

Research Paper

## Beyond Biomedical Approach: Exploring Perceived Child-Rearing Elegances, Education on Sexuality, and Immediate Environment's Effects on the Quality of Life of Homosexuals in India

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### ABSTRACT

This exploratory endeavour seeks to chart a course for future research by delving into the perceived parenting styles, foundational sex education, and the inherent need for belonging among homosexual individuals, and examining their subsequent influence on the overall quality of life. The claims of biological models explaining homosexual behaviour have been misleading and are used to perpetuate self-serving agendas (political/ ideological) on contrary the psychosocial claims are orthodox likewise (gender stereotyping, prejudice) (Weinrich, 1995). The extant body of research is notably deficient in comprehensively addressing these variables within the context of homosexual populations, thereby lacking in inclusivity and representation of diverse sexual orientations. (Makwana et al., 2023; T, 2019; Mishra & Singh, 2022). Employing perceived parenting style scale (Manikandan, K. 2020), need to belong (Leary & Cottrel, 2013), and perceived inclusivity scale for initial sex education (Keiser et al., 2019) to comprehend various aspects in 117 homosexual adolescents drawn through purposive sampling. Later qualitative aspects of this mixed method exploratory study employ structured questionnaire of WHOQOL: Measuring Quality of Life subsequently, thematic analysis was utilised to extract and elucidate the underlying themes. Authoritative parenting is prevalent akin to heterosexuals, a smaller number of adolescents received initial sex education while lower need to belong is witnessed among the homosexual adolescents. Qualitative results showcase themes like low social interaction, initial sex education deficiency and early trauma as hindrance in better quality of life.

**Keywords:** Parenting Style, Sex Education, Homosexuality, LGBTQIA+, Nurture, Quality of Life

Essential elements of an individual's development are embedded within the formative years of childhood. These early stages are not only of paramount importance, but also establish the groundwork for future developmental trajectories of children (W. Stanrock, 2012). Parenting is a dynamic and such an essential milestone in shaping the foundational developmental trajectories those are intricately connected with the process of socialization (Sahithya et al., 2019). However, the child rearing elegances /parenting styles

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are parenting attitudes, ideals, or the characteristic patterns of providing nurturance, sustenance, refrainment, authority, and autonomy (Power, 2013). These developmental trajectories might diverge owing to environmental changes and developmental milestones (like identity exploration). Each child has a different set of milestones laid based on an interplay determined together by the biology and environment which is quite difficult to model (Crews et al., 2014). Preparatory research indicates crucial yet independent developmental challenges faced by homosexuals and heterosexuals. Homosexuals have to go through different sets of challenges, and are more readily exposed to early sexual encounters (Rotherham-Borus & Fernandez, 1995; Van Wyk & Geist, 1984). This marks the importance of accurate sex education that fosters healthy development in early identification and prevention from risk factors (Keiser et al., 2019b). All these nuances are a rather crucial part of socialization while Bronfenbrenner (1989, 2002) accurately explains that the developmental changes can be observed with time; they are a product of environmental alterations and person's interaction (Härkönen, 2001). However, the developmental view urges to reconsider the extant body of research that is notably deficient in comprehensively addressing these variables within the context of homosexual populations, thereby lacking in inclusivity and representation of diverse sexual orientations (Makwana et al., 2023; T, 2019; Mishra & Singh, 2022).

### ***Deficits in Biological narratives of homosexuality***

The real difference began from the backdrop of American psychological association's announcement of 'homosexuality' being no longer classified as mental illness in 1973. The year marked the significance of psychological and psychiatric explanations rather than just biological explanations exhausted before. There have been multiple attempts to explain gender inversion as a cause of apparent homosexuality; Domner asserted that congenital factors in the womb determine homosexuality, citing hormonal variations such as androgens and changes in the hypothalamus as key influences (Ellis & Ames, 1987; Dorner et al., 1975). The 1980s marked a shift in biomedical research from hormonal to genetic explanations. Bailey and Pillard (1991) highlighted the significant heritability of male homosexuality, while Le Vay identified differences in hypothalamic nucleus size between homosexual and heterosexual men (Bailey et al., 1993). A study by Hamer et al. (1993) discovered genetic markers on the X-chromosome associated with male homosexuality (Hamer, Hu, Magnuson, Hu, & Pattatucci, 1993). In contrast, social psychology explains human behaviour through socialization theory: individuals tend to conform to norms they have been socialized into. In a thorough exploration of the biological origins of homosexuality, Weinrich (1955) highlighted how researchers often adhere to orthodox beliefs, using their findings to reinforce political agendas and ideological positions. These theories sometimes expropriate biology to pathologize homosexuality where no inherent pathology exists; however, claims are stringent about biology predisposing one to certain behaviours' (Van Wyk & Geist, 1984b). Moreover, psychosocial orthodoxies often confine human sexuality within narrow constructs of male and female, perpetuating stereotypical gender roles that limit the diverse nature of human identities (Weinrich, 1995). Both behaviourism and psychoanalytic traditions have historically been orthodox in similar ways, failing to acknowledge the spectrum of human experience and instead categorizing everything into rigid continuums.

***Parenting styles, need of accurate initial sex education, and environment effects on quality of life***

Parenting, an intricate and continuous endeavour that encompasses nurturing, guiding, and educating a child from the earliest stages of infancy to the threshold of adulthood (Isaac, R., 2014) With more acceptance and positive attitudes of youths toward homosexuality in India (H et al., 2021) this is a new paradigm of research that can focus on the development of homosexual youths and their parental child-rearing styles. Existing literature presents pattern-based approaches to describe child rearing elegances (authoritative, authoritarian, permissive and neglectful) conceptualised based on two orthogonal dimensions: responsiveness and demandingness (Smetana, 2017). There are multiple researches in the context of parenting style within India (Makwana et al., 2023; T, 2019; Mishra & Singh, 2022), though the literature is scarce and it obliterates the homosexual perspective. Sahithya et al., (2019) study offers insight into parenting style among transgender children, despite the crucial insights less efforts have been made in this direction. Similarly, the initial learning period about sexuality for identification and exploration of one's interest sets developmental milestones and if inclusivity was received during the initial years it would have significantly helped in managing risk factors (Szalacha, 2003, Keiser et al., 2019c). Interestingly, even the new education policy in India does not mention sex education yet recognise the significance of the comprehensive holistic education (Biswas A, 2019). Bronfenbrenner, (2002) emphasised the socialisation theory that aids in holistic development of the child throughout the life, he explicitly mentioned about interplay of environment and biology in governing the outcome on child development and rather determining their quality of life. Further the nexus can be connected with one's desire to belong is affected through environmental effects. However, the literature only cites quality of life in terms of homosexuals' risk-taking behaviour and the data is deficient in terms of explaining environmental effects (Berg et al., 2013). The following study aims at exploring the nuances present in the variables at hand.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***Sample***

Exploratory mixed method research is used to unleash the unknown aspects about perceived parenting styles, early sex education and the environmental effects that affect the quality of life amongst homosexuals in India. A sample of 117 adolescents' participants who self-identify as homosexuals was drawn through purposive sampling method for the quantitative paradigm while 24 participants were drawn from the same sample to voluntarily participate in qualitative paradigm. Sample was drawn through voluntary response sampling and the data collection was done online and as well as offline. Everyone was briefed about the purpose of the study and confidentiality was maintained in keeping the records of the participants.

### ***Instruments***

After the sample was drawn, 117 sample was subjected to quantitative paradigm that included 3 measures namely:

- 1. Perceived parenting scale** (Manikandan, K. 2020b): a standardised scale for parenting style. It was inclusive of 30 items (10 each for a single type of parenting style). This likert type scale ranged from 1 to 5 where (1- never to 5- always).
- 2. The Perceived Inclusivity of Sex Education Scale (PISES):** This measure uses a 7-point scale with responses ranging from Very strongly disagree to Very strongly agree. This scale measured the accurate amount of information LGB (Lesbian, Gay,

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Bisexual) initial sex education had in correspondence with their sexual orientation (Keiser et al., 2019d).

3. **The need to belong scale** (Leary, 2013): 5-point Likert scale developed to assess the desire and need to belong to immediate environments. Literature suggests better child interactions often lead to better desire to belong to the environment.

**Procedure**

Once the data was collected from the sample (N: 117), 40 participants randomly were asked to voluntarily participate in a virtual interview (qualitative paradigm), 24 participants agreed and gave consent to participate. A structured virtual interview format was prepared beforehand it included three set of pre decided questions that were administered on the sample once the rapport was formed, it included:

- a) Did you receive sex education back in school? If yes please feel free to share your experience.
- b) WHOQOL: Measuring Quality of Life: allowed to comprehend the quality of life using a reliable and standardized scale by World health organization.
- c) What environmental factors, according to you, have affected your quality of life?

Data collection was followed by quantitatively analyzing data set with Statistical package for social sciences version 2.0 and qualitatively through thematic analysis where the procured answers were transcribed and analytical efforts were made to bring out optimal themes.

**RESULTS**

**Quantitative paradigm**

The exploratory study aimed at comprehending the perceived parenting style, initial inclusivity of sex education, and the desire to belong to one's environment.

*Table No. 1 Descriptives of the sample on various variables*

Variables	Minimum Score	Maximum Score	Mean	Standard Deviation
<b>Perceived parenting style</b>				
<b>Authoritative</b>	17	46	35.2222	6.70706
<b>Authoritarian</b>	13	47	29.1538	7.91617
<b>Permissive</b>	12	45	26.1624	7.49938
<b>Inclusivity of sex education</b>	10	70	32.8376	17.93088
<b>Need to belong</b>	26	55	34.9744	4.41288
<b>N = 117</b>			N= 117	N= 117

Table 1 highlights the mean values and deviation values of 117 homosexuals. Authoritative parenting style is dominant amongst the sample population (Mean= 35.2222). While the sample scored below average in terms of inclusivity of sex education (Mean = 32.8376) against a maximum score of 70, the average population scored below 33. Further on the dimension of willingness to belong to one's environment trends are seen to be above average (Mean= 34.9744).

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**Qualitative paradigm**

After a virtual interview of 24 participants (N=24), the data was recorded and then transcribed for analytic efforts. Once the transcribed data was obtained, it was read and reread to procure recurrent themes. Following themes were grouped-

*Table No. 2 thematic analysis*

<b>Major themes</b>	<b>Sub Themes and Description</b>
<b>Initial Sex education</b>	Most of the participants <b>lack basic sex education</b> (23 out of 25 denied receiving sex education back in school). All those who received sex education were more in terms of biological mechanism, menstrual hygiene while there was emphasis on the education pertaining to sex was <b>too vague</b> . Either it was <b>uncomfortable</b> or the caregivers, teachers and the seminar facilitator became uncomfortable in answering and delivering proper talk about gender, sex, and choices. The traditional notions of <b>women to man attraction</b> were seen and was emphasized. Participants were more <b>dependent on books, internet, and peer advice</b> to understand their choices, and interest. One of the participants quoted <i>“We girls just had a menstrual hygiene seminar which was too uncomfortable and confusing for us to attend because they haven't cleared any doubts when we wanted to and when it was much needed. The school invited girls to that seminar; boys were not even allowed there as if they were not part of the process.”</i>
<b>Quality of life</b>	Majority population (17 out of 24) rated their <b>quality of life</b> as three (neither poor nor good). While others see their life quality on extreme poles either very poor or very good. Almost all the participants reported satisfaction with their current <b>health status</b> . Five out of total participants believe their life is less <b>meaningful</b> to a contrasting sample of 19 who believes their life has very much meaning. Almost all participants opted little or not at all when questioned about feeling <b>safe every day</b> and the <b>healthy environment</b> they live in. Twenty two out of twenty-four participants do not feel coherence with how their body looks. <b>Low acceptance of bodily appearance</b> is noticed amongst the sample. However, they rated themselves as better in their ability to <b>bond around their immediate environment</b> . Their <b>satisfaction</b> in terms of sleep, oneself, personal relationships, sex life, support from friends, and conditions of one's living space are less satisfactory in contrast to their ability to work, perform activities and access to healthcare services and their transport. However, many of them continue to face <b>negative feelings</b> daily.
<b>Environmental factors</b>	<b>Low parental support</b> as quoted by almost all the participants continues to be a major hindrance in better quality of life. Further <b>less acceptance in society</b> seems to be another problem that the homosexual population face everyday. <b>Discrimination, use of foul language, homophobia, low peer support, negative perceptions about homosexuals</b> including forcing them to restrict to their effeminate identity. Further multiple participants mentioned that <b>less awareness</b> about the community has led to numerous faulty presumptions that stain the identity of individuals and make it difficult and uncomfortable in coming out. These factors are not only affecting their environment, rather they also affect one's self. Three of the participants quote about <b>deterioration in their self esteem</b> to engage with people because they often judge how he walks, holds a mug of a coffee and sits like a girl.

## **DISCUSSION**

This exploratory study aimed to comprehend the nuances of perceived parenting style, initial sex education and environmental effects on the quality of life of homosexuals in India. Owing to deficiency of proper literature that highlights trends of the variables present at hand this study reveals the underlying exploration of the variables in the current study. The perceived parenting style of homosexual children is found to be coherent with heterosexual and transgender parenting styles (Makwana et al., 2023; T, 2019; Mishra & Singh, 2022). Authoritative parenting (Mean: 35.222) that involves more control, responsiveness and more demand towards children is prevalent (Smetana, 2017b). However, another aspect that can be sought is a shift in parenting once children explore their identity and come out to their parents. Along with that, sexual minority students face more challenges related to self-acceptance and mental health due to more heteronormative education and less awareness about identity exploration. It also develops faulty perceptions and notions about oneself and others. (Snapp, Hoenig, Fields, & Russell, 2015). The coherent analysis of qualitative and quantitative study showcases the same perceived notions and poor quality of life due to less acceptance and more heteronormativity. The below average scores on initial sex education is reasoned with the qualitative results. The dire need of the education system to incorporate sex and gender education is a prerequisite in creating a tolerant and accepting society. Further one's ability to belong to the environment is found to be above average (Mean: 34.9744) however the quality of life is still reported neither good nor bad by majority of the participants. Sexual minority adolescents are readily able to work in a volatile environment, rather they have developed more tolerance to threatening environmental challenges. The issues in regard with self, acceptance of one's body, sleep, mental health conditions are recurrent and dreadful amongst the sample. The resilience of sexual minority groups, parenting styles, and further nexus between environment and quality of life of homosexual adolescents in India can be studied in future with more population samples and correlated measures. This study is intended to be an exploratory study that can aid researchers in future exploration.

## **CONCLUSION**

Thus, beyond biology, the nexus are rather more environmental and culturally divergent to conclude. The nuances of the following study highlight the authoritative parenting style as prominent amongst the caregivers of homosexual adolescents, below average initial sex education pertaining to sexual minority's identity exploration and problems and finally homosexuals' readiness to belong to their environment. The environmental factors including homophobia, low parental support, social support and less awareness about the community has led to perpetuate faulty presumptions that affect the quality of life of homosexuals in India. While the quality of life in terms of oneself (i.e mental health, body image, self-esteem.) is low while homosexuals show extreme tolerance to violent and detrimental environments.

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***Conflict of Interest***

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