

## Perception of homosexuality: a study on relationship between homophobia and religiosity

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### ABSTRACT

Homosexuality is a complex phenomenon, one of the most sensitive topics about which we like to put forward our views without any factual knowledge or valid information. No doubt India is one of the vast, oldest, and modern civilizations, but still conservative in some perspectives. It depicts its diversity in terms of religion and culture which always influences the lifestyle and the mindset of people living in this part of the world. Religion directs to have a sense of equality but the subjective understanding of religion became quite a challenge as it is related to morality in terms of how one must live and choose and this subjectivity interferes with the acceptance of natural phenomena like sexuality and homosexuality. Homosexuality is the further variation in sexuality which determines one's inclination to have sexual intimacy with the person of the same sex. Nowadays homosexuality is emerging as the problem of identification, rather than the normative practice and orientation. The present paper aims to study how religion/religiosity influences the attitude towards homophobia. The sample consisted of 51 adult participants, in the age range of 20-35. The standardized measures of religiosity and homophobia were administered on participants. The study revealed that there is no significant relationship between homophobia and religiosity. Homophobia is a negative perception, which needs to be changed. The way we perceive others needs to be proactive. One must be subtle and sensitive enough that he/she is not considering the life and sexual orientations of others as 'act against the order of nature, violation of morality.' Perceiving their choices as scandalous, indecent acts, and unnatural offense hinder the progress of collective consciousness, which definitely will not be the great resource of knowledge for generations to come.

**Keywords:** *Homosexuality, Homophobia, Religion*

*“Consider the flowers of a garden: Though differing in kind, color, form, and shape, yet, in as much as they are refreshed by the waters of one spring, revived by the breath of one wind, invigorated by the rays of one sun, this diversity increases their charm and adds to their beauty.....How unpleasing to the eye if all the flowers and plants, the leaves and blossoms, the fruits, the branches, and the trees of that garden were all of the same shape and color! Diversity of hues, form, and shape enriches and heighten its effects.”*

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**Received: September 20, 2020; Revision Received: November 17, 2020; Accepted: November 22, 2020**

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Life is full of challenges, and novel situations. It cannot be defined as purely negative or purely positive, or we can say we cannot consider life to be based only on one perspective. Human nature is one the most complex phenomenon, consists innumerable features, how we think, how we are feeling, and how we are expressing what we are feeling through our behavior and what kind of attitude we are showing. Complications and rigidness take place with the expressions, reactions, and judgments we make because we have learned to be reactive towards the situations rather than to be proactive. As social animals, we should focus on controlling the disturbing element, and no doubt we try to maintain equilibrium in life and society by finding ways. But still, some human constructs need to be attended without any biases and homosexuality is one of them.

Indian civilization has failed to recognize and understand homosexuality as a normal construct within the Indian culture. Moreover, the irony is India has rich and powerful textual knowledge and evidence regarding sexuality and still the Indian people are not able to understand fully the essence of the aspects related to sexuality. Even the well-educated people are not fully aware of heterosexual relationships, their importance, besides this, sex education is a very challenging task for them; as it seems that how difficult it is for them to understand the heterosexuality, we can easily understand that why homosexuality is not less than a sin for them as everything is somehow related to religion. Scheepers et al., (2002) found that the more important religion is in individuals' lives, the more strongly they reject homosexuality.

From the evidence, it is possible to conclude that those with a negative attitude towards homosexuality are more likely to be religious, politically conservative, and less well educated (Kite & Whitney, 1996; Hort, Fagot & Leinbach, 1990).

It is a matter of concern for Indian people that they are not able to understand this phenomenon despite having a textual body like Kama sutra, in which there is a special reference to homosexual behavior and relations among eunuchs and male servants. In the scrimmage of accepting or not accepting homosexuality as a normal practice, we forgot that how difficult and challenging it is for homosexuals to go through the same, we have to understand that it is not easy to live in a body when the physical appearance is not spontaneous to the feelings and psyche. Homosexuality is like a taboo in India, except for a few social activists and likeminded people. For them, it feels like a sin to talk about the same. And there is a lack of awareness that people are not able or we can say don't want to talk about it. For a better understanding regarding the same, we need to explore the conceptual, social, and cultural aspects, the status of their acceptance in various countries, and the legal rights and facets related to homosexuals. We must understand the fact that to set a single pathway to human sexuality is impracticable. Sexual complexities and variations in identities require tolerance, hospitality, and nuanced understanding, even it is mandatory to help the homosexuals to understand their sexual variations in this predominantly heterosexual world so that there will be less mental health issues and more well-being which further provide a platform to maintain a healthy society.

Generally, people like to use the term 'negative attitudes' instead of homophobia. Feeling of hatred, issues regarding morality and life-style, violation of civil rights such as controlling the opportunities to gain educations and jobs, prohibiting them to enter the religious places and considering them aliens and abnormal, demonstrate homophobia. Victimization of any out-group based on their sexual orientations, gender roles, and significant discrimination in crime and against morality and social norms. The current research focuses on how people

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consider religiosity as a way to live a moral and ethical life and not accepting the novel or rare choices of people regarding sexuality and lifestyles. (specifically, homosexuals).

### ***Homophobia***

The term 'homophobia' was coined by George Weinberg (1972) in the late 1960s. His work signaled a general shift, whereby no longer homosexuality itself but the negative attitudes towards homosexuality became increasingly seen as the social problem worthy of study.

According to Hudson & Ricketts (1980), Homophobia is traditionally defined as "fear, disgust, anger, discomfort, and aversion that individuals experience in dealing with gay people."

Morin & Garfinkle (1978) defined homophobia as "any belief system which supports negative myths and stereotypes about homosexual people"

The most recent research shows that a majority of the American population still harbors negative attitudes towards homosexuals, although the size of the majority has diminished markedly over the past decades (American Enterprise, 2004).

While searching and collating writing from *Same-Sex Love in India: Readings from Literature and History*, Vanita and Kidwani (2000b, 203) found that almost every example of fiction depicting love between women was homophobic to some degree. Almost all Indian fiction they have found that depicts the love between women does so with different degrees of homophobia, usually influenced by Western Psychiatric discourse. Thus lesbianism is often depicted as situational—caused by lack of access to men, which they consider a pervasive form of homophobia.

Pollack & Olson (2007) reported a qualitative study on the attitudes of the public and social workers towards homosexuality. It was concluded that 55% of Americans believed that it is 'sin' to engage in homosexual behavior, and this view was more prevalent among those who had a high level of religious commitment.

### ***Religiosity***

Pearce, Little & Perez (2003) described religiosity as "the extent to which an individual is committed to the religion he or she professes and its teaching, such that his or her attitudes and behavior reflect this commitment."

According to Davis et al., (2003), religiosity implies "allegiance to a particular system of faith and worship" and "absence to a set of sacred doctrines or memberships in a body of people who share similar beliefs about God, holy observance and morality."

Hunter (2001) suggested that there is a tendency among highly religious people to perceive themselves as having stronger moral attributes than non-religious people have.

Allport & Karner (1946) found that students who reported an affiliation with Catholic or Protestant Churches were more likely to hold ethnically prejudiced views than students who reported non-religious affiliation.

Stouffer (1955) similarly found that frequent religious attendance predicted more intolerance for groups holding different ideologies.

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### *Purpose*

The purpose is to study the relationship between homophobia and religiosity.

### *Hypothesis*

There will no significant relationship between homophobia and religiosity.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### *Sample*

The sample consists of 51 adults from Chandigarh, Mohali, and Panchkula.

### *Measures*

The following standardized tests were used,

- 1. Homophobia Scale (HS):** HS is a 25 item self-report measure of Homophobia that was developed by Wright, Adams, & Bernat, (1999). Respondents were asked to rate each item on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). Items were summed to obtain total scores ranging from 0-100, with a score of 0 being the least homophobic and 100 being most homophobic. It also includes 3 subscales: Factor 1 (behavioral/negative affect), Factor 2 (affect/behavioral aggression), Factor 3 (cognitive negativism). (used subscales in excel sheet so mentioned here)
- 2. Religious Commitment Inventory (RCI-10):** RCI is a 10 item self-report measure of religious commitment that was developed by Worthington, Wade, Hight, Ripley, McCullough, Bursley, & O'Conner (2012). Items were summed to obtain the total scores.

### *Procedure*

The participants were informed about the purpose of the research and the questionnaires were filled through google forms. The participants were assured of the confidentiality of the information to elicit their honest responses without any fear or inhibitions. Standardized psychological tests were administered to participants.

## **RESULTS**

Showing Mean & Standard Deviation and Correlation of all variables, N=51

*Table 1: Showing Mean & Standard Deviation*

|            | Mean  | Std. Deviation |
|------------|-------|----------------|
| Religion   | 19.90 | 7.457          |
| Homophobia | 22.47 | 15.960         |
| Gender     | 1.73  | .451           |

Table 2: Showing the correlation between homophobia and religiosity.

|                     |  | RELIGION | HOMOPHOBIA | F1 BEH./NEG AFFECT | F2 AFFECT/BEH. AGG. | F3 COG. NEGATIVISM |
|---------------------|--|----------|------------|--------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| RELIGION            | Pearson Correlation<br>Sig. (2-tailed) | 1        |            |                    |                     |                    |
| HOMOPHOBIA          | Pearson Correlation<br>Sig. (2-tailed) | .080     | 1          |                    |                     |                    |
| F1 BEH./NEG AFFECT  | Pearson Correlation<br>Sig. (2-tailed) | .175     | .926**     | 1                  |                     |                    |
| F2 AFFECT/BEH. AGG. | Pearson Correlation<br>Sig. (2-tailed) | -.053    | .819**     | .690**             | 1                   |                    |
| F3 COG. NEGATIVISM  | Pearson Correlation<br>Sig. (2-tailed) | .222     | .555**     | .569**             | .124                | 1                  |

Note. \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

## DISCUSSION

There is no significant relationship between religion and homophobia. It means religion does not contribute to the perception of homophobia. The strength of the study lies in the fact that it is not the religion that makes homophobic but our perception. It has been seen that the previous researches supported the relationship between homophobia and religion; therefore, it is fascinating to come across the fact that we find the results that presents a positive aspect of the youth that there is newness in accepting the norms and idealizing the religiosity. It had been shown in the results that people moving towards the rational belief system, which will contribute positively to society that religion is not bounding our lifestyle and orientations but teaching us how to live and let others live with dignity and freedom of choice.

The shift in the understanding of homosexuality is the need of the hour. The strengths of the results concluded in the present study demonstrate that religion may contribute to our sense of understanding and accepting others the way they are, and homophobia may believe to be a negative perception. Being a part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century one must work positively for the growth and equality of others. This had been seen that there are studies that have attempted to study homosexuality and homophobia, especially in India. But we cannot overlook the literature we have about homosexuality and the acceptance given to this community. "The shift in the understanding of homosexuality from sin, crime, and pathology to the normal variant of sexuality occurred in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. The American Psychiatric Association, in 1973, and the World Health Organisation, in 1992, officially accepted its normal variant status. Many countries have since decriminalized homosexual behavior and some have recognized same-sex civil unions and marriage."

The Times of India reported in October 2015 about a study conducted at IIT Delhi. An LGBT questionnaire and Campus Climate Survey was conducted at the IIT Delhi gender sensitization group, on 300 students. It was found that 72% of the students accepted homosexuality to be as normal as heterosexuality. 62.5% of them "felt that nothing would

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change if one of their close friends comes out as homosexual" and 60% "would not have any problem if their roommate was gay."

The limitations of the present study were that it was conducted on a very small sample and only on the people in Chandigarh, Mohali, and Panchkula (Tricity), India.

### CONCLUSION

The research was aimed to study the perception of homosexuality: homophobia and religiosity among adults. The study was conducted on participants in Chandigarh, Mohali, and Panchkula (Tricity), India. The data was collected through google forms. The standardized measures were used and the results depicted that there is no significant difference between homophobia (its factors) and religiosity. The null hypothesis of no significant difference between variables was accepted. The findings are quite contracting with the presumption of the researcher and past researches but it provides newness and an opportunity to people being rational and non-judgmental towards the choices others make. This research was conducted on a very small sample of 51 adults but future researches on a larger sample in a broad area can give us more knowledge and in-depth insight to understand that LGBTQ is just a name given to community where humans do live, they are the part of society, they have the right to live life as per their desires and sexual variations, and have freedom of speech. Rather than making the concept of homosexuality more complex, we must understand that in the sense that it is an attraction towards the person of the same sex, moreover, it's not one's personal choice but the behavior and inclination based on the biological needs and order of nature which cannot be changed forcefully or through any medications and punishments.

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### **Acknowledgement**

The author appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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***How to cite this article:*** Bala R. (2020). Perception of homosexuality: a study on relationship between homophobia and religiosity. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 8(4), 486-493. DIP:18.01.060/20200804, DOI:10.25215/0804.060