) expressed lower awareness, which could be because they had less exposure or because they were socially desensitized.

Table 11. ANOVA Results: Structural Influences on LGBTQ+ Perceptions

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	F-value	P-value
Education	Legal Awareness	4.88	<0.01
Education	Comfort	1.62	0.189
Income	Optimism	2.71	0.051
Age	Observed Discrimination	5.42	<0.001

Overall, these findings reiterate that structural privilege, in education, age, and income, shapes awareness and perception unevenly. Whereas education extends legal knowledge, it is not necessarily inclusive. Likewise, whereas income incites mixed reactions, youth feel excluded more starkly because they are more socially sensitive.

6.2. Correlation Matrix: Interrelationship Between Constructs

Pearson correlation matrix assessed relationships between five central variables: familiarity, comfort, awareness, optimism, and discrimination perceived. Familiarity was strongly positively correlated with comfort (r = 0.63, p < 0.001), affirming Goleman's (2019) proximity theory whereby exposure diminishes discomfort. Awareness and optimism were positively correlated too (r = 0.42, p < 0.001), which indicates hopefulness may be promoted by legal knowledge. However, perceived discrimination was inversely related to optimism (r = -0.37, p = 0.002), so repeated exposure to unfairness could potentially lower belief in reform at the systemic level.

Table 12. Pearson Correlation Matrix: Relationships Between Key Perceptual Constructs

Variable 1	Variable 2	Pearson's r	p-value
Familiarity	Comfort	0.63	<0.001
Awareness	Optimism	0.42	<0.001
Discrimination	Optimism	-0.37	0.002
Familiarity	Optimism	0.25	0.018
Comfort	Optimism	0.21	0.036

These correlations represent a feedback cycle: familiarity leads to comfort, which leads to optimism. On the other hand, discrimination breaks this cycle by diminishing trust in progress. This emphasizes that change at an individual level is most potent when it is cognitive and emotional, merging awareness with empathy and experience.

7. Thematic Observations from Images and Charts

7.1. Familiarity, Comfort, and Awareness

Participants exhibited high familiarity with the identities frequently cited by the likes of Lesbian, Gay, and Transgender but had difficulty with identities like Queer, Intersex, and Asexual, resonating with UNESCO (2019)'s observation of sparse formal education concerning spectrums of identity. Such a knowledge gap was reflected in participants' self-reported legal acumen. While most professed a middle-level understanding of LGBTQ+ rights, open-ended answers indicated ignorance of key precedents such as Section 377 and marriage equality. Such inconsistencies negate the assumption by GLAAD (2023) that online access correlates with legal literacy.

Comfort levels differed markedly by context. Semi-public spaces such as classrooms and offices experienced relatively greater ease, whereas more personal or intimate settings (e.g., sharing meals or rooms) indicated discomfort and split. Answers generally rested in the vicinity of "Neutral" and "Somewhat Comfortable," with obvious polarization, particularly for male respondents. This affirms Roy's (2017) note that India's surface-level tolerance is regularly shaped by deeply ingrained gender norms.

7.2. Discrimination and Future Outlook

Perceived discrimination was strongest in official institutions like banks, health centres, and government offices, with relatively weaker concerns in relaxed or informal environments like public parks. This resonates with Srivastava's (2021) argument of India's private acceptance abutting systemic exclusion. Even against these adversities, most participants, particularly youth aged between 18 and 25, had moderate to strong optimism regarding the future of LGBTQ+ rights. Answers ranged in clusters between 3 and 4 on the Likert scale, mirroring Mishra's (2020) results of guarded generational hope rooted in reformist ideals.

8. Discussion and Implications

A revealing disconnect was found: several respondents were able to recite legislation such as Section 377 or affirm LGBTQ+ rights, but did not want to interact with queer persons in everyday life. An awkwardness was revealed in being willing to share space or talk about identity with relatives. This dissonance echoes Sahay and Menon's (2021) observation that legislative advancements frequently precede social ease.

Gender distinctions were evident. Male discomfort was prevalent, in line with Roy (2017), while younger and more educated respondents were more upbeat, in line with Mishra (2020). However, this optimism tended to remain theoretical—few felt empowered to do anything when confronted with discrimination, indicating a pattern of passive allyship.

Legal illiteracy was the other fundamental hindrance. A paltry 27 percent reported robust familiarity with LGBTQ+ protections, even among postgraduates. This is contrary to GLAAD's (2023) perspective that digital access enhances legal comprehension. Most respondents were confused or misidentified simple rights.

Class and education likewise proved to be within limits. Privileged groups did have greater awareness, though not necessarily comfort or understanding.

This makes Srivastava's (2021) contention that economic privilege is the cause of inclusion problematic. Likewise, UNESCO (2019) observed that increased education advances awareness, but the deeper understanding is often superficial.

These comparisons are charted below:

Table 13. Comparative summary of key themes and literature alignment

Key Theme	Study Reference	Present Study's Findings	Relationship
Male Discomfort	Roy (2017)	Males showed lower comfort in personal spaces	Supports
Generational optimism	Mishra (2020)	Gen Z respondents were more optimistic	Supports
Legal awareness & media	GLAAD (2023)	Confusion persisted despite digital exposure	Contradicts
Class-linked acceptance	Srivastava (2021)	High income did not guarantee comfort or awareness	Adds Nuance
Familiarity improves comfort	Herek (2002)	Awareness and comfort are positively correlated	Supports
Education & understanding	UNESCO (2019)	Education improved awareness, but gaps remained	Adds nuance

Familiarity was the most robust predictor of comfort, confirming Herek's (2002) findings. Still, even familiar respondents confessed to remaining silent in discriminatory environments. A moderate negative correlation ($r = -0.37$) between optimism and observed discrimination implies allyship burnout (Rao and Fernandes, 2020).

Women recorded higher scores in awareness, comfort, and optimism, confirming Banerjee and Desai's (2019) findings on how marginalization gives rise to empathy. This reinforces the imperative for intersectional sensitization efforts.

To bridge the awareness-action gap, citizenship education needs to go beyond tokenism. LGBTQ+ issues need to be integrated into ethics, civics, and health education. Anti-bullying policies, safe spaces, and mental health initiatives are needed in schools and workplaces.

Allyship training needs to engage with storytelling, panels, and peer leadership to cultivate everyday empathy. Inclusion needs to be not merely an idea, but a widely shared social practice.

This research corroborates and complements central literature. It confirms trends such as youth optimism and gendered empathy but challenges presumptions regarding class and media. To take awareness forward into action, India requires not only policy but preparedness, facilitation, and genuine human connection.

9. Conclusion

This research investigated the public attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals in India using quantitative measures and qualitative responses and gauged awareness, comfort, optimism, and discrimination. Though the results indicate increasing support, they also demonstrate continuing dissonance between professions and practice. Awareness was moderate, though most respondents misdefined central identities like intersex and non-binary. This suggests surface-level exposure to LGBTQ+ issues has not yet translated into correct civic or legal knowledge, particularly within formal education systems. Comfort was the most polarized measure. Respondents reported being highly comfortable in public situations like workplaces and classrooms. Nevertheless, intimate situations involving sharing a room or travelling together elicited considerably lower comfort. This disparity

demonstrates how social acceptance can collapse in emotionally or physically intimate settings.

Gendered differences were also present. Females reported more consistently higher comfort levels and optimism. This might be an indication of gendered empathy or more identification with rights-based frames, especially in the case of persons with personal or collective experiences of marginalization. Conversely, optimism proved to be the most universally high measure. Younger survey respondents, in fact, voiced very strong convictions about progress down the line, citing a values shift and identity politics among their generation. However, this optimism was frequently accompanied by deficiencies in awareness or comfort, indicating that belief is not always matched by preparedness for inclusion.

Discrimination reports were rampant, particularly in housing, schools, and government agencies. This indicates that although social discourse is changing, structural and institutional disparities are still deeply rooted. To progress, LGBTQ+ issues need to be infused into curricula, teacher preparation, and community outreach programs. Sensitization must prioritize accessibility by regions and languages. The media need to move beyond symbolic representation to normalize diverse identities in daily narratives.

Limitations of the study include online sampling bias, possible social desirability of responses, and the inability to follow changes over time. Longitudinal approaches should be taken in future research, intersectional identity experiences examined, and education, media, and culture measured for their effects on changing attitudes. Inclusion is not inevitable. It needs thoughtful policy, cultural examination, and concerted community effort. One starts making progress when the intention is followed by well-informed action, institutionally as well as in the routine of daily life.

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