93905

Public Disclosure Authorized

Public Disclosure Authorized

Education Resilience Approaches (ERA) Program

A complement to the Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER)

RES-Research
Resilience in Education Systems
India

The Resilience of LGBTQIA Students On Delhi Campuses

Education Resilience Approaches (ERA) Program

A complement to the Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER)

RES-Research
Resilience in Education Systems
India

The Resilience of LGBTQIA Students On Delhi Campuses

Anjali Krishan, Apurva Rastogi, Suneeta Singh, Lakshita Malik
Amaltas Consulting Pvt. Ltd

The findings, interpretations, and conclusions expressed in this paper are entirely those of the authors. They do not necessarily represent the views of the Education Resilience Approaches program team, the World Bank and its affiliated organizations, or those of the executive directors of the World Bank or the governments they represent.

Photo: Rain in the mountains produce a rainbow in India. © Curt Carnemark / World Bank

Acknowledgments

This study was supported by the Resilience in Education Settings Research (RES-Research) skills training delivered in South Asia by the World Bank's Education Resilience team. We especially acknowledge the methodological guidance of the RES-Research facilitators: Joel E. Reyes, Michael Ungar, Donna Mertens and Jo Kelcey.

It was also supported by Amaltas Consulting Pvt. Ltd., a consulting and research organization based in New Delhi, India. We would especially like to thank Indu Chelliah for providing her critical inputs and Ankan Mukherjee for transcribing our interviews. We would also like to acknowledge all our colleagues at Amaltas for their constant support and help.

This study would have been impossible without the aid of our Local Advisory Committee, gatekeepers and respondents. We would especially like to thank Queer Campus and Tanuj for their indispensable support and facilitation. While we cannot name all who contributed and helped in the current hostile environment we would like to thank them for their tremendous patience, compassion and willingness to share their stories with us.

We would also like to thank Neha Nivedita for editing and proofreading this report.

Contents

About the RES-Research Studies Series **10**

I. Introduction and Background **11**

LGBTQIA students in higher education 12

II. Findings in the Context of Adversity **15**

Context of adversity 15

Risks 21

III. Findings on the Desired Outcome and Resilience Strategies **24**

The desired outcome 24

Resilience strategies 29

Costs of resilience 32

The LGBTQIA community 33

IV. Conclusion **37**

References **42**

Annex. Overview of the Methodology **43**

About the RES-Research Studies Series

Development practitioners in fragile, conflict and violence-affected contexts are demanding better support for research, evaluation and assessments: this can range from conducting an exploratory needs assessment for an emergency intervention, monitoring and evaluating ongoing project impact, or building the evidence base to design a reconstruction or post-conflict program. In contexts of overwhelming adversity it is crucial not only to get reliable and valid data but to also ensure that we are going about this data collection in the right way. Doing research "right" in these contexts requires asking the right questions, talking to the relevant participants and stakeholders, using the most pertinent methods, and paying particular attention to ethics and power differentials.

To address these concerns, the ERA Program developed the Resilience in Education Settings (RES)-Research training module. The training is specifically targeted for researchers living in context of conflict, violence and other adversities. It brings together resilience theory and a transformative research paradigm. Resilience theory seeks to understand the process by which individuals, communities and organizations recover from crisis, continue to perform in the midst of adversities and even radically change to prevent future risk exposure and continue their development process (Reyes 2013). The transformative research paradigm provides methodological guidance to conduct studies with vulnerable populations, while recognizing both their exposure to overwhelming threats but also their assets such as strengths, opportunities and available services (Mertens 2009).

As with all SABER tools, the RES-Research training module is openly available for education practitioners within the World Bank, as well as other agencies. The module consists of a research manual and handouts, power point presentations and additional guidance materials.

If you are interested in using this tool please contact the ERA team for the appropriate resources: educationresilience@worldbank.org

Through a nine-month training program, RES-Research builds on the capacities of academics and education practitioners in fragile, conflict and violence-affected contexts to undertake locally relevant and rigorous education resilience research. First piloted in Central America, the training program was improved and recently implemented in the South Asia region as part of a multi-donor trust fund for the Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER) initiative supported by DfID-UKAID, DFAT-Australian AID and the World Bank.

This report presents the ongoing application of research design and implementation skills gained by the Indian participants in the RES-Research training module, delivered in November 2013, in Delhi, India, and in April 2014, in Kathmandu, Nepal. It provides valuable contributions to our on-going understanding of resilience in education settings in difficult contexts.

I. Introduction and Background

Higher education contexts have the potential to act as "empowering community setting[s]" where marginalized youths can "simultaneously [undergo] individual development, community betterment, and positive social change" (Kenneth 2008, 8). However, in our study, we find that college-going LGBTQIA[1] persons on Delhi campuses face a highly discriminatory context of adversity on campus, which makes their desired outcome for acceptance virtually impossible to achieve. Using the mixed-methods resilience research approach, this project examines how they negotiate through these challenges to reach some approximation of acceptance in their lives. This research approach is utilized to identify not only the risks to LGBTQIA students, but also the assets and resilience strategies they adopt to protect themselves from discrimination and promote acceptance. The study aims to gain a better understanding of the issues they face; their resilience strategies that enable respondents; and how the costs of these resilience strategies are negotiated. It covers the following five thematic areas:

1. Understanding what acceptance means for respondents, and how they try to navigate towards it.
2. Charting the types of discrimination and stigma that respondents face in their educational environment.
3. Identifying the resources and support networks respondents use to cope with discrimination and what, if any, consequences accompany their use.
4. Determining the impact of protective and promotive resilience strategies on the context of adversity and the gaining of acceptance.
5. Exploring how respondents' fears and hopes for their future evolve during higher education.

What is Resilience Research?

The concept of 'resilience' is commonly defined as a dynamic process that results in positive adaption to a situation of adversity. Resilience research seeks to understand the strategic protective and promotive processes through which individuals and groups can avert or mitigate risks.

We refined our resilience research approach by engaging with its critics. There are two primary critiques. One argues that resilience encourages adapting to a status quo context of adversity rather than changing it. The other, as exemplified by Joseph (2013), is troubled by its focus on individualism and individual level solutions. This effectively puts the onus of being resilient on the person rather than on society or the state.

These critiques have prompted researchers to further refine resilience research approaches in order to strengthen the credibility of the concept. Increasingly, they are challenged to see how resilience as a process, accounts for not only adaption to a context of adversity, but also to its transformation. Resilience also operates at multiple levels, apart from how it is used by and affects the individual. Researchers are thus challenged to document how it operates at the social and institutional levels and how these in turn can be used to achieve social justice. This study takes up this challenge with a view to uncovering avenues for transformation.

1 We use the term LGBTQIA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, queer, intersex and asexual) as it was the most widely used term by respondents when asked to describe themselves or the community. Similarly we use the term trans* as this was considered by our respondents to be the most appropriate and politically correct term.

The study finds that while respondents use multiple resilience strategies to carve out a space where they 'belong' and find acceptance, these strategies are costly. The costs are born out of and reinforce the stigma and discrimination against LGBTQIA prevalent in Indian society. Individuals and the LGBTQIA community on Delhi campuses have thus had to strategically navigate their environment to modulate these costs. Our research indicates that these strategies can in turn, be used to alter the context of adversity for LGBTQIA students on Delhi campuses.

For a detailed description of the study methodology, see Annex.

LGBTQIA students in higher education

Research on LGBTQIA people's experiences in higher education in India is lacking (Lee Badgett 2014, 30). What research exists is generally on the Men Who have Sex with Men (MSM) and male-to-female transgender (TG) populations. The experiences of lesbian, female bisexuals and female-to-male trans* people, however, are largely absent (Lee Badgett 2014, 10).

One study on MSM shows that those whose appearance is 'feminized' experience harassment by students and teachers (Khan and Bondyophadhyay 2005). Students in higher education are especially vulnerable as they experience more harassment than those in school, perhaps as "their manifestation of femininity is more pronounced" (Khan and Bondyophadhyay 2005, 19). Research also shows that discrimination against trans* persons is prevalent – groups such as hijras, India's male-to-female transgender minority, are actively excluded from participation in education and the workplace.[2] The root of this discrimination is complex: a qualitative study on violence against lesbians, female sex workers and disabled women in Bangladesh, India and Nepal shows that vulnerability is heightened by unsupportive state laws and discriminatory cultural practices that lead to hostile family and work environments (CREA 2012). This study shows that mainstream, derogatory constructs of homosexuality are reinforced by the cultural and familial idioms of heterosexuality.

More general research on LGBTQIA people in India establishes that the LGBTQIA community faces intense discrimination. As the 2006 World Value Survey shows, 64 percent of Indians say that they believe homosexuality is never justified, and 41 percent say that they would not want a homosexual neighbor.[3] Interestingly, an analysis of these answers shows that "more positive attitudes are seen among people in older age groups, in small (but not the smallest) towns, among people who attend religious services relatively often, and among the least educated and most highly educated groups" (Lee Badgett 2014, 7). This indicates that LGBTQIA students who are in Delhi for higher education are not necessarily entering an 'accepting' environment as they are interacting mostly with young people and living in a massive urban area.

It is also important to note that several recent groundbreaking legal judgments on LGBTQIA have had a drastic impact on LGBTQIA, including students. In India, historically, homosexuality was banned since 1860 when India's Penal Code was formulated. However, in July 2009, Section 377 of the Code implicitly addressing 'homosexual behavior' was declared unconstitutional by the

2 The documentary *Bioscope: Non Binary conversations on Gender and Education* (2014) produced by Nirantar: A Centre for Gender and Education, in India, poignantly captures the type of sexual, physical and mental abuse that trans* persons can be subjected to in the Indian education system.

3 See "Study Description: [India]," 2006, available at http://www.wvsevsdb.com/wvs/WVSDocumentation.jsp?Idioma=I.

High Court. The court argued that the "consensual sexual acts of adults in private" could not be criminalized without infringing on the rights guaranteed by the Indian Constitution (Kumar 2009). This reprieve, however, turned out to be temporary—the Delhi High Court's judgment was overturned on 11 December 2013, when the Supreme Court passed a ruling upholding Section 377, effectively criminalizing homosexuality in India.

The reverberations of this judgment have been complex and contradictory. It has created a precarious situation for LGBTQIA student who have 'come out' post the 2009 judgment and are now 'criminalized.' At the same time, the judgment has received media and academic attention pointing out its discriminatory nature and non-progressive precedent.

Furthermore, the Supreme Court of India has made another landmark legal decision recognizing a third gender, granting transgender Indians legal status. In this judgment, the Supreme Court noted that discrimination faced by transgender persons is deeply rooted and extends to all spheres of society, including education and employment, and has to be tackled beyond the legal level. The Court further suggested that there should be quotas for transgender persons in employment and education. While the LGBTQIA community in general is cautiously optimistic about the judgment, there is confusion about what it will lead to.

In summary, the combination of intense discrimination and challenges that LGBTQIA students face in higher education is an integral factor in their overall economic and social marginalization (Lee Badgett 2014). As a World Bank report points out, "[t] he educational system is often the point at which many community members face their greatest initial challenge. … The consequent high dropout from the school systems leads to poor educational outcomes and perpetuates poor social acceptance and achievement within mainstream society" (World Bank 2012). The literature suggests that many LGBTQIA students do not make it through the higher education system due to discrimination. Their context of adversity thus is discrimination, in all its subtle and overt manifestations. It systematically excludes many LGBTQIA people from higher education and impedes the few who are able to access this elite setting. Gaining acceptance both individually and socially is therefore is of the utmost importance.

The literature also indicates a dire need to study the higher education setting as it is often at the crux of LGBTQIA marginalization. Unfortunately, the lack of literature on LGBTQIA people in higher education in India means that there is a severe shortage of evidence on which to base this understanding. We hope that our mixed-method resilience research study is able to fill this gap by exploring a crucial time in the lived experience of the LGBTQIA community on Delhi campuses. We believe that the respondents of this study are extremely resilient as they have been able to make it to the college level. Their resilience strategies, both as individuals and as a community, for navigating through the higher education system shed light not only on their personal struggles but also the systematic nature of the discrimination they encounter in this setting. These strategies both protect them from discrimination in the higher education context and promote their desired outcome of acceptance as LGBTQIA persons.

The LGBTQIA Movement in India

India has had a long history of indigenous sexual minorities as is traced in Same-Sex Love in India (Vantia and Kidwai 2000) and A People Stronger (Singh et al. 2013). The latter points to communities like the hijras which have had a longstanding, tight knit community but were severed from the larger heterosexual population, as forerunners and contemporaries of the current community. By the 1980s, India witnessed the assertion of 'alternative sexualities' which resulted in the creation of safe spaces where LGBTQIA people could freely mingle. As concerns around the HIV/AIDS pandemic became increasingly pressing, health-based activism focusing on the importance of guaranteeing rights for the MSM and TG community, also emerged. These factors, alongside pride marches and protests against Section 377 across major urban cities in India, have spurred mainstream recognition for the LGBTQIA community.

There have, however, been critiques of the movement in India. Tellis (2012) argues that the queer movement in India is urban, with a strict upper class bias, which runs the risk of creating closed identities that are decontextualized. He argues that the struggle against 377 has remained skewed and has not been participated in by economically and otherwise marginalized LGBT people. The community thus faces multiple challenges in being inclusive, non-discriminatory, and equitable.

II. Findings on the Context of Adversity

Context of adversity

For the respondents, the context of adversity is the discrimination they encounter in the higher education setting. The reverberations of this context are experienced at all levels – individual, inter-personal and institutional. This section examines how the individual issues of 'growing pains' forms the backdrop to an openly homophobic educational environment, which in turn is provided a tacit legitimacy through the recent re-instatement of 377.

Growing pains

When examining the challenges before respondents in their higher education journeys it is difficult to separate their struggle for acceptance as LGBTQIA with their struggle to be accepted as adults. This is particularly true when it comes to their individual and family sphere. Respondents often battle to accept their LGBTQIA identity, internalizing instead that there is "something wrong" with them (KII_gay)[4]. Most also expect to be met with hostility by their family when they come out to them. Thus many respondents choose to hide their identity and not seek external advice.

However, even when they hide their identity they still face issues such as curfews and course choices imposed by their families. These challenges may be typical of other students their age but are impossible to separate from issues around being LGBTQIA. Several respondents saw these struggles as a proxy to the kind of hostility they would be met with if they came out to their family. It also contributes to their sense of being misunderstood and different from the rest of their peers.

Unfortunately, even when they do come out they still continue to have these challenges. An interviewee shared that "She [my mother] still doesn't understand many things about me. She doesn't always get all of it but she tries." (KII_trans*). This interviewee struggles to reconcile his mother's understanding of what is appropriate behavior for a girl vis-à-vis curfews and clothing choices with his own understanding of his gender identity and how he should express it. Other respondents share similar challenges while coming out to their parents. An interviewee shared the response of his mother to his coming out:

> *My mother's first reaction was that as she had not raised me with traditional values, I had become gay. So for one year there was arti[5] every morning, every evening, there was no non-vegetarian food on Tuesdays, Thursdays in an effort to inculcate more Hindu values in me.*
>
> KII_gay

In this example the respondent's mother's inability to see her son as an 'adult' and her belief that she could change him prevented her from accepting his sexuality. The respondent went on to share that it "took a year and the fact that I got acceptance into Masters-Ph.D. program in the US with full funding" for his parents to accept his sexuality and the fact that they could not change him. Challenges on campus thus do not exist in a vacuum. They take place within a broader struggle that respondents are engaged in to be accepted as adults and as LGBTQIA.

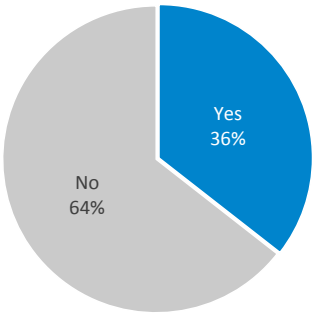
4 KII is an acronym for Key Informant Interview.

5 Arti is a Hindu religious ritual.

Educational environment

Almost two-thirds of our survey respondents do not feel safe expressing their LGBTQIA identity on campus. While college provides a break from the challenges it can also lead to greater vulnerability. Balancing the desire to fit in against the desire to express their unique identity is particularly challenging in this social arena as well.

Figure 1
Can you safely express your LGBTQIA identity on campus?



For many respondents, the fear of being ostracized by their classmates is very real, creating a negative college environment. A transgender respondent noted that it is not safe to disclose his identity, so he lets classmates make assumptions about his gender. Other respondents revealed that coming out is especially problematic for those living in hostels as they can be asked to leave. As a result some want only 'to be left alone' by their classmates:

> *People bully me about [my gender identity]. I don't let them. I avoid them. People may think privately whatever they want but as long as they don't say anything to my face, it is okay.*
>
> KII_trans*

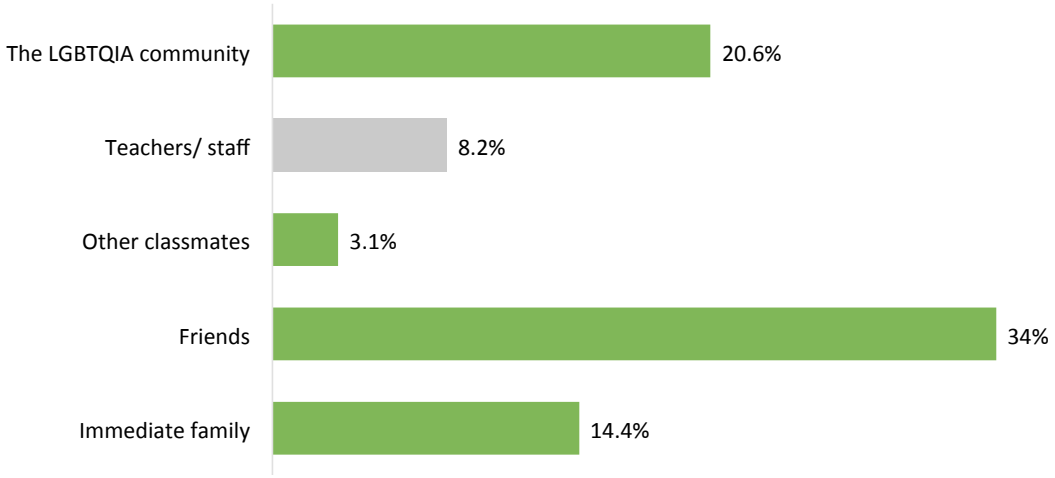
However, other respondents have found acceptance from their classmates. A lesbian respondent's classmates are "very supportive" of her identity as they think it's "cool" (KII_lesbian). A gay respondent adds:

> *It has now become fashionable to be accepting of queer people. … If [a male student] says something which insults a gay person, all the straight women will cut him off. So in order to be friends with straight women, [the student] has to be okay with the gay person—so it's hormones at work and it's lovely.*
>
> KII_gay

This 'fashionableness' has its downsides. Respondents worry they are caricatured as the 'gay friend' by 'supportive' classmates. It also increases their sense of being taken advantage of:

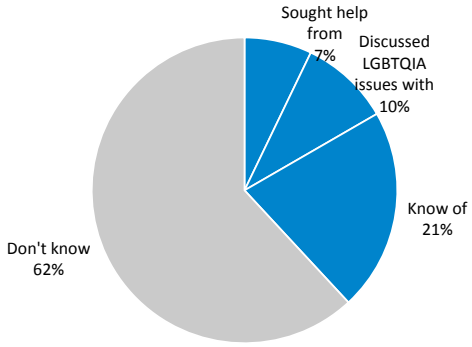
> *You 'come out' [and] there are certain women who try to hit on you while they are drunk. It's like an opportunity or a feather in their cap: [afterwards] they go around saying "I had a lesbian encounter, it was so cool, I was drunk." So that's why I don't indulge in this.*
>
> KII_lesbian

Figure 2
Whom would you talk to about an instance of discrimination?



While the immediate point of adversity within the educational environment is the LGBTQIA students' classmates, they have to also contend with a distant faculty. Our survey shows that the majority of respondents are unwilling to approach faculty about discrimination. Many are also unaware of LGBTQIA faculty on their campus. One respondent, a professor who is gay, explained that, "at that age if you're queer you really don't want to talk to an adult" (KII_gay). He continued that for him there is also pressure to "always maintain a professional distance" so that they "see me as an authority figure" which prevents him from approaching students about their gender or sexual identity (KII_gay).

Figure 3
Do you know of LGBTQIA faculty on your campus?



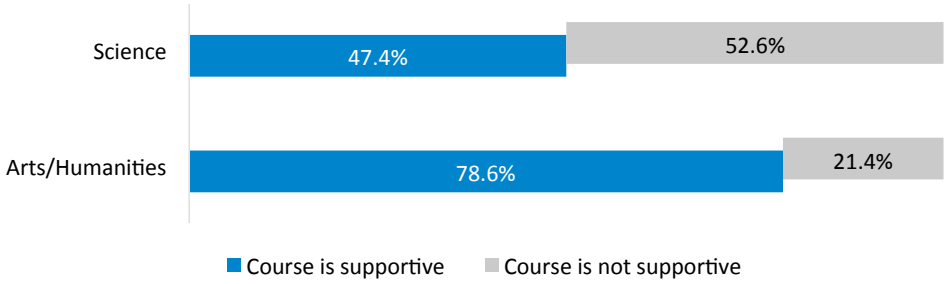
However, this distance can result in a negative educational environment for students. For instance, a trans* respondent who suffers from dysphoria when referred to as 'she', spoke about his struggles in approaching faculty:

> *Often times there has been a teacher whom I would not feel comfortable just asking "Please don't use these pronouns for me." I would think that it is just for one semester—just a few months. So deal with it. And that is what I have done. I won't go and talk to all my teachers.*
>
> KII_trans*

We did not come across first-hand experiences of academic bias against LGBTQIA students. However, there was a prevalent narrative across respondents stating that this type of discrimination exists. There were examples of "extreme instances of verbal insults" and discrimination by faculty towards LGBTQIA students (KII_straight). There was also a strong suspicion among respondents that visibly LGBTQIA students were denied admission to campuses where a face-to-face interview was part of the admission process.

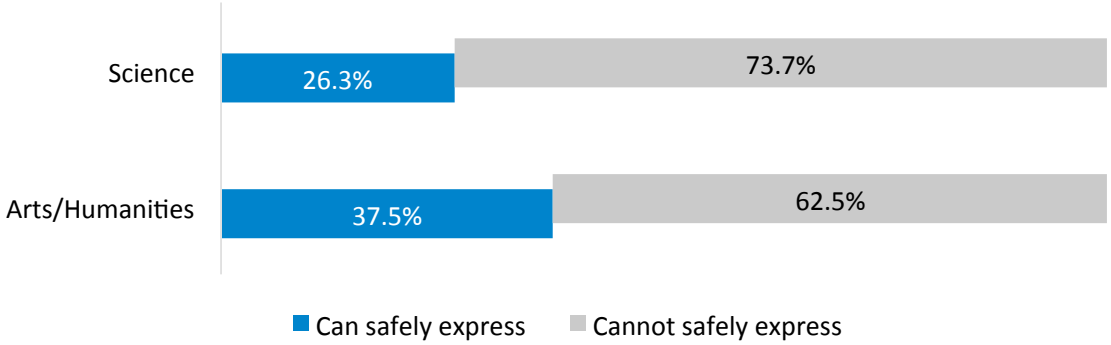
The experience of adversity is also linked to an LGBTQIA student's course of study, according to our findings. Almost all respondents felt that the humanities are more receptive to LGBTQIA than the sciences. A respondent noted that on her campus, "conservatism in general, unfortunately so far [has] found a certain consonance with the pure science schools," adding that students in these fields face greater difficulty in joining LGBTQIA rights movements as they "do not want to be alienated [from their] academic department" (KII_straight).

Figure 4
Is your course supportive of your LGBTQIA identity?



Focus group discussants agreed that humanities and art fields have more space to discuss issues of difference. A respondent said, "people from humanities and arts background are usually the ones with broad minds … open to certain notions and certain things happening," (KII_lesbian). She prefers to talk to only people studying these courses as she anticipates that students from other courses will be less accepting of her. Our survey reveals that those in humanities or arts not only feel that their course choice is more supportive of their LGBTQIA identity but also feel safer expressing their LGBTQIA identity than those in the sciences.

Figure 5
Can you safely express your LGBTQIA identity on campus?



This does not, however, mean that respondents specifically chose arts and humanities courses in the hopes that it will give them an 'easier' college experience. Instead, our survey shows that most of the respondents actually study fields in the sciences. When we asked respondents in interviews why they chose the sciences, many of them directly linked their choice to their LGBTQIA identity. One said:

> *See, sciences are logical. You can prove things or disprove things – if you look hard enough there is always an answer. Completely the opposite to dealing with sexuality – which is opaque, confused and subjective… So I could get away from [the confusion around sexuality] by studying math.*
>
> KII_gay

Our study shows that the experience of adversity is also linked to how far advanced LGBTQIA are in their college careers. Focus group informants shared that the first year is particularly difficult. At this stage, finding a social group is a priority and many feel compelled to use protective strategies, such as hiding and being resigned, to shield themselves from discrimination.

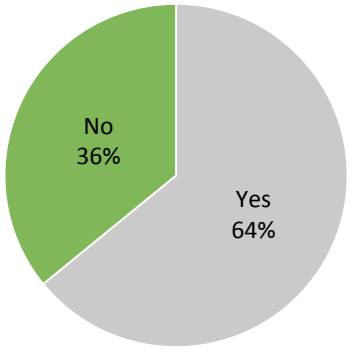
However, this pressure to hide and conform seems to abate, and by the second or third year, respondents said they gained confidence that enabled them to use promotive resilience strategies and actively seek acceptance as individuals. Crucial to this process of moving from a first-year student desperately seeking acceptance to becoming a confident third year student is having a group of supportive friends which provide a 'sense of belonging.'

Thus, LGBTQIA students in our sample are for the most part on their own to form protective social circles. They receive little support from college authorities and struggle to find safe spaces on campus. However, the limited acceptance that they are able to find in certain fields of study suggests that the higher education establishment can explore fostering a more interdisciplinary environment for those in the sciences as it may help protect LGBTQIA students and promote acceptance of the LGBTQIA community.

Section 377

This study took place at a particularly precarious time. The reinstatement of Section 377 has jolted the LGBTQIA community. Our survey clearly shows life has become harder for them since the judgment. One survey respondent said, *fatati hai, dar lagta hai! kuch karo yaar jaldi,* which translates to, "It's terrifying! I am very frightened. Do something please! Quickly!" An interviewee advises students "to stop randomly coming out to people. If you are not sure how your parents will handle it, do not tell them right now, especially with the judgment having gone the other way" (KII_gay). The gay men who came out after the 2009 judgment are particularly scared: "After it was criminalized again, the people who had come out were a little hesitant to go back to work because they would perhaps face discrimination" (KII_lesbian).

Figure 6
Has life become harder after the 11/12/2013 judgment?



Others did not see the judgment making much of a difference. A gay interviewee said the following:

> *The reality of the situation is this: before the High Court judgment you had to pay a 1000 rupees as a bribe to the police to not be arrested because of 377. It became 200 rupees after the High Court judgment and now, it has gone up to being 2000. That is the only real difference. You will find more harassment, you will find more bullying but that's all. Because the whole thing is very difficult to prosecute under the law and what the police is usually looking for is a graft* [bribe]*, it's just the size has increased, that is all in real terms that has happened.*
>
> KII_gay

Of course, this disproportionately impacts the economically marginalized as this respondent admits: "People [have] said that police had harassed them and let them go in return for sexual favors because they could not pay the price" (KII_gay).

Some respondents, however, point out that the 11/12/13 judgment has had unintended positive effects. A respondent said that the judgment "jolted everybody into action… Post the verdict people have actually made it a point to come out and actually say, 'This is not done'" (KII_straight). A survey respondent wrote that the judgment was personally empowering for them: "It, in fact, became a little easier… Since the cat was out of bag, nobody can deny its existence anymore. If they are saying it's illegal, it means it exists. When so many like me are on the street, nobody can say I am not real."

The impact of the 11/12/13 judgment is dependent on the student's position. Those who are gay,[6] who have come out, whose parents disapprove and who have limited financial means are particularly vulnerable. However, others may have found empowerment in the groundswell of support for the LGBTQIA community that arose after the judgment.

As of this study's publication the judgment explicitly criminalizes same-sex activity but does not target same-sex identity. To be prosecuted under the judgment requires evidence of sodomy. However, at the higher education level there is an increasing fear that LGBTQIA students will be specifically targeted. Respondents worry that cases of students being dismissed from hostels, blackmailed due to their sexual orientation and being set-up in sting operations will rise in the

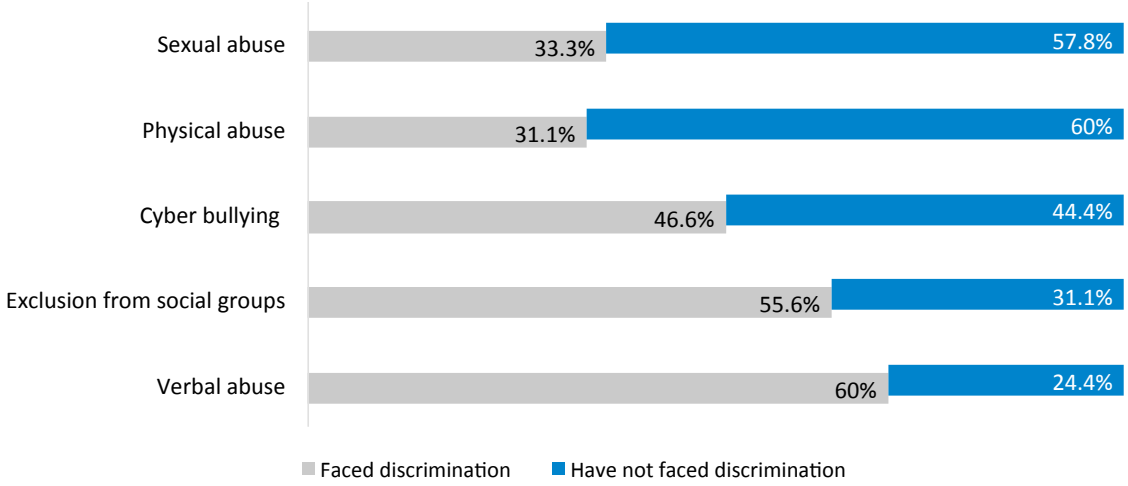
6 Section 377, with its ban on 'unnatural sex,' is normally interpreted to refer to sodomy and thus gay men specifically fall under its ambient.

aftermath of the judgment. Equally worrying is the knowledge that this judgment gives legitimacy to homophobic contentions that same-sex relationships are 'wrong' or 'unnatural.'

Risks

Nearly all respondents reported some form of discrimination due to their LGBTQIA identity. This discrimination can manifest as internalized stigma, fear of being outed, exclusion, violence (both physical and psychological) and even sexual assault. Risks can be divided between external, internal and community risks.

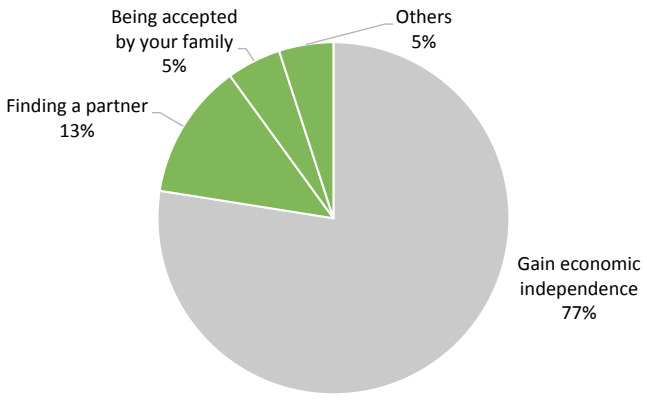
Figure 7
What type of discrimination have you faced because of your LGBTQIA identity?



External risks

Most respondents feared that they would be betrayed, loose friendships, be forcibly outed and be isolated if they came out. One respondent described how, upon sharing his sexual identity with one person in his first year of college, it was shared with "practically everyone we knew," and he was "ridiculed [and] to a large extent ostracized by [his] peer group" (KII_gay). Other respondents worried about how their families would react when they came out. Being cast out of the family was a huge fear and it is not surprising that most people identified economic independence as their greatest priority.

Figure 8
What is your top priority for the next five years?



Discrimination by family and classmates can dramatically affect a student's daily life. It can range from verbal abuse to physical and sexual harassment. The type of discrimination varies; verbal abuse can manifest as 'jokes' about the virility and masculinity of gay men and as outright bullying. A respondent pointed out that the distinction between these can be blurry: "you don't know where to draw the line…[People] who are otherwise very affable and seem progressive would come in with a stray [homophobic] joke" (KII_straight). This harassment can turn into violence and sexual assault on occasion:

> *This one time during first semester, a guy tried to touch my chest. I bind [my bosom] and he was like "What is that?" And he was pointing towards my chest. He was moving slowly closer and closer and then I just grabbed his finger and twisted it. I cursed him, and gave him the finger – that sort of thing. It was all very dramatic. Also traumatic.*
>
> KII_trans*

Vulnerability to more overt discrimination such as violence and sexual assault, in the words of a focus group discussant "comes down to appearance." Lesbians, gays and bisexuals who 'pass' as straight, have a different set of challenges when it comes to discrimination. For them the main risk they grapple with is the pervasive fear of being outed in an extremely hostile society that displays its homophobia on a daily basis. Trans* students and people who don't fit gender norms, on the other hand, are particularly vulnerable to explicit acts of violence and sexual assault like the example above. The trans* respondent who underwent that experience added: "I am pretty sure that some have it even worse. The thing about people who are visibly queer, mostly trans* people, is that they are visible" (KII_trans*). The social and psychological costs related to both overt and hidden manifestations of discrimination are extremely high, and can significantly impact respondents both in their current and future settings.

Risks within the LGBTQIA community

Significantly, a key site of discrimination is within the LGBTQIA community. We found that while the community can be a source of acceptance, the fact that it is also extremely discriminatory limits its accessibility and its capacity to empower students. Discussants shared that self-policing within the LGBTQIA community exists. LGBTQIA students often censor other LGBTQIA friends to behave in a more 'straight fashion.'

Once again, trans* persons and those perceived to not be conforming to gender norms are vulnerable to discrimination within the community. A gay focus group discussant thought the LGBTQIA community welcomed most queer students but could be transphobic. Another respondent found it "surprisingly hard" to be accepted as he did not look like "the stereotypical gay male" (KII_gay). A trans* respondent noted that it housed many "people who are not quite open [to others] themselves" (KII_trans*). We found it difficult to access trans* persons in this study, with only one interview with a trans* person and another trans* survey respondent. Respondents, even those highly involved with LGBTQIA groups, similarly struggled to name trans* students. Discussants speculated that male-to-female trans* students found the hijra community more welcoming than the LGBTQIA community. Other respondents suggested there were few openly trans* students in Delhi due to the intense discrimination they have to deal with. Disturbingly,

some believed (and this is also suggested by the literature) that many trans* persons dropped out of schooling before college because of how unaccepting the Indian education system is of them.

Internal risks

While discrimination and the potential consequences of coming out are external risks, we found that students also face internal risks such as alienation and internalized stigma. Discussants shared how alienating the first year was for them. Many respondents have at points in their college career felt they had to withdraw from campus life to be safe and avoid discrimination. Dealing with alienation and internalized stigma can cause depression and impact academic performance. All our interviewees had underperformed academically due to feeling alienated or internalizing stigma. One shared:

> *My grades significantly declined once I started having same sex attraction. It was not just the fact that I was having attraction, but the fact that it was so taboo and nobody had talked about it.*
>
> KII_gay

A trans* respondent shared how after scoring "96 percent in tenth class" he "failed Math in twelfth class" partially due to the stress of hiding his identity (KII_trans*).[7] This prevented him from attending a top college and affected his confidence. Risks can thus significantly impact respondents' self-esteem and their futures. The fact that our respondent was able to attend college and not drop out like many other trans* persons points to his resilience.

Internalized stigma is exacerbated by the limited information on LGBTQIA. Those who cannot regularly access internet still suffer from lack of information and misinformation especially as popular media—such as Baba Ram Dev (a popular Hindu yogi) and Bollywood movies—are often homophobic.

These risks all emanate from a higher education setting where discrimination against LGBTQIA students runs mostly unchecked. The severity and systematic nature of this discrimination is undeniable, as is the fact that the experience varies greatly by individual realities. Thus protective and promotive resilience strategies have to be used by respondents in myriad, customized and flexible ways.

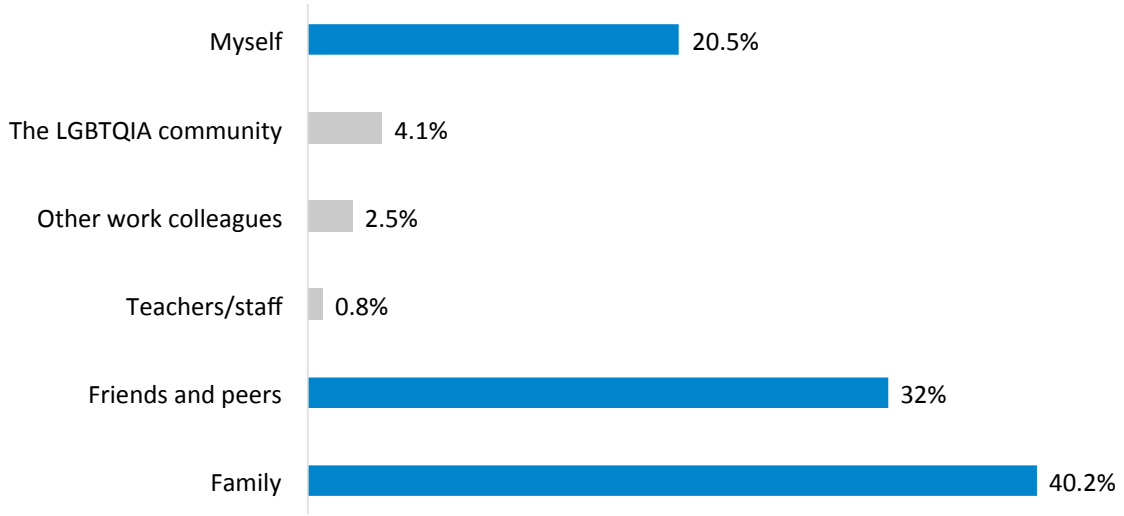
7 Class 10 and 12 are watershed years during school, marking points of time when school board exams are held and choices of subject of study are made. These years are often trying for students and parents alike.

III. Findings on the Desired Outcome and Resilience Strategies

The desired outcome

Individual LGBTQIA students' desired outcomes naturally vary but acceptance forms a central pillar that links all of them. Acceptance is necessary not only for its individual merits as a promotive and empowering state of being, but also because it is crucial for seeking protection from the risks within the context of adversity. For many, the journey moves from self-acceptance to acceptance from family and friends to general acceptance in the workplace, at school and within society. Our survey shows that the primary groups that students want acceptance from are themselves, their peers and their family. Gaining acceptance from these groups can result in LGBTQIA students having several assets that support them. By assets we refer to existing strengths, opportunities or resources used by individuals and groups to protect themselves from risks in the context of adversity and to promote the desirable outcome of acceptance.

Figure 9
Who do you want acceptance from?

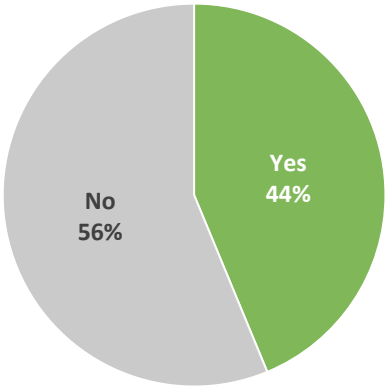


Self-acceptance

Most survey respondents found coming to terms with their identity difficult, although a sizable proportion did not find it a challenge. Navigating the risks of discrimination, internalized stigma and increasing alienation while negotiating outward social identity is difficult for students and the pressure to conform can hinder the process of self-acceptance:

> *When I finally accepted [being a lesbian] I was in the first or second year of college. I think before that time, there was always the pressure of being 'normal' and you know, not deviating because if you are gay, or if you are lesbian, people will ostracize you. That time I was in school, I just entered college. Still in that world—which is so guarded—you don't want to be thrown out of it. So I suppose in the mix of all that, I didn't quite accept it.*
>
> KII_lesbian

Figure 10
Did you find it easy to come to terms with your LGBTQIA identity?



Self-acceptance is also challenging if ones' sexuality does not fit existing definitions. A respondent said:

> *I tried to get myself to believe that I was straight. After that there was the realization that I am lesbian and female. Then it changed to queer and butch. Now it's nothing and nothing … It felt like okay this was the coat that used to fit me but now I have a different coat. It fits me better so I am going to put it on.*
>
> KII_trans*

A crucial asset for self-acceptance was social media. This emerged as a key protective and promotive asset for students as it provides safe access to a space in which to openly identify as LGBTQIA. A respondent spoke about how online resources made him realize for the first time that "there are other [gay] people as well! There is a word for it and apparently [some] people are okay with it!" (KII_gay). It can provide an avenue to communicate openly about LGBTQIA issues and often is the crucial first step for meeting other LGBTQIA persons and collectivizing.

Figure 11
How do you use social media?

Acceptance by family

Respondents are acutely aware of the possible backlash of coming out and how it can dramatically and negatively change familial relationships. When they do come out, however, it is almost anti-climactic: "I thought that my mom would be a Bollywood mom and say, *Pata nahi maine kya sikahya hain* [What have I taught you] and all. But none of that happened" (KII_lesbian). In fact, acceptance by the family appears to be a long process and it is rarely achieved overnight. A respondent who counsels LGBTQIA students said:

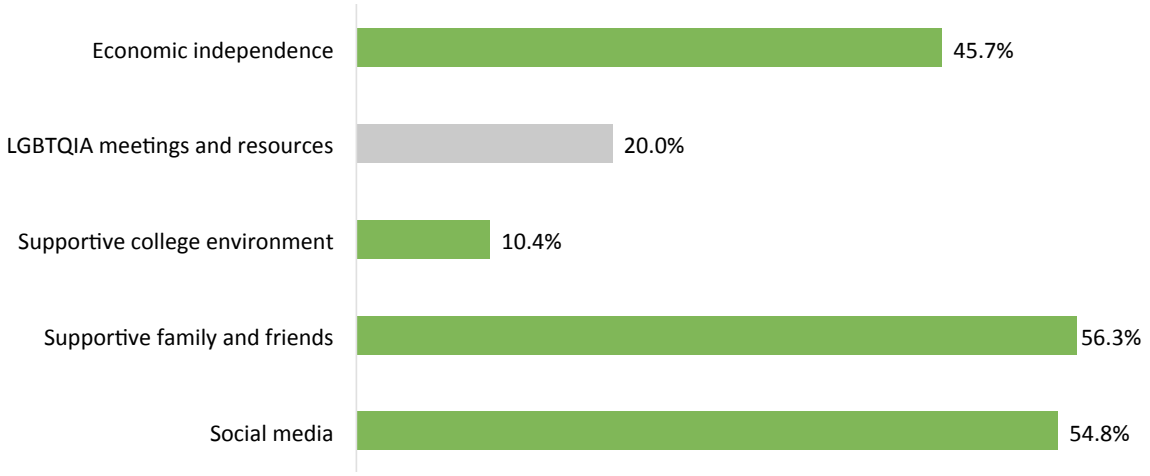
> *Here's what I tell people who plan to come out. You must keep on talking. Your parents must see that nothing else has changed about you except this. You are still the same person who you are except in this one way. And for the parents to realize that it's going to take time. You need to have patience.*
>
> KII_gay

When acceptance is not there or when it is taken away, it can be devastating:

> *At that time it seemed that it had gone pretty well, excellently, unbelievably so. So my Mum was like "*Haan beta *we still love you and it's all right" and my Dad went along. It was only one and a half years later that I realized that my Dad had only gone along with it just for the heck of it… I was very upset. I asked him if this is what you thought why did you say all of those things? You should have just said that so that I would have known and got used to it.*
>
> KII_trans*

Respondents noted that siblings, on the other hand, not only accept them but are also protective: "[My brother] was in sixth [class] and I was in eleventh but he came up to me one day and said I should tell him if anyone bullies me because he will get him or her bashed up" (KII_gay). They can even act as intermediaries between the respondent and parents. For instance, a respondent shared her experience introducing her girlfriend to her parents: "I think my parents knew that she was my girlfriend because my mom clearly asked my sister, '*yeh hai kaun?*' [Who is she?] [My sister] said that she's a friend. My mother understood" (KII_lesbian).

Figure 12
What would support you as an LGBTQIA person the most?



When acceptance is received from the family, it can create a safe space, supporting LGBTQIA respondents when they are in crisis as well as through everyday situations. While respondents expressed fear and anxiety about coming out, in the aftermath, family often served as a source of support. A respondent noted that her parents and sister just want her to be happy. Another respondent who counsels LGBTQIA students through the coming out process remarked that although some parents reject their children, the majority eventually "will step up … because thankfully Indian parents very rarely can let go of their kids" (KII_gay).

Acceptance by friends

The main acceptance respondents sought was from friends. This process of peer acceptance is riddled with strife: friends can betray students or pressurize them to be 'normal'. A respondent shared how he strategically chose to come out to "a friend, not somebody who I considered close [as] he was leaving India" (KII_gay). Some respondents were able to come out to friends relatively easily:

> *For the longest time a lot of my close friends didn't know till I finally told them, when I was with somebody. This friend of mine said, "I already knew." I have a few friends whom I have known for about ten to twelve years, who are still with me… They have been protective of me in my relationships. If they think that something right isn't happening, they tell me.*
>
> KII_lesbian

As this interviewee indicates, friends can play a protective role. The respondent who was sexually harassed added, "if my friends were around, they would do something about it" (KII_trans*). Friends can also be promotive. Our straight respondent evolved from being a 'best friend' to an LGBTQIA activist.

Discussants emphasized that their greatest asset is often a group of close friends who accept the LGBTQIA student. This group provides a safe and nurturing space to explore their sexual or gender identity with adequate support.

Acceptance in general

Many respondents are not immediately concerned with general acceptance, and are more worried about self, peer and family acceptance. However, it is clear that acceptance—whether it is in the legal environment, in the classroom or the workplace—dramatically impacts daily lives and future priorities.

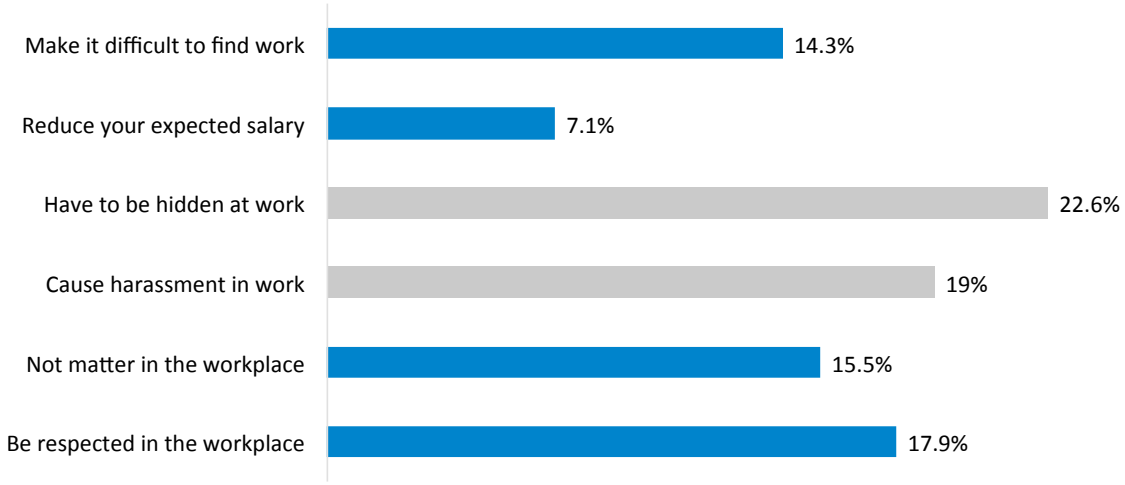
Respondents hope the legal environment will provide a crucial cushion for LGBTQIA persons when facing discrimination. The reinstatement of Section 377 has left many community members in a vulnerable position. However, it is difficult to understand how legal decisions will translate into daily life. Even the pro-LGBTQIA transgender bill has confused respondents:

> *I am still reading reports about [the bill]. Very contradicting reports. In one way, it is good for some transgender people in that it gives them recognition but what about those transgender people who do identify as one or other, if they identity as female, can they do that? Things are not very clear at his point. There is not so*

> *much about FTM* [female-to-male] *people in there. The press only did reporting about the hijras.*
>
> KII_trans*

Similarly, focus group discussants shared their bemusement at college anti-discriminatory statements that include sexuality. There was confusion as to whether faculty and staff would take them seriously, if they understood the full extent of what these statements implied and also how they would be implemented. There is a realization that college itself has the potential to be a safe space as it offers greater freedom and provides a protective enclosure in which to explore ones' identity. However, this potential seems rarely realized.

Figure 13
Do you think your LGBTQIA identity will...



Most respondents are more worried about finding acceptance in the workplace. Many believe that they will have to hide their gender and sexual identity at work. A significant proportion believes that their identity will lead to harassment at the workplace. Our trans* interviewee had some very tangible concerns for the workplace:

> *The issues that I faced in college… more of those will pop up in the workplace. But the more daunting thing about the workplace is that I would need to be professional at all times. I cannot just tell people don't talk to me, if you can't talk to me properly. I need to deal with all of that. Also is there going to be dress code? … I look ridiculous in [male] formals.*
>
> KII_trans*

As these examples show, there are significant costs and benefits associated with seeking all types of acceptance. Respondents who struggle with individual acceptance are more likely to have low self-esteem, feel that there is something 'wrong' with them and suffer from depression. This can have dramatic reverberations on their academics, relationships and future priorities. Similarly, for personal and proximal acceptance in the form of peer and family acceptance there is immense anxiety and risk that seeking acceptance may mean losing a highly meaningful and supportive relationship. More general acceptance in the form of acceptance in the classroom, in the workplace

and society is also risky because seeking it requires exposing oneself to the discrimination meted out to LGBTQIA people who are openly out. Of course, there are also immense benefits tied to each type of acceptance and we cannot stress enough the importance of being able to accept who you are, having supportive peers and family, and living in an environment which accepts your sexual or gender identity. Often, our respondents do not feel that they have the choice to not seek acceptance, at least in their personal spheres. The pressure of keeping silent, of hiding and trying to pass as straight just becomes too much.

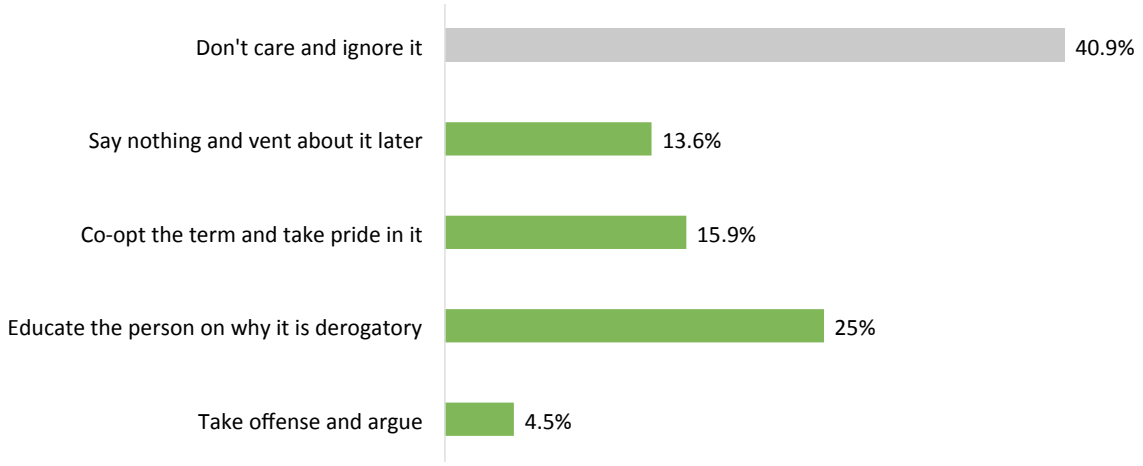
Resilience strategies

Resilience is crucial to navigate and negotiate through the context of adversity to gain the desired outcome of acceptance. As a process, we're interested in two aspects of resilience—its protective and promotive facets. Respondents use multiple resilience strategies to leverage assets and negotiate the risks they face within their education context. The same respondent can use many resilience strategies, depending on the situation (situational resilience). They also take on several roles that enable them to find that sense of belonging and acceptance they desire, as well as to handle risks.

Situational resilience

Perhaps the most common situational resilience strategy is the one of resignation and 'not caring'. Our survey shows that when dealing with discrimination most respondents choose not to care and do nothing. Respondents may use this strategy when initially coming to terms with their sexual orientation.

Figure 14
How do you deal with derogatory comments?

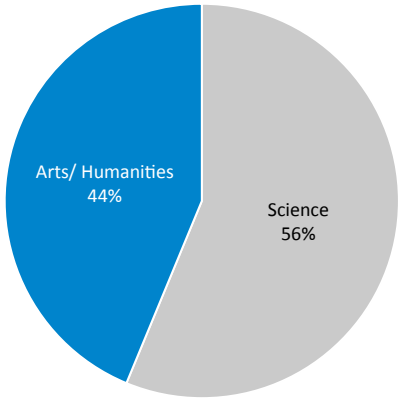


One interviewee spoke about how when he realized he was gay it was "more of a resignation than acceptance at first" when he realized that his sexuality was "not changeable" (KII_gay). It can also be used in upsetting situations, such as when another respondent had to face the fact that his father did not approve of his gender identity. He said "By that time I had already become self-certain on some level… so it was more like I don't care what you say, I don't care. I was upset but not demotivated" (KII_trans*). In this case, 'caring' about what his father says impedes

the respondent on his personal journey and demotivates him. Thus not caring was a strategic choice on the respondent's part as it allows him to balance his individual progress with not being confrontational in a potentially explosive situation. However, using this strategy requires some strength in the form of being 'self-certain' and having the courage to defy those around you. Our survey indicates that those enrolled in the sciences are more likely to use this approach of resignation. An interviewee explains that once again resignation allows for individual progress for these respondents:

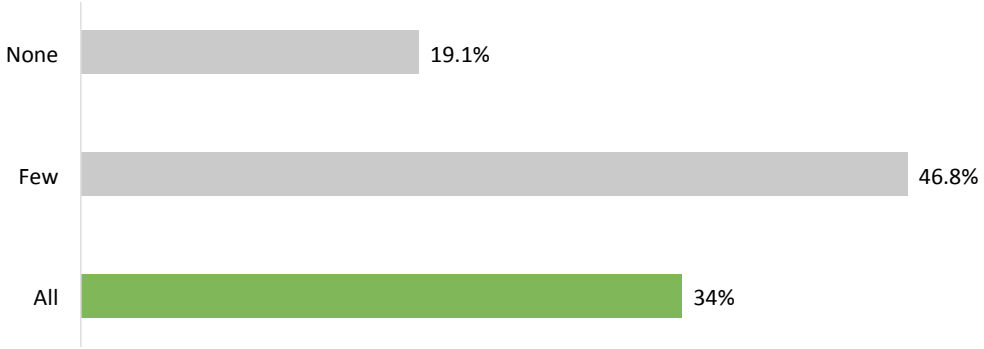
> *See, people in the sciences especially here in this country are so involved in their work, because it is tough… you are doing everything yourself and there is so much competition… So most of them tend to put all of these issues [of sexuality] in the back burner and deal with them later.*
>
> KII_gay

Figure 15
When faced with a derogatory comment do you not care and ignore it?



Another popular strategy is to hide one's gender and sexual orientation. Perhaps the most common use of this strategy is when it comes to parents. All our respondents have hidden their orientation from their family at one point in their lives. A substantial proportion of our survey respondents is either not out, or only out to a few of the people from whom they desire acceptance. Focus group discussants shared that hiding their identity from their parents is part of a broader strategy of waiting to be economically independent before coming out. This way, if their parents don't accept them they have a fallback.

Figure 16
Who all are you out to?



Of course, for some hiding their sexual orientation or gender identity may not be an option. However, they do adapt this strategy of hiding to suit their needs. For instance, in the course of getting people to leave him alone our trans* respondent has created strategies including what he describes as a 'death glare' and actively avoiding people, to navigate through the discrimination he faces in college:

> *It's not very good, but I keep at a distance from most of the things. Usually the kind of question I get is, "Are you a boy or a girl?" which is none of your business… What happened was that random people… I don't even know them… they would randomly come and ask me; are you a boy or a girl? More often they would ask, "Can I ask you a question?" And I knew what the question was going to be and I would say "No", and then I would go away. So that is the way I deal with it.*
>
> KII_trans*

For this respondent, to be seen as being approachable in this setting would be to invite teasing (at the best) and beatings (at the worst). His entry into the higher establishment, as a trans* person, is contingent on him keeping a 'low profile" and not mixing with other students in his college. While this is unquestionably problematic or a form of maladaptive resilience, in that it restricts the individuals' freedom of interaction, it is also protective and necessary.

The situational resilience strategies discussed thus far are all in relation to avoiding risks, particularly risks borne out of discrimination. They do not actually leverage assets to achieve respondents' desired outcome of acceptance. However, as mentioned earlier, social media can provide that safe space which nurtures those who are still coming to terms with their sexuality. One respondent shares:

> *I used to read a few people's blogs… I was away from home and I wanted to write random things about my life, so it started off like that and then it delved into more of the issues that I was dealing with, it became more serious after that… It was an outlet. It was ways to meet new people also, read about them, and have them read about me. Sometimes they would have advice for me; sometimes they would have got some encouragement. It was all like that.*
>
> KII_trans*

Other assets are articles and LGBTQIA material online used to educate respondents' families, friends and themselves. Once again these assets can be strategically used. For instance, one interviewee while coming out to his family ended up "printing out articles and links and sending them to my parents" to help them understand about LGBTQIA (KII_gay). Similarly, one focus group discussant revealed that he strategically placed certain LGBTQIA pamphlets around the house for his mother to read so that he could ease his coming out to his family.

Resilience roles

Another way to look at these resilience strategies is to examine the different roles LGBTQIA students adopt in order to cope with the context of adversity. One of the most popular roles respondents took on was that of 'mentor' to other LGBTQIA persons:

> *[I was asked about the "It gets better campaign"]. I said, "It doesn't get better. It gets different. The things that you find important right now, the things that you find challenging right now, you will and you can overcome them but there is a fresh set waiting for you." So they had not heard that answer before and once I finished with my answer then things changed, then they realized they could actually talk to me because… I was treating them as equals, just with a little bit more experience, and then they insisted I come back.*
>
> KII_gay

This respondent went on to not only be an active member of the LGBTQIA community but also to counsel and mentor multiple LGBTQIA students through their coming out process. We found that it is beneficial to respondents to take on mentorship roles. One respondent spoke about how if she sees "an interesting article" she shares it with her friends on Facebook as "it's good to know that there are people who read stuff and who would want to be informed about it rather than thinking that 'Oh it's just an LGBT thing'" (KII_lesbian). By sharing articles she not only 'educates' and gets potential straight allies but she also feels connected to her friends, counteracting the feeling of alienation she may otherwise have felt.

Another role closely related to being a mentor is that of an empowered activist. This is probably the most overt resilience strategy where respondents come together and agitate through collectivization. Raising voices against the criminalization of homosexuality through pride marches is one such form of resilience. The formation and growth of student-based organizations exemplify the collective action towards the protection of interests of LGBTQIA higher education students in Delhi.

Costs of resilience

While resilience strategies can be empowering, it would be naïve to discuss them without talking about the associated costs. For instance, hiding one's identity from either family or friends can be mentally stressful, alienating and have an impact on one's grades. Students end up having two identities, with two different social media profiles. They thus ironically end up being forced to 'betray' both their own identity and their friendships by having to hide their LGBTQIA status. It also makes it difficult for respondents to be reached by the LGBTQIA community if they are completely hidden. The risks of alienation and internalizing stigma are therefore very real. However, for many there is no other choice.

Similarly, resignation can be a passive way of dealing with difficult situations but also precludes the ability to change them, as respondents are effectively silenced in situations where they use the resignation strategy. As they do not protest against homophobia, it passes unchallenged in their society.

Those who do directly engage with discrimination by either trying to educate the person doing the discrimination or by trying to get the person to leave them alone also face problems. As mentioned above, such tactics require courage and can also be emotionally draining. The respondent who acts as a mentor to students admitted that this role takes a toll on his personal life:

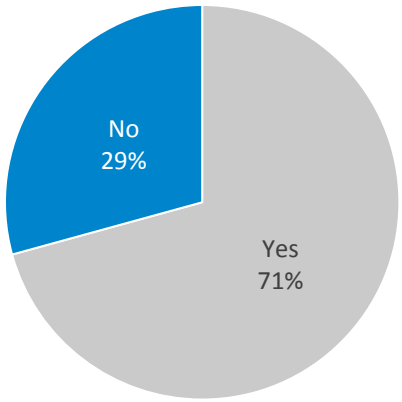
> *It is extremely difficult for me to find a person who is romantically interested in me because I have young people around me. The older people who are my age constantly keep asking, "Why are you hanging out with young queer people?" They automatically assume that I must be interested in them because I am with them all the time and therefore don't want to hang out with me or talk to me.*
>
> KII_gay

Similarly, those who act as empowered activists within the community are often frustrated by the politics within the LGBTQIA community and can often find involvement difficult to sustain over a long period of time. Thus, the LGBTQIA community, which should facilitate resilience for many students, has a more complex impact.

The LGBTQIA community

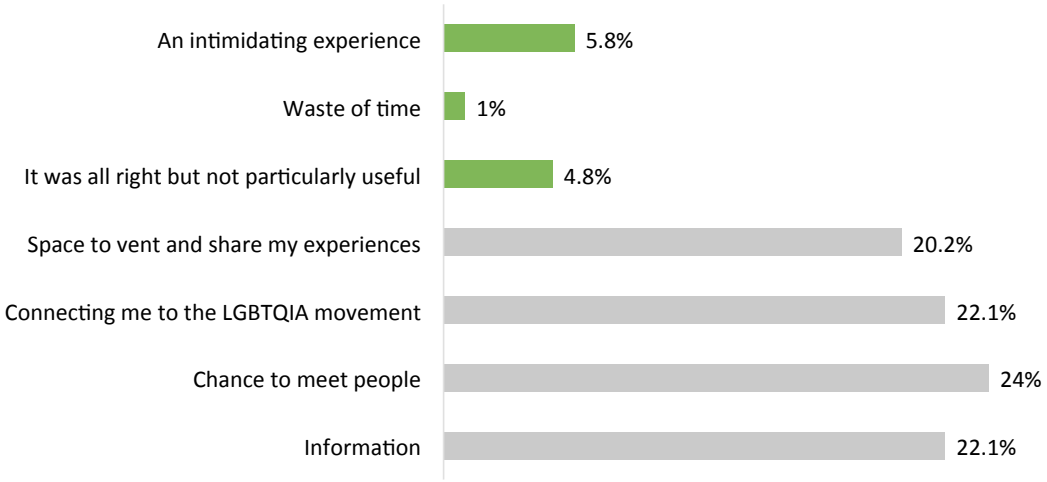
Clearly, some of these resilience strategies such as acting as a mentor or an empowered activist directly feed into the collectivization and formation of the LGBTQIA movement. When it comes to the context of adversity, a major concern for student LGBTQIA organizations is to create a safe space especially for vulnerable young LGBTQIA students where they can find acceptance and be empowered. While some major Delhi colleges have queer groups, and one organization, QueerCampus, spans campuses, unfortunately groups are concentrated amongst the most prestigious Delhi colleges, indicating that many students do not have access to them.

Figure 17
Have you attended LGBTQIA meetings?



While neither LGBTQIA meetings nor resources emerged as major sources of support for survey respondents, a significant proportion of our respondents had attended LGBTQIA meetings and found them useful. They are generally cautious of meetings and while they find them positive, they admit that they can be intimidating at first. One remarked that they "have not been to many of the meetings, but one that I went to was very good" (KII_trans*). Nevertheless, LGBTQIA meetings and groups have immense potential to positively impact the overall context of adversity. A straight respondent believed that in the aftermath of the 377 verdict, the public meetings and exhibitions have familiarized straight students with queer issues and gained the LGBTQIA community allies.

Figure 18
What do you think of LGBTQIA meetings?

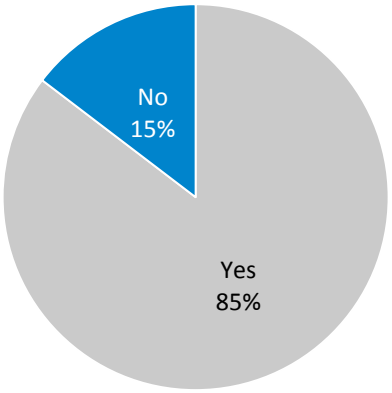


However, respondents from LGBTQIA student-run organizations shared with us how, especially after the 11/12/13 judgment, they face an uphill battle. Reaching LGBTQIA students and providing them with a safe space is both badly needed and difficult to do. Groups struggle with balancing membership growth and finding spots to meet. Certain LGBTQIA groups keep the size of these meetings small to make it easier for those who are recently out or are still exploring their sexual orientation to participate without being intimidated, but this limits their reach. Groups also try to leverage social media by being accessible through popular online platforms. Social media, in fact, is a major avenue through which these organizations have been reaching out to people. They provide information through this medium about LGBTQIA issues for students who may not find any support in their immediate environment. Once again this strategy means that those who don't have access to social media tend to be out of these groups' purview. Nevertheless, some campus groups also partner with other LGBTQIA groups in Delhi to provide access to physical resources such as books and brochures addressing LGBTQIA issues.

These organizations face practical struggles in the process of making them sustainable without compromising on accessibility. An advisor to a campus group noted that the group has attempted to avoid pitfalls of older LGBTQIA organizations. Having realized that older groups changed once they received sponsorships, since "the minute you take somebody's sponsorship you are bound to him or her," they have focused on donations in order to retain their independence, even if that means working with a significantly smaller budget (KII_gay).

However, for individual respondents the community can appear daunting because of the discrimination within it. Our survey shows that most people believe there are "cracks" within the LGBTQIA community. Similarly, most also have experienced discrimination firsthand as discussed earlier.

Figure 19
Are there cracks in the LGBTQIA community?

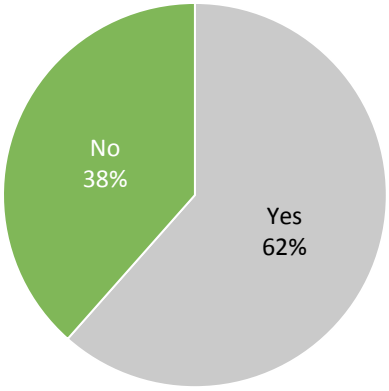


The LGBTQIA community appears to be highly exclusionary for people who do not come from an urban and privileged background:

> *The whole idiom of the party is something that has put off a lot of gay men that I know in this campus. Boys who have come from small towns of North India who are completely uncomfortable with the idea to start with and have a lot of issues struggling with their own sexuality but also have this social diffidence about "how do I deal with myself in these situations? Do I need to carry a gift? What kind of shoes do I wear? Am I dressed appropriately?" So they say "*ki mai jaunga hi nahi *[I am just not going to go]."*
>
> KII_straight

What struck us as researchers was not just how much discrimination respondents faced but how normalized and accepted aspects of discrimination, such as sexual harassment, appeared. One respondent, when discussing having to give sexual favors to the police in the wake of the 11/12/13 judgment, was very matter-of-fact and not particularly alarmed. His desensitization is problematic because it not only points to how frequent such incidents are but also indicates that there are few resilience strategies to combat it. Focus group discussants shared how skeptical they are about bars and parties in the queer scene within Delhi. There was a strong sense that these venues are not appropriate for someone who is still trying to come to terms with their sexuality or gender identity as they can be exploitative and uncomfortable.

Figure 20
Have you experienced discrimination in the LGBTQIA community?



So while LGBTQIA groups have potential to change the context of adversity for LGBTQIA students in positive ways, there are multiple obstacles for students not only to gain acceptance but also for students being able to reach them. Those from marginalized backgrounds or those who are less privileged, and therefore the most vulnerable, are likely to find it difficult to receive support from these groups.

IV. Conclusion

Our research provides a micro level view of the complexities faced by college-going LGBTQIA students on Delhi campuses through a resilience lens. In our study we tried to address the following five questions:

1. Understanding what acceptance means for respondents, and how they try to navigate towards it.
2. Charting the types of discrimination and stigma that respondents come across in their educational environment.
3. Identifying the resources and support networks respondents use to cope with discrimination and what, if any, consequences accompany their use.
4. Determining the impact of protective and promotive resilience strategies on the context of adversity and the gaining of acceptance.
5. Exploring how respondents' fears and hopes for their future evolve during higher education.

At the outset we would like to acknowledge that the study is exploratory conducted as it was with a limited number of respondents, and it has only begun to uncover the issues faced by LGBTQIA persons. Furthermore, our respondents tended to be highly resilient, indicating that they are possibly highly privileged. The recommendations emerging from it therefore should be treated with caution, as wider scale studies that capture the experiences of more vulnerable respondents might provide other avenues worth exploring.

We found that most respondents are keenly aware of discrimination and the need to protect themselves from it. They do not feel safe expressing their LGBTQIA identity on campus and negotiating an accepting educational environment remains a challenge. Given that the context of adversity was discrimination, the risks also arose from it. Respondents feared experiencing discrimination, they internalized stigma and many felt alienated. To protect themselves from these risks, they leveraged the resilience strategies of hiding and resignation.

Pathways towards the desired outcome

Respondents sought acceptance as their desired outcome. This acceptance ranged from self-acceptance to acceptance from primary social networks to general acceptance. We found that respondents' hopes and fears shift as they go through college. Initially, they are primarily concerned with having a social group in college and are fearful that being LGBTQIA will interfere with making friends. At this point the main resilience strategies they use are the protective ones of hiding and being resigned to the discrimination they experience. However, as they advance through college, increasingly their primary concern is to have economic independence. It also seems that the pressure to come out and gain acceptance from friends and family also increases by their final year. At this point respondents have to juggle between using protective resilience strategies and using promotive ones. This is particularly difficult as in higher education settings,

with their tacit approval of discrimination against LGBTQIA students, protective strategies are often the most feasible and practical options. However, protective strategies do not allow for the context of adversity to be changed and nor do they allow for students to gain acceptance as LGBTQIA individuals. Promotive resilience strategies, on the other hand, do challenge the context of adversity but there are few situations in which it is safe for LGBTQIA students to use them. Thus many of our respondents have to make the difficult decision on whether they should utilize the more promotive resilience strategies of being empowered activists or mentoring other LGBTQIA students during their college career.

There are two key takeaways from these findings:

1. Higher education, despite its potential to be a supportive and accepting environment, fails not only to support but also to respect the rights of LGBTQIA students.

2. Generally, students are primarily concerned with gaining acceptance from their friends and family rather than their immediate educational environment.

It is clear that friends and family impact the student's experience of the higher education environment. However, it appears that respondents feel quite powerless within the broader higher education establishment and do not believe that they can gain acceptance from it. In the more immediate circle of friends and family, respondents have a stronger ability to negotiate for acceptance. The general sense of unease and frustration on campus reported by almost every respondent, the multiple campus-level LGBTQIA organizations, and the activism of many of our respondents strongly suggests that LGBTQIA students are not only unhappy with their campus environment but are actively trying to change it.

For the context of adversity to change two primary goals need to be accomplished: 1) the LGBTQIA community needs to be strengthened and 2) LGBTQIA issues must gain mainstream legitimacy. While the reinstatement of Section 377 is an overwhelmingly negative development, we believe that at this juncture there is enough urgency and visibility of LGBTQIA issues in India for progress to be made towards these two goals. The resilience methodology suggests that the current promotive resilience strategies used by LGBTQIA students on campuses would lead to the accomplishment of these two goals as they actively change the context of adversity for the better. Therefore, the recommendations that follow focus on how the higher education setting in Delhi can emerge as a place where hiding and resignation are not the default resilience strategies.

When writing these recommendations we are not interested in coming up with "external, expert-dominated approaches"; rather, our focus is on "capacity-building [which] emphasizes a participatory, self-help, assets-based approach to enhancing" the education setting (Maton 2000, 31). To do this we borrow from Maton's (2008) piece on "empowering community settings" where he identifies three primary ways in which community organizations can impact the external environment. For LGBTQIA students on Delhi campuses, these ways can be translated to: 1) facilitating an atmosphere where more students are able to be empowered activists and mentors; 2) increasing the influence of these empowered activists and mentors; and 3) collaborating with other colleges' organizations and external organizations. Through the resilience approach, we translate our respondents' concerns into several paths that can be explored by the LGBTQIA community, the higher education establishment and the Delhi legislature.

Strengthening the LGBTQIA community

Our respondents saw the Delhi LGBTQIA community as having the twin purposes of challenging the heteronormative normal and of advocating for the right to be LGBTQIA. The LGBTQIA community has a strong potential to become a safe space, which supports and nurtures students from varying backgrounds both in times of crisis and on a daily basis. However, as the community is currently also a site of discrimination, this potential is not being realized. There are many cracks between Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans*, Queer, Intersex and Asexual. There are also very real barriers in accessing the LGBTQIA community for individuals who do not conform to elitist values or come from privileged backgrounds. These differences overshadow the common threads uniting LGBTQIA.

The LGBTQIA community thus needs to improve its accessibility. Our study suggests that this can be achieved by harnessing the promotive strategies of empowered activists and mentors, both of which involve students actively seeking out other LGBTQIA people and helping them through their challenges. It also means that the LGBTQIA community has to take a second look at how they reach LGBTQIA students. Currently most LGBTQIA events are advertised through social media. As we noted earlier, this limits their reach to the privileged few who can access social media. It may be worthwhile exploring campus media such as college newspapers and magazines as a source to advertise events as they tend to reach a wider range of students. College media can also be used to discuss LGBTQIA issues, including instances of discrimination, so that the reality of LGBTQIA life is more widely acknowledged. Another tactic that could improve accessibility is using on-campus facilities to hold meetings, as these are more accessible to students. While it can be a challenge to get permission for classrooms, meeting in public spaces such as campus lawns and canteens could be feasible. One might also argue that the process of seeking permission itself acts to sensitize the campus community to LGBTQIA students.

LGBTQIA campus organizations take great effort in ensuring that meetings are not intimidating experiences, and even limit their size to ensure this. Despite their efforts, we found that most respondents did not consider these meetings as an asset. Speaking to respondents, it became apparent that the LGBTQIA community activities that had helped them the most and made an impression tended to center on issues they faced in their personal sphere. For example, a recent event where a counselor role-played coming out to parents was received positively. Such events appeal to almost all respondents, as they mirror the situations that they face in their everyday life. Even those who are disillusioned with or intimidated by the LGBTQIA community reacted positively as such sessions address their primary concerns around proximal acceptance. We think similar activities that focus on gaining proximate acceptance and coping with discrimination, while acknowledging and responding to the variety of LGBTQIA realities, would be valued. Such events would not only help to cultivate individual resilience, but may also be the start of integrating members into the community. This, in turn, can benefit the community as it gains members, visibility and legitimacy.

The community also has to find ways in which to help LGBTQIA students in universities and colleges that do not have LGBTQIA organizations and are isolated. It might be worth exploring how the LGBTQIA community can collaborate with external organizations that have connections to such campuses. Many LGBTQIA organizations already have strong ties with college student unions and

women's groups. They can leverage these ties to reach campuses they do not have access to and perhaps consider alliances with student groups of marginalized populations such as Dalits,[8] or the disabled. This may be a fractious process, but it is worth exploring as it would make a dramatic impact on the external environment.

A World Bank report had suggested several steps the LGBTQIA community in general can take (2012, 27). These remain relevant. The report suggests that by documenting every instance of LGBTQIA discrimination and creating a compendium of such instances, the community can have powerful tool that can be used while advocating for future legislative changes (2012, 27). Similarly campus level helplines, crisis and counseling centers could be beneficial if the funds for them were available.

The legislative framework

Our respondents' experiences clearly show a lot can be done on the part of the higher education establishment to cater to the needs to LGBTQIA students. However, we are also cognizant of the fact that the reinstatement of Section 377 has effectively legitimatized discrimination against LGBTQIA people, making it all too easy for educational institutes to ignore their plight. Nonetheless, higher education establishments in Delhi do have an obligation to set up structures and processes that lead to increased approachability, accessibility and accountability for all students. There have been multiple recommendations in the past on how to achieve this (World Bank 2012). Many of these could be adopted by the higher education establishment. For instance, there must be efforts to ensure that all spaces on campus are safe spaces for everyone, even those who do not conform to gender norms. This would enable LGBTQIA students to openly express their identity instead of having to hide. There are also suggestions for including LGBTQIA-sensitive sex education at the college level.[9] While full-fledged sex education is difficult to implement, there is demand for education on sexual harassment and assault. We believe that if this were offered with an emphasis on LGBTQIA concerns, it would not only lead to a safer environment and more informed population, but also dismantle stereotypes and ignorance by explicitly discussing LGBTQIA concerns with the wider community.

Similarly, documentation allowing for identification beyond the binaries of male and female can also be highly beneficial. Students in at least one Delhi university have been able to successfully lobby for this information to be incorporated in the admission procedure to introduce accountability and transparency in the admissions of trans* persons. In light of the Supreme Court's recent recognition of transgenders, this has ample legal precedent and support to make it a feasible recommendation.

At the state level, anti-ragging and anti-discrimination rules and laws which explicitly forbid baiting of LGBTQIA students would be highly beneficial. While anti-ragging laws are already implemented in most Indian states, they need to be modified to cover LGBTQIA students. Such a law can be both protective, by limiting the risks attached to the use of resilience strategies such as empowered activism, as well as promotive, as it asserts the rights of LGBTQIA people to mainstream society.

8 Dalits belong to the lowest castes, the Scheduled Caste groups in India.
9 Most schools in India do not offer sex education, despite pressure to add it to the curriculum.

The above recommendations spring from our respondents' shared stories. Our primary aim for this study was to document these stories using the mixed-methods resilience approach. We have tried to capture not only the discrimination that our respondents face, but also their resilience in navigating and negotiating it, and even making conscious efforts to transform this context of adversity. More research is needed to document and understand the LGBTQIA reality in India from the perspective of the community beyond the campus experience. This exploratory study was also influenced by the fact that our respondents are almost certainly some of the most resilient LGBTQIA students in Delhi as they are politicized and can openly assert their LGBTQIA identity (at least to us). There are certainly other students who are still questioning, who do not have access to social media and are too apprehensive to assert their identity, whose viewpoint this study was unable to capture. It therefore cannot be said to be representative, but its findings do suggest avenues that can be further explored by both the LGBTQIA community, as well as the Indian higher education establishment.

References

_____. 2006. Study Description: [India]. http://www.wvsevsdb.com/wvs/WVSDocumentation.jsp?Idioma=I.

Lee Badgett, M.V. 2014. *The Economic Cost of Homophobia and the Exclusion of LGBT People: A Case Study of India*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

CREA. 2012. *Count me in! Research report, violence against disabled, lesbian, and sex working women in Bangladesh, India and Nepal*. New Delhi.

Joseph, J. 2013. "Resilience as embedded neoliberalism: a governmentality approach." *Resilience: International Polices, Practices and Discourses*, 1(1): 38-52.

Kumar, N. 2009. "Delhi High Court strikes down Section 377 of IPC." *The Hindu*, 2 July. http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/article219269.ece

Khan S., and A. Bondyophadhyay. 2005. *From the front line: The impact of social, legal and judicial impediments to sexual health promotion, and HIV and AIDS related care and support for males who have sex with males in Bangladesh and India: A study report.* NAZ Foundation International.

Maton, K.I. 2008. "Empowering community settings: Agents of Individual development, community betterment and positive social change." *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 41:4-21.

Maton, K.I. 2000. "Making a difference: The social ecology of social transformation." *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 28(1): 25-57.

Singh S., S. Dasgupta, P. Patankar and M. Sinha. 2013. *A People Stronger: The Collectivization of MSM and TG Groups in India.* New Delhi: Sage Publications India.

Tellis, A. 2012. "Disrupting the dinner table: Rethinking the 'queer movement' in contemporary India." *Jindal Global Law Review*, 4(1): 142-56.

Vantia, R., and S. Kidwai. (eds.). 2000. *Same-sex love in India: Readings from literature and history*. London: Palgrave Macmillian.

World Bank. 2012. *Charting a Programmatic Roadmap for Sexual Minority Groups in India*. South Asia Human Development Sector, Report No.55. July.

Annex. Overview of the Methodology

Central research question

How do LGBTQIA students on Delhi's campuses relate and live through widespread stigma and discrimination, and how can resilience processes mediate this discrimination to achieve acceptance?

Sub-Questions

1. Understanding what acceptance means for respondents, and how they try to navigate towards it.
2. Charting the types of discrimination and stigma that respondents come across in their educational environment.
3. Identifying the resources and support networks respondents use to cope with discrimination and what, if any, consequences accompany their use.
4. Determining the impact of protective and promotive resilience strategies on the context of adversity and the process of gaining acceptance.
5. Exploring how respondents' fears and hopes for their future evolve during higher education.

Sample

We used a mixed-methods design for our study to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data. Our sample was drawn from a universe of LGBTQIA students and recent graduates of Delhi campuses. This universe is highly marginalized especially in the wake of the 11/12/13 judgment. We therefore accessed the universe through two primary methods: 1) going through LGBTQIA campus organizations and 2) through word of mouth. We were also aware that similar surveys in the past tend not to be able to reach the lesbian and female bisexual and female-to-male trans* population so we approached an off-campus, Delhi-based LBT (lesbian, bisexual, trans*) organization as well. These organizations shared information about our data collection activities on their Facebook posts, blogs, email lists and twitter. We deliberately chose a social media approach as a formative focus group revealed it was the medium of choice for information on LGBTQIA events and also ensured that respondents could maintain their anonymity, thereby reducing the risk of participating.

We were able to access a sample of 54 students or recent graduates of Delhi campuses who identified as LGBTQIA, and answered our web-based survey. We also interviewed/held focus groups with eight persons about the issues outlined above. These persons included a professor who identifies as gay, and one activist/straight friend.

Data collection methods

We carried out one focus group at a private residence to ensure anonymity and safety for respondents. The focus group took four hours. The key themes from the focus group were written up and disseminated to campus-based LGBTQIA organizations with an invite to take the web

survey. We also had four in-depth interviews with key informants. Two interviews took place at the Amaltas office, one over Skype, as the informant was anxious about their safety, and one on the informant's campus. Interviews on average lasted between an hour and a half and two hours. The anonymous web-based survey was hosted on Survey Monkey. The survey was live for three weeks.

Analysis strategies

We took four sets of field notes during the focus group and compiled them to gain comprehensive understanding of the event. Interview data was coded using Atlas.ti. A codebook was also formed to aid in the coding. We analyzed the web survey using Survey Monkey tools and MS Excel.

Participation and ethics

We formed a Local Advisory Committee (LAC) with four members. These included: 1) a gay activist working with youth on HIV Prevention; 2) a transgender activist who is a founder of Mitr trust, a community-based organization which works with MSMs and TGs; 3) a student activist who is a member of a campus club, QueerCampus; and 4) an expert on LGBTQIA issues and CEO of Amaltas Consulting Pvt. Ltd.

We also sought and received ethics clearance from Amaltas's Ethical Review Board.

Challenges

This community is highly marginalized and quite a few individuals are very frightened and unwilling to trust outsiders. We soon realized that data collection activities which require people come together (such as focus groups) would be difficult to do as people are scared to openly come out and share their experiences. We therefore deliberately chose the web survey so that respondents could retain their anonymity and use a data collection tool with which they are at ease. We also thought the best way to approach the community would be through LGBTQIA groups as they had already established a relationship and trust with the target population. These tactics meant that our final sample size was 62, a figure that exceeded our best estimates.

However, they also led to a respondent mix that is effectively an extension of these groups' membership. Most respondents are out about their sexuality—at least to themselves. They are also mostly gay men and tend to be in third year or above. It appears that most are from the top universities of Delhi. The fact that they are accessing the web survey through the internet suggests a certain level of social privilege and wealth as well. While this shows who in the LGBTQIA community gets politicized and thereby who is the most 'resilient,' it also indicates that we're missing out on a more vulnerable population of LGBTQIA students. This population is that of lesbians, bisexuals and trans*, those in the less prestigious colleges, and those who are in their first or second year of college or are still coming to terms with their sexuality.

The World Bank
1818 H Street, NW
Washington DC 20433 USA
www.worldbank.org/education/resilience
educationresilience@worldbank.org