

Research Paper

Association Between Social Support, Family Environment, and Psychological Well-Being among LGBTQ+ Individuals: A Cross-Sectional Study

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ABSTRACT

Sexual and gender minority populations (LGBTQ+) experience stigma, discrimination, and social exclusion that severely impact their psychological well-being. The presence of social support and an affirming family environment are among the most powerful buffers against such minority stress. The present study explores the association among social support, family environment, and psychological well-being in LGBTQ+ individuals, with additional comparisons by occupational status and family structure (joint vs. nuclear). A cross-sectional correlational design was adopted, involving 100 LGBTQ+ participants selected through purposive sampling. The tools used were the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), Vohra's Family Environment Scale (FES), and Ryff's 42-item Psychological Well-Being (PWB) scale. Statistical analyses were performed in SPSS 20 using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and independent-samples *t*-tests. Findings revealed strong positive correlations between perceived social support and multiple family environment dimensions such as cohesion, expressiveness, moral orientation, and organization. Social support also demonstrated a strong relationship with overall psychological well-being ($r = 0.822, p < .001$). Participants from joint families and those who were employed reported significantly higher PWB and social support than their counterparts. These results highlight that a cohesive and accepting family environment—combined with external social resources—enhances resilience and psychological functioning in LGBTQ+ individuals. The study emphasizes the urgent need for awareness, inclusive family-based interventions, and community programs that foster acceptance and support for gender and sexual minorities in India.

Keywords: LGBTQ+, Social Support, Family Environment, Psychological Well-Being, Minority Stress, India, Ryff, MSPSS, Family Cohesion

The mental health of LGBTQ+ individuals continues to be a major global concern. Despite increasing visibility and partial legal recognition, the lived realities of LGBTQ+ persons are marked by chronic exposure to stigma, prejudice, and discrimination—factors conceptualized under the framework of **Minority Stress Theory** (Meyer, 2003). This model posits that stressors unique to sexual and gender minorities lead

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to cumulative psychological strain, manifesting in higher rates of anxiety, depression, substance abuse, and suicidality compared to heterosexual and cisgender populations.

In collectivist societies like India, family plays a pivotal role in shaping individual well-being. Acceptance or rejection within the family context has profound implications for self-esteem, identity integration, and emotional stability. However, Indian families often view non-heteronormative identities as violations of traditional and moral codes, leading to experiences of rejection, shame, and concealment (Chakraborty et al., 2015). Such environments can deteriorate mental health, while affirming and cohesive families can provide a psychological safety net.

Social support, both from family and peers, acts as a protective factor that mitigates the negative effects of discrimination and internalized stigma. Prior studies in Western contexts (Ryan et al., 2010; Frost & Meyer, 2012) have shown that family acceptance predicts higher self-esteem, better mental health, and lower suicidality among LGBTQ+ individuals. Yet, there is limited empirical evidence from India linking family environment and social support with well-being outcomes in this population.

Hence, this study sought to:

1. Examine the association between perceived social support, family environment, and psychological well-being in LGBTQ+ individuals.
2. Compare the levels of psychological well-being and social support between employed and unemployed participants.
3. Compare these variables across family structures (joint vs. nuclear).

It was hypothesized that individuals reporting higher social support and positive family environments would also report greater psychological well-being.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. Social Support and Well-Being among LGBTQ+ Individuals

Social support has consistently been identified as a major determinant of mental health among LGBTQ+ populations. **Tabler, Schmitz, and Charak (2022)** investigated the mediating role of social support between discrimination and depression among sexual minority youth. They found that higher perceived social support significantly reduced depressive symptoms and improved life satisfaction. Similarly, **Simons et al. (2013)** reported that parental warmth and community connectedness are critical protective factors that buffer against stress and suicidal ideation in sexual minority adolescents.

Wilson and Cariola (2019) conducted a meta-synthesis of qualitative studies on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) adolescents and observed that consistent emotional support from friends and families helped participants develop self-acceptance and resilience despite societal stigma. Likewise, **Ryan et al. (2010)**, in their landmark study, demonstrated that family acceptance during adolescence predicted higher self-esteem, better general health, and lower rates of depression and substance misuse among LGBTQ+ adults.

In addition, **Darby-Mullins and Murdock (2007)** found that perceived social support from peers and family members was positively related to psychological adjustment and relationship satisfaction among gay and lesbian adults. These studies collectively emphasize that strong social support networks — both familial and non-familial — enhance

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psychological well-being and reduce the negative effects of minority stress in LGBTQ+ populations.

2. Family Environment and Mental Health Outcomes

Family environment plays an indispensable role in shaping mental health outcomes of LGBTQ+ individuals. **Simons et al. (2013)** established that family cohesion and open communication contribute to self-acceptance and adaptive coping among sexual minorities. **Ryan et al. (2010)** further confirmed that family acceptance acts as a buffer against depression and substance abuse, whereas rejection from family members results in isolation and psychological distress.

Shilo and Savaya (2012) analyzed the impact of parental attitudes and family dynamics on the mental health of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) youth in Israel and found that supportive family behavior was associated with higher life satisfaction and lower internalized homophobia. **Rostosky et al. (2007)** also reported that affirming family relationships enhance self-esteem and positive affect, reinforcing the centrality of familial support systems in emotional stability.

In the Indian context, **Chakraborty et al. (2015)** highlighted that most Indian families exhibit strong heteronormative values, leading to concealment and emotional withdrawal among LGBTQ+ members. Nonetheless, they found that even minimal parental empathy or acceptance substantially improves psychological well-being. **Vohra (1997)**, using the Family Environment Scale, demonstrated that cohesion, expressiveness, and organization are significant predictors of emotional health and adjustment in Indian youth, confirming the relevance of family climate in shaping psychological outcomes.

3. Psychological Well-Being and Protective Factors

Psychological well-being refers to positive functioning across domains such as autonomy, purpose in life, personal growth, and self-acceptance (Ryff, 1989). Several international studies have documented poor mental health among LGBTQ+ individuals, primarily due to stigma and discrimination. **Izutsu and Tsutsumi (2021)** observed that discrimination and lack of social recognition were major predictors of anxiety and depression among sexual minorities in Asia. Similarly, **Kertzner et al. (2009)** found that gay men with stronger social and community connectedness reported higher levels of self-acceptance and life satisfaction, while isolation predicted depressive symptoms.

Earlier work by **Reisen and Poppen (1999)** among HIV-positive gay men revealed that those with supportive networks and greater community belonging had better mental health and coping outcomes than those facing rejection or concealment. **Meyer (2003)**, in his Minority Stress Model, theorized that prejudice and discrimination lead to chronic stress, but that social support and resilience mitigate the psychological burden.

Indian studies mirror these findings. **Sivasubramanian et al. (2011)** demonstrated that concealment of sexual identity among Indian gay and bisexual men correlates with depression and suicidal ideation. **Bhattacharya (2017)** further emphasized that perceived family rejection remains a key predictor of psychological distress among Indian LGBTQ+ youth, reinforcing the urgent need for inclusive family-based interventions.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design

The study employed a **cross-sectional correlational design**, enabling examination of the relationships between the three major variables without manipulating them experimentally.

Sample

A purposive sample of **100 LGBTQ+ adults** (aged 18–45 years) participated. Recruitment occurred via LGBTQ+ community organizations, peer networks, and online support groups across urban areas. Inclusion criteria were: (a) self-identification as LGBTQ+, (b) age above 18 years, and (c) ability to give informed consent. Participants represented diverse identities (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and non-binary).

Tools Used

- 1. Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS; Zimet et al., 1988)**
A 12-item scale assessing perceived support from family, friends, and significant others on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Very Strongly Disagree, 7 = Very Strongly Agree). It provides sub-scores and a total support index. Reported internal consistency ranges from $\alpha = 0.81$ – 0.94 .
- 2. Family Environment Scale (FES; Vohra, 1997):** This 98-item scale evaluates seven dimensions of the family system: competitive framework, cohesion, expressiveness, independence, moral orientation, organization, and recreational orientation. High scores indicate a positive and organized family environment. Test–retest reliability ranges between .77–.89.
- 3. Psychological Well-Being Scale (Ryff, 1989):** A 42-item instrument assessing six domains of well-being: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Responses are rated on a 6-point Likert scale. Reported Cronbach’s alpha values range between .81 and .88.

Procedure

Data collection occurred over three months. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Institutional Ethics Committee (IGNOU). Participants provided written informed consent before participating. Data were collected both online (Google Forms) and offline (in person) ensuring anonymity. Each participant required approximately 30–35 minutes to complete the scales.

Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using **SPSS Version 20**. Descriptive statistics summarized demographic and scale characteristics. **Pearson’s correlation coefficients** were used to assess the relationships among social support, family environment, and psychological well-being. **Independent-samples t-tests** compared groups by occupational status and family structure. A significance level of $p < .05$ was used throughout.

RESULTS

Correlation Analysis: Social Support and Family Environment

Table 1. Correlations between perceived social support and family-environment dimensions (N = 100)

FES Dimension	r	p
Competitive Framework	0.4823	< .05
Cohesion	0.5603	< .01
Expressiveness	0.5423	< .01
Independence	0.4701	< .05
Moral Orientation	0.6634	< .01
Organization	0.7221	< .01
Recreational Orientation	0.5763	< .01

Perceived social support exhibited significant positive correlations with all seven family-environment dimensions, suggesting that individuals perceiving their families as cohesive, expressive, morally guided, and organized also experienced stronger perceived social support.

Correlation Between Social Support and Psychological Well-Being

Table 2. Correlation between perceived social support and psychological well-being (N = 100)

Variables	r	p
Social Support ↔ Psychological Well-Being	0.822	< .001

A strong positive correlation was found between social support and psychological well-being, indicating that supportive interpersonal environments directly enhance emotional and functional health among LGBTQ+ individuals.

Group Differences by Occupation

Table 3. Group differences by occupation (selected outcomes)

Measure	Employed (M)	Unemployed (M)	t	p
Psychological Well-Being	88.24	79.20	2.460	< .01
Social Support	76.45	70.65	2.353	< .01
FES—Competitive Framework	94.31	80.12	2.651	< .05
FES—Independence	85.61	101.56	2.564	< .001
FES—Moral Orientation	90.23	77.81	1.976	< .05
FES—Organization	103.41	80.12	2.345	< .001

Employed participants demonstrated higher psychological well-being and social support scores. Employment appears to offer financial autonomy, social integration, and purpose, thereby enhancing resilience and family connectedness.

Group Differences by Family Type

Table 4. Group differences by family type (selected outcomes)

Measure	Joint (M)	Nuclear (M)	t	p
Psychological Well-Being	89.21	78.20	3.460	< .01
Social Support	79.65	69.45	2.553	< .05
FES—Competitive Framework	99.12	84.31	2.551	< .05

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Measure	Joint (M)	Nuclear (M)	t	p
FES—Cohesion	109.61	87.91	2.321	< .05
FES—Independence	81.56	105.61	2.564	< .001
FES—Moral Orientation	107.81	70.23	2.976	< .001
FES—Organization	100.12	83.41	2.345	< .001

Participants from joint families reported higher social support and psychological well-being compared to those from nuclear families, possibly due to greater familial interaction and emotional closeness inherent in extended family systems.

DISCUSSION

The results confirm that social support and family environment substantially predict psychological well-being among LGBTQ+ individuals. These findings align with the minority stress framework, which identifies external social support as a critical buffer against identity-based stress.

High correlations between social support and family dimensions such as cohesion, expressiveness, and organization highlight that emotionally communicative and structured families nurture psychological resilience. The strong association between moral orientation and social support implies that value-based families tend to extend acceptance even in non-traditional contexts.

The occupational analysis showed that employed LGBTQ+ individuals had better psychological well-being. Employment fosters financial stability, self-efficacy, and routine — factors that are protective against depression and internalized stigma. Joint-family participants exhibited greater well-being due to stronger emotional and instrumental support, though nuclear-family participants reported greater independence, reflecting evolving family norms in urban India.

This interplay between **autonomy** and **collectivism** is crucial: while collectivist systems offer belonging and care, autonomy supports self-expression — both essential for LGBTQ+ well-being.

The results resonate with international findings (Ryan et al., 2010; Frost & Meyer, 2012) but extend their implications to Indian contexts, emphasizing culturally embedded pathways of support.

CONCLUSION

Social support and a positive family environment are integral to psychological well-being in LGBTQ+ individuals. The study's results suggest that promoting family acceptance and community inclusivity can significantly improve mental health outcomes. Policymakers, educators, and mental health professionals must collaborate to design culturally sensitive interventions that enhance familial understanding and reduce stigma in Indian society.

Future research should employ longitudinal and mixed-method designs to examine causal relationships and capture the lived experiences of different subgroups within the LGBTQ+ spectrum.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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