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NON–ACCEPTANCE AND PREJUDICE AGAINST SEXUAL MINORITY- CAUSE TOWARDS SUICIDAL IDEATION

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Abstract

The sexual minority is the group of an individual whose sexual identity and sexual orientation is different from the majority of society. It comprises of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, ally, and many more (LGBTQIA+). After coming out as different from the presumed gender, sexual minorities often deal with an array of stressors. They often face numerous negative experiences such as lack of family support, social rejection, prejudice, bullying, teasing, discrimination, lack of access to support groups, etc. All these factors make them feel miserable, depressed and develop the feeling of thwarted belongingness as well as perceived burdensome which contributes to suicidal ideation among the sexual minority. Studies also revealed that LGBTQ youth experience a greater risk of suicidal ideation than heterosexual individuals (McGraw, et al., 2021). The sexual minority are not inherently prone to suicidal risk due to their sexual orientation but the way they were mistreated and stigmatized in society places them in a higher place in terms of suicidal risk. The interpersonal psychological theory of suicidal behavior by Joiner, et al., 2005 stated that individuals will not die by suicide unless they have both the desire as well as the ability to die by suicide. Some of the warning sign for suicidal ideation among sexual minority includes anxiety, withdrawal, substance abuse, purposeless, hopelessness, being trapped, and many more. Although there are sustainable development goals to promote good health and well-being, gender equality, and reduced inequality but sexual minorities continue to face discrimination and exclusion across all spheres of life based on their sexual orientation. Day-by-day there is a drastic change observed towards acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals in society but still, due to lack of proper knowledge and the homophobic attitude, most of the members in society treat them as invisible as well as different which makes them more prone towards suicidal ideation.

Keyword: *Sexual minority, non-acceptance, prejudice, thwarted belongingness, perceived burdensome and suicidal ideation*

INTRODUCTION

Suicide is a self-directed injurious behavior with an intention which leads to death. Each suicide is a personal tragedy that prematurely takes the life of an individual and has a continuing ripple effect, affecting the lives of families, friends, and communities. According to the World Health Organization, in India suicide is an emerging and serious public health issue. It ranges from seriously considering suicide, and creating a suicide plan or an attempt to commit suicide. A suicide attempt is a non-fatal, self-directed injurious behavior with an intention to die whereas suicidal ideation is the thinking and planning about suicide which includes wishing to die with no method

to active suicidal ideation with a specific method. Every year, more than 1,00,000 people commit suicide in the country. As per the Suicide of India 2020 report, a total of 1,53,052 suicides were reported in the country showing the increasing rate of suicides by 8.7% during 2020 over 2019. According to Statista Research Department in 2020 more than 44 thousand females and 108 thousand males were deaths due to suicides in India. Various factors lead to suicidal ideation such as professional or career problems, sense of isolation, abuse, violence, family problems, mental disorders, substance abuse, financial loss, chronic pain, etc.

Over period of time, there has been a massive change observed in gender transitioning which is a process of changing one's gender presentation or sex characteristics to accord with one's internal sense of gender identity – the idea of what it means to be non-binary. In April 2014, the Supreme Court of India formally recognized the existence of a third gender but there is no formal definition of the third gender in India, and the people who identify as neither man nor woman are commonly referred to as Hijra. Although Supreme Court has recognized their existence but the majority of people who belong to this community hide their sexuality out of fear for losing their loved ones. They still experienced disaffection from their family and friends, invisibleness, and harassment at school which affects their mental health, and well-being. This discrimination also affects their access to facilities such as education, employment, health care, and housing which make them feel more miserable and vulnerable due to their sexual orientation

PREVALENCE OF SUICIDE AMONG SEXUAL MINORITIES

The sexual minority is not prone to suicidal ideation inherently but the way surrounding society treat them due to their sexual orientation, places them in a higher place in suicidal ideation. Decades of research as well as recent data have consistently found that LGBTQ youth are at greater risk of experiencing suicidal ideations and attempts suicide compared to their heterosexual counterparts (Chang *et al*., 2020; Haas *et al*., 2010). Suicide is the second leading cause of death among 10 to 24 aged young people and LGBTQ youth are more than four times more likely to attempt suicide compared to their peers (Johns *et al*., 2020). The Trevor project also stated that more than 1.8 million LGBTQ youth in the age group 13-24 try to attempt suicide each year and at least one attempt in every 45 seconds. The Trevor Project, 2022 National survey on LGBTQ youth Mental Health revealed that most of the i.e. 45% of the LGBTQ youth tried to commit suicide in the past year including more than half of transgender and non-binary youth. They also found that individuals who found high social support from their families attempted less suicide than the individual who felt less social support. Kaushik, (2021) stated that 200 transgender people died by suicide in India and many cases related to LGBTQ+ suicide are neglected and gone under-reported. Studies also revealed that the prevalence of suicidal ideation is not only found in developing countries but in a developed country like in the U.S. 81.7 % of transgender thought about suicide in their lifetimes, while 48.3% had done in the past year (Herman, 2019). In Canada, LGB youth were found at higher risk of suicidal ideation compared to heterosexual individuals (Peter *et al.,* 2017).

FACTORS LEADING TOWARDS SUICIDAL IDEATION AMONG SEXUAL MINORITIES

General risk factors for suicide ideation identified over the past several decades include a family history of suicide, lack of support, childhood maltreatment, having a mental illness and struggling with substance abuse, bullying, feeling of hopelessness, cultural and religious beliefs, etc. Studies revealed that discrimination towards LGBTQ individuals in society has prevented them from obtaining proper education, job, and housing and have forced them towards begging and sex work, this type of pitiful situation have broken their confidence, self-esteem and forced them to end their

life by committing suicide (DiStefano, 2008). Discrimination, non-acceptance, prejudice, and violence against sexual minorities occur on every platform. They are rejected, harassed either physically, or verbally, stigmatized, and face refusal of services due to their sexual orientation. It's further led them to lose interest in day-to-day activities and makes them more prone to committing suicide to escape reality. Mustanski & Liu (2013) stated that suicidality among sexual minorities is also associated with poor mental health conditions which include emotional fatigue, low self-esteem, not able to disclose their identity, confusion about their sexual orientation, etc. Research also shows that the risk of HIV and HIV status among sexual minorities and a history of forced sex increase the chance of suicidal ideation in LGBTQ+ individuals (Chakrapani *et al.,* 2007). In addition, some triggering factors include rape, deception from a partner, unwanted pregnancy, and refusal of sex reassignment by family members that influence the individual to commit suicide (Virupaksha *et al.,* 2016). The negative attitude toward LGBTQ lifestyles and gender bias leads to isolation, family rejection, and lack of access to support groups. Consequently, this increases stress levels, depression, and substance abuse and it contributes to the suicide risk in LGBTQ youth.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

THE INTERPERSONAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORY OF SUICIDAL BEHAVIOR (JOINER, 2005)

The interpersonal–psychological theory of suicidal behavior proposed by Thomas Joiner, 2005 stated that individuals will not die by suicide unless they have both the desire to die by suicide and the ability to do so. The theory includes three main components which are perceived burdensomeness, a sense of low belongingness or thwarted belongingness, and acquired capability or ability of self-injury.

PERCEIVED BURDENSOME AND SUICIDAL IDEATION

Perceived burdensome is the belief that one is a burden on family, others, and society. Individuals think they are burden on others and view suicide as a means of improving the lives of those they care about. In society, it is always assumed that all people are heterosexual and that their identity matches with their birth-assigned sex (Rosati *et al*., 2020). But the reality may be different sometime. Although the number of people identifying as something other than heterosexual is on the rise, but it is still difficult for many people to come out as LGBTQ+. They have to work out when it is the right time to tell someone they are not heterosexual or that they have a different gender. Coming out about sexual orientation and gender identity makes a huge difference to LGBT people's ability to lead happy, open, and fulfilling lives. Being open about sexual and gender identity improves LGBT people's self-esteem and self-confidence enables better relationships, improves employment satisfaction, and increases well-being and psychological health. But sometimes after coming out and disclosing their identity society as well as family and friends started to treat them differently. They often face a lack of support, harassment, bullying, and discrimination based on their sexual orientation which makes them feel miserable about themselves and develop a feeling of burdensome on others. In this regard, they develop the concept that their death will be worth more than their life to family, friends, society, etc., and tend to commit suicide. Rosati *et al.,* (2020) stated that coming out (CO) is fundamental for identity integration among LGBQ+ people, and its positive impact tends to lower the level of anxiety, depression, and burdensome towards others which helps in reducing suicidal ideation among LGBTQ individuals. Also, there are tremendous negative impacts on LGBTQIA+ people when they cannot be open about their sexual orientation or identity. This silencing can lead to isolation, self-harm, substance abuse and poor relationships, etc. Research shows that the inability to disclose sexual or gender identity, and the stress related to

decisions about coming out, are also linked with suicide and depression in LGBT people (Klein & Golub 2016).

THWARTED BELONGINGNESS AND SUICIDAL IDEATION

Thwarted belongingness refers to an unmet need for a sense of social connection and is reflected in issues such as isolation, loneliness, and impoverished social networks. A low sense of belongingness is developed when the individual experience that they are different from others, not an integral part of a family, circle of friends, or other valued groups. Sexual minorities face a unique combination of stressors based on their orientation and identity which have been associated with high rates of suicidal ideation (Fox *et al.,* 2020). Protective factors in the community like family, peers, and social support reduce suicidal ideation and enhance the ability to cope with sexual-orientation barriers and obstacles towards LGBTQ individuals. More specifically, greater social support for the LGBTQ community has been associated with higher levels of self-esteem, and lower depression and anxiety (Tabaac *et al.,* 2015). When LGBTQ individual express their sexual orientation to parents, parents evolved through a series of stages from initial shock, denial, and isolation to the eventual acceptance of their child's orientation. This process is a period of uncertainty and chaos which also leads to disruption within the family. Sometimes parents reject them thinking it will affect their reputation and fail to accept their child's sexual orientation. Parents also try to suppress their homosexual children by forcing them to be heterosexual, blocking their access to any LGBTQ resources. Parents believe that their actions will help their LGBTQ children to have a good life but it increases conflict within the child's personality as well as within the family and it makes them feel isolated, the loneliness which leads to suicidal ideation. Research shows that sexual minority who receive social support from family shows lower depressive symptoms and suicide ideation (Fingerhut, 2018). Support from educational institutions also appears to play an important role in LGBTQ+ suicide risk. School-based homophobic victimization has been associated with increased suicidal thoughts and attempts in school-going LGBTQ youth. Studies also revealed that high school and college-aged youth who receive support from educational institutions with supportive environments to protect them from victimization make them feel secure and have less suicide attempts, self-harm, and lower levels of depression than institutions lacking such protections and supports (Kull *et al.,* 2016). Seelman (2016) indicated that sexual minorities who were denied access to fundamental facilities, gender-appropriate bathrooms, housing, and employment were tend to have a lifetime suicide attempt, even after controlling the interpersonal issue that makes them feel like a victim. The community context also contributes to suicide risk among LGBTQ youth which makes them vulnerable and influences towards suicidal risk. From the studies, it was found that sexual minority who lived in LGBT-targeted hate crimes neighborhoods tend to show higher suicidal ideation and attempts than those living in neighborhoods with a lower incidence of LGBT hate crimes (Duncan & Hatzenbuehler, 2014). Community support includes community integration (i.e., feeling like a part of the community and being valued by the community), community participation (i.e., involved in community activities and social events), and use of community organizations (i.e., perceived availability of resources in the larger community. Community support has been linked to lower levels of thwarted belongingness and higher subjective well-being among LGBTQ individuals.

ACQUIRED CAPABILITY OR THE ABILITY OF SELF-INJURY

The third component is the acquired ability of self-injury. When an individual develops the feeling of perceived burdensome and thwarted belongingness it may lead to the desire for suicide but without the ability to perform self-injury individual is not sufficient to commit a suicide attempt.

Acquired capability is developed when an individual is repeatedly exposed to psychologically provocative experiences and painful life events. When sexual minorities repeatedly face discrimination, harassment, non-acceptance, bullying, rejection, and prejudice on the ground of their sexual minority over a period of time they develop the ability of self-injury. Later individual start to injure them in the form of self–starvation, physical abuse, etc whenever they encounter painful or fearsome experiences which are associated with suicidal attempts. Research also revealed that individuals with past suicidal attempts experience more serious forms of suicidality than individuals who do not have any history of non-suicidal self-injury (Joiner *et al.,* 2005). Ryan *et al.,* (2010) also revealed that LGB has increased susceptibility to develop acquired capability due to traumatic events, homophobic attitudes, physical assault as well as sexual assault, etc. They were twice more prone to harassment as compared to heterosexual individuals due to their sexual orientation (Rankin *et al.,* 2010).

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

BE A TRUSTED INDIVIDUAL WHO ACCEPTS AND LOVES LGBTQ

LGBTQ individuals were found 40 percent less likely to attempt suicide when they have at least one individual who accepted them as they are (Chang *et al.,* 2020). Family support helps in developing a sense of belongingness increased self-esteem and protection against depression which helps in reducing suicidal ideation among the sexual minority.

SCHOOL AND COLLEGE SHOULD BE GENDER SENSITIZED

School and college climate can be notoriously hostile for LGBTQ youth. Adopting programs and practices that positively affect LGBTQ youth including gender and sexuality alliance clubs; prohibiting bullying based on a student's sexuality or gender identity; identifying "safe spaces" where students can receive support and providing training for staff on how to create safe environments for all students will help the LGBTQ individual feel secured and loved.

ATE INCLUSIVE RESOURCES AND SCREERVICES FOR LGBTQ INDIVIDUALS

LGBTQ individuals disproportionately become homeless as a result of family conflict or rejection. But when they seek housing services they often encounter bias, harassment, and discrimination, which can deepen their despair. Research shows that individuals that are experiencing homelessness tend to attempt suicide more than heterosexual individuals in the same situation (Ecker *et al.,* 2019).

ENCOURAGE THEM TO CALL A HELPLINE OR CONTACT SOMEONE THEY MIGHT TURN TO FOR SUPPORT

If an individual is feeling suicidal, facing bullying, or require help, and then they can contact any of the following helpline numbers such as Sneha prevention center 044-24640050, Queerythm on 9745545559, Sahodari (helpline for transgender community), Sahay, LGBTQ National youth helpline number 800-246-7743, LGBTQ National Senior helpline number 888-234-724 and many more. By calling the helpline numbers the individual will received assistance, as well as confidential peer support which will help in protecting the life of the individual who is prone to suicidal ideation.

CONCLUSION

LGBTQIA+ individuals face tremendous difficulties growing up in a society where heterosexuality is often presented as the only acceptable orientation and homosexuality is regarded as deviant.

Although there are Sustainable Development Goals to promote good health and well-being (Goal 3), gender equality (Goal 5), and reduced inequality (Goal 10) but they continue to face discrimination and exclusion across all spheres of life due to their sexual orientation. All the negative social environments, inadequate support within the closest social network, and an absence of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex support space in communities contribute to the development of loneliness, hopelessness, feeling a burden on others, which contributes towards the higher likelihood of considering suicide among the sexual minority.

So it is a need of an hour to provide knowledge and awareness among the family as well as society to accept the LGBTQ+ individual as whom they are so that they will feel loved and secure and it will help in preventing the increasing risk of suicidal ideation among the sexual minority.

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