Coping with Expectations of Marriage: Stories of Sexual Minority Women in Urban India

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ABSTRACT

The present study examined how sexual minority women cope with their families' expectations about marriage in young adulthood. Seven urban women between the ages of 21 to 28 were interviewed about their experiences related to expectations of marriage. Thematic analysis was performed to analyze the data. Findings indicate that most families viewed marriage as a compulsory milestone, and were not open to the possibility that women don't want to marry men. The participants hesitated to come out to their family because of possible denial or loss of relationships and found it difficult to have honest conversations about marriage. Most participants attempted to cope with stressors through emotion focused coping strategies like avoiding conversations about marriage, distractions like work or hobbies, daydreaming and social support. Some problem focused strategies were also used, like working toward financial independence and physically moving away from family. Findings point to the need to better understand the needs of sexual minority women dealing with marriage pressure, suggest ways of coping and create community spaces for them to share their experiences and learn from each other's lives.

Keywords: Marriage, Sexual Minority Women

The inevitability of marriage for an Indian woman is visible in the concept of *paraya dhan*, meaning that the daughter is meant to be the property of someone else, i.e., her husband and in-laws, and never belongs to her natal family. Lamb (2022), in her interviews with single women from India, observed that although in theory women have the choice to opt out of marriage, most women in India cannot do that. There are several reasons why marriage is considered necessary for a woman. Marital status determines a woman's position in the familial hierarchy. In her fieldwork in the slums of Ahmedabad, Baruah (2007) observed that single male relatives living with a family were treated as a part of the family, even accorded higher status than the wife and children because of their gender and perceived ability to contribute to the household income. Single women, on the other hand, were considered temporary members until they moved to their marital homes. Marital status also determines access to material resources like land. Despite being given equal rights under the Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act (2005), most women acquire land through their marital families, especially as widows, not through their natal families (Agarwal et. al., 2021).

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Even though India is a marriage society, same sex couples don't have the right to legally register their marriage. Section 377 was decriminalized in 2018, but in 2021, the Union Government told the Delhi High Court (in response to pleas for legal recognition of same sex marriages) that a valid marriage is only between a biological man and a biological woman capable of producing children, and that decriminalizing homosexuality has nothing to do with same sex marriages (Hindustan Times, 2021). While hearing a plea for police protection from a lesbian couple, the Gurgaon High Court acknowledged that the couple claimed to be married, but recorded it as a live-in relationship (Dash and Yadav, 2011). In March 2023, the Centre said that judicial interpretation should not disturb the "socially, culturally, and legally ingrained" definition of a marriage. They said that marriage is a social institution "from which several rights and liabilities flow" and it has "more ramifications than simple legal recognition" (Kumar, 2023). In April 2022, NCP leader Supriya Sule introduced a bill in the Lok Sabha seeking to amend the Special Marriage Act, 1954 to give legal recognition to same sex marriage between consenting adults (Express News Service, 2022). Till today, same sex marriages don't have legal recognition in India.

Literature in Asian countries has thrown light on different ways in which sexual minority women respond to marriage pressure, like marriages of convenience (Huang and Brouwer, 2018), moving away from family, staying with one's partner along with one's parents (Engebretsen, 2014), and hiding one's sexual orientation from one's husband (Brainer, 2017). In India, Srivastava and Singh (2015) documented the unfavorable views of people toward the LGBTQ community. Bhattacharya (2014) has enumerated the various ways in which a heteronormative society violates people who are sexual and gender minorities. Srivastava (2020) observed that sexual minority women face a two-fold hardship because of their gender and sexual orientation. Wandrekar and Nirgudkar (2020) have enlisted stressors like family enacted violence, lack of family acceptance, pressure to marry, violence from peers and partners, institutional violence, discrimination at schools or workplaces, and discrimination in employment, housing and healthcare. Bowling and colleagues (2017) reported the mental health issues faced by sexual minority women, and observed that they were hesitant to consult a psychologist out of fear that the psychologist will try to "cure" homosexuality.

Research on coping and stress in the LGBTQ+ community can be understood using several frameworks, like the Stigma Coping Framework by Miller and Kaiser (2001) that distinguishes between engagement and disengagement as two broad categories of coping strategies, and the Minority Stress Framework that was specifically developed to explain how a hostile social environment causes mental health issues among gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals by Meyer (2003). In the present study, however, coping is broadly distinguished as problem focused and emotion focused, as given in the cognitive appraisal theory of Lazarus and Folkman (1984). This theory was chosen because it is simple, established and forms the foundation of widely used coping inventories like the COPE Inventory (Carver, 1989).

In context of the compulsion of marriage in Indian society and the uncertain status of legalization and acceptance of same sex marriages, it is important to understand the unique psychological problems faced by women who are sexual minorities. This population faces a two-fold discrimination on account of gender and sexual orientation, making it more difficult for them to claim a place in society. The problem of marriage pressure is a glaring example of the conflict between social expectations and individual desires of these women. A study of coping mechanisms will create more awareness both inside and outside the LGBTQ+ community about the experiences of this population. Moreover, it will help women who are

sexual minorities to use healthy coping mechanisms while dealing with stressful situations related to marriage pressure.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample comprised of seven participants. All participants were living in Bengaluru, Karnataka. They were in the age range of 21 to 28 years. They were living in urban or semi-urban areas, were college educated and were from middle class or upper middle-class families. Five participants were working and two were students. In terms of sexual orientation, one participant identified as a lesbian, four identified as bisexual and two identified as pansexual.

Instruments

Data was collected using a semi structured questionnaire having 13 questions about various experiences of the participants. There were questions about their family relationships, views on marriage, mental health and ways of coping. Some questions from the COPE inventory by Carver (1989) were asked to understand participants' coping strategies. The interviews were conducted via phone calls.

Procedure

An online survey form was circulated to screen respondents as per certain eligibility criteria. The inclusion criteria for the sample were minimum 18 years of age, being assigned the female sex at birth, identifying as a woman, and identifying as a lesbian, bisexual, pansexual or queer in terms of sexual orientation. The exclusion criteria for the sample were absence of marriage expectations by the family. 43 people responded to the questionnaire. Among those respondents who were eligible to participate in the study, seven respondents agreed to give interviews. They were contacted using information provided in their Google Form and a date and time was decided for a telephone interview. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary, and they could choose to withdraw anytime they wanted, and informed consent was taken. The study was carried out using a phenomenological qualitative approach. Thematic analysis was performed to understand the data. The interviews were transcribed and initial codes were developed from the transcripts. Then the codes were refined, and themes and sub-themes were developed from the final codes.

RESULTS

Table No. 1 Codes, themes and sub-themes of coping with marriage expectations among sexual minority women

S.No.	Codes	Themes	Sub-themes
1	Lack of family support	Lack of awareness	Inability to understand same sex relationships
			Negative views toward LGBTQ+ community
		Poor family relationships	Distant family members
		Fear of disclosing	Possible negative reactions
			Losing relationships
2	Decisions about dating and marriage	Opinions on marriage	Personal choice
			Legal benefits
			Decision dependent on

			gender of partner
			History of sexual abuse
3	Marriage expectations from family	Views on marriage	Marriage as compulsory
			Marriage as form of security
			Caste and religion preferences
			Rejection of alternatives to marriage
		Efforts to arrange marriage	Looking for partner
			Involvement of relatives and extended family
			Emotional conversations about marriage
4	Mental health outcomes	Experience of negative emotions	Sadness or depression
			Anxiety, high stress
5	Coping	Problem focused	Financial independence
			Moving away from family
			Seeking advice
		Emotion focused	Avoiding conversations or arguments
			Distraction through work or hobbies
			Day-dreaming to reduce stress
			Venting out to someone

1. Lack of family support
1.1. Lack of awareness and acceptance
Family members of a different generation, i.e., parents and grandparents were less likely to be considered allies compared to siblings and cousins.

   1.1.1. Inability to understand same sex relationships
The idea of a romantic relationship between two women was unheard of, and physically impossible in the minds of family members.
"She (grandmother) will think we are just best friends. Even if you explicitly tell her that it is a romantic relationship, I don't think she understands the concept of even a romantic relationship." (V, 21, bisexual)
"My mom still thinks that it's biologically not possible. I don't think she understands the anatomy." (MD, 25, bisexual)

   1.1.2. Negative views of the LGBTQ+ community
Participants expressed discomfort at the negative, sometimes hostile views held by their family toward the community. Such an environment can contribute to feelings of alienation and guilt.
"My father…I don't even plan to talk to. Because when covid came, he literally said that the entire LGBTQ+ community are deviants and COVID is here just to attack them. (MA, 24, pansexual)"

"Even before I knew the term homosexual, I knew homophobia first...at a very young age my family used to preach and talk about how homosexual relationships are a sin. So, they feel like only because it's in the Bible…they think it's in the Bible and that's what the church preaches. (CM, 24, bisexual)"

1.2. Poor family relationships
1.2.1.   Distant family members

Those who said that they were not close to their family spoke of it in a matter-of-fact way. It seemed that they were used to it, and, as we can see in GR's case, were actually comfortable with a rather distant relationship with family members.

"It hasn't been that great since the beginning. Both of them have been working since I was very young. I kind of grew up by myself… in my therapy sessions when every time my therapist would bring up the situation of childhood, I don't remember anything of that sort with my parents." (MD, 25, bisexual)

"… I don't share much with them, I keep secrets all the time because they are very narrow minded and judgmental, and by now it has become a habit. I am comfortable just hiding things from them." (GR, 23, pansexual)

1.3. Fear of disclosing sexual orientation
1.3.1.   Negative reactions

Participants were very sure of receiving such discouraging responses from their family. They were prepared to be questioned, dismissed and reprimanded for it. None of the participants had any hopes of reconciling with their family on this issue.

"My mom might be pretty shocked and disheartened. My dad might be little furious." (SS, 28, lesbian)

"I am guessing they would be either in denial or complete angst. I am not sure which way it would go, but I think it would be like denial." (V, 21, bisexual)

1.3.2.   Fear of losing relationships

It is remarkable that even in families who supported every other decision of the participants related to the choice of career and place of residence, participants felt that talking about sexual orientation was off-limits, and it would break the trust and mutual understanding between them.

"I am scared that what if they abandon me?... That is the part that scares me the most. Not being able to have that bond with them which I have now." (NM, 24, bisexual)

"He (father) mentions multiple times that I am his perfect child. I feel like I am going to shatter that image completely. Even if my mother told my father, my dad would dismiss it. I am so perfect that I would do no such thing." (MA, 25, pansexual)

2.   Decisions about dating and marriage

It was found that the participants' life plans and aspirations were quite in contrast with what their family and relatives expected from them. This difference was the most visible in how they viewed the institution of marriage, and what it meant to them.

2.1. Opinions on marriage
2.1.1.   Personal choice

Perhaps because marriage to a same-sex partner is not a socially acceptable alternative, participants were well aware of different options like live-in relationships. As a result, marriage was viewed as just one way of living, and a matter of personal choice.

"I sometimes feel like you should have the freedom to not participate in marriage…it is looked at as a prescribed way of living…that idea kind of makes me uncomfortable. (MD, 25, bisexual)"

"It's a personal choice. If you want it, you're ready to commit, you should do it. But some people tell me, that certain things should happen at certain age…I disagree with that. That's just not true. It's better to be thoughtful about your decision than to regret it in the future." (GR, 23, pansexual).

2.1.2. Legal benefits
A certain level of familiarity with the legal aspects of marriage was present in each participant. More importantly, they were able to openly speak about these legal aspects in separation from marriage as a relationship between two people. It is possible that their level of formal education gave them certain exposure and opportunities to form opinions on this matter.
"…benefits like home loans and insurance schemes…it can all be easily done if government legalises same sex marriage...So it's not like it makes a huge difference, except that any benefits people get in banks, or government schemes, on the basis of marital status, those will not be available to us." (CM, 24, bisexual)
"…it seeps into every bit of your life, starting from the house you live in, the rent deposit, insurance forms, and just having the right to say, "This is my spouse". (V, 21, bisexual)

2.1.3. Decision dependent on gender of partner
While most participants were comfortable with their sexual orientation, when it came to acting upon their desires, they were very cautious. It seemed like they lived in two worlds, one in which they desired for a happy relationship with a partner, and another in which social constraints denied them the right to label this relationship the way they wanted. As seen in these two examples, they were contemplating the negative consequences of trying to claim social acceptance for a private relationship.
"…It's going to be a huge drama at home…it could even mean disowning me. Obviously, gender is a huge part of me deciding whether I get married." (MA, 24, pansexual)
"This is a very difficult question. I think I would not want it to be influenced. But I don't know how my family will react to it. So, I don't know. I would want to be truly happy with whomever I get married to." (NM, 24, bisexual)

2.1.4. History of sexual abuse
Four participants said that they couldn't feel happy with a man, and two of them gave the reason that they had had disturbing experiences with men in the past.
"Let me be honest, I have been abused and harassed. When men get close to me, I get very uncomfortable. I have a lot of emotions running through me. There are only certain men I am comfortable around, like my long-term friends, my dad or my brother. Even they… if they suddenly touch me out of nowhere, I freak out, I have such reactions like "Don't touch me." (SS, 28, lesbian)
"I am a survivor of sexual assault; I am super scared of cis men. I don't like being approached by them or approaching them for dating." (MA, 24, pansexual)
It is a commonly held view that women who are attracted to women are just scared of men because of past history of sexual abuse. It is implied that this attraction is not valid in itself, and it just a reaction to bad experiences with men. It is important to note here that none of the participants mentioned these painful experiences as playing any major role in them realizing their sexual orientation.

3. Marriage expectations by family
3.1. Views on marriage

Most sub-themes in this area were related to marriage as a social institution. None of the participants, while speaking about their family's views on marriage, mentioned marriage as a relationship between two people. Rather, they spoke more about marriage as a social requirement.

3.1.1. Marriage as compulsory

India is a marriage society, meaning that it doesn't recognise the concept of girlfriends or boyfriends without the intention of marriage. It is assumed that finding a partner who fulfils the expectations of family and society is an important life goal, and refusing it is a sign of being deviant.

"It's not about being happy, it's just a list of things to do. Okay now you finished LKG, go to school, finish high school, college, then you get a job, then you get married." (V, 21, bisexual)

"They want me to get married. Soon. like within 2 years or so. In our community where I am from, the family is usually…it's an arranged marriage situation, and like people of my generation they usually get married very soon, in their early twenties." (NM, 24, bisexual)

3.1.2. Caste and religion preferences

Such rigid preferences led to more fear about being with a same sex partner. If it was difficult for them to accept someone from a different caste or religion, breaking the norm of a heterosexual marriage, and trying to propose a marriage with a woman, felt like an impossible feat. One can see how a general atmosphere of prejudice and discrimination against anyone who is different from one's own group, intensified the pressure to conform to social norms about whom to marry. It served to further solidify the notion that marriage can only happen between certain people, and anything beyond the norm is unacceptable.

"They will still look for the caste. Maybe not caste. My mom recently made a statement that "If you really like somebody, I think you should get married to them." But they don't want somebody who is a Muslim". (MD, 25, bisexual)

"…they are very particular that I should marry a Catholic guy so I'll just be like, "No, I like someone who is not Catholic." (CM, 24, bisexual).

3.1.3. Marriage as a form of security

Some of the participants themselves mentioned that marriage provides companionship for life, and that it is a good enough reason to get married. The difference, however, was that while their parents saw marriage as the only way of securing long term companionship, the participants themselves were aware of other alternatives and open to experimenting with them.

"Some sort of a security, I need somebody to take care of me, just to call family, I need to have children. Only then I will have interest in life. These are their views on marriage, none of them I agree with." (MA, 24, pansexual)

"Now that they are sick, there is this general idea in families that "oh, somebody is sick? Then get the girl married before they die." …they want to see me settled, in their idea of settled it is being married. (MD, 24, bisexual).

3.1.4. Rejection of alternatives to marriage

Those who expressed a wish to opt out of marriage were denied romance and sexual satisfaction completely. One can see this rejection of live-in relationships and sexual

relationships without marriage as an attempt to control women's sexuality outside the context of marriage.

"…she is scared that I will be in a live in relationship with someone. So she told me, "If you don't marry, at least don't be in a live in relationship. You will not get support from the family." (GR, 23, pansexual)"

"…if you remain single for long, it is not the right way. And you will tend to sleep…I mean engage sexually with a lot of people. You won't have this sort of structure in your life if you don't marry unless you are a really disciplined person who will choose…I don't know why 'disciplined' is there…they think if you are disciplined enough to not engage in any. So they think if you don't sleep with anyone, that is okay. You need to live a life of a priest or a nun." (CM, 24, bisexual)

2. Efforts to arrange marriage

3.2.1. Looking for partners

Family members were trying to familiarize themselves with the "marriage market", so to speak, by creating, for example, a temporary matrimonial profile to see what kind of men are available.

"They send me the photo and details; I barely look at them. I'm like, "I'm not interested…At one point it is to an extent…they considered kundali for the wedding. They reached out to an astrologer and saw if it matches. It didn't work out." (SS, 38, lesbian)

"So far, the only planning they have done is browse through matrimonial websites with a profile. The profile is a temporary one. They look what's there and they update me about it." (CM, 24, bisexual)

3.2.2. Involvement of relatives and extended family

Relatives tried to provide additional support, in case the immediate family 'failed' to ensure timely marriage of their daughter. V's relatives felt obligated to help out with arranging her marriage because their family was perceived as "tattered" in the absence of a male leader.

My aunt, or my other relatives who are not that close to us pop in and say, "Hey, so what's happening? You just finished college, should we have the conversation?" (V, 21, bisexual).

"Usually it's not them initiating it, it's the extended family initiating them and trying to tell them. They will approach with a proposal and that's where the conversation begins." (SS, 28, lesbian)

3.2.3. Emotional conversations about marriage

There was a certain guilt associated with rejecting such emotional requests from family members. Although participants believed they had a certain degree of control over this decision, some of them were not sure whether could stay firm on their choices.

"When family is involved, it is not a one-day conversation. It's not like if you say no once, they are like okay, she said no. Over a period of time, they are going to coerce you into it. Before you know, sometimes because it's family and it's emotional, and it's personal, just sometimes you feel like you have to do it. You can only say no so many times and after a while, they will just not hear no anymore". (V, 21, bisexual)

"They will be like oh I am not going to survive really long; I have to clear your marriage. That's kind of like an emotional blackmail. And then they say, "we took care of you all your life. Can't you do this much for your parents?" and then you feel like you are so cold hearted to ignore all of that but sometimes you need it, for your mental health." (MD, 25, bisexual)

4. Mental health
4.1. Experience of negative emotions
Different environmental and internal stressors jointly contributed to the distress. A majority of stressors were related to uncertainty about the future and anticipation of negative outcomes.

4.1.1. Sadness or depression
"I was in depression, but I used to not show it to anyone. I used to deal with it myself. I have childhood trauma and lot of triggers. But slowly I am trying to heal. It's not an easy process."
"I don't laugh about the situation because it's very sad to think about. I know, if not now, sooner or later it's going to happen. It's something very unavoidable." (CM, 24, bisexual)

4.1.2. Anxiety or stress
"…when my family is calling me to specifically ask about marriage, it puts me in this frenzy. My first reaction is to be scared and I start panicking. It is like an anxiety attack almost… I feel like I am constantly on the verge…all of this will eventually lead to a point where we will have this really dramatic conversation where things will be super final. Either I am going to end up getting forcefully married, or me fully abandoning them and being on my own, and both of these are equally terrifying situations." (V, 21, bisexual)

"I kind of prepare myself mentally for one day to go (to my parents' house). Every time I go back from there, I need another half day to get settled again mentally. Every time they say something that will disrupt the continuity." (MD, 25, bisexual)

5. Coping
Participants showed a heavier reliance on emotion focused, as opposed to problem focused strategies of coping. They felt that marriage pressure was not under their control, since it had more to do with their family's beliefs and expectations than their own. On the other hand, their own thoughts and feelings were easier to change, hence they used emotion focused strategies like avoiding, day-dreaming, using distractions, and talking to someone.

5.1. Problem focused coping
According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), problem focused coping includes defining the problem, generating alternative solutions, weighing them in terms of costs and benefits, choosing a solution and acting upon it.

5.1.1. Financial independence
"Once I figure out my life, like once I settle down on my own money, the marriage thing won't be a big problem." (GR, 23, pansexual)
"So currently my plan is to become more financially stable to a point where I can tell them that I don't want to get married…Then if things go bad, I can still be okay." (V, 21, bisexual)

5.1.2. Moving away from family
"First, I am trying to move abroad for a job. If that doesn't work out, I am planning how to move out and find a roommate." (CM, 24, bisexual)
"Right now, the reason I don't tell them is that I am slowly planning to drift away from them, in terms of like fully cutting them off." (V, 21, bisexual)

5.1.3. Seeking advice

"I spoke to one of my friends a few months back…Her first question was, "How would your parents react, how it might affect them?" Because there I understood, her thought process is based on family. So, when I told her, she said, "See you can tell them that you are not comfortable around a guy and you can't be with a guy as a partner, or live with a guy. You can choose to not come out to them and avoid the marriage by saying so and so. I was like, "It's not the ideal solution." She was like, "I know it isn't, but just considering your parents' health, just a safer consideration." I said, "Okay, makes sense, but let's see." (SS, 28, lesbian)
"I talk to married people to know how things happen, how life is, and I talk to them to find out what they would have done. Sometimes there are queer spaces that I reach out to for extra support… It's always a 50-50 with queer groups. Either you will find it, or you will trigger the conversations and find out that everybody is suffering through the same thing." (V, 21, bisexual)

"I have an aunt; she is my mother's sister. She is like my elder sister. I talk to her. She is married. She knows everything really well. Whenever I feel like I don't know what to do, I talk to her and she has been very helpful and supportive. She gives me practical advice like "Say this to your mom, say this to your dad." And sometimes she will tell me, "Don't do anything, they are just talking randomly. You do your work, don't focus on this." (NM, 24, bisexual)

5.2. Emotion focused coping
Emotion focused coping includes cognitive strategies for reducing emotional distress, reappraisal, selective attention or avoidance to certain stimuli, behavioural strategies (exercise, meditating, drinking) and in some cases increasing emotional distress through self-blame or punishment for feeling better. Most commonly used emotion focused coping strategies were avoiding conversations, using distractions, day-dreaming and talking to someone.

5.2.1. Avoiding conversations or arguments
"First, I avoid these conversations, and if they come up, I just don't really think about it. I just listen to what they have to say. It's not like I agree with them. I don't say anything and I walk away." (CM, 24, bisexual)
"Very recent incident…there was a family gathering and one of my dad's cousins spoke about it and I didn't pay attention and he was constantly talking. Whatever. I don't pay attention, I don't try to break my head about it, like "Oh shit, what am I going to do, they are talking about these things. Should I stop the conversation or should I engage in it?" I'll be like, "You carry on, I am not interested." I just leave them there and I walk away." (SS, 28, lesbian)
"I'll just go ahead with whatever assumptions they have about a guy or the family. I usually listen to them, and understand where they come from. I don't say something from my side." (NM, 24, bisexual)

5.2.2. Distraction through work or hobbies
"When things get bad, in college I would get obsessed with my assignments. I would go into this full work mode and engage myself in as many activities as I can…Either binge watch or find an activity I can obsess over for the next few days. Usually, it's like painting or gardening or trying to find something new on the internet, go down a rabbit-hole and get obsessed with it. Even shopping, that has come up recently." (V, 21, bisexual)

"I like basically, clicking pictures, and I cook. That's my way to destress myself. Sometimes I dance, or I work out." (SS, 28, lesbian)

5.2.3. Day-dreaming to reduce stress

The content of day-dreams was usually future scenarios where participants were living the life they desired, far different from the kind of choices that their family expected them to make.

"Very often I day dream that I am not going to get married, what I would be like when I am 30 or 40. Sometimes I envision a partner, sometimes I don't. Sometimes I think of myself getting married, sometimes I don't. But there's definitely that aspect of dreaming and looking up to what would happen in the future, or what else I would be doing rather than this." (V, 21, bisexual)

"I manifest about not having a dependent life, doing what I love. I don't know how to get into details, but not having a married life. Being independent, living a life in the city I love. Cooking and feeding people." (SS, 28, lesbian).

5.2.4. Venting out to someone

"The pressure is more of an age thing…I think everyone is going through it and everybody doesn't know. They are all figuring out how to deal with it. I do talk to them to vent, that's it." (CM, 24, bisexual)

"When I can't deal with it myself, I talk to my best friend or my ex. She knows how to handle my panic attacks." (SS, 28, lesbian)

"I do that a lot. I mostly talk to my girlfriend about it, because she has had similar experiences. I also talk to my room-mate, she is very understanding and she is a good listener. I occasionally see a therapist, like maybe once a month. I vent out during the sessions." (GR, 23, pansexual.

DISCUSSION

The findings show that there is a huge gap in understanding between young adults and their parents with respect to LGBTQ+ issues. It is difficult to bridge this gap because firstly, a majority of parents in India don't have much sympathy for the community, and secondly, people who show outward support for the community may hesitate to accept their own children if they come out as gay. As a result, people from the community seek a chosen family, i.e., a group of close friends who provide emotional, and at times, instrumental support to make up for the gaps in family support. They might find it easier to meet like-minded people if they have access to safe spaces for socializing. Bhargava (2022) challenged the socio-political narratives that prescribe marriage as a way of having a 'good life'. Moreover, she started an online support group for young women to share their struggles with marriage expectations. Such initiatives would greatly benefit from inclusion of women from diverse backgrounds, like women who are sexual minorities. There are some non-governmental organizations who are helping the community in metropolitan cities, like Humsafar Trust in Mumbai, Sangama in Bengaluru and Naz Foundation in Delhi. Mental health professionals who work with clients from the LGBTQ+ community should familiarize themselves with such initiatives so that they can provide the information to those who are in need of social support.

Financial independence is an effective way of resisting the pressure to marry. It empowers women by allowing them to make their own decisions without the fear of being cut-off by way of income. There are some organizations that provide financial help to transgender persons and sexual minorities in the form of business loans, facilitating access to pension

schemes and skill training. Social media pages for LGBTQ+ users are especially popular among urban youth. Such pages should include regular posts, lecture series and book recommendations on financial literacy, and emphasize on it as an important tool for ensuring an independent life.

Future studies on this topic should focus on women from different age groups, e.g., women in their late 30s or 40s, and so on. Perhaps, older women deal with marriage pressure in more active ways, and the families' efforts may intensify or fade with age. Second, the experiences of women who have lesser access to education and employment opportunities, live in rural areas and belong to disadvantaged socio-economic groups should be explored to get a complete understanding of the struggles of sexual minority women. Finally, future research can look into the experiences of sexual minority women who have already married against their will.

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