



SOCIETIAL ATTITUDES
AND CHALLENGES FACED BY LGBT PEOPLE OF
BHUTAN

AUTHOR:

Puja Rai

Karma Sonam Choden

Dechen Tshomo

Samiksha Thapa.

Table of content:

Topics	Page no
Acknowledgement	1
Abstract	2-3
Introduction	3
Literature review	4-6
Objectives	6
Methodology	6-7
Sample questions	8-12
Findings	12-17
Analysis	18-21
Limitations	22
Recommendation	23
Conclusion	24
Reference	25

Acknowledgement

We would like to offer our deepest gratitude to Asian university for women for giving us this opportunity and platform where we could implement and further enhance our research skills and knowledge. Not only this, we are also thankful to them for funding our project which was essential to carry out our research. Furthermore, we would like to offer our gratitude to Lhak-sam organization for their cooperation, assistance and participation. Similarly, we would also like to thank all the participants of Gedu College of Business Studies, Motithang High school and other participants. Moreover, we would like to thank President Sonam Choden of Gedu college and teachers of Motithang high school for their hospitality and cooperation. Lastly, we would also like to thank our project supervisor Mr. Jason Homer for his effective feedback and suggestions which played a vital role in our research.

Abstract

LGBT stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender. This term describe people's sexual orientation and gender identity. Officially the concept of LGBT in Bhutan started in early 2010 where not much research has been done. It is still obscure and a lack information exists among the Bhutanese people. Thus to fill this research gap we conducted the study as a contribution to the existing literature. In addition, we did an in-depth face to face interview with some of the LGBT people. In our research, we contacted an organization called Lhak-Sam who supports LGBT to gather more information regarding the LGBT like the total number of LGBT officially registered under them. Around 118 LGBT are registered in that organization. Due to privacy concerns and less attention from the society, there is not much reliable research done on this topic. Through this research we found that many people still

lack knowledge and information about LGBT people. This may have been because of less visibility of LGBT people as we have found through our research that many LGBT people still fear opening up due to the stigmatization and the discrimination by society and family.

Introduction

The concept of Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender has been widely accepted and common throughout the world and most of the Asian countries; however in Bhutan it is still a new concept. Among the SAARC countries after Nepal and India, Bhutan has started to accept LGBT people by decriminalizing homosexuality in June 7, 2019. However, LGBT people are largely not visible in mainstream society because of a limited access to information, social, cultural and religious prospects. Despite the fact some media has begun to feature LGBT people but majority struggle to receive acceptance in Bhutan. Some exceptions to these norms include Karma Dupchen, is the creator of LGBT Bhutan, Bhutan's first ever Facebook page dedicated to spread awareness about LGBT community in 2013. In addition, Lhak-sam organization which was initially designated for HIV patients is the first and only organization which has been supporting LGBT in Bhutan since 2016. They play a vital role in spreading knowledge and broadening up the accessibility of LGBT information among Bhutanese people. As per the data of 2018, 118 LGBT members have been registered under Lhak-Sam Organisation.

Literature review

Vocabulary for LGBT people did not exist.

There was no such vocabulary named as LGBT until the sexual revolution happened in the 1960s. Before the 1960s, people used term “Third Gender” (Subhrajit, 318). LGBT people are more likely to get discriminated and harassed by majority of people who identify themselves as straight or Heterosexual (Subhrajit, 317). Homosexual people face lots of difficulties opening up to the society due to certain factors which includes religious, social, cultural and political beliefs of some “superior group”. LGBT people face social ostracization difficulties in a place where claiming a Homosexuality is a crime (Subhrajit, 318). They get life imprisonment, and in some countries they may risk even life penalty and harassment when caught front of the public (Subhrajit, 325). In addition, LGBT people are considered as criminal from Muslim perspective. For example, many Muslim people also consider having same sex relationship is sinful and against their religious laws. By extension, they believe that LGBT people deserves severe punishment in the form of stoning to death. Some of the major problems faced by the LGBT people in the whole world are rejection from their family, exclusion from society, discrimination from homophobic people, oral and physical harassment in schools, work area and public places. Due to fear of the negative reactions and rejection from their families and societies, when they are younger, most of the LGBT hesitate to come out to their families especially LGBT adolescents (Subhrajit, 320). People were unaware of homosexuality due to lack of information but now an increased access to internet. People have families themselves with LGBT concept all around the world except in few isolated countries such as Bhutan. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender students are being harassed daily in school space which often considered safest (Subhrajit, 322). As a result,

many LGBT students dropped out, considered self-harm, attempted suicide, felt socially excluded or turned to drugs (Tshering, 25).

In the research study done by Chatterjee Subhrajit shows that homosexual people are eight times more likely to commit suicide than heterosexual people. Nearly six times to get depression and more than three times more likely to use drugs (Subhrajit, 321). This information indicates that the LGBT people face discrimination due to their different sexual orientation preferences in the world. By extension, homosexual people encounter obstacles in satisfying their needs (Subhrajit, 326).

While there are many things that need to be done regarding LGBT rights. The recent decade have shown improvement in LGBT rights. Many countries have started legalizing same sex marriage or have decriminalized consensual same sex relationships. In her article “Decriminalizing same sex relations in Asia: Socio-cultural factors impeding legal reform”, Dinusha Panditaratne writes, “In many countries, especially those in Western Europe, North America, and Latin America, legal and social reforms have progressed far beyond decriminalization, towards equal civil rights and broad social acceptance for L.G.B.T persons.” (Panditaratne 173) However, the same cannot be said regarding the south Asian countries where most of the countries still criminalize homosexuality. Among the eight countries in South Asia, only two countries have decriminalized homosexuality, which are India and Nepal. In Bhutan, according to the article 213 of the Penal code 2004, homosexual conduct was considered to be a crime considering it to be “against the order of nature” (Tshering, 25). Although this ‘crime’ results to imprisonment for minimum one month to maximum one year but till date no such cases have yet been recorded as Tshering mentions Bhutanese are not aware of its (LGBT) existence (Tshering, 25). LGBT is still a new term in Bhutan. There was no specific word in Dzongkha coined for LGBT, until 2015 by Dzongkha Development Commission (Tshering, 24). Even course books in Bhutanese schools exclude

LGBT topics. This causes LGBT individuals to experience harassment, mocking and bullying by teachers and other students (Tshering, 25). However, recently, LGBT people have become more visible in television and social media. For example, there are Facebook groups for LGBT communities and the Bhutan Broadcasting Service, National television channel which held LGBT's live discussion. "A health worker of the Ministry of Health made history by becoming the first gay man to come out when the NACP(National Aids Control Programme) organized a half an hour interview on the national television BBS" (Tshering, 26).

Objectives:

Considering the current situation of LGBT in Bhutan, we address the following objectives:

- To identify the current situation of LGBT in Bhutan.
- To explore the bond of Bhutanese society community.
- To fill the research gap and contribute to the existing literature.
- To highlight the topic of LGBT rights among Bhutanese society.
- To provide some recommendations for LGBT rights to the concerned authority.

Methodology

Study design

Cross-sectional and correlational study.

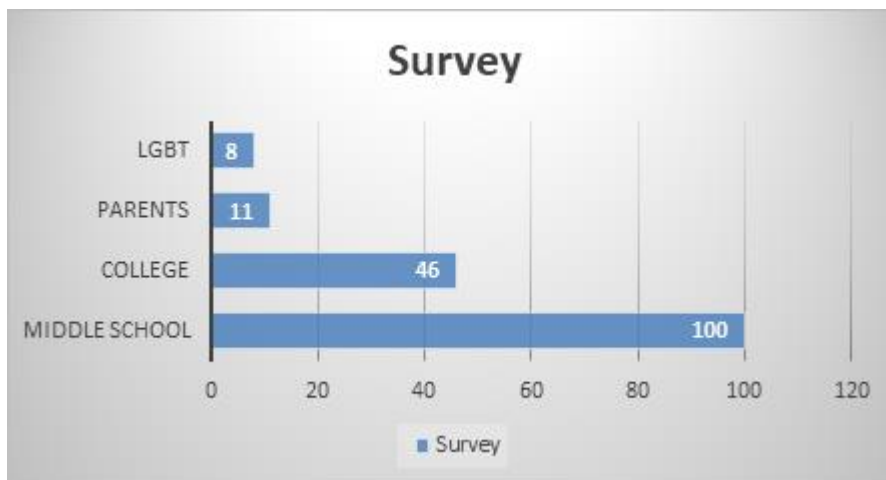
Data Collection Method

Survey and interview were used to collect data under primary sources.

Setting

- Thimphu, Motithang Higher Secondary school
- Yangchenphug Higher Secondary School
- Gedu, Gedu College of Business Studies
- Phuntsholing
- Lhak-sam Organization.

Study Population



Total participants 157 which includes, high School Students (100), college Students(46), LGBT People(8) and the general public(8).

Sampling and Sample size

-Sample size: 157 excluding LGBT people.

Data was collected through structured questionnaires survey between August 09th to August 18th . This study used the stratified sampling method to recruit participants. We used microsoft excel to analyze our data that we collected through survey.

Sample questionnaire

For students and community participants

1. Do you know about LGBT?

- Yes (full form)
- No

2. If yes, how did you know?

- Media
- Friends
- Family
- School
- Others

3. Do you support LGBT?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

5. What would you do if you were LGBT? Would you open up about it or not?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

6. Do you know any LGBT people?

- Yes
- No

7.If any of your friend open up to you as LGBT, would you still behave the same to your friend?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

8. Do you think that LGBT people are facing discrimination in Bhutan?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

9.If yes, who do you think is mostly to discriminate them?

- friend
- family
- society
- others

10. Do you have any message for LGBT community?

.....

.....

For LGBT individuals

1. What do you identify as?

- Lesbian
- Gay
- Transgender F/M
- Transgender M/F
- Bisexual
- I don't level myself anything

2. Have you ever been abused for being who you are? (in the street/ at home etc..)

- Verbally abused
- Physical abused
- Friends/family
- Never
- Others

3. Who did you come out to first?

- Mother
- Father
- Sister
- Brother
- Best friend
- Online friend

- Stranger
- Other

4. Are you ashamed of your sexuality?

- Sometimes
- No
- Yes

5. Have you ever experienced any form social injustice due to your sexuality?

- Yes
- No

6. Do you feel your essential identity is based on your sexual orientation?

- Yes
- No
- I am not sure

7. Have you at any point, had any sorts of suicidal thoughts or attempt because of your sexuality?

- Yes
- No

8. If society as a whole was more acceptable to LGBT people, do you think that you would have been open to others about your sexuality sooner?

- Yes
- No

- I am not sure

9. Are there certain places you avoid going because you feel as if you are treated differently because of your sexual orientation?

- Yes
- No

10. Do you believe, life would be easier if you are straight?

- Yes
- No

Findings:

Survey details

1) Do you know about LGBT?

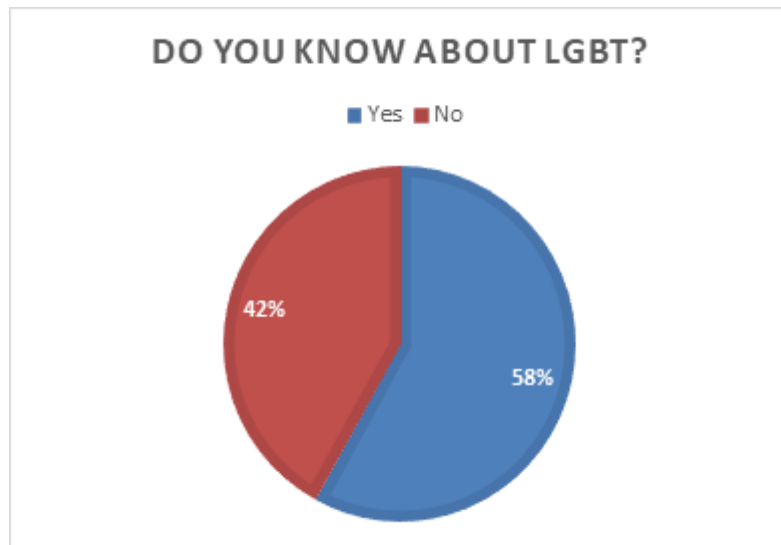


Fig. 1

2) From where?

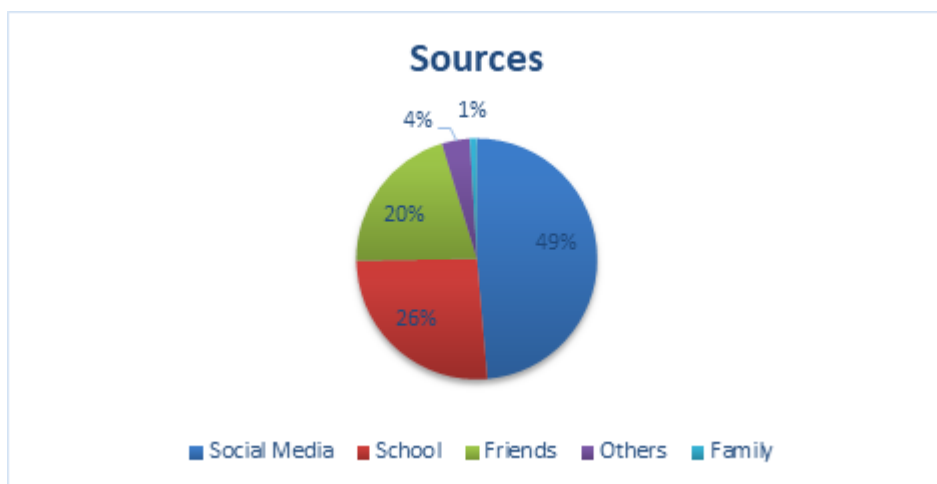


Fig. 2

3) Do you support LGBT?

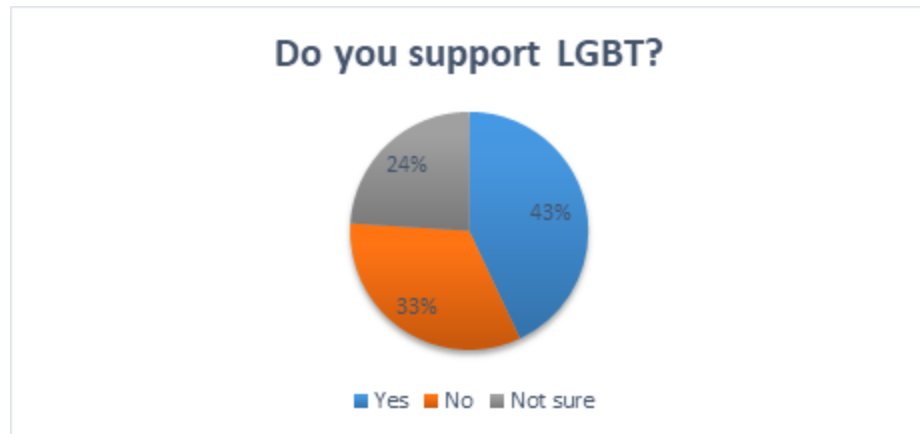


Fig. 3

4) Would you open up about it?

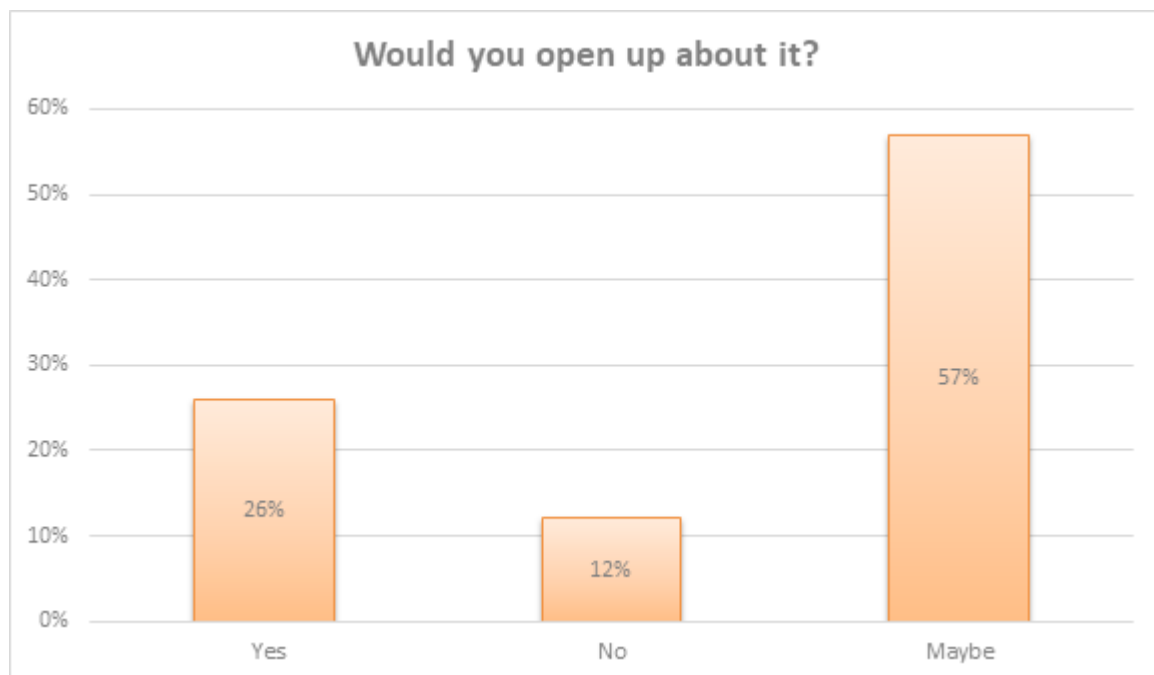


Fig. 4

5) Do you know any LGBT people?

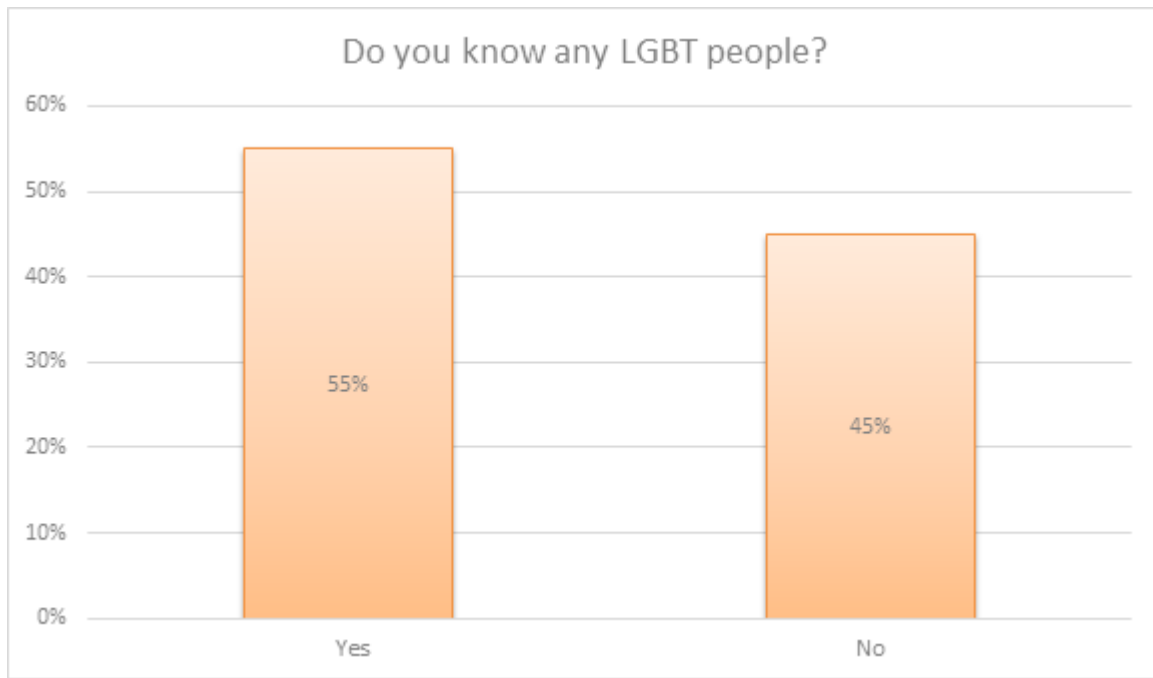


Fig. 5

6) If any of your friend open up, would you behave the same?

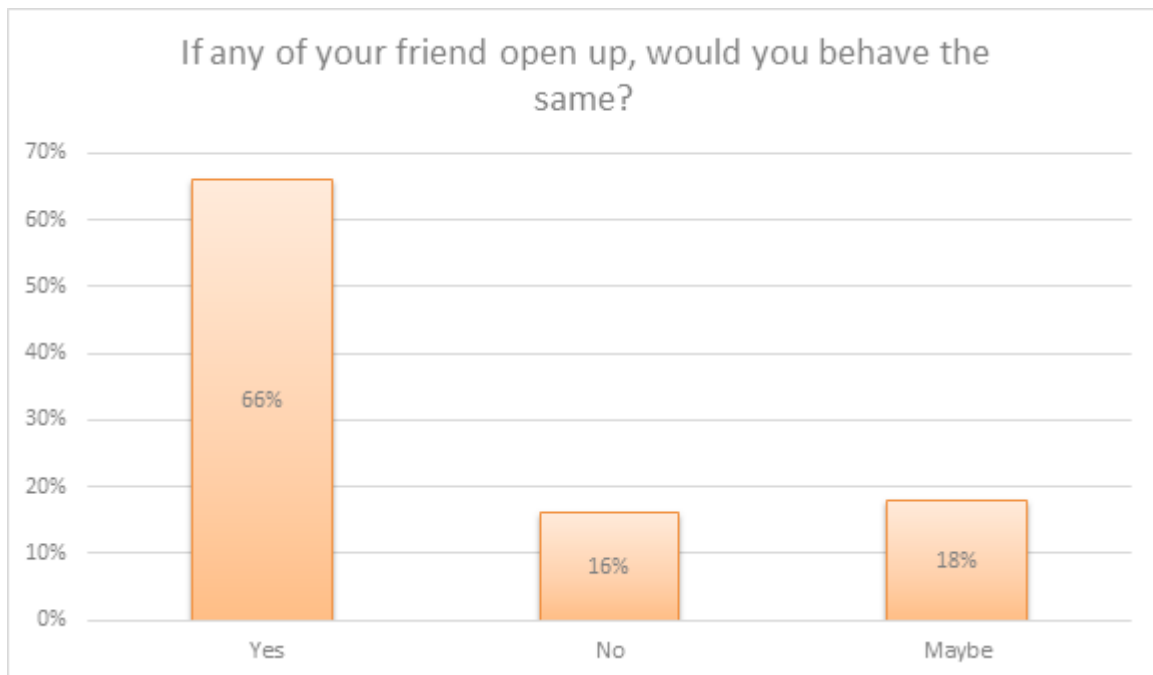


Fig. 6

7) Do you think that LGBT people are facing discrimination?

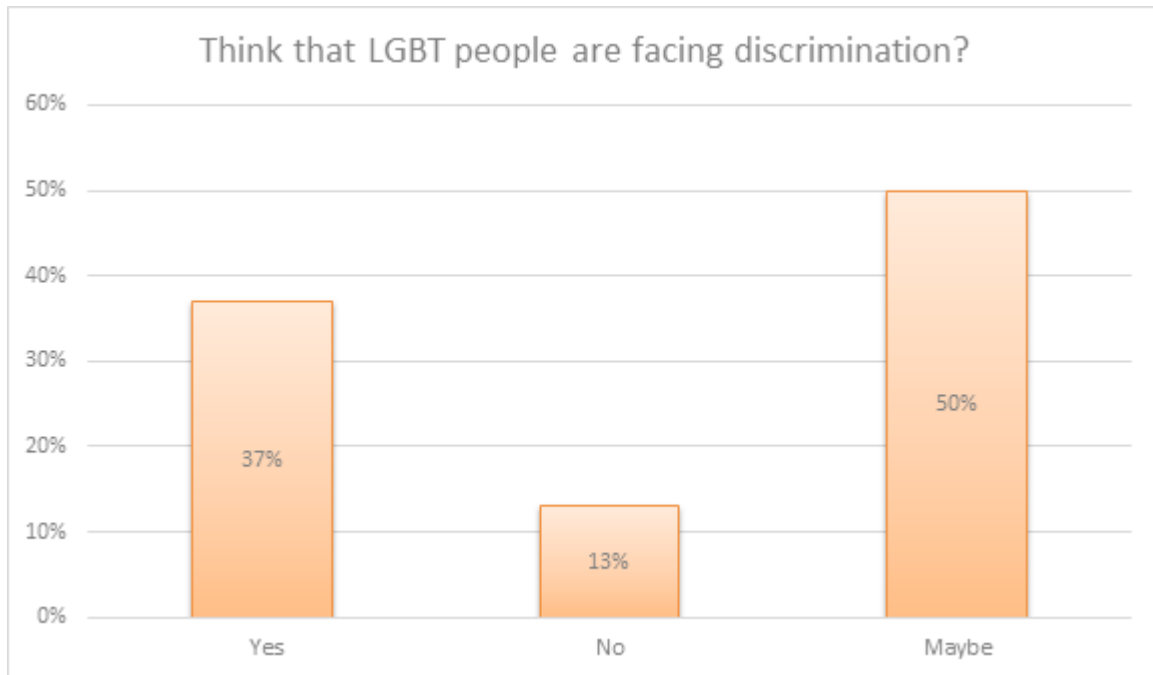


Fig. 7

8) How?

Ignore, bully, no support, criticize, no acceptance, conservative mind, badmouthing, treated differently,

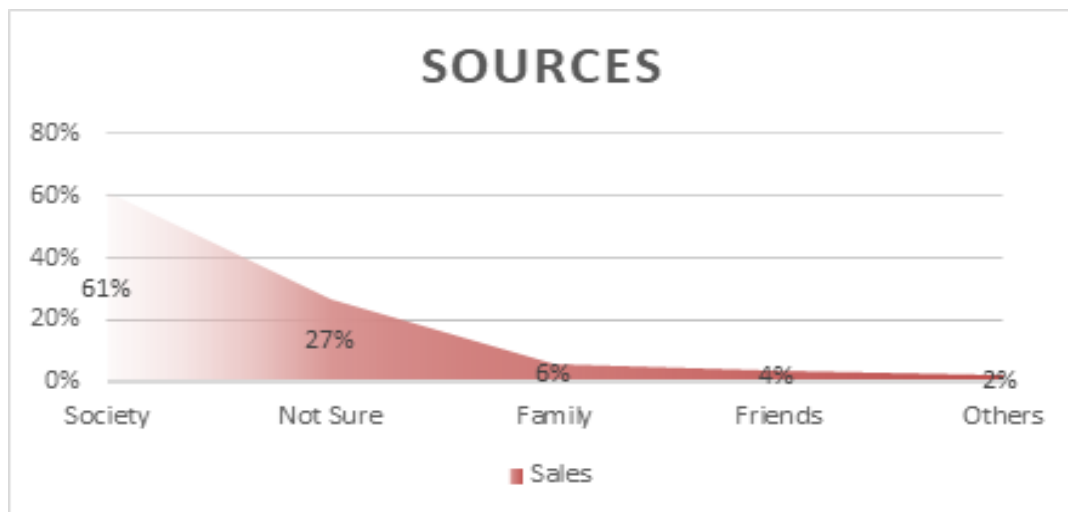
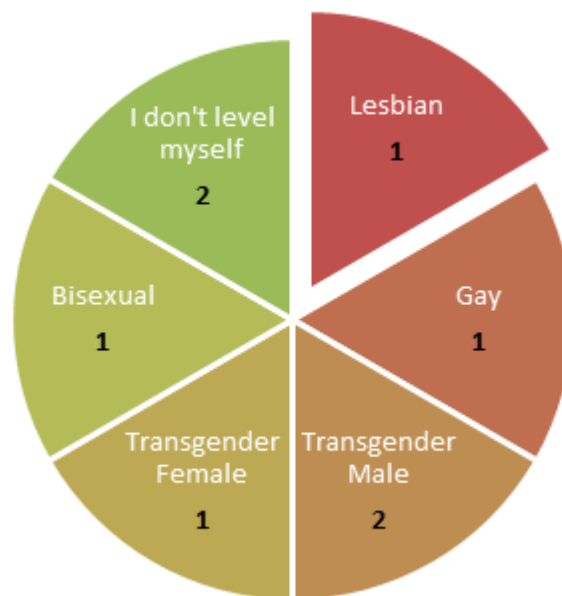


Fig. 8

Findings from LGBT survey



	Yes	No
Have you ever been abused for being who you are	87%	13%
Have you at any points, had any sorts of suicidal thoughts or attempt?	87%	13%
If society was more acceptable to LGBT people, do you think that you would have been open to others?		

	100%	0
Do you believe, life would be easier if you were straight?	63%	37%

Analysis:

Analysis of Society:

In our study, total 157 participants consisting of 46 college students, 11 general public and 100 high school students participated. They were given a set of nine survey questions. As shown in *figure 1*, students were questioned if they know about LGBT or not. As a result, 58% of them said yes and 42% of them said no. From this result, we can infer that many of the Bhutanese people know about the LGBT but we can not ignore the fact that moderately high percentage of people is still unaware of the concept of LGBT. In addition, one of the surprising aspects of the survey was that the high percentage of high school students knew about the LGBT compared to college students. This might have resulted due to the involvement of students from all around the country with different educational standard where some students were more exposed to LGBT compared to other students in Gedu college whereas in case of high school survey, only one high school from Thimphu city was included. Comparatively high school students were more exposed with LGBT concept as the place being more modernized compared to other parts of the country. We can also infer that

knowledge about LGBT can differ along with educational, geographical and social background.

Following that we can see that in figure 2 where participants have answered the source of information about the LGBT. Out of the given options media, school, friends, family and others, 49% of them said that they got it through social media like facebook, instagram, newspaper and etc. Likewise, 26% of them knew from school, 20% of them knew from their friends, 4% of them from other sources and only 1% of them came to know from their family. As a result, we can conclude that the majority of them came to know about LGBT from social media which also infers that this topic is not very often discussed with family or friends or taught in the school. This may have resulted due to Bhutan being one of the conservative countries. In figure 3, they asked whether they support LGBT or not, and we got the result where 43% of the participants said that they do but as we can see that 33% of them said no and rest 24% of them were not sure about it. Here we can deduce that though high percentage of them said yes but relatively high percentage of them also said no and we can also see that many were unsure about it. This shows the lack of information and concept of LGBT among the Bhutanese people.

In addition, we also asked the participants if they were LGBT would they open up or not. As we can see in figure 4 that more than 50% of them said maybe. Here we can deduce two things. Firstly it may be resulted due to lack of information regarding LGBT. And secondly, due to conservative society they might be not sure of which answer to go with as they might fear to be rejected by society and family. In addition, we can also see in the figure above that there are more that 10% of the participants who answered no. This also indicates two things, either they are afraid to open up due to fear of mistreatment or discrimination from the society and family or they do not support LGBT.

Furthermore, participants were asked if they know anyone who is LGBT. And to our surprise, we found that 55% of them said yes but fairly high percentage of them said no (45%) which consists of almost half of the participants as you can see in the figure 5. Here we can deduce that as many people are not exposed to LGBT people, it may have contributed to the lack of information and less visibility in the country.

Following that we asked them if any of their friends or family open up then would they behave the same to them. To this participants were given options with yes, no and maybe as you can see in figure5. And 66% of them said yes with 16% saying no and 18% said maybe. Even though a high percentage of the sample population said yes still one-fifth of the participants said no. From this result we can infer that there are still some people who still disagree with LGBT concept. It is very sad because most of them who responded no were from the students, young generation who represent the future of the country.

After that we asked them if they think that LGBT people are facing discrimination in the society and if yes then how. And as we can see in figure.6 that around 37% of the participants said yes that they do feel LGBT are facing discrimination while 13% said no and 50% of them answered not sure. In addition to it we asked how they were being bullied and maximum participants had said that most of the LGBT people are being bullied by the society, ignored by their friends and looked down differently. The reason that participants were not sure about the discrimination is due to less visibility of LGBT people in Bhutan as this concept is still very new among Bhutanese.

Analysis of LGBT survey

In our research we also conducted a survey on LGBT. They were given certain questions to answer if they were comfortable answering it. First question was whether they were abused for being LGBT. To this 87% of them said yes while 13% of them said no, as

we can see in table1. From this we can infer that maximum people have been abused for being who they are which violates the human rights. As per the WHO human rights declaration article 1, 2 and 3 which states that all human beings are born free and have equal rights and dignity and also that they have life, liberty and security. In addition to the questionnaire, we also did an interview with 3 of them. They were asked the same question but in more depth like how they were abused. To this they shared their experience about being abused as a LGBT. One of them were abused both verbally and physically by their classmates while others were abused their family. They were thrown out of their house after they came out of the closet. They were treated as an ill or disordered person.

Following this, they were asked if at any point have they had any sorts of suicidal thoughts or attempted it. More than half of the participants which consists of 87% answered yes to the questions. From this result we can deduce that those who were abused being a LGBT by their family and friends might have been through a very tough time both physically and mentally to the extreme to have thoughts to end their life. After that, participants were asked if the society were more acceptable to LGBT then do you think you would open up to others. And to this we got 100% yes which is very sad and disheartening since they have to hide their true self because of the society. This also infers that many participants have still not opened in the fear of being abused and neglected by the society and family.

And then we asked them would their life would be much easier if they were straight. And to our surprise we got only 63% of them saying yes and rest 37% of the participants saying no. we expected 100% of yes as a result of the previous question where 100% of them said they would open up to society if they were more accepted by them. Hence, it might have been resulted due to other factors like as we have seen in table1, that few of them have answered that they have never been abused in their life for being LGBT, these participants might have said no. not only this, many of them said yes to have suicidal thoughts in the

figure. Might have answered yes as they might also be the one who have been abused by other people.

Limitations:

Due to time constraint and limited funds we could carry out only intensive research. Moreover, with the limited time and funding we could only include a small sample size which contributed to one of the limitations of the research. Our sample also includes general population with different educational and employment titles which further creates space for further research. In addition, there was some biases which is one of the main limitations of our project. Biasness includes information biases which resulted due to presence of some of the authorities during the survey and also due to lack of information of the topic among the participants. Due to lack of time and privacy concern, only seven LGBT participants responded to our survey questions.

Recommendations:

LGBT topics should be included in Bhutanese course book in order to normalize and familiarize the term. Different public awareness programs on LGBT should be carried out to motivate society to be more accepting towards them. NGOs and government should encourage their safe involvement in workplace, media and public places to make them more visible in the society. Most importantly, more extensive research should be carried out in future to address societal attitudes and challenges faced by LGBT in Bhutan (that we missed) so that we can minimize the biases involved in our research. There should be more organization specifically for LGBT only in order to support and advocate for their rights in Bhutan.

Conclusion:

As per the findings of our research we can conclude that LGBT still is a new concept in Bhutan. The future of the country lies in the hands of youth and it was disheartening to know that almost 42% of youth in Bhutan had no idea about LGBT and problem faced by them. In such case progress on LGBT rights and visibility does not seem to improve in the future. However the recent political attempt to decriminalize of same sex marriage and the organizations like Lhaksam brings rays of hope for LGBT people of Bhutan. These little steps helps a lot in making LGBT's life comfortable in their country. Hence, LGBT the sexual minorities too should be considered in Bhutanese society, workplace and political level in order to ensure and upraise the GNH (Gross National Happiness) of Bhutan.

References:

Tshering, Ugyen & Wangdi, Sonam. “*Sexual Diversity in Bhutan*” 2017, pp. 24-27. Research Gate.Vol.3.Issue1

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328651036_Sexual_Diversity_in_Bhutan

Panditaratne,Dinusha.“*Decriminalizing same sex relation in Asia: Socio_cultural factors impedinglegalform*”2017,pp.172-

207.ResearchGate.Vol.31.<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/307978149>.

Subhrajit, Chatterjee.” *Problems faced by LGBT people in the Mainstream Society: Some Recommendations*” 2014, pp. 317- 330. International Journal of Interdisciplinary and MultidisciplinaryStudies(IJIMS),Vol,No.5.<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/5900/36d6ef4c94f2cbc899bac133eedb4f59e3d6.pdf>.

“Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” *United Nations*, United Nations, www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/.