

## Exploring the Role of Emotional Intelligence in Shaping Attitude towards Homosexuality among College Students

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### ABSTRACT

In Indian society, "homosexual behavior" continues to be stigmatized as immoral, against the law, and contrary to nature. This is one of the least explored areas in Indian research. Recognizing this research vacuum, the current study sought to investigate the influence of emotional intelligence (EI) in moulding college students' opinions about homosexuality. With a sample size of N = 122, the research used a convenience sampling procedure. For data collection, two standardized instruments, the Emotional Intelligence Scale created by Hyde, Pethe, and Dhar (20011) and the Attitude towards Homosexuality Scale developed by Kite and Deaux (1986), as well as a socio-demographic form, were used. To investigate the associations between emotional intelligence and attitudes towards homosexuality (ATH), Pearson product-moment correlation and multiple regression analyses were used with the help of SPSS. The findings demonstrated a link between emotional intelligence and attitudes towards homosexuality. Specifically, among the eight elements of emotional intelligence, empathy and commitment were shown to be significant predictors of ATH. This research implies that those with greater degrees of empathy and commitment are more likely to have favourable views about homosexuality. The findings suggest that developing emotional intelligence, especially in the aspects of empathy and commitment, may help to promote favourable views towards homosexuality among college students.

**Keywords:** *Homosexuality, homosexual, attitude, emotional intelligence, empathy, commitment*

The persistence of societal taboos surrounding gay, lesbianism, and bisexuality across different cultures, including India, is a sad reminder of the unfortunate reality, despite the widespread awareness of these terms, there is a significant social stigma attached to homosexual behavior and their community in India. Despite advances in education and legislation, people are still a long way from accepting people who identify as members of the LGBTQ community. It's disappointing that people's views have not really changed at the same rate as the legalisation of same-sex alliances in many countries. The road to true acceptance is difficult and complicated, but it is very important that we keep teaching ourselves and our community members about how beautiful and important all kinds of difference are. Understanding attitude towards same-sex relations is really complex but in India it's even more complex. India is home to people of a variety of religious and cultural

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backgrounds. Homosexuality has been depicted in our age-old scripts and sculptures. Homosexual behavior has been present in Indian culture since ancient times, and it may be seen in many art forms like as paintings, sculptures and sensual carvings like Khajuraho, Konark temples. Even homosexuality is explicitly mentioned in Kamasutra, Arthshastra and Rigveda (Ahuja, 2017). Moreover, It wasn't until the British took over India that strict religious values were imposed on Indians, and being gay or lesbian was seen as a problem (Gill, 2015), which means India could be more flexible in terms of accepting homosexuality if Britishers had not imposed such values. In the past, the western countries like USA, Canada, England etc. did not show same level of acceptance as they do today. Such romantic and sexual relationships were often considered immoral, aberrant and even subject to criminalization. It is surprising that according to DSM-I, homosexuality was once considered a psychiatric disorder (APA, 1952) The diagnosis of "homosexuality" was taken out of the 2nd edition of the Diagnostic & Statistical Manual for psychological Disorders, published by the APA. This came about after contrasting beliefs that pathologized homosexuality with others that saw it as healthy (Drescher & Merlino, 2007). Most countries still regard homosexuality to be a crime or something against nature, punishing homosexuals with fines, jail, or even death sentences. Section 377 of the IPC formerly prohibited sex or union between individuals of the same genders unlawful. On September 6, 2018, the Supreme Court of India decriminalized Section 377, making gay sex constitutional. Homosexuality has always been a feature of human activity. however, acceptance levels have fluctuated.

### *Attitudes*

In our daily existence, we hear the term "attitude" quite frequently. We all have preconceived notions about certain objects and individuals. Essentially, attitude is a collection of views, opinions, and emotions about a person, incident, or thing. Attitude is defined similarly by psychologists. Attitude is a taught propensity to assess things in a particular manner. This includes evaluations of individuals, problems, things, or occurrences. Such evaluations or judgements are frequently favourable or negative, but they can also be unclear at times (Cherry, 2023). Attitudes are frequently developed as a result of experiences, learning, upbringing, and socio-cultural influences. Many attitudes are learned by watching people's behaviours and responses to different items, people, and situations. They can be good, negative, or indifferent, and they can be conveyed verbally or nonverbally. Attitudes can be either clear, conscious beliefs that are readily available to a person or implicit, subliminal beliefs that are not always obvious. To this day, the ABC framework remains one of the most often cited and used theories of attitude (Eagly & Chaiken, 1998; Van den Berg et al., 2006; Jain, 2014). According to this model, there are three components that make up one's attitude: The term "affective" is used to describe how we feel about something or someone. Cognitive essentially means our beliefs, thoughts or ideas about something. Finally, the behavioral component describes the course of action taken in relation to the object of our attitude. Individuals' and society's attitudes can have serious repercussions. They have the ability to affect conduct, decision-making, and social relationships. They can also help to shape preconceptions and prejudices against people or groups. As a result, studying attitude is an essential topic of study in psychology, with real uses in business, social policy, and dispute settlement.

### *Stereotypes & Prejudices*

Stereotypes encompass fixed, simplistic, and generalised ideas or impressions that people have about themselves, their communities, or any place they visit. These ideas are often founded on incomplete facts and presumptions rather than real knowledge or experience.

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Stereotypes may be either advantageous or detrimental, conscious or unconscious, and based on a number of characteristics such as sexual orientation, racial background, gender, age, nationality, profession, and so on. Individuals who are stereotyped on the basis of their group membership may internalize these views and feel compelled to adhere to their particular group's perceived standards. This might result in feelings of inferiority or poor self-esteem. Although, there are both advantage and disadvantage associated with stereotyping. A stereotype has the benefit of allowing us to react quickly to events since we might have had similar experiences previously. Stereotypes have a profound influence on the stereotyper's impression of those who are stereotyped (Blum, 2004). Although stereotypes can be both positive and negative but mostly, they are associated with negative connotation and likely to leave negative impression (Adilow, 2012). Prejudice is a negative attitude or a strong dislike for someone based on his membership in a group/community or simply It is preconception-based evaluations or emotional reactions towards a social group or the people within it (Amodio, 2014). It is possible for prejudice to result in behaviour that is discriminatory and in the unfair or unjust treatment of people or groups depending on the perceived attributes of those persons or community for example LGBTQ+ community. Although prejudice and stereotypes are used interchangeably yet they are different in both content and procedure, Prejudices and stereotypes often work together to impact overall social conduct (Amodio & Devine, 2006).

### *Emotional Intelligence (EI)*

Emotional intelligence is the capacity to effectively notice, interpret, regulate, and use emotions. Several theories for explaining and measuring emotional intelligence have been presented. Salovey and Mayer devised a four-branch framework consisting of perceiving emotions, using emotions to facilitate thinking, understanding emotions, and managing emotions (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Grewal & Salovey, 2005). Another well-known model was proposed by Goleman (1995), who actually popularized the concept of EI offered, another well-known model that emphasised five components: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Bar-on has made an important contribution to the area by presenting a hybrid model that combines emotional and social intelligence. These theories give frameworks for understanding and developing emotional intelligence, emphasizing the importance of emotional intelligence in personal and professional success.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

A significant body of research conducted worldwide has focused on exploring attitudes, stereotypes, and discrimination towards sexual minorities (Herek & Glunt, 1993; Kite & Whitley, 1996; Lim, 2002; Ventura et al., 2004; Magrath et al., 2020 etc.). There have been studies in India as well (Sahni et al., 2016; Akhouri, et al., 2018; Pratibha et al., 2018; Sharma, 2019 etc.), but the number is insufficient to provide a comprehensive picture of the current situation. The majority of the studies are comparative study pertaining to homophobia, or people's, prejudice, attitudes towards same-sex relations. In recent years, there has been a growing interest in examining the attitudes of heterosexual individuals towards sexual minorities, but the number of studies in this area remains limited. A well-known idea in social psychology contends that interactions or contact among members of various groups might lessen intergroup animosity and foster a more accepting attitude towards one another (Christ et al., 2014) which is also known as contact hypothesis which was given by Allport (Allport, 1958). The underlying premise behind the idea of contact is that when people from various groups come along in a pleasant or cooperative manner, they might perceive those around them as distinct individuals instead of being part of a certain out

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group. This idea of contact hypothesis has also been explored in the context of homophobia, where it is found that individuals who have personal contact with homosexuals are likely to have more positive attitude towards homosexuality than those who don't have contact (Lance, 1987; Herek & Capitanio, 1996; Anderssen, 2002; Heinze & Horn, 2009; Sahni et al., 2016). Thus, literature shows evidence for the hypothesis in the context of homosexual attitudes too. Furthermore, research suggests that attitudes towards homosexuality can vary based on socio-demographic factors such as gender and religion. There are various studies across the globe whose findings reveal that women as whole have more favorable attitude towards homosexual behavior than males (eg: Hong, 1983; LaMar & Kite, 1998; Johnson et al., 1997). The findings are little contradictory to the findings of few studies conducted in India where males are found to hold relatively more favourable attitude (Akhouri, et al., 2018; Sharma, 2019). Country like India is a diverse nation having diversity in terms of culture and religion, moreover studies show that there continues to be a broad range of prejudice existing across the world among different religions. There exist differences in attitude among different religion (Jäckle & Wenzelburger, 2014; Pratibha et al., 2018). Moreover, people having higher religiosity are found to have more unfavorable attitude towards same-sex relationships (Griffiths et al., 2001; Roggemans et al., 2015; Johnson et al., 1997) whereas some studies claim that moral conservatism acts as an intervening variable linking religiosity and homonegativity (VanderStoep & Green, 1988).

Personality can also be an important predictor of attitude. People of certain personality traits may show more flexible attitude towards homosexual relationship than other, like people with high openness to experience (OTE) are more likely to have a balanced or positive attitude towards such relationships (Shackelford & Besser, 2007), this might be because those with a greater level of openness are willing to explore new things and ponder upon their private life. These people are less likely to have hostile attitude because of their OTE, which also makes them more likely to be creative and welcoming of others with various sexual preferences or other marginalized identities although, OTE may not directly predict it but there may be other moderating effect of variables like attachment style, gender etc. (Metin-Orta & Camgoz, 2020). There are not much studies based on how emotional intelligence is directly related to prejudice reduction, specifically homophobia. Few studies suggest that empathy significantly correlates with lower-level levels of homophobia (Johnson et al., 1997).

### *Objectives –*

1. To explore the relationship between EI & ATH among college students.
2. To find out which dimensions of EI are significant predictor of ATH.

### *Hypotheses*

- H<sub>01</sub> – There is no significant relationship between EI & ATH  
H<sub>02</sub> – Dimensions of EI are not significant predictors of ATH.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The present study is a correlational research. It focused on two important psychological constructs: EI and attitude. The study's goal is to discover the nature of the association among EI and attitudes towards same-sex behaviours. The information is gathered in both online and offline mode from university students.

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- *Independent Variable:* Emotional Intelligence, it's dimensions
- *Dependent Variable:* Attitude of people towards homosexuality

**Sampling method** – The data was collected from 122 university students of age group 17 – 26 years using convenience sampling method.

**N = 122**

- *Inclusion Criteria:* Age – 18-27 years  
college students
- *Exclusion Criteria* Age – Below 18 years and above 27 years  
School students, working

### *Instruments Used –*

- 1. Attitude towards Homosexuality Scale (ATHS)** - "The Homosexuality Attitude Scale (HAS)" (Kite and Deaux, 1986) was used for collecting data regarding their attitude. It is a unidimensional scale having total 21 items. The scale has a high degree of internal consistency (alphas > 0.92). The test - retest reliability of the scale is excellent ( $r = .71$ ). It is equally trustworthy for both homosexual men and lesbians. The scale has a decent convergent validity of ( $r_s = .50$ )
- 2. Emotional Intelligence Scale** - "The Emotional Intelligence Scale" English version is chosen (Hyde, A., Pethe, S. and Dhar, U. 2011). It is a multidimensional scale with total 34 items. The scale's reliability was evaluated by calculating the reliability co-efficient on a sample of 200 participants. It was discovered that the split half reliability co-efficient was 0.88. The scale has a high level of content validity.

### *Procedure*

The researcher collected data using both offline and online modes. The offline data was primarily obtained from students of Amity University Chhattisgarh, representing various departments such as AIBAS, ABS, ASSET, ASCO, ALS, and ASL. The researcher visited different classes during campus hours and provided a brief explanation of the research study and its objectives. Interested participants were given sheets to fill out individually or in groups of 3-4 students at most. The researcher established a general rapport with the participants to make them feel comfortable and at ease. The participants were asked to read the consent form and provide their demographic details before being given specific instructions for both the scales. It took around 6 days to gather data in offline mode. Along with the offline data, the researcher gathered around certain responses via Google Forms. Because it was hard to contact students in different regions of India in person, these questionnaires were sent through various social networking sites and applications, such as the messaging app WhatsApp, LinkedIn, and Instagram. The majority of the responses obtained via Google Forms were from students at anonymous universities across India.

### *Statistical Analysis*

Following are the statistical method used –

Correlational & Regression Analysis – Pearson product moment and Multiple regression

**RESULTS & INTERPRETATION**

*Correlational Analysis*

*Table - 1 Correlational analysis between EI and ATH scores*

*Correlations*

		Emotional Intelligence	Attitude towards homosexuality
<b>Emotional Intelligence</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	.365**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001
	N	122	122
<b>Attitude towards homosexuality</b>	Pearson Correlation	.365**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	N	122	122

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**H<sub>01</sub>** – There is no significant relationship between attitude towards EI and ATH  
 According to *table-1*, the correlational analysis found a significant positive association between EI and ATH scores ( $r = .365$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This suggests that greater levels of EI were linked to more favourable attitudes towards homosexuals. Lower levels of EI, on the other hand, were related with more unfavourable attitudes towards those who are homosexual. Thus, null hypothesis was rejected.

*Multiple Regression Analysis*

**H<sub>02</sub>** – Dimensions of EI are not significant predictors of ATH

**Table – 2**

<i>Model Summary</i>									
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.639 <sup>a</sup>	.408	.355	11.30534	.408	7.649	10	111	<.001

a. Predictors: (Constant), Altruistic behavior, Value orientation, Emotional Stability, Commitment, Empathy, Integrity, Self-motivation, Self-awareness, Self-development, Managing relations

The results in above table of model summary shows that the dimensions of EI as a whole explained 40.8% variance in ATH, which was statistically significant. Thus, we can say this model is significant.

**Table – 3**

*ANOVA<sup>a</sup>*

Model		Sum Squares	of df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	9776.328	10	977.633	7.649	<.001 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	14186.991	111	127.811		
	Total	23963.320	121			

a. Dependent Variable: Attitude towards homosexuality

b. Predictors: (Constant), Altruistic behavior, Value orientation, Emotional Stability, Commitment, Empathy, Integrity, Self-motivation, Self-awareness, Self-development, Managing relations

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The results in the above ANOVA table shows that the overall regression model was significant,  $F(10, 111) = 7.649, p < .001, R^2 = .408$

**Table – 4 Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		95.0% Confidence Interval for B		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	27.776	11.550		2.405	.018	4.889	50.663
	Self awareness	1.045	.542	.170	1.929	.056	-.028	2.118
	Empathy	2.515	.435	.516	5.778	<.001	1.652	3.377
	Self motivation	.255	.430	.052	.593	.554	-.596	1.106
	Emotional Stability	-.242	.508	-.040	-.475	.635	-1.248	.765
	Managing relations	-.121	.566	-.020	-.215	.831	-1.243	1.000
	Integrity	1.418	.738	.174	1.922	.057	-.044	2.881
	Self-development	-1.006	.966	-.095	-1.042	.300	-2.920	.908
	Value orientation	.189	.932	.016	.203	.840	-1.658	2.036
	Commitment	-2.249	.774	-.234	-2.904	.004	-3.783	-.714
	Altruistic behavior	-.433	.957	-.039	-.452	.652	-2.329	1.463

a. Dependent Variable: Attitude towards homosexuality

The results in the above table shows if each predictor significantly accounts for change in outcome variable ATH. Among all the 8 predictors, empathy ( $p < .001$ ) and commitment ( $P=.004$ ) are the only major dimensions of EI that significantly predict ATH.

**DISCUSSION**

The present study targets a largely unexplored field of research in India, namely Attitude towards sexual minorities and its possible relationship with emotional intelligence (EI). Despite recent studies on attitude towards homosexuality/LGBTQ+ community, there is still a need for further studies on how different traits, such as EI, relates to such negative prejudices. The current investigation finds evidence of a positive relationship between these variables. However, since human behaviour is so complicated, establishing exact cause-and-effect relations in the behavioural sciences may be difficult. Given the dearth of research in the field, there is a lack of substantial literature examining the relationship between emotional intelligence and attitudes towards sexual minorities, including homosexuality. The findings of this study are consistent with some related research that has shown a link between emotional intelligence and the reduction of prejudices, including racial prejudice (Johnson et al., 1997; Makwana et al., 2021; Dierckx et al., 2021). But since emotional intelligence is a multi-dimensional construct. There are several components of EI. Not all components are necessarily responsible for shaping attitude towards homosexuality. In this study the results of regression analysis shows that among the eight dimensions, empathy and commitment is

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found to be the most significant predictor of positive attitude towards homosexuality. The findings are congruent with some earlier studies showing empathy as a predictor of prejudice reduction (Batson et al., 1997; Johnson et al., 1997; Stephan & Finlay, 1999; Vescio et al., 2003; Batson & Ahmad, 2009). So, It can be concluded empathy does play an important role in reducing any kind of prejudices (homophobia, racism) or improving attitudes towards them. It means people who have high level of empathy are more likely to show acceptance and positive attitude towards same-sex relationships. People with higher levels of empathy may be more inclined to adopt a perspective-taking approach, allowing them to empathize with the experiences and challenges faced by sexual minorities. Whereas Commitment, as an aspect of emotional intelligence, relates to dedication, perseverance, and the ability to maintain positive attitudes over time. Individuals with higher levels of commitment may be more inclined to challenge societal norms, prejudices, and stereotypes, and actively advocate for inclusivity and equal rights for sexual minorities. Their commitment may drive them to maintain positive attitudes and work towards fostering a more accepting society.

### CONCLUSION

The findings of the study show that there exists a significant relationship between EI and ATH among college students. Also, dimension of empathy and commitment is found to be the most significant predictor of ATH. Overall, this research emphasises the significance of emotional intelligence in understanding and shaping attitude about homosexuality. The results imply that treatments targeted at improving emotional intelligence skills, especially empathy and commitment, may help college students develop more favourable and accepting attitude towards same-sex partnerships and help reducing prejudices like homophobia.

However, further study is needed to investigate the possible influence of other factors on EI and ATH, such as marital status, socioeconomic level, and other personality correlates. Investigating these aspects might lead to a better understanding of the complicated interplay between individual attributes and attitudes towards homosexuality. Future research might also look at the effectiveness of therapies aimed at improving emotional intelligence skills, notably empathy and commitment, in promoting more favourable and accepting views towards homosexuality.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

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