

Intergenerational Attitude Change towards Homosexuality

Nishchay Kohli

Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

India is a land of diversity. But diversity comes with a price, and in India, with diversity, there exists few negative consequences such as negative attitudes towards a variety of issues like homosexuality, which is a characteristic of being sexually, physically and emotionally attracted to the person of the same-sex. The current research aimed to examine the attitude change between two generations, in which one group is of college – going students in the age range of 18 to 21 years and the other group is of individuals in middle adulthood, falling in the age range of 40 to 60. A total of 216 participants were there, out of which 115 participants were there in the college-going students' group of 18 to 21 years and 101 participants were present in the age group of 40 to 60 years. Purposive Sampling was done in this study. The Homophobia Scale (HS) was employed for studying the attitude towards homosexuality which was developed by Wright, Adams, and Jeffrey Bernat. The results revealed highly significant differences in the attitudes towards homosexuality between the two generations in which participants from the older generation had comparatively more negative and homophobic attitudes as compared to the younger generation which had relatively more positive attitudes towards homosexuality.

Keywords: Homosexuality, Attitude, Change, Difference, Generations

Homosexuality and same-sex relationships have always been prejudiced and individuals being open about it have been discriminated against. Numerous instances of it have been documented across various time periods. However, with more education and knowledge, the preconceived notions and the stereotypes are reducing, thus providing hope that inclusive societies can exist. Recently, it has been found that being more educated and having information is a major factor that can bring down negative attitudes toward homosexuality. Younger individuals have more positive attitudes and thus have more acceptance for queer individuals than those in the older generation. This may be due to the fact that the level of education has increased in the younger generation, exposing them to more knowledge about a variety of topics in general and sexuality to be specific. Cohort differences have been found in this context, with more intolerance

being observed in older individuals while younger individuals were more tolerant of it. Education was also found to be influencing the attitudes towards homosexuality (Cheng et al., 2016). Differences among 10 cohorts from 1921 to 1980 were analysed and it was found that older cohorts disapproved of homosexuality more than the younger ones. Religiosity, supporting conventionalism, attaching to traditions, level of education were all found to be related to the attitudes toward homosexuality (Akker et al., 2013). Around 75% of White Americans disapprove of Homosexual Relations. Individuals below the age of 30 years, residing in larger urban centres and having a college experience were having more favourable attitudes toward Homosexual Relations (Nyberg & Alston, 2014). Younger generation can have negative attitudes but older individuals disapprove homosexuality more seriously and strictly (Adela, 2010). Older cohorts,

especially the ones born before 1948 were more likely to deny equal civil rights to lesbian and gay people. These findings suggest an aging effect on attitudes toward Homosexuals and Homosexuality (Meerendonk & Scheepers, 2008). In the Indian context, a study found major differences between older and younger generations, with younger generations displaying positive and favourable attitudes towards homosexuality (Anand, 2016).

The age-stability hypothesis given by Alwin and Krosnick (1991) is an excellent explanation of the age related differences observed in terms of favourable attitudes toward homosexuality. According to this hypothesis, the minds of people change little as their age increases. There are other social bases of conservative social attitudes too. Such as the importance of university education which is an important factor that makes people more liberal and open-minded to a variety of issues. Education's role has been found in a number of studies. Education diminishes the opposition to homosexual relations by enabling support for civil liberties even for groups that are unconventional. The relationship of schooling with cognitive sophistication also explains the role of education in more favourable attitudes to homosexuality. Another line of explanation for the relationship between education and tolerance of homosexuality is that gaining education provides novel information or social networks which leads to more exposure to unusual ideas than those with less education (Ohlander et al., 2005). The importance of social class has also been found in this context such as the Working Class Authoritarian Hypothesis by Lipset (1959) which argues that low education, economic and social tension and the family tensions prevalent disproportionately in the working class which leads to hostility towards out-group and moral conservatism. Evidence has been found for it which supports the role

of social class in determining attitudes towards plenty of social issues including attitudes towards homosexuality (Svallfors, 2005). Religious institutions also have a focus on historical wisdom and respecting the status quo, which can disturb the process of social change (Durkheim, 1959). This explains why religiosity and religious practice is strongly associated to conservative social attitudes. Muslims and Protestants have been found to be having more negative attitudes towards homosexuality than people from other religions (Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009; Jäckle & Wenzelburger, 2015). Attitudes towards homosexuality are a function of age, religiosity, religious affiliation, contact with queer individuals (Adela, 2010). Although it has been found that tolerance of homosexuality is negatively correlated to age. However, older age should not be understood in a negative light here as it has also been found that the surrounding atmosphere and the visibility of queer individuals has brought a positive shift in the attitudes in all the cohorts and intracohort positive changes are also seen in older cohorts as well (Andersen & Fetner, 2008).

With the decriminalizing of Section 377 from the Constitution of India in 2018, there is an increasing attention paid towards the struggles and experiences of people who identify themselves as a part of the LGBTQIA+ Community. While there are many stereotypes and stigmas prevalent in the society, an observation has surfaced that there is a change of attitudes to more positive ones in the younger generations, especially the college-going students because there have been attempts made to educate the younger generation regarding the issue and experiences of people from the LGBTQIA+ community. With June being celebrated as the Pride Month and various societies being formed in colleges for people from the LGBTQ+ community are indicative of the fact that the younger generation has a more

positive attitude towards the individuals from this community than the people in middle adulthood. This prompts us to scientifically investigate the intergenerational attitude change in the Indian context to provide a comprehensive understanding of the changes surfacing in the social attitudes, facilitating better understanding of the Indian population.

Objective

To examine the intergenerational attitude change towards homosexuality between college-going students and people in middle adulthood using The Homophobia Scale (HS).

Hypothesis

There will be a significant intergenerational change in the attitude towards homosexuality between college-going students and people in middle adulthood.

Method

Sample

The sample in the study was drawn from two groups, one was belonging to the age group of 18 to 21 and included students who were college-going and the other group comprised individuals in their middle adulthood in the age group 40 to 60 years. A total of 216 participants were there in the sample out of which 57 participants were males, 157 were females and 2 participants reported themselves as Queer. A total of 101 participants were there in the study from the age group of 40 to 60 years while 115 participants were there from the age group of 18 to 21 years. Purposive Sampling also known as Judgmental Sampling was done in the present study, which is a non-random sampling in which those cases are taken who fit a particular criterion/criteria.

Tools

The Homophobia Scale (HS) was developed by Lester W. Wright, JR., Henry

E. Adams, and Jeffrey Bernat (1999) so that the assessment of behavioural, affective and cognitive components of homophobia is possible. The Homophobia Scale consists of 25 statements on which respondents have to answer on a 5 – point Likert Scale where 1 meaning “Strongly Agree” and 5 meaning “Strongly Disagree”. This scale is different from other attitude scales for homosexuality because it also has items assessing Social Avoidance and Aggressive Acting which is not there in other scales. This scale has 3 subscales: Behavior/Negative Affect, Affect/Behavioral Aggression and Cognitive Negativism. The overall reliability coefficient of the scale came out as 0.94 and 1 week test-retest reliability coefficient came out to be as 0.96. The validity of the scale was determined by Pearson Correlation coefficient from overall scores of Index of Homophobia (IHP) and The Homophobia Scale yielding a significant correlation of 0.66 which is moderately strong indicating that HS measures something different than IHP.

Procedure

After deciding a date and time of administration of the questionnaire and arranging all the materials needed, rapport formation was carried out with the participant. After this, consent was taken and all the rights and ethics regarding the participation in the practical were reported to the participant verbally also in order to ensure that there were no doubts or confusions. All the necessary instructions were verbally given to the participant. The data was collected through Google Form to reduce costs and aid the process of data collection. The items were completed serially by the participant. After completion, debriefing was carried out carefully. All of the doubts regarding the questionnaire and its administration were addressed. The participant was thanked for their time.

Results

Table I: Mean and Standard Deviation (SD) scores of the college-going students and individuals in middle adulthood on the three subscales and the total score of the Homophobia Scale (HS).

	Age Group	N	Mean	SD	t
Negative Affect	18-21	115	6.36	5.41	7.410**
	40-60	101	12.70	7.12	
Behavioural Aggression	18-21	115	4.80	4.94	5.177**
	40-60	101	8.77	6.28	
Cognitive Negativism	18-21	115	3.20	3.75	8.676**
	40-60	101	8.31	4.89	
TOTAL SCORE	18-21	115	14.37	12.65	7.780**
	40-60	101	29.89	16.58	

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$

Table I shows the Mean and Standard Deviation (SD) scores of the college-going students and individuals in middle adulthood on the three subscales and the total score of the Homophobia Scale (HS). There was a significant difference between both the groups on all three subscales and the total score. Negative Affect subscale witnessed college-going students scoring lower ($M=6.36$, $SD=5.41$) than those in middle adulthood ($M=12.70$, $SD=7.12$). Similarly, Behavioural Aggression subscale also had lower scores for the younger age group ($M=4.80$, $SD=4.94$) than the older age group ($M=8.77$, $SD=6.28$). The Cognitive Negativism subscale also had similar results with college-going students scoring less ($M=3.20$, $SD=3.75$) than the middle adulthood group ($M=8.31$, $SD=4.89$). Lastly, the total score on the Homophobia Scale (HS) also witnessed lower scores in the younger age group ($M=14.37$, $SD=12.65$) than those in the middle adulthood age group ($M=29.89$, $SD=16.58$).

Discussion

The present research was a quantitative study assessing the intergenerational attitude change towards homosexuality in India, in which two age groups were there, out of which 115 participants were there in the 18 to 21 years old college-going students while the older age group with age range of 40-60 years middle adulthood individuals had 101 participants, making up a total of 216 participants in this study. It was hypothesized there will be significant differences in the attitudes towards homosexuality between the two age groups i.e., 18-21 years, college – going students' group and the 40-60 years, middle adulthood group. The Homophobia Scale (HS) was employed for assessing the attitudes towards homosexuality.

A significant difference was found in the attitudes of the two cohorts with the younger age group having more positive and accepting attitudes towards homosexuality while the older age group having more negative, conservative and homophobic attitudes towards homosexuality. Regarding the attitudes of the younger cohort, the younger age group of 18-21 years, scored low on all the three subscales as well as the overall attitude scale; Negative Affect subscale ($M=6.36$, $SD=5.41$), Behavioural Aggression subscale ($M=4.80$, $SD=4.94$), Cognitive Negativism subscale ($M=3.20$, $SD=3.75$) and the total score on the Homophobia Scale (HS; ($M=14.37$, $SD=12.65$)). On the other hand, the older group had higher scores on all three subscales and the total score as well; Negative Affect subscale ($M=12.70$, $SD=7.12$), Behavioural Aggression subscale ($M=8.77$, $SD=6.28$), Cognitive Negativism subscale ($M=8.31$, $SD=4.89$) and the total score on the scale ($M=29.89$, $SD=16.58$).

These results suggest a highly significant difference between the two generations in the attitudes towards homosexuality which has

led us to retain the hypothesis. The findings of this study reveal that people who are more likely to perceive homosexuals in a negative manner are from middle adulthood falling in the age group 40 to 60 years old. One reason behind this negative judgement, as suggested by Adela (2010) is that older people often have lesser information and knowledge about the LGBTQIA+ Community which makes them distant from the experiences of people belonging to the community. Cheng et al. (2016) in their research suggested another reason for this positive change in the attitudes in the younger generations, which is because the younger population is able to devote more time and energy as compared to the individuals in the middle age, which in turn increases their awareness about social issues. There is also a higher probability of the younger generation investing in social issues and problems when they are not preoccupied with their domestic tasks and career-oriented tasks. Moreover, the participants falling in the age range of 18 to 21 and who are college – going students became adults during a time when there were debates and arguments going on over Homosexuality in India and whether a decision should be taken to decriminalize it, which may have prompted them to understand about it more, thus increasing their awareness and allowing them to make more informed opinions and attitudes. The participants representing the younger generation also witnessed the scrapping of Article 377 of the Indian Constitution which decriminalized homosexuality and having sexual relations between consenting individuals of the same gender and/or sex. This increase in the attention given by government and media to these issues led to absorbing more knowledge by the younger people, resulting in more liberal and positive attitudes towards homosexuality and homosexuals. This is consistent with prior studies which suggested that when there are

dramatic modifications in the political, cultural, and legal systems related to an issue, there are changes in the attitudes of that cohort which is known as Period Effects (Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009).

Tolerance and acceptance for homosexuality in the younger generation can also be explained due to exposure to novel ideas, thoughts and perspectives which are often accompanied by being in a college or university. Another factor influencing change in attitudes in particularly younger people is that younger people have been observed to be malleable i.e., they are accepting and open to a diverse range of attitudes (Treas, 2002). Keeping aside factors like secularism, individualism and higher level of education which may lead to more tolerance and acceptance, transitions in the early life course like leaving home and having a job etc. increases the influence of peers and friends on an individual, which is the reason for liberal attitudes (Treas, 2002). This is an explanation to why the younger population manifests more positive, liberal, accepting and tolerating attitudes towards diverse issues.

Socializing agents are also found to be playing a role in forming the valence and direction of attitudes towards any issue. Van de Meerendonk and Scheepers (2004) found that older people are found to be intolerant and negative towards issues like homosexuality because they were socialized during a time when homosexuality was believed to be a disease, sin or a crime and considered something immoral or unethical. As they experienced exposure to socializing circumstances including conventional norms and perspectives on homosexuality and constraints on freedom and liberty of individuals. There was also a denial of equality in rights to gay and lesbian individuals in the previous decades by legislature and society which may have led to the formation of homophobic attitudes.

Gradually, homosexuality was found to be natural and also decriminalized which has led to formation of more positive and supportive attitudes towards homosexuality. This is known as Cohort Socialization which means that differences in socializing circumstances can explain the reasons for variety in opinions, attitudes and values. People who have experienced exposure to conventional socializing agents and socializing environments where traditional rules and norms existed like being a member of denomination, attending religious institutions like church and those who are old as well as less well – educated (Van de Meerendonk&Scheepers, 2004). Strand (1998) concluded that “massive generational differences in socialization environments” had led to more support for equal rights for lesbians and gay men among younger cohorts. The overall results suggest that the theories of socializing agents (Durkheim, 1897/1951) and socializing circumstances (Mannheim, 1936/1972) provide us with rather good explanations of which social categories deny lesbians and gay men equal rights more strongly than other categories. In a recent study, interviews were conducted with participants who responded to a questionnaire on homosexuality. Thematic Analysis was carried out and the following themes were obtained: homosexuality is a mental disorder, more awareness should be there regarding homosexuality, one should have the freedom regarding the choice of one’s sexuality, homosexuality should be legal, homosexuality is opposed to the Indian culture, sympathizing with homosexuals, discriminating against homosexuals, role of media, homosexuality is natural and homosexuality is a kind of criminal behaviour. These themes shed light on the variety of reasons and factors responsible for the formation and development of a variety of attitudes towards homosexuality (Anand, 2016).

Apart from the socializing agents like religious and educational institutions, there are also some individual characteristics and contextual characteristics. Individual characteristics like religiosity, education, cohort socialization, supporting conventionalism and more attachment to traditions are found to be playing a role in developing attitudes towards homosexuality. Contextual characteristics are the attributes of the country which also shape the beliefs, opinions and attitudes towards a wide variety of issues. These characteristics include the nature of laws on homosexuality and the religious climate of the country which means whether the country is secular or highly religious. Attitudes towards homosexuality are a function of age, religiosity, religious affiliation, contact with queer individuals (Adela, 2010). Being in a country that is highly religious and has restrictive laws on homosexuality has people with more negativity in attitudes towards homosexuality as compared to the people living in countries which are secular and have liberal laws on homosexuality (Van den Akker et al., 2012).

Conclusion

This study aimed to study the intergenerational attitude change towards homosexuality in an Indian setting. The present study revealed highly significant differences in the attitudes towards homosexuality between the two generations indicating that there is an intergenerational attitude change towards homosexuality in India. The participants from the younger age group i.e., 18-21 years old, college going students, demonstrated a more positive and tolerant attitude towards homosexuality than those who are in their middle adulthood, falling in the age group 40-60 years. A number of factors have been suggested by numerous researchers responsible for this change in the attitudes. It is inferred that there is a significant difference in the attitude

of the two generations towards homosexuality in the Indian context. However, there were some drawbacks in the present study. Since a self – report measure was utilized to assess the attitudes towards homosexuality, there is a possibility that participants might have responded in a socially desirable way. The attitude scale employed in the study was not standardized on the Indian sample. These limitations should be avoided in the subsequent studies being conducted in the similar arena. This study has several strengths as well. There are fewer studies which have studied the attitude towards homosexuality in the Indian population. The research was conducted on a sample which was large enough which increases the generalizability of the findings of this research. Efforts were put in to make the sample as heterogeneous as possible. Future studies should employ a tool that has been standardized and developed for the Indian population. Other variables, apart from the age can be used like marital status, influence of social media, socio-economic variables. Another suggestion is to employ a mixed methods approach including both quantitative and qualitative aspects to assess the change and understand the factors responsible for this change.

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Nishchay Kohli, Research Scholar, Department of Psychology, Zahir Husain Centre for Educational Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Email: kohli.15.nishchay@gmail.com