

RAINBOW LANYARDS: A STUDY ON GENDER INCLUSIVITY AT WORKPLACE

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Abstract

Inclusive terms and statements that demonstrate the company's commitment to diversity are very evidently mentioned on most of the company websites and reports. The study aims at identifying the extent of the practice of inclusivity of LGBTQAI+ community in organisations and the challenges faced by them in the workplace. As the study is based on individual experiences of the participants, the phenomenology method of Qualitative approach is adopted in the study. The content analysis of the data elicited from the interviews resulted in the categories of issues, trauma and the ways they overcome the barriers. The results of this study would be of great relevance to organisations in formulation of gender inclusivity policies.

Keywords: Gender Identity; Inclusion; LGBTQAI+; Minorities; Sexual Minorities; Qualitative Research; Phenomenology; Workplace Discrimination.

INTRODUCTION

In the present world, most people spend large portions of their lives working, due to which a safe and equal working environment should be every employee's basic right. When we say “equal”, a focus on discrimination one faces in the workplace comes more to prominence, especially when LGBTQAI+ society faces discrimination and exclusion on a very regular basis. LGBTQIA+ is an inclusive term that includes people of all genders and sexualities, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, queer, intersex, asexual, pansexual, and allies. While each letter in LGBTQIA+ stands for a specific group of people, the term encompasses the entire spectrum of gender fluidity and sexual identities.

In India, the idea of sexuality and gender is very rigid, often used interchangeably and often unknown to many. Freedom of sexuality is lost

somewhere in pages of books, the ones who display freedom are often ridiculed, and it renders many from the community in the closet. Whether it is Dr. Trinetra Haldar, a trans-woman and doctor, who strives for trans acceptance, or Mr. Harish Iyer, a cis-het gay man, or foundations such as Himachal Queer and Naaz foundation, who try to better the lives of LGBTQAI+ people by bringing in job opportunities, and awareness through workshops and programs, for queer sensitivity. The concept of not being Hetero-normative is a difficult battle fought by these individuals and foundations alike.

In India, The British, passed the law against being “gay” (Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code ,1862). Although Section 377 did not explicitly include the word homosexual, it has been used to prosecute homosexual activity and it functioned as the legal impetus behind the criminalization of what was referred to as,

"unnatural offenses" throughout the various colonies, in several cases with the same section number.

The Right to Privacy as in the historic judgement (Puttaswamy J.K, 2017), was declared a fundamental right by the Supreme Court. Under Article 21, the Right to privacy is protected as an intrinsic part of the right to life and personal liberty and as a part of the freedoms guaranteed by Part III of the Constitution. "Sexual orientation is an essential attribute of privacy" The right to privacy is denied by the existence of 'sodomy laws' or Section 377, even if the relation is in private between consenting adults., and in August 2018, Section 377, a law which criminalised "unnatural sex, and consensual relation between two consenting adults of the same gender", was decriminalized.

The stigma and harassment of the LGBTQAI+ community started a long time ago, specially post the British rule and exists to date. Post the decriminalisation, many companies like IBM, Godrej etc., have come up with LGBTQAI+ friendly policies. Today many companies, like Infosys and Oracle, have friendly policies for LGBTQAI+. It's been four years since the abolishment of section 377, but yet people from the community are treated as a pariah, and we wonder how long this bias will continue to exist. What happens when the Cis-Heterosexual community is supposed to work in tandem with the homosexual community, in a confined space like an office? Do they win the battle of acceptance or that is where the problem begins, most often it is the latter.

Since last one decade there has seen a lot of conversation about issues of LGBTQIA+ individuals in India, but they continue to be a group that is neglected. LGBTQAI+ community is subjected to various forms of harassment in India (Patel,2016). In most formal spaces, locker rooms and toilets are often segregated based on cis-normative genders, i.e. male and female, this violates the basic right of "necessity to hygiene and cleanliness" as part of the form of corporate responsibility. Often a trans person is referred to by incorrect pronouns, deliberately or non-

deliberately due to the norm we grow up having, to see a person through only two gender frames and they often have to face and tolerate inappropriate questions, which can often lead to employee disengagement, subjugation to humiliating arguments and avoidance of the issue, if the cis-heterosexual person is at fault (Sudarshan Varadhan, 2021) India as a nation, still has a lot of work to do towards accepting and empowering the LGBTQIA+ communities

Social stigmas in India are often based not just on one's sexual orientation but also on intersections of age, caste, abilities and social class, making it an extremely complex space to navigate as much as 57% of the participants responded negatively to a statement that their companies openly recruited LGBTQ+ and candidates with disabilities. More than 55% said they still experienced bias in the workplace, including over gender, ethnicity and sexual orientation. Forty per cent had been harassed at work and the majority were not covered by LGBT workplace protection policies(MINGLE,2016).

The World Bank estimates that homophobia costs India \$31 billion a year in lower educational achievement, loss of labour productivity and the added costs of providing health care to LGBT people who are poor, stressed, suicidal or HIV-positive.

92 per cent of the transgender community members are deprived of the right to participate in any form of economic activity in India, with even those qualified ones finding it tough to procure jobs. Among the respondents, around 89 per cent of transgender people said there are no jobs for even qualified ones (Kerala Development Society,2017)

96 per cent of trans genders are denied jobs and forced to take low-paying or undignified work for livelihood like prostitution and begging (National Human Rights Commission,2018)

The cis-heterosexual society often sits on the modest throne of "Normal" and takes copious amounts of conceited pride in passing comments, judgements and ways to get through the office, and comments to invalidate the

closeted existence of the LGBTQ community, in a workspace.

In India, most workplace attitudes of “don't ask, don't tell” patterns are followed towards employees' sexual orientation or gender identity. These issues are considered confidential, and most often left out of the workplace. The effect of such various forms of discrimination causes considerable harm to the individual's social health and mental health. Hence through this research we are trying to understand it from the community the difficulty they face while working in the Indian workplace and try to find the solution for the same.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Though there has been a steep rise in the focus towards diversity and inclusion among practitioners and scholar's studies on LGBTQI community is very limited, they are one of the most understudied populations in business management research. (Oswick, C., & Noon, M., 2014). India will lose up to 1.7 % of its GDP every year through LGBTQ+ exclusion (Divya Shekhar, 2020). Employability is one of the major challenges faced by transgender people as they are discriminated against at the workplace through exclusion and stigmatisation and they confront barriers to their careers from the initial stage of recruitment and selection. (Philip, J., & Soumyaja, D, 2019). An organisational culture which align with the diversities of sexual minorities and feeling a sense of belonging remains a matter of vital concern for LGBTQAI+ ex-pats (Julie Gedro, 2013). Despite the fact that there is no difference in terms of qualifications, commitment and effort at work, it is noticed that a clear axis of inequality exists in STEM fields and are more likely to experience career limitations, harassment, and professional devaluation than their non-LGBTQ (Cech, E. A., & Waidzunus, T. J. 2021). Hatred, non-acceptance and sexual discrimination is mainly provoked by negative attitudes towards the homosexual community which is developed through such rigid perceptions, cultural beliefs.

(Herek 2000; Yang, 1997). The correlation between acceptance and exposure of gay men was predominantly propitiated through views or attitudes toward gay men, opinions on community acceptance, and perceptions of the impact of stigma on gay men (Shawnika J. Hull, Catasha R. Davis, 2017). internal and external signs of discrimination, victimization and social stigma affects the health of the homosexuals (Brian S. Mustanski, Robert Garofalo and d Erin M. Emerson, 2010). Undermining personal differences and validation like sexual orientation or gender identity can cause one to self-blame for difficulties they face without considering the conspiracy of environmental stressors of teasing, harassment, stigmatization and discrimination which in turn affects the LGBTQAI+ individual's behaviour, choice, individual, cultural, and professional opportunities freedom; and community involvement. (Darrell C. Greene and Paula J. Britton, 2012). The stressful situation of being the only one in a team of a given identity or sexual orientation is quite common among LGBTQ in the corporate which affects performance and becomes an obstacle for career progression. Ellsworth, D., Mendy, A., & Sullivan, G. (2020).

The LGBTQAI+ community has been studied previously by several researchers in various countries. The studies have reinforced the need to have inclusive policies in the corporate world. Increasing workplace tolerance of homosexuality, providing a safe and tolerant environment for LGBTQAI+ employees will increase the labour supply of behaviourally gay men (Michael E Martell, 2014). The presence of an open climate in the workplace with less discernment, judgement and stigmatisation towards the LGBTQAI+ employees helps to reduce job anxiety (Zhou Jiang, Ying Wang, Xiaowen Hu, and Zhongmin Wang, 2017). Immediate supervisors and managers or team leaders perform a vital part in creating a positive group and acceptable climates (Schminke, Ambrose and Neubaum, 2005). Leaders should take more proactive measures such as countering heteronormativity, implementing professional development for

employees, and organizing and being a part of rituals, celebrations, and activities that support LGBTQAI+ people (Frank Hernandez, Donald J. Fraynd, 2014). As the literature points out, the hardships and policies adopted by companies are studied mainly in Western countries; seldom are any research found on the hardships faced in Indian offices by the LGBTQAI+ community. Also it is observed that the offices rarely have queer friendly policies, therefore the need for this study. This study explores the barriers and challenges faced by the LGBTQ community in their place of work. And Provide suggestions to help organizations with inputs to uniquely tailor policies ensuring a diverse and inclusive environment.

RESEARCH PROBLEM STATEMENT

Inclusive terms and statements that demonstrate the company's commitment to how they believe that a workplace should be a safe place for folks from the LGBTQIA+ community are very evidently mentioned on most of the company websites and reports. But the real question lies in whether these statements and policies are merely printed in words or are they put into action and implemented. It's the need of the hour that we find reasons for all rejections, slurs, discrimination, biases and taunts slashed at LGBTQ employees by colleagues and society and find a solution to it. Therefore, this study aims to comprehend the challenges and the need for inclusion of LGBTQAI+ people in corporate workspaces in India.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

LGBTQ employees are usually not shielded by existing sexual orientation and anti-discrimination strategies, statements and policies. There is a need for proper implementation and escalation. While working in this heteronormative world, they (People from the community) often cite a persistent feeling of being unwelcomed, especially in workplaces. This identity struggle has detrimental impacts on their health, happiness, and productivity.

The origins of isolation and prejudice reach far beyond what one might presume. There are various roadblocks for LGBTQAI+ employees ranging from availability of opportunities, workplace discrimination, difficulties in career trajectory, for example they are coerced to perform sexual favours for promotions, or overlooked during appraisals, etc, struggling with the gender bias, and general brutality.

Also, the most prominent issue is the implicit bias and discernment which emerges due to the social and religious conditioning. These roadblocks and problems are countless, and the support is confined to a limit or we can say it's non-existing.

OBJECTIVES

Inclusion initiatives have climbed corporate agendas over the past few years in India but even today many LGBTQ+ employees continue to face discrimination, discomfort and even danger in the workplace. The companies in India have introduced LGBTQ-friendly policies but are they implemented? Why do Indian companies still don't prefer people from the community for job roles? Are Indian workplaces creating a supportive atmosphere for LGBTQ+ employees to thrive in the workplace and grow in their career trajectory? Thus the objective of the research is to dive in deep and seek the answers to these unresolved questions from the experience of respondents.

- To evaluate the discriminatory issues that the LGBTQ community face in the corporate world.
- To document the reasons why the community faces emotional, mental or physical trauma in Indian workplaces.
- To understand various ways on how the LGBTQ community has overcome exclusion in the workplace.
- To evaluate the barriers that the LGBTQAI+ community face in the corporate trajectory.

METHODOLOGY

Approach: The essence of the research which was to examine in depth the opinions and expectations of LGBTQ employees necessitated a qualitative approach to the study. As the study is based on the description of the events as experienced by the participants in the study, phenomenology method of qualitative research was adopted for the study.

Identification of participants: Websites and social media platforms served as the base for identifying the database for the study. Snowball sampling was used for the study. The databases were collected over months and they were contacted through emails, LinkedIn messages and Instagram. Some of the participants in this study were friends, colleagues or acquaintances of one of the authors. They have worked on multiple projects or been acquainted with each other, through pride walks, or through friends. The data is excluded from IRB, however, once the participant consented to the research, the researchers sent them consent forms, and also took verbal confirmation through the calls,

Data collection process: The data is collected by interview method. With the topic being of extreme sensitivity, the interview began with warm-up questions, which would help them be at ease. Further questions in the interview probed on relevant matters pertaining to research objectives, some of the questions are: How did they deal with abuse in office? Are there any challenges they faced in companies? What are the strategies their company employs or employed for building an inclusive team?

The interviews were conducted through telephonic or video-based conversations and each of which lasted for about 45 minutes to two hours. When the participants didn't consent to be recorded, the conversation was transcribed while on call, memoing was adopted to ensure every aspect of the conversation is recorded and it was validated by the participants after the interview. The audio and video recordings were transcribed.

Data Analysis: Post the interview and transcription, the data was triangulated by all the three researchers identifying similar

patterns, similar sentences and repetitive words. If the words, sentences and patterns were repeated in at least seven out of the ten interviews, then they were considered, or else they were discarded. Content analysis was used in the study to derive themes and subthemes. These were then matched to the objective, and based on that various categories, themes and sub-themes mentioned further in the research were finalised. Author's expertise in finding patterns and forming ques to come up with a meaningful solution, was favourable in this research. The analysis was done individually and then together to ensure unbiased approach.

RESULTS

As mentioned in the methodology, based on the patterns, sentences and words we developed the following themes that this study deals with. It has issues ranging from "issues faced in the workplace to barriers in scaling the corporate trajectory".

1. ISSUES IN THE WORKPLACE

Companies do have policies in favour of inclusion such as ASHI (In Infosys), OPEN (in Oracle) and few others. The discrimination by their teammates, peers and managers is the major concern, often the employees don't come up to report the issues in offices as sometimes managers tend to intimidate the complainers or tend to suppress the complaints due to lack of evidence or because of the company policy.

1.1. Issues with Co-Employees

Lack of comfort and acceptance from peers and colleagues and experience of judgement and discernment, often prevent LGBTQAI+ employees from unveiling their genuine selves and identity at work. The reaction of their colleagues has always been an issue for their existence which forces them to conceal their identity. The consequences of homophobia among co-workers go beyond skipping inconsequential-seeming small talk. Being unable to engage can erode vital rapport with co-workers since informal talks play a significant role in how connections are developed in workplaces.

1.1.1. Concealment and Choice

The majority of LGBTQAI+ workers in our country are closeted in the workplace. Few of the LGBTQAI+ employees also consider keeping it private as a choice. As participant 2 mentioned, "it's not like I would go in front of someone and tell them that, Hey, you know I am a Gay, I don't believe in that because I feel my personal space is different from professional space." But few non-LGBTQAI+ employees on the other hand consider it "unprofessional" to discuss sexual orientation or gender identity in the workplace.

The Queer employees state their feeling of being enfeebled as they spend their time and energy concealing their genuine selves i.e., their sexual orientation and gender identity. They are forced to hide their orientation due to fear of being harassed, mocked, neglected, bullied, tortured etc. But concealment is not a choice for transgender employees who want to begin transitioning unless they leave their current organisation.

They cannot easily pass. Passing is used when closeted gay men and lesbians pass for straight. As participant 7 mentioned, "Many times other gay guys have just told me that, you know what? You don't see him gay at all". Then there would be the feminine guys who have the nuances and the body language, which is more feminine, also they cannot pass the same as Transgender people. While disclosing their sexual orientation is a choice for few LGB members, transgendered and few gay employees usually don't have that privilege as their transition or orientation is easily visible.

1.1.2. Non-Acceptance and Reactions

The non-acceptance from their colleagues and teammates affects their productivity, efficiency, morale and mental health. Often, they experience micro aggressions, like hearing demeaning remarks, trolls and gossip about them or people like them. They often fall prey to sexual harassment, sexist jokes or obscene or sexually explicit comments directed at them and unwanted judgements. They are also abused, called names and bullied by their colleagues because of their sexuality.

Participant 1 was sexually abused in her workplace by a colleague where she mentions, "he was trying to be cosy and felt me which was very uncomfortable. I resisted saying it was not right but then he crossed his limits and did more inappropriate things. He kept saying Hey dude you are Queer you can be free and have it with anyone!"

Hence workplace harassment and exclusionary behaviour is the most common actions of colleagues towards their LGBTQ peers

1.2. Issues with Managers

LGBTQ professionals frequently feel isolated due to the pressure of disguising their identities, lost possibilities for promotion, and frequently persistent unfavourable attitudes of their managers about their identities.

1.2.1. Effect on the Career

LGBTQAI+ employees are more prone to encounter conflict and harassment at work than their heterosexual colleagues. Sexual orientation bigotry in the workplace happens when an employee is constrained to negative workplace action, harassment, or denial of several benefits because of their sexual orientation. According to Participant 8 - "Just imagine my mental trauma, people abusing me behind my back it did affect me. Biasness and denial of my promotions affected my work and productivity. My colleagues were against me after that incident. There were only one or two who supported it. I had to leave the organisation as people won't accept me easily." LGBTQAI+ employees are neglected, not hired, not promoted, restrained and even fired specifically because the manager or top management might have issues like internal transphobia, orthodox mind-set etc. Being disregarded for a promotion, wrongful termination, getting a memo with no basis and other adverse employment actions are few other discriminating behaviours from the manager's end.

1.2.2. Maligning Behaviour

LGBTQAI+ employees are forced to undergo hostile comments about their mannerisms or sexual activity, inappropriate or intrusive

questions are prompted and most of the time abusive words are used to address them. Participant 2 mentioned, "There was a manager who was always annoyed with me, I wasn't doing anything wrong but didn't know what his problem was, he was just not okay with me for some reason and there was a lot of name-calling, like Chakka, Bailla (swear words used for transgender in the Hindi Language)" Such snide comments and behaviours puts LGBTQAI+ employees in a bad phase and affects them mentally. The unwanted behaviours by the superiors violate their dignity and create a degrading, intimidating and humiliating workplace environment for them.

1.3. Issues with Company

Though most Indian companies portray themselves to be highly engaged in inclusion and diversity and enclose LGBTQAI+ policies on their website, they are still lagging behind in process and execution of the same. The value of a supportive cultural environment and LGBTQAI+ friendly policies play an immense role in LGBTQAI+ employees' coming-out decisions in an organization.

1.3.1. Lack of Implementation of Policies

A company's culture and values have a lot of impact on the inclusion of the LGBTQAI+ community in the workplace. Participant 7 happened to mention that "The general view among employees in my company is that I shouldn't take these insults and bullying seriously as these comments are meant in a playful witty manner and are all just a part of the work culture where every employee is teased about something. There was no escalation or actions taken against such trolls and insulting behaviour"

Often there are policies mentioned in the company's website or reports but in reality, they might not be implemented or practised. Often the LGBTQAI+ employees seem physically included but continue to feel like an alien because of the reactions and behaviours of their colleagues. They may be included and hired as they are members of the underrepresented community but, the organizational culture fails to embrace and

fundamentally value those communities. It's not just about having a policy but there must be an adequate process for escalation must be orchestrated because an employer is responsible for the behaviours of its employees in an organization. The companies fail to take reasonable steps to challenge and prevent homophobic harassment.

1.3.2. A Distinction of Culture in Different Companies

According to research conducted, the samples from MNCs feel safer and more acceptable in their workplace than the ones working in smaller companies. The escalation process and grievance portals in big companies make LGBTQAI+ employees feel safer in the workplace. The companies with brands that aim for higher productivity recognise that inclusion is crucial for the company's future.

Participant 5 working in a renowned MNC mentioned " I am working in MNC and they have a brand but in private companies, nothing is escalated as it is not considered to be essential. In my friend's company, there were just two HR employees and they told him to work hard but didn't give him the reason why he was bothered by his superiors and did not give an appraisal. They didn't have strong policies on the other hand MNC has policies that support inclusion and things are heard and escalated"

1.4. Impact on Self

The encounters and various experiences that the LGBTQAI+ workers confront in their workplace often influence their life resulting in a major detriment to their overall wellbeing.

1.4.1. External Factors

The traumatic experiences that they face in their workplace often urge LGBTQAI+ employees to self-isolate themselves thus resulting in an increased risk for tormenting health issues due to loneliness. LGBTQAI+ employees are further prone to struggle with depression or anxiety. The stigma that encircles mental breakdowns also holds back the employees from seeking help.

There is a constant fear that if their colleagues or superiors found out about their sexual orientation, it could affect their career trajectory. As participant 5 mentioned “I sort of went into a very bad mental space. I started thinking that, you know what, I don't think this field is right for me Just leave this and go join something else. Yeah, it was kind of horrible. And then it was even worse during the whole lockdown last year that I was like indoors.”

The constant incidents of negligence, insults, discrimination and homophobic reactions in the workplace towards LGBTQAI+ employees cause anxiety, self-loathing and insecurity in them and thus they tend to quit the job or look for change.

1.4.2. Internal Factors

Our research interview stated definite examples of the fear, shame, and suppressions that lead to internal transphobia and homophobia. Due to the persistent prejudice and discrimination from their peers and colleagues in the workplace, LGBTQAI+ employees tend to consider themselves as unworthy, unlovable, hopeless and flawed.

Participant 9 mentioned “Yes after that incident people have trolled, bullied made fun went behind my back It was mental torture. I was scared and started hating myself for who I am. Fear of self-acceptance was lurking around me. Accusing myself, self-doubting and victimising were the only things I did. It was indeed a bad phase”

But then there seems to be an unspoken perception that LGBTQAI+ employees must keep their private lives under wrap to hide their sexual orientation. Only then they can have a normal life. Hence many LGBTQAI+ employees maintain firm boundaries between their work and personal lives. But this involves constant lying, keeping personal life outside work, not disclosing about partners and living a life of secrecy. Sometimes for a few people, it becomes suffocating and they get tired of living a two-phased life. All these discriminations, micro aggressions, internalized stigma, identity concealment lead to minority stress among the LGBTQAI+ employees

2. REASONS WHY THE COMMUNITY FACES TRAUMA IN THE WORKPLACE

Deeply-embedded homophobic and transphobic attitudes, mindset, perception, beliefs combined with a lack of knowledge and sex education causes the community to face discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity from the Heterosexual majority in the workplace.

2.1. Mind-Set of Colleagues

The homophobia of the colleagues pours out in different forms, for example, homophobic jokes, physical attacks, discrimination in the workplace and negative media representation. For people who have been brought up to believe that homosexuality is wrong leads them to believe that exclusion and ostracism. Thus their thoughts and mindset span the spectrum of misleading opinions toward homosexuality.

2.1.1. Regressive Mind-Set

Though management, employees and peers support alternative sexualities and gender identities when it comes to routine day to day functioning, there is an urgent requirement to improve the ground reality. LGBTQAI+ employees come across a lot of homophobic colleagues who are stubbornly orthodox (conventional thoughts) due to their social and religious conditioning and consider sexual orientation and gender identity to be a sin “Often organised Religion and sexuality haven't always made the best bedfellows. Christianity, Judaism and Islam and interpretations of their religious texts and oral scriptures, ranging from the Bible, Mishnah, Talmud, Tanakh, and Quran, have been used to argue that being LGBTQ is a sin. Same-sex relationships are illegal in as many as 74 countries around the world, while trans people's rights are still unprotected - with religion frequently acting as a barrier to progress...” (Kashmira Gander,2017). The mind-set of superiors and employees often tend to be regressive due to their social conditioning, cultural aspects and upbringing. similarly, “Hinduism does not provide a fundamental spiritual reason to reject or ostracize LGBTQAI+ individuals, and that, “Given their inherent spiritual equality, Hindus

should not socially ostracize LGBTQAI+ individuals, but should accept them as fellow sojourners on the path to moksha.” (HRC foundation,)

Gsp is not as successful/effective/does not have enough reach as it should be, though Companies come up with gender sensitisation programmes and seminars and employees are optional to attend the same. As participant 6 mentioned “When they randomly keep sessions, it is on the individual to attend or not or to lend ears. And in such a session, they say if you want to come you come so it’s more of HR and top management who attends it and most of them are queer people who are curious to know. But actual people who need that talk and awareness are never there because it’s a free thing if you want to come or else don’t.”

Sometimes the ones who attend it tend to ignore these seminars and lectures because they find them to be minimal or not important enough. Lack of awareness and unwanted urges result in different fantasies and inappropriate behaviour.

2.1.2. Perceptions

The perception of Indian society i.e. a specific viewpoint or understanding of LGBTQAI+ an opinion for the same is very distinct. The major cause for Homophobic behaviour is a lack of knowledge and education because most Indians aren't familiar with the phrases, concepts and facts about LGBTQAI+. Indian culture and upbringing appear to be the primary contributing factors to this issue because it is ingrained in us since childhood that homosexuality is immoral, and as a result, we tend to build our perception on this. It's not always about the policies and company culture, one of the concerns that troubles the LGBTQAI+ employees are the people's perception in the workplace.

One of the experiences mentioned by participant 2 “You are a Lesbian, how can a guy approach you? You can never be approached by men.” This is the kind of treatment I got, no one has sympathised they even said I can never be harassed or assaulted

by anyone as I am someone different not I am not normal and that’s my fault”

Sometimes heterosexual employees at workplaces have so much resentment that it leads to hate-motivated violence like sexual assault. This kind of hyper-sexualizing of LGBTQAI+ people and stigmatising them arises from strong aversion and internalised homophobia. Various issues also crop up due to rigid opinions and beliefs that vary broadly based on religious practices and affiliations.

2.2. The Mind-Set of the Society

Homosexuality is viewed as abnormal in Indian society, an issue that necessitates corrective therapy, and talks about it are kept under wraps. The majority of the population still believes that heterosexual marriage and relationships are the only acceptable norm. And they don't want the status quo changes to be accepted by everyone for some irrational, arbitrary, and incomprehensible beliefs and reasons.

2.2.1. Rigid Culture and Beliefs

Society sees the LGBTQAI+ community with hatred and disgust. The societal culture and the values are unfriendly towards sexual minorities hence they are usually labelled using filthy words or abuses. Society refuses the LGBTQAI+ community under various boundless pretexts.

Participant 3 says “Our culture has always worked based on Heterosexist and authenticated only male-female relations to be valid and executed other relations inappropriate for society. Society has always preached that the LGBTQAI+ community is strange and this exception is immoral, offensive, disgusting, shameful and abnormal”

The stories they shared about how the LGBTQ community are being attacked in society informs us about the despair prevailing in society. Also, it’s high time to find a “remedy” for “wicked desires”. Always the LGBTQAI+ employees feel blamed for society’s prejudices, hatred, or actions.

2.2.2. Awareness Follows Acceptability

The existence of the LGBTQAI+ community is still seen as taboo. The rigid beliefs, stereotyping and years of conditioning will take a long time to weed out and become socially acceptable to the community.

As participant 11 mentioned “Understanding the person going through transition is something the colleagues didn't do. because they aren't aware of anything. They aren't supportive even if they tried it was not something they could accept wholeheartedly. They often got confused and came up to me to ask what should we call you? Which pronoun to use? Are you a guy or a girl? What about your genitals? If that was genuine doubt, I would have been the happiest but it was in a tone of mocking considering which phase of transition I was in.”

We cannot expect mind-sets and beliefs to just vanish overnight. But it is a fact that social acceptability follows social awareness. This homophobic judgment is higher because of the lack of awareness. In our society, it's all about men and women, right from education to washrooms and signboards. Lack of focus on gender sensitization and sex education is the basic root cause. It is important to be aware and understand.

3. OVERCOMING HURDLES IN THE OFFICE SPACE:

Often managers and colleagues can be insensitive due to their social and religious conditioning. After seeing such direct and indirect homophobia and transphobia due to fear of alienation, many of the LGBTQ employees chose to not come out in their professional space. LGBTQAI+ employees often conceal their sexual identity to obtain a job and prefer not to reveal it for their personal reasons and also sometimes for concern to sacrifice their employment.

3.1. Actions of the Company

Companies tend to have ratings based on good places to work, and they pay heed to looking after their employees, regardless of gender, sexuality etc., but that becomes difficult to

prove and employees tend to leave the company dissatisfied, when the mid management, and upper management tries to hamper the fairness aspect during the appraisal process, and the stigma of being shunned by their peers overpowered their need for freedom of expression. They then shun the company on glass door, or fishbowl, which brings a bad name to the company. Sometimes the biases stem during the hiring processes, and candidates could be rejected based on their appearance and their mannerisms, and they have no chance of finding out.

3.1.1. Non-Disclosure of Gender Identity and the Effects on LGBTQI

Often, People from the LGBTQAI+ community, tend to not disclose their identity in their corporate space, this non-disclosure makes it impracticable to receive any sort of workplace emotional support. The perception of insecurity influences their productivity and social relations at the workplace. They had in the past seen how matters escalated to the HR department, did not help as the only solution was to send the accused to a gender sensitization program and most of GSP was considered as Mockery most of the cases saw No action was taken.

Participant 4, mentioned, “it happened outside the office space, we were at a wedding, and we were sharing a hotel room, between three adults and my colleague refused to sleep on the same bed with another colleague who was gay and open about it, whereas I wasn't, and that made me wonder if I ever came out, would I be met with a similar prejudice/bias, and I was but in the office space, by name calling”.

Participant 4 also said, “I had one instance where a client asked that an LGBTQAI+ colleague be removed from the team “because they were not happy a gay person was on their project.” This occurred even though our company supported inclusion: “We raised the issue with the client's senior management because most of the people we work with would be shocked if someone said that.” We have a policy of not being neutral about this. If you can't be your authentic self on a client

team, we didn't continue working with that client." But this is a rare event.

3.1.2. Confrontation Impedes and Creates Hurdles to Their Careers

One of the prevailing areas of social differentiation is the workplace, delineated by the exclusion and stigmatisation of LGBTQAI+ individuals. Their confrontation impedes and creates hurdles to their careers, right from the initial stage of the recruitment process and it sometimes catapults into massive issues during their working lives. One of the participants said, "Many Organizations consciously shun their applications to evade the extra burden of transforming the infrastructure and policies to support the LGBTQAI+ employees in the company, or behave like they are people with special needs and treat them differently."

Some studies even say that their abuse was Strongly opposed and contested by the management and wasn't escalated like in any standard posh case. POSH didn't take up the case saying it was difficult to find reasons or prove accusations against the accused. They used to receive humiliating explanations from the management claiming that it was a wrong and malice filled allegation and were never Considered not vital. These factors have often left them with options to conceal their identity or change the organisation if they had already come out in the professional space.

3.2. Action for Self-Development

Conditioning and Re-factoring beliefs of an individual is a huge task, let alone an organisation with multiple individuals with various backgrounds. and change hardly never happens overnight.

Social aspects can be developed by regular workshops and regular sessions, to inculcate the practices and beliefs of the company. Most companies tend to conduct these sessions only during the month of June. Then the whole year the topic remains in the closet. just like most of the employees. New joinees are given an hours training during joining, to introduce them to company policies, and not reinforced in their

minds continuously by holding sessions, for community/organisation building.

3.2.1. Ordeals of Bullying

Company bullies or homophobic managers were often due to the non-awareness, and upbringing. Often participants have complained only to find out that, "It's not like companies don't have an inclusivity program, they do, but a two-hour session is just a joke for many and it's a fun session to pass time and we are just subjected to a mockery session after that. There is a minimal amount of penalty for being a bully, but I wish it was more stringent at times. I would rather suggest these should be done." One of the participants mentioned his ordeal of bullying, "sometimes people need to understand that, they won't come out to anybody if not made to feel safe. And there's a lot of intersectionality here that, you know, affects their mental health. They're here to work. They're here to get something for them to own the bread or to have central professional development, which they won't be able to do if they're not comfortable enough to work in that space.

A lot of people change jobs because their companies are homophobic, participant 3 said, "I had to shift to Bangalore because of that, I did that because my Bombay office was homophobic, with comments and constant vigilance on your sort of not vigil intimately or to always be aware that, oh, I should not do this. I should not give out that vibe. I don't want them to gossip because it's not okay." These sorts of bullying lead to loss of talent and revenue on a large scale to companies and sometimes, even reduces the goodwill of the company. Candidates can malign the company by talking about such bad incidents and put organisation names to shame.

3.2.2. Turning a Blind Eye; A Solution?

Some participants mentioned how they turned a blind eye towards bullying, Participant 6 mentioned in their interview, that; "I know. It's just something that happens, in the earliest stages you just let it hurt yourself, but one day you just get over it and accept it. I just got over it. If I focus a lot of my attention on it. I'll keep

thinking about it. What is the problem? Like if it's like the story of the frog, uh, the Deaf frog who went up the hill. the abled one couldn't, and the one who was deaf was the only one who could go up because couldn't hear, people saying that he wouldn't be able to do it. And you're just too fat and you won't be able to climb the dark. So if I don't listen to people, I'm just like, I will just endure it. But then that is also not the right way. I would say because you need to stand up, are done. I might not have put it."

Factors of overlooking bullies or tolerating it are the norm many followed. Homophobic staff and homophobic managers have often leave them with no options but to conceal their identity or change the organisation if they had already come out in the professional space.

3.3. Actions of Colleagues and Teammates

Participant 3, mentioned, "A homophobic company who celebrate pride month, hire, a bunch of people just the sake of it, to tick boxes, Diversity and inclusivity is a sham in such companies. I think you might know about, Gaurav Pramanik, he had written this letter and surprisingly, "the manager", who was heading the inclusion and diversity board in his office was homophobic". According to them, Companies can only claim to be truly inclusive when everyone, from business leaders to cafeteria workers, have been attuned; only when they build a more sustainable infrastructure varying from comprehensive health benefits to all-gender, safe and neutral spaces that enable queer individuals to feel safe and be their true self.

3.3.1. Raising Voice, and Increasing Visibility

Managers and Teammates who were allies were supportive, helping them with signing various petitions for a safe workspace. They often, raised their voice on behalf of the employees and, helped in educating co-employees, they often became the vocal team that raised their voice against gossip, derogatory and abusive behaviours in the office. They tend to create Neutral spaces which help everyone in the team thrive and

achieve their potential, without hampering their mental health and physical wellbeing.

Participants number 4 and 6 have had managers who sometimes went out of the way making it the path for success for them., "My manager did a lot of work, she made sure I was heard and not bullied and she pushed my limits in work. I am whatever I am professional because of her. She made sure everyone was part of the team, and anyone who was deterrent to ideas because of orientation was reprimanded. Everybody was to attend meetings and we had to brainstorm; we didn't have a hierarchy so the culture was open. Our manager was empathetic and she let us be understood if there were genuine emergencies and went beyond her way to make us comfortable." Such Managers are hard to come by and make the necessary difference in company spaces, by making them neutral. Often safe space is taken over by majority/dominant parties, a neutral space helps give voice to everyone and promote equality.

4. BARRIERS IN CORPORATE TRAJECTORY

With their sexuality being questioned, the ingrained Bias and evil, prejudicisms or comical perception of LGBTQAI+ often came out in the speech and way they were treated. Often, they find no support. With opinions being ignored, to gender and sexuality being issues in the hiring and appraisal process, lack of team support, a hindrance on promotion due to documentation issues, etc. leads to a huge downfall in their morale. Weird stares, Verbal or sexual attacks and reactions in nonverbal indirect ways affect productivity, create trauma. Many say their orientation makes their colleagues look at them differently, "In the office it's like, you stay that far from me and then you talk from there and okay. We'll do that. or don't say much, you are gay, what would you even know. I was trying not to use the word untouchable, but yeah, that is how it is somehow."

4.1. External Barriers

The issue of internalised homophobia, intersectionality in terms of gender and sexual orientation, negligence towards their feelings

often lead to unwanted discrimination in office spaces. Participant 1, mentioned; “when your manager is homophobic, everybody's home, it kind of makes it difficult. You have nobody, and these managers and people in top authority have worked somewhere for five, six years, or they are in the same office for 10 years. And if they continue to have that impact, it is difficult for people to navigate and to work with them.”

4.1.1. Are Abuses Explicit?

Often the participants also said that “The thing with abuse is that explicitly no one faces abuse, but it's always there from where is this person from? when people look at you with weird faces and guffawing. People judge you in the first sentence, which you say, and then the judgement just stays intact, hidden in those statements continuously, whenever you interact with people. It's similar to people ill-treating women because they are women. like people casually pass sexist jokes and comments, it is like those mean jokes, and statements and perceptions that one is not capable of work or doing anything because they are gay?”.

4.1.2. Bad Touch and Vibes in the Corporate World!

Participants often sense bad touch and bad vibes, many even went ahead to state the following, “It's obvious in the sense that, as he touched me right now. I mean, as, as friends, you obviously like, do like, Hey, hi, what's up, shake hands just in a friendly manner. but you know, when the touch is bad, right. All of us know when the touch is bad I don't flirt with every minute of my life.” Children should be made aware, and so should adults, to recognise predatory behaviour and put an end to it. Often the perpetrator thinks it's okay and continuous. Which must be resolved using policies available in the corporate

The Posh committee often can go only so far as to address an issue of sexual misconduct, condemn it, but the problem lies much ahead and it's often in the thinking. A participant mentioned, “I went and reported the incident of advances and jokes to my HR, So I had told them how this person made me uncomfortable, and they were like, nothing could be done.

What could be done is that they could send this person for a gender sensitization program and that's it.

At my workspace, they used to have these gender sensitization programs and talks by people from the community. But a lot of people used to look at these talks as mockery, or just have a time where they are not working and serving the purpose. They just go there and spend two hours there and then they make a bunch of jokes on them.”

4.2. Internal Barriers

The workplace environment that LGBTQAI+ people, particularly trans people, face is most likely to be a significant root cause of barriers. A McKinsey report said, "They are nearly twice as likely to hear sexist jokes about people of their gender or demeaning comments about people like themselves, and they are more than three times more likely to feel unable to discuss themselves or their lives outside of work".

These barriers most likely contribute to the fact that they are much more likely to consider leaving their company. According to a McKenzie report, 32 percent versus 21 percent of cisgender people consider leaving the company, and 18 percent versus 8 percent of cisgender people expect to stay at their current company for less than a year.

4.2.1. Lack of Morale

The abuse leaves the participants with a Lack of focus and self-direction, lack of motivation and very often fear of going to the workplace and dissatisfaction. Many participants were young millennials, who are still in the initial phase of their careers, affording private transport is tough, they felt, “When they're travelling to the office, certain transgender people might be travelling, women or men don't share seats with them. They prefer to stand alone. They will not share a seat with a trans person. So they already have isolated them. But these issues have to be dealt with in the real world. And then they come to the office in a professional space where they are supposed to work for eight hours per day.

This tends to make them feel unmotivated, and no number of motivational theories used by “HRs” can help in perking them to work and outshine themselves. The energy reserved for the aspect of working and doing better gets consumed in dealing with all sorts of mundane abuses, which people don’t see as abuse.

4.2.2. Gossip and Loss of Talent

They also face a similar issue to where they also have a back, gossip going on about them. Participants said that “People calling them extra people, calling them, or, that he's a throwing tantrum because he's gay. I think that's not fair. I think, in your future, people are denied, uh, higher positions because of their orientation or their identity and people being like, “Oh, I will, I refuse to work with this person.”

This only leads them into the poverty of good working spaces and loss of talent for the company. Many times, participants said that “it was very late in my office when my boss motivated me, I tried taking the initiative to do something. My morale was boosted and I had to see counsellors regularly to understand myself. I don't think anything tops college, but I feel the office was a little less harsh”.

Often the ability to look over gossip or nipping it in the bud lies with the managers. Managers often play a huge role apart from just completion of projects, hence gender and LGBTQAI sensitive managers are the necessity.

DISCUSSIONS

Often in workspaces diversity and inclusion, is a huge task, but it gets trickier when employing transgender- policies and best practices for organisations is often not set. This study has contributed to the existing literature on the challenges of qualifications, the preparation of organisations for inclusive work culture, basic facilities and dress codes policies, and awareness-raising. (Joby Philip; Devi Soumyaja, 2019) in employing trans genders in organisations.

The study has been an attempt to understand the broader spectrum of the queer community. Though still in its latency, even though we have multiple organisations, both private and public have openings for trans-gendered people, but the acceptance is very less. Often special hiring drives deal with policy issues, various sexual harassment and mental abuse in workspaces.

This study has reaffirmed the findings of previous research (Christian Thoroughgood et al,2020) which has highlighted the effect of mental and social wellbeing on the performance of various LGBTQAI+ employees.

In an initiative to promote inclusivity hiring drive should be reframed and help with steering the hiring process towards more gender neutral, or gender deaf methodologies. With job and job descriptions being gender neutral, this not only helps with employer branding, but also helps enhance candidate experience. With the latest hiring trends, “as many as 81% of Gen Z strongly believe gender no longer defines a person as much as it did in the past” (Zing Tsjeng 2016).

Proactively emphasising the company's support for the LGBTQAI+ community can help prospective employees feel safe. Companies can reduce the "only" experience during recruitment by diversifying their candidate pool and providing feedback to them after their interviews. To reduce the role of unconscious bias in hiring decisions, they can use blind resume screening (removing names, gender signifiers, and affinity-group affiliations). They can also strengthen employee resource groups by providing dedicated resources for LGBTQAI+ employees, especially LGBTQAI+ women and trans employees, who might be frequently overlooked in LGBTQAI+ employee resource groups.

The discrimination against trans-employees cannot be overcome quickly and easily by only work-related initiatives. It takes time, but the main objective of companies should be to rescue and eliminate discrimination, which prevails in the system, through policies and practices, Companies could use tools—like

mindfulness training, cognitive behavioural training, and self-compassion and acceptance training—to reduce the abuse in LGBTQIA communities.

The company should make it obligatory to include discussion on LGBTQAI+ during the induction training. It should be like every other induction process and must be a compulsion rather than an option. The sensitisation and awareness about gender identity and sexual orientation can also be attained through informal conversations and mandatory Inclusion & diversity training programs, held at intervals by experts.

The study complemented the findings of Singh & Chatterjee (2019) that college-educated LGBTQAI+ have always confronted different forms of unfairness at the workplace unfairness has harmed the productivity of sexual minorities and it also resulted in underemployment, lower job satisfaction, fear of working in corporate amongst the LGBTQAI+ community. Even in Indian corporations, the employees have come across such absurd actions and harassments which has affected their career trajectory and mental peace. It has lowered their morale and self-respect and these traumas have forced them to quit the organisation.

Organizational legacies of formal LGBT discrimination may foster workplace experience disadvantages, and demographic diversity within an organization may mitigate these workplace inequalities (Cech, E.A & Rothwell, W. R, 2020). Despite the boundaries and cultural differences, the same issue of the organisational legacy of LGBT discriminations prevails in Indian workplaces too. As revealed in the study the companies' policies, culture and values drop down from the top management and legacy they follow which is sometimes homophobic, intersectional and discriminative.

Working from home, particularly in the post-pandemic era, presents unique challenges for companies wanting to ensure that all employees, including LGBTQAI+ employees, feel respected and safe. Leaders can help

reduce these challenges by establishing direct lines of communication with all remote workers to see how they are doing and to inquire about any assistance they may require. Teams should also collaborate to establish virtual-working norms in order to foster an inclusive environment. These may include, for example, rotating speaking roles in meetings and scheduling downtime during the day for team members to attend to personal matters.

The current research shows LGBTQAI employees having an option of remaining unidentified Queer makes them more satisfied, respected and were comfortable contradicts with the previous literature stating that LGBTQAI+ employees who tend to have greater openness in their work environment are likely to be more satisfied with their jobs and experience less anxiety in the workplace (Jiang ,Z. et al, 2019).

Based on an in-depth analysis of the transcripts and discussions we can conclude that the procedures and policies need to be updated and framed especially on right to privacy, updating personal records, gender-transition guidelines, non-discrimination, buddy at work, counselling facilities, sensitisation compliance, gender-neutral toilets, health benefits and a grievance redressal mechanism. There must be loans and financial help and assistance given for transition and also medical leave for the same.

Within community group sexual and gender minority youth feel physically and mentally safe while connections with heterosexual supportive peers, was also found to be a vital shielding factor for LGBTQAI+ youth (Wilson, C., & Cariola, L. A.,2020) which adds to research that not just the policy and its implementation, even the support from the team members and peers are equally vital. Not just a change in the mind-set of the HR managers and top management even the mind-set of the team, the Queer employee is working with should be open and supportive. Apart from the basic education and awareness spread, Sensitisation is the most crucial step towards LGBTQAI+ inclusion both in the workplace and in the society we live in. The key is to

create safe and not neutral spaces, which will be taken over by dominating groups.

Inclusion policies that address the centrality of not fitting in the box is a necessity. This would aid to overcome the stigmas and homophobic behaviour attached to the LGBTQAI+ community. The preponderance of the employees is not even informed of the existence of an LGBTQAI+ community. Many of them aren't aware of how to address a transgender person and which pronoun to use while addressing them. Each employee right from the top to the bottom should be sensitised. The absence of sensitisation would cause differentiation at the workplace.

Companies should think of having queer affirming people. while solving the queer issues. If somebody comes up with a more intricate problem, the ability to solve them then falls on the queer affirming people. When one complains of homophobia workplace, or somebody is harassing a queer person, having somebody who knows about what it is, and is well equipped to handle the issue, instead of gas lighting the abused is the need of the hour

Unequal treatment of heterosexual and lesbian work candidates could be identified by observing the consequent call-back though there was no immediate evidence of the sexual orientation of the 'heterosexual' applicant; discrimination at the primary stage of the selection and not at the following stage (Baert, 2014). That the community are meted out with greater inequality, is mirrored in most of our findings.

Day and Greene (2008) found that gay and lesbian employees who worked in smaller organizations were more secure, accepted, supported and satisfied than their counterparts who worked in larger organizations but on contrary in India as samples of our study state they felt more satisfied, committed and secured in big Corporates and MNCs than smaller firms. As the main aspects of workplace safety and policy implementations are more prominent in the MNCs. also, the LGBTQAI+ community feel safer, comfortable and secured in bigger firms as they are assured with

effective implementation and escalation procedures.

Firms of all sizes need experts, and allies who can help the employees understand the nuances and be empathetic to the community. The expert can be a personality, especially an Indian, from the community with rooted culture, experience, and acumen about the LGBTQAI+ community and the prevailing issues. Arranging for Ted Talks and Own Experience sharing platforms can create a sense of empathy among the employees which can have a much better impact on a person emotionally. All the culture as well as values in an organisation flow from the top-level hence not just by propagating but also by practising, the top management should set an example and should be subjected to gender sensitisation training without exception.

In most cases, the manager was the key and crucial element in addressing the issue. Managers who are queer sensitive, queer affirming played a major part in motivating and eliminating the bias. Most of the time, the well-established people in the firm or corporate, need to focus on reducing their biases and those who were less homophobic and transphobic, helped to reduce the majority of the abuse. They set the tone, which helped to negate the tormenting behaviour, use of inappropriate or derogatory words and pronouns. Whereas, their unsupportive behaviour and lack of acceptance led to a lower-performing team and individuals.

Having an inclusive manager helps people in the office to unlearn their biases. Community building and reinforcement of policies should be from top-down and implementation from the middle order, to make it more successful. Companies should be focused on making a place inclusive rather than just diverse, by hiring people from different backgrounds.

Policies and procedures contribute transparency to the employees when dealing with issues or activities that are of significant value to the company, such as, health and safety, legal liabilities, regulatory requirements or issues that have serious consequences (Ozeren, E., 2014). This study adds to the existing

literature which shows that companies can get competitive advantages if they lead space by formulating inclusive/supportive policies for LGBTQAI+.

The studies, even though they were progressive, had various limitations which ranged from, LGBTQAI+ employees did not want to talk, fewer samples; an in-depth analysis of each policy adopted in organisations could be carried out to understand their legal and reasonable pertinence. The topics related to the motivation of people from the community, retaining, performance assessment, satisfaction and compensation could also be the subjects of further research

CONCLUSION

Based on an in-depth analysis of the transcripts and discussions we can conclude that the procedures and policies need to be updated and framed especially on right to privacy, updating personal records, gender-transition guidelines, non-discrimination, buddy at work, counselling facilities, sensitisation compliance, gender-neutral toilets, health benefits and a grievance redressal mechanism. There must be loans and financial help and assistance given for transition and also medical leave for the same.

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