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IRAN

# The Forbidden Tale of LGB in Iran

A Comprehensive Research Study On LGB

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## ACRONYMS

**APA** The American Psychiatric Association, American Psychological Association

**CEDAW** Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

**CGN** Childhood Gender Nonconformity

**DSM-II** Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of classification of mental disorders

**DOMA** Defence of Marriage Act

**ECHR** European Convention on Human Rights

**ECTHR** European Court of Human Rights

**EU** European Union

**GBV** Gender-based violence

**GLSEN** Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network

**GSC** Gender Confirmation Surgery

**HRC** Human Rights Committee

**HRW** Human Rights Watch

**ICCPR** International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

**ICESC** International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

**IDAHOT** International Day against Homophobia and Tran's phobia,

**ILGA** International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association

**IMMAAN** a Muslim LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) support group

**LGB** Lesbian, gay, bisexual

**LGBT** Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender

**MSM** Men having sex with men

**NARTH National** Association for Research & Therapy of Homosexuality

**NGO** Non-governmental organisation

**PDA** Public Displays of Affection

**SOGI** Sexual orientation and gender identity

**SOV** Sexual Orientation Violence

**SRS** Sex Reassignment Surgery

**TGNC** Trans and Gender Non-Conforming

**TIGR** The Initiative for Equal Rights

**UN** United Nations

**UNGA** United Nations General Assembly

**UDHR** Universal Declaration of Human Rights

**UNIFEM** United Nations Fund for Women

**YRBS** Youth Risk Behaviour Surveillance

**WAS** World Association for Sexual Health

**WHO** World Health Organization

**WLUML** Women Living Under Muslim Law

**WSW** Women having Sex with Women

## TERMINOLOGY/GLOSSARY

The following is a list of the most commonly used terms or institutions referred to in this research study.

<b>Asexual</b>	<b>Having no sexual desire for persons of the same sex or opposite sex</b>
<b>Bisexual</b>	An individual who is emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to males/men and females/women. This attraction does not have to be equally split or indicative of a level of interest that is the same across the genders or sexes an individual may be attracted to.
<b>Cisgender</b>	Describes people who identify with the sex they were assigned at birth.
<b>Coming Out</b>	Coming out describes a person who is open about being bisexual, gay, lesbian, or transgender. Coming out is a lifelong process of self-acceptance of one's sexual orientation and/or gender identity.
<b>Gay</b>	<b>Male</b> who are primarily emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to members of the same sex and/or gender. More commonly used when referring to men who are attracted to other men, but can be applicable to women. This umbrella term is often used to refer to the LGB community as a whole, or as an individual identity label for anyone who does not identify as heterosexual. It is also noteworthy to observe that the word "Gay" is used for the first time on film in reference to homosexuality ( <i>The First Time "Gay", Meaning "Homosexual", Was Used as Such in a Film". todayifoundout.com. 17 January 2011.</i> )
<b>Gender</b>	A term that refers to social or cultural distinctions associated with a given sex; it is generally considered to be a socially constructed concept. These set of socially constructed standards of community, identity, and covert and overt behaviours, ascribed to persons by virtue of their apparent biological makeup. ( <i>American Psychological Association Task Force on Gender Identity and Gender Variance 2008; West and Zimmerman 1987</i> ). Gender has been viewed as a critical means by which societal structures of power, privilege, and

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oppression are shaped (*Moradi and Yoder 2011*) A person's sex, as determined by their biology, does not always correspond with their gender. Therefore, the terms "sex" and "gender" are not interchangeable.

**Gender Identity** One's internal, personal sense of being male, female, or third-gender. For transgender and third gender people, their birth-assigned sex and their own internal sense of gender identity do not match.

**Heteronormativity** The set of power relations that normalize and regiment sexuality, marginalizing everything outside the ideals of heterosexuality, monogamy, and gender conformity.

**Heterosexual** An individual who enduring physical, romantic, emotional, and/or spiritual attraction is to people of a different sex.

**Homophobia** A broadly defined dislike or hatred toward homosexuals, including both cultural and personal biases against homosexuals. Homophobia has dual facets including both internalized homophobia, i.e., the internalization of society's anti-homosexual sentiments within the psyche of gay and lesbian individuals, as well as external (generally heterosexual) homophobia. It can be measured on a continuum from mild anti-homosexual bias, through overt phobic avoidance of same sex socialization (*Fyfe, 1983*)

**Homosexual** A person primarily emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to members of the same sex/gender. At one time this term was considered stigmatizing (particularly as a noun) due to its history as a category of mental illness, and was discouraged for common use (gay or lesbian is used instead). A 1993 Janus Report estimated that nine percent of men and five percent of women had more than "occasional" homosexual relationships. The 2000 U.S. Census Bureau found that homosexual couples constitute less than 1% of American households. In August 2002, Gallup the average estimates were that 21% of men are gay.

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<b>Intersex</b>	Describes a person whose biological sex is ambiguous.
<b>Lesbians</b>	Women who have the capacity to be attracted romantically, erotically, and/or emotionally to some other women. In August 2002, Gallup the average estimates were that 21% of men are gay and 22% of women are lesbians.
<b>LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL TRANSGENDER</b>	Individuals who fall in between the two end points are typically labelled as bisexual and treated as a single homogenous group by researchers.
<b>Sex</b>	refers to physical or physiological differences between male, female, and intersex bodies, including both primary sex characteristics (the reproductive system) and secondary sex characteristics (such as breasts and facial hair).The physical, biological state of a person's genital area that makes him/her fit into the categories labelled female/male.
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	An enduring emotional, romantic, sexual and/or affectional attraction to another person. It can be distinguished from other aspects of sexuality including biological sex, gender identity (the psychological sense of being male or female) and the social gender role, adherence to cultural norms for feminine and masculine behaviour.( <i>Sexual orientation discrimination, Equality and Human Rights</i> ... <a href="http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice">www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice</a> ). Sexual orientation is a personal characteristic that forms part of who you are. It covers the range of human sexuality from lesbian and gay, to bisexual and heterosexual.
<b>Sexuality</b>	The desires human being possess in relation to one another, interest in and attraction to others, as well as the capacity to have erotic experiences and responses to reproduce and to share satisfactory inner feelings. Sexuality ranges differently through sexes and genders and can be directed toward a different sex or the same sex. Halperin (1990) argued a social constructionist paradigm, suggesting that sexuality is a matter of invention, and before this invention, sexual evaluation was determined by one's sexual acts, not their sexual

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	orientation. The sexual desire can be towards the opposite sex or the same sex. Most sexuality researchers believe that sexual preference is determined very early in life.
<b>Transphobia</b>	Fear or hatred of transgender people, sometimes manifesting in discrimination, isolation, harassment, or violence. <i>See also</i> phobia, homophobia
<b>Transgender</b>	An adjective that is an umbrella term used to describe the full range of individuals whose gender identity and/or gender role does not conform to what is typically associated with their sex assigned at birth. Sex and gender do not always align. Whilst the term “transgender” is commonly accepted, not all TGNC people self-identify as transgender. Individuals who fall in this category may feel as if they are in the wrong gender, but this perception may or may not correlate with a desire for surgical or hormonal reassignment ( <i>Meier &amp; Labuski, 2013 (Page 1 of 7 Definitions Related to Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity in APA Documents. APA Dictionary of Psychology Citation American Psychological Association. (2015).</i>
<b>Tamkeen</b>	A legal concept under Iranian legislation that refers to the submission of a woman (wife) to the will of her husband.

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Although the terms cited above assist in distinguishing the gradations of sexuality they still reinforce the idea of sexual orientation as existing on a continuum between homosexuality and heterosexuality. More recently, research has sought to complicate the middle points on the sexual orientation continuum with labels such as bi-heterosexual, bi-bisexual, bi-lesbian<sup>1</sup>, bi-curious<sup>2</sup>, mostly straight<sup>3</sup>, and mostly heterosexual<sup>4</sup>. In addition, these labels place

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<sup>1</sup> Weinrich, J. D., & Klein, F. (2002). Bi-gay, bi-straight, and bi-bi: Three bisexual subgroups identified using cluster analysis of the Klein Sexual Orientation Grid. *Journal of Bisexuality*, 2(4), 109–139

<sup>2</sup> Morgan, E. M., & Thompson, E. M. (2006). Young women's sexual experiences within same sex friendships: Discovering and defining bisexual and bi-curious identity. *Journal of Bisexuality*, 6(3), 7–34.

<sup>3</sup> Morgan, E. M., & Thompson, E. M. (2008). “Mostly Straight” Young Women: Variations in Sexual Behavior and Identity Development. *Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 2008, Vol. 44, No. 1, 15–21

<sup>4</sup> Vrangalova, Z., & Savin-Williams, R. C. (2012). Mostly heterosexual and mostly gay/lesbian: Evidence for new sexual orientation identities. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 41, 85–101. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10508-012-9921-y>.



bisexuality and other plurisexual experiences as a blend of heterosexual and homosexual desires and linguistically serve to rectify distinct categories of heterosexual, lesbian/gay, and bisexual to the exclusion of other identity labels.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Some years ago while working on my research related to Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)<sup>5</sup> and Early Child Marriage (ECM) in Iran<sup>6</sup> also concept of so called "White Marriage" (Co habitation) I came across a group of individuals with no socially acceptable gender identity. These individuals are commonly described in one acronym, LGB, which stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual. LGB refers to a broad group of people who are highly diverse when it comes to gender, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. In general, it can be a sensitive subject, especially for young people who may be confused about their sexuality, or may fear discrimination and stigma. In Iran, being a member of the LGB community is fraught with danger. Neither society nor any legal institution supports you and you live in constant fear of being persecuted. I decided to research this topic because I wanted to carry out first hand anthropological study at the same time tell their story of struggle and fear and hope that this will bring about positive change.

That encounter was a life changing moment for me and I gained the courage to explore the secret lives which are unknown to many of us. When I made the decision to produce a research study on LGB lives in Iran, straight away it became clear that in order to uncover and illuminate their cauldron of hardship, this would necessitated being physically present inside the country rather than in the cold comfort of a sterile world shielded from any indicia of threats or vulnerability of attacks. The research, committed to clarity amidst the reigning of suppression, felt the need to tell their story to the world by exposing what it actually means living in a jurisdiction that denies LGB's existence and the difficulties that befall those whom has to has deal with their family, relatives and the public. The qualitative phase of the research consisted of focus groups and in-depth interviews with LGB and heterosexual people, which were conducted by the fieldwork assistant group. For the first time this study wanted to record the opinions and feelings from those who are inside the country and later triangulated through the use of the Grounded Theory (GT) to extract genuine findings. Grounded theory helped us out to triangulate the emotions of respondents and proactively transformed them in narration.

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<sup>5</sup> Ahmady. K. 2015. In the Name of Tradition. Female Genital Mutilation in Iran.pp.49. Uncut/VOICES Press <http://kameelahmady.com/fgm-in-iran>

<sup>6</sup> Ahmady, Kameel. An Echo of Silence- A comprehensive research Study n Early Child Marriage (ECM) in Iran (2016). [https://www.novapublishers.com/catalog/product\\_info.php?products\\_id=62825](https://www.novapublishers.com/catalog/product_info.php?products_id=62825)

I took the courage because I want to validate what is happening to the LGB community in Iran, to enumerate the feelings of these individuals and to bring into the open what their society wants to suppress or keep hidden. It is my hopes that by being there to document it first-hand will bring truth and hopefully contribute to positive changes.

To complement that analysis this study also spoke to representatives of LGB hidden groups in three major cities in Iran. As a researcher and anthropologist it was a way to understand the perspective of LGB communities more broadly. Those approached were very receptive and glad to see that this work is part and parcel of our business. This study gives a summary of the review and what was found and as a result of the focus will be squarely on sharing the findings with commissioner and editors in particular, and continuing to monitor this study's progress.

The truth of LGB lives demands witnesses. Their existence is comprehensively and systematically denied. Writing this note of thanks is the finishing touch on this study. It has been a period of intense learning for me, not only in the scientific and anthropological arena, but also on a personal level. Writing this research has had a big impact on me. I would like to reflect on the people who have supported and helped me so much throughout this period. I am forever grateful to the field work team and to those brave souls that allowed their feeling to be recorded. Indeed, speaking out in that matter have put their lives at risk.

My special gratitude goes to my consultant, Ms. Humaira Naz, who helped to assembled, analyzed and developed a narrative. She provided stimulating suggestions and encouragement, which helped me coordinate this project especially in writing this report, although she may not agree with all of the interpretation of this paper.

I would like to thank Lorraine Koonce and Katayune Ehsani whom assisted with the editing and proofreading and provided insights and expertise that greatly assisted the research.

I would also like to show my gratitude to the LGBT groups, medical doctors and research centres for sharing their pearls of wisdom throughout the course of this research and also thank my "anonymous" reviewers for their beneficial insights and comments on an earlier version of the manuscript. Any errors are my own and should not tarnish the reputations of these esteemed persons.

I am grateful to all of those with whom I have had the pleasure to work during this and other related projects. Each of the members of my field work group has provided me extensive personal and professional guidance and taught me a great deal about both scientific research and life in general. This research project was only made achievable by detailed fact finding, field based training, support and assistance. In this regard, I would like to thank my first assistant Ms. Fariba Alamsi for her great work, analysis and team leading the fieldwork stages; Ms. Aysheh Shilan Aliyar who accompanied me by helping me with data collection and GT analyses along with Ms. Hakima Pashazadhe, Ms. Zhila Sedighi, Mr. Sabah Vatani, Ms. Vida Zafari, Ms. Fatana Sadegi, Ms. Golita Hosseinpour. My thanks also goes to Ms. Zeinab Pezeshkian who edited the Farsi version of this work and made it precise and structured and Mr Muslim Nazemi for his guidance and his assistance and step by step GT consultation. I would also like to thank Mr. Mohammad Hosseini in preparing the summary of the research and data analysis.

I am much obliged to thank all my friends and the LGB community members during the fieldwork stages in Tehran, Mashhad and Isfahan for their support, hospitality, views and suggestions.

Nobody has been more important to me in the pursuit of this project than the members of my family. I would like to thank them, whose love and guidance are with me in whatever I pursue.

Thank you very much, everyone!

Kameel Ahmady

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## WORD TO THE READERS

When I made the decision to produce a research study on LGB lives in Iran, straight away it became clear to me that in order to uncover and illuminate the constant fear and suppression they live under this would require me being physically present inside the country. There is no doubt that LGB individuals in Iran are entitled to be part of the wider community and their existence needs acknowledgment.

In the study “*Forbidden Tale*” I have tried my best to capture the myriad of social and emotive hurdles that exist in Iran for LGB individuals via social findings, first-hand accounts, interviews and feedback from the LGB individuals themselves. It is an honest examination of an unspoken subject. Moreover, the research illuminates and conveys a gripping narrative which will engross the readers.

This research study, committed to clarity amidst the numerous social and legal limitations, felt the need to tell the LGB individuals’ story to the world by exposing what it actually means living in a country that denies their existence. I wanted to record the opinions and feelings from those who are inside the country and I was determined by a strong sense of duty as researcher and anthropologist to report, analyse and expose.

The small fieldwork team of young and committed people who were helping to conduct the interviews were cognisant of the risks not only for our subjects but for us. Speaking out could further endanger their lives. Knowing that, they bravely treaded into this territory and were supported by a united view regarding sexual orientation as a human right. In Iran, for LGB individuals, openly being oneself is either comprehensively or systematically denied by the system and society, or can turn one into an unfortunate statistic.

What was apparent from the beginning of this research study was the constant fear that LGB individuals live under. Their unease and distress of being exposed was real. Moreover, many of them live a dual existence: heterosexual during the day and, at opportune moments, a LGB at night. They keep their voices lowered as they live with the constant fear that their family or friends would find out. Voicing their opinion was hazardous due to these security concerns. As they were aware of police decoys, they were more cautious about meeting up. I have changed names to protect sources.

The researchers took the risk to research this topic because we wanted to validate what is happening to the LGB community in Iran, to enumerate the feelings of these individuals and to uncover what their society wants to suppress or keep hidden. It is my hope that by being there to document it first-hand, this will bring out the truth and hopefully contribute to positive changes both within the society and the system.

I am forever grateful to the researchers and to those brave souls that allowed me to record their feelings.

## ABSTRACT

Sexuality is a central aspect of humanity and encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationships. Whilst sexuality can include all of these dimensions, not all of them are always experienced or expressed. Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, ethical, legal, historical, religious and spiritual factors<sup>7</sup>.

Up until now, the human rights reporting and media coverage of the LBGT community from Iran has mainly been compiled and documented from those who left Iran and are living in exile. There have been very few, if any, research studies undertaken on the LGB community in contemporary Iranian society and how the LGB community is viewed from the individual's own perspective. In essence, there is scarcely any information about the experiences of LGB individuals in Iran. More specifically, there has been little or no research about their lives and how LGB people in Iran feel that their experiences are affected by their sexual identity. This study attempts to fill this gap on this important subject. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first study conducted inside Iran exploring LGB in Iran. The present research study contributes a unique dimension to the literature on LGB by focusing specifically on Iran.

This study examines this unvisited field of sexuality in Iran by looking into the multiple complex dimensions of sexual identity and nuances within the LGB community against a rising recognition of one's sexual orientation. This study challenges misunderstandings of LGB and sexuality in Iran by scrutinising the myths and narratives that have so often misinformed gender, development policy and practice, in order to inspire a more inclusive approach.

This study is incredibly complex as it gives more than just a simple overview of sexual orientation and thoughts about gender within the spheres of the individuals' private and

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<sup>7</sup> FN Progress in Reproductive Health Research, No 67. Geneva: WHO. 2004, <http://www.who.int/reproductive health/hrp/progress/67.pdf>

public lives. For the first time, this intense research centred on in-depth interviews with over 300 individuals (60% male and 40% female) in 3 major Iranian cities: Tehran, Mashhad and Isfahan. This study addresses the challenges arising from contemporary changes in gender relationships and how this is played out in Iran whilst providing readers, LGB communities, universities and research centres, public and social advocates and students with the theoretical and methodological frameworks in which LGB is explored and researched. The purposes and key aims of this research project are to understand the perceptions, beliefs and of LGB in Iran through critical analysis from the individuals themselves and the challenges they face living in a religious, class based traditional and patriarchal bound society that has rejected LGB as an identity. It is here where this study begins to seek why.

The necessity of focusing on the LGB society and the vulnerability of its oppressed and silenced members was the motivation to shed light on the state of affairs of LGB individuals who have been intentionally neglected and socially marginalised.

This study weaves together phenomenological, hermeneutic, post-modern, and depth-psychological approaches to create a methodology of subjectivity suitable for researching the LGB experience that encompasses the examiner's own intuitions and feelings in the research study's verification criteria for safeguarding "objectivity". This approach places the individual as the final arbiter of any psychological discovery and, thus, provides unique solutions for the understanding of sacred phenomena that are firmly grounded in the felt-experience of embodied subjectivity.

### **Methodology (organization of the study, sampling, structures, measures)**

The data for this research study was collected over the course of one year between 2016 and 2017. Most projects of this nature lack sound methodology and often suffer under the almost inevitable weakness of convenience sampling. LGB individuals in Iran belong to a silenced minority who often are compelled to hide their sexual orientation from their families and friends out of a well-founded fear of reprisals and social rejection. Although this study that the 300 individuals may not be representative of the general population of LGB individuals in Iran but by far 300 interviews are more than enough to achieve a high standard and credible research method. This research study undoubtedly offers a window into the lives of



LGB individuals in Iran who live covert lives. It is the hope that the findings and conclusions in this study will lead to new policies and interventions. Hopefully future research studies should replicate this research with a larger, possibly nationally representative population, and outline the extent to which results vary by individual who identified as LGB.

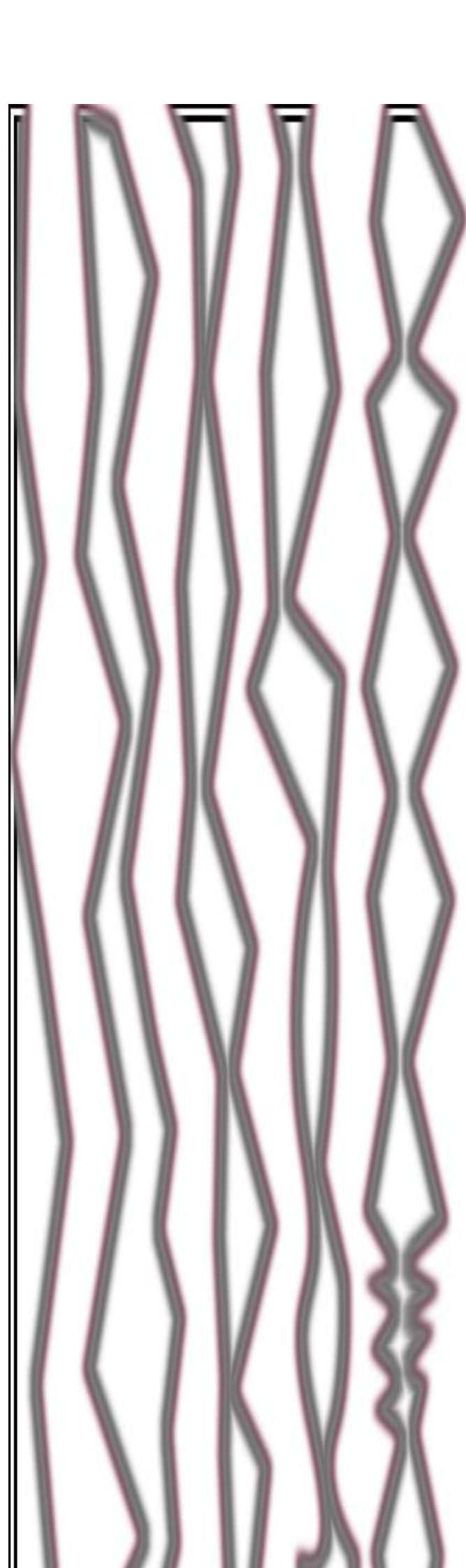
The study is retrospective; adults provided information about experiences that took place during their adolescent years. This plausibly lends itself to bias recall when describing specific family reactions to their LGB identity. To minimize this concern, this study created measures that queried as objectively as possible whether or not a specific family behaviour or response related to their LGB identity actually occurred. Additionally there was concern that respondents either will not answer sensitive questions regarding sexual orientation or will answer inaccurately. In particular, the study took extra precautions to enhance the privacy of the survey environment to encourage respondents to respond to sensitive questions sufficiently without feeling shy or self-conscious.

A unique feature of the scope of this research study is that it focuses only on LGB and not Transgender and or Transsexual individuals (who possess two different sides of sexuality that operate simultaneously). Transgender is normally part of the LGBT acronym. Transsexuals have been intentionally excluded from this study as their status in Iran is somewhat legally approved. Whilst they are recognized and legitimized in Iran, their situation is still dependent on one Fatwa line that allows them to undergo sex-change operations. In the mid-1980s a Fatwa by Iran's Supreme Cleric Imam Khomeini allowed transgender individuals officially recognized by the government to undergo sex reassignment surgery. As of 2008, Iran carries out more sex change operations than any other nation in the world except for Thailand. The government typically pays up to half the cost (and in some case in full) for those needing financial assistance, and the sex change is duly noted and recognised on the birth certificate.

As promising as this legal permission seems to be it is still not immune from sudden changes. For example, at any time a supreme cleric can issue a superseding fatwa revoking this right and thus deny Transgender basic civil and social rights. This important fact has been one of the reasons to exclude Transsexuals from this research in addition to the fact that transsexuals in Iran have already been studied and widely written about. Although Transsexuals as an identifiable group suffer from the same problems as homosexuals, such as labelling, violations and bullying the crucial difference is that the government does not deny their existence. Transsexuals in comparison to LGB individuals face less stigmatization and

ostracisation in Iran. (For further discussion see Chapter LGBT Rights in Iran). There was also a very genuine pressing concern amongst the researchers about sensitization and drawing attention to Transsexuals' relatively fragile position in Iranian society. This concern equally underlined the decision to concentrate the research study on LGB individuals and exclude trans genders.

Thus, taking into consideration time constraints, it was decided to focus the research study on LGB attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences and reactions in Iran in order to gain a larger amount of information over a shorter period of time. The necessity of focusing on LGB society and the vulnerability of its very oppressed and silenced members is of paramount importance. Nevertheless, in addressing LGB in Iranian society this is not to dismiss the various threats the transgender community faces, including being stigmatised, excluded, social or marital rejection, alienation and economic reprisals.



# Chapter 1

## The Rhetoric of Sexual Orientation -Definition, Explanation, & History

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### Contents:

- Definition, Explanation, & History
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- Homosexual
- Heterosexual or straight
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- Historical Narrative of LGBT and Its Struggle
- LGB in Iran-The Missing Pieces
- Iranians-Not coming out but in the Closets
- LGBT Literature in Iran



Sex as a biological characteristic, is usually the primordial question posed when a woman is expecting a baby. Loosely speaking, "sex" refers to the physical or physiological differences between male, female, and intersex bodies, including both primary sex characteristics (the reproductive system) and secondary sex characteristics (such as breasts and facial hair). Nevertheless, gender is socially determined based on characteristics derived from sexual classifications that in turn reflect the social or cultural distinctions associated with a given sex. Western society, as well as many others, has always recognized only two sexes. As our society operates in a binary system when it comes to gender, it is viewed as only having two options: male or female. Sex (as female or male), and gender (as woman or man) are the attributed titles that are mostly confused and mistakenly used. Sex is a biological category. Beemyn and Rankin argue that gender is distinct from sex, but related: they consider gender as the translation of biological realities into social expectations for "men" and "women"<sup>9</sup>. However we are now realising that a person's sex, as determined by their biology, does not always correspond with their gender. Therefore, the terms "sex" and "gender" are not interchangeable.

This sociocultural phenomenon of the division of individuals into either one or the other category according to their biological sex, each with its associated roles, clothing, and stereotypes, starts quite early. Although unborn and still swimming in the womb's amniotic fluid, once the sex is determined (usually between 16 and 20 weeks) as a girl or as a boy, social expectations and role responsibilities are automatically attached to the child in the womb, with a series of labels and duties that form one's identity. From conception, children are assigned a gender (either male or female) and socialized to conform to certain gender roles based on this assignment. Identity formation, thought of as self-labelling, reflects humans' strong desire to categorise and label themselves. Children are further conformed into prescribed gender roles at a very young age, possibly beginning with a pink versus blue swaddling blankets that quickly escalates to chosen toys and games that culturally are associated with girls or boys. When children are between the ages of two and three, they start to assimilate gender role stereotypes by the kinds of toys and games they prefer with similar preferences for clothing, household objects and work<sup>10</sup>. These gender roles continue to be

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<sup>9</sup> Beemyn, Genny, and Susan Rankin. 2011. *The Lives of Transgender People*. New York: Columbia University Press.

<sup>10</sup> Spencer A. Rathus. *Childhood: Voyages in Development*. Cengage Learning, 2013

constructed and later reinforced through accepted and approved social relationships and economic and political power dynamics.

Society has its own defined characteristics of a man or a woman reinforced by its socialisation process that conditions individuals to mimic and demonstrate a flawless adaptation of these carefully defined characteristics. However, characteristics of gender demonstrate enormous variation amongst different societies. For example, in certain Western cultures, it is considered feminine (or a trait of the female gender) to wear a dress or skirt. Whilst the idea of a man wearing a skirt is strictly taboo in some parts of the world under certain circumstances it is generally acceptable for men to wear skirts. Furthermore, in many Middle Eastern, Asian, and African cultures, dresses or skirts (often referred to as sarongs, robes, or gowns) are viewed as masculine. Similarly, the skirts (referred to as kilts) worn by Scottish males does not make him appear feminine in his culture.<sup>11</sup>

Generally speaking, gender refers to the widely shared set of expectations and norms linked to how women, men, girls and boys should behave<sup>12</sup>. The dichotomous view of gender (the notion that one is either male or female) is specific to certain cultures and is not universal. In fact, the hetero-homosexual binaries, the current sexual paradigm in American culture, is a relatively recent creation<sup>13</sup>

In some cultures, gender is viewed as fluid. What is interesting to note is that some societies accept a third dimension where an individual is not thought of as homosexual, but only as a passive effeminate partner. Previously some anthropologists used the term *Berdache* to refer to individuals who occasionally or permanently dressed and lived as the opposite gender as noted amongst certain Aboriginal groups<sup>14</sup>. The *Beardache* (gay Indians) were thought of as a third sex. It was acceptable for a man to have sex with a *Beardache*, but a taboo for *Beardaches* to have sex with each other<sup>15</sup>. This acceptance of a third gender can also be seen in the Samoan culture, in what is referred to as a *Fa'afafine*, roughly translated as “the way of

<sup>11</sup> Defining Sex, Gender, and Sexuality - Boundless [www.boundless.com](http://www.boundless.com)

<sup>12</sup> What is the link between sexuality and gender? | Sexuality ...spl.ids.ac.uk/

<sup>13</sup> Chauncey, G. (1995). Gay New York: The Making of the Gay Male World 1890-1940. London, England: Flamingo.

<sup>14</sup> Jacobs, Sue-Ellen, Wesley Thomas, and Sabine Lang. 1997. Two Spirit People: Native American Gender Identity, Sexuality, and Spirituality. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press.)

<sup>15</sup> Jill M. Chonody, Phillip S. Kavanagh, Michael R. Woodford. (2016) Does Closeness to Someone Who Is Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual Influence Etiology Beliefs About Homosexuality? Journal of Homosexuality 63:12, pages 1726-1748.

the woman”. This term describes individuals who are born biologically male but embodies both masculine and feminine traits. *Fa’afafines* are considered an important aspect of Samoan culture. Indeed, individuals from other cultures may mislabel them as homosexuals because *Fa’afafines* has a varied sexual life that may include men or women<sup>16</sup>.

Strict societal constructed norms are expected to be adhered to by both genders. In Western culture and industrialized nations, this translates to “masculine” versus “feminine”. Consequently, people tend to think of masculinity and femininity in dichotomous terms, viewing men and women as distinctly different opposites. Through this socialization process, one is introduced to certain norms that are typically linked to one’s biological sex. The norms are policed, internalised and upheld by a system of punishment and privileges. Although biology plays a pivotal role, the way in which sexuality is expressed and acted upon is highly influenced by society’s ideas of what is and is not correct.

At an early age, individuals are socialized to these norms from their family, education system, peers, media, and religion. The societies we live in dictate the right and wrong way to behave as men and women and these are mapped into ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ sexual practices, beliefs and behaviours. The polarization of roles based on gender demands that its members engage in upholding the straight-laced defined characteristics inherent in the traditional belief systems by exhibiting behaviours concurrent with those teachings including role-modelling behaviours. Thus any behaviour that falls outside these accepted straight-laced norms of defined characteristics clash against social acquiescence, and therefore, are not accepted. This deeply rooted mechanism of adherence to the socially accepted belief does not tolerate any deviations or changes including a strong excluding force in order to maintain strictly valued narratives.

The deeply rooted relationship between one man and one woman is sacred. According to this system, with the support of history, customs, well-established norms and the omniscient power of religion, the sacred is distinguished from the profane. What is deemed profane is any other sexual relationship or desire that exists outside this carefully socially proscribed

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<sup>16</sup> Poasa, Kris. 1992. “The Samoan Fa’afafine: One Case Study and Discussion of Transsexualism.” *Journal of Psychology & Human Sexuality* 5(3):39–51



norm of men being with women. Now, the LGBT classification is challenging these norms and dichotomy.

Although behaviours that are understood as masculine and feminine vary across cultures and time, newly emerging human rights' standards and the lack of empirical evidence supporting the pathologisation and medicalization of variations in sexual orientation expression have challenged these carefully socially proscribed norms<sup>17</sup>. Historically, the terms "sex" and "gender" have been used interchangeably, but, in modern society, their meanings are becoming increasingly delineated. The emerging new way of viewing sexual orientation demands for more inclusive strategies that bring in women, men and transgender. However this is not seen in class based, traditional and patriarchal Iran. These issues are discussed more openly in the following chapters.

Within the past two decades, the discourse on gender and sexuality has undergone many paradigm shifts, mainly due to the introduction of new terms to define sexual orientation and with the emergence of the Queer Theory in the 90s that developed in the context of gay and lesbian studies<sup>18</sup>. The Queer Theory argues that "identities are not fixed, but somewhat fluid."<sup>19</sup> Research over several decades has demonstrated that sexual orientation ranges along a continuum, from exclusive attraction to the opposite sex to exclusive fascination with the same sex. This is a natural part of what one is and is not a choice. Though usually set early in life, a person's sexual orientation can change over their lifetime. It is not unusual. This is called "fluidity", the notion that an individual's attractions and thus their sexual identities can change over time, consequently making it not static<sup>20</sup>.

Although confusion can prevail which often muddles sexual orientation with gender identity, both narratives are not synonymous as there is a very prominent difference. Sexual orientation relates to whom you are attracted and whom you feel drawn in terms of romance, emotions, and sex. It is different from gender identity. Gender identity is not about attraction

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<sup>17</sup> Drescher J. Queer diagnoses: parallels and contrasts in the history of homosexuality, gender variance, and the diagnostic and statistical manual. *Arch Sex Behav.* 2010; 39(2):427–60. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10508-009-9531-5>. See, also O'Flaherty M, Fisher J. Sexual orientation, gender identity and international human rights law: contextualising the Yogyakarta Principles. *Human Rights Law Rev.* 2008; 8(2):207–48

<sup>18</sup> Butler. Judith *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 1990

<sup>19</sup> Wood, T, Julia "Gendered Lives: Communication, Gender and Culture". Page 62

<sup>20</sup> Katz-Wise, Sabra L. "Sexual fluidity in young adult women and men: Associations with sexual orientation and sexual identity development." *Psychology & Sexuality* 6.2 (2015): 189-208.



towards someone, but about who you are: male, female, or gender queer, etc. The expression of gender identity describes a person's psychological identification with a particular gender, rather than their attraction to people. The American Psychological Association described it as: "the person's basic sense of being male, female, or of indeterminate sex"<sup>21</sup>. This term was initially coined in the middle 1960s, describing one's persistent inner sense of belonging to either the male and female gender category<sup>22</sup>. The concept of gender identity has evolved over time to include those people who do not identify either as female or male: a "person's self-concept of their gender (regardless of their biological sex) is called their gender identity"<sup>23</sup>. Sexual orientation includes the individual physical and affectional sexual preferences for relationships with members of the same and/or opposite biological sex.

Sexual orientation is not a characteristic of an individual, as it can be also be defined in terms of relationships with others or, in other words, the intimate personal relationship where people feel a deep need for attachment and intimacy<sup>24</sup>. It is closely related to sexual identity and can easily be seen through the prisms of people's behaviours with others, including such simple actions as holding hands or kissing<sup>25</sup>. In different cultures, different labels may be used to describe people who express their attractions.

The sexual orientation continuum is broadly comprised of three categories: homosexual, bisexual, and heterosexual. Asexuality<sup>26</sup> is the fourth type which is often not discussed. The exact reasons of how an individual develops a particular sort of social orientation are highly debated and not well understood by scientists. Various theories have proposed differing sources. Many scientists share the view that sexual orientation is shaped for most people at an early age.<sup>27</sup> Some researcher's see an interplay amongst genetic, hormonal,

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<sup>21</sup> American Psychological Association (2009a). Report of the Task Force on Gender Identity and Gender Variance. Available at: <http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/policy/gender-identity-report.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> Money J. (1994). The concept of gender identity disorder in childhood and adolescence after 39 years. *J. Sex Marital Ther.* 20 163–177. 10.1080/00926239408403428 [PubMed] [Cross Ref]

<sup>23</sup> Lev A. I. (2004). *Transgender Emergence: Therapeutic Guidelines for Working with Gender-Variant People and their Families*. New York, NY: Haworth Clinical Practice Press.

<sup>24</sup> Giddens, Anthony. *The transformation of intimacy: Sexuality, love and eroticism in modern societies*. John Wiley & Sons, 2013.

<sup>25</sup> American Psychological Association. (2008). *Answers to your questions: For a better understanding of sexual orientation and homosexuality*. Washington, DC: Author. [Retrieved from [www.apa.org/topics/orientation.pdf](http://www.apa.org/topics/orientation.pdf).]

<sup>26</sup> the lack of sexual attraction to others

<sup>27</sup> American Psychological Association *Answers to Your Questions About Sexual*, [www.massresistance.org/.../answers-to-your-questions.pdf](http://www.massresistance.org/.../answers-to-your-questions.pdf)

developmental, social, and cultural influences on sexual orientation; however, there is no particular singular factor or factors that are exclusively determinative.

Theory and research concerning sexual orientation has been restricted in its scope and influence and by the lack of clear and widely accepted definitions of terms like heterosexual, bisexual, and homosexual<sup>28</sup>. Although umbrella terms cover most aspects of sexual identity, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) may have more than one meaning based on the social context. This chapter examines the components of sexual orientation with the widespread terminologies that are generally used for expressing these orientations. This study may help to clarify the meanings of the above mentioned terms used in research on sexual identity.

It is pertinent to mention that whilst the concept of LGBT covers the majority of sexual and gender expressions, it still does not cover the full range of sexual and gender non-conforming people. However, in line with common terminology, this study uses the term LGBT to represent all sexual and gender minorities, excluding heterosexual and asexual.

### ***LGBT: The Umbrella Terms***

LGBT is the acronym used to describe lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender individuals. The LGBT community is diverse in its essence where the acronym expresses homogeneity to non-heterosexuals. Nonetheless, despite the fact that they are tied together in one acronym, “each letter represents a wide range of people of different races, ethnicities, ages, socioeconomic status and identities”<sup>29</sup>. With a vocal and rising LGBT community that embraces and recognizes all genders and sexualities, a word to reflect the community’s diverse membership is desperately needed. The most inclusive acronym that is currently in use is LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual,), but it still omits genders and sexualities such as heterosexuals and asexual. In the context of this research study, it is important to understand how members of this community might identify and define themselves. Although this is not an exhaustive list, it is a starting point. Below is the description of the main and prominent terms of sexuality that falls under the category of LGBT, heterosexuals, and asexual. Further clarification can be found in the definition section.

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<sup>28</sup> James M. Lovelock. (2014) Using the Klein Sexual Orientation Grid in Sociological Studies. Journal of Bisexuality 14:3-4, pages 457-467.

<sup>29</sup> Kevin L Ard, Harvey J Makadon. IMPROVING THE HEALTH CARE OF LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER (LGBT) PEOPLE: Understanding and Eliminating Health Disparities. Page 3

*a. Lesbian & Gays-Homosexuality:*

Same sex orientation is not a new concept; its history is unknown and it has existed in every era. Many early written sculptures of homosexuality indicated that a tolerant attitude to same-sex relationships has existed in many cultures, as it was considered a transitional rite of passage for young men in early Greek and Roman societies<sup>30</sup>. However, the term homosexual was coined and developed in late 19<sup>th</sup> century by a German psychologist, Karoly Maria Benkert<sup>31</sup>. Before this, homosexuality was considered to be an aspect of sexuality without any name or label. In the past, same sex behaviour was regarded as a sin and the greatest disapproval was found in many religious faiths. Homosexuality" was always regarded as a Western and foreign concept in countries where practicing this is still prohibited.

Generally, homosexuality is an identity where people self-identify as gay or lesbian. Under this identification, people are primarily attracted to and/or have sex with people of the same sex. The expression of homosexuality often refers to men and women having a sexual orientation towards persons of the same sex. However, the word homosexual can mean many things dependent on the culture and temporal period as we will discuss in this study. Some same-sex eroticism would not be classified as homosexual in some modern or Western societies. This sexual orientation identity is now cemented in the general consensus that an individual's sexual attraction toward persons of the same sex was an inherent and unchanging aspect of their personality. Though invention of homosexual as a concept changed the entire narrative, nonetheless, homosexual is a term limited in its scope. It does not include bisexual, transgender, queer, or many of the other diverse sexual orientations and gender identities<sup>32</sup>.

*b. Bisexual:*

The term bisexuality is used to describe the existence of both masculine and feminine aspects in all human beings. Until recently, bisexual individuals have been a largely invisible and unacknowledged segment of the population as they often keep their orientation hidden and secret. Bisexuality in its generic form is difficult for some people to understand. For most people, sexual identity exists in two states: heterosexuality and homosexuality. However,

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<sup>30</sup> Butrica, "Some Myths and Anomalies in the Study of Roman Sexuality," in *Same-Sex Desire and Love in Greco-Roman Antiquity*

<sup>31</sup> Pickett, Brent, "Homosexuality", *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2015/entries/homosexuality/>>

<sup>32</sup> Jonathan Ned Katz, *Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the USA* (1978)

given the fluid nature of human sexuality and its many variations, the existing two classifications of sexuality cannot describe it effectively. Bisexual women and men have a sexual orientation not only towards persons of the same sex but also to those of the opposite sex and with similar intensity. This is not just an identity label but a trait in human sexuality that can describe a set of behaviours<sup>33</sup>. Whereas men are more likely to be either gay or straight (Bisexual Invisibility: Impacts and Recommendations', issued by the San Francisco Human Rights Commission's LGBT Advisory Committee<sup>34</sup>) bisexuality is more common in women than men. Despite increasing support for lesbian and gay individuals, this same degree of tolerance has not extended to bisexual individuals. As per the report, bisexuals in the United States, face widespread discrimination, even from their non-heterosexual peers<sup>35</sup>.

Unlike the support and unity that exist in gay men and lesbian women for creating community network support and political organisations, bisexual individuals have found it difficult to come out and form political and social alliance to gain visibility and political power. Due to the rigid dichotomy between gay and straight, the bisexual communities also face hardship to be accepted by the homosexual communities. They often feel alienated and rejected.

### *c. Transgender vs. Cisgender*

Although 'Transgender' is an umbrella term that refers to people whose gender identity differs from the biological sex attribute from birth, 36 the transgender terminology is complex and in constant flux. Transgender, as homosexuals, have always existed; their existence can be seen in myths, legends, and oral and written histories on every continent. They are the most forgotten and neglected group in the LGBT movement as this 'T' quadrant reflects transgendered individuals who sometimes face disrespect and opposition from more mainstream lesbians and gays. There is a visible and obvious division in the ranks of this powerful movement and perceived valid reasons for this division. The Trans gender's narrative challenges the public gender narrative that has been successfully promoted in the culture.

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<sup>33</sup> Jerrold S. Greenberg, Clint E. Bruess, Sara B. Oswalt Jones & Bartlett Publishers, 2016

<sup>34</sup> San Francisco Human Rights Commission, LGBT Advisory Committee. "Bisexual Invisibility: Impacts and Recommendations", March 2011.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Spade D. 2008. Documenting Gender. Hastings Law Journal. 59:731-842. Available from: <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Spade-Documenting-Gender-Apr-2008.pdf>

Some people feel that the sex they were assigned to at birth does not correspond to their gender identity, or the gender that they feel is trapped inside. These people are often called transgender. According to the definition presented by the Institute of Medicine “The term transgender refers to a diverse population that significantly separate themselves from gender norms”<sup>37</sup>. The term transgender also defines anyone whose gender identity is not aligned with the sex assigned to them at birth<sup>38</sup>. Use of hormones or gender-affirming surgery is also a preference of certain transgender groups; nonetheless, not all transgender individuals undergo this. Someone may be diagnosed with gender dysphoria whether or not that person has taken any steps to align their gender expression with their (inner) gender identity.<sup>39</sup>

At the polar end of the transgender orientation is cis-gender, which refers to individuals whose gender identity corresponds to the sex they were assigned at birth<sup>40</sup>. *Cis-gender* describes individuals whose biological body and gender identity are aligned. Thus, someone who is not transgender is cisgender and vice versa<sup>41</sup>.

### ***Heterosexual or Straight***

Heterosexual defines the characteristics of a straight person with a sexual orientation towards a person of the opposite sex. Heterosexuality has had its history of struggling with the identity crises. The discourse on heterosexuality has been slow and the definition was not completely formulated in the American popular culture until the 1920s. During the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Dorland’s Medical Dictionary defined heterosexuality as an “abnormal or perverted appetite towards the opposite sex.” More than two decades later, in 1923, another definition came out by the Merriam Webster’s dictionary labelling heterosexuality as a “morbid sexual passion for one of the opposite sex”. It was only in 1934 after decades of hovering in a state

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<sup>37</sup> Institute of Medicine (IOM). 2011. The Health of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People: Building a Foundation for Better Understanding. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. Available from: <http://www.nationalacademies.org/hmd/Reports/2011/The-Health-of-Lesbian-GayBisexual-and-Transgender-People.aspx>.

<sup>38</sup> Spade D. 2008. Documenting Gender. Hastings Law Journal. 59:731-842. Available from: <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Spade-Documenting-Gender-Apr-2008.pdf>

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Schilt, Kristen; Westbrook, Laurel (August 2009). "Doing Gender, Doing Heteronormativity: 'Gender Normals,' Transgender People, and the Social Maintenance of Heterosexuality". *Gender & Society*. 23 (4): 440–464 [461]

<sup>41</sup> Beemyn, Genny, and Susan Rankin. 2011. The Lives of Transgender People. New York: Columbia University Press.

of doubt, the term heterosexuality finally was graced with the meaning that is now considered a term of normalcy in human sexuality<sup>42</sup>.

Heterosexuality is the only sexual orientation in which sexual and marital relations mostly take place between people of the opposite sexes. While Heteronormativity is the belief that supports heterosexuality and which is often linked to heterosexist and homophobia.<sup>43</sup>. Between the 1890s and the 1960s the terms heterosexual and homosexual moved into the American popular culture and started staking its place as the very first sign of a stable and normal sexuality. The arrival of the term was not welcomed by the feminists as for them this term affirmed the superiority of men over women<sup>44</sup>. Even more contentious, was the phrase "Compulsory Heterosexuality" originated by *Adrienne Cecile Rich*, an American poet, essayist and radical feminist<sup>45</sup> who argued that human beings are not born heterosexual.<sup>46</sup> She also refused to accept this as a normal sexuality. She defines heterosexuality as "in service of and emerges from the subjection of women to men"<sup>47</sup>.

## ***Asexuality***

A person who never feels sexually attracted to anyone can be formally recognized as a distinct, fourth sexual orientation according to Canadian researchers<sup>48</sup>. They may view other people are physically attractive, or they may want to be in romantic relationships with people but they are not interested in having sex or engaging in sexual practices with other people.

Only recently has asexuality been a topic of discussion. In cultures where sex is a taboo topic and/or virginity is sacrosanct people do not usually need to assess their feelings and notice that they are asexual because their lack of sexual attraction is not marginalized. Bogaert (2004) in his study discusses that there are many demographic characteristics which

<sup>42</sup> Katz, Jonathan Ned (1995) *The Invention of Heterosexuality*. New York, NY: Dutton (Penguin Books).

<sup>43</sup> Lovaas, Karen, and Mercilee M. Jenkins. "Charting a Path through the 'Desert of Nothing.'" *Sexualities and Communication in Everyday Life: A Reader*. 8 July 2006. Sage Publications Inc. 5 May 2008

<sup>44</sup> Tong, Rosemarie. *Feminist Thoughts: A more comprehensive Introduction*. Avalon Publishing, 2013

<sup>45</sup> "Poet Adrienne Rich, 82, has died". *Los Angeles Times*. March 28, 2012. Retrieved March 29, 2012.

<sup>46</sup> Rich, Adrienne (1980). *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence*. Only women Press Ltd. p. 32. ISBN 0-906500-07-9.

<sup>47</sup> MacKinnon, *Sexual Harassment*, p. 219. Susan Schechter writes: "The push for heterosexual union at whatever cost is so intense that . . . it has become a cultural force of its own that creates battering. The ideology of romantic love and its jealous possession of the partner as property provide the masquerade for what can become severe abuse" (*Aegis: Magazine on Ending Violence Against Women* [July-August 1979]: 50-51).

<sup>48</sup> Recognize asexuality as its own, unique sexual orientation .[www.theprovince.com/health/asexuality+needs+recognized](http://www.theprovince.com/health/asexuality+needs+recognized)

differentiate an asexual from sexual human being. He found that significantly more women are inclined towards asexuality than men. Bogaert also found that compared to sexual, asexual had lower average socioeconomic status, and were less well-educated<sup>49</sup>.

In this part of Chapter One, we are going to describe many expressions used in different societies that lead heterosexuals to commit hate crimes towards LGBT individuals.

### ***The three Expressions of Sexual Prejudice-Homophobia, Bio phobia, Trans phobia***

As made clear from their labels, the three expressions of sexual prejudice reflect attitude, behaviours, and action of people toward homosexuals, bisexuals, and transgender. These are based on negative feelings and cultural/personal biases vis-a-vis LGBT. Research studies on prejudices based on sexual orientation have introduced a number of expressions to represent the inner hate of communities towards LGBT<sup>50</sup>. In this regard, there are certain names that have gained popularity in the academic and pragmatic world. They include homophobia, bi-phobia, and trans-phobia.

Trans-phobia is an expression of sexual prejudice that exhibits a negative attitude towards an individual because of his or her sexual orientation. In the contemporary world where LGBT is a rapidly growing term familiar to the majority of people, there is still some fear and sexual prejudice towards LGBT in communities. Fears of such nature create prejudices which further lead to various phobias and heightened sexual prejudices. The defined gender roles underpin homophobia, as many heterosexuals believe homosexuals are gender confused. In addition, there does appear to be a gender differentiation associated with external homophobia as heterosexual men were more homophobic than women. Nevertheless, gender was not a predictor of the level of internalized homophobia.

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<sup>49</sup> Bogaert, A.F. (2004). Asexuality: Prevalence and Associated Factors in a National Probability Sample. The Journal of Sex Research 41(3): 279-287.

<sup>50</sup> Nosek BA, Greenwald AG, Banaji MR (2007) The Implicit Association Test at age 7: A methodological and conceptual review. In: Bargh JA, editor. Automatic processes in social thinking and behavior. London: Psychology Press. pp. 265–292.

Another possible underpinning of homophobia is misogyny, where society's [disgust or disdain or hatred for] gay male sexuality is linked to gays who 'act like women,' thus abandoning the masculine privilege to which they are entitled; whereas a lesbian sexual orientation is seen as usurping male authority and privilege. Here gender differentiation is noted. Lesbians may be scorned for their behaviours and choices but are likely to be more understood. Studies have shown that males reported more sexual orientation –related victimization than females. The research by Cullen, Wright, and Alessandri demonstrates that that heterosexual male is more homophobic than the heterosexual female.<sup>51</sup> They are more biased and critical when dealing with the discourse of homosexuality.



A protest against homophobic behaviour in Iran

Most sexuality scholars concur that the scarce references to homosexuality in the Bible, the primary moral authority on the subject, laid the foundation for the modern basis for homophobia.<sup>52</sup> Sullivan and Wodarski (2002) mention that “the Bible references to homosexuality have become the modern basis for homophobia as the majority of anti-homosexual and homophobic attitudes and behaviours are supported by the major premise that homosexuality is unholy and/or forbidden by the Bible”.<sup>53</sup> This is sometimes the only area where leaders of all the major religious faiths show unity and view it as sexual misconduct. For most of them, it undermines the institution of marriage, and therefore family and therefore society.<sup>54</sup> Klassen, William, and Levit (1989) state that religion has its own

<sup>51</sup> Sullivan & Wodarski (2002), Social alienation in gay youth. Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment, 5 (1), 1-17. Page 4

<sup>52</sup> Sullivan & Wodarski (2002), Social alienation in gay youth. Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment, 5 (1), 1-17. Page 4

<sup>53</sup> Sullivan & Wodarski (2002), Social alienation in gay youth. Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment, 5 (1), 1-17. Page 4

<sup>54</sup> Steven Waldman(2003) , A Common Missed Conception-  
[http://www.slate.com/articles/life/faithbased/2003/11/a\\_common\\_missed\\_conception.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/life/faithbased/2003/11/a_common_missed_conception.html)



perception which leads to every kind of phobia against homosexuality or any type of sexual orientation which is unnatural as per the religious beliefs<sup>55</sup>.

In accordance to this belief, it has been observed that religiously-attached families are more severe in their reactions toward their LGBT children: rejection, deprivation of inheritances and medicalization treatments to force LGBTs to fit into the norms on sexual orientation are just a few examples of high frequency amongst the respondents.

Homophobia with all its attributes can lead to rejection by friends and family and sometimes provoke discriminatory acts and violence against homosexuals, bisexuals and transsexuals/transgender. In particular, discrimination can result in lack of gainful employment, health insurance and access to high quality health care to those affected. The emotional toll to those affected can be severe, including developing mental health issues, suicidal thoughts and attempts. All of these factors make it daunting for a homosexual/bisexual/transgender person to be open about his/her sexual orientation, which can increase stress, limit social support, and negatively affect their health<sup>56</sup>.

Homophobia can contribute to young people harbouring negative feelings about their own sexuality and developing low self-esteem or even self-loathing. These emotions can trigger self-destructive cycles of behaviour such as drinking, drug taking, and unsafe sexual practices and self-harm<sup>57</sup>.

In a report for the International Day against Homophobia in 2016, the World Bank studied the negative effects of homophobia and transphobia on the economic performance of countries and increasing poverty. According to the World Bank's report, because of the persistent stigmatization and discrimination, LGBT are likely overrepresented amongst the poor. As these people are left behind in terms of education and job opportunities, society as a whole misses out on their skills and productivity<sup>58</sup>. Therefore fighting LGBT phobia in the society can result in improving prosperity and producing more wealth for all.

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<sup>55</sup> Klassen, A., Williams, C., & Levitt, E. (1989). Sex and morality in the U.S. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.

<sup>56</sup> Valentine, G., Skelton, T. and Butler, R. (2002) The vulnerability and marginalisation of lesbian and gay youth: ways forward. *Youth and Policy*, 75, 4–29

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> To Fight Poverty, We Need to Fight Homophobia and Transphobia

<http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2016/05/17/to-fight-poverty-we-need-to-fight-homophobia-and-transphobia> [Accessed November 30th, 2017]

Biphobia is a sexual orientation concept that has a very real presence within the gay community and embodies an attitude that is widely overlooked. Individuals who identify as bisexual often receive persecution from heterosexuals who deem their identity as “a passing phase,” or simply illegitimate. Biphobia has a destructive impact on bisexual peoples’ lives. It pushes many of them to hide and remain ‘in the closet’ to avoid ridicule and rejection. It can affect their well-being, sense of identity and simply makes it harder for bisexuals to develop confidence and be assertive about whom they are.

One of the worst consequences of biphobia is the discrimination that a bisexual person faces not only from mainstream society but also from the homosexuals community as well. As mentioned above, bisexuals face widespread discrimination even from their non-heterosexual peers. Biphobia is manifested by both homosexuals and heterosexuals. This prevailing trend within the LGBT community of marginalizing bisexuals is alarming. Activist, scholar, and bisexual Robyn Ochs writes to explain this dilemma that “Gay- and lesbian-identified individuals frequently view us as either confused or interlopers possessing a degree of privilege not available to them, and many heterosexuals see us as amoral, hedonistic spreaders of disease and disrupters of families.”<sup>59</sup> Through his narrative he gives an account on how lesbians and gays, as well as heterosexuals, perceive bisexual people. Monroe (2015) further clarifies that that gays and lesbians persecute the already marginalized to establish their superiority<sup>60</sup>.

Coming out as a bisexual is most often a very sad and difficult time in a bisexual’s life. In Western societies, where homosexuality is gaining acceptability, bisexuality is still pushed to the side and considered taboo. Therefore keeping it hidden is the only feasible and viable option. Narratives surrounding bisexuals have been erased from history so that bisexuals do not have a role model to follow. There are hidden celebrities and personalities who are bisexual but have been labelled as lesbian or gay for their same-sex relationships. It includes but is not limited to Marlene Dietrich, June Jordan, Freddie Mercury, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Walt Whitman<sup>61</sup>.

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<sup>59</sup> Ochs, Robyn, and Sarah E. Rowley. "Getting bi." Bisexual Resource Centre (2009).Page 249

<sup>60</sup> Monroe, Surya. Bisexuality: Identities, politics, and theories. Springer, 2015.

<sup>61</sup> Tollefson, Kaia. "Straight Privilege: Unpacking the (Still) Invisible Knapsack." Online Submission (2010).

The situation across the globe is not viable for bisexuals. In Iran, bisexuality has received minimal attention from the Persian media and journals on LGBT's human rights in recent years. Iranian bisexuals have no voice of their own and have been judged based on homosexual stereotypes<sup>62</sup>.

Trans-phobia can be described as fear, hatred, disbelief, or mistrust of people who are transgender, or whose gender expression does not conform to traditional gender roles. Trans-phobia has been defined by Ryan Joelle (2009) as an irrational fear and hatred of people who cross, blur or transcend the male/female binary. Trans-phobia is viewed as an omnipresent force. Transgender is an identity which is quite uncomfortable for most of the world to reckon with. This uncomfortable feeling leads to trans-phobia in which gender nonconforming people experience harassment or discrimination from people who are scared or uneasy with these identities. Trans-phobic attitudes fuel institutional discrimination, which includes employment and housing discrimination, police brutality and hate-motivated violence<sup>63</sup>. Trans-phobia can prevent transgender and gender nonconforming people from living full lives free from harm.

### ***Historical Narrative of LGBT and Its Struggle***

Homosexuality has been ubiquitous throughout the world and history. It has existed in all cultures and has been part of society for all of recorded time. Societal attitudes towards same-sex relationships have varied over time and place, from expecting all males to engage in same-sex relationships, to casual integration, through acceptance, to viewing homosexuality as a cardinal sin, through repression by law enforcement and judicial mechanisms, and in some cases proscription under penalty of death. The striking difference amongst cultures is the openness in which it is talked about and practiced.

A quick overview of the historical narrative reveals that there have always been individuals who have engaged in what we would now identify as same-sex romantic or sexual relationships. These relationships have always been a part of every culture though the acceptability and understanding of these relationships have varied throughout the centuries. However, the Western contemporary concept of LGBT or homosexuality is a new term to

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<sup>62</sup> Zeynab Alsadat Peyghambarzadeh, Iranian LGBT Movement Without B

<sup>63</sup> Ryan, ruby, Joelle. REEL GENDER: EXAMINING THE POLITICS OF TRANS IMAGES IN FILM AND MEDIA, 2009. Page 8

highlight lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transsexuals communities. Albeit, their existence is quite old even if the history or origins are obscured. In fact, the concept of heterosexuality and bisexuality dates from contemporary time, as prior to it, people did not think to identify ‘what they were,’ in terms of to whom they were sexually attracted. Thus, the specific ways in which we now think of sexual identity or even sexual practices have changed dramatically over time. The homosexual community has also experienced tremendous strides, going from an atmosphere of persecution to overall acceptance by the culture at large<sup>64</sup>.

LGBT in all its types has been part of society for all of recorded time. Most historical narratives about LGBT concentrate primarily on male homosexuality within the Western culture, and suggest society’s attitude toward homosexuality has been in turmoil and flux across the ages as noted below.

Through the end of the nineteenth and into the early twentieth century, many Western societies accepted very close emotional attachments between persons of the same sex that might now be identified as romantic relationships, but at the time, they were viewed as deeply committed friendships (now referred to by many historians as “romantic friendships”). Many societies and cultures are quite clear about their behaviour towards same-sex sexual contact, especially between men<sup>65</sup>. In Western parts of the world and in countries where people strictly follow Christianity and Islam, same sex relationships have been rejected<sup>66</sup>.

The term homosexual was coined in 1869. Up to that time homosexuality was not viewed as a separate orientation. This newly accepted sexual orientation began to emerge suggesting that an individual’s sexual attraction towards someone of the same sex was an inherent and unchanging aspect of their personality.

As previously mentioned, there are scarce references to homosexuality in the Bible. Homosexuality in the Bible is first mentioned in Genesis 9:2-24, in which many Christian scholars believe that Ham, the youngest son of Noah, committed a homosexual act with his

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<sup>64</sup> David Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* (2002)

<sup>65</sup> LaMar, Lisa, and Mary Kite. "Sex differences in attitudes toward gay men and lesbians: A multidimensional perspective." *Journal of Sex Research* 35.2 (1998): 189-196.

<sup>66</sup> Jäckle, S., & Wenzelburger, G. (2015). Religion, religiosity, and the attitudes toward homosexuality—A multilevel analysis of 79 countries. *Journal of homosexuality*, 62(2), 207-241.

father, whilst the latter was asleep, having been overcome with wine<sup>67</sup>. The Bible acquaints us with some of the earliest taboos on the subject from Old Testament tales such as Leviticus admonitions: "If a man also lie with mankind, as he lie with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them"<sup>68</sup> and "In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error"<sup>69</sup>. In Deuteronomy 22:5, cross-dressing is condemned as being "abominable".

By contrast, homosexual behaviour was accepted in certain countries and time periods, such as in ancient Rome and Greece. As mentioned above, many early accounts of homosexuality indicated that a permissive attitude with same-sex relationships existed in many cultures, and at the very least, had been considered as a transitional rite of passage for young men in early Greek and Roman societies. In fact the two most principal areas of historical enquiry which have been studied by historians in relation to ancient occurrences of homosexuality are Greek and Roman homosexuality. The largest amount of material pertinent to the history of homosexuality is from Greece, from notable philosophers and writers such as Plato, Xenophon, Plutarch, and pseudo-Lucian, to plays by Aristophanes, to Greek artwork and vases. Professor James B. De Young, professor of New Testament Language and Literature at Western Seminary, in Portland, Oregon has also noted that homosexuality seems to have existed more widely amongst the ancient Greeks more than any other ancient culture<sup>70</sup>. According to psychiatrist and sexual historian Norman Sussman, "In contrast to the self-conscious and elaborate efforts of the Greeks to glorify and idealize homosexuality, the Romans simply accepted it as a matter of fact and as an inevitable part of human sexual life"<sup>71</sup>.

In Ancient Rome, the young male body remained a focus of male sexual attention, but there were relationships that existed between older free men and slaves or freed youths who took the receptive role in sex<sup>72</sup>. All the emperors, with the exception of Claudius, took male

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<sup>67</sup> Notes to Gagnon's Essay in the Gagnon-Via Two Views Book, #32, by Robert A. J. Gagnon, Ph.D. The Bible and Homosexual Practice, pp. 63-78, 91-1105

<sup>68</sup> Holy Bible, Lev. 20.13KJV

<sup>69</sup> Romans 1:27 New International Version (NIV)

<sup>70</sup> Homosexuality, claims Examined in light of the bible and Other Ancient Literature and Law By James B. DeYoung p. 322

<sup>71</sup> Homosexuality: Road to Visibility – OAJI [oaji.net/articles/2015/1170-1449166623](http://oaji.net/articles/2015/1170-1449166623).

<sup>72</sup> Prioreschi, Plinio (1996). A History of Medicine. Horatius Press. pp. 21–23, 29

lovers<sup>73</sup>. Many of the most prominent men in Roman society were bisexual if not homosexual. Julius Caesar was called by his contemporaries every woman's man and every man's woman<sup>74</sup>.

During the Roman Empire under the rule of Augustus, the first recorded same-sex marriage happened, homosexual prostitution was taxed, and if a Roman was caught being sexually passive with another male, citizenship could be revoked<sup>75</sup>.

In the Middle East, the same permissive attitude existed. An 11th-century Persian ruler advised his son to alternate his partners seasonally with young men in the summer and women in the winter. Many of the love poems of the eighth-century Abu Nuwas in Baghdad, and of other Persian and Urdu poets, were addressed to boys. In medieval mystic writings, particularly Sufi texts, it is unclear whether the beloved being addressed is a teenage boy or God, providing a quasi-religious sanction for relationships between men and boys<sup>76</sup>.

By contrast, Egypt's history of homosexuality is somewhat enigmatic as the documents and literature that actually contains sexual orientated stories never explicitly alluded to a homosexual nature. Ancient Egyptian documents were ambiguous and never clearly stated that same-sex relationships were seen as reprehensible or despicable. And no Ancient Egyptian document enumerated that homosexuality is sanctioned under criminal law. Instead poetic and flowery paraphrases were used. The best known case of a plausible homosexual relationship in Ancient Egypt is between two high officials Nyankh-Khnum and Khnum-hotep that took place under pharaoh Niuserre during the 5th Dynasty (c. 2494–2345 BC)<sup>77</sup>. Although each man had his own respective family with children and wives, upon their deaths they were buried together in the same mastaba tomb. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, men who had been persecuted for their sexuality in Europe often sought refuge in Morocco and, long before same-sex marriage was dreamed of in the West, male-on-male partnerships were recognised and marked with a ceremony in the remote Egyptian oasis of Siwa.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Gibbon, Edward (1781). *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*

<sup>74</sup> Williams, Craig Arthur. *Roman homosexuality: Ideologies of masculinity in classical antiquity*. Oxford University Press on Demand, 1999.

<sup>75</sup> Myers, JoAnne. *Historical dictionary of the lesbian and gay liberation movements*. Scarecrow Press, 2013.

<sup>76</sup> Straight but narrow | *The Economist*, [www.economist.com/node/21546002](http://www.economist.com/node/21546002)

<sup>77</sup> Richard Parkinson: *Homosexual Desire and Middle Kingdom Literature*. In: *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology (JEA)*, vol. 81, 1995, pp. 57–76.

<sup>78</sup> Ev Brian Whitaker 21 June 2016, *Everything you need to know about being gay in Muslim ...* [www.theguardian.com › World › LGBT right](http://www.theguardian.com › World › LGBT right)

Before pre Victorian times, people did not perceive homosexuality as a distinct identity, but rather thought of all sexuality within the framework of heterosexuality. Some cultures assumed that all persons harboured homoerotic feelings.

During Victorian Britain (1837–1901), the notion of homosexuality was rarely spoken of in Victorian society. Unlike other European countries<sup>79</sup>, newspapers, legislature and medical journals resisted speaking about this perceived taboo subject. This lack of information from these communication medium reflected the acute level of unwillingness and strict taboo to the point that the public neither wanted to hear nor needed to know about homosexuality. This naturally had a direct effect on the discussion of homosexuality throughout society. It was erroneously thought that by not disseminating this information to the public the issue would simply disappear. It was only towards the mid-twentieth century that sex psychology was even brought into existence where homosexuality was considered to be a condition. Nevertheless, the Victorian period is a key moment in the history of sexuality; it is the era in which the present day modern terminologies we use to structure the ways we think and talk about sexuality were invented.

From the 1880s sexologists such as Richard von Kraft-Ebbing and Havelock Ellis pioneered a science in which sexual preferences were analysed and categorised; they created terms including homosexuality, heterosexuality and nymphomaniac<sup>80</sup>.

At the academic level, the study of homosexuality began in Germany, where it was combined with the struggle to eliminate state proscriptions against homosexual practices<sup>81</sup>. In this regard, Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, a German law student and journalist who was the secretary to various civil servants and diplomats, was the front runner responsible for the creation of the labels used in the discourse about homosexuality. By writing about the contemporary concept of homosexuality, he changed the entire discourse on same sex relationships. Today he is seen as the pioneer of the modern gay rights movement. In 1864, the term homosexuality appeared in print for the first time in a German-Hungarian pamphlet written by Karl-Maria Kertbeny, one of the first to formulate a scientific theory of homosexuality. Up to that time, homosexuality was not viewed as a separate orientation. His view that homosexuality is

<sup>79</sup> Brady, Sean. *Masculinity and Male Homosexuality in Britain, 1861-1913*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. Brady 17

<sup>80</sup> Victorian sexualities the British Library [www.bl.uk/.../articles/Victorian-sexualities](http://www.bl.uk/.../articles/Victorian-sexualities).)

<sup>81</sup> Dean, Carolyn J. *Sexuality and Modern Western Culture*. Twayne Publishers. New York, 1996. Page. 22

inborn was a major departure from previous and subsequent theories that viewed homosexuality/“sodomy” as an acquired vice. Both of the terms did not exist until the second half of the 1860s. Undoubtedly he was one in a long and continuing queue of researchers who believe that there is a biological basis for homosexuality<sup>82</sup>. In the world of print media, The New York Times was the first major publication to use the word "homosexuality"<sup>83</sup>.

According to Dynes and Donaldson (1990), both terms moved from Germany and entered the English language towards the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century in a translation of *Psychopathic Sexualize*, a work by Richard von Krafft-Ebing<sup>84</sup>. He attempted to catalogue various forms of sexual behaviour. In the early years of twentieth century, homosexuality was seen by many as a psychiatric disorder, and was part of the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic Manual until 1986.

However, the term heterosexual is the product of the twentieth century. Katz (1995) in his book “The Invention of Heterosexuality” discusses the evolution of the term heterosexuality. According to him, the term entered the English language a little more than a hundred years ago. He termed the 20th century “a heterosexual century” where, according to Katz, “hetero hypothesis was stabilized, fixed, and widely distributed as the ruling sexual orthodoxy”<sup>85</sup>. Nevertheless, from the mid-1890s until the 1960s, American popular culture became acquainted with the terms heterosexual and homosexual; and thus, a new sex differentiated norm started dominating the hetero population which was seen as superior over the homosexuals (gays, lesbians) population.

An overall examination of the history of society's overt aversion to and rejection of homosexuality reveals how strongly homosexuality was rejected.

For example, the trial of Oscar Wilde resulted in a successful prosecution under the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885 for "gross indecency" and a two year sentence of hard labour in prison. In Brazil, Adolfo Caminha published his controversial novel *Bom-Crioulo* (in

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<sup>82</sup> Hubert Kennedy, Karl Heinrich Ulrichs: First Theorist of Homosexuality," in Science and Homosexualities, ed. Vernon Rosario (pp. 26–45). New York: Rutledge, 1997.)

<sup>83</sup> Fone, Byrne R. S. (2000). Homophobia: a history. New York: Metropolitan Books.

<sup>84</sup> Wayne R. Dynes, Stephen Donaldson. “Encyclopaedia of Homosexuality”. Garland Pub., 1990

<sup>85</sup> Katz, Jonathan Ned (1995) The Invention of Heterosexuality. New York, NY: Dutton (Penguin Books). Page 235



English: *The Black Man and the Cabin Boy*) that dealt with homosexuality at its centre theme and race (a Black man as the story's hero). An English translation by E.A. Lacey was published in 1982 by Gay Sunshine. The novel was the first major literary work on homosexuality to be published in Brazil, and one of the first to have a Black person as its hero. The novel caused a stir upon its publication.

The 1900s yield no better. In New York City on 21 February 1903, New York police conducted the first United States recorded raid on a gay bathhouse, the Ariston Hotel Baths. 26 men were arrested, 12 were brought to trial on sodomy charges and 7 men received sentences ranging from 4 to 20 years in prison<sup>86</sup>. The new strict boundaries made the new gendered, erotic world less polymorphous. The National Socialist German Workers Party banned homosexual groups. In Nazi Germany, homosexuals were sent to concentration camps. During the Holocaust, 100,000 gay men were arrested, and between 5,000–15,000 gay men perished in Nazi concentration camps<sup>87</sup>. During the McCarthy witch hunt 190 individuals in the United States were dismissed from government employment for their sexual orientation, commencing what was to be referred to as *The Lavender Scare*, the witch hunt and mass firings of gay people in the 1950s. It paralleled the anti-communist campaign known as McCarthyism and the Second Red Scare. Senator McCarthy insisted homosexuals and lesbians were a threat to the U.S. State Department's security and communist sympathizers, which led to the call to remove them from state employment<sup>88</sup>.

This societal backlash that began in the Prohibition in America carried on throughout the 1950s. Drag balls were cancelled, plays and films were censored, and a host of laws and regulations were enacted prohibiting homosexuals from being served or even working in restaurants, bars, and clubs. In New York, it was illegal to serve liquor to known homosexuals until 1970. Anti-gay policing intensified during the Cold War. Local police warned that homosexuals threatened the nation's children.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Chauncey, G. (1995). *Gay New York: The Making of the Gay Male World 1890-1940*. London, England: Flamingo.

<sup>87</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archived 19 January 2012

<sup>88</sup> Johnson, David K. (2004). *The Lavender Scare*. Chicago University Press

<sup>89</sup> Chauncey, G. (1995). *Gay New York: The Making of the Gay Male World 1890-1940*. London, England: Flamingo.

In the middle of 19<sup>th</sup> century, American and European cities became a hub of complex sexual communities where people with diverse sexual orientation crossed class, racial, gender and age boundaries, and which offered a focus for identity development. Immediately after World War II, homosexuality emerged and was firmly established as a public issue<sup>90</sup>. Weeks (1988) mentions in one of his narratives that “since the Second World War the expansion of these subcultures has been spectacular, with one of these unlikely heroes of this growth being the gay bar”<sup>91</sup>. Starting in the early to mid-twentieth century, gay bars became a feature of many American cities, providing a gathering place for people to meet partners, engage in gender expression or dress, or simply interact with like-minded people in other spaces.

### ***LGB in Iran-The Missing Pieces***

Homosexuality has always been a contentious topic in Iran due to the stigma surrounding the homophobic views of certain members of society, which related to a “radicalized view of sexuality, cultural norms concerning sexuality and gender, and connections to religious institutions<sup>2</sup>. Iran is a traditional society that operates on a basic premise that homosexuality is an abnormality. Traditional society dealing with what are assumed abnormalities such as heterosexualism is not a new story in Iran nor is the combat against it, but the manner in which Iran exposes perceived “abnormalities” to maintain control over its sexual minorities is yet a controversial issue rooted in its past and carrying on in the present. An extract from the work of Mehrangiz Kar concludes that “Members of the LGBT community in Iran are viewed as the ones who depart significantly from mainstream religious values or social expectations. LGBT rights activists thus face huge obstacles in their efforts towards accommodating their identity in the current context of Iranian society”<sup>92</sup>.

In Iran there is no standardized measure of gender binaries. Sexual desires are bound to intricate deep-rooted ever-lasting social definitions to such a significant extent that sometimes it is difficult for homosexuals themselves to distinguish, understand and accept their own orientations. In Iran, when enquiring about someone’s gender, one cannot find an appropriate response that yields a third possibility. Either one is a man or a woman. This fact

<sup>90</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp. 83-96.

<sup>91</sup> Weeks, Jeffery. *Sexuality and Its Discontents Meanings, Myths and Modern Sexualities*. Rutledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1988. Page 192

<sup>92</sup> Iranian’s Queers & Laws: <http://hir.harvard.edu/article/?a=9885> {Accessed April 12, 2018}

is so categorically clear cut that it has left no questionable room of doubt. Any departure from this dual sexual system of classification in Iran is categorized under the auspice of mental and behavioural disorders. Iran emphasizes the complementarity and unity of the two sexes, each associated with distinguishable gender roles. Given that homosexuality can undermine the Iranian patriarchal social structure, Iran and Islamic ideology strictly oppose homosexuality<sup>3</sup>.

The narrative of “LGBT rights” itself is used as a tool of oppression. Hate crimes against queer communities are very much a part of their existence. Even the nominally inclusive term ‘LGBT’ that represents lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender sexualities, is restrictive. It is viewed as Western ideology, on a history constructed in the West, loaded with struggles, accomplishments, experiences, and identities unique to Western societies, and not necessarily applicable within the Iranian society. For these reasons, even this ‘progressive’ terminology can be alienating, as it fails to describe the struggles of sexual orientation and gender identity in Iran. Ironically its narratives and signs do exist in Iranian literature as well as in historical characters

There have not been many freely conducted surveys or personal research studies on LGBT in Iran where researchers have been able to contribute to the existing body of already acquired knowledge about the LGBT community. Restrictions from the system and within the universities and the stigma of such an isolated highly sensitive issue has made social activists, students and researchers less willing to work on this subject. Outside of Western countries, psychological research on SOV in Iran is almost non-existent. This current study fills this acute gap of information.

Interestingly, amongst all members of LGBT community in Iran, bisexuals are the one category in the sexual orientation framework that receives less attention. This area of research of bisexuality in Iran suffers from the lack of available literature and the overriding rationale that bisexuality in Iran is a sin. Bisexuality is not only an insult to heterosexuality, but is not even categorized in the Lesbian-Gay binary. In many respects, bisexuals are viewed as the “unacceptable” within an already unacceptable group. In addition to thorough analysis of the LGB discourse in Iran, this research study also revealed an uncomfortable fact: the unacceptance of bisexuals was the norm and frequently the familiar attitude.

It is the method and approach in which Iran exposes these assumed abnormalities in order to maintain control over its sexual minorities. The societal control element has always existed. The current Iranian penal code upholds a zero-tolerance approach with respect to LGBT individuals, but the fact is that in most cases these rules and regulations exist only in law and not in practice. As previously mentioned in Chapter One, the most recent execution of a person convicted under the penal code for being homosexual occurred a decade ago. In cases of LGBT sanctions, whilst there still is a great deal of pressure and oppression in Iranian society, including the fact that LGBT individuals are not immune from arbitrary arrests, the draconian and strict rules of sanctions are not as heavy handed as they were in the past. These groups are normally tolerated by the system. Police normally do not venture to LGBT's known gathering venues, commonly known spots and parks and often allow many social networking groups to operate within Telegram, Facebook and Whatsapp social platforms. When there is a crack-down, they are usually freed. The latest recent example is the case of the arrests of more than 30 gay individuals in a party in Bagh-e Bahadoran located in Isfahan in April 2017<sup>4</sup>. Although all were imprisoned, eventually they were able to hire lawyers and were released by providing the court with bail and perhaps written statements promising not to repeat and assemble.

This light-handed approach is not the same for women. LGBT have been oppressed during the sociocultural transformations in contemporary Iran while Femi phobic attitudes have been central to this marginalization. Notwithstanding the profound distortion of the concepts of femininity and masculinity in the course of the modernization and Islamization of the country, defeminisation of the public space and prioritization of the masculinity in gender discourses have been crucial to all social transitions that intend to feed their desired social-ideal identity.

What is more revealing is that women, even amongst the sexual minorities (Lesbians) in comparison to gays and male bisexuals, suffer more from societal restrictions and risk harsher social repercussions and punishments when caught. Women are already marginalized in Iranian society as the demands of their patriarchal society and draconian policies define their existence. They are even more so marginalized if they are lesbian. Frequently familiar and none at all surprising is that there is a heightened level of discrimination towards women even within the category of sexual minorities.

## ***The Historical Background of Lesbians in Iran***

In contemporary Iran, the prevailing legal system discriminates against females. This is quite evident from the fact that Iran has not ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women<sup>17</sup>. It is noteworthy to observe that the United States, one of the first signatories of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women when it was adopted by the U.N. in 1979 is the only industrialized democracy in the world that has not ratified CEDAW.<sup>93</sup>

Lesbians, in comparison to gays suffer more from restrictions, sanctions and even have more social punishments when caught. Deprived from freedom of movement and action similar to other types of sexual minorities, lesbians seem to be under much more societal pressure and denial. Even within the sphere of condemnation for “wrong actions”, social gender discriminations still play a heavy-handed role in the classifications and acceptable parameters of GBV.

Lesbians in comparison to gays and male bisexuals, risk harsher punishments when caught. This important observation was revealed when interviewing several LGB individuals in Mashhad, Tehran and Isfahan. Lesbians seem to be under much more pressure and denial and bear a particularly heavy burden. We can only conclude that even in conducting these alleged “wrong actions”, the pre-determined secondary status of women in a highly patriarchal Iran still plays a role of classifications and permissible ranges of actions. Mean whilst, Lesbian activity goes largely unnoticed, probably because in a male-orientated society men do not give it much attention or do not regard it as very significant act. However, when girls come out as lesbian, the encounter more restrictions and in some cases, a hastily arranged early marriages.

Lesbians have little chance or ability to challenge or resist when the familial decision is undertaken that they will marry a man. This can lead to situations where lesbians live their entire lives in marriages in which non-consensual heterosexual sexual acts are continually and regularly forced upon them.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Why Hasn't the US Ratified the UN Women's Rights ... – SSRN, [papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1900265](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1900265)

Large segments of Iranian society remain steadfastly patriarchal where the views and opinions of women are not of high importance. Although there has been marginal improvement and some changes encouraging women to come forward and take an active role in society, in the Islamic Republic of Iran, women remain legally and socially at a disadvantage. Social control- mainly in smaller towns and rural areas- is much more heavily exercised over women than men.

Often observed in conservative families, at some point women are forced to marry, even if she is a lesbian, and even if she abhors intimacy with men. This is particularly in the case where the familial infrastructures are robust enough to ignore personal choices and control marital choice. For those lesbians who are forced to marry a man against their wills, it leads to debilitating trauma to their personal, sexual and mental health. Under Iran's civil code a wife is required to be submissive to the will of her husband (*tamkeen*). This naturally includes being sexually available to her husband whenever he desires<sup>26</sup>.

In this already fraught situation, for some of these women who are aware of their SO, they are now in the precarious and hellish situation of realising that they are not even attracted to males let alone the chosen husband in these forced marriages, and now are forced to “live and love outside the ‘legitimised’ legal system”<sup>27</sup>. For many women whose lives are shaped, conditioned or governed by laws and customs derived from Islam this is an unimaginable nightmare. Leaving is an already insurmountable, if not impossible task, and leaving because one is a lesbian is inconceivable. It will cause a scandal as well as adversely exacerbate and affect her social status, economic position and health.

There is the added trauma of repercussions from families. The pressure on lesbian Muslims also differs depending on where they live, as lesbian Muslims living in the West “experienced pressure from their families to follow normative gender roles through marriage, because many of them were not openly gay in the Western sense”<sup>28</sup>, whereas the repercussions from families are intensified for lesbian Muslims living in Muslim countries.

Many lesbians struggle to cope with the emotional constraints of masquerading or ‘passing’ as heterosexual women, which culminates in the difficulties of having to cope with the pressure of marriage. In some cases, lesbian Muslims are forced to compartmentalise different aspects of their identity depending on the situation they are in. This involves

“compartmentalizing one’s life into areas where one is known as gay or lesbian and other places and spaces where this is hidden”<sup>29</sup>.

For lesbian women, their quest for legal and cultural citizenship is inextricably linked to the intimate/sexual citizenship. In mainstream society, where their cultural and religious minority statuses are paramount, lesbian and bisexual Muslim women, as their heterosexual counterparts, have to manage gargantuan social and legal issues such as Islamic phobia, racism, and assimilationist government policies that significantly dictate their bodily performances and social identities. However, within their own religious and cultural communities, their sexual orientation often undermines their sense of belonging and compels them to ‘queer’ Islam. Their “minority within minority” status underlines their quest for various civil and social rights such as accurate representation, maintenance of identity/lifestyle, freedom from discrimination based on sexual orientation, practice of religious faith in harmony with sexuality, and participation in religious/community life. They achieve this through the ‘queering’ of religious texts and traditions, and grassroots support network. Indeed, their quest for legal and cultural citizenship unites them with fellow Muslims, but their quest for intimate/sexual citizenship, puts them on a collision course with the majority of Muslims<sup>30</sup> and the daunting difficulty of coming out<sup>31</sup>.

As Iran is a male dominated society and people live with a patriarchal mind-set, being a *female* in Iran is already a deprivation of some rights. Being a lesbian in Iran brings on further restrictions due to societal criminalization of same-sex conduct. Such restrictions force many Iranian lesbians to “go underground” and lead secret lives out of fear of being targeted by the police or being subjected to prosecution<sup>32</sup>. For lesbian, their sexual interaction is punishable by flogging. Many have been beaten, forced into marriage or disowned.

In poor and strict religious families, a desire for a life that naturally incorporates autonomy, self-determination and self-reliance is a very common desire that many will never have. Without the support of their families, they are forced to marry to survive. Cases have been identified in which lesbian women have been abused and tortured by their relatives until they “consented” to marriage. For these women, marriage always means the end of any possibility of having a same-sex relationship.

For lesbians in Iran, the lethal combination of their countries' homophobic laws and outspoken overt anti-LGB attitudes by many laws enforcement agencies have made it extremely difficult to survive. This righteous attitude of law enforcement agencies encourages acts of social and domestic abuse and violence against gays and lesbians, who are portrayed as criminals and sick because of their sexual orientation<sup>34</sup>. There is a heightened the need for high quality scientific data on lesbian women in Iran. The sad fact remains that until mind-sets change within Iranian communities many lesbian Muslim women will continue to live in turmoil, leading double lives just to please their families<sup>35</sup>.

### ***Iranian-Not coming out but in the Closet***

Iran's position on homosexuality is clearly defined and acknowledged by the Iranian's government and religious clerics therefore, LGBT find it difficult to come out and declare their true sexual orientation. This is not only an Iranian issue, but commonplace in countries where non-heterosexual identity has been frowned upon and or rejected. Heterosexual unions are the only recognized ones. In such societies, a man is expected to marry, and as long as he fulfils his procreative obligations, the community does not probe into his extracurricular activities<sup>36</sup>. Some Iranian gay men, who are in heterosexual marriages prefer prostitution as the preferred way to have same-sex affairs. For others, staying in the closet is the only viable option

Coming out is the process through which an LGB individuals accept their sexual orientation or gender identity as part of their overall identity. It not only refers to the process of self-acceptance, but also to the act of sharing one's identity with others. In Iran, the consequences of an open homosexual relationship are severe, ranging from draconian persecution, harassment, 100 lashes and punishment by death. Homosexuality is an open secret and coming out, a difficult trajectory to walk, is simply something very few do, even in capital city, Tehran. Many live in fear at being discovered and ousted. At the same time, Iranian homosexuals, who are condemned both for their sexuality and nonconformist gender effeminacy, have recently formed fictive kinships and backstage friendship groups in order to negotiate and attain a new social identity

Paradoxically, the life of transgender individuals, *albeit* by no means perfect, is more comfortable than the life of homosexuals. For homosexuals, it is unfathomable to declare their true sexual orientation. Unlike homosexuals, Iran has liberal laws with regards to



transgender individuals, with an encouraging government that is very supportive of financing sex changing surgeries. The 1980 *Fatwa* by Ayatollah Khomeini, Iran's late Supreme Leader, declared that sex assignment surgery is a “solution” to gender identity disorder. He allowed the government through this religious ruling to supervise such surgeries<sup>37</sup>. These sorts of surgeries are commonly referred to as GCS.

However, the Iranian government stance on allowing GCSs actually operate as another tool to destroy and persecute gays and lesbians in Iran<sup>38</sup>. There is a belief, played out by the religious clerics and supported by the government, that a person is trapped in a body of the wrong sex. Iranian homosexuals are encouraged to undergo sexual reassignment surgery for their own benefit, thus discouraging LGB to live their lives in an open and peaceful manner. Although sexual reassignment surgery is not an official government policy forcing gay men or women to undergo gender reassignment, the pressure can be intense<sup>39</sup>. The end result is that these individuals are now compelled to live with the pain and emotional scars. It is not hard to fathom that many of them did not genuinely desire the surgery. There are cases of mistreatment where the patient needs hospitalization after the surgery. Such cases of mistreatment may be seen as culminating in a medical recommendation for sex reassignment surgery and the accompanying hormonal drug therapy. This is reported by local news that in less than four years, from 2006 to 2010, over 1,360 gender reassignment operations were performed in Iran<sup>94</sup>. These operations almost invariably lead to serious physical complications, depression, and in some cases, suicide.

Further, many employers openly discriminate against people they deem as queer, rendering trans-identified individuals with little financial means and resulting in poor economic survival. As sex work can be conducted legally in Iran through the Shiite notion of a temporary marriage, participation in sex work is common and protected. For a trans-identified person who has undergone GCS, it is legal to have a temporary marriage conducted as often as once per hour because there is no chance of pregnancy and thus negating any future parental responsibilities on the part of the soliciting party

### **Literature on LGBT groups in Iran**

There is little research on LGBT in Iran. Instead, only meagre documentaries and a few newspaper articles exist.

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<sup>94</sup> Iranian's Queers & Laws: <http://hir.harvard.edu/article/?a=9885> {Accessed April 12, 2018}

The Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP) circulated information on Out Right Action International (formerly the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission). Outright convened three interrelated experts October 2015 to discuss some of the theological, legal and social issues facing LGBT-identified people living in Iran. Previously, in 2012 and 2014 there were rounds of meetings held in Düsseldorf, Germany in which Outright Action International brought together lawyers, human rights activists and academics for a roundtable on the situation of LGBT and queer people in Iran, called LGBT Rights in Iran<sup>95</sup>. Their report *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights in Iran* summarised the findings and conclusions from the conference and to explore new approaches to improve the human rights situation for LGBT Iranians<sup>96</sup>.

In 2013 the Iran Human Rights Documentation Centre produced a 60 page report entitled “*Denied Identity: Human Rights Abuses against Iran's LGBT Community*”. Although scores of interviews with gay, lesbian, and transgender Iranians were conducted, due to security concerns the vast majority of individuals interviewed were no longer living in Iran. In contrast this research study was conducted in Iran by interviewing individuals currently living in Iran.

With the election of Hassan Rouhani as Iran’s president, there were hopes that human rights would improve for the country’s struggling LGBT community. To date, those hopes have not been realised. A joint letter written by four human rights organizations, -*Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, and Iranian Queer Organization* was sent to him in December, 2013. The groups called for Iran to repeal its laws imposing anti-LGBT punishments “ranging from 100 lashes for consensual sexual relations between women to the death penalty for consensual intercourse between men.”(Joint Letter to President Hassan Rouhani<sup>97</sup> Experts have voiced that despite President Hassan Rouhani overtures to the contrary, Iran will remain a deadly place for LGBTs<sup>98</sup>.

<sup>95</sup> Middle East Research and Information ...merip.org/lgbt-rights-Iran

<sup>96</sup> Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights in Iran, www.iglhrc.org/.../files/LGBTRightsInIran\_0.pdf

<sup>97</sup> LGBT Rights. www.hrw.org/news/2013/12/20/joint-letter

<sup>98</sup> expertsgayasianews.wordpress.com/2014/03/16/Iran-still-human-rights-for-Iran’s-struggling-LGBT-community. .Benjamin Weinthal March 14 2014

## Chapter 2

# LGBT-Global Overview, Human rights and Legal Scenarios in Iran

### Contents:

- Contemporary Worldview of LGBT
- Increased Tolerance Of Homosexuality
- Sexual Orientation in the context of Human Rights
- United Nation's Perspective
- Legal & Judicial Perspective
- LGB Human Rights and the Muslim's World
- Iranian Legal perspective on LGBT

## ***Contemporary Worldviews of LGBT***

Laws combatting same-sex relations have dated back to the sixteenth century reflecting much of British society's belief that homosexuality is "the worst of crimes"<sup>99</sup>. This unspeakable act threatened the stability of Victorian society so remarkably that a homosexual identity did not exist (at least not openly) during this era. This did not mean that British citizens did not know the characteristics of homosexual men. Rather there was a general societal distaste for them during the nineteenth century<sup>100</sup>. Statistics are scarce but the number of arrests is undoubtedly lower than it was during the British wave of homophobia in the 1950s. In England during the year 1952, there were 670 prosecutions for sodomy, 3,087 for attempted sodomy or indecent assault, and 1,686 for gross indecency<sup>101</sup>.

Nevertheless, this distaste was not universal. Indeed, there are cultures that revere same-sex relationships and love. Hinduism does not view homosexuality as a religious sin. In fact, the Hindu Council UK released a statement asserting "Hinduism does not condemn homosexuality"<sup>102</sup>. The Sikh Holy Scriptures the *Guru Granth Sahib*, teaches tolerance, equality and acceptance of all people, regardless of race, religion, gender, or sexuality. Sikh wedding ceremonies are non-gender specific and so same-sex marriage is possible within Sikhism<sup>103</sup>.

An analysis of the global perception of LGBT shows a striking and troubling observation. In general, in the Middle East and Africa, homosexuality has been predominantly rejected<sup>104</sup>.

As the United States and other countries grapple with the issue of same-sex marriage, a new Pew Research Centre survey finds huge variance by region on the broader question of whether homosexuality should be accepted or rejected by society. The survey find out that total of 39 countries finds has accepted homosexuality. These countries comprised of North

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<sup>99</sup> Upchurch, Charles. *Before Wilde: Sex between Men in Britain's Age of Reform*. Berkeley: University of California, 2009. Print. Page 14 & 49

<sup>100</sup> Brady, Sean. *Masculinity and Male Homosexuality in Britain, 1861-1913*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. Print. Page 11, 17, & 46

<sup>101</sup> Whitaker, Brian. *Unspeakable Love: Gay and Lesbian Life in the Middle East*. Berkeley: University of California, 2006

<sup>102</sup> *Gay Histories and Cultures*, Rutledge, p. 438, George Haggerly

<sup>103</sup> <http://www.wahegurunet.com/gay-sikh>

<sup>104</sup> *The Global Divide on Homosexuality Greater Acceptance in More Secular and Affluent Countries*, [www.pewglobal.org](http://www.pewglobal.org). See also *The Global Divide on Homosexuality Greater Acceptance in More Secular and Affluent Countries*, [www.pewglobal.org](http://www.pewglobal.org)

America, the European Union, and much of Latin America. In terms of widespread Muslim nations and in Africa are predominant<sup>105</sup>.

Africa has a harsh view towards the LGBT community. Many African leaders have openly made disparaging and vile comments about LGBT individuals, comments that would be deemed unacceptable if directed toward another group. President Mugabe of Zimbabwe publicly called gay people less than human and therefore not deserving of human rights. The president of Uganda ordered the Criminal Investigations Department to hunt out lesbians and gays and lock them up. Since joining the U. S. coalition against terrorism, Egypt has begun hunting gay men alleged to be homosexual and entrapping them on the Internet in order to convince their citizens that the government and not just Muslim extremists are protecting the morality of the nation<sup>106</sup>. Opinion about the acceptability of homosexuality is divided in Israel, Poland and Bolivia as well as in parts of Asia and in Russia<sup>107</sup>.

Since joining the U. S. coalition against terrorism, Egypt has hunted gay men and entrapped them on the internet in order to convince their citizens that the government and not just Muslim extremists are protecting the morality of the nation<sup>108</sup>. These waves of open hatred have naturally caused couples to heed caution. Although public displays of affection (PDA) should generally be avoided to both homosexual and heterosexual couples, LGBTs in Africa have been advised to use discretion<sup>109</sup>.

Recent years have seen a stable attitude towards homosexuals and other members of the LGBT community, except in South Korea, the United States and Canada, where the percentage saying homosexuality should be accepted by society has grown by at least ten percentage points since 2007. These are among the key findings of a new survey by the Pew Research Centre conducted in 39 countries among 37,653 respondents.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> The Global Divide on Homosexuality Greater Acceptance in More Secular and Affluent Countries, [www.pewglobal.org](http://www.pewglobal.org)

<sup>106</sup> Gauch, S. (2002, March 1). Egypt cracks down on gays, trumping Islamists. Christian Science Monitor, p. 7

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Gauch, S. (2002, March 1). Egypt cracks down on gays, trumping Islamists. Christian Science Monitor, p. 7

<sup>109</sup> Planet, Lonely. "Gay and Lesbian travel in Africa - Lonely Planet". Retrieved 13 July 2016

<sup>110</sup> Ibid

There remains a great deal to be accomplished in freeing many millions of gays and lesbians from the tyranny of fear of discovery, of actual and potential economic disenfranchisement, of the burden of ridicule, shame, and scorn, and of penalties for alleged criminal behavior<sup>111</sup>. According to the Amnesty International (2001) reports, rapes, beatings, and life imprisonment for alleged crimes against the order of nature in such countries as Uganda, Zimbabwe, Romania, Malaysia, the Caribbean, Russia, China, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, and the U. S. In fact, at least 70 countries criminalize same-gender relationships and some countries punish offenders with flogging or the death penalty<sup>112</sup>.



LGBT people cannot count on the police or the courts to offer any protection. In fact in most of the world the police are the worst offenders, beating and raping the very people they are supposed to protect while in custody<sup>113</sup>. A very recent incident is a proof that how police violates and discriminates the lives and rights of LGB people. In 2017, during an anti-gay purge in Chechnya, Law enforcement and security officials arrested gay and bisexual men and beat and tortured them. The Canadian government, working with a Toronto-based nonprofit, quietly allowed gay men and lesbians from the Russian republic of Chechnya to seek safety in Canada. The vast majority are men as it is harder for women to escape Chechnya<sup>114</sup>.

A 1993 Janus Report estimated that nine percent of men and five percent of women had more than "occasional" homosexual relationships. The 2000 U.S. Census Bureau found that homosexual couples constitute less than 1% of American households. In August 2002, Gallup the average estimates were that 21% of men are gay and 22% of women are lesbians.

As the United States and other countries grapple with the issue of same-sex marriage, a new Pew Research Centre survey found a huge variance by region on the broader question of

<sup>111</sup> Sari H. Dworkin ;and Huso Yi.(2003), LGBT Identity, Violence, and Social Justice: The Psychological is Political, International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling, Vol. 25, No. 4, December 2003

<sup>112</sup> Amnesty International. (2001). Crimes of hate, conspiracy of silence. Oxford, United Kingdom: The Alden Press

<sup>113</sup> Sari H. Dworkin ;and Huso Yi.(2003), LGBT Identity, Violence, and Social Justice: The Psychological is Political, International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling, Vol. 25, No. 4, December 2003 Page 271

<sup>114</sup> NY Times, Chechnya's Persecuted Gays Find Refuge in Canada September 3 2017



whether homosexuality should be accepted or rejected by society. The survey in 39 countries has revealed that homosexuality has accepted broadly by countries in North America, the European Union, and much of Latin America<sup>115</sup>.

Homosexuality exists and flourishes at all levels of society. The Middle East is not an exception. An open LGB life in Muslim-majority countries is rare, but the closet is spacious. By and large, Muslim society is still strongly patriarchal and by its nature, extols masculinity. And yet, ironically whilst gender segregation goes to extreme lengths in the more conservative Muslim countries, at the same time this patriarchal segregation creates situations where men are often more comfortable in the presence of other men, where women are incidental and when placing a hand on another man's knee is a sign of friendship, not an invitation to sex. According to a former head of Al-Azhar's fatwa committee in Egypt, there is nothing wrong with same-sex kissing so long as there is no chance for any temptation. Syria's otherwise fearsome police rarely arrest gays. Sibkeh Park in Damascus is a tree-filled children's playground during the day but at night it is known for the young men who linger on its benches or walls. In Afghanistan, wealthy Afghans buy Bachabazi, (dancing boys) as Catamites (boys who have sexual relationship with men)<sup>116</sup>.

## **LGB and the Middle East**

Although Muslim societies today can be described as generally homophobic, it is erroneous thinking to view homophobia as a self-contained problem. Rather it is part of a syndrome in which the rights of individuals are subsumed in the perceived interests of the community and, often, maintain an "Islamic" ethos. Muslim societies are very much steeped in a patriarchal culture that values family, stability, passing on the bloodline and rejection of homosexuality. Consequently in these highly patriarchal societies, the high value on conformity is sacrosanct and expressions of individuality are unacceptable. Simply put, there is a strong emphasis on upholding social "norms" and keeping up appearances – in public if not necessarily in private. The patriarchal system plays a major part with strongly defined roles for men and women. Gay men, especially those who exhibit what is perceived as feminine attributes are regarded as those who are challenging the social order. Ironically, "masculine" men who have sex with other men is a slightly different matter. Although state and traditional Islamic law view the penetrator and penetrated in anal sex as equally culpable, the popular opinion is

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<sup>115</sup> The Global Divide on Homosexuality Greater Acceptance in More Secular and Affluent Countries, [www.pewglobal.org](http://www.pewglobal.org)

<sup>116</sup> Straight but Narrow, The Economist [www.economist.com/node/21546002](http://www.economist.com/node/21546002)

that the penetrator tends to be viewed with less hostility: he is still a man, doing what men naturally do, even if it is not with a woman. The receptive (or passive) partner, on the other hand, is viewed with disgust, shame and dishonour. As his behaviour is that of a woman, it is assumed that he cannot be engaging in homosexual behaviour for pleasure, so he must be a prostitute.

Organised activism for gay rights began to develop in the Middle East in the early 2000s. In 2002 a group of Palestinian women formed Aswat (“Voices”) which was later joined by another Palestinian group, al-Qaws (“The Rainbow”). Both groups are based in Israel but have connections in the Palestinian territories. Around 2004 a group of Lebanese activists established Helem, the first LGBT organisation to function openly in an Arab country. These are not the only activist groups. Others have sprung up in various places but often disappear quickly. There are also Arab LGBT websites and blogs which, as the activist groups, do come and go. *My Kali*, a Jordanian magazine which aims “to address homophobia and transphobia and empower the youth to defy mainstream gender binaries in the Arab world” has been published regularly since 2007.

Whitaker (2016) shares in his article that “Even today, in some Muslim countries, whole towns have become the butt of jokes about the supposed homosexuality of their inhabitants. Idlib in Syria is one of them; Qazvin in Iran is another. In Pakistan, there are jokes associated with one of the famous cities in the north of the country. An old joke in Afghanistan is that birds fly over Kandahar with one wing held under their tail as a precaution<sup>117</sup>.”

Still, no one has attempted to hold a Gay Pride parade in any country in the Middle East, though there have been parades in Istanbul, Turkey since 2003, albeit not without opposition. The city is hardly rolling out the rainbow carpet. However there have been activities in Lebanon and elsewhere linked to IDAHOT, the International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia, which have been less likely to arouse hostility. But one thing the LGBT community has done is make it difficult to claim that LGBT Muslims do not exist. They have established the first step towards achieving SO rights<sup>118</sup>.

<sup>117</sup> Whitaker, Brian. Everything you need to know about being gay in Muslim countries. 2016  
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jun/21/gay-lgbt-muslim-countries-middle-east>

<sup>118</sup> Everything you need to know about being gay in Muslim ... [www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com) › World › LGBT rights



However it has been three years that the ruling pro-Islamic AKP government has cancelled the Istanbul Gay Pride Parade " due to security concerns". The official fiction is that LGBT people do not exist in the Middle East. They do and for many LGB, the attitudes of family and society are a problematic source of pain and fear. The one common denominator that affects all LGB individuals in making the decision to come out of the closet is fear of their family's reaction. For Muslims this can be an especially excruciating and difficult decision. How families respond to a coming out depends on several factors, including their social class and level of education. In the more extreme cases, coming out results in the person being ostracised by their family, physically attacked, imposed religious cure or, in more affluent families, expensive but futile psychiatric treatments.

The pressure to marry is much greater in Muslim countries than in most Western countries. Remaining single is usually equated with social disaster so once young people have completed their studies, organising their marriage becomes a priority for the families. The more traditional kinds of family take on the task of finding them a partner; arranged marriages are still very common<sup>119</sup>. Some LGBT individuals manage to circumvent this by prolonged studies or going abroad. Nonetheless, some cave into the pressure and accept a marriage for which they are ill-suited. A few of the more fortunate ones find a gay or lesbian partner of the opposite sex and enter a false marriage. And some simply decide to "come out". However, coming out is usually rare, even in capital city, Tehran which is more liberal.

The Prophet Muhammad never specified a punishment for homosexuality. It was only some years after his death that Muslims began discussing what would be a suitable punishment. In predominantly Muslim countries with a large Christian population, such as Egypt and Lebanon, attitudes towards homosexuality amongst Christians are not very different from those amongst Muslims. Muslims' collective disdain of homosexuality, like those found in Christianity, are based mainly on the story about Sodom and Gomorrah and homosexuality as in the Qur'an and the Old Testament. In essence, the biblical and Qur'anic versions are very similar. The difference is that over the last 60 years or so many Christians globally have chosen another interpretation of the story and concluded that it is actually a condemnation of attempted male rape and the ill-treatment of strangers rather than consensual sex between males. So far, though, there have been only a few Muslims willing to reappraise the story

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<sup>119</sup> (See, Early/Child marriage (ECM) in Iran for a further in depth discussion on the pressure to marry).

Similarly in Muslim countries, individuals who identify as gay or lesbian are reduced only to their sexual behaviour. Many LGBT activists say they lack legal protections and face widespread social dishonour in nations that are heavily influenced by conservative and religious values. In essence, their identity is negated in daily life.

### ***Sexual Orientation in the context of Human Rights***

As discussed in Chapter 1, sexual orientation exists along a continuum that ranges from exclusive homosexuality to exclusive heterosexuality and includes various forms of bisexuality.

It is the premise of this study that sexual orientation and gender identity are integral aspects of the selves and should never lead to discrimination or abuse. Sexual orientation as a human right is not creating a new set of defined rights but rather seeking entry into an already existing set of rights unequivocally accepted in international human rights law. This encompasses the right to be free from discrimination and harassment in employment, services and facilities, accommodation and housing, contracts and membership in unions, trade or professional associations.

Violence against individuals is compounded by discrimination on the grounds of race, ethnicity, social status, class, and sexual orientation. History has overtly shown that many people have been persecuted on account of their sexual orientation. Those seeking to peaceably affirm diverse sexual orientations or gender identities have also experienced violence and discrimination. LGBT individuals are often treated differently because of their sexual orientation, whether as a one-off action or as a result of regulations or policies based on sexual orientation. Around the world, they often face violence and inequality, sometimes torture, and execution, because of who they love, how they look, or who they are.

Human rights violations against LGBT individuals take many forms, from outright denial of the right to life to discrimination on various levels, such as accessing economic, social, and cultural rights. More than 80 countries still maintain laws that make same-sex consensual relations between adults a criminal offence. For many public officials and opinion-makers the expressions of vile homophobic prejudice remains both legitimate and respectable, in a

shocking manner that would be unacceptable for any other minority. A total of 78 countries globally continue to criminalise same-sex sexual behaviour; and due to the legal legacies of the British Empire, 42 of these states, are in the Commonwealth of Nations. In recent years many countries have seen the emergence of a new sexual nationalism, leading to increased enforcement of colonial sodomy laws against men and new criminalisation of sex between women<sup>120</sup>. This has clashed against the rising awareness that sexual orientation is a human right<sup>121</sup>. The emerging vision of sexual orientation as a human right grapples with current dichotomization of the political civil rights and economic rights to all individuals including LGBT. If not, those who are deemed “different “will be burdened with the psychological scars of societal alienation and non-protection. It is the normative obligation of human rights advocates and scholars to deconstruct the myths and stereotypes on LGBT and reconstruct a rights discourse that affirms the dignity of LGBT just as one affirms the rights of human beings.

The subject of sexual orientation and human rights is vast and political. Prejudices, negative stereotypes and discrimination are deeply imbedded in society’s value system, patterns of behaviour and sexual orientation. Although the state is not the only or even the main actor with regard to sexual orientation rights, the state plays a pivotal role. Undoubtedly sexual orientation as a human right is a deeply political issue. Indeed, when the focus is on formal rights, and on formal law, the state is an essential actor in policy terms, even if the larger understanding is that sexuality takes shape at the intersection of many different social, political and inter- and intra-personal systems. The notion of sexual orientation becomes a political issue due to the importance and sensitivity of sexuality and sexual issues, and the role of the state in legally establishing the relationship between individuals and recognition of this relationship from the state.

Sexual orientation rights make a strong claim to universality since it relates to an element of the self which is common to all humans: one’s sexuality. The concept therefore avoids the complex task of identifying a fixed sub-category of humanity to whom these rights apply. By proposing an affirmative vision of sexuality as a fundamental aspect of being human, as central to the full development of the human personality as freedom of

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<sup>120</sup> Human Rights, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in the ...commonwealth.sas.ac.uk/resources/publications

<sup>121</sup> *About LGBT Human Rights*". Amnesty International. 2013.).

conscience or physical integrity, sexual rights offers enormous transformational potential not just for society's "sexual minorities", but for its "sexual majorities" as well<sup>122</sup>.

Human rights laws is in a constant state of evolution, from the recognition of rights laid down in treaties, UN resolutions, domestic state practices to the level of custom and *jus cogens*. Many protections that we casually assume today originated in international domestic law that escalated to a gradual recognition of general principles of international law common to most legal systems. Still, when many of the key international human rights instruments were drafted, in most modern countries, marriage meant male and female. Reproduction provides the legal and social contexts for acceptable sexual conduct<sup>123</sup>.

Human rights approach towards sexual orientation and gender identity is at last reaching the heart of global debates. Nevertheless, it is now widely understood that global conversations around human rights are not automatically universal. Similar to the gendered defined human rights' landscape recognition that some forms of cultural practices are in actually GBV, there is now an emerging and acceptable acquiescence that one's sexual orientation deserves protection, similar to ones religion or ethnicity. Tremendous changes over the last two decades have taken place, particularly the recognition that sexuality and therefore sexual rights arise to the point where the vertex of public and private domains blends. The fact that sexuality encompasses both domains makes it necessary to re-visualise and conceptualise human rights.

As sexually stigmatised persons are often denied standing as public actors, it is important to focus on participation as a key human rights value. The notion of human dignity is similarly essential, although it can complicate and often restrict gender particularly when applied to women. To not do so undermines sexual orientation as a coherent set of claims within human rights. Bringing sexual orientation into the package of human rights, with an emphasis on affirming common humanity, requires a deliberate commitment to become more self-aware about the 'ideological formations' that govern our assumptions

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<sup>122</sup> Saiz, Ignacio. "Bracketing Sexuality: Human Rights and Sexual Orientation –2004, pp. 66-67

<sup>123</sup> Freedman, Lynn, Alice Miller, and J. Alexander. Public Health Monitoring and Accountability: A Map of Current Initiatives and Conceptual Challenges: A Briefing paper for OSI (2004) Freedman, Miller, and Alexander, 2004, pp. 7-9.

about sexual behaviours and expression and a willingness to explore the assumptions that underlie different political, religious and cultural arguments about sexuality.

By examining sexuality within international human rights law, what needs to be addressed is how existing international norms should be interpreted to include rights against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, including rights of privacy, equality, speech, expression, and association. The right to sexuality and freedom from discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation is based on the universality of human rights and the inalienable nature of rights belonging to every person by virtue of being human. LGBT individuals do not claim any 'special' or 'additional rights' just the same rights as those of heterosexual persons. Equality, dignity and non-discrimination are the main principles guiding the sexual orientation rights approach that human rights advocates, lawyers and other activists seek to ensure.



### ***United Nation's Perspective***

Primarily, as a result of the vocalisation of LGBT rights with a growing number of LGBT individuals using their status or platforms to draw the world's attention to the treatment of LGBT, the issue has received renewed attention in many countries, and from NGOs and international organisations such as the UN. The UN in particular has made its position clear via resolutions condemning discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. The first ever United Nations report on the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in 2011 details how around the world people are killed or endure hate-motivated violence, torture, detention, criminalization and discrimination in jobs, health

care and education because of their real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity<sup>124</sup>. According to the report, homophobic and trans phobic violence has been recorded in every region of the world. Violence against this group tends to be especially vicious compared to other bias-motivated crimes: "incidents often show a high degree of cruelty and brutality and include beatings, torture, mutilation, castration and sexual assault"<sup>125126</sup>.

Vitit Muntarbhorn who was newly appointed by the Human Rights Council used his first speech as UN Independent Expert on the protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity to criticize antiquated laws, illiberal interpretations of religion and stereotyping<sup>127</sup>.

The High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein and his predecessor Navi Pillay, as well as the former United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and other senior UN officials have made several public statements on LGBT protection. On Human Rights Day (10 December) 2010, the then Secretary-General delivered the first of several major policy speeches on the quest for LGBT equality, calling for the worldwide decriminalization of homosexuality and for other measures to tackle violence and discrimination against LGBT people. "As men and women of conscience, we reject discrimination in general, and in particular discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Where there is a tension between cultural attitudes and universal human rights, rights must carry the day," he said. Since 2003, the General Assembly has repeatedly called attention to the killings of persons because of their sexual orientation or gender identity through its resolutions on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions.

In 2011, the United Nations Human Rights Council passed resolution 17/19 – the first United Nations resolution on sexual orientation and gender identity – expressing "grave concern" at violence and discrimination against individuals based on their sexual orientation and gender identity. This recognition of LGBT was followed up with a report from the UN Human Rights Commission documenting violations of the rights of LGBT community, including hate crimes, criminalization of homosexuality, and discrimination. The report's findings

<sup>124</sup> [http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/19session/A.HRC.19.41\\_English.pdf](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/19session/A.HRC.19.41_English.pdf)

<sup>125</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on Discriminatory laws and practices and acts of violence against individuals based on their sexual orientation and gender identity, 2011, UN Human Rights Council: Geneva

<sup>126</sup> Friman, J., 2014. LGBT-rights: sexual orientation, gender identity and the human rights.

<sup>127</sup> OHCHR, LGBT Speeches and statements [www.ohchr.org/.../Pages/LGBTspeechesandstatements.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/.../Pages/LGBTspeechesandstatements.aspx)

formed the basis of a panel discussion that took place at the Council in March 2012. It was the first time that a United Nations inter-governmental body had held a formal debate on the subject. Its adoption paved the way for the first official United Nations report on the issue prepared by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Further recognition followed when the UN Human Rights Commission urged all countries that had not yet done so to enact laws protecting basic LGBT rights. Similarly, the UN Human Rights Council has adopted a variety of United Nations Resolutions on human rights, sexual orientation and gender identity as set out below.

In September 2014, the Human Rights Council adopted a new resolution (27/32), once again expressing grave concern at such human rights violations and requesting the High Commissioner to produce an updated report (A/HRC/19/41) with a view to sharing good practices and ways to overcome violence and discrimination, in application of existing international human rights law and standards, and to present it to the 29th session of the Human Rights Council<sup>128</sup>

The first international document to recognise equal rights without regard to sex was the UN Charter's preamble.

*"We the peoples of the United Nations determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women"<sup>129</sup>.*

Article (55 C) states

*"Universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion"<sup>130</sup>.*

No right to sexuality exists overtly in international human rights law. Instead it is found in a number of international human rights instruments, including the Universal Declaration of

<sup>128</sup> .( United Nations Statement on LGBT discrimination - ohchr.org;  
[www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Discrimination/Pages/LGBT.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Discrimination/Pages/LGBT.aspx)

<sup>129</sup> Wellman, C., 2000. Solidarity, the individual and human rights. Human Rights Quarterly, 22(3), pp.639-657.

<sup>130</sup> United Nations [www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/un-charter-full-text](http://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/un-charter-full-text)



Human Rights, (UDHR) under Article 2 where it explicitly mentions freedom from discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation<sup>131</sup>:

*“Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it is independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty”<sup>132</sup>.*

Sexual orientation can be read into Article 2 as "other status" or alternatively as falling under "sex".

In the ICCPR, Article 2 sets out a similar provision for non-discrimination:

*“Each State Party to the present Covenant undertakes to respect and to ensure to all individuals within its territory and subject to its jurisdiction the rights recognized in the present Covenant, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.”<sup>133</sup>*

In 2011, the United Nations Human Rights Council passed its first resolution recognizing LGBT rights that was followed up with a report from the UN Human Rights Commission documenting violations of the rights of LGBT people, including hate crimes, criminalization of homosexuality, and discrimination. Further recognition followed when the UN Human Rights Commission urged all countries which had not yet done so to enact laws protecting basic LGBT rights<sup>134</sup>. Equally The UN Human Rights Council has adopted a variety of United Nations Resolutions on human rights, sexual orientation and gender identity<sup>135</sup>.

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<sup>131</sup> The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. (ICESR)

<sup>132</sup> <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

<sup>133</sup> International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CCPR.aspx>

<sup>134</sup> Jordan, Frank (17 June 2011). "U.N. Gay Rights Protection Resolution Passes, Hailed As 'Historic Moment'". Associated Press.

<sup>135</sup> A/HRC/RES/32/2 S) - A/HRC/RES/17/19 and A/HRC/RES/27/32



## ***Iranian Legal perspective on LGBT***

Amongst other Arab countries, the penalty in Algeria, Bahrain, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Somalia, Tunisia and Syria is imprisonment – up to 10 years in the case of Bahrain<sup>136</sup>. In countries that do not have an explicit law against homosexuality, LGBT individuals may still be prosecuted under other laws. In Egypt, for example, an old law against “debauchery” is often used. Egyptian law does not explicitly criminalize homosexuality or cross-dressing, but it does have several provisions that criminalize any behaviour or the expression<sup>137</sup>.

At another more horrific level, homosexuality can be a grim march to death. In Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Yemen and Mauritania, sodomy is also punishable by death, though allegedly no executions have been reported for at least a decade. Fourteen nations with a large Muslim population have laws providing for the death penalty for same-sex activity or otherwise allow such executions<sup>138</sup>. In Today's Iran, *lavat* (sodomy) is a capital offence. Iran is perhaps one of the few nations that have executed a number of its citizens for homosexuality. Since the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran, it is believed the Iranian government has executed more than 4,000 people charged with homosexual acts<sup>139</sup>. The reported 4000 death has not been confirmed by the government and it is hard to prove that many have been executed because of being LGBT. However, it appears that things are changing in Iran where executions have stopped in the last few years and homosexuality appears to be a tolerated practice with the police turning a blind eye. This change in attitude seems to be due to international pressure and negative press coverage homosexuality.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is another state that has a poor human rights record and that is hostile to LGBT individuals<sup>140</sup>. Since 1979, Iran has been an Islamic State under Article 2 of the 1979 Constitution of Islamic Republic of Iran. The Iranian Legal System is structured as a

<sup>136</sup> Whitakar, Brian. Everything you need to know about being gay in Muslim countries. 2016  
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jun/21/gay-lgbt-muslim-countries-middle-east>

<sup>137</sup> Mohamed, M.S., 2015. *Sexuality, Development and Non-conforming Desire in the Arab World: The Case of Lebanon and Egypt* (No. IDS Evidence Report; 158). IDS.

<sup>138</sup> 2017 edition, *State-Sponsored Homophobia report from ILGA, the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association*

<sup>139</sup> (Vexen Crabtree (3 January 2014). "The Battle between Monotheism and Homosexuality: Religious Prejudice Versus Equality: Islam". Retrieved 8 December 2014

<sup>140</sup> Saeed Kamali Dehghan, Iran's Persecution of Gay Community Revealed, GUARDIAN (London), May 17, 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/may/17/Iran-persecution-gay-community-revealed>. See generally Human Rights Watch, *We Are a Buried Generation: Discrimination and Violence Against Sexual Minorities in Iran* (2010), <http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/iran1210webwcover.pdf>

civil law system similar to the French civil law system. The government is comprised of the Supreme Leader, the Executive, Judicial and Legislative powers.<sup>53</sup>

Homosexuality is against the law in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Iranian penal laws are rooted in an interpretation of Islam that does not acknowledge same-sex desire as a permanent state. According to The UN Special Rapporteur's March 2013 report the members of the LGB community in Iran were denied basic human rights. According to Iranian law, which is modelled on Islamic Sharia Law, homosexuality is illegal and punishable either by 100 lashes or the death penalty. Homosexual acts still carry a sentence of corporal punishment and, although the revision of Iran's Penal Code reduced the circumstances under which the death penalty should be applied for sodomy, its application was retained. A "confession" can be punished by thirty one to seventy four lashes without other evidence but a confession "repeated four times is considered to be sufficient evidence of guilt for the full penalty of either 100 lashes or the death penalty.<sup>41</sup> The Iranian judiciary can often extract "confessions" under torture as evidence. Under the revised Iranian Penal Code in 2012-2013, the laws regarding homosexuality were altered. The earlier version mandated that an 'active participant' (male) would receive the death penalty in all cases, when he was of age. However, the limitation of 'only' up to 74 lashes for minors in the earlier version was removed in the newer version.

The hovering presence of receiving the death sentence is always present. If a man is a "passive partner" in a homosexual act, he always faces the possibility of death. The "active" partner faces the death penalty under certain conditions, or otherwise receives 100 lashes. Therefore, Iranian men who have sex with men (MSM) or women who have sex with women (WSW) are penalized for their actions,<sup>42</sup> by punishing men with death and flogging women for same-sex sexual relations<sup>43</sup>.

In Iran the rules and legislation concerning LGB individuals are varied from those rules concerning transsexual individuals. Historical discussions speak to a varied religious discourse, with many followers of the faith choosing to accept trans-identity as normal within Islam<sup>44</sup>. In 1967, Khomeini published a religious *fiqh* (Religious Ruling), or Islamic jurisprudence that prescribes guidance based on historical experiences, in his Tahrir al-wasilah. Tahrir al-wasilah was a philosophical important document primarily aimed to Khomeini's followers at its time of publication, but it later cemented into national policy when Khomeini became the Supreme Leader of Iran. Khomeini's religious *fiqh* validated the

rights of trans-identified persons to pursue gender change surgery. Khomeini's progressive *fiqh* proclaimed that the "prima facie, or al-zahir, view is contrary to prohibiting the changing sex by operation"<sup>45</sup>. As previously reiterated, the pressure to undergo GCS can be intense.

The Iranian administrative system often plays a role in transgender victimization which repeatedly occurs at various familial, societal and state levels. This has been mentioned in many ethnographic studies such as the one undertaken by Afsaneh Najmabadi in *Professing Selves: Tran's sexuality and Same-Sex Desire in Contemporary Iran* (2013). The study illustrates how gender and sexual minorities in Iran have opted to approach the Iranian bureaucratic order through the discourse of "needs" and not "rights." That is to say, transgender individuals use the fractious Iranian bureaucracy to their advantage in order to shape the various rules and regulations that will give them access not only to medical resources, but also to spaces of relative manoeuvre through which they can create liveable lives. As Najmabadi demonstrates, instead of attempting to change laws through Parliament for example, gender and sexual minorities in Iran work with the Welfare Organization and other state bureaucracies to create the changes they need.

In 2010, the Office for the Socially Harmed at the Welfare Organization of Iran responded to strategic lobbying and activism by trans-identified individuals to reclassify their military exemption from the "mental disorders clause" (Section 33.8) to the "glandular disorders clause" (Section 30)<sup>46</sup>. As this "glandular disorders clause is now clearly displayed on their identification, this has, at least in theory, reduced the amount of discrimination trans-identified men receive when seeking employment. The glandular disorders clause is viewed as a more socially-permissible exemption. Najmabadi explains that "For legal and medical authorities, sex change surgeries are explicitly framed as the cure for a diseased abnormality, and on occasion they are proposed as a religion-legally sanctioned option for heteronormalizing people with same-sex desires or practices"<sup>47</sup>.

Iran's legal system with respect to LGB individuals is emblematic, unequivocal and adamant in its non-acceptance and no recognition of homosexuality. The Judiciary does not recognize the concept of sexual orientation other than the heterosexuals, and thus from a legal standpoint there are no homosexuals or bisexuals, only persons committing homosexual acts<sup>54</sup>. The adverse and broad-ranging impact of these laws and punishment of criminalizing

consensual, private same-sex conduct between two adults are punctilious in its interpretation and applications.

The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran, Asma Jahangir, in her second report, covering the period January 1 – June 31, 2017, drew on information from a number of expert and civil society sources, including the Abdorrahman Boroumand Foundation, to describe Iran's "serious human rights challenges"<sup>48</sup>. Ms. Jahangir criticized the Iranian's Judicial System in her report and condemned the alarming number of capital punishment sanctions for homosexuality that is illegal in the country. Her influential comments have exposed the prevailing harsh circumstances LGB individuals face in Iran. Her position on this subject has also given a ray of hope that efforts are in process to bring peace and comfort in LGBT's marginalized lives.

The 1979 revolution transformed Iran's judicial system. Part of the transformation included the incorporation of Islamic Sharia law. Sharia contains all the guidance communicated by God to the Prophet Muhammad in the text of the Qur'an, as explicated by Muhammad in word and deed<sup>57</sup>. In Iran, Sharia law is largely interpreted by the clerical establishment, which wields great influence over the legislative process, and ensures that laws and regulations do not violate Islamic law. Under this law, the criminal and civil codes were modified and the family laws encompassing marriage, divorce, child custody and many women's rights were the recipient of the biggest changes<sup>58</sup>.

### **Iran and International Laws on Human Rights**

Iran is a signatory to various human rights treaties and instruments, which explicitly prohibit any form of sexual, mental, or physical abuse of individuals, and especially children. The Iranian government has obligations arising from their signatory acquiescence and under international law to ensure women's rights to equality and non-discrimination, including freedom from domestic violence and abuse by family members. However, the lack of congruencies between Islam and international standards is glaring. Iran's penal code that incorporates stoning, amputations and flogging meets the definition of torture under international law. The prohibition of torture and inhuman treatment is enshrined in the following regional and universal human rights instruments.

The United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT) provides the most precise and widely-cited definition of torture under international law. It defines torture as:

*“any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions<sup>64</sup>. As of August 2017, the Convention has 162 state parties;<sup>65</sup> however, Iran is not a signatory.*

Nevertheless, Iran is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Article 7 of ICCPR provides that *“no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.”<sup>66</sup>* Iran signed the ICCPR on April 4, 1968 and ratified the agreement on June 24, 1975 without reservations.

Iran is also a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Article 37(a) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) provides that:

*Neither capital punishment nor life imprisonment without possibility of release shall be imposed for offenses committed by persons below eighteen years of age”* Iran justifies its non-compliance actions by claiming dispensation in cases where the Convention is deemed “incompatible with Islamic jurisprudence<sup>6768</sup>.”

### ***The statistics are odious.***

Iran is one of the seven countries in the world that still employs the death penalty for homosexuality<sup>69</sup>. Iran also has the largest number of executions of any country proportional to its population. Only China executed more people in sheer numbers than Iran. In 2009, Iran executed 388 people. Between 2010 and 2014, executions rose dramatically with a total of at least 3,242 executions<sup>70</sup>.

Iran continues to execute juveniles despite being a signatory of to various human rights treaties and instruments. In 2007, Iran executed eight juvenile offenders.<sup>72</sup> In 2008 and 2009, it was the only country to carry out executions of minors, in violation of its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In 2013 and 2014, Iran carried out at least 11 juvenile executions<sup>73</sup>. And these are the ones we are aware of. Undoubtedly there are countless unknown executions.

In 2014 two men, Abdullah Ghavami Chahzanjiru and Salman Ghanbari Chahzanjiri, were hung in southern Iran on August 6, plausibly for consensual sodomy. It is uncertain whether or not they were executed for being gay as there are conflicting stories: one Iranian source said they were, another source was vague about their “crimes” but called them “immoral villains”<sup>75</sup>. In 2011 three Iranian men were executed after being found guilty of charges related to homosexuality. The men, only identified by their initials, were hung in the south-western city of Ahvaz, the capital of Iran's Khuzestan province. A judiciary official publically stated that the three convicts were sentenced to death based on acts against Sharia law and “bad deeds”. Iran Human Rights Organization based in Norway, said the men were charged with “*lavat*” – sexual intercourse between two men. It is not clear whether the three men were homosexuals or merely smeared with homosexuality<sup>76</sup>. In 2007 it was announced that 20 criminals will be hung in Tehran on a variety of charges, including rape and sodomy<sup>77</sup>. No further details of the case were made public

In 2005 the highly publicized and public executions of two teenage boys, Mahmoud Asgari and Ayaz Marhoni, who were hung in public for their alleged involvement in sodomy and rape, brought to the surface the unpredictability and harshness of Iran’s draconian view of homosexuality. There are disturbing and flinching photos of the hangings that were widely distributed on the Internet. Both teenagers were juveniles at the time of the offense, and one was believed to have been a juvenile at the time of his execution. It is still uncertain whether or not the dual executions were carried out specifically because of their homosexuality<sup>78</sup>. To this day, the facts on which the charges against them were based on are inconclusive.

Similarly, a teenage boy named Moloudzadeh was found guilty of *Lavat* (sodomy rape) and executed for raping three teenage boys when he was 13, even though all witnesses retracted their accusations and Moloudzade withdrew a confession. Normally as a minor the death penalty would not be applicable. There was an international outcry and a nullification of the death sentence by Iranian Chief Justice Ayatollah Syedxecut. The planned execution was an

uncontestably a violation of two international treaties signed by Iran that outlaw capital punishment for crimes committed by minors, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>79</sup>. Nevertheless, Moloudzadeh was hung without his family or his attorney being informed until after the fact<sup>80</sup>. Magdalena Mughrabi, Deputy Middle East and North Africa Program Director at Amnesty International has voiced that Iran has proven its sickening enthusiasm for putting juveniles to death, in contravention of international law, knows no bounds<sup>81</sup>.

The new Islamic Penal Code targets those whose sexuality is believed to defy social norms and serves as justification for state action to remove the “offenders” from the community. Within the structure of many penal codes, if not in the minds of the general public, sodomy laws are coalesced with crimes of moral turpitude such as rape, sexual assault, incest and sexual abuse of children thereby confusing and inflaming the public that homosexuality is on par with abhorrent crimes of sexual violence with acts of non-procreative sex. Rape and child sexual abuse are reprehensible and heinous crimes. Being homosexual is not. As discussed in the previous chapters, unfortunately they are often lumped with pedophiles and sexual deviants that requires them to be ostracised from society, punished and executed.<sup>82</sup> Iran’s penal laws against homosexuality grossly violate and carry on violating numerous basic universal human rights. According to a new October 2017 UN report by Dr. Ahmed Shaheed, UN special rapporteur on human rights in Iran, the Islamic Republic’s penal system fails to conform to international human rights standards because it, for example, classifies homosexuality as a “capital offense”<sup>83</sup>.

Human Rights Watch published a complete report in 2010 on homosexuals and other sexual minorities’ circumstances in Iran. Human Rights Watch reported that because the courts’ investigations of “morale issues” are not public, it was difficult to determine how many people have been executed because of same-sex relationships. Amnesty International estimated that since 1979 about 5000 people have been executed because of same-sex relationships<sup>84</sup>.

The Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights as well as the Human Rights Committee has repeatedly called on all state parties, including Iran, to repeal laws criminalizing same sex conduct.<sup>85</sup> The government of Iran is a state party to ICESCR and ICCPR. Iran has also ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Declaration for Human Rights. The terms and obligations are clear. Instead, the Iranian judicial response is to

use its existing penal laws to criminalize same sex relationships. The struggles faced by LGBT groups in Iran are legal in origin. There are limited, if not outright non-existent legal remedies available to them in cases of injury or rights violation; compounding this is the stark fact that the laws are specifically enacted against them. The laws are inherently discriminatory and prejudicial against vulnerable segments of the population, and flagrantly violate Iran's international obligations<sup>86</sup>.

Muslims themselves are acutely aware of the stigma of homosexuality, and the prejudice and, in some cases, harsh punishment that they may face if they disclose their sexual identity.<sup>87</sup> For LGBTs living in Iran's climate of state-sanctioned discrimination with its acute level of intolerance and the ultimate sanction of death, this is a bleak picture.

An examination of the circumstance faced by homosexuals and bisexuals in the neighbouring countries of Iran, potentially widen the view to possible law reforms and solutions to social challenges in Iran. For example, in Turkey, same-sex relationships were decriminalized in 1858; and the discriminations which are based on laws, have been limited<sup>88</sup>. One of the greatest achievements of Turkish LGBT society, the social activists and NGOs was the LGBT Pride Prada in Istanbul making Turkey the only Islamic country With LGBT pride Prada<sup>89</sup>. Iranian LGBTs participated in some LGBT Pride Prada; include Prides in Istanbul and Amsterdam Pride Prada and Stockholm Pride Prada in 2015 and 2016.

In spite of this highly visible and promising public stance, Turkish society still maintains negative views regarding LGBT individuals. According to a research published by Pew Research Centre in 2013 only 9 percent of Turkish people believed homosexuality should be accepted by the society. <sup>90</sup> Turkish people overwhelmingly opposed the acceptance of homosexuality by the society. This rejection is also displayed in Russia and Lebanon as well. Same-sex relationship is not a crime but 80 and 74 percent of these two societies believed homosexuality should not be accepted by the society. Despite legal reforms which undoubtedly is an important step, the social challenges are equally daunting in solving the challenges LGBT people chronically face.



## Chapter 3

### *Analysis on Religion and Mental Disorder Patterns*

#### Contents:

- The Psychological Implications of Sexual Orientation on Adolescent Social Life
- LGBT and the Family
- LGBT and Cyber Bullying
- Analysis on Religion and Mental Disorder Patterns
- Religion-Iranian's Perspective
- Iranian's LGB & Asylum

### ***The Psychological Implications of Sexual Orientation on Adolescent Social Life***

Adolescence (usually the years between ages 13 and 19) is the transitional journey from childhood to adulthood that can at times be a period of increased risk-taking, disorientation and discovery. This transitional journey is often fraught with issues of independence and self-identity; many adolescents face difficult choices regarding drugs, alcohol, and sexuality. Peer groups, romantic interests, and appearance tend to take on heightened importance. In general, LGBT youths share many of the same coming of age developmental stages as their heterosexual peers<sup>141</sup>. Adolescence is also a period marked by defining a personal identity. One's sexual orientation typically emerges between the period of middle childhood and early adolescence and without any prior sexual experience.

For many LGB youths, adolescence can be simply hellish as they first become aware of and recognise their own sexual and emotional attraction to members of their own gender which often results in feelings of shame. In fact, shame and pride are powerful emotions that have been historically linked to non-conformist sexual identities<sup>142</sup>. For some, shame is simply the first, and remains a permanent, structuring fact of identity<sup>143</sup>. Munt (2000) argues that for the 'homosexual subject' the increasing consciousness of same-sex desire generates feelings of marginality<sup>144</sup>. An individual may feel ashamed of his/her feelings or may replace shame with the feeling of pride. What has been proposed by such theorists is that the LGBT identity, however it is formed, is formed through the shame/pride binary. Sadly, recognising ones LGBT identity at this most vulnerable period can have hazardous consequences on one's mental and physical health.

For young struggling LGB people, the road to acceptance is arduous as the journey into adulthood becomes more complicated and uncertain. As homophobia works by punishing and attacking on a personal individual level, this pushes young struggling LGB people to maintain a false heterosexual enigma because their sexual desire or gender has been labelled abnormal, dirty and disgusting. Homophobia plausibly contributes to young people having

<sup>141</sup> Homosexuality and Adolescence-Paediatrics, aappublications.org/content/paediatrics/92/4/...PEDIATRICS Vol. 92 No. 4 October 1993 631 Committee on Adolescence

<sup>142</sup> Scheff, T. J. (1994) Emotions and identity: a theory of ethnic nationalism. In C. Calhoun (ed.) Social theory and the politics of identity (Oxford: Blackwell), pp. 277–303

<sup>143</sup> Pile, S. and Thrift, N.J. eds., 1995. *Mapping the subject: geographies of cultural transformation*. Psychology Press.

<sup>144</sup> Munt, S. R. (2000) Shame/pride dichotomies in Queer as Folk. *Textual Practice*, 14, 531–46.

feelings of self-loath about their own sexuality and may cause them to have a low self-esteem. These emotions can in turn trigger self-destructive cycles of behaviour such as drinking, drug consumption, unsafe sexual practices and self-harm.

This vulnerable period in their lives is often tempered by the fact that many LGB youths receive little support from either their family and/or social institutions<sup>145</sup>. Adolescents experiencing same-sex attraction are increasingly uncomfortable identifying themselves as LGB. The complexities of an approach to same-sex issues with adults multiply when the client is an adolescent<sup>146</sup>. Accumulating evidence indicates that adolescents who have had same-sex sexual attractions, who have had sexual or romantic relationships with persons of the same sex, or who identify as LGB are more likely than heterosexual adolescents to experience symptoms of depression, suicidal thoughts, and may even try to commit suicide<sup>147</sup>.

Today's LGBT youths in the Western developed world are more likely to be victimized because they are more visible. In comparison, in most of the developing countries and /or non-Western world, LGBT youths are invisible. Although invisibility might mean less victimization, it does not mean free of stressors. Members in an invisible stigmatized groups are required to have "careful monitoring of all interactions and awareness that relationships are based on a lie that could be exposed at any time"<sup>148</sup>. Their stress is exacerbated by the potential rejection from family as well as from society, especially as there are less existing supportive community or professional services to help LGBT youth in developing countries to deal with these rejections. The stresses from rejection and masking one's real sexual identity can often result in poor physical and mental health.

## **LGB and the Family**

For many LGB youths, their relationship with their families is often painful. Initial parental reactions to the disclosure of LGB identity are mostly negative, sometimes including ejection from the home. Thus, gay adolescents are susceptible to loneliness, isolation, depression, and

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<sup>145</sup> Sullivan & Wodarski (2002), Social alienation in gay youth. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 5 (1), 1-17. Page 4

<sup>146</sup> *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal* August 2007, Volume 24, Issue 4, pp 369–383, James A. Cates, 2007, *Identity in Crisis: Spirituality and Homosexuality in Adolescents*

<sup>147</sup> Remafedi et al. 1998 ; Russell and Joyner 2001; Safren and Heimberg 1999

<sup>148</sup> Ryam, C., & Futterman, D. (1998). *Lesbian and gay youth: Care and counselling*. New York: Columbia University Press. Page 20.

suicide<sup>149</sup>. Although family relationships are understood to be a primary context for adolescent development, only a small number of studies have focused on the role of parent–adolescent relationships for LGB youth and young adults. The literature addressing the family relationships for transgender adolescents and young people is lacking. Parents and many providers have limited information about sexual orientation and gender identity development in children and adolescents. Given that family support is perhaps the major influence on an adolescents' self-esteem and the crucial role of parents in promoting adolescent well-being, it is surprising that sparse attention has focused on the parenting of LGBT adolescents.

Nonetheless, this is not easy for the family to accept the non-traditional sexual orientation of the LGBT adolescent. In many cultures, homosexuality can bring shame upon the person and his or her entire family, with consequences for friends and family members. For example, female relatives cannot marry due to a lack of willing suitors, male relatives may be fired from their jobs, and the social standing of the entire family can be compromised<sup>150</sup>. As a result, honour killings of homosexual family members can occur in an attempt to restore honour to the family in many areas of the Middle East<sup>151</sup>.

Cumulative knowledge suggests both family and religious support contributes to boosting self-esteem whilst lack of such support contributes to a low self-esteem. Many parents may not believe their children when they come out and instead genuinely believe they are going through a phase or that being gay is due to outside influences. Sometimes gay youths simultaneously receive overt and covert messages of worthlessness from their family. For example, parents will often detach themselves emotionally from their gay child early in childhood when they recognise that their child is different, particularly if non-gender conforming issues arise. Reports from researchers who have studied family reactions to their children's LGB identity indicate that parental acceptance and rejection are different constructs; thus, accepting and rejecting behaviours can co-occur as families adjust to learning about their child's LGBT identity. In startling contrast, affirmation or acceptance of

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<sup>149</sup> Yadegarfar, M., Meinhold-Bergmann, M.E. and Ho, R., 2014. Family rejection, social isolation, and loneliness as predictors of negative health outcomes (depression, suicidal ideation, and sexual risk behavior) among Thai male-to-female transgender adolescents. *Journal of LGBT youth*, 11(4), pp.347-363.

<sup>150</sup> (Jimenez, Marina. "Gay Jordanian Now 'Gloriously Free' in Canada." *Gay Middle East*. 20 May 2004.)

<sup>151</sup> Bilgehan Ozturk, M., 2011. Sexual orientation discrimination: Exploring the experiences of lesbian, gay and bisexual employees in Turkey. *Human relations*, 64(8), pp.1099-1118.

LGBT adolescents is associated with a positive adjustment, increased self-esteem, increased social support, better overall health status, decreased mental health and behavioural health risks, sexual risk behaviour, suicidal thoughts and substance abuse.

With diminished parental bonding, LGB adolescents often withdraw from society or commence risky endeavours that can often lead to self-destructive behaviours such as substance abuse to aid in the coming-out process and to alleviate the anxiety or depression associated with concealing their identity and facing rejection from family and friends. As far back as 1982 it was hypothesized that homosexuals use substances to dull the pain of feeling “different and alone,” to reduce “sexual inhibitions” relating to internalized homophobia, and to reduce the stress of the competition for good-looking sexual partners Colcher (1982). Researchers in one study<sup>152</sup> examined substance use amongst LGB youths and asked their subjects whether they perceived reactions to their LGB identity from a range of people, including family members, coaches, teachers, therapists, neighbours, and friends, to be acceptance, neutral, or rejection. The number of perceived reactions of rejection was reported to predict the probability of substance use. Although reactions of acceptance did not directly reduce substance use, such reactions buffered the link between rejections and substance use. Another recent study assessed the relationship between family rejection in adolescence and the health of LGB young adults.<sup>153</sup> That study showed a clear association between parental behaviours of rejection during adolescence and the use of illegal drugs, feelings of depression, attempted suicide, and sexual health risk by LGB young adults.

Facing this external view of the self, it is small wonder that the external homosexual person internalizes this hatred and has difficulty with accepting his or her identity, building self-esteem, and expressing sexuality. Numerous bodies of research demonstrate that LGB youths have high levels of emotional distress. About 65% of all homosexuals who seek therapy state that depression as a reason, which is often a result of adjusting to their homosexuality, and within this percentage 50% started therapy between the ages of 18-21<sup>154</sup>.

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<sup>152</sup> Rosario, M., Schrimshaw, E.W. and Hunter, J., 2009. Disclosure of sexual orientation and subsequent substance use and abuse among lesbian, gay, and bisexual youths: critical role of disclosure reactions. *Psychology of Addictive Behaviours*, 23(1), p.175.

<sup>153</sup> Ryan, Caitlin & Huebner, David & M Diaz, Rafael & Jorge Sanchez, J. (2009). Family Rejection as a Predictor of Negative Health Outcomes in White and Latino Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Young Adults. *Paediatrics*. 123. 346-52. 10.1542/peds.2007-3524.

<sup>154</sup> Diamond-Friedman, Cassandra. "A multivariant model of alcoholism specific to gay-lesbian populations." *Alcoholism Treatment Quarterly* 7.2 (1990): 111-117.

Whilst studies have documented that LGBT youth suffer more emotional distress than heterosexual, non-transgendered youth, the reasons for their elevated risk are often not explicitly studied or stated. A growing body of research supports the theory that negative experiences resulting from LGBT stigma leads to chronic stress that contributes to emotional distress amongst LGBT adolescents and adults, indicating the mediating role of being treated badly<sup>155</sup>. It is possible that LGBT adolescents have less social support, fewer resources to cope with victimization experiences or that their victimization experiences are more severe.<sup>156</sup>

Recent North American and New Zealand studies of large populations reveal that young LGBT people have higher suicide attempts rates: at least four times higher in comparison to their heterosexual counterparts<sup>157</sup>. About seven per cent of the respondents reported that they had experienced discrimination because someone thought they were gay, lesbian, or bisexual. There were no notable differences in rates of perceived discrimination by age, race, or sex.

Amongst both males and females, LGBT youth displayed more emotional distress as compared to heterosexual, non-transgendered youth as evidenced by significantly higher rates of suicidal thoughts and self-harm. The prevalence of self-harm was particularly high amongst LGBT males. LGBT youth also had significantly higher depressive symptomatology<sup>158</sup> scores than heterosexual, non-transgendered.

The difficulties some young LGBT people encounter in the process of becoming adults include, but not limited to: homelessness, homophobic bullying at school, family rejection and difficulties finding safe spaces to form supportive relationships. Data from the 2007 Washington, DC, Youth Risk Behaviour Surveillance (YRBS) system showed that 40% of youths who reported a minority sexual orientation indicated feelings of sadness or hopelessness within the previous 2 weeks of the study, compared to 26% of heterosexual youths. This data also showed that LGB youths were more than twice as likely as

<sup>155</sup> Bontempo DE, D'Augelli AR. Effects of at-school victimization and sexual orientation on lesbian, gay, or bisexual youths' health risk behavior. *J Adolesc Health*. 2002; 30(5):364–374. [PubMed]

<sup>156</sup> Dunbar E. Race, gender, and sexual orientation in hate crime victimization: Identity politics or identity risk? *Violence and Victims*. 2006; 21:323–337. [PubMed]

<sup>157</sup> Bagley C, Tremblay P. Suicidal behaviours in homosexual and bisexual males. *Crisis*. 1997;18:24–34. [PubMed]

<sup>158</sup> the set of symptoms characteristic of a medical condition or exhibited by a patient

heterosexual youths to have considered attempting suicide in the past year (31% vs. 14%)<sup>159</sup>. One plausible explanation for this elevated risk of emotional distress amongst adolescents with a minority sexual orientation or transgendered identity is that these youths are dealing with stressors related to having a stigmatized identity<sup>160</sup>.

LGBT adolescents live in social environments in which they may be exposed to negative experiences, including social rejection and isolation, diminished social support, discrimination, and verbal and physical abuse.<sup>161</sup> Often the school environment becomes a place of sexual orientation violence (SOV) a term coined by D'Augelli<sup>162</sup>.

It begins early. By the end of elementary school, LGBT youths receive the message that heterosexuality is natural and correct and homosexuality is bad. Not conforming to gender role stereotypes is unacceptable especially for boys. For those youths who consider themselves LGB, moving into adolescence with increased hormone productivity that is a normal part of the period of sexual maturation, often means their puberty passage is marked by being bullied because of their non-conformity to gender norms.

LGB youths frequently deal with bullying in the form of harassment, violence, and attacks. Studies have shown that LGB students constantly received bigoted verbal abuse in the form of pejorative labelling such as homo, fag or sissy more than two dozen times per day. Literature shows that appearance is the number one reason for bullying<sup>163</sup>. The second most common reason was actual or assumed sexual orientation and gender identity.

A study undertaken by the Schools Health Education Unit for campaign group Stonewall revealed that almost two thirds of homosexual pupils in Britain's schools have suffered

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<sup>159</sup> District of Columbia Public Schools 2007

<sup>160</sup> Rosario M, Schrimshaw EW, Hunter J, Gwadz M. Gay-related stress and emotional distress among gay lesbian and bisexual youths: A longitudinal examination. *Journal of Consulting & Clinical Psychology*. 2002; 70(4):967–975. [PubMed]

<sup>161</sup> Lombardi EL, Wilchins RA, and Priesing D, Malouf D. Gender violence: transgender experiences with violence and discrimination. *J Homosex*. 2001; 42(1):89–101. [PubMed]. Savin-Williams RC. Verbal and physical abuse as stressors in the lives of lesbian, gay male, and bisexual youths: associations with school problems, running away, substance abuse, prostitution, and suicide. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*. 1994; 62(2):261–269. [PubMed]

<sup>162</sup> D'Augelli AR, Grossman AH, Starks MT. Childhood gender typicality, victimization, and PTSD among lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. 2006; 21(11):1462–1482. [PubMed]

<sup>163</sup> Berne, S., Frisén, A. and Kling, J., 2014. Appearance-related cyberbullying: A qualitative investigation of characteristics, content, reasons, and effects. *Body image*, 11(4), pp.527-533.

homophobic bullying<sup>164</sup>. Even more alarming was that the study revealed a shocking picture of the extent of homophobic bullying undertaken by fellow pupils and school staff. Almost all of those had experienced verbal bullying, 41% had been physically attacked, whilst 17% said they had received death threats<sup>165</sup>. Even if LGB individuals did not directly experience bullying, they were still in an environment where homophobic language and comments are commonplace.

### ***LGBT and Cyber Bullying***

GLSEN has found that LGBT youths spend more time online than youths in general. LGBT youths make friends online, and use the Internet to gather information about sexuality and health including information about HIV/Aids. LGBT youths are twice as likely to participate in political activities as other youths, also making these connections online. Because LGBT youth spend more time online, they are more likely the targets of cyber bullying<sup>166</sup>.

Cyber bullying are attacks that include electronic distribution of humiliating photos, dissemination of false or private information, targeting youth in cruel online polls, and other types of online harassment. It consists of using the Internet and other related technologies to harm other people, in a deliberate, repeated, and hostile manner. Cyber bullying gives bullies the protection of anonymity.

On one hand, as technology has become an intrinsic part of our everyday lives and has become more accessible, it allow the LGBT community to interact within itself globally and to give the world better understanding of LGBT issues. One the other hand, this digital territory has transformed into another venue to display hate crimes against LGBT youth. It is reported that expression of hatred toward minority groups is more serious within the online community than it is with the “off-line” community<sup>167</sup>.

Cyber bullying combined with bullying lowers self-esteem, which affects and mental health and life style. An Iowa State survey of 444 youths, revealed that one in two LGBT youths

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<sup>164</sup> BBC News | Education | Gay bullying in schools.

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/education/6239098.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/education/6239098.stm). Accessed December 22, 2017

<sup>165</sup> BBC NEWS | Education | Gay bullying in schools 'common' [news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/6239098.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/6239098.stm) Accessed Dec 22, 2017

<sup>166</sup> LGBT Bullying Statistics - No Bullying - Bullying ... [nobullying.com/lgbt-bullying-statistics](http://nobullying.com/lgbt-bullying-statistics)

<sup>167</sup> [Glaser, J.](#), Dixit, S., & Green, D. P. (2002). Studying hate crime with the Internet: What makes racists advocate racial violence? *Journal of Social Issues*, 58, 177-193.



report being cyber bullied about their sexual identities<sup>168</sup>. More than half report being afraid to tell their parents about being bullied because their parents might restrict online access, which, ironically, is often the "lifeline to the outside world" for many young LGBT students who have been ostracized by their peers at school<sup>169</sup>.

Moreover, 40 per cent of the respondents say that their parents would not believe they were being cyber bullied, 55 per cent report that their parents could not do anything to stop it and 57 per cent said they did not think a school official could help. Amongst the LGBT respondents, 45 per cent report feeling depressed because of being bullied, 38 per cent embarrassed, and 28 per cent anxious about simply going to school. One in four reported mentioned suicidal thoughts<sup>170</sup>. Another survey showed that young adults who identified as LGBT had a whopping 52 per cent chance of being bullied in the previous year, compared to their heterosexual peers who had a 38 per cent chance.

Clearly LGB and or those who identify as being a sexual minority are more likely to experience being bullied both in early adulthood and during compulsory secondary schooling with the use of the internet as the main vehicle. Schools, potentially one of the most dangerous places for LGBT youth must challenge homophobic behaviour at all levels to encourage an understanding of alternative lifestyles and sexualities. Anti-bullying interventions calls for policymakers, employers, further educational institutions, and others working with young adults to help address sexual orientation inequality by challenging discrimination at all ages<sup>171</sup>, should not be limited to schools.

## ***Analysis on Religion and Mental Disorder Patterns***

### ***Religion***

Religion adds another layer of pressure and continues to be a crucial factor in opposition to societal acceptance of homosexuality and same-sex marriage. What determines the types of orientations are not one person's mere inclination but a falsely understood religion and continuously impacted by powerful socio-religious sources. It is noteworthy that a family's

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<sup>168</sup> Cyber bullying hits LGBT youth especially hard - CNET [www.cnet.com/news/cyberbullying-hits-lgbt-youth](http://www.cnet.com/news/cyberbullying-hits-lgbt-youth). Accessed November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2017

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Bullying among lesbian, gay and bisexual young people in England [www.cls.ioe.ac.uk/shared/get](http://www.cls.ioe.ac.uk/shared/get)

religious affiliation, although linked to lower family acceptance, was positively associated with young adult LGBT social support.

Views on the relationship between religions and various versions of sexual orientation have diversified amongst time and place, within organised religions and between different religions and denominations. Attitudes toward homosexuality have been found to be determined not only by personal religious beliefs, but by the interaction of those beliefs with the predominant national religious context—even for people who are less religious or who do not share their local dominant religious context. Generally, the present day religious doctrines of the world's major religions enormously vary on attitudes toward LGB.

In Islam, there is only one incomparable God (Allah) and that Muhammad (PBUH) is the messenger of God<sup>172</sup>. It is the world's second-largest religion and the fastest-growing major religion in the world with over 1.8 billion followers or 24.1% of the global population, who are known as Muslims. Muslims make up the majority of the population in 49 countries<sup>173</sup>. All major Islamic schools disapprove of homosexuality and views same-sex desires as an unnatural temptation. Sexual relations are seen as a transgression of the natural role and aim of sexual activity<sup>174</sup>.

In Judaism, the Torah (first five books of the Hebrew Bible) states that: "[A man] shall not lie with another man as [he would] with a woman, it is an abomination".

Christian denominations hold a variety of views on the issue of homosexual activity, ranging from outright condemnation to complete acceptance. Most Christian denominations welcome people who are attracted to the same sex, but still teach that homosexual acts are sinful<sup>175</sup>. The Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church, and other mainline denominations, such as the Reformed Church in America, and the American Baptist Church, view homosexuality as a sin.

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<sup>172</sup> Horrie, C. and Chippendale, P., 2007. What is Islam? A Comprehensive Introduction. Virgin Books Limited.

<sup>173</sup> Maoz, Z. and Henderson, E.A., 2013. The world religion dataset, 1945–2010: Logic, estimates, and trends. *International Interactions*, 39(3), pp.265-291.

<sup>174</sup> "Homosexuality in the Light of Islam" Archived 6 December 2006 at the Way back Machine., 20 September 2003

<sup>175</sup> "Human Sexuality". The United Methodist Church. Archived from the original on 1 July 2012. Retrieved 16 May 2008

All 3 major religions take a variety of approaches of condemnation ranging from quietly discouraging homosexual activity, explicitly forbidding same-sex sexual practices amongst adherents to actively and vocally opposing social acceptance of homosexuality to execution.

Religious belief seems to be a crucial factor in terms of sexual orientation. A study revealed that amongst those who attend religious services weekly or more, there continues to be slightly more opposition to societal acceptance of homosexuality. When the nearly one-third of Americans who say homosexuality should be discouraged are asked why they feel this way, by far the most common reason given (52%) is that homosexuality conflicts with their religious or moral beliefs<sup>176</sup>. This is equally supported by data suggesting the widely-held belief that the more religiously devout harboured the most vehement homophobia.<sup>177</sup>

However, some liberal Christians are supportive of homosexuals. In particular, the Metropolitan Community Church, a denomination of 40,000 members, was founded specifically to serve the Christian LGBT community, and is devoted to being open and affirming to LGBT individuals. Within the Anglican community, there are openly gay clergy: Gene Robinson and Mary Glasspool who are openly homosexual bishops in the US Episcopal Church and Eva Brunne in Lutheran Church of Sweden.

In 2005 the Rev. Rob Schenck, a prominent Washington, D.C., Evangelical leader, told a large gathering of young Evangelicals that he believes homosexuality is not a choice but rather a predisposition, something "deeply rooted" in people. Although he supported opposition to homosexuality he did voice "If it's inevitable that this scientific evidence is coming, we have to be prepared with a loving response"<sup>178</sup>.

However, the situation is changing on ground and there are visible paradigm shifts which help LGBT people to live in peace. The number of supportive religions is continuously increasing around the world as the developed world enacts laws supporting LGBT rights. Under the leadership of Pope Francis, the Catholic Church is also evolving on LGBT issues.

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<sup>176</sup> Pew Research Centre May 15 2013 (Religious Belief and Views of Homosexuality | .people-press.org/...religious-belief-and-homosexuality)

<sup>177</sup> Kessler RC, Mickelson KD, Williams DR. The prevalence, distribution, and mental health correlates of perceived discrimination in the United States. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*. 1999; 40(3):208–230. [PubMed]

<sup>178</sup> What Makes People Gay? - The Boston Globe, [www.boston.com](http://www.boston.com)

In the summer of 2014, the popular Pope Francis said “If someone is gay and searches for the Lord and is willing to do well then who am I to judge him?” This sent shockwaves throughout the Catholic Church and the world as his position stood in contrast to that of his predecessor Pope Benedict XVI who suggested that gay marriage was a threat to global peace. His statement jump started a remarkable period in which several high-ranking Catholics motivated by Pope Francis’s more open posture made comments of a similar vein. In May, a top-ranking Italian bishop said that the church should listen to same-sex marriage arguments. A few weeks later, Brazilian Cardinal Cláudio Hummes, said he did not know whether Jesus would oppose gay marriage. In early September, New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan approved the St. Patrick Day Parade Committee’s decision to allow a gay group to march in the 2015 parade under their own banner. Twenty-one years earlier, one of Dolan’s predecessors, Cardinal John O’Connor, said that to allow a gay group to march would be a slander to the Apostles’ Creed<sup>179</sup>.

These modern day religious postulates are in line with The Commission on Human Rights’ statement that international standards require that there be concerted state policy to eradicate practices even if the proponents argue that they have their roots in religious beliefs and rituals<sup>180</sup>.

### ***Mental Disorder Patterns and LGBT***

Historical overview of sexuality concentrates primarily on male homosexuality within Western culture, and suggests society’s attitude toward homosexuality has been in conflict across the ages. Various theories of homosexuality are derived from either an essentialist approach or a social constructionist approach.

The evolution of the status of homosexuality in mental disorder classifications persuasively suggests that notions of mental disorder can rapidly evolve when social constructs and society evolves. Historically, the medical community was one of the most powerful anti-gay social forces, taking an early stance that gays were, in fact, mentally ill and in need of treatment.

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<sup>179</sup> (The Pope Francis Statement That Changed the Church on LGBT [time.com/3975630/pope-francis-lgbt-issues](http://time.com/3975630/pope-francis-lgbt-issues))  
<sup>180</sup> See Amnesty International, 2001, p. 45

Modern attitudes toward homosexuality have religious, legal, and medical underpinnings. Before the High Middle Ages, homosexual acts appear to have been tolerated or ignored by the Christian churches throughout Europe. Beginning in the latter half of twelfth century, however, hostility toward homosexuality began to take root, and eventually diffused throughout European religious and secular institutions. Condemnation of homosexual acts (and other no procreative sexual behaviour) labelled as "unnatural," (which received official expression in the writings of Thomas Aquinas and others), became widespread and has continued through the present day<sup>181</sup>.

By the end of the 19th century, medicine and psychiatry were effectively competing with the religion and the legal system for jurisdiction over sexuality. Consequently, homosexual discourse expanded from the realms of sin and crime to the realms of mental pathology. This historical shift was generally considered progressive because a sick person was less blameful than a sinner or criminal.<sup>182</sup> Homosexuality became defined as a perversion in which individuals suffer from primitive object relations, impaired ego function, and a defective superego.

However even within the medicine and psychiatric circles, there were divergent views; homosexuality was not universally viewed as pathological. One of the first to write a text on sexual pathology, with a special emphasis on male homosexuality, was by Richard von Krafft-Ebing an Austro-German psychiatrist and author of the 1886 foundational text work *Psychopathic Sexualise*. He described homosexuality as a degenerative sickness. However, Sigmund Freud and Havelock Ellis both adopted more accepting stances. Early in the twentieth century, Ellis argued that homosexuality was inborn, not immoral, that it was not a disease, and that many homosexuals made outstanding contributions to society.<sup>183</sup>

Freud agreed with Ellis that a homosexual orientation should not be viewed as a form of pathology. In a now-famous letter to an American mother in 1935, Freud wrote:

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<sup>181</sup> 1980 Boswell, J. (1980). Christianity, social tolerance and homosexuality. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.).

<sup>182</sup> Chauncey, G., Jr. (1982/1983). From sexual inversion to homosexuality: Medicine and the changing conceptualization of female deviance. *Salmagundi*, No. 58-59, 114-146.

D'Emilio, J., & Freedman, E.B. (1988). *Intimate matters: A history of sexuality in America*. New York: Harper & Row

<sup>183</sup> Robinson, P. (1976). The modernization of sex. New York: Harper & Row

*Homosexuality is assuredly no advantage, but it is nothing to be ashamed of, no vice, no degradation, it cannot be classified as an illness; we consider it to be a variation of the sexual function produced by a certain arrest of sexual development. Many highly respectable individuals of ancient and modern times have been homosexuals, several of the greatest men among them (Plato, Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, etc.). It is a great injustice to persecute homosexuality as a crime, and cruelty too*<sup>184</sup>.

Nevertheless, Sigmund Freud's basic theory of human sexuality was different from that of Ellis. He believed all human beings were innately bisexual, and that they become heterosexual or homosexual as a result of their experiences with parents and others<sup>185</sup>.

In 1957, Evelyn Hooker's research was instrumental in the removal of homosexuality as a mental disorder from the DSM. Her study was innovative in several important respects. First, rather than simply accepting the predominant view of homosexuality as pathology, she posed the question of whether homosexuals and heterosexuals differed in their psychological adjustment. Second, rather than studying psychiatric patients, she recruited a sample of homosexual men who were functioning normally in society. In other words she pioneered a study where she contrasted an experimental group of homosexuals with a heterosexual control matched on age, IQ, education and on a battery of psychological tests. She then asked a panel of expert psychologists to rate the psychological health and predict who was gay versus straight. The adjustment ratings showed no significant differences; if anything, the gay men did better. Indeed, the experts in psychoanalysis could not distinguish between the interpreted responses of participants from these two groups on three different projective tests, which indicated no significant differences in mental health between the groups. Although it took time for views to shift the studies caused a stir in the dialogue surrounding human sexual activity in the psychological community and are often seen as a starting point for contemporary understandings of sexual orientation.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Freud, S. (1905). Three essays on the theory of sexuality. In J. Strachey (Ed. and Trans.), *the standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud*. (Vol. 7, pp. 123-245). London: Hogarth Press. (Original work published 1905)

<sup>185</sup> Freud, S. (1905). Three essays on the theory of sexuality. In J. Strachey (Ed. and Trans.), *the standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud*. (Vol. 7, pp. 123-245). London: Hogarth Press. (Original work published 1905)

<sup>186</sup> Hsueh-Hao Chiang, Howard. (2008). Effecting science, affecting medicine: Homosexuality, the Kinsey reports, and the contested boundaries of psychopathology in the United States, 1948-1965. *Journal of the history of the behavioural sciences*. 44. 300-18. 10.1002/jhbs.20343.

Still in 1968, DSM-II, the APA's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of classification of mental disorders, reinstated homosexuality as a mental disorder, following a long tradition in medicine and psychiatry, which in the 19th century appropriated homosexuality from the Church transforming it from sin to mental disorder. Until the early 1970s the American Psychiatric Association (APA) retained the classification of homosexuality as a disease, based on Freudian concepts of arrested sexual development that leads to a loveless life. The classification was referred to as ego-dystonic homosexuality, or negative homosexual identity, characterized by guilt, shame, anxiety, and depression. The age of onset was thought to be adolescence, and one of the pre-disposing factors was the presence of anti-social attitudes<sup>187</sup>.

In December 1973, bowing under the weight of empirical data, coupled with changing social norms and the development of a politically active gay community in the United States, the Board of Directors of the APA halted the classification of homosexuality as a mental illness by removing it from the DSM. The APA asked all members attending its convention to vote on whether they believed homosexuality to be a mental disorder. 5,854 psychiatrists voted to remove homosexuality from the DSM, and 3,810 to retain it. However although the APA removed homosexuality from the DSM it was replaced with "sexual orientation disturbance" for people "in conflict with" their sexual orientation. Not until 1987 did homosexuality completely fall out of the DSM.<sup>188</sup> Following suit, in 1992, The World Health Organization (WHO) removed homosexuality from its ICD classification with the publication of ICD-10, although ICD-10 still carries the construct of "ego-dystonic sexual orientation". In this condition, the person is not in doubt about his or her sexual preference, but "wishes it were different because of associated psychological and behavioural disorders"<sup>189</sup>.

Zoologist and taxonomist Alfred C. Kinsey and his colleague Hooker began to utilize empirical research as a foundation for the present day knowledge about sexuality that others followed in debunking the myth that homosexuality was a mental illness<sup>190</sup>. Kinsey, in his ground breaking empirical studies of sexual behaviour amongst American adults, revealed that a significant number of his research participants reported having engaged in homosexual

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<sup>187</sup> Nungesser, L.G. (1983). *Homosexual acts, actors, and identities*. New York: Praeger

<sup>188</sup> Neel Burton M.D., Sept 18 2015, *Hide and Seek, When Homosexuality Stopped Being a Mental Disorder*

<sup>189</sup> Ibid

<sup>190</sup> Mondimore, F.M., 2010. *A natural history of homosexuality*. JHU Press.

behaviour to the point of orgasm after age 16<sup>191</sup>. Furthermore, Kinsey and his colleagues reported that 10% of the males in their sample and 2-6% of the females (depending on marital status) had been more or less exclusively homosexual in their behaviour for at least three years between the ages of 16 and 55. Kinsey's empirical findings and conclusions provided some assistance in the movement to have homosexuality eliminated as a psychiatric disorder.

Throughout the years of debate on whether homosexuality is a mental disorder, different types of 'cures' based on psychological or spiritual interventions cropped up to try to change an individual's sexual orientation, even when there is virtually no reliable evidence that sexuality can be controlled or changed.

In the 1950s and 1960s, some therapists employed aversion therapy to "cure" male homosexuality. This typically involved showing patients pictures of naked men whilst giving them electric shocks or drugs to make the patient vomit. Once they could no longer bear it, the patient was shown pictures of naked women or sent out on a "date" with a young nurse. A main organization that advocates secular forms of conversion therapy is the National Association for Research & Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH), which often partners with religious groups. NARTH believe that they can "heal" or "cure" homosexuality through conversion therapy or other methods to change sexual orientation. Needless to say, these shockingly cruel and degrading methods have proved entirely ineffective.<sup>192</sup>

Another method used to cure homosexuality was Reparative Therapy. Reparative Therapy tried to magically transform homosexuals into heterosexuals. According to a review by Drescher (1998), current day Reparative Therapists draw from pastoral counselling, having abandoned the neutrality psycho-analysis. Reparative Therapy is based on conformity to traditional values and idealization of heterosexuality. Supporters of this school of thought file affidavits in support of antigay amendments and believe that their homosexual clients must be ostracized in order to be cured of homosexuality<sup>193</sup>. In spite of the declassification of homosexuality as an illness (and this declassification is slowly happening around the world) some therapists continue to treat it as one.

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<sup>191</sup> Kinsey, A.C., Pomeroy, W.B., & Martin, C.E. (1948). *Sexual behaviour in the human male*. Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders. Kinsey, A.C., Pomeroy, W.B., Martin, C.E., & Gebhard, P.H. (1953). *Sexual behaviour in the human female*. Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders.

<sup>192</sup> Neel Burton M.D., Sept 18 2015, *Hide and Seek, When Homosexuality Stopped Being a Mental Disorder*

<sup>193</sup> Dworkin, S.H., *TITLE LGBT Identity, Violence, and Social Justice: The Psychological Is Political*.



Medical services are often used to force a change to heterosexuality. These medical interventions range from institutionalization, aversion therapy, and chemical castration.<sup>194</sup> Indigenous medicines also are used to attempt to change sexual orientation. Najmabadi explains, “For legal and medical authorities, sex change surgeries are explicitly framed as the cure for a diseased abnormality, and on occasion they are proposed as a religiously and legally sanctioned option for heteronormalizing people with same-sex desires or practices”<sup>195</sup>. One area in which this can be seen is military service.

Obligatory service in the military opens many doors for Iranian men, especially with the possession of a document card. Upon completion of service, men are given a card that grants them many privileges, including the ability to qualify for a passport, officially buy or sell goods, participate in public sector activities, and gain governmental employment. In 2010, the Office for the Socially Harmed at the Welfare Organization of Iran responded to strategic lobbying and activism by trans-identified individuals to reclassify their exemption from the military from “mental disorders clause” (Section 33.8) to the “glandular disorders clause” (Section 30)<sup>196</sup>.

This has, in theory, reduced the amount of discrimination trans-identified men receive when seeking employment as a more socially-permissible exemption as it is clearly displayed on their identification. Gay-identified men and MSM, however, must still abide by the “mental disorder clause,” which categorizes them as “moral and sexual deviants”<sup>197</sup>. For them, a card is stamped with the words “sexual deviant” or “behavioural disorder” as a “red-exemption,” stigmatizing labels that render the person virtually unemployable.<sup>198</sup>

Some psychologists and psychiatrists still hold negative personal attitudes toward homosexuality. However, empirical evidence and professional norms do not support the idea that homosexuality is a form of mental illness or is inherently linked to psychopathology.

<sup>194</sup> Svensson, T.K., 2004. A Bioethical Analysis of Sexual Reorientation Interventions: The Ethics of Conversion Therapy. Universal-Publishers.

<sup>195</sup> Najmabadi, A. (2011). Verdicts of science, rulings of faith: Transgender/ sexuality in contemporary Iran. *Social Research*, 78(2), 1-24.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Human Rights Watch. (2010). “We are a buried generation”: Discrimination and violence against sexual minorities in Iran. Retrieved September 21, 2013, from

<http://www.hrw.org/reports/2010/12/15/we-are-buried-generation>. Page 24

<sup>198</sup> Ibid

Indeed, given the stresses created by sexual stigma and prejudice, it would be surprising if some of them did not manifest psychological problems<sup>199</sup>.

## Paedophilia

Often mainstream society makes the erroneous conclusion that there is a link between homosexuality and paedophilia therefore justifying the discrimination and violence LGB individuals face. Members of LGBT community are often stereotyped as representing a danger to the majority's most vulnerable members: children. Some people fear exposing their children to homosexuals in unsupervised settings, because they believe the children might be molested, raped, or "recruited" to be homosexuals themselves<sup>200</sup>.

As discussed above, sexual orientation is not a mental illness nor is it inherently associated with impaired psychological functioning. On the other hand, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) has included paedophilia in its Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), since 1968. However, in a move towards de-stigmatizing paedophilia, the APA in its updated DSM distinguishes between paedophiles who desire sex with children, and those who act on those desires. The former who want to have sex with children but whose desires are not distressing or harmful to themselves or others, is no longer classified as having a psychiatric condition in the updated DSM. What was once known as paedophilia is now called "paedophiliac disorder"<sup>201</sup>.

Research psychologist and noted authority on paedophiles Gregory Herek defines paedophilia as a psychosexual disorder characterized by a preference for prepubescent children as sexual partners, which may or may not be acted upon. He points out that not all paedophiles actually molest children. A paedophile may be attracted to children but never actually engage in sexual contact with them. Quite often, paedophiles never develop a sexual orientation toward other adults. They usually do not identify as homosexual; the majority identify as heterosexual, even those who abuse children of the same gender. They are sexually aroused by extreme youth, not by gender<sup>202</sup>. Research clearly demonstrates heterosexual men comprise the vast majority of known paedophiles

There is no inherent connection between an adult's sexual orientation and her or his propensity for endangering others. There are no data, for example, showing that LGB individuals are more likely

<sup>199</sup> Prejudice, social stress, and mental health in lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations: Conceptual issues and research evidence. *Psychological Bulletin*, 129, 674-697. Meyer, 2003

<sup>200</sup> Schlatter, Evelyn; Steinback, Robert (9 December 2010). "10 Hateful Anti-Gay Myths Debunked". *AlterNet*. Retrieved 18 June 2013. And Halperin, David (2007). Haggerty, George, ed. "Deviant Teaching". *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Studies*. Wiley-Blackwell: 146-167

<sup>201</sup> Pedophilia Is No Longer Always A Mental Disorder, APA Says [www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/11/01/dsm-pedophilia-menta](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/11/01/dsm-pedophilia-menta)

<sup>202</sup> *Homosexuality and Pedophilia: The False Link* | HuffPost [www.huffingtonpost.com/joe-kort-phd/homosexuality](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/joe-kort-phd/homosexuality)

than heterosexual men and women to sexually harass their subordinates in the workplace, more likely than heterosexuals to possess any psychological characteristics that would make them less capable of controlling their sexual urges, refrain from the abuse of power, obey rules and laws, interact effectively with others, and less likely to exercise good judgment in handling authority<sup>203</sup>. Herek writes that it is society's aversion to male homosexuality, and the attempts by some to represent gay men as a danger to the family<sup>204</sup>.

Similarly, studies by Dr. Carole Jenny, Dr. A.W. and Richard Snipe, and others have not found evidence that LGB individuals are more likely to molest children than heterosexuals. Interestingly, Anna C. Salter writes, in *Predators, Paedophiles, Rapists and other Sex Offenders*, that when a man molests little girls, we call him a "paedophile" and not a "heterosexual." Of course, when a man molests little boys, people automatically assume the perpetrator is a homosexual<sup>205</sup>. Certainly the publicity surrounding the Roman Catholic sex abuse cases has contributed and heightened these concerns.

The mainstream view amongst researchers and professionals who work in the area of child sexual abuse is that homosexual and bisexual men do not pose any special threat to children. Another noted authority on this topic is Nicholas Groth. In an influential 1982 study he wrote:

Are homosexual adults in general sexually attracted to children, and are pre-adolescent children at greater risk of molestation from homosexual adults than from heterosexual adults? There is no reason to believe so. The research to date all points to there being no significant relationship between a homosexual lifestyle and child molestation. There appears to be practically no reportage of sexual molestation of girls by lesbian adults, and the adult male who sexually molests young boys is not likely to be homosexual<sup>206</sup>.

In the same vein in 1998 Dr. Nathaniel Mc Conaghy similarly cautioned against confusing homosexuality with paedophilia. He noted, "The man who offends against pre pubertal or post pubertal boys is typically not sexually interested in older men or in women"<sup>207</sup>.

Whilst the empirical research shows that sexual orientation does not affect the likelihood that people will abuse children<sup>208</sup>, many heterosexuals still believe that homosexuals have natural tendencies toward paedophilia<sup>209</sup>.

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<sup>203</sup> Facts About Homosexuality and Child Molestation)

psychology.ucdavis.edu/rainbow/html/facts\_molestation.html

<sup>204</sup> Herek, G.M. and McLemore, K.A., 2013. Sexual prejudice. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 64, pp.309-333.

<sup>205</sup> Homosexuality and Pedophilia: The False Link | HuffPost [www.huffingtonpost.com/joe-kort-phd](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/joe-kort-phd)

<sup>206</sup> *Nicholas Groth PhD, William F. Hobson MS & Thomas S. Gary Medkeley*: University of California Press; 2005

<sup>207</sup> McConaghy, N. (1998). Paedophilia: A review of the evidence. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 32(2), 252-265. p. 259

<sup>208</sup> Herek, Gregory M (2000b) 'The Psychology of Sexual Prejudice', 9(1) *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 19-22.

## Religion-Islamic Perspective on LGB in Iran

The religious fundamentalism that characterizes the attitude of the Iranian judiciary toward homosexuality is longstanding<sup>210</sup>. To contextualize the strict upholding of such judiciary practices one must first consider the ideology of the Islamic Republic as it is embodied in its religious and political leaders. Within months of the 1979 Iranian revolution, the birth date of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, then the highest-ranking political and religious authority in the Islamic Republic of Iran, and its supreme leader—called for homosexuals to be exterminated. They were to be understood as the “parasites and corruptors of the nation” who “spread the stains of wickedness”<sup>211</sup>. In view of such theological intolerance it is unsurprising that social representations of homosexuality remain negative within Muslim communities.

Theological opposition can be seen in Islamic Holy Scripture (the Quran), Islamic law (Shari’ah), and the verbal sayings attributed to Prophet Mohammed (Hadith), all which hold a very negative view towards homosexuality. Under current Sharia law, homosexuality is considered a “Hadd crime,” a crime for which the Quran suggests a specific punishment.

Proponents of more progressive thinking in Islam say that many Hadd crimes are at odds with another Islamic concept. Tajdid calls for the reform of Islamic society, in order to keep the religion pure<sup>212</sup>.

Human-rights campaigners report that over 4,000 members of sexual minorities have been executed since the ayatollahs seized power in 1979. In Iran, the Islamic Revolution in 1979 brought a massive destruction for homosexuals in the country. As Taylor et al. (2015) “It is unclear that how many non-heterosexuals individuals have been executed since the Islamic Revolution but between 1979 and 1990 some 107 executions were recorded”<sup>213</sup>.

Religion often plays a pivotal part in the rejection of LGBT in the Islamic society and is the guide dog for the thinking and action of millions of believers. Religion is often on par with “core” identity amongst Muslims, both heterosexual and LGB alike, and thus, the Islamic stance on homosexuality is of prime importance. It is more than a theological guidance;

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<sup>209</sup> Herek, Gregory M (2000b) ‘The Psychology of Sexual Prejudice’, 9(1) Current Directions in Psychological Science 19-22.

<sup>210</sup> Arsham Parsi, The Iranian Regime Makes War on Queers, <https://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/238465/iran-war-on-queers>. Accessed October 14 2018

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Peters, R. (2005). *Crime and punishment in Islamic law: Theory and practice from the sixteenth to the twenty-first century* (No. 2). Cambridge University Press.

<sup>213</sup> Taylor, Yvette, Ria Snowdon. *Queering Religion*, Religious Queers Volume 38 of Rutledge Studies in Religion. 2015. Page 45.

rather religion is the underlying essence in the political foundation as it possesses the moral authority to influence social opinions and behaviour especially in marriage, family life of religion and education. And nowhere is this more aptly seen when it comes to society's view on homosexuality. Simply put, through the prism of religion, homosexuality is an abomination.

Religious beliefs continue to be a reckoning force and a momentous factor in thwarting societal acceptance of homosexuality and same-sex marriage. In Iran, homosexuality is viewed as a sin whilst transsexual is viewed as a sickness. <sup>51</sup> These harsh social realities often spill over into the lives of LGB- identified Iranians. Trans-identified individuals are not specifically addressed in the Quran, <sup>52</sup> whilst paradoxically the Iranian government facilitates the sex change operations for transsexuals.

In Iran, the Islamic Revolution in 1979 resulted in massive changes, via executions and sex change operations, for homosexuals. Taylor *et al.* (2015) comments that "It is unclear that how many non-heterosexuals individuals have been executed since the Islamic Revolution but between 1979 and 1990 some 107 executions were recorded"<sup>55</sup>. Whilst referencing Najmabadi, Taylor *et al.* notes that "after Thailand, the Islamic Republic of Iran performs more sex change operations per annum than any other country in the world"<sup>56</sup>

The Iranian penal code was also reformed. The newly revised Islamic Penal Code was ratified by the Islamic Consultative Assembly in 2009 and in May 2013, the Guardian Council of the Constitution, the upper house of the Iranian Parliament, also ratified the new penal code, formally known as the Islamic Penal Code<sup>59</sup>. The new Islamic Penal Code lists the different types of punishments. According to Islamic law, *Hadd* punishments are considered penalties which concern the 'legal rights of God'. The sentence is set, and the court has no room for discretion. In *ta'zir* penalties, the judge has a margin for discretion<sup>60</sup>. The new Islamic Penal Code includes controversial articles, such as the *Qisas* law of retribution for murder, stoning for adultery, amputations of body parts for theft and certain national security offenses, and flogging for a wide range of offenses<sup>61</sup>.

Similar to the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979, the newly enacted Islamic Penal Code directly and indirectly effected the lives of LGBT individuals. Specifically, under Chapter 2, articles 232 to 241 it is clear the legal system's preference for heterosexual relationships. LGBT individuals are not wanted and will not be protected. The numerous

atrocities being perpetrated against LGBT in Iran are sanctioned under this new criminal code.

Article 233 - *Livat* is defined as penetration of a man's sex organ (penis), up to the point of circumcision, into another male person's anus.

Article 234 - The *hadd* punishment for *livat* shall be the death penalty for the insertive/active party if he has committed *livat* by using force, coercion, or in cases where he meets the conditions for *ihsan*; otherwise, he shall be sentenced to one hundred lashes. The *hadd* punishment for the receptive/passive party, in any case (whether or not he meets the conditions for *ihsan*) shall be the death penalty. If the insertive/active party is a non-Muslim and the receptive/passive party is a Muslim, the *hadd* punishment for the insertive/active party shall be the death penalty.

Article 235 - *Tafkhiz* is defined as putting a man's sex organ (penis) between the thighs or buttocks of another male person.

Article 236 - In the case of *tafkhez*, the *hadd* punishment for the active and passive party shall be one hundred lashes.

Article 237 - Homosexual acts of a male person in cases other than *livat* and *tafkhez*, such as kissing or touching as a result of lust, shall be punishable by thirty-one to seventy-four lashes of *ta'zir* punishment of the sixth grade.

Article 238 - *Musaheqeh* is defined as where a female person puts her sex organ on the sex organ of another person of the same sex.

Article 239 - The *hadd* punishment for *musaheqeh* shall be one hundred lashes.

Article 240 - Regarding the *hadd* punishment for *musaheqeh*, there is no difference between the active or passive parties or between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Article 241 - In the cases of indecent offenses, in the absence of admissible legal evidence and the denial from accused, any type of investigation and interrogation in order to discover hidden affairs and things concealed from the public eye shall be prohibited. They cannot entrap people or interrogate them if there is no evidence.

As plainly evident, the new Islamic Penal Code criminalizes same sex relationships, with a myriad of punishments ranging from 100 lashes for consensual sexual activity between women (Article 239) to the death penalty for consensual sexual intercourse between men (Article 234). The law also criminalizes other acts between members of the same sex, including touching and intimate kissing, which are punishable up to 74 lashes. Articles 232-233 sentence the “passive” partner of consensual sexual intercourse between two men to death, whilst the law sentences the “active” partner to receive 100 lashes, as long as he is Muslim and unmarried. Non-Muslims and married men who engage in consensual same sex relations are subjected to the death penalty<sup>62</sup>.

It is interesting to note that the second book of the Fourth Chapter of the Islamic Penal Code, which covers all forms of sexual crimes, remains ostensibly mute on the subject of rape between married couples. The rape of a minor is a crime only if the sex act takes place outside religiously sanctioned relationships. This twisted logic means that two consenting adult men in an intimate sexual relationship have committed a crime and risk death whilst someone who forces sex on a ten-year-old girl in the name of marriage is not considered to have committed a crime.

Under the new Penal Code, homosexuality and the hovering application of the death penalty operate in unity. It is understandable why many LGBT live in a state of constant anxiety and fear as the Iranian authorities often publicly flaunt its laws and the executions.

Heavy punishments for “homosexual behaviour” are still firmly in place; the social climate is hardly conducive to frank discussion of sexual rights. LGB Iranians are left with two options: to live in secrecy, or to seek asylum as refugees, leaving their country, their homes and their families behind them.

### ***Iranian’s LGB and Asylum***

The consequences of a same-sex relationship deemed a punishable crime or even death in Iran, the negative view of society, the harassment of LGB people by government and the pressures of family results in a toil that forces many LGB people to seek asylum in countries where the life situation is better. 91

Many of them go to Turkey and receive refugee status from the UNHCR to be resettled in Australia, Canada or the United States<sup>92</sup>. If they seek asylum in Turkey, these individuals

have very limited rights under the Turkish Law 187 (including limited access to employment and universal health care), and have no financial means or resources to provide for themselves<sup>93</sup>.

The LGBT asylum applicant must show that the LGBT community in their home country is sufficiently visible and that one's treatment amounts to persecution on account of their LGB identity or sexual orientation. Many LGB in Iran demonstrate a prima case for claiming asylum: violation of LGBT rights is a violation of human rights; homosexuals and bisexuals are under a real fear of persecution and harassment in Iran and the fact they are in danger of being arrested and punished. Thus, there is a possibility of meeting the legal definition of a well-founded fear of persecution and thus being granted refugee status.

Unfortunately, there are some individuals who either exploit or take advantage of this situation and receive refugee status and future residency by falsely disguising themselves as homosexual and bisexuals. This exploitation is not limited to individuals.

In the last two decades there have been some NGOs founded by mostly former LGB refugees. These NGO's ostensibly are cooperating with UNHCR; assist Iranian LGBT refugees in obtaining refugee status and resettling them in safe countries. But there has also been criticism about their actions in the recent years and some of them have been accused of corruption and mismanagement of funds and donation.



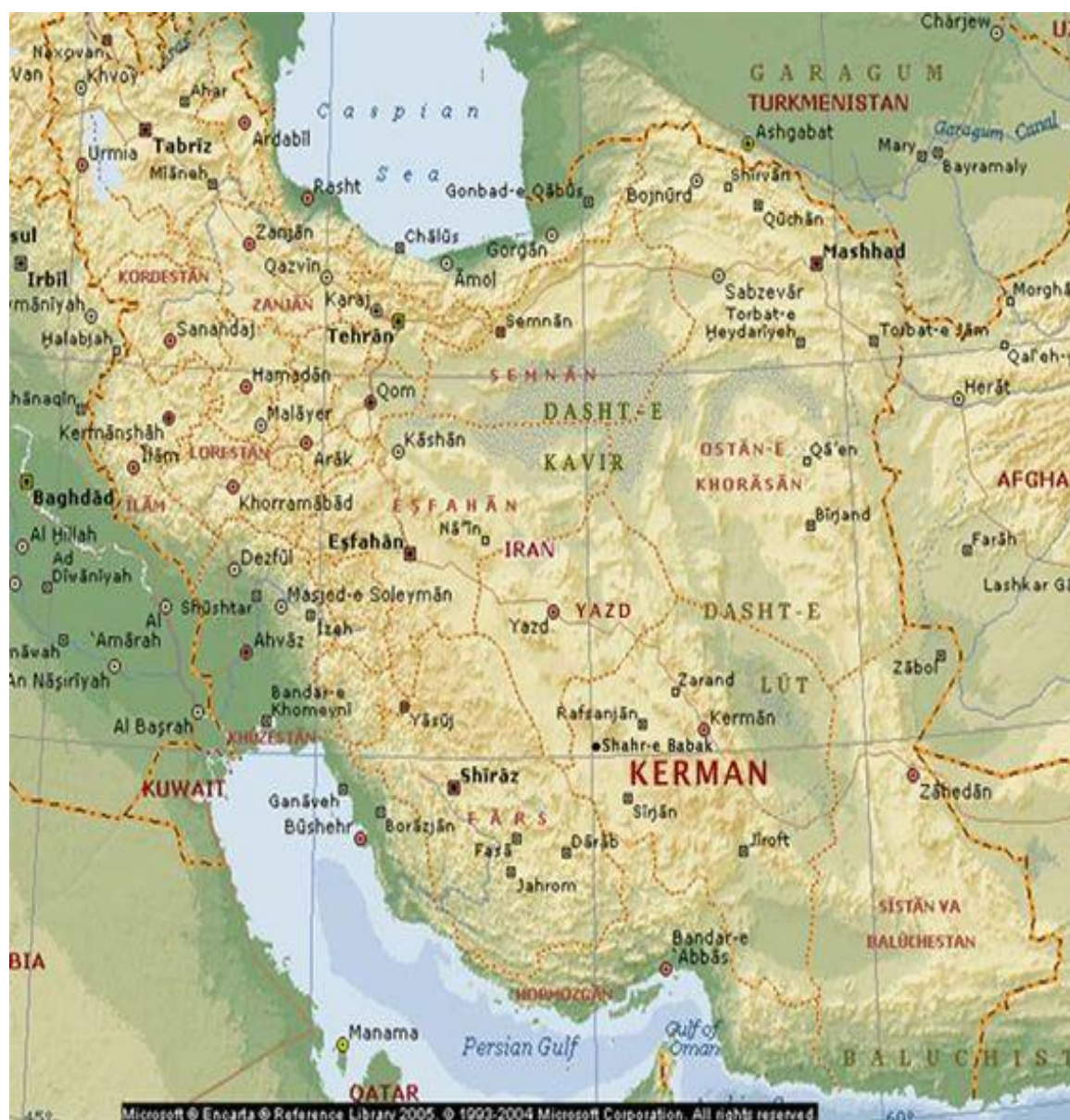
# Chapter 4

## The Research Study

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- Methodology adopted in previous studies
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- Population & Geographical Location of the Research
- Tehran
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- An Elaboration on the Research's Narrative
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- Findings of the Research- Quantitative Result of the Research Study

## *Forbidden Cities -The Research Study*



## *Introduction*

The research study has three major dimensions: a literature review, quantitative survey distributed to LGB individuals from three Iranian cities and a qualitative case study.

The main purpose of the literature review was to demonstrate divergent views on homosexuality stemming from fictional, scientific and sociological and historical perspectives ranging from ancient Greece to the modern era. Our objective was to enlighten the public on the existing written discourse on LGB that depicts the enormous diversified attitudes and contributing multiple factors that are critical to our research. The literature review was conducted using a variety of pools of information which included research

papers, banned novels and governmental papers. Periods of time were allocated for the literature and library researches that helped strengthen the body of this research study. Finally and most importantly the research study also wants to contribute to the systematic collection and analysis of data on LGBT lives in Iran that is sorely lacking and needed.

The quantitative survey reflects the basic premise in any research project. Appropriate and good quality methods are a pre-requisite of a research study in order to be representative, reliable and valid. Without good quality methods, it is highly unlikely to ascertain whether the validity of the research findings truly reflect the real needs of LGBT communities. The existing research methodologies should be assessed for its usefulness in capturing necessary data for future research and to inform complex policy and funding decision makers so that it is taken seriously by potential funders<sup>214</sup>.

Collateral consequences of poor or non-transparent methodology or data collection are findings that are either bias and or misleading. This plausibly could lead to damaging misrepresentation of issues pertaining to the LGBT communities. The transparency and quality of reporting is ethically important for a number of practical and principled reasons. Accurate methods reporting allow for appropriate peer review, critical evaluation of studies, eases reproduction and replication of research findings, reduces waste, avoids redundancy and unnecessary repetition and facilitates public trust in scientific research. This chapter explains what methodologies were applied, the methodological issues, ethical considerations, limitations, the research analysis itself and also the design strategies underpinning this research study are discussed. The methodological aspects include approaches to sampling, qualitative and quantitative methods, community consultation and dissemination and ethical limitations. Whilst explaining the stages and processes involved in the study, this chapter also discusses the research methodologies, and the design strategies underpinning this research used in the study including data collection and analysis methods.

Methodological barriers have been highlighted as a primary reason for the limited research with lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) people. Thus, strategies for anticipating and addressing potential methodological barriers are needed. To address this need, this study discusses potential challenges associated with conducting research with LGB people and describes

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<sup>214</sup> Webb D, Wright D (2001) Count Me In: Findings from the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Community Needs Assessment 2000 [online]. Available at <http://www.lgbtmind.com/content/ACMI.htm> (accessed 7 February 2010)

specific strategies for addressing these challenges. Each step of the research process—from development of research questions to interpretation and dissemination of results is discussed. This discussion concludes with a summary of recommended strategies for advancing the quality and quantity of future scholarship with LGB people.

## ***Background of the Research***

This study research emerged in 2016 when the previous project on Early Child Marriage (ECM) was published in English and Persian<sup>215</sup> and launched at the University of Oxford London and at the Tehran National Library in Iran. Prior to this LGBT research study, the subjects of enquiry were mainly centred on late childhood/ early young adulthood issues such as the harmful traditional practices of **FGM** (Female Genital Mutilation) and honour killings<sup>216</sup>.

These abominable pressing topics of concern produced an epiphany moment of realisation that the author of this research study has always seen and understood. Despite its variation and diversity FGM and ECM spring from the same oppressive framework, i.e. human slavery. Slavery exists in many forms: from the visible cruel chains of slavery, to the invisible chains of societal disapproval and rejection that corralled individuals under the genesis of social deviants and abnormal. Groups of people who are reduced to insignificant nothings. Unspoken and kept silent, unacknowledged and scorned upon. These sub-groups within society lack attention not only from civil society itself but also from the social structures thriving inside society that supposedly are put in place to proffer protection such as the legal system, the police and the courts. Not only are those in authority ignoring them but these subgroups are given sparse attention, from society in general. Many are victims of pre supposed assumptions and are automatically deemed deviant, abnormal and inherently dangerous. Many live their lives under these clouds of disparaging labels. The history of oppression and discrimination has greatly affected the well-being of LGB individuals as they do suffer from the reinforcement of societal negative messages, stigmatization, widespread inequality and the struggle not to get caught under Iran's repressive regime where Islamic law

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<sup>215</sup> Ahmady, Kameel. An Echo of Silence- A comprehensive research Study n Early Child Marriage (ECM) in Iran (2016). [https://www.novapublishers.com/catalog/product\\_info.php?products\\_id=62825](https://www.novapublishers.com/catalog/product_info.php?products_id=62825)

<sup>216</sup> Ahmady. K. 2015. In the Name of Tradition. Female Genital Mutilation in Iran.pp.49. Uncut/VOICES Press <http://kameelahmady.com/fgm-in-iran>

criminalizes same-sex relations. The idea of exposing this gradually shaped itself into its present form as a research study.

The research study presents an overview and exploration of the dynamics of LGBT individuals in Iran that employs fieldwork as a base. The survey represents 500 personal accounts of chronic incidents of prejudice, discrimination, and other forms of discrimination experienced by LGBT respondents from the three largest cities in Iran, including one city reputed for its religious fervour. This study, in the long queue of the continuum of previous similarly liked studies, puts another debate to the surface of LGB individuals' lives that are persistent quotidian cycles of fear and suppression by analysing the reasons and root causes for such dislike.

This covert sexual minority group of LGB in Iran possesses unknown boundaries that are too difficult to distinguish, to approach and to gain trust. Although there have been some surveys on LGBT in homophobic Muslim countries ( See Chapter 2 for a more in-depth discussion) in general there has been little research on attitudes towards homosexuality amongst Muslims, mainly attributed to difficulties associated with conducting empirical research into such a taboo topic. Moreover, as argued by Murray<sup>217</sup> (1997), there is a culture of collective denial of homosexuality in Islamic societies.

The present study is unique in its perspective towards LGBT minorities. Our first priority and utmost concern was how they tackle the day-to-day prejudices, discrimination, societal disapproval and threats of legal punishment they chronically face. This research study findings conveys a clear message about the massive scale of change needed in Iran for LGBT individuals. This is based on an optimistic anticipation that the respective study would bridge the data and research gap on LGB and development in the Iranian context by collecting reliable first hand data. This plausibly poses many challenges, but it is the key to establishing evidence-based policies and strengthening the economic case for inclusion. Furthermore, the study would also help in mobilizing experts from multiple sectors by presenting a comprehensive narrative of the actual on the ground realities.

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<sup>217</sup> Murray, S.O (1997).The will not to know: Islamic accommodations of male homosexuality. In S.O. Murray & W. Roscoe (eds.), *Islamic homosexualities: Culture, history and literature* (pp.14-54). New York, NY: New York University Press.



## ***Methodology adopted in previous studies***

This research is comparable to the normal available realm of methodologies ranging from qualitative to quantitative techniques, field works, ethnographies, country wide surveys etc. Each method was chosen for its upmost functionality and often adapted based on the subjectivity and the sphere of research. This topic is extremely sensitive and often shrouded in secrecy even amongst and within families. In a country as Iran where social norms and harsh legal sanctions create an atmosphere of justifiable fear and paranoid distrust, one must always take heed not only of the sociological and anthropological methods that usually are priority but also of the inherent ethical boundaries in which these methods operate. It can be limited in scope and restricted in range. Moreover, the political forces operating in Iran potentially rendered the research study susceptible to



FGM survey-A gathering of traditional female circumcisers in Iran

PHOTO BY: KAMEEL AHMADY

reciprocal repercussions for both the researchers and the LGB interviewers. For example whilst undertaking the field missions there was always the omniscient presence of fear of being exposed, caught by the security of police forces or being spied upon. There were moments we were afraid. This occurred on more than several occasions when the subjects preferred to have their interviews in parks or other public locations. These potential repercussions affected critical aspects of the work. Hence, this is where mere methodology had to be sacrificed to assure the LGB persons' safety and confidentiality. There is no redeeming value in a perfectly conducted research that harms its participants.

In previous researches, several studies have been conducted within the parameter of Gender Studies and Human Rights which differ in their basic approaches to the participants/respondents. In the author's first research FGM study that was the first country wide research on issues of a very similar nature, a survey was conducted through four main provinces of Iran that were still practicing this harmful traditional practice on high levels.<sup>218</sup>

<sup>218</sup> Ahmady. K. 2015. In the Name of Tradition. Female Genital Mutilation in Iran.pp.49. Uncut/VOICES Press <http://kameelahmady.com/fgm-in-iran>

After estimating the overall frequencies the team concluded that out of the four provinces with the highest frequency of practicing FGM, included West Azerbaijan, Kermanshah, Kurdistan and Hormozgan located in Western and southern Iran. Four main geographical directions were then chosen as the first cluster, each within an urban area. For each city or town, a number of villages or countryside were chosen as the second cluster for further evaluations. Interviews with local informants and key persons from each community were arranged as this permitted gathering a great deal of information to help shape the vital chronic steps of the research. Victims of FGM and their families were interviewed in confidential settings and qualitative analysis of the gathered data was then maintained through SPSS software. The findings and results of the study, published both in Farsi and English and submitted to the UN and the UNICEF, provided first hands up to date information on this much neglected subject.

Our next research study on ECM took place under the same quantitative manner although with different steps and logistics. ECM is prevalent in most rural areas cutting across a wide range of socio classes, economies and spheres. Consequently, a more detailed set of group surveyors were sent to the top seven provinces of Iran that had a high ECM frequency and rate. Systematic sampling method was applied to those areas in which ECM was highly practiced and overwhelmingly as an accepted societal norm. Teams of four were sent to each district following up the aforementioned cluster sampling method. Localized DHS questionnaires were filled out and the qualitative analysis of the gathered data alongside narratives of the ECM victims, their families, local informants and key characters and social figures. Similar to the first research study, the findings are readily available and publish both in Farsi and English<sup>219</sup>.

Unlike our previous studies that were accompanied with images and photos, this current study is not. Given the delicate subject matter and more importantly the potential lethal repercussions and stigma that could result from exposing faces and pictures, the research team decided that in the interest of privacy and respect not to show their faces. Their safety and well-being was our primordial priority.

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<sup>219</sup> Ahmady, Kameel. An Echo of Silence- A comprehensive research Study n Early Child Marriage (ECM) in Iran (2016). [https://www.novapublishers.com/catalog/product\\_info.php?products\\_id=62825](https://www.novapublishers.com/catalog/product_info.php?products_id=62825)

## Methodology for Current Study

Most projects of this nature whilst tackling LGBT issues in the framework of gender studies, often lack sound methodology and in all likelihood suffer from the almost inescapable weakness of convenience sampling. Building upon the two earlier research studies, the current research study was resigned to minor inevitable mistakes that could potentially led to methodological sacrifice. Given the highly sensitive issue of LGBT and its hidden narrative of LGB, theory fell behind reality. We were obligated to provide the upmost effort to keep these entities as close as possible.

The data presented in the subsequent part are the findings from 180 semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted with LGB individuals in Iran. The details of the orientation of interviewers, research methods, sample demographic information, and data analysis are discussed below;

## Training of the Interviewers:

When thinking about the best methodological approaches within the LGB context that addresses issues of sexuality and/or gender, it was crucial to realise the means by which language, categories, definitions used to describe individuals could plausibly impact the participants and the research study itself. Giving some thought to these matters is critical, as both quantitative and qualitative research demands accurate definitions and classifications. This is essential to accurately analyse statistical data. In this regard the various definitions and classifications are often appended to certain groups of people<sup>220</sup>. As such, these issues help shape a project's methodological trajectory and credibility.



<sup>220</sup> McManus S (2003) Sexual Orientation Research Phase 1: A Review of Methodological Approaches, National Centre for Social Research, London.

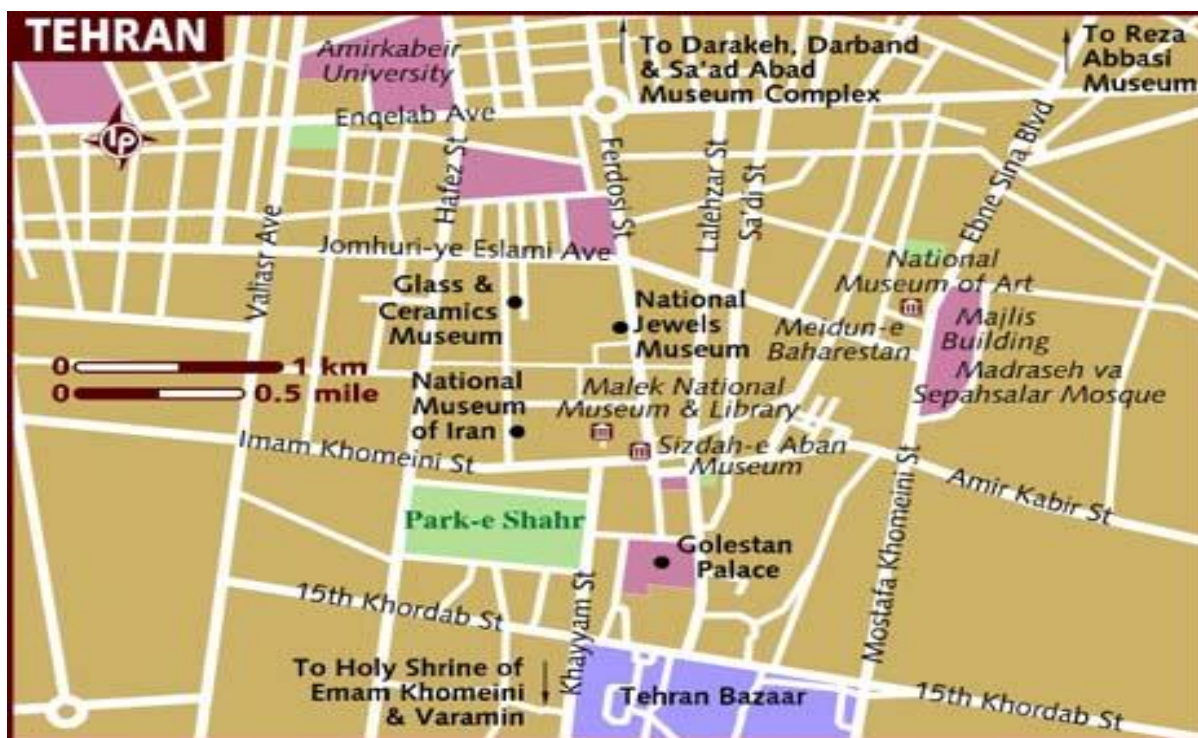


Perhaps one of the most striking feature of this research study is that in comparison to similarly held research as previously described, this research study on LGB faced major methodological challenges that require precise attention, namely the social status and living conditions in Iran. This necessitated the research team to adopt a new approach to the study.

In order to do so, a number of interviewers underwent training in preparation for their assigned tasks. Several workshops and field visits were arranged to augment the selection and preparation of the team members. A team of 8 graduate students with various backgrounds and expertise in sociology, anthropology and social work embarked on six month training under the supervision of the writer of this book and his research assistant. Their training was twofold: to learn how to approach highly sensitive and personal subjects and to address vulnerable groups in society with significant low numbers of participants in an unbiased manner. The newly cadre was comprised equally of male and female to access lesbian and gays. The initial orientation equipped interviewers with the requisite skills to ask questions about a dimension of sexual orientation and to probe sensitive issues carefully. The Training also explained the reason(s) question(s) had been added, reviewed the clarification language about the responses categories and the privacy protection of responses. Every single step had been methodically and well- planned and precise in order not to lose the very hard-to-find participants of the study. Even unintentional trivial mistakes could potentially have devastating and significant consequences

### ***Population & Geographical Location of the Research***

LGB individuals exist in all facets of Iranian societies and regions and are clearly not limited to any specific urban or rural area. An internal decision was made that that the research would be conducted in major metropolitan cities of Iran as neither the available data nor the locals within each region would have any input or influence the outcome. To achieve the underlying essential objective, three major metropolitan cities of Iran were found to be potentially more opened minded so that LGB groups and persons might have more freedom in expression. Tehran, Mashhad and Isfahan were the chosen cities. In viewing the structural mechanisms that operate against LGB persons at different levels of actions and given the



cultural differences, societal contexts and decades of ruling traditions, selecting these three metropolitan cities was a wise choice. Additionally many LGB groups from these three metropolitan cities in Iran used social networks and were habitually exposed to social media, the flurry of social networks and digital communications. Lastly these three cities were reputed for well-known meeting spots and parks where the LGB community discreetly gathered in small groups or visited in order to bond. Some of these parks and cafes are familiar to the public especially in the city of Tehran where many LGB individuals are recognised by their appearance. A brief overview of each city is given below.

## TEHRAN

Tehran is the capital of Iran and a metropolitan city. It represents a fusion of an historical and developed era. This vibrant Iranian capital is home to 15 million people, and is located in the northern part of the country<sup>221</sup>.

Tehran is Iran's administrative, economic, and cultural centre as well as the major industrial and transportation centre of the region. The city sits on the slopes of the Alborz Mountains at an elevation of about 1210 m<sup>222</sup>. Most commercial and government buildings are located within the centre of the city. The climate is marked by seasonal contrasts, with short springs

<sup>221</sup> The world's largest cities and urban areas in 2006". City Mayors. Accessed October 6, 2017.

<sup>222</sup> Tools, Free Map. "Elevation Finder". www.freemaptools.com. Retrieved October 6, 2017

and autumns, separating cold winters and hot dry summers. Although the majority of the people in Tehran are Persian-speaking, as roughly 99% of the population understand and speak Persian, there are also large populations of other Iranian ethnicities in the city such as Azerbaijanis, Armenians, Lurs and Kurds who speak Persian as an acquired second language<sup>223</sup>.

There were some compelling reasons why Tehran was one of the chosen cities. First of all, in recent years small pockets of gay public life have established itself around the city. At night, a well-known park near the City Theatre and the University of Tehran transitions to a vibrant cruising ground for gay men. They come to trawl the park, to look, to show off, exchanging furtive glances in the dark, occasionally meeting for a few minutes in the public facilities or heading to some third location for more comprehensive interaction<sup>224</sup>.

This does not mean that LGB has become a common norm in Tehran. Although there does exist clusters of night life for LGB, there is still less tolerance for homosexuality. Gestures, holding hands, intimate looks are not unusual things; nonetheless, they are permissible until they are not noticed. This has given a little breathing space to gays in Tehran as compared



<sup>223</sup> Abbasi-Shavazi, Mohammad Jalal; McDonald, Peter; Hosseini-Chavoshi, Meimanat. (September 30, 2009). "Region of Residence". *The Fertility Transition in Iran: Revolution and Reproduction*. Springer. pp. 100–101.

<sup>224</sup> The Tehran Bureau. *Intimate spaces: coming out in Iran*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/iran-blog/2015/jun/11/iran-gay-coming-out-intimate-spaces>. Accessed October 6, 2017

to other cities and rural areas. Gays from the lower classes and rural areas, where stigmatization is often most severe, rarely have the ability to move out of the house before marriage. Even in the more modern and wealthy communities, there is generally little acceptance of homosexuality, but some middle- and upper-class Iranians have the means to create parallel lives, out of sight from their relatives or friends. Additionally many LGB mostly move to Tehran which is a bit more liberal when it comes to have a space for their particular orientation. These are the compelling reasons that Tehran was selected to be researched in terms of LGB. Finally there was also a contributory logistical factor: accessing LGB is easier in Tehran as compared to other rural areas or smaller cities.

## MASHHAD



The historical city of Mashhad is amongst the most influential areas in the region in terms of archeology, tourism, historical monuments and religiosity. Mashhad with an area about 328 square kilometers and 3 million inhabitants is the second largest and most-populated city in Iran after the capital, Tehran, and amongst the largest cities within the Islamic world<sup>225</sup>. The city annually hosts around 21 million local and 2 million foreign Arab shiaat visitors who mostly visit for Islamic and cultural tourism. Mashhad is the second prominent and largest city in east of Iran and the capital of Khorasan Razavi province.

For some time, Mashhad has long been the host city for visitors and tourists for the Shiaat sect of Islam. It has been a pioneer and prominent venue for scholars and intellectuals for

<sup>225</sup> "Razavi Khorasan (Iran): Counties & Cities - Population Statistics in Maps and Charts".  
www.citypopulation.de.

spreading Islamic knowledge and the Shiaat school of thought. Mashhad, as the place for the coexistence of religions and sects, has also been the focal point for influential historical and revolutionary events. Mashhad is famous of the shrine of Ali-ibn-Mosa Alreza (P.B.U.H); thus ornamented to the noble Razavi characteristics derived from historical experience.

Although Mashhad is a cultural hub that has gained a vast popularity amongst tourists, Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, and Transgender are not living freely in Mashhad. Less than ten years ago, their mere existence of being Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Intersex and Queer was denied by then president of Iran. Three years earlier, two teenagers who had been accused of sodomy were publically hung in Mashhad.<sup>226</sup> In Iran everyone must live as a heterosexual. In other words, heterosexuality is an obligatory sexual orientation identity for everyone in Iran and this dogma is particularly acute in Mashad. People of every sexual orientation have to behave and conduct themselves as if they were heterosexuals. In this part of the study, the researchers not only tried to measure the number of LGBTs amongst adult men and women in Mashhad but also capture their way of lives including this enormous psychological state of feigning.

## ***ISFAHAN***

Isfahan, a famous conservative Iranian touristic city, is no doubt amongst the most important historical cities and urban centre in Iran throughout most of the Persian history<sup>227</sup>. It is located in central part of Iran that intersects all main routes in four directions. This city acquires its social and cultural traits from neighbouring provinces especially in towns near the borders. The latest Census (2014) recorded a population of 5,007,000 residents.<sup>228</sup> The dominated nationality and language is Persian (also referred to as Farsi) and the Isfahani dialect. The vast majority of the population are Shiite Muslims. The bulk of the populace adhere to traditional beliefs and this loyalty to traditions is seen within the province's context. Variety of nationalities including Qashghayi Turk, Bkhtiyari Lur and Fars helped shape the distinguished forms of cultures and norms in the province. During the Iraqi war in Iran, Isfahan province witnessed the thousands of immigrants who came from the Khuzestan

<sup>226</sup> Ahmadinejad: No Gays, No Oppression of Women in Iran – <http://abcnews.go.com/US/story?id=3642673>. Iranian teenagers from the province of Khorasan who were publicly hanged –

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahmoud\\_Asgari\\_and\\_Ayaz\\_Marhoni](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahmoud_Asgari_and_Ayaz_Marhoni)

<sup>227</sup> Michael Dumper, Bruce E. Stanley. Cities of the Middle East and North Africa: A Historical Encyclopaedia

<sup>228</sup> The National Organization for Civil Registrations, 2014.

<https://www.sabteahval.ir/Upload/Modules/Contents/asset99/salnameh93.pdf>

province and other border areas. This welcoming variety of Fars, Lur, Bekhatiri, Jewish and Armenian people alone has had a significant role in shaping the province's demographical outlook. It was a safe locale away from the war zone. The plethora of industrial factories proved to be a source of attraction for the jobless and homeless immigrants.

The prevalence of LGB in Isfahan is no doubt undeniable. The young generation in Isfahan is very free and liberal and never hesitant to experience new ideas<sup>229</sup>. There are multiple incidences of arrests of gays in Isfahan which justifies the notion of their active presence in the city. Accordingly, Isfahan was selected to demonstrate how this new generation of LGB orientation is surviving in the city that has a vast historical, religious and cultural background.

### ***Areas of Interest and Sampling***

Multiple challenges are associated with sampling the LGB population in Iran, especially when trying to obtain a representative sample. The biggest challenge was accessing the LGB population and receiving sufficient response rates. In such types of researches, there are random samples. As this particular research is novel random samples of the LGB population are impossible to obtain and peruse because no conceivable sampling frame exists for them. Additionally problematic (and virtually impossible) was obtaining representative samples of the LGB population, partly because there is no clear-cut definition of what or who is LGB. Undoubtedly, this may be explained by the simple fact that many LGB people may choose not to identify themselves or, in other words they have not admitted to themselves<sup>230</sup>.

Combining several sampling approaches assists by tackling these challenges, maximizing the diversity and increasing the chances of the number of people being selected. One increasingly popular method in recruiting subjects is snowball sampling. Snowball sampling can be used when a qualified participant shares an invitation with other subjects similar situated who fulfil the qualifications defined for the targeted population. This was one sampling method used amongst a range of innovative approaches that included the use of sponsors (key informants) and peer researchers. This method resulted in a sample (180 people), diverse than

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<sup>229</sup> Khorashad, Behzad S., et al. "Sexual orientation and medical history among Iranian people with Complete Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome and Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia." *Journal of psychosomatic research* 92 (2017): 55-62.

<sup>230</sup> Hare, Jan. (1994). Concerns and issues faced by families headed by a lesbian couple. *Families in Society*. 32. 27-35.



many comparable studies. Using snowball sampling provided an intimate insight into the vagaries of sampling and data collection with regards to LGB individuals.

As all LGB group activities are banned in Iran and no university or researcher is allowed to approach the issue (apart from limited number of research studies with a focus on religious and medical aspects of LGB groups), there is no official data on the number of LGB in Iran. There was also no compelling major evidence provided by the government and or nongovernmental institutions which are often in direct contact with LGB individuals. Therefore, the critical question was 'who to approach' rather than 'how to approach'. The crucial lack of any official or even unofficial data on LGB individual in Iran, forced us to resort to other forms of population estimations. Due to ingrained religious responses and legal approaches in Muslim countries such as Iran, homosexuals are reticent in revealing their sexual identity. Nevertheless, thanks to social and virtual networks the homosexual community has managed to connect to one another and manifest their very existence in the form of underground clandestine groups in such cities as Tehran, Isfahan and Mashhad. Through vast investigations it became clear that LGB societies in Iran are more comfortable with using social network platforms such as Telegram and WhatsApp than Facebook and other applications. By joining in Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual groups on Telegram we discovered that these social networks groups have no less than five hundred members and, in some instances, as high as one thousand. The added comfort of anonymity and the often use of multiple sim cards and IDs provided the members with a more heightened sense of freedom. As most of the LGB individuals maintain a low profile and are understandably reluctant to emerge from their secret shells, this has inevitably led to their increased use of online social networking tools and applications of the virtual world. It is the only provided space where they can be their true selves. Due to ingrained religious responses and legal approaches in Muslim countries such as Iran, homosexuals are reticent in revealing their sexual identity.

## ***Research Methods***

### **Mixed Research Methods**

The long-term consultations resulted in a selection of a range of methods to choose, and even these methods were prone to differ from one city to another. This research exemplifies of a mixed method research where both quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts and language have been combined into a single study. Using mixed methods enhances research because each technique has its pros and cons<sup>231</sup>. In this case, although the survey could not surmise why questions were answered in a certain way, nevertheless, the survey could reach more people.

There are two predominant methodological approaches in research which is commonly used in every research study i.e. qualitative and quantitative research. For this particular research study, both methods were adopted to elicit information from the respondents. Unlike previous research studies of a like nature under taken by the author, there were two approaches/methods utilized to make this current research study technically sound and politically correct. In the following section the study, we elaborated on the methods and approaches that were utilized to identify, approached, interviewed the participants on the one hand, and triangulated, interpreted and excreted relent data on the other hand.

### **Snowball Sampling Method:**

As previously discussed, Snowball sampling is a popular technique amongst social scientists who wish to work with a population difficult to identify or locate. This often occurs when the population is somewhat marginalized, homeless or include those individuals who were formerly incarcerated or involved in illegal activities. It is also common to use this sampling technique with people whose membership in a particular group is not widely known, such as LGB individuals in Iran.

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<sup>231</sup> Johnson, B., & Christensen L. (2012). Educational Research: Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Approaches. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.



For the research on LGB in Iran, sampling was conceptually designed as a method that offered a way to overcome many of the challenges associated with inviting difficult-to-reach communities to be a part of this research study. Adaptations of the basic approach were then developed to extend the effectiveness of the strategy in identifying hard-to-reach and hidden populations and to expand the character of the achieved sample in order to make it more representative of the general population amongst whom these hidden populations reside<sup>232</sup>. A particular advantage of Snowball sampling was its cultural competence and the inherent trust it promotes amongst potential participants. This helped to increase the likelihood of the identified person agreeing to talk to the teams of researchers.

### **Quantitative Research: quantitative survey**

The first data collection step in this research was conducting a quantitative survey. A survey was used to gather information about the thoughts, feelings, attitudes, beliefs, values, perceptions, personality, and behavioural patterns of research participants. This is the first study on the LGB community conducted whilst actually inside the country. Moreover, the use of public space, whilst conducting the survey allowed many of the participants to answer questions with relative ease and provided the foundation for a more detailed research study to be conducted in the future. Participants were located through Snowball sampling in which the survey was first distributed to a few in the study area, who in turn, passed it on to their friends, both males and females who identify LGB community and lived in the area. Individual in-depth interviews with these key stakeholders provided the bulk of data to form the investigation. The initial interviews occasionally supplemented by some paired and group interviews and telephone conferences. Fieldwork took place between September and December 2017. Each interview was exploratory and interactive in form, based on a topic guide that listed the key topics to be addressed. The interviews were flexible to allow issues of relevance for individual respondents to be covered through detailed follow-up questioning.

Additionally, the quantitative part of the research was driven by the context of the questionnaire itself, through a systematic estimation. Snowball method was used on every LGB individual; mainly name the number of people he or she knows whose sexual orientation falls within the domain of this study (LGB). Using this strategy, participants counted the number of their LGB friends or people they regard as LGB. Therefore, a part of

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<sup>232</sup> Magnani R, et al. Review of sampling hard-to-reach and hidden populations for HIV surveillance. *Aids*. 2005; 19(Suppl 2):S67–72.

the quantitative data collection relied on the honesty and personal estimations of people who were already a member of the LGB community.

## Qualitative Research

Qualitative methods have proven to be an effective research paradigm to address similar types of research questions. Qualitative research is “grounded in the assumption that individuals construct social reality in the form of meanings and interpretations”<sup>233</sup>. As qualitative research is interpretive research, it is important that researchers use high standards of quality and verification techniques. The researcher could, for example, spend a prolonged time in the field gathering data<sup>234</sup>. In the current study, this meant that as many interviews as possible were conducted until all the categories were saturated and no new themes emerged.

Qualitative research was well suited for this research study as it allowed the researcher to capture the voices and complex views of this marginalized group were captured and noted. The qualitative aspect of this study was viewed within a threefold dimension: the context of the current political debate about LGB lives; the social fabric and norms of the participants’ geographical region and the context in which to enter into the analysis. These contextual factors add a complex layer to the research study yet with rigorous qualitative research, rich and insightful descriptions of this complex phenomenon are presented.

Research obviously can be done in many ways but its usefulness and effectiveness on social realities must be taken into account. As rigid attention to the proper implementation of research results was crucial, this naturally led us to use the qualitative Ground Theory (GT) method. As previously mentioned, this research study is emblematic of mixed methodologies meaning that the social interpretations and results are mainly driven from the GT method. Thus the interviews that incorporated a wide aspect of LGB lives were analysed and noted through the GT method of coding. .

Despite the draconian conditions and perpetual feelings of fear, what was revealed was a surprisingly optimistic and brighter image of what is currently taking place of LGB’s individual’s lives in Iran. Many of the LGB individuals were resilient. A number of open-

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<sup>233</sup> Gall, M. D., Gall, J. P., & Borg, W. R. (2007). *Educational research: an introduction* (8th Ed.). Boston: Pearson/Allyn & Bacon. Page 767

<sup>234</sup> Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2007). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications

ended questions were purposefully designed so the interviewed LGB individual felt free to open up and discuss at length issues and matters that they wanted to share. What was immediately observable and interesting was that a significant majority were keen to share their ideas, their thoughts and talk about material issues. It was also readily obvious to the research team that the poignant LGB discourse needs to be heard from the LGB community itself.

The sets of localized questions were decided as the main cores of interview directions and in each part the questions and the relevant track of the talk were different for lesbians, gays and bisexuals.

Whilst the face-to-face interviews were being conducted, the researchers wrote down field notes, and recorded observations and impressions of the LGB individuals. After each interview, additional descriptive and reflective notes were compiled. This afforded a source of triangulation for the data, as well as a background for a more complete picture of LGB individuals. By doing so, the researcher was able to ascertain other aspects about the strength of the LGB individuals and triangulate the information by using multiple forms of data, sources, and methods to corroborate the evidence that was uncovered.

## **Grounded Theory**

In Grounded Theory method, the process of analysis initiates as soon as the data is collected and continues until the research study is completed. Once sufficient data has been collected and transcribed, it is possible to progress to the next stage - the building of an indexing system for the data. The Grounded Theory method, as defined by Strauss and Corbin (1998) is the “theory that was derived from data, systematically gathered and analysed through the research process”<sup>235</sup>.

Grounded Theory was chosen for several reasons. Firstly, it provides a great deal of flexibility for the experiences of the participants to emerge through the identified themes.<sup>236</sup> Secondly as there is very little known about the presence of LGB in Iran, it requires openness and flexibility on the part of the researcher throughout the data collection and data analysis

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<sup>235</sup> Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. M. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications. Page 12

<sup>236</sup> Punch, M. (1998). Politics and ethics in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The landscape of qualitative research: Theories and issues* (pp. 156-184). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications

processes, which occur concurrently, each process informing the other. *Basic Grounded generation use an approach with open, axial and selective coding.* All data was transcribed and coded soon after the conclusion of each interview by the researcher. This also allowed for memoing, diagramming and shifts in the direction of the research as the data collection process unfolded. All transcriptions were conducted by the researcher and transcribed from digital recordings to text transcripts. In this theory, the data was gathered and analysed before a complete review of the literature has been completed so the “grounded theory” that is created is based in real-world data and not preconceived notions based on prior research that could influence the researchers’ objectivity<sup>237</sup>.

### ***Data Collection & Field Work***

The two different categories of field work began in mid-2016. In the first category, LGB individuals were contacted through their online social networks groups. In Iran, the LGB community is subtle and unknown. The research team encountered difficulties in locating, contacting, and establishing an informed conversation which then created a steady flow of several setbacks and barriers. In the second one, the bulk of data on LGB had been collected though the surveys.

This research study, its implementations and aims were being proposed to an individual with the hopes that this would eventually lead to a face to face meeting or chatting. Initially, as there had been a great deal of mistrust and suspicion due to previous bad experiences, gaining their trust and demonstrating the intent of the research study was daunting and difficult. Here is when the second type of approach became useful. A specific LGB person introduced a friend of his/her or arranged a meeting with another group of their friends. The interviewer’s goal was to keep up with the chain and follow up this Snow-ball sampling method with additional methods such as networking.

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<sup>237</sup> Gall, M. D., Gall, J. P., & Borg, W. R. (2007). Educational research: an introduction (8th ed.). Boston: Pearson/Allyn & Bacon

## ***Ethical limitations & Considerations***

### **Limitations**

It is important to recognise the limitations of time and budget constraints in this research study. These attributes should be taken into account when examining the LGB data should be considered carefully within the full body of literature on the well-being of LGB individuals. Whilst undertaking this sensitive research study, our initial thoughts were how the findings could lead to new LGB policies, interventions, and programmes. It is our genuine hope that future research should replicate this research study with a larger, possibly nationally representative population. Although in general LGB individuals are a cloistered population it is even more so in Iran. Many LGBs in Iran fervently guard their sexual identities against the backdrops of negative theological, legal and social un-acceptance of homosexuality. The dissentient and unsupportive social and psychological obstacles they face are enormous. Given their insulated and angst hidden lives and understandable fears of coming out, this research study cannot claim unequivocally that this sample is representative of the general population of LGB individuals.

In terms of accuracy and validity of the research theme, the research team made every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the “Content”) contained in the publications on our platform. Due to the extreme sensitivity of the topic, the legal orientation of the target population and also the social regard of sexual minorities who live in societies that do not accept them, claims of completeness and correctness of context are not the purpose of this study. The very carefully set up Grounded Theory Method was used to ensure the maximum understanding of the people within the LGB categories and their society that does not included them. The accuracy of the Content should be independently verified with primary sources of information.

## **Ethical Considerations:**

Ethical considerations were extremely important in the sampling (and collection) strategy. Moore and Miller (1999) mention that members of vulnerable populations often experience multiple risks that may diminish their autonomy, thus rendering them doubly (or indeed triply and so on) vulnerable<sup>238</sup>. This means that researchers might avoid working with people who are classified or perceived as vulnerable; consequently, their needs and concerns are not addressed within research, practice and policy arenas. Albeit there are many ethical limitations and boundaries if we are going to research on sensitive topics or groups, however, it is clear that some research questions may only be effectively addressed by recourse to work with vulnerable people<sup>239</sup>. For our research objectives, the research study employed numerous techniques to ensure their safety. The research study also employed ethical practices to ensure young people were not harmed by participating.

As this research study involves human subjects, Institutional Review Board permission was required. Particular attention was paid to ensure that the young people were carefully informed and understood the nature of the research. Confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing the data and using pseudonyms for the participants, youth organizations and their locations. Both the interview and observational data were collected. Participants were interviewed in a location of their choice. By informing the participants they acknowledged that he/she understood his/her rights as a volunteer for the project, thereby giving permission to the researcher to use any data collected.

Given the fact that the interviews were conducted in public and open places in the form of an ordinary chat rather than a formal interview the participants were willing to open up for deep and long interviews, the interviews were mostly audio recorded using digital voice recorder and subsequently transcribed for analysis. The recordings were destroyed after the transcription and all names and identifying information were changed and or removed so the identity of the participants remained confidential. In some places where traditional norms of society were the ruling sectors and the keys in which people socialized and formed their opinion on sexual education, working with LGB individuals tended to be even more arduous.

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<sup>238</sup> Moore LW, Miller M (1999) Initiating research with doubly vulnerable populations, *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 30, 5, 1034–1040.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

As the case in the city of Isfahan, even when most of the subjects were introduced by a mutual friend, the participant would not answer all the questions.

Bearing in mind the sensitivity and ultra-vulnerability of the participants, their personal issues, routines, and everyday problems, this potentially could create a barrier of morality judgment. In order not to aggressive and harm the respondents, the author had to sometimes sacrifice anthropological thirst and curiosity whilst maintaining a well-trained professional team.

### ***Methodological Challenges in Conducting Research on LGB***

The methodological challenges associated with research on LGB individuals are numerous in a country such as Iran. These challenges include accurately defining, measuring and sampling respondents and the ethical considerations discussed above. The following section explore these challenges in some detail asking, first, how researchers may define, classify and categorised LGB people, second, discussing the inherent problems associated with sampling this population and third taking into consideration the ethical considerations that are imperative with respect to working with LGB individuals.

Conducting research on LGB individuals presents numerous challenges as it is about a representative subgroup of individuals where standard populous definitions are lacking and are not readily identifiable. Samplings of LGB populations in Iran are difficult as they are social group that is generally considered to be hard to reach. These challenges are further compounded because many in the LGB community distrust research studies and researchers which may partly explains the sparse lack of methodologically rigorous large-scale studies in this domain.

The major hurdle in respective research is the meagre amount of available evidence that provides a reliable estimate of the numbers of LGB individuals in Iran. Whilst there exists sizeable small-scale qualitative research that explores the experiences of LGBT people in public life, there remains a dearth of evidence that details the actual size of the population in question. Reasons for this lack of evidence are debatable and varied. Betts (2008), for example, suggested that when people are asked to define their sexual orientation (or gender), there is a generalised failure to capture the subtlety that may be associated with varying definitions and categorisations of sexual minorities. There is, therefore, confusion about

what, or who, is actually being measured<sup>240</sup>. Further challenges are associated with questions which in turn invite a range of possible labels. People have limited knowledge and sharing mechanism to identify accurately.

Another challenge researcher faced was the extra time and effort required to maintain standards of deep interview methods. Despite the considerable amount of effort and attention given to time management and efficient data recording whilst training the team, the interviews were often long and difficult to arrange.

It is a hope that the findings from this research study will mandate change for civil society, policy influencing, government, traditional leaders and other stakeholders. To the many LGBT individuals who dared to shared their stories and experiences their contributions have been invaluable.

### ***An Elaboration on the Research's Narrative***

Gender is as a socially generated concept that assigns and attributes different roles and identities to both men and women. In the vast majority of most cases, gender differences are not neutral. Indeed, in a sweeping majority of societies, gender represents a significant form of social and sexual stratification. As a sensitive and crucial form of identity, gender often determines and construes a variety of life opportunities and chances in which individuals and groups can either have or have not. Genders' tremendous impact on ascribed social roles cannot be underestimated – from the family to government policy.

Any discussions on Iran's sexual minorities, their collective social plight and day to day experiences, mandates a comprehensive insight not only into the social context and societal failures directed towards this silent and often terrified community but also at the woven web of Iran's patriarchal social and cultural infrastructures that highly influence religion, laws and the educational bodies players. The issue of sexual orientation in Iran has turned into a complicated maze of intricacies and unknown territories that has collaterally undermined the social lives of many sexual minorities in Iran. Although most of the international community has acknowledged a spectrum of sexual orientations that has gone beyond biological definitions, in Iranian society sexual orientations are viewed as an aberration. As aptly stated

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<sup>240</sup> Betts, P. (2008). Developing survey questions on sexual identity: UK experiences of administering questions on sexual identity/orientation. ONS (Office for National Statistics) Page. 4



“There is no dialogue, no discussion about us or our lives”<sup>241</sup>. This is due to Iran’s unacceptance of sexual minorities that is firmly rooted in its centuries’ long-lasting venerated norms, resistant traditions and most importantly in its pivotal and powerful role of religion. This has of course made any effort to shed light on the issue even more difficult.

The true stories of the LGB community in Iran are more than a mainstream western read page-turner. The true story is a rich and dynamic narrative that embraces creativity, poetry, resilience, love and family. There are the ancient odes to same-sex love that persisted after Islam and were pushed aside and forgotten after colonialism. There are the unique ways that men/women manage to show affection to one another that allow their unacknowledged and unspoken lives to covertly exist. Quiet but always present. Behind the simple narratives, the same sex love is intertwined into the numerous anecdotes of their daily lives in Iran. It has been noted that despite state repression and the frequent compromises they are forced to make to protect themselves, many Iranian LGBs manage to get on with their lives and to forge a sense of community and solidarity<sup>242</sup>. "The most powerful aspects of the stories from the LGB community in Iran do not derive from details or contexts. Instead, it is derived from the collective voices of the storyteller and noted by the researchers making their poignant stories microcosmically captivating all of the issues that so many LGB individuals face. This is a powerful riveting read worth listening to. LGB individuals in Iran challenge the rigidly defined parameters of sex and family, and in the process, transform the very fabric of this religious and patriarchal society.

This research study seeks to address the living experiences amongst three sexual orientation groups. The interviews with the LGB groups were conducted in three largest and well known cities in Iran, using a questionnaire specifically developed. In this research study the different preferences, interests and all other aspects of homosexuality have been carefully considered. Drawing on ethnographic, first-hand accounts and interviews, the research study and its subsequent part elaborates on the processes and the findings. Iran’s attitudes toward homosexuality have had a decisive effect on the extent to which individuals have masked their sexual orientation. The narrative exposes the covert feelings and fears from the individuals themselves who live in Iran. As a result one gets a palpable sense of what life is like for an individual whose sexual orientation is heavily sanctioned. Their stories have never

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<sup>241</sup> Growing up gay in Iran, WWW, the guardian.com

<sup>242</sup> Iran's persecution of gay community revealed | World news ...  
www.theguardian.com › World › Iran

been heard or written are being told today. These stories take place in Iran, where homosexuality is illegal, making the feeling they own much more forbidden.

## Data Analysis

As mentioned in preceding paragraphs, the methods adopted for analysis are prototypical mixed methods often used in research of such a comprehensive and delicate nature. As previously discussed, the methods comprised of qualitative, quantitative, grounded theory, and snowball method. It should be noted that whilst the methods are presented here in sequential order, the actual processes were seldom, if at all in a concatenated order.

The myriad used of a constant comparative method of data analysis, sampling, data collection, and data analysis occurred continuously and in relation to one another.<sup>243</sup> This required analysis at every stage in the research process. Upon collecting data from participants that carried on throughout the interview process, data analysis began straight away. Strauss and Corbin (1998) identified five purposes of coding procedures: (1) to build rather than test theory; (2) to provide researchers with analytic tools for handling masses of raw data; (3) to help analysts to consider alternative meanings of phenomena; (4) to be systematic and creative simultaneously and (5) to identify, develop, and connect the concepts that are the building blocks of theory. Whilst fundamentally interpretive, the process for data collection and analysis does involve specific steps. The first of these steps is open coding, where categories of information are formed from initial interviews, and includes subcategories or properties and dimensions (range and variation within each category). During open coding, data are broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, and compared for similarities and differences<sup>244</sup>. Where properties are the general or specific characteristics or attributes of a category, dimensions represent the location of a property along a continuum or range<sup>245</sup>. In this study, these characteristics and their properties and dimensions could be defined outside of the data collection.

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<sup>243</sup> Jones, Susan R, Vasti Torres, and Jan Arminio. *Negotiating the Complexities of Qualitative Research in Higher Education: Fundamental Elements and Issues*. Rutledge, 2013.

Whitaker, Brian. *Unspeakable Love: Gay and Lesbian Life in the Middle East*. Saqi, 2011.

<sup>244</sup> " (Strauss & Corbin, p. 102).

<sup>245</sup> Corbin, J. and Strauss, A., 2008. Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory. *Thousand Oaks*. Page. 116

The second step in analysis is axial coding, the process of reconnecting the subcategories together in new and conceptually different ways to discover relationships amongst properties and dimensions. When coding axially, the researcher looks “for answers to questions such as why or how come, where, when, how, and with what results”<sup>246</sup>. In this step, conditions were examined, and relationship statements (hypotheses of sorts) were produced.

Selective coding is the next step. It is “the process of integrating and refining the theory”<sup>247</sup>, or the development of a central or core category that relates to all other categories. This is the primary storyline that substantially answers the research questions. To be considered a core category, it must have analytic power, gained through “its ability to pull the other categories together to form an explanatory whole. Also, a core category should be able to account for considerable variation within categories”<sup>248</sup>. The development of this core category allowed development of a “storyline” that clearly explained the phenomenon that was happening, which, in this case, was the experience of LGB individuals and their development of self-efficacy and coping in Iran.

Ruth Fassinger (1998), whose work is perhaps less well known than Cass or Savin-Williams by student affairs professionals, developed an inclusive model of lesbian/gay identity formation. Although it is also stage based, it is also multi-faceted, reflecting dual aspects of development, both individual sexual identity and group membership identity. The first of Fassinger's four stages is **awareness** (from an individual perspective, being different from heterosexual peers; from a group perspective, the existence of differing sexual orientations among people).

The second stage is one of **exploration**: on an individual level, emotions and erotic desires for individuals of the same gender; on the group level, how one might fit into the category of a gay person as a social class. The third level represents a **deepening commitment** to this changing notion of identity; individually, a personalization of the knowledge and beliefs about same-sex sexuality; on the group level, personal involvement with a non-heterosexual reference group, realizing oppression and consequences of choices of vocalizing and socially participating with non-heterosexuals. The final stage, **internalization/synthesis**, represents an integration of same-sex sexuality into one's overall identity; from the collective perspective, it conveys one's identity as a member of a minority group, across social contexts (Fassinger, 1998).

## ***Findings of the Study***

The research findings have been collected, screened, and triangulated through the GT method so that the actual situation could be visible to a vast majority of readers via diagrammatic representations and directs quotes that represent the major facets of the research study. They represent a thorough analysis of what the study gathered through a comprehensive research process in the three major and prominent cities in Iran.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> Corbin, J. and Strauss, A., 2008. Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory. *Thousand Oaks*. Page. 143

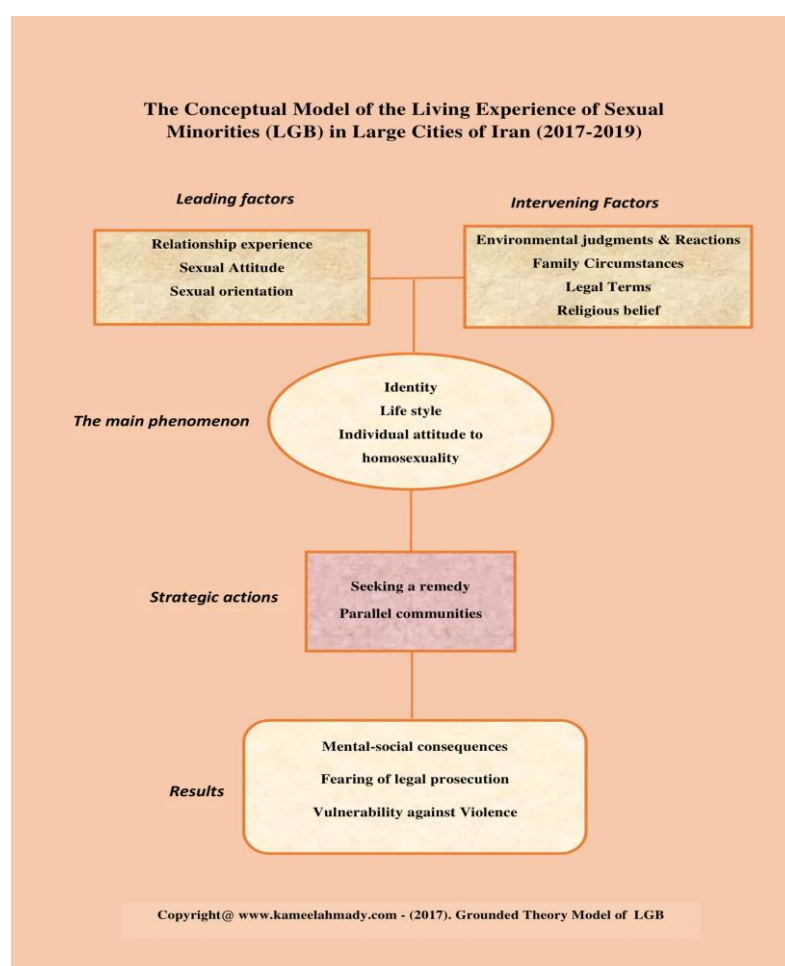
<sup>248</sup> Corbin, J. and Strauss, A., 2008. Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory. *Thousand Oaks*. Page 146

As previously mentioned both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to obtain the actual data and synchronize findings order to reach the actual facts about their lives. Presented in two parts, the research study translated elaborate de-coded of findings which we discovered by the use of GT Method whilst the figurative findings derived through quantitative method.

## ***Qualitative Result of the Research Study***

### **١-١: Unveiling Identities and accepting sexual orientation**

After discovering one's sexual orientation, what becomes significant is how one reacts, integrates and accepts this realization. Based on Fassinger's model of lesbian/gay identity formation, homosexuals develop their identity on both the individual and group levels during four phases: (1) awareness (2) exploration (3) and (4) internalization/synthesis.<sup>249</sup> The four stages are not a linear and predictable progression, as it may be seen as a collation of four common stages that can occur in any order. Nevertheless, almost all homosexuals go through these



four phases *albeit* with individual variation. Following Fassinger's model of lesbian/gay identity formation, meant that many of the homosexuals and transsexuals living in Mashhad, although

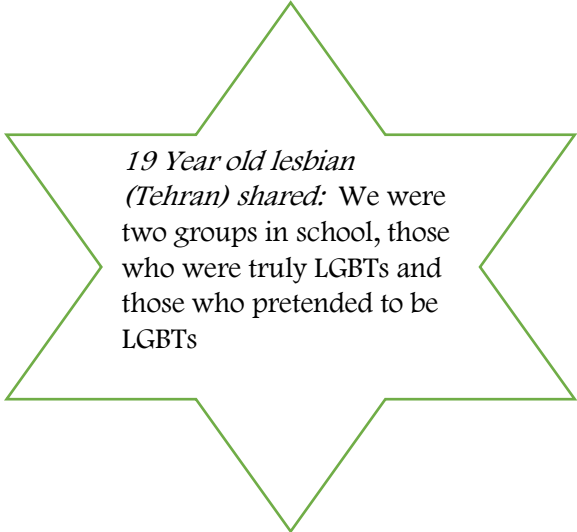
<sup>249</sup> Fassinger, Ruth E. "Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Identity and Student Development Theory." *Working with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender college students: A handbook for faculty and administrators* (1998): 13-

they have reached the phase of awareness and acceptance of their sexual orientation, arriving at this crucial guidepost was excruciatingly difficult.

From the time LGB individuals realize their sexual orientation until they arrive to the acceptance phase, many had experienced numerous moments of ebbs and flows. Many were unable to pinpoint with precision a specific time when the realization of their sexuality descended upon them. This might

be attributed to a nagging persistent feeling of being different as their attraction to their own sex has always existed since childhood and early school days. For most, it was the salient arrival of adolescence and puberty with its accompanying hormonal and physiological changes and sexual maturity. Many coped with their silent realization that they were attracted to their own sex and struggled *via* denials and attempts to change their sexual orientation. Many were aware that the harbingers of adult heterosexuality and interest in the opposite sex were simply not there.

Paradoxically, this difficult road of acceptance of their gay, lesbian identities contributed to their development of personal awareness, including an increased ability to understand and appreciate different perspectives, more concern for the well-being of others and, a willingness to discuss uncomfortable topics. It was observed that for LGB individuals in Mashhad, their orientation eased the difficulty of discussing freely taboo subjects such as sexuality. This self-awareness also has created a sense of resilience and determination about what is and is not wrong. Their personal journey resulted in a demand for others to treat them fairly.



*19 Year old lesbian (Tehran) shared:* We were two groups in school, those who were truly LGBTs and those who pretended to be LGBTs

The millennial LGB generation who has grown up with the internet and technology are now the generation of individuals who often see the world through digital lenses. Whether this has translated as opening the door to their collective sexual orientation existence or boosting a new sexual elite of technologically savvy LGB individuals is open to discussion. What is irrefutable is that the infiltration of the virtual space and the various social network groups inevitably has had a permanent impact on this group. The media, including TV channels and the internet, the fact that people are up to date on how to use the latest communication technologies and the sufficiently decent levels of the English language have all played a crucial role in unveiling the persons' sexual orientation.

In an article entitled "Changes in Sexual Attitudes" Afsaneh Najmabadi, refers to Iran's modernization. She considers sex reassignment surgeries and access to technology as features of transfer from one phase to another. Almost all participants in this research used social media, certain programs and software for communication purposes. With some of these applications one could activate the location of another LGB individual or to find other

homosexuals on the map in the nearby areas just by using ones cell phone. It is worth noting that such programs are filtered but are accessible via a proxy (VPN).

As previously discussed (See Chapter 4) as Telegram groups are mostly monitored and shut down, people continue setting up new groups. Nevertheless, not even the Internet is safe. While dating apps like Grindr, Scruff and Hornet are not censored like Facebook and Twitter, some



A very skinny boy please. Under 23. From Tehran.

Only for friendship. I am 43. Blocked

Subject. 20. from Tehran. Anyone interested please PV.

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I want a B friend from Tehran or Qom under 19. I am 21 and an inserter. PV.

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Inserter. 20. Tehran. Anyone interested PV.

\*\*\*

Inserter, under 25. PV only

LGB communities still assume the country's Cyber Police (FETA) monitor them. Often the best alternative is random and anonymous encounters.

What is irrefutable is that amongst the LGB individuals in Iran, was our observation of a surprising sense of their superiority and pride and resilience was present. Many have work through the arduous task of accepting themselves as gay persons within a homophobic society. The team witnessed their vigour and resilience even in the midst of the cultural and social sanctions which renders them uniquely vulnerable. This is clearly a testament to their strength despite societal criminalization.

The in-depth analysis of the interviews startlingly revealed a number of interviewees who were not initially aware that there existed a name for their sexual orientation. The fact that society had previously deemed sexual orientation as either male or female leaving no room for another dimension may have attributed to this unawareness. The sexual orientation ranges are not on par with the sociological and scientific criteria governing the types of homosexuality or transsexuality. More attention is sorely needed if the nature of sexual minorities and their accompanying issues are to be explored.

*32 year old lesbian (from Tehran):*  
From the very beginning when I was 4 or 5 my dream was to grow up sooner, grow a moustache, grow beard, go for a girl; for example get her a place.

My mom recounts that from childhood I wanted to be a girl. It is even strange to me. I used to ask them to call me Farshad. I said No to wearing shirts. I was a friend to boys. Usually girls have some images of their wedding and that sort of things; at that time, I thought I could marry girls. I liked my girlfriends; I fell in love with the daughter of our neighbour. Later I fell in love with my cousin. Because the social norms tell you that being heterosexual is normal, I was thinking that was all. I thought that the right thing to do is to marry a man. *23 year old gay (Isfahan)*

Acceptance of one's sexual of orientation does not magically stop at adolescence. The process of self-discovery and accepting ones sexuality evolves over time. People become acquainted with their sexual tendencies within a limited available range. As previously reiterated, the feeling of being different from their peers comes to light through such indications as disinterest/inability to establish a relationship with the people of the opposite sex; not having the expected sexual interest in them; satisfaction with links to people of the same sex in school; having interests different from peers and interest in sexual behaviours which are not defined by socially

sanctioned clichés of sexual behaviour, such as disinterest in games commonly expected of their biological sex.

In the final step of Fassenger's model, integration and identification as a member of a specific minority group now cements. For Iranian's LGBs, the struggle is how to gain societal recognition and acceptance by daring to come out in a system that forbids homosexuality. Their fear is a social reality and part of their lives. (See Chapter 2 for a more in-depth discussion). An internal research study showed that a group of LGBT individual shave posted videos of themselves on Facebook in a campaign to highlight the discrimination against sexual minorities in Iran where homosexuals are put to death<sup>250</sup>.

The qualitative findings of the study are given below with great details;

### **1-2- Roots of the sexual orientation**

In order to understand the phenomenon of same-sex sexual relations, the origins of such attractions needs to be explored. The scientific debate pertaining to the ethology of homosexuality and its root causes and exploration of sexual tendencies is a complicated issue outside the parameters of this research study. As previously discussed, there we can find a wide range of homosexual theories and several schools of thought. (See, Chapter 2). Many of these theories are not well understood and accepted.

There are two main theories as to what are the causes of homosexual attractions. One is that a homosexual orientation is essentially dictated by genetic and or biological factors. There is some suggestive evidence, widely accepted and worth pursuing that homosexuality is innate. Simply put people are "born gay." The other theory is that homosexual attractions develop primarily as a result of psychological and environmental influences and early experiences. At the end of the day there are possibly multiple factors that ultimately coalesce and contribute to homosexuality.

What was of significance to the interviewers was to know whether or not the participants thought there were significant events or contributing factors that led to their sexual

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<sup>250</sup> We are everywhere: gay and lesbian Iranians come out on Facebook.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/sep/11/gay-iranians-facebook-defiance>. Accessed December 12, 2017



orientation and what approach and history of this identity influence their self-image. The analysis of the interviews show that some sexual minorities consider their sexual orientation as just a feeling they were born with; if this is the case, these statements give credence to the theory that genetic and or biological factors are at play. Many saw their homosexuality as a natural phenomenon in the sexual orientation parameters as it fits solidly in human biological concepts of involuntary behaviours. In this regard, they refer to the ancient history of homosexuality in Iranian poetry and folklore claiming that it has always existed. Some examples include the ancient Roman paintings and many other examples refer to by ancient poets and literary figures.

Based on the participant's feedback about their childhood games and moods which are interpreted as the genetic and internal criteria of sexual orientation, some of the participants said from a young age, how they vividly recalled exhibiting gender non-conforming interests and tendencies in comparison to their peers. In other words, their interactions, friends, favourite games and personal habits and characteristics were different from the norms expected from their physical gender.

The earliest antecedent of same-sex attraction has already been addressed. J. Michael Bailey, a psychologist from North-western University, and Canadian psychiatrist Kenneth Zucker published a seminal paper on childhood markers of homosexuality with their controversial 1995 review article in *Developmental Psychology*. Bailey and Zucker hypothesized that homosexuals would show an inverted pattern of sex-typed childhood behaviours—little boys preferring girls as playmates and becoming infatuated with their mother's makeup kit; little girls strangely enamoured of field hockey or professional wrestling.<sup>251</sup> The research finding has been expounded upon by further studies. In several studies, scientists have documented that these sex differences are largely impervious to learning as there have been some studies that bear this out.<sup>252</sup> Numerous studies have since replicated this general pattern, revealing a strong link between childhood deviations from gender role norms and adult sexual orientation. It is only been relatively recent that developmental scientists have conducted controlled studies with one clear aim in mind, that is to go beyond mere stereotypes and accurately identify the most reliable signs of later homosexuality, what researchers referred to as “prehomosexual.”<sup>253</sup> In looking carefully at the childhoods of now-gay adults,

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<sup>251</sup> Kelley D. Drummond, Susan J. Bradley, Michele Peterson-Badali and Kenneth J. Zucker in *Developmental Psychology*, Vol. 44, No. 1, pages: 34–45; 2008.

<sup>252</sup> How to Find Out If Your Kid Is A Pre-Homosexual / Queerty  
[www.queerty.com/how-to-find-out-if-your-kid-is-a](http://www.queerty.com/how-to-find-out-if-your-kid-is-a).

<sup>253</sup> Is Your Child Gay? : Article : Scientific American Mind, [www.nature.com](http://www.nature.com)

researchers are finding an intriguing set of early behavioural indicators that homosexuals seem to have in common.

Both lesbians and gay men often have a history of cross-sex-typed behaviours: little boys becoming infatuated with their mother's makeup kit; little girls enamoured with sports usually associated with men. On the other hand, there were participants who emphasized- although indirectly and during the course of the conversation- environmental factors that were present in single-sex environment or the familiar masculine realm, where most socialization revolves around someone of the same sex. At this juncture, same-sex relationships exist on platonic levels. As one individual stated "We didn't feel different then. The all-boys school and growing up among boys gave a sense of normalcy. All the boys were intimate with each other to some extent; we occupied one end of a spectrum, but even those at the far end didn't regard us as freaks."<sup>254</sup> This means that after an individual is in an absolute male environment (such as military services) or absolute female environments (female student dorms or girls boarding schools) he/she is cognizant of their sexual interest in towards someone of the same sex. One major reason may be the inaccessibility to relationships with the opposite sex partially due to the societal restrictions from traditional religious families.

Heritable biological factors do interact with environmental experiences. The impact of the surrounding environment on the formation of the sexual tendencies, interests and behaviours goes back to the significance of sociability and behavioural factors. In other words, gender stereotypes and the structure of acquisitive roles transferred to an individual as he/she is being brought up are eventually internalized. Various and subtle degrees of misogyny abound are encouraged and accepted as a natural part of childhood. Some homosexuals or bisexuals revealed their experiences of being victims of sexual orientation violence, abuse and harassment and these painful memories became life long memories resulting in lingering trauma. Sexual abuse harms them in ways that are similar and different, but equally harmful are such type of memories. They find homosexuality as the comforting tool.

Amongst the LGB that participated in this research study, a third group was encountered that considers sexual tendency neither a biological gene-oriented claiming phenomena nor a male or female dominated environmental issue. This hybrid group of LGBs live in a world full of love. For this group, sexual tendency is tantamount to love and love is neither genetic nor acquisitive but a

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<sup>254</sup> Growing up gay in Iran As told to a Tehran Bureau correspondent, Copyright © 2013 Tehran Bureau

natural phenomenon which science has not been yet able to recognize. The concept of love cannot be measured within the unnatural frameworks. Examples of such an analysis can be found in the remarks by those who believed in new-emerging mystic paths. They argued that with all its broadness, love cannot be limited to a certain sex, role or tendency. In other words, they live in a world of romanticism and for them nothing matters but love.

### **1-3- Homosexual relationships- How it began**

In this section, we deal with the analysis of early homosexual relationships based on the information acquired through the interviews and then will proceed discussing the details of such relationships.

The first sexual relationship usually starts in upper secondary school although there are some rare cases of it starting in lower secondary school. Such relations gradually mature into more serious sexual interactions. At that age, people are still in the age of innocence.

Adolescence is characterized by profound changes in several areas. The maturation of intellectual thought, substantial psychosocial development, and a series of physical changes that reflect neurological and endocrinological processes are intertwined in the process referred to as puberty. This maturation process is associated with increased levels of sex steroids. During puberty, the body releases hormones that stimulate ovaries to start producing the female hormone estrogen. The most obvious physical changes during puberty reflect the influence of powerful hormones. The attainment of adult secondary sexual characteristics (breast maturation, testicular and penile maturation, and pubertal hair), body composition changes, and attainment of fertility are all easily noticed<sup>255</sup>.

Awareness of one's sexual orientation crystallize around puberty when all the hormones started kicking in. The hormonal changes triggered by this onset of puberty bring about intense feelings, cravings and sexual arousals. Although individual differences range widely, for LGBT Iranian adolescents exploring these natural sexual feelings juxtaposes society's stern message that having sexual desires and contact with the opposite sex is forbidden and religiously prohibited.

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<sup>255</sup> Puberty stages for boys and girls, WWW; emedicine.com

## The dynamics of Lesbian Relationships

The question of gender roles is one of the most complex issues in contemporary Iranian society<sup>256</sup>. Iran by and large is a country with a stern patriarchal social set up. Although it is changing, many women still live under an arduous shadow of century time honoured patriarchal subjugation. The sexual orientation on homosexuality in Iran often focuses on discourses centred on homosexual men. Lesbians and bisexuals are discussed less frequently.

Lesbians face discrimination first as women, and then as lesbians. Since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, some of women's legal rights in Iran have been restricted and stripped away. In addition to the restrictions on their rights as women, lesbians in Iran face further restrictions due to the criminalization of same-sex conduct, along with widespread social intolerance. This dual discrimination contributes significantly to the abuses they face<sup>257</sup>.

Although most historical records leave lesbians invisible, lesbian relationships sometimes parallel those of heterosexual relationships. Undoubtedly many of the issues in lesbian relationships reflecting the ups and downs of intimacy are also present in heterosexual relationships rather than specific to lesbian relationships. Lesbian relationships cautions against stereotypical assumptions and dispelling the heterosexual clichés and stereotypes that woman are more nurturing than men and woman reveal their feelings quicker than men. Above else, society expects woman to find and have a relationship, fall in love with a man, have children and live happily ever after. This is the amorous myth read to all females. Instead, lesbian relationships find and have a relationship and fall in love with a woman. Social expectations for women to marry, coupled with a lack of economic and legal independence (women account for only 16 per cent of the labour force<sup>258</sup>), mean that lesbians, as women, will often have decisions made for them by males in their family. This can lead to situations where lesbians live their entire lives in marriages in which non-consensual heterosexual sexual acts are chronically forced upon them.

Being a lesbian is fraught with danger. Under Iranian Penal Code, punishment for *mosaheqeh*, or the rubbing of female genitalia between women, is 100 lashes. Their love is in

<sup>256</sup> Culture of Iran - history, people, clothing, traditions ... [www.everyculture.com](http://www.everyculture.com) ›

<sup>257</sup> Being Lesbian and Trans in Iran | OutRight [www.outrightinternational.org/being-lesbian-and](http://www.outrightinternational.org/being-lesbian-and).

<sup>258</sup> Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Report of the Secretary-General," UN General Assembly, Human Rights Council, A/HRC/28/26, (February 20, 2015), page 7, available at: [p://www.ohchr.org/EN/HR/Bodies/HRC/Regular Sessions/Session28/Documents/A\\_HRC\\_28\\_26\\_ENG.doc](http://p://www.ohchr.org/EN/HR/Bodies/HRC/Regular%20Sessions/Session28/Documents/A_HRC_28_26_ENG.doc)

direct conflict with the penal code. In addition to the restrictions on their rights as women, lesbians in Iran face further restrictions due to the criminalization of same-sex conduct, along with widespread social intolerance. Although not enforced and even tolerated, if caught in public, women can also be flogged for same-sex kissing.

Lesbian community members in the Islamic Republic of Iran have grown up not only in an unflinching patriarchal society but in a society that devalues and criminalizes their sexual orientation. They are subjected to a confluence of legal discrimination, social harassment, domestic abuse, and acts of violence inflicted by both state officials and private citizens. Whilst there are shared causes between homosexuals and lesbians such as the profound differences in Iranian social context, intolerant religious indoctrination, labels that clearly identify homosexuality as unforgivable sin, the impact of the strictly patriarchal structure ideology on lesbians needs to be acknowledged.

In addition to the above cited difficulties, lesbian relationships have a longer duration than male homosexual's relationships and in some cases it has led to cohabitation and committed relationships. In 1948, Kinsey observed that long-term homosexual relationships were notably few. Now, although long-term gay male relationships may be more common, the fact remains that they are typically not monogamous. This study follows the classic research of McWhirter and Mattison, reported in *The Male Couple* (1984), which found that not a single male pair was able to maintain fidelity in their relationship for more than five years.<sup>259</sup>

The vast majority of media reports about homosexuality in Iran are based on accounts of torment and oppression from gays and lesbians who have fled the country. Some have voiced that in Iran if you want to be different you have to hide it. Then you are free to do as you please, or rather just so far as they do not become aware of you and your way of life<sup>260</sup>.

Whilst their experiences of those who are able to flee are to a certain extent representative for some of Iran's homosexuals, they are hugely different from those who either choose to stay in the country, or do not have the opportunity to leave. An important factor in this research study is that some of the interviewees were not locals. Amongst the participants of this study in Tehran, most were young university students or professionals and some were not originally

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<sup>259</sup> Gay Male Relationships are Inherently Unfaithful — Joseph ...[www.josephnicolosi.com/an-open-secret-the-truth-about](http://www.josephnicolosi.com/an-open-secret-the-truth-about)

<sup>260</sup> Growing up gay in Iran

from Tehran. Their independent life style somewhat free from the prying eyes of family, the financial pressures and concerns make cohabitation a better option for individuals. Moreover in a semi-traditional society young university students sharing lodgings is deemed normal and acceptable (as often seen in Western societies). Thus whilst two individuals from the opposite sexes are not legally and conventionally encouraged to cohabit, the cohabitation of two males or two females, whilst masking their sexual tendencies, falls within the parameters of normality. Some have the means to create parallel lives, out of sight of their relatives or friends.<sup>261</sup> The sexual and emotional aspects of the relationships of sexual minorities were such a core vital part of the comments, that people were ready to divulge them.

What was a prevalent importance in all of the gathered interviews was that in the analysis of the status sexual minorities in Iran, special attention was paid to the social and cultural contexts and the place of residences of the LGB individuals. This study observed that the type of emotional and sexual relationship experiences of people within the three targeted cities is somehow linked to the sexual context of the city and that differences were attributed to the particular culture prevailing in each area. LGBs in Tehran, in comparison to LGBs in Isfahan and Mashhad, enjoyed more freedom of movement for dates in parks or have privy to certain gathering points and weekend parties (called Life) where they could see one another or meet up. Although these small pockets of relatively “safe zones” allow quick public displays of affection, the fear of the authorities is also present. They are still fraught with risk<sup>262</sup>.

In terms of municipal and urban contexts, Isfahan is a traditional Iranian city and as with many cities in Iran, the subject of sexual

A tough experience that totally changed my life happened in my university days. There was this fellow at university and we liked each other very much. I admitted my interest to him and apparently it was fine with him. But he was straight. Anyways we were in a relationship for two years out of which one year and a half was very difficult for me. I became attached to him. I lost my life. I had a studio where I used to sing. I stopped that all together. I stopped composing poems and started drinking. It was mostly because I had started a wrong relationship with a straight person.

Babak, 23, Tehran

<sup>261</sup> What it's like to be gay in Iran, Sune Engel Rasmussen, The Week [theweek.com/articles/532005/what-like-gay-iran](http://theweek.com/articles/532005/what-like-gay-iran)

<sup>262</sup> Ibid

minorities are so unfathomably tabooed that most of the inhabitants are not even aware of homosexuality's mere existence.

Given the taboo nature of the issue that is cloaked in religious ideology and society's unawareness of LGBT's existence, it was perilous locating individuals willing to participate in this research study. This was a challenging and thorny hurdle. One reason for this difficulty was the heightened level of distrust. This distrust on one hand, makes them more fastidious in their choice of a sexual partner and on the other, inevitably shortens the life cycle of their relationships. The feeling of being under surveillance, both by other Iranians and the state has taken a toll.<sup>263</sup> It is worth noting that during the telephone and face-to-face interviews we quickly surmised that many do not even trust other homosexuals. The interviewers were instructed to contact them through cyberspace in order to pave the way for the face-to-face interviews. Once the face to face interview took place it was much easier to contact their friends and partners.

With respect to short term relationships, research findings showed that interviewees expressed the onerous difficulty of finding a partner. The challenge of finding a steady partner weighs heavily on Iranian gays. In some cases they initiated a relationship with their partner's friends and after one quick episode of sexual contact, the relationship was terminated.

Cheating and lack of mutual commitment in a relationship are rampant amongst sexual minorities. Not only amongst the homosexuals themselves but long-term meaningful relationships are rare. At times due to unwanted relationships with non-homosexuals they suffer from irreparable loss and trauma which can be life sustaining and haunting.

The underlying reasons for these numerous short-term relationships spin cycles are plentiful. A heterosexual union may be rooted in religious and cultural by laws that reinforce monogamy long after the excitement has dissipated and left the bedroom. Couples are forced to push beyond the immediate gratification of sexual desire and find more meaningful forms of pleasure and release. Conversely same sex couples, who are the antithesis of what a monogamous union should be by most traditional standards, are an abomination of the sacred "one-man-one-woman" union. Gatekeepers of these standards did not hold same sex couples

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<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

accountable to the same societal norms and expectations that are the foundation for the modern family.

The twin pressures of the historical constructs of monogamy competing with social non-acceptance of same sex relationships often produces an additional layer of anxiety and chaos in the relationships, producing limitations in free relationships. Since people are deprived of the security in a long-term relationship and cannot have a sense of belonging that normally follows a long-term relationships, they turn to short-term temporary relationships which, in some cases manifest itself as a sort of sexual profligacy.

### **1-3: The impact of homosexuality on family**

There is no scientific evidence that sexual orientation, be it heterosexual, homosexual or otherwise, is a freewill choice. When we are born, we are endowed automatically with a set of expectations and values silently handed down from our parents and society to the family. Enmeshed within these social entities are the culture, loyalty to the family and the family reputation. Any judgment or view of the family members can significantly affect the individual's actions. Familial power and meanings which organize the social and cultural statuses are active and form a basic part of one's identity. The family extends its influence into as many spheres as possible impacting identity and lifestyle. In Iran once the children are married; the two families virtually merge, and have extensive rights and obligations vis-à-vis each other that are close to a sacred duty<sup>264</sup>.

During the impressionable formative years, **one** learns from watching, observing and eventually internalising what are good values and expectations. As the primary teacher is the family, the family places a direct or indirect crucial role. The random happenstance of where one is born and what family a person is born into plays a determinative role in one's identity, what language will be utilised to communicate, prescribed social status and what religion to follow, all which make up major parts that forms ones identity.

In this research study, identity was a pivotal phenomenon formatted within the above-mentioned factors. Identities are a complicated series of human material and spiritual belongings. Identities as a combination of sociological and ideological constructs are fabricated within prescribed social statuses that both sexes acquire either by the roles they

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<sup>264</sup> Culture of Iran - history, people, clothing, traditions. [www.everyculture.com](http://www.everyculture.com)



play, the biological differences attached to each sex or the nature of rights and obligations that these pressures imposed on the sexes.<sup>265</sup> We are also taught that our sexual identity is bifurcated, in other words, the idea that gender is male and female with no shades of grey. We are also taught that the gay portion of the human sexual spectrum is morally corrupt.

Starting from birth, through the stages of childhood, youth, young adult and old age, socialisation is a continuous process of different sets of prescriptions and proscriptions. The family structure plays a crucial role in this phenomenon. Kinship relations predominate in interaction and individual identifies himself with this primary groups.

The role of the family invariably depends on the pulls and pressures that are imposed, knowing or unknowingly, on each individual family members' assumed roles and the social economic, psychological and political effects on their assumed roles. Homosexuality within the family is problematic because social life is often fabricated within the social experiences that are characteristic of men<sup>266</sup>. A sexual orientation outside the classic male female dichotomy disrupts the continuation of an oppressive patriarchal male dominated and male female relationship. An identification of being gay can have a dire effect on families who are unflinchingly unaccepting of their child's homosexuality. These are not problems uniquely confined to Iran. Every year thousands of LGBT teenagers in the United States who come out are thrown out of their homes, and a quarter of homeless people in the UK identify as LGBT.

For the vast majority who identify as LGB, the attitudes and acceptance or non-acceptance of their family (and society) is a much bigger problem. The early years of life lay the seeds of recognition of their orientation, and the beginnings of realising and knowing their sexual identity as LGB. The remarks made by these people themselves during the research study revealed the pain when they realized that their sexual tendencies are different from others and the decision to hide their sexual tendency. LGBT individuals spend some wasted years on this unbalanced fight of hiding their sexual tendency rather than time better served for individual and personality growth.

Shielding the family from discovering the individual's sexual identity is the most calamitous issue for sexual monitories. The fear of creating familial problems is interwoven with the

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<sup>265</sup> Lucie Ddurbeman (ed) Gender and Sex in Society

<sup>266</sup> Sandra, Harding. (1935) Introduction: Is There a Feminist Methodology, Open University Press

very fabric of LGBT lives leading to intense emotional, psychological and spiritual trauma. The participants referred to the family encounters as the toughest experience of their lives and an enormous challenge.

The one issue that affects all LGB individuals at some point in their lives is coming out to their families. For Muslims this can be an especially difficult decision rendered easier by largely keeping it in the shadow. (See Chapter 2 for more in-depth analyses) The myriad social hurdles are enormous: the family, the fear of shaming their family and losing community respect, the stigma of sexuality, and the hard line view of homosexuality. The Iranian tradition and the patriarchal culture are bracing reminders that these entities are powerful structures to be shouldered by the individual alone. Many families struggle with balancing and navigating deeply held religious and personal values with the love for their LGBT children.

The juggling task of pretending and hiding ones sexual orientation from the family has been the greatest and saddest torment to sexual minorities. The pain and angst inflicted on sexual minorities within the safe space of the family is far greater than what they have experiences in other places such as schools. For most LGB individuals, the sacred family blood lines that provide many of the narratives that most profoundly shape their lives, is now up against and in direct contrast to relatives that will never be ready to accept this sexual orientation as it is glaringly at odds with everything one has been taught. For many LGBs, this has been an acute source of anguish and deep trauma. Our research study revealed that the dread of punishment by stoning seemed to take second fiddle to the obtrusiveness of societal dictates and obedience. Once again this is persuasive evidence of the high importance of familial and community social approval and adherences.

Within communities and family groups, homosexuality is considered to bring shame upon the person and his or her entire family, with dire consequences for all friends and family members. Of the most common social and economic repercussions are that female relatives cannot marry due to a lack of willing suitors, male relatives may be fired from their jobs, and the social standing of family can be compromised.

For those families who are aware of the person's sexual orientation, they have resorted to various desperate tactics in a vain attempt to change the person in their genuine belief that the

sexual orientation is mutable condition or simply transitory phase. This research study revealed that majority of the interviewees experience this familial reaction and response; the number of participants who had a different experience was less than the fingers on one hand. Once the family became aware of the person's sexual tendency, not only did their response result in the situation not changing but also in most cases, the family became more oppressively controlling. Their genuine belief is that they can change the person into what they assume is a normal family member with normal sexual desires. Even in those families who are more flexible and open, they are not ready to welcome homosexuality with open arms and hugs. Thus as long as this readiness is absent, the family will continue to fiercely denounce and resistance a sexuality that does not encompass men and women.

Some families are simply more sympathetic than others. For those families who believed in accepting the individuals, it is their fear of their relatives, neighbours and relatives' negative judgments that often spur them to encourage the individual to be clandestinely discreet and considerate. The social backlash and community unacceptance are major repercussions. Paramount to these fears is the idea of bring disrepute to the family dignity which outweighs the family members' physical and mental health. Sexual orientation is seen as the ultimate sign of familial humiliation and a serious threat to "family dignity". This means that not only is the very notion of dignity of the individual is dependent on respect for the societal frameworks operating around gender roles, but also these sexual tendencies also control the dignity of the family and relatives.

For the sexual minorities, this fear of scandal, disrepute, mockery and ultimately rejection casts a shadow of guilt spilling over into social interactions. Such manifested reactions within the family structure are very much affected by the social, economic and cultural status of parents (educational level, cultural prejudices and religious beliefs) but they have all been more or less on the same scale. This means that even within families that are open families, the immediate reaction often has been of profound discomfort. Families often seek therapeutic and interventionist therapy hoping for a treatment to change the person's true nature.

If I were born once again, I would have liked it not to be a homosexual. So far I have done everything possible. I have contacted these safe houses to let me in as I escaped my house. But instead of sheltering me, they started lecturing me. They told me maybe you are not a good girl. Be a good girl so that you are not beaten up.

*Nerges 27, Mashhad*

Principally, boys are interested in the same sex. I have a friend called Ahmad. He had too much sex with the opposite sex that now he has turned into a homosexual. Even when he wants to talk, he prefers talking to someone from the same sex.

*Bisexual, 19, Isfahan*

*Akbar, 35, Tehran*

You know, I didn't like having such tendencies and that's why I thought of marrying someone from the opposite sex. I was thinking maybe this can relieve me of my tendencies. At first it was OK but then I realized that I really can't do it.

In addition to the rejection and lack of understanding, sexual minorities reported more serious and violent confrontational reactions within the family. In some cases this has led to outright ostracisation and exclusion, vilification and deprivation of any inheritance rights as an offspring.

In some cases, the homosexual person – despite having a clear attraction to persons of a same sex, gives in to a complicated relationship with a person of the opposite sex just to appease family and friends. In some cases, the participants said they expressed their dissatisfaction categorically with such relationships and have never even entered into a relationship with a member of the opposite sex. Amongst those who have had such relationships, it did not lead to any sexual contact and from its very grim ominous beginnings were emotionally dead-end relationships void of sentiment. The relationship did not lead to any sexual contact. The analysis of the interviewer's responses also exposed a disturbing pattern: in some cases, the participants caved into the family and friends of the family's demands and marry someone from the opposite sex, irrespective of their sexual tendency and despite having a clear gravitation towards those of the same sex. Although the consequences of such marriages are depressingly predictable, it is worth noting that the discontent and angst resulting from a

forced marriage inflicts another blow on the already damaged fragile identity of the individual and adds another layer of psychological trauma to an already deep wound.

For lesbian sexual minorities, the prevalence of these reactions by family and society has transformed their already fragile minority within minority status even more precarious and thus multiplying the inequality, physical, sexual and psychological pressures. The myriad social challenges facing lesbians accompanied by societal exclusion and non-recognition flourishes within a patriarchal Islamic discourse that emphasizes gender differences, gender inferiority and gender boundaries that restricts women's lives now has heightened.

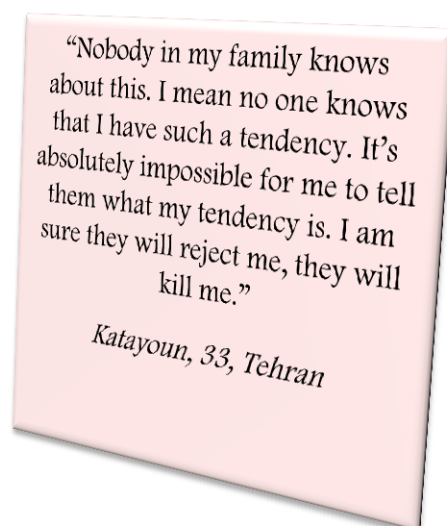
Lesbians experience violence. The oppressive gender discrimination which not only manifests itself in cliché male and female gender roles, now thrives with dogged tenacity in patriarchal Iran and even operating WITHIN the sexual minority community. Some face physical abuse. In dealing with the dual pressures of patriarchal gender discrimination on one hand and society abject non-acceptance of their sexual orientation on the other, lesbians who are now in the inner throes of struggling with an “undesirable” self, finds themselves on a yet bigger battlefield, whilst they are woefully unequipped and lacking any knowledge or capacity to fight the discriminating structure. Even if the individual takes refuge in social activism, the women’s rights organizations and movements has been of little use. Based on the personal accounts of the participants, most “the safe houses” run by the State Welfare Organization, have rejected some girls who have been victim of domestic violence. Undoubtedly some of these girls have been subjected to physical abuse due to their sexual orientation. Most “safe houses have simply failed to address the physical violence.

Given the beginning of the normal part of sexual developments and curiosities and further awareness of one’s sexual orientation, no two individual's mode of sexual communication and exploration is the same. At the outset of recognition of one’s homosexual orientation, coupled with confusing inner conflicts and sense of muddled shame, there may be a response to the external pressures. People normally start a trial and error phase such as initiating a sexual or emotional relationships with someone of the opposite sex. These relationships may temporarily blur the individual’s true tendency; the difficult analysis of self-acceptance becomes more complicated and leading to forced marriage, forced engagements, and relationships that reflect expediency than sentiment and thus leaving everlasting traces on the person’s moods and character.

### 1-4-The Rejection part

Apart from the core fact that the participants collectively shared similar mental images of their families' conceivable reaction, what is worth noticing is the steady pace of the progressive normalization process of homosexuality and the individual's acceptance of himself as a definite novel definition of "self". This is akin to the normalization process further discussed under Strategic Reaction. This is where "self" is redefined as "what I am" and is no more "what I have to be". This phase, if it occurs, appropriately, can be the first step in stabilisation; if not it can lead to the denial of sexual identity.

Although positive attitudes toward gay men and lesbians have increased over recent decades, attitudes toward bisexual individuals are relatively neutral, if not ambivalent. Despite the inner desirability of the image of being gay or lesbian, bisexuality comes with increase mental chaos and complications. Bisexual people, who have been at the forefront of LGBT rights throughout history, are still too often left out of the conversation. As far as we can reasonably ascertain, in the case of Iran's bisexual community this current study is the only research and analyse which have been conducted on bisexuals as a recognisable group. Often the validity of bisexuality is undermined; it has been opined that bisexuals are confused or in transition regarding their sexual orientation. Bisexual men and women face a disproportionate rate of physical, mental, and other health disparities in comparison to those who identify as exclusively heterosexual or exclusively homosexual.<sup>267</sup> A bisexual person struggles to place oneself in a defined frame and after a series of failed frustrating attempts, one stops the inner search and usually (if not mistakenly) forges oneself in a more solidified frame, which depending on one's tendencies and culmination of past experiences, can either try to fit neatly in the homosexuality or heterosexuality boxes. These labels often only further divide and ultimately erode full acceptance.



<sup>267</sup> Negative Attitudes Slow Acceptance of Bisexuality, psychcentral.com/news/2016/11/01/negative...

In any respect, in addition to their position in the sexual spectrum, what is a common denominator to all of the above mentioned individuals is the adversarial encounter of an acrimonious social reaction. The most important underlying factor in their everyday lives is the fear of discovery from a family member or other key figures in their lives, people with whom they have mutual interactions and the plausible reactions of avoidance, non-acceptance and unrelenting hostility. Their biggest worry is the potential for painful estrangement from the family and that the people whom they love will not accept them once they come out. This is a particularly difficult and unpleasant territory to navigate, especially if ones family or parents are also the core of one's existence.

This fear of scandal, infamy, mockery and eventual finally rejection casts a shadow over the social interactions of sexual minorities. Moreover, family reactions are affected by the social,

If I could get back to the past, I'd rather never talk to my high school friends about this. When I see them on the street or somewhere, I am disturbed. All the time I am thinking what if they are talking about me. I have not told my dad. It is very tough for him to know that well now my daughter has such a tendency. It's very difficult for me if my father gets to know about all this. But if I had a choice, I would have liked all those around me to know. But I am hiding it. No one understands me. Whenever I talk to my sisters or when they come over, they behave in a way as if saying doesn't do anything which may expose the issue to our husbands. I am always in fear. That's why I distance myself from everyone. I spend time mostly in my room, alone.

*Lesbian, 27, Tehran*

economic, and cultural status of parents (e.g. educational level, cultural prejudice, and religious beliefs), but have all been more or less of the same scale. This means that families, even the most open ones, have a therapeutic and interventionist reaction towards the coming out and often force them to seek therapy in a futile attempt to change his/her true nature.

Part of the stigma against homosexuals is intrinsic to the Persian language, which has two different words for homosexuality.<sup>268</sup> This has led to much controversy within sexual minority groups concerns definitions of "homosexuality" or "*hamjensbazi*". The study identified the basic difference between these two important narratives in relation to this research. Homosexuality is seen as an acceptable sexual tendency in an individual whilst *hamjensbazi* is seen as an undesirable form of a relationship in reference to the participant's

<sup>268</sup> What it's like to be gay in Iran -theweek.com/articles/532005/what-like-gay-iran

friends and relatives. Both concepts are intangible and vague without any clear definition. The LGBT community uses hamjens-garai (literally, "the state of being interested in the same sex") while the government and state media use the term hamjens-bazi, which has a derogatory connotation as someone who "plays" with people of the same sex. The closest, but not universally agreed upon translation is the pejorative word "faggotry." It is possible to be gay and live under a repressive regime that is always threatening to out, whilst the government and state media use the term hamjens-bazi,<sup>269</sup>

### **1-5- Identity –Coping Strategies**

The very nature of “sexual minority” with conflicting ideologies for any person belonging to this group, something that the individual tries to soften and frame in order to normalize it. To fulfil their search for identity and a particular lifestyle, homosexuals undertake different strategies to compensate for the existing gaps in their relationships so that they can carry on whilst maintaining sexual and mental stability. One such strategy is to try and “normalise” oneself. Some examples include denying ones sexual orientation, burying sexual orientation thoughts, attempting endeavours to change sexuality and pushing oneself on to the opposite sex. Many engage in heterosexual activity merely to appear socially acceptable. These strategies of discarding any vestiges of ones sexuality only serve as a temporary, and ultimately, unsatisfying distraction. Beneath the bravado, their true sexual orientation remains.

What has been emphasized categorically by the research team and the field work was the endeavour to understand and translate these lived experiences into the analysis at hand. The chaos resulting from the use of “inappropriate labels” comes to light when the person considers himself a “homosexual” whilst his behaviour and history of relationships actually revealed that the label bisexuality was a more fitting definition.

Most of the respondents from the sexual orientation category of “bisexual” shared that they were unaware of this existing sexual nature. Many had previous sexual relationships with both sexes and many mask the reality of life as a “bi” individual. As previously discussed, bisexuality is still common with scorn; with many people believing bisexuality does not exist. Being bisexual is one of society’s taboos. It is still widely under-represented, plagued with

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<sup>269</sup> Ibid



misconceptions and riddled with prejudice and stereotypes. As some bisexual people do not feel that they fit into either the homosexual or the heterosexual world, by choosing the gay label it garners some relief by allowing the individual to have a more defined frame. Bisexuals may feel pressured to label themselves as homosexuals instead of occupying a difficult middle ground in a culture that does not readily understand this orientation. The reasons for this are twofold: “the unawareness of the existence of bisexuality” and the “imagined relative acceptance of only being gay or straight” rather than bisexual.

Iranian society and LGBT’s surrounding community as a whole is unable, unwilling and more importantly uninterested in comprehending these sexual orientations that flatly contradict societal norms. Any sexual orientation that operates outside the defined binary of male female relationships is disparagingly viewed as a disturbance, a shame, a disease and. or a disorder, disparaging labels that some African leaders have routinely employed when describing LGBT individuals. When one considers the steady beat of difficulties for LGBT: the external stressors of family and friend potential rejection, growing up in a world orientated towards heterosexual norms and values, the unyielding tenacity of religion and its unforgiving stance against homosexuality, the laws and omniscient presence of death, and the negative influence of the social stigma against homosexuality, it is of little wonder that these powerful repercussions are observed and internalised.

In the course of socialization *via* school, friend and family, the LGB individual is cognisant that his\her sexual orientation has been labelled by society as unnatural and problematic. The impact of these unwritten cultural and conventional laws is not only reflected on the individual’s self-image and plausible consequences of his behaviour, but it is also visible in a range of unnatural and at times dangerous reactions ranging from self-repression, denial and engagement in high-risk behaviour, all of which can have adverse effects on mental well-being.

### **1-6: The Influence of Religion and Religious Beliefs**

Whilst attitudes toward the LGB community around the world have recently become more tolerant, Iran remains one of the countries resistant to change. In some jurisdictions of Iran, even homosexuality as a topic of discussion is shunned, which makes it quite formidable for LGB advocacy groups to form and affect change. The religious infrastructure in Iran produces a political

and legal “supra-structure” defined on the basis of traditional Shi’a jurisprudence. This ideological system rarely allows other voices, and upholds strict religious interpretations.<sup>270</sup>

Iran as a traditional society lays emphasis on religion (and magic) in behavioural norms and values, implying continuity (deep links) with a real or imagined past.<sup>271</sup> Religion plays a pivotal role. Most family structures are based on religious teachings and often centred on the teaching of the Prophet. The heavy impact of religion on the identity and lifestyle on individuals is already highly influential but on LGB individuals it is highly grave as Muslim religious beliefs are fundamentally homophobic. The more religious and biased the family, the more pressure is imposed on the individual. Religion is not just a matter of personal belief and prayer; it constitutes a public sphere that includes the nation itself.<sup>272</sup> Considering the social and biological status of sexual minorities, religion creates a more powerful leverage for sexual control.

Based on what has been explored and discussed, we can only conclude that religion; the ratified laws of the country and the society’s traditional context are all significant factors contributing to the restricted life of homosexuals. This leads to unbalanced relationships, mental disorders and finally different lifestyles and identity formations. This identity includes some elements which have been the focus of this study based on the data compiled during the fieldwork. Evidently the newly shaped identity follows particular behaviour strategies and performance which have been analysed extensively under strategic actions.

Given the religious influence in the religious city of Mashhad and the taboo nature of the issue, these twin forces shed light on the impact of religion, identity and lifestyle of an individual. In addition to its contextual influences on family and identity formation, religious beliefs on Mashhad city are also more dominant and the issue differentiates sexual minorities in Mashhad than from other cities. The religious beliefs of these sexual minorities, not only make them resistant against accepting their inclination, but also they make them insistent on not revealing their orientation. The stigma attached to homosexuality in Islamic communities can have profound effects on those Muslims who self-identify as gay. In Iran, most people follow basic Islamic concepts in their social

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<sup>270</sup> Denied Identity: Human Rights Abuses Against Iran's LGBT ...  
[www.iranhrdc.org/English/publications/reports/1000000398...](http://www.iranhrdc.org/English/publications/reports/1000000398...)

<sup>271</sup> Difference between Traditional and Modern Society, [www.yourarticlelibrary.com](http://www.yourarticlelibrary.com) › Society

<sup>272</sup> Between Religion and Desire: Being Muslim and Gay in Indonesia,  
[www.sjsu.edu/.../courses/soci172/s0/10GayMuslim.pdf](http://www.sjsu.edu/.../courses/soci172/s0/10GayMuslim.pdf)

*28 year old bisexual from Tehran*

"I do nothing to impress the God. I neither say my prayers, nor read the Quran. I don't fast. I swear to God and I fuck in the ass"

lives and therefore sexual relationships are also considered valid unless they clash against acceptable inviolable social norms. Homosexuality is not a tolerant let alone accepted social norm.

Religion acts as another contributing layer of pressure on LGB communities in Iran. As stated in Chapter I, religious beliefs have always been amongst the main factors and actors that are at a crossroads with progressive social reforms and transitions, creating an obtrusive interference in homosexuality acceptance. Iranian society, places a high value on conformity where expressions of individuality are frowned upon; there is an emphasis on upholding social "norms" with defined roles for men and women that exist in a binary sphere. Homosexuality challenges this social order. And for millions their blind submission to an intolerant brand of religion that emphatically states homosexuality is an unforgivable sin is significant. When the sacrosanct social norms within the parameters of approved Islamic rules are threatened, religion serves as a moderating tool and entity for organizing and controlling social behaviours. For the family, homosexuality is akin to renouncing ones religion (called apostate).

Creating mental ambiguity for the individual, religion can have a pressurising effect on one's personal, social and sexual decisions. Interpretations abound in the constant debate on whether it is acceptable to be gay in the Islamic faith and many struggle reconciling ones spirituality with ones sexuality. Those gay Muslims who conceptualise their sexuality as immoral and/or wrong can understandably struggle for self-esteem. For instance, take the premise of the widely accepted view that homosexuality is a sin. Islamic religion unequivocally and unambiguously views homosexuality as a deviant behaviour. For LGBT individuals, the beginning of recognizing their sexual orientation is fraught with an existential religious and spiritual despair. Many are under no illusions about the strength of homophobia within the Iranian culture. The internalized sense of religion that is the core of one's existence, the societal and religious concepts of a male and female as the only societal acceptable relationship in the Islamic framework, make the individual judge his natural feelings through the prism of a blanket condemnation of homosexuality and a religious structure. Clearly, the stigma attached to homosexuality in Islamic communities can have profound effects for those Muslims who also self-identify as gay.

It is easy to see how belief in the negativity of homosexuality from the perspective of one's faith could conversely cause some gay Muslims to develop internalised homophobia. For those LGB individuals who are on the receiving end of societal homophobia hate, their internal inescapable struggle that sometimes only alters after years of facing fixed sexual inclinations, has in turn led many to religious rejection or lack of belief in religious punishments.

LGB individuals are always subject to human interpretation, and interpretations may vary according to time, place and social conditions. In this regard, most of the respondents advocated more ethical interpretations of the religious texts which exalt pluralism and the value of difference between God's creations and resisted the dominant interpretations of the Qua'ran used by scholars to condemn homosexuality. Muslims invoke the story of Lut in the Quran (comparable to the story of Lot in the Bible) to argue that Islam condemns men who love men. Many gay Muslims have a different interpretation: the story condemns cruelty, not any particular sexual act.<sup>273</sup> In an attempt to reconcile their faith with their sexual orientation, they distinguish between 'homosexual acts' and 'homosexual identity' in order to affirm that the fact they were born non-heterosexual as part of Allah's plan. Thus their homosexuality is an expression of divine will and not a personal choice due to lust or perverse desires. Additionally, a small number of Islamic scholars, mainly in the West, have started re-examining Islamic teaching on same-gender sex and have concluded that the blanket condemnation is a misinterpretation<sup>274</sup>.

Nevertheless, for many their choices are limited: hold steadfast to ones beliefs, be yourself as you are unable to carry on masking or deny your homosexual tendencies and thus weaken your beliefs in the hopes you will progressively forget them. When the individual is lacking familial and entourage support and acceptance, and the supposed solace of religion is absent leaving the person isolated and rejected, it is not at all surprising that one loses religious beliefs and turns to receiving support from non-secular sources.

Paradoxically this religion factor sometimes renders people towards more conservative ideology. LGB individuals, who have carried the fear of negative family reaction and judgment, attempt to be compatible going so far as to mimic heterosexuals' behaviour, speech and clothing style. The conservatism can result in short-term relationships.

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<sup>273</sup> Muslim attitudes about LGBT are complex, far from universally ...  
[www.usatoday.com/.../Muslim-lgbt-gay-views/86046404](http://www.usatoday.com/.../Muslim-lgbt-gay-views/86046404)

<sup>274</sup> Islam and Homosexuality: What does the Koran say ...  
[www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/1.724908](http://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/1.724908)

The spirit of Islam is all about empathy, tolerance and understanding and yet LGB simply has no positive theological frame of reference in Islam. The acceptance or endorsement of homosexuality is perceived as contravening key tenets of Islam. And yet, the need for a religion that acknowledges and accepts faith groups in LGB contexts which tends to be secular is lacking during this epoch of homosexual acceptance. This has attributed many to seek a new way forward to metaphysical power and alternative spiritual ideologies in one's life instead of the dominant and governing religion of Islam. The concepts include humanism, and belief in human dignity as a real religion or inclination to new-fashioned mysticisms believing in sexual fluidity. Perhaps this century can be a historical story of remix, tolerance and coexistence that will go beyond superficial support and hash tag solidarity.

As the selected anecdotes below have persuasively shown the journey to acceptance is brutal. Below are a few poignant voices from the LGB community from the field;

### ***23 years old Gay from Isfahan***

*Well we are condemned, we live in a Muslim country we have Muslim parents and naturally we are Muslims. We believe in God and afterlife but it's weak and I don't say my prayers. But I have faith. I do not deny God. Nevertheless, I have relationships, I have sex, and I have always tried to separate these two dimensions. For me, the issue of being heterosexual or homosexual is not related to God, religion and hereafter. I don't connect them to each other; I don't think I have committed a sin. My religious beliefs are weak but I have accepted the issue easily and I have no problems.*

### ***31 year old lesbian from Mashhad***

*During my childhood, I remember, I went to the mosque with my mom or my dad, but after facing these problems and issues, guarding against God was the first feeling I had because I was really under pressure. God could have created me like other people of my sex, I could lead a normal life, get married, have children. I could live easily. I still have the same feeling. The issues we face sometimes really make us ignore our beliefs, but this problem made me lose many of my beliefs, many of them. I would like to die one day and only ask God why, because there are some people I am in contact with and some people are like me with the same problems. I am really fed up.*

### ***27 year old lesbian from Tehran***

*Now I delete my groups (Telegram LGB group), again tomorrow I search in the groups to find something better, I delete my groups, turn off my cell phone. I think I have bought 20 SIM cards so far and I have burned them out. I ask myself to leave it. Not to do it anymore. I open the Quran; tomorrow again I am searching the groups. Again searching for a suitable case. I think I have changed ten cell phone batteries so far. I just search by my cell phone from morning till night. My mom says: you may come back Arash if you pray to God. You may find a job, go to work.*

### ***Exposure of Homosexuals to Law***

LGB individuals are attacked and harassed in Iran. The laws are stacked against them; they are vulnerable to harassment, abuse and violence from their families and society. There is an eternal and inseparable connection between religion with sexual norms in Iran and a flourishing legal system and draconian laws which serve to punish those who do not respect religious and sexual norms. Legal sanctions are perpetrated by the government, the judiciary system and by non-state actors such as schools, communities and families. Iranian laws provide no protection against discrimination or harassment on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. LGB individuals are denied the legal right to be who they are.

The penal code of Iran uses the term *lavāt*, in reference to the name of the prophet Lot (Lūt in the Qur'an) and the story of Sodom. Its association of this story with homosexuality is debateable and controversial, but suffice to say that the religious authorities in Iran have chosen to interpret it in this way.

With reference to Iran's Penal Code as discussed at length in Chapter I and in the author's previous books,<sup>275</sup> there is an indisputable gap between penal ratifications and executive realities. Recent studies indicate that punishments and penalties for having homosexual relationships (see Chapter 5), pederasty/ Paedophilia and lesbianism are met with a combination of corporal punishments such as flogging. In case the deed is repeated and evidenced, the homosexual person will be sentenced or stoned to death, although it has been years since such a sentence has been passed and it seems the justice system and the police tolerate the LGB community as long as they do not congregate in large groups and remain invisible. Paying attention to laws in today's current Iran continues to weigh on then LGB community. Although these laws are considered as human rights violation, the

<sup>275</sup> See, Kameel. Ahmady Early Child Marriage and In the name of Tradition ( Nova publishing,2017)

history and background of their implementation in Iranian society go back to 2005. The feedback from the interviewees indicates that they think the lifting of such punishments is unlikely.

When the sexual minorities were asked about their knowledge of laws, many exhibited ambiguities about the details on implementations of the regulations, even though some of the participants used words such as execution or stoning, and flogging. As we observed, as many of the interviewed sexual minorities have an inflated feeling of being in control, a sense of relative carelessness, and no recent cases of execution or stoning, many considered the occurrence of such an event quite unlikely. Cocooned in the safe zone that is located in a secure circle has pushed many to exist within a protective mode, falsely leading many to believe there will be protection for their privacy and for their wish to keep their sexual relationships confidential. Despite being individually concerned over the laws, many had carved out a social niche that merely emphasizes remaining a hidden and invisible member of society. It seems that the Iranian authorities usually turn a blind eye to the gay community's escapades, but even this de facto borderline tolerance can be risky.

The impuissant forces that implement control, power and supervision on sexual desire, although external and compulsory such as laws and police, often transform into internal provoked forces created by the person himself. The individual is now in a vortex of self-censorship and loathing. Strangely, although there is concern or fright about being arrested by the police or the sanction of death, this fear is eclipsed by their worries of disgracing the family and/or the disclosure of their sexual identity that had been carefully hidden or disguised for years.

Considering the above mentioned issues, one can have a clearer image of the effect of the law on the individual's life. There is an evidence that the police actions are only against the gathering of sexual minorities venues in public places, cafes or parks in the city centre that draw the police to their large crowds. These parks are well known hangouts for the LGBT community. During the interviews, the participants revealed they were relegated to visiting well-reputed public places, like special parks in the metropolitan cities of Tehran, Isfahan and Mashhad.

This sort of security response is a classic method to set a moderate and radical atmosphere of traditionalism and to control human communities at various intervals for reasons such as social interest, or supervising interactions. It is a response to the complexity and the interrelatedness of both old and new by tackling such threats. However, the primary goal is not to make arrests or

inflict punishment but ostensibly to disperse large crowds in well-known public places for security reasons.

Despite the atrocities being perpetrated against gays in Iran, a deeper analysis on such a projective reaction proves that in reality the heterosexual public's awareness of homosexuality is low. No matter what rationales are put forth, the veracity of sexual minorities' existence cannot be denied or ignored. Yet, what is important here is that obliterating the appearance of sexual minorities is not meant to disguise or cover up their existence. Rather the strategy may be an attempt not to highlight their existence and thus garner legal recognition and international media attention. The governing security system does not insist on drawing attention to this group that defies all acceptable norms of sexual behaviour. As the former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad once stated "In Iran we don't have homosexuals like in your country"<sup>276</sup>. This eyebrow raising statement may not exactly false. As homosexuality is illegal and punishable, the idea of someone living their life openly gay in Iran is difficult to imagine. Ahmadinejad's now infamous assertion was flat out erroneous as there are plenty of gay Iranians living in the shadows. It is just that the government chooses to ignore them — at least until it doesn't.<sup>277</sup>

Dispersing homosexual groups and preventing them from assembling in public places for occasions such as birthdays, recreations, anniversaries, anniversary of creating Telegram channels, etc. shows the length Iranian society will go to keep sexual minorities swept under the rug. It is done to appeasing the majority who are terrified of and repulsed by homosexuality.

Our research team witnessed the omniscient threat of police security. The police and morality enforcement forces interrupted the field study several times causing participants to quickly scramble in order to avoid possible recognition. It is worth mentioning that the measures were taken differently in each metropolitan city like Tehran, Mashhad, and Isfahan and even in various areas within the city. In addition to the difficulties securing participants who were willing to be interviewed, this cloak and dagger routine when the police interrupted made the interview process additionally laborious.

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<sup>276</sup> We don't have any gays in Iran,' Iranian president tells Ivy. [www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-483746/We-dont-gays](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-483746/We-dont-gays).

<sup>277</sup> A Rare Glimpse into Iran's Underground Gay Community. [www.towleroad.com/2014/12/when-then-president-Mahmoud...](http://www.towleroad.com/2014/12/when-then-president-Mahmoud...)



During an interview a gay man from Mashhad shared his feeling;

*“Communities of sexual minorities provoke the current susceptibility based on their type and context. Gatherings for celebrating birthday and anniversary trigger various police reactions in case transgender people or those with special makeup and clothing are present. Specially Mashhad and in Tehran, I have heard some [good] things have happened for homosexuals. Such as parties and other issues, but Mashhad and both cities are home to shrine of important religious figures) are horrible, I don't know why at all”.*

Predictably, we discovered that sexual minorities' sense of trust has been eroded owing to traumatic experiences of police arrests and attacks at parties or in public places. Building trust with the interviewees for the face to face conversations and interviews necessitated the field study researchers to employ additional time and energy. During the research, many cancelled their visits at the last moment even after many attempts were made for arrangements, owing to the chronic fear of discovery and mistrust. In particular, the team members in the field study in Isfahan encountered these last minute cancellations with alarming regularity and on numerous occasions. Therefore, researchers made greater attempts to select larger homosexual samples.

Interpretation of the interviews indicated that sexual minorities' concerns and anxieties were not specifically limited to governmental security forces but to the potential disclosure of their sexual orientation to the hidden enclaves of family, friends and relatives.

### **1-8: Military Exemption, Chance or Way of Defence**

As previously mentioned, being openly gay creates an incredibly adamant living circumstances for individuals. Simply having an effeminate appearance sends out an invitation for trouble, let alone coming out. Coming out as a gay man has consequences in Iran as homosexuality is amongst the biggest taboos on social and legal levels. However, the taboo transforms itself to a paradox if and when the issue of serving in the military arises.

Normally, once a young man reaches the age of majority (18 years of old), a two year military service is mandatory. All healthy and able male high school graduates or drop-outs are mandated to serve in the military if they do not succeed in the University Entrance Exam. A card is issued upon completion of a citizen's two-year service. This card potentially can make life much easier. Without that card, an Iranian man cannot officially buy or sell anything, cannot participate in formal public sector activities, nor can he be employed by the government, or qualify to obtain a

passport. Some companies in the private sector tend to refrain from recruiting men who have not served in the military.<sup>278</sup>

Depending on one's geographic location, educational or marital status, sometimes the age is lower than 18. The compulsory service is sometimes not favoured due to its long term duration that people are quite reluctant to serve, and its restrictive conditions. Some try to find means to avoid it. More affluent families would go above and beyond to circumvent the military service, be it through bribery, undergoing attempts to be smuggled out of the country, inventing false pretences of illness, or many other ways people created to escape the military service, attempting to fit in as exceptions so they could be excused.<sup>279</sup> Exemption from serving as a soldier entails special laws and regulations that occasionally are modified and moderated. Thus, the status of a great number of people can possibly be modified by changing a few words in a paragraph. Serving as a soldier is considered as a complicated issue in analysing problems of sexual minorities in the military. The nature of garrison's closed environment and the two-year compulsory serving time can trigger homosexual inclinations.

The process of receiving an exemption is time consuming, consisting of providing evidence for being transgender or homosexual. The individual must undergo required medical and mental evaluations prior to commencing the two-year experience. Sometimes, the homosexual person will lie about his sexual role or position, pretending to be the feminine partner or having a special makeup and clothing, so that he can win the court case and receive exemption. In such cases, homosexuality is not considered as a biological sexual inclination but an outward manifestation of what is deemed as an effeminate appearance. In addition to makeup, clothing and appearance, an individual's size is a determinative ostensive sign: homosexual individuals with large and masculine bodies are less likely to win at court.

Should the examining officers or physicians come across any evidence of "queerness," they refer the soldier-to-be to an appropriate official for further evaluation. If the psychological diagnosis confirms the individual's homosexuality, an official permanent exemption is issued for him. More often than not, a thorough and clearly humiliating and stressful rectal exam follows the mental evaluation. If the physician's observations provide evidence of occurred same-sex intercourse, it is

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<sup>278</sup> Gay Men in Iran's Military Can Seek Exemption - Al-Monitor  
[www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/08/](http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/08/)

<sup>279</sup> Ibid

then written formally and submitted to the military. In some cases, further detail-oriented examinations come into play, so the decision-makers can be certain of the applicant's "queerness," making sure the claim of homosexuality is genuine rather than a ploy to escape military service.<sup>280</sup>

The participants in the research study recounted experiences of relentless humiliation and degradation as the price paid in order to receive the exemption card. They reported mandatory classes in groups of 20 or more. In reality, the mandatory classes function as a platform to spew out anti-homosexual ideology through abasement and shame as the adviser tried to convince them to change their sexual orientation, return to heterosexuality and that their same sex desire is an illness. Participants spoke of belittlement, accusations, and suppression of their different ideas and discussions as recurring experiences that they were subjected to in the classes. According to the feedback received from the participants, in addition to attending psychology classes, the individuals underwent another examination and many had to submit to hormone tests before being granted exemption status.

Obtaining a military exemption is radically different for exemptions from serving for homosexual and heterosexual young men. For heterosexuals, exemption means saving two years of youth, getting married, and a chance for education and finding a job. However, for homosexuals, although it leads to a fleeting moment of tranquillity and security, it is quickly followed by alleviation of stress caused by living amongst people who may attack them. This short lived relief is also rapidly followed by employment big issue. One of the consequences that is starkly felt by the card bearer who is seeking employment is that their military exemption now renders finding a job extremely difficult. This card makes the individual unmarketable.

Mental illness or Personality Disorder will be mentioned as the reasons on the exemption card. The Personality Disorder is quickly surmised as a euphuism for homosexuality. Sometimes the card shows the compatible regulation number under which the exemption is issued. It would therefore, be very easy to verify the reason underlying the exemption. As many recruiters and employers are reluctant to have homosexual men on staff, securing employment could become truly arduous for exempted gays. Exempted card carrying gay men will have difficulties securing work in governmental sectors or at any governmental company, entity, or organization. This clearly will have economic consequences. Stigma and discrimination based on sexual orientation that is

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<sup>280</sup> Ibid

essentially announced on a card can result in less disposable income and earnings, and fewer employment opportunities for people who are LGBT.

Iranian authorities may prefer to remain tight-lipped about the prevailing of homosexuality in Iran, but it may be safe to assume that when it comes to mandatory military service, the closet is wide open.

### **1-9: Counselling Services and additional aids**

As explained in more detail in preceding chapters, visiting a doctor or a psychologist is undertaken for a myriad of intentions and purposes. One radical difference is that when one visits a medical doctor it is to seek medical treatment, medical relief about abnormal physical symptoms that hopefully can be resolved by medical interventions ranging from prescription drugs to surgical procedures. When one visits a psychologist it is usually for mental trauma. When a LGB individual visits a psychologist to discuss with respect to their sexual orientation they usually are not seeking treatment or change but are seeking reconciliation in an attempt to face their sexuality.

As perceptions of the "causes" of homosexuality reflected the fears of society, the treatment reflected the appropriate punishments for their assumed transgressions. LGBT individuals suffer because they were taught to suffer, first by their society at large and then by the scientific community, which declared that homosexuality was a medical illness. Underlying these attempts by psychiatry and psychology to change sexual orientation is a basic philosophical belief: an assumption that human behaviour and sexual orientation are potentially malleable<sup>281</sup>.

Many psychologists have responded with negative "solutions." For example, a psychologist recommends having sexual relationships with the opposite sex with the purpose of changing the sexual orientation of the individual. These solutions eventually pushed participants to be involved in complicated relationships, triggering sexual agitation and sorrow and contributing to the feeling of losing one's identity.

Despite the general consensus that homosexuality is not a mental disease, there are "expert" psychologists in Iran who consider homosexuality as an illness and try to categorize the person within a defined sexual role framework. The ineffectiveness and deficiency of advice to the

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<sup>281</sup> History of Treatment/The Medical Treatment of Homosexuality. Edited by Cabaj & Stein, American Psychiatric Association, 1996.

patients has resulted in psychologists introducing the LGB participants to each other in consecutive uninterrupted periods. Although this may have a possible short live positive output, the technique triggers an inevitable mal-effect. Each of these psychologists reacts to the individuals and their family separately using different approaches. These approaches inevitably cause the LGBT individual stop the counselling sessions as the visits seem useless and do not help ameliorate feelings and status. The survey findings from the LGBT individuals in Mashhad and Isfahan demonstrate how LGB individuals feel about psychological treatment.

Sexual minorities have a distrust and negative attitude towards the role of psychologists or counsellors. The constant state of wariness and caution that accompanies and clings to LGBT individuals all their life spills over even in the presence of a social worker or psychoanalyst. Distrust prevents the person from letting ones guard down to reveal his problems and disables him from receiving support or useful advice and recommendations.

**A 28 year old male respondent from Mashhad shared the following;**

*I haven't gone to psychology sessions. Like sexual treatment ones. Totally, psychology is not interesting and I do not believe in it that much. I don't really believe. Counselling is just getting money. One time is not enough. There are people who are aggressive, who quarrel. I hold counselling classes for them two, three times a week. I spend 1.5 hours for them. In one and a half hour they change suddenly. He was aggressive, he becomes calm. Psychology is not interesting, I don't believe in it.*

**A 24 year old from Isfahan shared;**

*"My mother gave me this suggestion too. In my point of view, I became really angry and upset. I said I'm not sick and I do not have mental problems to visit a psychologist or psychotherapist. This is for the reason that normally a person with mental problems is taken to a psychologist or psychotherapist. They take him there if there is vulnerability. Therefore, asking me to visit a psychologist or psychotherapist can be the biggest insult. What does she mean? It means that we don't accept you and can't cope with you and believe that you have a problem and disorderliness, thus we want to take you to a doctor. This is the biggest mistake. If you are willing to do so, again it is a personal attitude, you should choose if you want to accept it or not.*

Another insightful issue is the gender dichotomy aspect sexuality of the visits. This research study revealed that amongst the male participants, seeking a professional help is deemed as a sign of weakness. Men are less willing to exhibit their “weakness”. On the other hand, female participants were more willing to seek receive help and receive advice. Given the fact that psychology is something new in the public culture, visiting a psychologist is still stigmatizing. The patient prefers not be seen while entering a counselling office as he does not want to be considered as a person who is incapable of solving his/her problems.

Providing some clarification over the atmosphere of psychology and the culture of visiting a counsellor in Iran seems useful here. In recent decades, the science of psychology has become familiar for the public as there are now accessible centres considered as places to visit in case an individual is facing emotional, mental, personal and/or family problems.

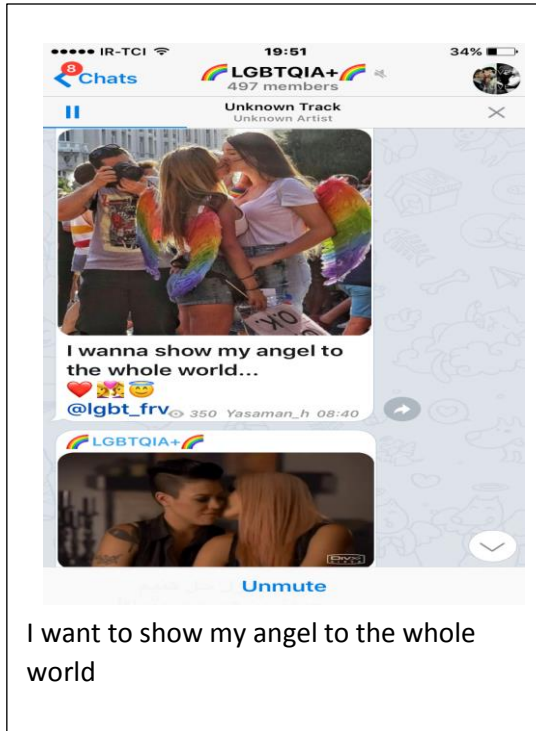
Currently in Iran there are two sources of licence issuing in the psychology field as a scientific profession in Iran: 1) I.R. of Iran Medical Council, and 2) State Welfare Organization of Iran. Considering these two extensions in the field of counselling as a profession, we learnt there were two different types of professionals: psychologists and counsellors who work for the government and those who have their own private practice. Psychologists in the first category have limited knowledge and information on sexual orientation issues within their working community, and consequently their authority and control over implementing their thoughts are limited.

Some groups of people choose state psychologists when they are unable to afford a private counsellor. These people are introduced to psychologists from the State Welfare Organization as patients in order to take advantage of the free counselling sessions. In these sessions experts have limited strategies and solutions for treating their “homosexual patients”. These psychologists by extension are government employees. When the homosexuality is conspicuously absent in Iran's laws, save for doling out punishments and clearly not acceptance, counselling with a state psychologist is not fathomable. Indeed a psychologist, who even suggests acceptance of one's sexual orientation as a natural occurrence in the sexuality spectrum, is in essence taking a stance against the principles defined by his/her employer, the government. This may even lead to annulment of the psychologists' license.

The second group of people are usually from affluent families who have the financial means to visit private psychologists who have their own practice in city centres and not affiliated with governmental

organizations. These psychologists have a relatively higher understanding of sexual identity issues, perhaps less concern with aetiology and focus on a cure for homosexuality, and thus can act more authoritatively in giving counselling.

### 1-10 Violence & Mental Health of Homosexuals:



A study comparing methods of dependency amongst heterosexuals and LGBTs indicates that with respect to stress levels, there is a significant difference between the affection styles of homosexuals and heterosexuals. In the Western culture, males pat each other's backs or hug each other as their only socially-acceptable show of mutual affection. In contrast, many LGB dare not show this public affection in Iran.

Hiding and fear of being identified do not end with adolescence. For example, studies on the workplace experience of LGB people found that fear of discrimination and concealment of sexual orientation are prevalent<sup>282</sup> and that they have adverse psychological, health, and job-related outcomes<sup>283</sup>. These studies showed that LGB people engage

in identity disclosure and concealment strategies that address fear of discrimination on one hand and a need for self-integrity on the other.

The study revealed that people who are less accepting of their sexual orientation have a comparatively higher level of stress. The results of the research study indicate that there is a direct relationship between the negative attitudes of society and people's stress level. The constant need to mask one's true identity coupled with LGB's stigmatization by their culture can contribute to acute mental health issues. Living within Iran's rigid system and obviously coping with societal stigma and abject disapproval in a traditional society is arduous. Rates of mental health conditions are particularly high in bisexual individuals and those who fear or choose not to reveal their sexual orientation or gender identity. But those that do not identify as a part of that community are often left to struggle against discrimination

<sup>282</sup> Croteau JM. Research on the work experience of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people: An integrative review of methodology and findings. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*. 1996; 48:195–209.

<sup>283</sup> Waldo CR. Working in a majority context: A structural model of heterosexism as minority stress in the workplace. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*. 1999; 46:218–232.

I think at the end of the day every woman needs to rely on a man. Even in the relationships of Lesbians the one who plays the role of a stronger partner still needs someone stronger than herself to rely on to survive.

*Meshad, 18, lesbian*

alone, an experience that is frequently isolating and damaging to one's mental and emotional wellbeing. Though not all LGB people will face mental health challenges, discrimination or violence, many people report mental wellbeing and satisfaction<sup>284</sup>.

## LESBIANS

The actual rates of depression and anxiety among lesbians is not clear, with data varying widely amongst differently designed studies, but the literature taken as a whole suggests that lesbians have higher rates of mental health problems. Population based studies provide the best data. A national probability survey in the US showed a higher rate of anxiety disorders among lesbians compared to heterosexual women.<sup>285</sup>

Conversely another study in the Netherlands showed higher rates of depression, but not anxiety, amongst lesbians compared to heterosexual women.<sup>286</sup> Additionally, this same study also found that lesbians have a two-fold rate of at least two lifetime mental health diagnoses. The risk of depression and other mental health problems, including the risk of suicidal ideation, appears to be increased amongst lesbians who are not 'out'<sup>287</sup> and those who have experienced bullying and discrimination. The risk of depression and other mental health problems, including risk of suicidal ideation, appears to be increased amongst lesbians who have experienced bullying and discrimination.<sup>288</sup>

Lastly, the culmination of the chronic problems that most of the sexual minorities experience on a daily basis, the ridicules at home, school, and workplace and even on the streets, the extreme peril of being caught, the forced exploitations, bullying and sexual harassments lead to an intolerable, unfair and

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<sup>285</sup> Cochran, S.D., V.M. Mays, and J.G. Sullivan, Prevalence of mental disorders, psychological distress, and mental health services use among lesbian, gay, and bisexual adults in the United States. *Journal of Consulting & Clinical Psychology*. 2003. 71(1): p. 53-61

<sup>286</sup> Sand fort, T.G., et al., Same-sex sexual behavior and psychiatric disorders: findings from the Netherlands Mental Health Survey and Incidence Study (NEMESIS). *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 2001. 58(1): p. 85-91

<sup>287</sup> Koh, A.S. and L.K. Ross, Mental health issues: a comparison of lesbian, bisexual and heterosexual women. *J Homosex*, 2006. 51(1): p. 33-57

<sup>288</sup> Ibid at foot note 48



inhumane living conditions. Many live under social and state repression. When such conditions remain fixed, it further paves the way for social harms such as HIV, violence, mental disorders, depression and suicide to flourish. In many cases, the individual sees no alleviation of this chronic social rejecting ambience and often resorts to suicide attempts. What was discovered during the research that many of the participants had tried to commit suicide. Most of the participants recounted stories of their failed suicide attempts.

Abed (2006) reported that out of 30 gays, 20 had attempted suicide at one point in their lives. Previous studies suggest attempts were significantly associated with psychosocial stressors, including gender nonconformity, early awareness of being gay and victimization<sup>289</sup>. The most common suicidal modes were ingestion of pills, suffocation by gas or slitting wrist. Many showed the research team their visible scars from failed suicide attempts. Even though some of the scars had faded away they were still deeply present internally in their minds and hearts with no relief.

The violent and insulting reactions that are played out on streets and public places area are also played out in their community where their sexuality is judged and viewed with disdained and derision. It is also played out at the workplace where they spend a significant part of the day. This is not uniquely confined to Iran. In general, globally LGB continue to face widespread discrimination in the workplace<sup>290</sup>. And again Iran proves not to be an exception. The barriers to health care faced by LGB individuals, coupled with violence and mental health issues experienced by this population due to homophobia can also cut short the number of years LGB people are able to work

The interviewees reported countless stories of insults, rapes, humiliations and contempt at their workplace that creates a real and immediate threat to their economic and mental security and adding another layer of dead-end dismay in the LGBT world. In addition to the abysmal behaviour of co-workers, needless to say, career promotions and advancements are unlikely for those sexual minorities who are unsuccessful is masking their true identity and pretending at workplace.

Not being able to pretend or just weary in feigning society approved sexual orientation, decreases the chance of sexual minorities from having professional positions. Managers who make employment decision are normally not willing to employ sexual minorities. Revealing ones sexual tendency runs the

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<sup>289</sup> Kitts, R. Adolescence. Gay adolescents and suicide: understanding the association. *Adolescence*, 40(159), 621-628. 2005.

<sup>290</sup> Gay and Transgender People Face High Rates of Workplace  
Workplace ...[www.americanprogress.org/issues/lgbt/news/2011/](http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/lgbt/news/2011/)

risks of thwarting job opportunities and producing adverse job outcomes such as receiving a negative performance evaluation, being passed over for a promotion or labelled incompetence. Securing a governmental or political position is virtually impossible and realistically less likely to occur.

Domestic abuse or violence by an intimate partner is usually discussed in the context of heterosexual relationships. But the incidence of domestic abuse in heterosexual's relationships is also prevalent in homosexual relationships as well. In heterosexual relationships there are some legal options for protection such as restraining or protective orders, and arrests. Typical framing of partner abuse in heterosexual relationship issue, primarily focuses on men physically or verbally abusing women and poignantly ignores victims in abusive homosexual relationships. As the lives for many have always been a cascading combination of tolerance, suppression and social and family adversities, they are much more vulnerable to experiencing violent sexual relationships. Sexual minorities do not fit the traditional stereotype of a domestic violence victim. Homosexuals and particularly the ones with a feminine role potentially and mentally accept violence. In an abusive LGB relationship, the primary concern of exposing the homosexual relationship may thwart exposing the abuse. Many are disinclined to report attacks to avoid the publicity. Many survivors feel shame and stigma.

In Iran, sexual minorities cannot take advantage of their constitutional and civic rights in Iran and cannot defend themselves when involved in an unhealthy violent relationship. In fact LGBT are comprehensively and systematically denied any legal protection. As the laws in Iran already view their relationship as blatant contravention of religion norms and legal violations, sexual minorities already terrified of disclosure do not have a comfortable relationship with the legal system, police and/or law enforcement.

Multiple factors have been shown to contribute to abusive homosexual relationships, including but not limited to childhood abuse and cultural norms. Sometimes the lingering stress of abusive childhood incidents leads to an on-going shame in adulthood which plausibly can further contribute to stress in a gay relationship.<sup>291</sup> Sexual attacks and rapes are frequent in these cases and individuals often experience these sexual aggressions in their later relationships. As previously mentioned relationships are short-term and superficial and this obstructs individuals, particularly the individual who assumes the "masculine role" from having a healthy emotional investment with the other partner.

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<sup>291</sup> A Same-Sex Domestic Violence Epidemic Is Silent - The Atlantic  
[www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2013/11/a](http://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2013/11/a).

Amongst the numerous testimonies gathered by our research team was that of a very soft spoken humble 25 year old gay individual in Isfahan. He shared a deplorable chilling encounter he experienced.

Verbal violence (or verbal bullying) is the more common aggression seen against homosexuals. LGBT incidents of verbal violence can be from strangers, but also people familiar to the individual. The verbal abuse starts early from the family and partners, to humiliating name-calling from peer groups, and to verbal harassment and humiliation at the workplace. Those targeted by such violence are perceived to violate heteronormative rules and contravene perceived protocols of gender and sexual roles. In some worse case scenarios, participants reported sexual assault and threats of being physically attacked, raped and compulsory sex.

Violence targeted at people because of their perceived sexuality can often be played out in violent sexual games. It is difficult to determine what motivates the violence: sorting out their own identities and attacking the very people who make them the most uncomfortable about their own sexuality; men with a weak sense of individual identity, attacks on LGB to counter their own sense of low status or a sadistic orientation. Given the intensity of the violence in these sexual relationships it is not unrealistic to venture that heterosexuals might be suppressing latent homosexual feelings or mental sexual illnesses, transferring it to younger homosexuals.

### **PEDERASTY/PEDOPHILLIA**

Heterosexuality cloaked in the tradition of strong masculine bonds that are a hallmark of Islamic culture are at odds with pederasty. Pederasty refers to sexual relations between middle aged men with young boys (referred to as *Becha baz in Iran*), commonly accompanied by violence, harassment, and deceit. Probing the profound intricacies on relationships between middle aged men and young boys leads to a more different and more comprehensive discourse.

This unilateral sexual relationship is riddle with child abuse, sexual exploitation and rape issues. Even when the young boy (as the feminine partner) forms an attachment to the older person and is aware of the relationship, he still has no freedom and choice. By the older person imposing his intentions on his victim, he does not teach but leads the young boy in the direction he wishes. The affair is sarcastically called a “long-term project” by the man. This long-term project expresses the way sexual relations are formed between male homosexuals with younger boys.

According to the participants, these pederast individuals usually have separate houses and domiciles for their sexual relations that take place outside their family network. Industrial work places, company warehouses, factories, restaurants, cafes, a second house or in their office apartment, etc., are amongst such venues.

**No. I don't like it. I have one or two sex toys at home. The fellow I was hanging out with gave me two and told me to take them home. I told him I don't want it. He said take it and I will use it when I come over. I don't like it much. Doing it with a piece of plastic gives you no pleasure.**

*Mohammad, 62, respondent from Tehran*

Within this one side perderastic relationship are linguistic issues. Idiomatically, men involved with same sex partners are pejoratively referred to as “fagots” (bugger in colloquial Persian- in Frasi “Koni”) an epithet insulting term riddle with derogation. The recipient, either male or female is referred to as fagot, a definitive etymology depiction reinforcing the word’s negative connotations, and by implication ascribing negative connotations of homosexuality.

### **A 25 Year old guy from Isfahan shared;**

*I'm homosexual; I'm an emotional person. I have made friends with a person who was looking sincere and nice. I became intimate with him. After sometime he asked me to go to his house along with him. He showed extreme warm feelings and intimacy and said that we are a real and perfect match. It over whelmed me deep down. Eventually I went there and found out that there were two, three people more. They hit me severely, tied my hands and feet and did whatever they wanted. Now I'm bleeding, ruined, my mind is ruined.*

I was a university student when I got to know the girl with whom I have been going out for 7-8 years. It was mere accident. I don't know if it is right or wrong. I just got rid of my mental struggles and suicide thoughts. I once attempted suicide and I was almost dead. They brought me back to life. I wanted to kill myself because nobody could understand me. For instance, my sisters told me that we are married and our husbands may abandon us if they know about you. Our dignity is at risk. People start talking and so I attempted suicide.

*Lesbian, 32, Tehran*

The promotion of such linguistic terminology in a sexual role framework causes society to interpret men with the “masculine” roles more respectfully. The prevalence of such gendered biased language and how it affects society’s understanding and acceptance of male and female stereotypes places men who are the “doers” at a more respectable position. They are the ones who have both authority and control over the sexual relationship to set the rules and conditions. These men have the power of penetration. Conversely, the feminine partner is seen as having an inferior worthless personality and thus his/her sexual role is referred to with swearwords or pejorative language.

### **1-11: Marriage and adoption**

As repeatedly voiced in the interviewees, another chronic issue for Iranian homosexuals and bisexuals is the lack of legal recognition of their union. For LGB individuals, this potentially translates into a lack of access to health plan benefits, state tax benefits, protection from discrimination, or other legal rights that married spouses enjoy. They struggle with the absolute inability to be married required to make their relationship official. Iran is not a same sex marriage-friendly jurisdiction. Evidently when there is no chance for official relationships, the relationships are unofficial and many times superficial and trivial which in turn, leads to increase emotional harm amongst homosexuals.

Under the rules and regulations of the Iranian’s State Welfare Organization, currently all those who are mentally, physically and financially capable are eligible for adopting child. Young and single are included in this law. However, as Iran sexual minorities have no chance to marry someone from the same sex, they are automatically deprived of this social right to marriage mirroring the identical way their sexual orientation does not allow them to be deemed as eligible for adoption.

### **1-12: Lack of Sex Education & Health Issues**

Multiple sex partners or relationships can lead to health problems. What we observed is that amongst the interviewees, health issues were of a lesser concern for many of them. Based on the comments by the participants, attention to health issues was limited to condom use and/ or contraceptive pills. Sometimes

people would go to health centres for health check-ups and blood tests but these were not reported in large numbers.

There is a need for culturally competent medical care and prevention services that are specific to this population but in Iran, homophobia continues to be a major barrier. LGB people face specific challenges and barriers, including violence, human right violations, stigma and discrimination. Stigmatization can lead to varying types of chronic health issues. Criminalisation of same-sex relationships, cross-dressing, sodomy and ‘gender impersonation’ feeds into ‘social homophobia’ — everyday instances of discrimination – and both factors prevent LGB people from accessing vital HIV prevention, testing, and treatment. As a result, some LGB people are unknowingly living with HIV or being diagnosed late when HIV is harder to treat.

The fear of AIDS amongst gays is high. Most of them reported that the largest number of people diagnosed with AIDS is amongst gays. There is a need for alarm. On World AIDS Day (December 1<sup>st</sup> 2017), Iran’s Health Minister Hassan Hashmi, announced that Iran is facing a dramatic increase in HIV diagnoses. Speaking at an AIDS-awareness conference at the Ministry of Health, Hashmi noted that over the past eleven years, AIDS cases have increased nine-fold. He further warned that the lack of sexual education and persistent social taboos surrounding sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) in Iranian society were factors in this alarming trend.<sup>292</sup> The situation of HIV in Iran poses a challenging paradox, which speaks to the interwoven social and geopolitical influences that govern health. New HIV infections are increasingly being caused by unsafe sexual practices, as opposed historically to injecting drug use. But the cultural taboos surrounding the discussion of sex continue to mask a silent catastrophe.<sup>293</sup>

Anal sex, oral sex and inattention to health considerations increase the risk of this disease. Despite the chronic fear of AID, generally speaking, the rate of sexual health awareness and relevant considerations was quite low amongst sexual minorities. For example, although sexually active, gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men should be tested regularly for STDs. However, whether out of feigned embarrassment or the

A gay friend gave me a book by Freud called *Essays in Sexuality* so that I read. At that age I sat down and read the book. I didn’t understand some parts but I understood what I needed to understand.  
*Sajid 25, respondent from, Tehran*

<sup>292</sup> Iran’s Battle with STDs and Cultural Taboos – Muftah muftah.org/irans-battle-with-stds-and-cultural...

<sup>293</sup> HIV in Iran - The Lancet, [www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736...](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736...)

very real fear of being reported to authorities, our research study revealed that many of the male homosexuals have not had regular check-ups or tests for STD. Conversely, lesbians were completely unaware of the very existence of female condoms.

It was also revealed during the research survey that use of sex toys is rampant amongst some homosexuals and bisexuals. This is another cause of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Whether or not LGBTs use sex toys with more frequency than heterosexuals is a matter of debate. Amongst lesbian woman the use of sex toys, including vibrators and dildos is common<sup>294</sup>. Differences in sexual behaviour may account for some of these disparities. These toys which are mostly bought illegally from the black market, not a trusted source, are usually not sterilised. Sex toys can pass on STI and infections passed on through the blood (blood-borne infections).

Most gynaecological and health concerns of lesbians are no different from those of heterosexual women. However, there are some unique factors. First, the sexual behaviours of lesbians include all those available to the heterosexual woman except for penile–vaginal intercourse. This is most urgent regarding HIV transmission risk. Second, if she wants to become a parent, she will have a more difficult time accessing the usual options for achieving that goal. Third, apart from the gynaecological issues, broader areas of issues are chronic illness and or mental health issues which do affect physical health, etc. Finally, lesbians live in a unique psycho-social-economic milieu. It is plausible that each new clinician from whom she seeks care will be indifferent or hostile simply because of her sexuality; her access to health care and insurance may be limited if partner's benefits are not available; sources of health care may present their services in a way that is not welcoming or effective for lesbians; and lesbians may view the stages of reproductive life differently from heterosexual women, which may affect the preventive choices they make<sup>295</sup>.

For lesbians, the most frequent activities appear to be mutual masturbation and oral–vaginal sex.<sup>296</sup> There is an increased risk of bacterial vaginitis in women who have sex with women who have a history of sharing sex toys, or whose partners have bacterial vaginitis<sup>297</sup>. Skin-to-skin and mouth-to-genital contact, as well as sharing sex toys and exchanging vaginal fluid or menstrual blood through manual

<sup>294</sup> Bailey JV, Farquhar C, Owen C: Sexual behaviour of lesbians and bisexual women. *Sex Transm Infect* 79:147, 2003

<sup>295</sup> Gynaecologic Issues for Lesbians | GLOWM, [www.glowm.com/section\\_view/heading/Gynecologic\\_Issues](http://www.glowm.com/section_view/heading/Gynecologic_Issues) for.

<sup>296</sup> Supra at 55

<sup>297</sup> Are sex toys safe? - Health questions - NHS Choices [www.nhs.uk/chq/Pages/1690.aspx?CategoryID=118&...](http://www.nhs.uk/chq/Pages/1690.aspx?CategoryID=118&...)

stimulation leaves lesbian and bisexual women vulnerable to STD infections. Bisexual women have a higher risk of contracting HIV than women who have sex with women exclusively, because they also have sex with men whose semen contains proteins that serves as an extremely efficient carrier of the virus.

Sexual Health Education (SHE) has been recognized by international organizations as a human right, a necessity for development, and a promoter of equity.<sup>298</sup> In Iran SHE for unmarried people is socially frowned upon because of the countries' religious and cultural prohibitions of premarital sex and community shared stigmatization of sexuality.

Sex education can provide the correct information and dispel myths and misinformation. Young people are already introduced to the topic via social platforms much of the information they see may be potentially erroneous. Although sex education taught in school can provide a healthy and realistic view of sex, unfortunately the Islamic Republic of Iran's national curriculum does not offer/allow lessons in sex education.

Such misguides are persuasive demonstrations how the lack of sex education leads to developing poor understanding or a complete absence of understanding of sexual issues. This also demonstrates how this ignorance can lead to serious health problems not only for individuals but society at large. The sexual minorities are deprived of any education on basic sexual health issues and what little they know has been through sporadic studies or through their own research and discussions.

State Welfare Organization is of prime importance to the welfare and well-being anywhere in the world where sexual minorities are registered in compliance with certain statistics such as birth, death, marriage etc. Thus these already available and already in place demographic statistics can easily be used by Iranian government or NGOs in assisting homosexuals and bisexuals, facilitating accessible knowledge and other required aids. As LGB in Iran are vilified, denied and rejected in various aspects of their lives, they have no presence in demographic statistics and thus they are not included in any welfare laws or policies. The skyrocketing figures on STDs and the unsuitable living circumstances of sexual minorities could be ameliorated if there is support by the State Welfare Organization for these groups. Giving legitimacy to the minorities and noticing their particular enigma is the first step in any endeavours to improve their situation.

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<sup>298</sup> UNFPA. Comprehensive sexuality education: Advancing human rights, gender equality and improved sexual and reproductive health. 2010.



## 1. 13 Strategic reactions

In response to the experienced suppression and limitations, sexual minorities have not been always passive and submissive and at times have shown some intentional or unintentional organized or unorganized reactions. The majority of sexual minorities prefer to mask their sexual orientation as their family, religion, legislation, and security forces are considered as anaemic and virtually non-existent shaky sources of support. Concealment is the first strategic coping mechanism used by sexual minorities to resist the pressure. The results of interviews with some homosexuals and bisexuals revealed that all were in agreement on concealment and collectively utilised this strategy.

### 1.14 Sham marriages

Iran is a country where rules are fluid, where people of all classes and degrees of religion pride themselves on finding loopholes in the Islamic system. Sham marriages being one of the oddest and biggest. LGB are forced to find 'innovative' ways to be with the one they love. This is the sad reality, with millions of gay men and women in the world opting to take part in 'fake marriages' as a way of appeasing family members, and their wider communities Sham marriages between two homosexuals who are trying to eliminate the familial pressures and highly possible collateral damage to the family reputation. It is seen as the best means to keep all parties happy and to elude any suspicion of homosexuality. The biggest driving force underlying sham marriage was to appease their parents. Many people are scared of being disowned by their families if they come out as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender<sup>299</sup>. Undoubtedly this creates a tense situation, a sham life which can be destroyed instantly.

Those homosexuals who are active on social platforms and other social media or are in contact with a network of friends collectively face the daily cascading wave of family pressure to marry. There are two individuals operating within the pressure to be married. Firstly, many cave into family pressure to marrying a homosexual person from the opposite sex, normally do so at a time they are in a clandestine relationship with a same sex person. As previously reported these marriages from its very grim ominous



*I am in Yazd. B, an inserter, looking for a T from Yazd. Only PV from Yazd.*

<sup>299</sup> LGBT British Asians turning to sham marriages over fears. [www.independent.co.uk](http://www.independent.co.uk) › News › UK › Home News

beginnings were emotionally dead-end relationships void of sentiment. Secondly, they agree to the marriage so that in a win-win situation they can eliminate the powerful family pressure and still covertly continue their relationship with the desired person. The family is content because their child is married, while the sham union allows the couple to be with their preferred sex outside the marriage. The success of such solutions requires further research.

Another type of marriage is when the individual marries a heterosexual rather than a homosexual individual, with the same objectives in mind, that is to say release from the family and community pressures. Under such conditions, this is a quick fix for a person who has not come to terms with his or her sexual orientation and/or is struggling to come out. This marriage temporarily solves the dilemma of trying to sort them out, whilst the individual enjoys the financial, emotional and psychological support of their heterosexual partner. This was revealed through the interviews with participants, who although married, maintained their relationships with their homosexual partners. Living a double life and wearing the mask of heterosexuality results in yet another bleak concealment attempt in their lives.

The third solution which came to light through the field work was the participants' interest in leaving the country and immigrating in the hopes that they can live more openly in a non-repressive humane society as a LGB individual whilst having access to their basic human rights without the fear of persecution. They have already initiated the immigration application process of claiming asylum. Some of them had tried to immigrate at a younger age and were preparing for this process taking it in stride as if it were a normal part of their life routine. This is not as easy as it appears to be, particularly in the US.

Asylum is an immigration benefit that allows certain foreign nationals who fear persecution to remain lawfully in the U.S. indefinitely. People who are granted asylum may apply for lawful permanent residence (a green card) one year after being granted asylum. With some exceptions, an asylum application generally must be filed within one year of the applicant's last entry into the U.S.<sup>300</sup>.

Asylum claims based on persecution related to LGBT sexual orientation are particularly difficult to file, argue, and win, even with substantial evidence of persecution and ill-treatment. LGBT asylum trends in the United States are closely linked within the domestic political, social, and legal climates surrounding

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<sup>300</sup> Applying for Asylum - Immigration Equality, [www.immigrationequality.org/.../applying-for-asylum](http://www.immigrationequality.org/.../applying-for-asylum)

gays and lesbians. This situation, combined with difficulties in proving LGBT identity makes sexual orientation asylum claims especially challenging<sup>301</sup>.

The challenge is particularly acute with a current American administration bolstered by a list of strict immigration policies that include scaling back of legal pathways to citizenship. In a speech, it was stated that the immigration system is rife with “fraud and abuse” which paves the way for millions of immigrants to enter the country illegally and that “dirty immigration lawyers” are coaching their clients to make “fake claims” to trigger “credible fear” proceedings so they can stay in the United States<sup>302</sup>.

The Islamic penal codes and laws within an anti-homosexual tense society as well as the obligatory military service have compelled LGBs to exile to another country where there are more relaxed and supportive social laws rules and wider public acceptance. Amongst the countries that are attractive include neighbouring countries such as Georgia and Turkey. Those who are in a better financial situation prefer the US, Germany or Canada.

Overall, the unattainable and unfathomable living conditions in Iran and the masked lives, suppressions and hatred has caused many of the participants want to leave Iran and go no matter where. As previously mentioned (**See Chapter4**), homosexuality reports in Iran are based on antecedents of a well-founded fear of persecution and oppression. These LGBT individuals who do manage to obtain the difficult asylum status are now in a safer jurisdiction and no longer living in Iran. For the lucky ones who were able to do so, there are countless others who do not have the opportunity or financial means to leave, they remain behind.

Another type of strategic reaction by sexual minorities to the social pressures is engagement in heightened social activity. This reaction has been adopted by those who strongly believe in their sexual orientation and who come from more supportive and open families, who, although *are* not in absolute acceptance, are not that harsh and suppressive.

If you want to leave the country through asylum seeking and homosexuality, be careful! At the interview they may send you a man and ask you to have sex with him to prove you are gay. Usually the officers are well-built Africans.

*Ali, comment in a forum, educational migration*

<sup>301</sup> The Difficulties of U.S. Asylum Claims Based on Sexual. [www.migrationpolicy.org](http://www.migrationpolicy.org) › Migration Information Source

<sup>302</sup> Sessions' claim that 'dirty immigration lawyers' encourage. [www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/wp/2017/...](http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/wp/2017/...)

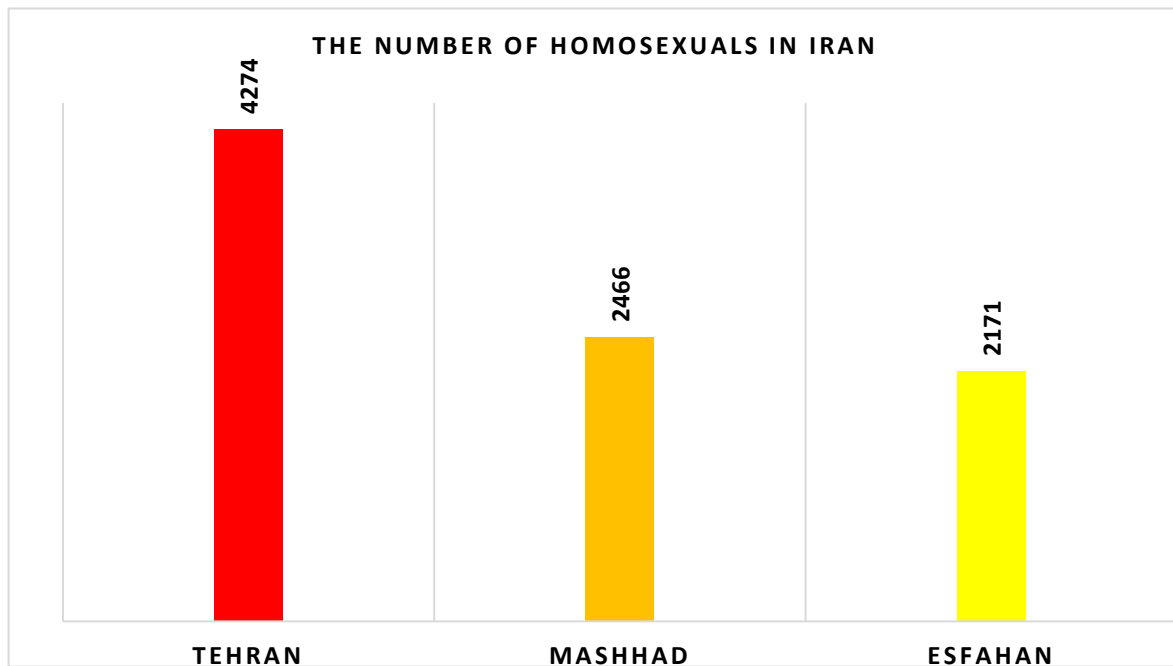
These people can no longer conceal their identity. This group consists of mostly of young university students who began an independent movement through which they try to introduce to the public the very nature of sexual minority's lives. In Telegram groups, they called the movement "Normalization" which consists of a series of activities such as dialogue with people classmates, neighbours and relatives to bring about attitude change, no matter how small. They arrange for calls, presentations at universities (not the university where they study), talks with one another's families, and dialogue with those hurling abuses on the street promoting the hash tag consensual "normalization".

The strategy of the normalization movement by LGB individual is define to themselves against society's perceived lenses of abnormality through a process of normalization. LGB individual wish to show they exist within socially and politically respectable parameters, through a consideration of the everyday lives of same-sex couples. This normalization will continue to reverberate as gays and lesbians push for more rights. The objective is to transform the society even if it is just one person.

Another strategic reaction, but in the same vein as in heightened social activity, is the formation of parallel communities to counterbalance the homophobia and societal conformist pressures existing in Iranian society. Fed up with social negative judgment and rejection, in these communities the members have more empathy with one another as their constituency share unique and potentially life-threatening concerns. Active within their own micro-culture LGB individuals can live in a small invisible community where there is someone who is a mother like figure for a group of friends or having someone as an aunt. Parallel communities offer a diverse range of social networking opportunities aimed at compensating for the shortcomings and rejections many LGB individuals have suffered in the family and social lives. In these circles, people feel a sense of social belonging, an increased awareness of their civic and legal rights and increase self-confidence to improve and maintain their health and wellbeing. Through these small communities they make connections and find support systems. Often these grassroots parallel communities in Iran operate underground. Their safe spaces are tenuous. It is worth noting that these communities can be virtual or real and both have their own arrangement. There are also a wide range of social networking opportunities online, albeit with caution.

Lastly, another strategic action for those who have the financial means or opportunity is to leave their hometown unlike asylum seekers who leave their country. LGB individuals usually leave their hometown for either educational or job opportunities or for a sense of increase freedom in big cities such as Tehran. Others choose to live in another city out of fear of their families discovering their sexual orientation. To manage the skyrocketing costs of an independent life with no external support, they sometimes move in

together to manage living expenses and vicariously to find emotional support. The problem of such cohabitation lies in the fact that the individual opts for such a lifestyle not as a choice or a preference but as the only way out of the situation. If the individual does not have the opportune moment or the financial means, economically he or she must reside in a place where the fragile and covert sexual identity lays in the shadows whilst their non-existent rights are violated by an available source of violence.



*Graph 1 shows the population of LGB in Tehran, Mashad and Isfahan. On this basis, Tehran with 4274 homosexuals has the biggest number followed by Mashad, 2466 and Isfahan, 2171*

It is worth considering that homosexuality does not emerge in a vacuum and no doubt, it entails consequences for the society. At times these consequences are not at all favoured by certain bodies such as the State, religion or the educational entities. The emerging landscape of LGB recognition demands a change in attitude and law. At times these consequences are not at all favoured by certain bodies such as the State, religion or educational entities. By virtue of Iran's penal codes that further strengthens its societal hostile attitude towards homosexuality, as it laws continue to denigrate LGB, this in itself leads to dire consequences. The silence and lack of their recognition that thrives in perpetuity against these vulnerable people is deplorable and tragic.

### **The Interviewees**

A total of 136 homosexuals were interviewed in three phenomenal cities in Iran. Each city has its own ambience and significance. The findings show that LGB are in abundance in these three selected cities as

they have come out, as much as one can come openly come out in Iran, within certain like-minded circles and talk openly about their sexual orientation

## ***2. Quantitative Result of the Research Study***

As previously reiterated, given LGBs insulated hidden lives and understandable angst of coming out, this research study cannot claim unequivocally that this sample is representative of the general population of LGB individuals. Nevertheless, some things do stand out. This research has utilized field techniques and targeted interviews to get to an estimate of the number of homosexuals in Iran with a focus on three major cities of Tehran, Mashhad and Isfahan. The results are presented below:

A very noticeable number of more than 4,000 prevails in Tehran alone which may as previously discussed, be partly due to the perception that Tehran is a bit more liberal when it comes to have a space for their particular orientation. In comparison, the numbers are half in Mashhad and Esfahan. It is pertinent to mention that these numbers depict those who have come out whose sexual orientation somehow is already known within their community. Undoubtedly there are countless more that prefer to remain hidden.

In Iran, the three forces that dictate ones behavior, law, religion and popular culture are opposed to homosexuality. They operate singularly, collectively and simultaneously. Thus homosexuals in Iran cannot come out as freely as LGBT do in other countries. Nevertheless, there are threads that indicate traces of homosexuality acceptance; that particular lifestyle is cautiously thriving more than ever before. This issue has been unknown to the Iranian society up until recently and no detailed study has been conducted on the matter. This is because the authorities do not see it as a societal phenomenon or even a social issue and therefore, there is a lack of data on the prevalence of this issue.

A closer look to their marital status shows that all of them are single because they apparently are not interested in getting married and having families. As most are young adults falling within the age bracket of 20-31, these numbers decrease as they approach and get beyond the age of 31. Similarly, the educational level of the LGB people in Iran indicates that people with higher education have very limited tendencies while the ratio is quite high in diploma holders, particularly in Esfahan where the percentage has reached to 40%. It also shows regardless of education, LGB orientation cuts across all echelons.

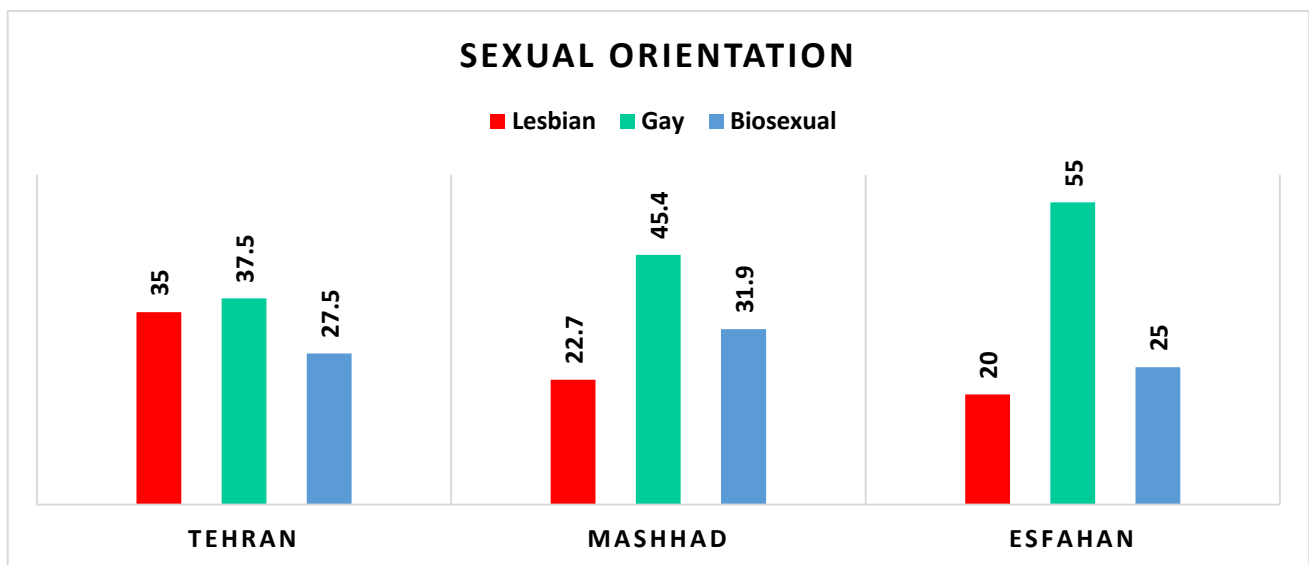
The study also analysed the socioeconomic status of LGB people in Iran. Socioeconomic status encompasses not just income but also educational attainment, financial security, and subjective perceptions of social status and social class. The findings show LGB tendencies in middle and high

income and class families, while the lower class was active only in Esfahan. Nearly 100% say they accepted their orientation during puberty whilst family acceptance is very low in respective cities. Most of the LGB people in Iran follow certain principles in their relationships which is quite high in Esfahan followed by Mashhad and Tehran. However, there are people who also have stable relationships and also multiple relationships.

In Mashhad, the ratio of stable relationships and multiple relationships is moderately favourable at 50% in both categories. The research duly noticed and mentioned the signs of depression and suicide amongst LGB people attributed to its challenges and psychological issues. Lesbians also were significantly more likely to experience psychological distress than female heterosexuals. The percentage is high in Mashhad which is 50%, moderate in Esfahan (40%) and a bit low in Tehran (35%).

The results are presented below;

### 2.1 Sexual Orientation

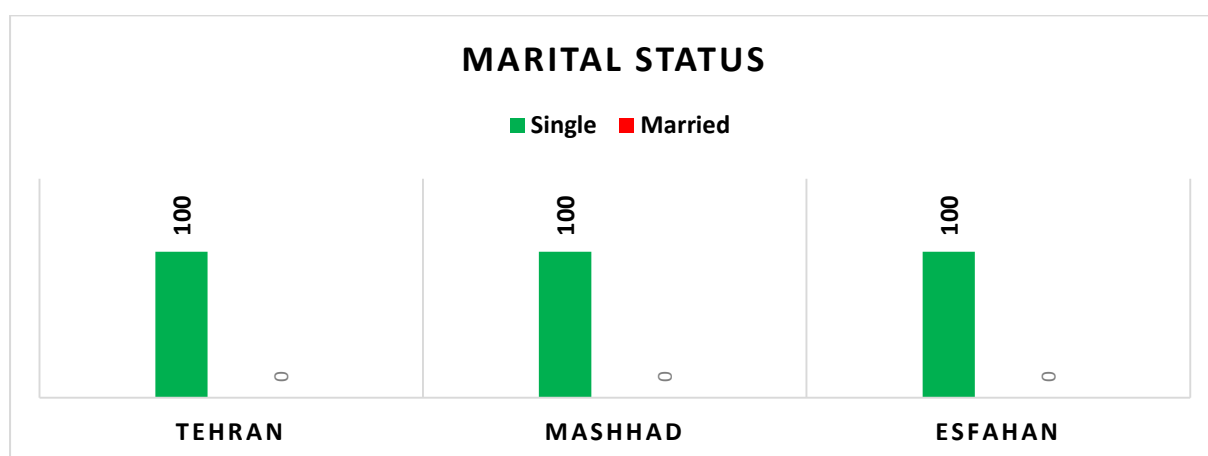


*Graph No.1: Prevalence of sexual orientations in the sample population*

Graph No.1 indicates the prevalence of lesbians, gays and bisexuals in the sample populations in Tehran, Mashhad and Isfahan. In Tehran the prevalence rates are: Lesbians 35%, gays 37.5% and bisexuals 22.5%. The figures for Mashhad are: Lesbians 22.7%, 45.5% gays and bisexuals 31.9% and in Isfahan the figures include: Lesbians 20%, gays 55% and bisexuals 25%. The graph shows that in all three cities, gays significantly outnumber lesbians and bisexuals. The 35% ratio of lesbians in Tehran is an indication of the tepid level of liberal openness in comparison to Mashad and Isfahan.

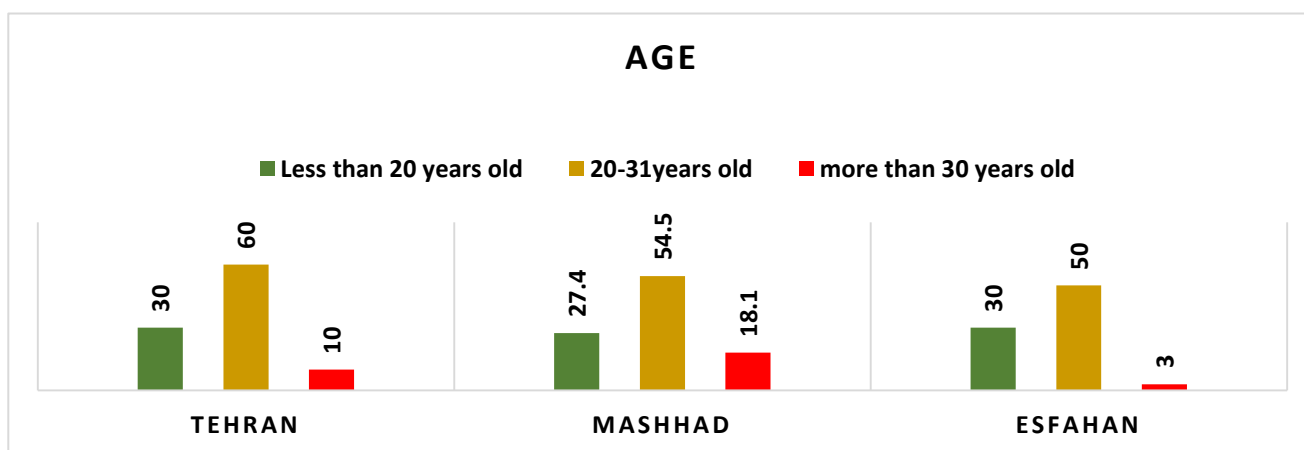
## 2.2 Marital Status

Graph No.2 depicts the marital status of the target population in the three cities of Tehran, Isfahan and Mashhad. 100% of the sample population is single. For a confluence of reasons, homosexual men and women may enter into a relationship with someone from the opposite sex. One predominate reason is the formation of a family in the traditional sense. Based on the above graph, the sample population has had no reason to enter into marriage and family life in the traditional, legal and religious sense. Nevertheless, despite bowing to society and family demands, any marriage of this nature collapses due to the identity and sexual pressures on the homosexual partner. Only a very low percentage of these marriages last.



*Graph No.2: Percentage of marital status in the sample population*

## 2.2 Age



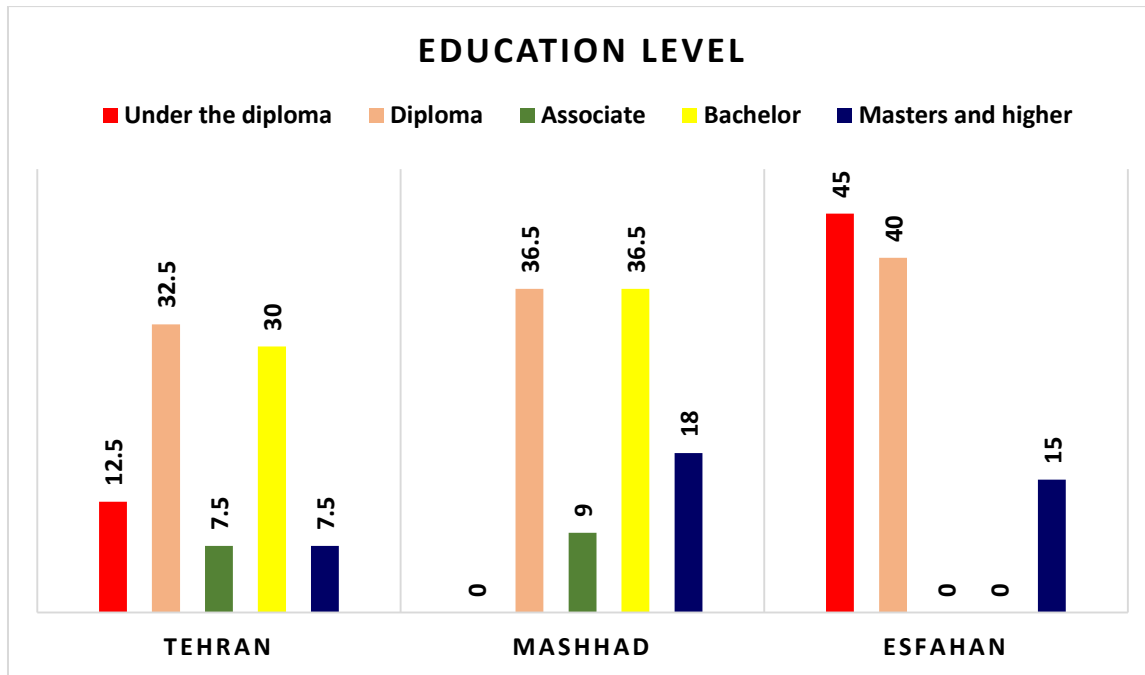
*Graph No.3: Percentage of age groups in the sample population*

Graph No.3 shows the age ranges of homosexuals in Tehran, Isfahan and Mashhad. Based on the graph, in Tehran, 30% of the homosexuals are under 20, 60% are between the age 20 to 31 and 10% are above 31. In Mashhad, 27.4% of them are under 20, 54.5% belong to 21-30 the age bracket and



18.1% are older than 31. In Isfahan the ratios are 30%, 50% and 3% respectively. The findings unequivocally indicate that the homosexuals in this sample population are mostly found in the age group of 20 to 31. A clear decline can be seen in the 30s group.

## 2.4 Education Level

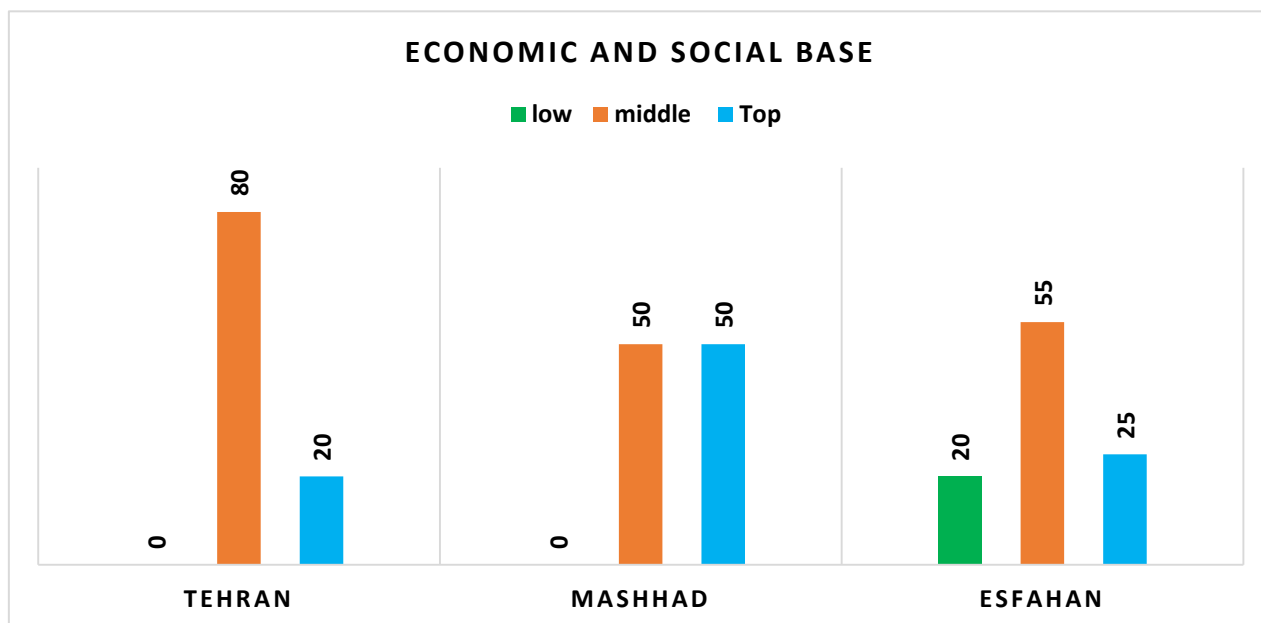


*Graph No.4: Percentage of educational level in the sample population*

Graph No.4 indicates the acquired educational status of homosexuals in Tehran, Mashad and Isfahan. In Tehran, 12.5% homosexuals do not have a high-school diploma, 7.5% have attained a college degree, 30% are graduates and 7.5% are postgraduates. In Mashad the figures are 36.5%, 9%, 36.5% and 18% respectively whilst in Isfahan 45% have not attained a high-school diploma, 40% have a diploma and 15% have higher education. Based on the subcultural theories, in terms of functionalism, a mismatch can be observed between the lower strata of the society with a lower educational level. But based on this graph, it can be said that a person's sexual orientation seemingly does depend on his/her acquired educational status. Homosexuality can be found in un-educated, less educated as well as in individuals with higher educational qualifications. The graph depicts that mostly high school diploma and university BA holders also have homosexual tendencies, especially in Isfahan.

## 2.5 Economic & Social Base

Graph No.5 concerns the socioeconomic status of homosexuals in Tehran, Mashad and Isfahan. In Tehran about 80% of the homosexuals are amongst the middle class and 20% are affluent. In Mashhad 50% of them belong to the middle class and 50% are well-to-do. In Isfahan 20% are in the lower socioeconomic stratum, 55% are middle class and 25% are amongst the higher socioeconomic groups.



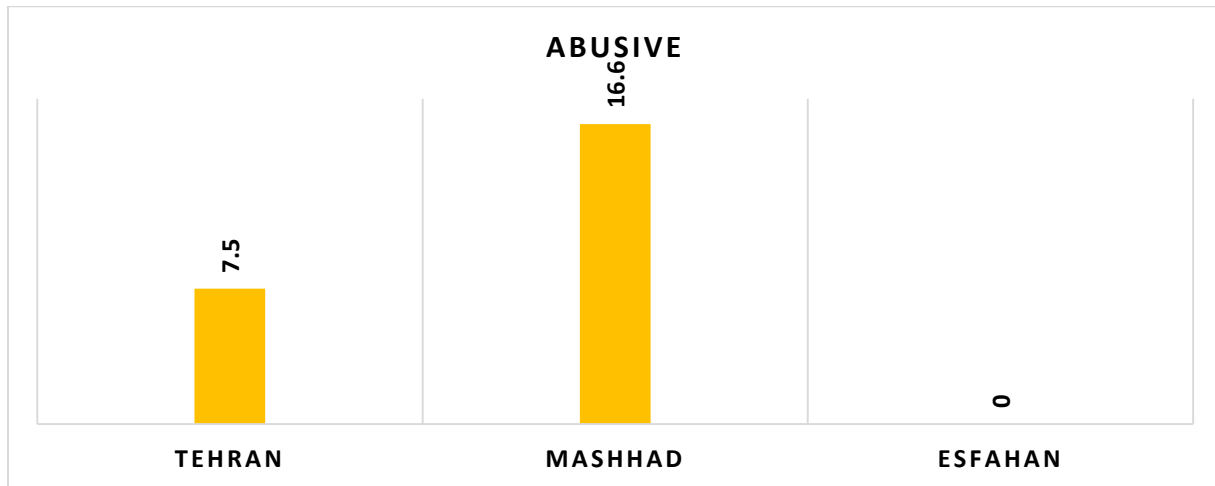
Graph No.5: Percentage of socioeconomic status in the sample population

Whilst in Isfahan, 20% of homosexuals are in the lower socioeconomic stratum, 55% are middle class and 25% are amongst the higher socioeconomic groups. In his book *Delinquent Boys* (1955) Cohen reasons that boys from an economically weak socioeconomic base are dissatisfied and disappointed. Aligning with those from the same economic background they often form groups that promote a subculture which contradicts the norms of the middle and upper classes. Their behavior is often the antithesis of what society deems as acceptable behavior. But unlike what Cohen states, the study's results show that the sexual conduct which is not in line with the general public's behavior is seen within the middle and upper classes.



## 2.6 Attitude of the Community

Graph No.6 indicates the rate of childhood rape amongst the sample populations. Essentially we wanted to ascertain the impact of childhood abuse, particularly childhood rape, and whether or not this could lead to homosexuality or if this could a primordial contributing factor for a homosexual orientation.



*Graph No.6: Percentage of childhood rape in the sample population*

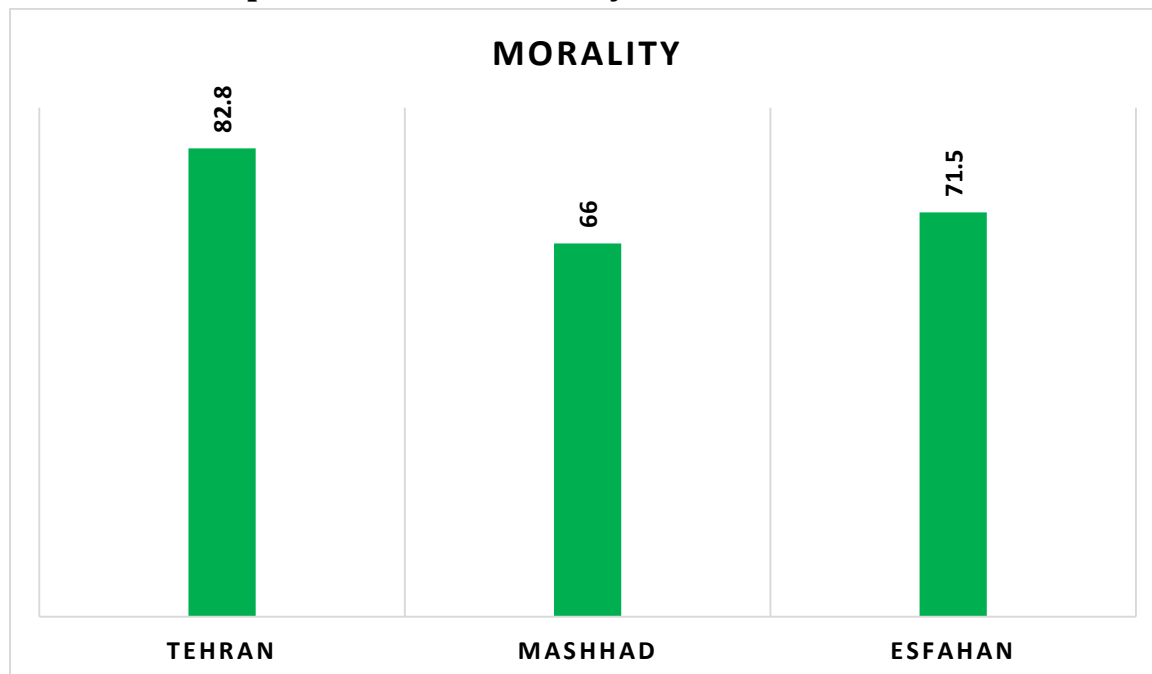
Based on the graph, 7.5% of the homosexuals in Tehran and 16.6% of them in Mashhad have been raped as a child. The studies that focus on the role of family and the childhood environment try to portray homosexuality as a phenomenon linked to emotions, growth and development processes. Based on the General Strain Theory of Robert Agnew individuals who are under pressure and stress behave in a way that is not acceptable to the society's laws and norms<sup>303</sup>. Agnew says that negative relationships lead to negative emotions in the individual and then lead to misbehavior and deviation<sup>304</sup>. Negative relationships include relationships which take away sacrosanct values such as innocence and chastity, from the individual or imposes something traumatic on him/her such as rape. The experience of negative phenomena such as rape during childhood is one of the reasons that lead the person to social divergence, homosexuality and rape as a means to express one's anger. Thus, whether or not childhood rape can be a psychological factor which can lead to homosexual tendencies

<sup>303</sup> Agnew, Robert, and Helene Raskin White. 1992. "An Empirical Test of General Strain Theory." *Criminology* 30(4): 475-499.

<sup>304</sup> Agnew, Robert, and Helene Raskin White. 1992. "An Empirical Test of General Strain Theory." *Criminology* 30(4): 475-499.

in adolescence needs further exploration but the results of this research study indicate it may be a factor.

## 2.7 Moral aspect of Homosexuality



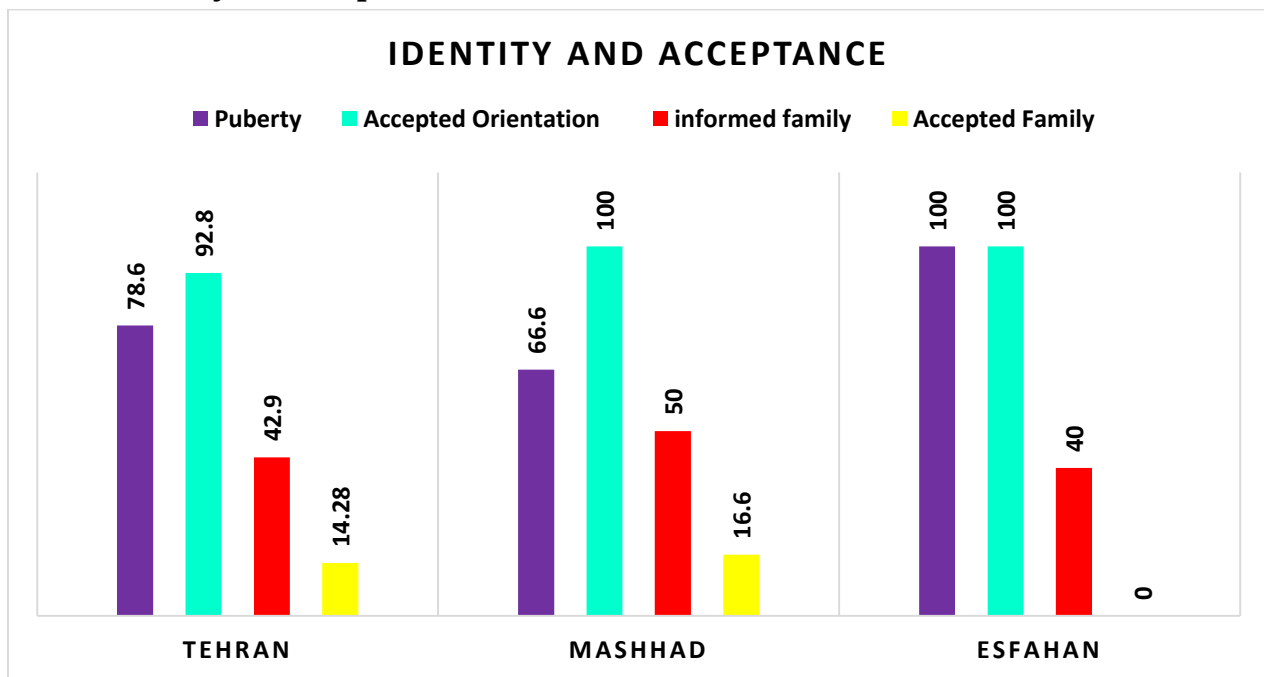
*Graph No.7: Percentage of interviewees' attitude toward the moral aspect of homosexuality*

Graph No.7 indicates the sample population's attitude toward the moral aspect of homosexuality. 82.8% in Tehran, 66% in Mashhad and 71.5% of the population believed that homosexuality is a natural and normal phenomenon. In the pre-modern legal and moral system, the sexual act is often valued merely as a tool of reproduction as its most important function. Any sexual act which did not lead to reproduction was considered immoral. For example, masturbation, anal sex with women, use of contraception's as well as sex with people of the same sex were immoral and religiously sinful. Therefore, a higher reproduction rate was a necessity for the survival of the population, defence of society and economic prosperity of tribes. This necessity was reflected in the value system of the society in the form of sanctioning and reprimanding any sexual act which did not lead to reproduction.

In contrast, the modern era is the era of the human population explosion. The average life expectancy has increased and the role of human's physical power in the military and economic affairs has decreased dramatically. The fertility rate is also far beyond the mortality rate. Thus today reproduction is not considered a virtue and the final goal of sex has changed from reproduction to

pleasure seeking or intimacy. This development manifests itself in the value system of the modern world where there is nothing wrong with sexual acts which do not seek reproduction; at least this approach is now subject to doubt. Thus homosexuality is now considered natural in many terms. This moral attitude has been raised by modern philosophers whilst genetic factors, health consequences and malfunctions of the homosexuality have not been noted. However, this novel attitude has been greatly welcomed by homosexuals who state that romantic love and pleasure are the absolute essences of a relationship in today's modern era. In recent years, the approaches toward homosexuality have softened in Western countries and a positive image of homosexuality has been further promoted in the press, social platforms and the media.

## 2.8 Identity & Acceptance

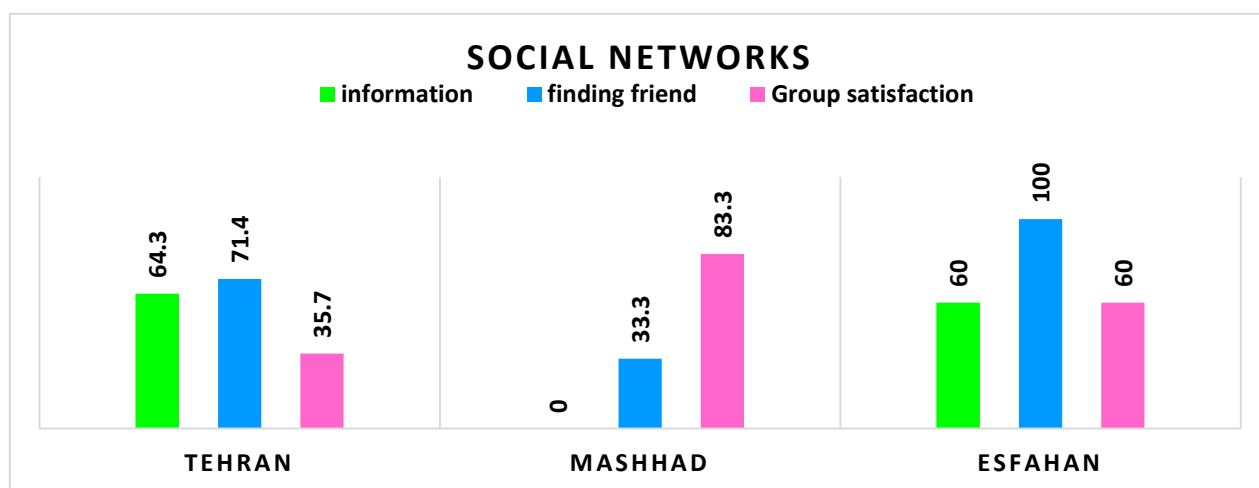


Graph No.8: Percentage of awareness and acceptance of homosexuality by the individual and his/her family

LGBT individuals' self-realisation of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity is a staggering challenge to themselves as well as to the Iranian society. Graph No.7 shows the percentage of homosexuals that realized their sexual orientation during puberty and accepted it as their sexual identity. It also shows how families knew and accepted homosexuality in the three cities of Tehran, Mashhad and Isfahan. In Tehran, 78.6%, whilst in Mashhad 66.6% and in Mashhad 100% of the respondents reported that they were aware of their sexual orientation during the puberty phase of their development. In terms of accepting their own sexual orientation, 92.8% of the respondents in Tehran, 100% of them in Mashhad and Isfahan mentioned that they have accepted homosexuality as their

sexual orientation. Based on the above graph, in Tehran 42.9%, in Mashad 50% and in Isfahan 40% of the respondents said that their families know about their sexual orientation and 14.28% of the families in Tehran and 16.6% in Isfahan have accepted their children's sexual identity.

Communicating with parents was reported as problematic by the majority of participants. As can be seen in the graph, between 40% to 50 % have reported informing their parents about their sexual orientation. Nonetheless, the ratio of acceptance is relatively low and falls between 14% to 16% in Tehran and Mashad, whilst in Isfahan the respondents reported a dismal zero acceptance against the 40% of confessions to parents. Most families in Iran are socially conservative and adhere to an iron clad firm belief in societal acceptance. Even if they are aware of their child's orientation they always restrict them from sharing that part of their identity with other family members and people in their communities.



*Graph No.9: role of cyber space in friendships and relationships with other homosexuals*

## 2.9 Social Networking

Hammack's (2005) framework of LGB identity development suggests that cultural factors such as the media may influence important psychological domains, including individuals' self-perceptions<sup>305</sup>.

Graph 8 shows the prevalence of homosexuals who became familiar with each other through interacting on social media. Based on the above table, 64.3% of people in Tehran and 60% of them in Isfahan realized their sexual identity through social networks while chatting on different versions of cyberspaces. Meanwhile 71.4% of the sample population in Tehran, 33.3% in Mashad and 100% in Isfahan became friends with people of a similar sexual orientation through social media. 35.7% of homosexuals in Tehran, 83.3% in Isfahan and 60% of them in Isfahan have assessed these friendships as satisfactory.

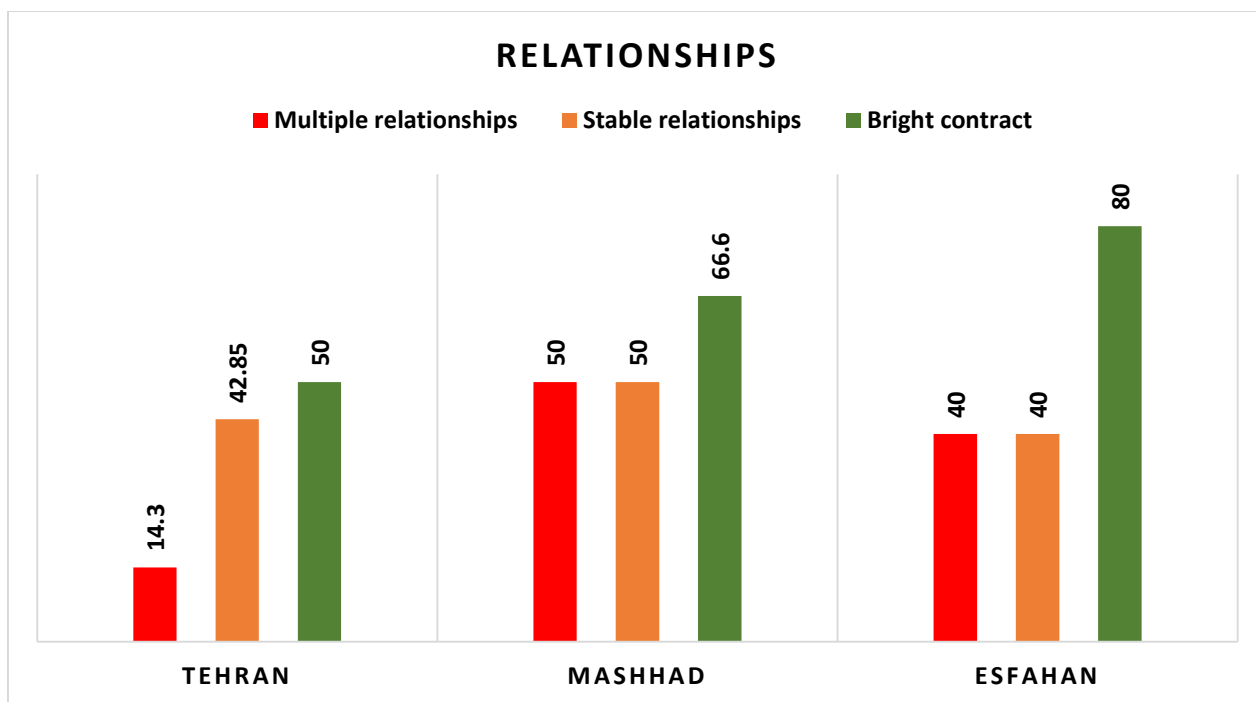
As witnessed in the graph, social networks play a key role in social upbringing and stronger relationships amongst homosexuals in Tehran, Mashad and Isfahan. From a psychological and social point of view, the most important means for homosexual support is the social environment such as social networks and homosexual friends. Social networks facilitate and accelerate links between homosexuals. Edwin Sutherland in the Theory of Differential Association opines most abnormal behaviors are learnt in early groups specially groups of friends<sup>306</sup>. At this level of social interaction, Sutherland claimed that the same way people learn to follow laws, they learn to be abnormal. People learn abnormal behavior via the communication process and through interaction with others. Based on Sutherland's view, the group and friendly relationships which are established amongst homosexuals through the social networks and are rising can be learnt. People enter homosexual groups, learn about homosexual identity and internalize it.

## 2.10 Relationships

Graph No.10 show the prevalence of multiple, lasting and clear relationships amongst LGB in Tehran, Mashhad and Isfahan. Based on the graph, 14.3% of homosexuals in Tehran, 50% in Mashhad and 40% in Isfahan have had multiple unclear sexual relationships. However, 42.85% of them in Tehran, 50% in Mashhad and 40% in Isfahan have stable relationships. Moreover, 50% of homosexuals in Tehran, 66.6% in Mashhad and 80% in Isfahan follow certain principles in their relationships.

<sup>305</sup> Hammack, P. L. 2005. The life course development of human sexual orientation: An integrative paradigm. *Human Development*, 48: 267–290.

<sup>306</sup> Sutherland, E.H., Cressey, D.R. and Luckenbill, D., 1995. The theory of differential association. *Deviance: a symbolic interactionist approach*. General Hall, Lanham, pp.64-68.



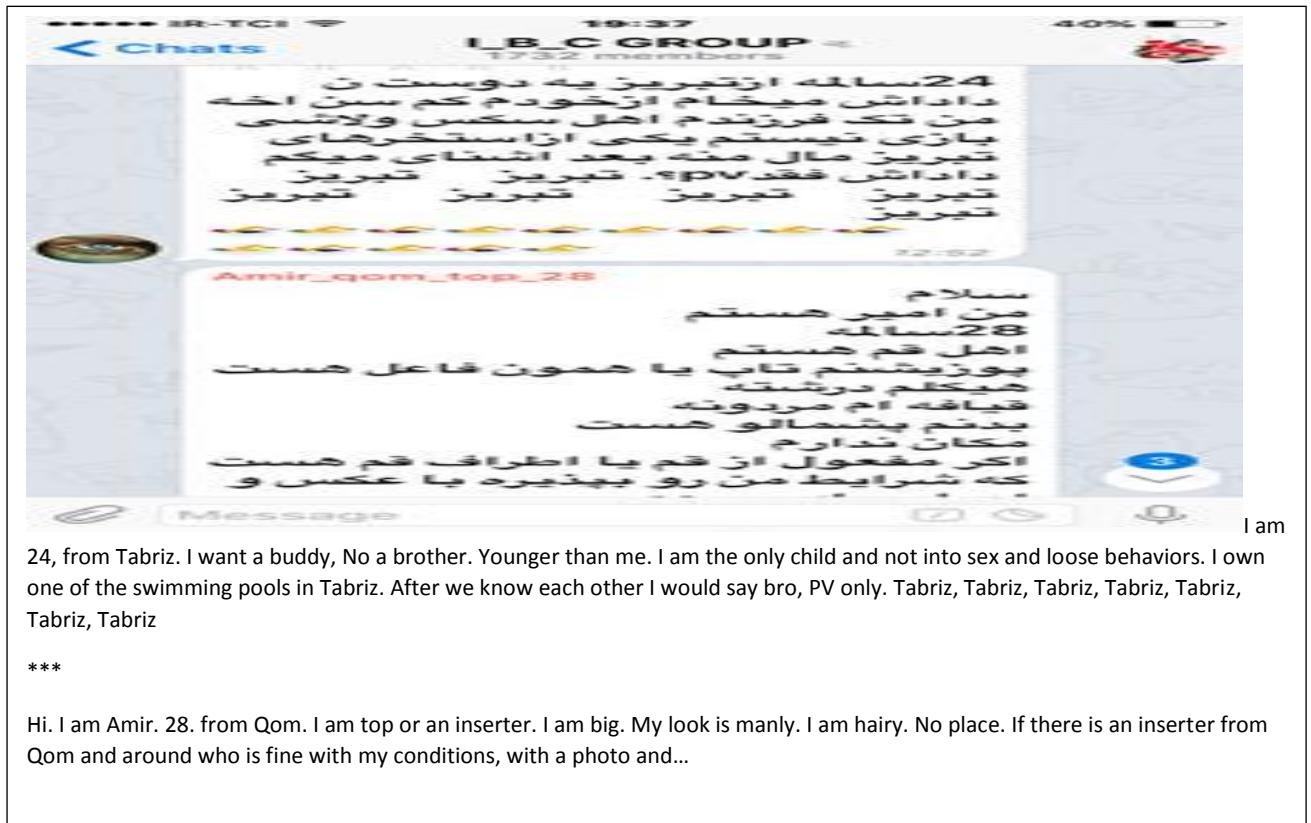
*Graph No.10: Percentage of different kinds of homosexual relationships in the sample population*

Plummer distinguishes four types of homosexuality in the modern Western culture. Casual homosexuality” is a passing homosexual encounter that does not substantially structure a person’s sex life such as schoolboys’ crushes<sup>307</sup>. Another type is “situated activities” which refers to circumstances in which homosexual acts are regularly carried out but do not become an individual’s overriding preference. In places such as the military camps or prisons where men live without women, such behaviours are rampant. “Personalized homosexuality” refers to individuals who have a preference for homosexual activities but who are isolated from groups in which this is easily accepted.

<sup>307</sup> Plummer, K. ed., 2002. *Modern homosexualities: fragments of lesbian and gay experiences*. Routledge



Homosexuality here is a furtive activity, hidden away from friends and colleagues. “Homosexuality as a way of life” refers to individuals who have “come out” and have made associations with others of similar sexual tastes a key part of their life. When we view Graph 10 within the framework of



Plummer’s four types of homosexuality, we realize that most of the homosexuals in Tehran, Mashhad and Isfahan fall under the categories of “personalized homosexuality” and “homosexuality as a way of life.”

## 2.11 Violence & Discrimination



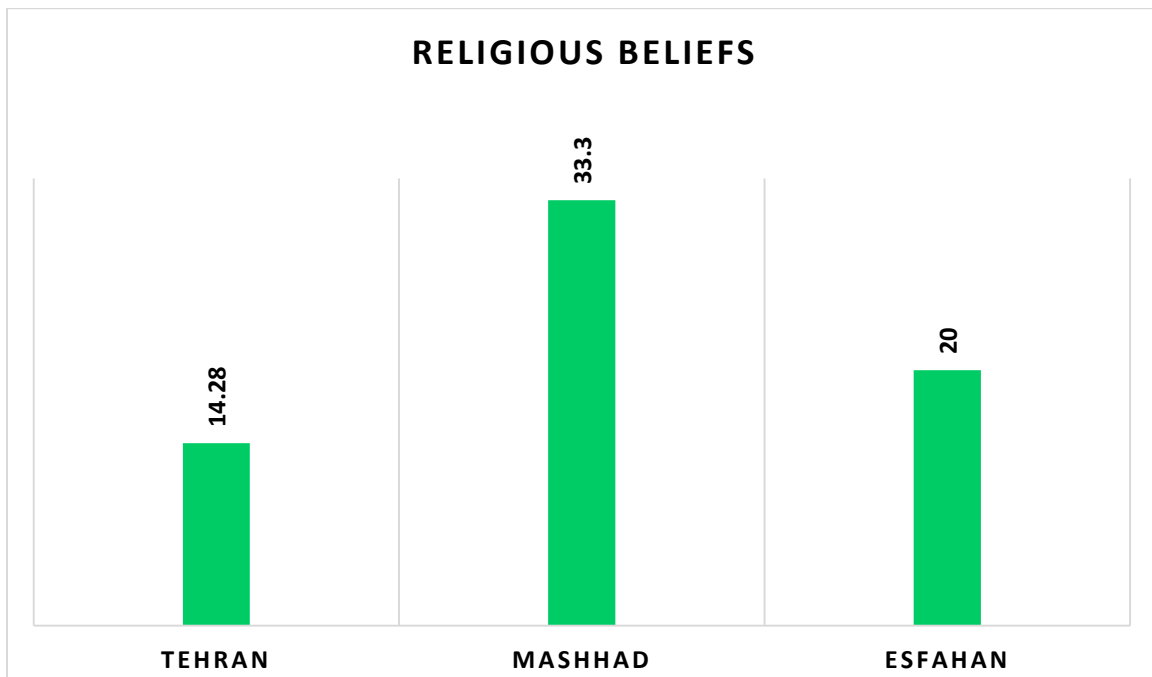
*Graph No.11: Percentage of violence and discrimination against homosexuals*

Graph No.11 shows the percentage of violence, discrimination and humiliation inflicted on homosexuals in Tehran, Mashhad and Isfahan. Based on the graph, most violence and discrimination is seen in Isfahan (80%) followed by Mashhad and Tehran (66.6% and 7.1% respectively). Compared to Tehran, Mashhad and Isfahan are more traditional and religious and thus consider homosexuality as an abnormality and deviation. It is unsurprising that these two cities have a high rate of violence against homosexuals.

The opponents of homosexuality see it as moral corruption or something unnatural. Homophobia and stigmatization of homosexuality in these societies are the major causes behind violence and discrimination. In Iranian society, homosexuality is punishable under the law by state ordered executions and floggings. From a religious perspective, it is seen as an unacceptable and abnormal conduct. Since homosexuality is considered a flagrant social mismatch and is stigmatized, there are many who believe that homosexuals deserve the violence and discrimination.

In general, the public perceive homosexuals as perverts who threaten the moral health of the society. Aggressive attacks on homosexuals and murders are still rampant; many homosexuals try to have anti-homosexual attempts categorized as hate crimes based on the law.

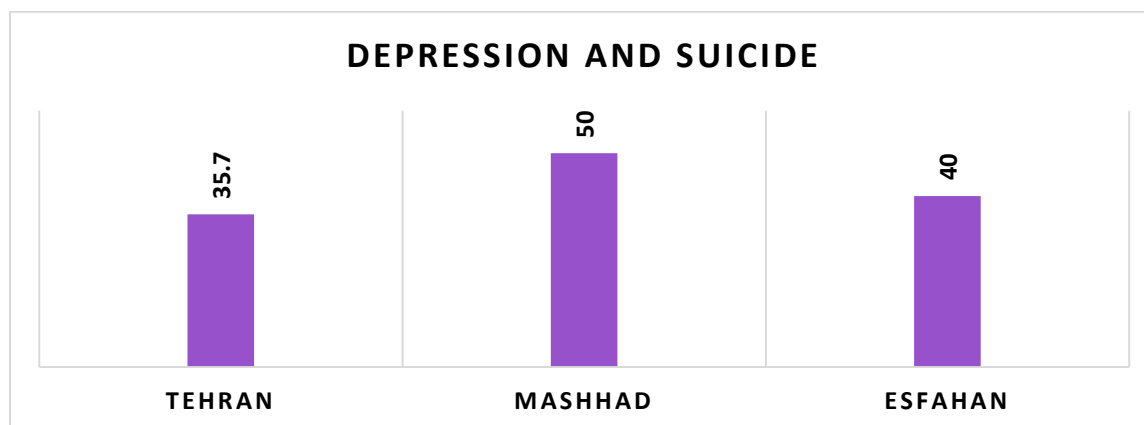
## 2.12 Religious Beliefs



*Graph No.12: Percentage of religious beliefs in the sample population*

Graph No.12 shows the prevalence of religious beliefs amongst this population in Tehran, Mashad and Isfahan. Based on the graph, 14.28 of homosexuals in Tehran, 33.3% in Mashhad and 20% in Isfahan believe in religious concepts such as God, and in religious rituals such as prayer and fasting. This data indicates that the homosexuals in Mashhad have stronger religious beliefs, as religious upbringings and socialization is more prevalent in this city. Isfahan and Tehran are more modern with less traditional and religious beliefs.

## 2.13 Depression & Suicide

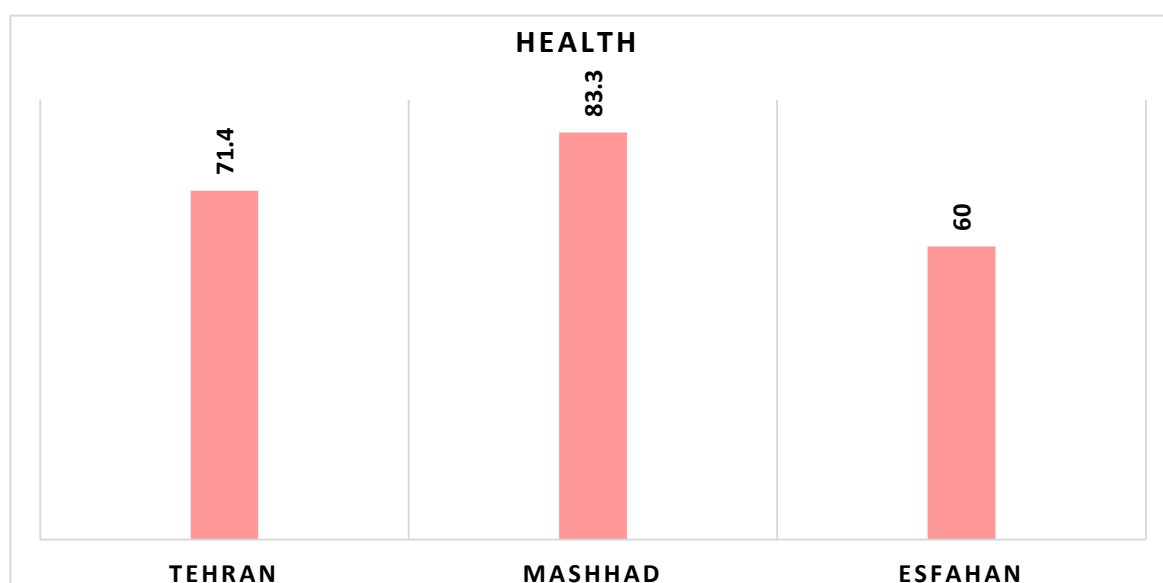


*Graph No.13: Percentage of suicide and depression in the sample population*

Graph No.13 shows suicide and depression amongst homosexuals in Tehran, Mashhad and Isfahan. Tehran with 35.7%, Isfahan with 40% and Mashhad with 50% of suicide cases. The figures tell us that due to the prevalence of traditional values and pressures in Mashhad and thus a higher rate of violence and discrimination, there are more cases of suicide amongst homosexuals in this city.

## 2.14 Health Concerns

Graph No.14, shows the percentage of homosexuals who observe safe sex practices in their sexual contacts. In Tehran, Mashhad, and Isfahan, many do not take extra measures to protect themselves from related health hazards. In Mashhad 83.3%, in Tehran 71.4% and in Isfahan 60% of homosexuals observe health issues. The ratio in sample population in three cities is above 50% which displays a great deal of ignorance amongst gays, lesbian, and bisexual on this subject matter.



*Graph No.14: Percentage of homosexuals observing sexual health considerations in the sample population*

## **Chapter 6**

# **Changing Global Paradigms & Way Forward**

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### **Contents:**

- Changing Global Paradigms & Way Forward
- The Changing Paradigms of LGB
- What's going on in Islamic Countries?
- A Look to the Future
- Conclusion

## ***Changing Global Paradigms & Way Forward***

The wheels of change come painfully and slowly. A quick backward glance of history bears this out. Witness the number of years it took for the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) to declassified homosexuality from its original stance that homosexuality is a mental illness disease; the years it took a Supreme Court to recognise the inherent zones of privacy in one's sexuality (See Lawrence case discussion in Chapter 4), and the legal declaration by the highest court in the US legal hierarchy, already held in numerous European court decisions, that two people of the same sex have the right to be marry. This court decision was the apogee of LGBT rights. After decades of backsliding there is a growing public acceptance of homosexuality.

The international community has been clear and cognate in its stance that human rights and legal protection is applicable to everyone, including the LGBT community. This has been exemplified in court decisions, supportive governments, numerous activisms, changing law and regulations, the demand for better treatment and legal recognition for its vulnerable minority and the erosion of the un-acceptance to the acceptance that has been an earmark for the LGB community. However, this vigorous defence and recognition of LGBT lives remains fragile in the Middle East including Iran.

This research study is one of the most comprehensive study of its genre about LGB lives, not only in a broader worldwide context, but also about LGB lives in Iran that struggle to thrive in the throes of a glaring lack of legal remedies and lack of societal protection. It is based on a survey of 500 respondents from three major cities. This research study reveals to the readers that whilst homosexuality has gained greater social acceptance in many Western societies, it remains highly stigmatized, in most cases forbidden and potentially lethal in Islamic countries. This chapter pieces together major problems encountered by LGB people worldwide, the emerging and changing paradigms of LGBT around the globe and the paradigms and the scale of change needed in order to progress in the Islamic world.

### ***The Changing Paradigms of LGB***

Previously, LGB individual's people were forced to live cloistered lives in duplicitous existence in the shadows, lie to friends and families and hide an important aspect of them. They often face tremendous difficulties growing up in a society where heterosexuality was presented as the only acceptable sexual orientation and homosexuality was regarded

as deviant<sup>308</sup>. Many LGB people, whilst masking their sexuality so that they would not face the overwhelming hate from society, would still congregate in safe venues where others would not discriminate against them. As previously mentioned one such venue was a bar in New York named Stonewall which catered to the gay community. (See Chapter 1 Historical Narrative of LGBT for an analysis of Stonewall). Although interest groups for gay persons had previously existed, the raid on Stonewall began the true movement for homosexual equality in America<sup>309</sup>. The legacy of Stonewall drew attention to the issue of discrimination against the gay community, and homosexuals began to stop masking their orientation.

LGBT has become a widely accepted acronym to describe sexual and gender orientation for minorities. Currently, in many Western countries, LGBT people do live openly in heterosexual-dominated communities, unafraid and unhesitant to reveal their true sexual nature. Western society has become much more accepting of homosexuality due to increased cultural exposure via media and daily lives, popular individual and collective movements, debates, and the generational shift of opinion that has accompanied a new population that has grown up with the concept of a LGBT culture embedded in their lives. The US government has responded to the public's shifting views, and has, slowly, removed restrictions on discriminatory laws against the LGBT community, a group of people simply hated for having different sexual preferences<sup>310</sup>. Nevertheless, despite these encouraging realities, the homosexual community has struggled for a long time in seeking the understanding of those around them.<sup>311</sup>

The driving factor underlying the expansion and progressive growth of support for same-sex rights has been the exposure of the LGB community. Whether through the media or personal connections, Americans are finding that homosexuality is much more widespread than what had been previously thought, resulting in more acceptance of the LGB culture. As per the

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<sup>308</sup> Problems Faced by LGBT People in the Mainstream Society:  
[www.ijims.com/uploads/cae8049d138e24ed7f5azppd\\_597.pdf](http://www.ijims.com/uploads/cae8049d138e24ed7f5azppd_597.pdf)

<sup>309</sup> Galarza, Priscilla. "The History of Gay Rights in America." University Wire Nov 08 2013. ProQuest. Web. 24 Oct. 2014

<sup>310</sup> Ibid.

<sup>311</sup> Galarza, Priscilla. "The History of Gay Rights in America." University Wire Nov 08 2013. ProQuest. Web. 24 Oct. 2014.

findings of the PEW research “49% said homosexuality should be accepted by society and 41% said it should be rejected”<sup>312</sup>.

When some states courts deciding that same-sex marriage bans are legal and others declaring the bans illegal, the Supreme Court was expected to make a national ruling whether or not same-sex marriage bans are legal<sup>313</sup>. The US Supreme Court’s pronouncement on the bans on same-sex marriage from five states (Utah, Oklahoma, Virginia, Indiana, and Wisconsin) was an apogee US Supreme Court decision. Appellate and district courts in other states have also followed suit with legal decisions that reflect the holding of the U.S. Supreme Court. Based on recent Supreme Court decisions regarding same-sex equality and the immense Western (and European) shift of acceptance that has cascaded, it is not surprising that the 2015 United States Supreme Court decision that marriage to same same-sex marriages is offensive against the constitution. There are now 37 states including the District of Columbia that has legalized gay marriage,<sup>314</sup> and 21 other countries where same-sex marriage is legal.<sup>315</sup> In 2015, the Mexican Supreme Court issued a ruling making it much easier for gay and lesbian couples to wed. Although the court did not technically legalize same-sex unions nationwide, it was a major step in that direction. Since 2011, the southern Mexican state of Quintana Roo also has allowed gay marriages. In 2014, the Congress of the northern state of Coahuila approved same-sex marriage, and in 2015, neighbouring Chihuahua followed suit<sup>316</sup>.

<sup>312</sup> PEW Research-The Global Divide on Homosexuality-Greater Acceptance in More Secular and Affluent Countries. <http://www.pewglobal.org/2013/06/04/the-global-divide-on-homosexuality/>. Accessed: October 16, 2017

<sup>313</sup> Wolf, Richard. “Supreme Court Will Consider Hearing Gay Marriage Cases.” USA Today. Gannett, 29 Sept. 2014. Web. 03 Nov. 2014.

<sup>314</sup> By the numbers: Same-sex marriage – CNNPolitics [www.cnn.com/2012/05/11/politics/btn-same-sex-marriage](http://www.cnn.com/2012/05/11/politics/btn-same-sex-marriage) the District of Columbia: Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin and Wyoming.

<sup>315</sup> Argentina (2010) Greenland (2015) South Africa (2006) Australia (2017) Iceland (2010) Spain (2005) Belgium (2003) Ireland (2015) Brazil (2013) Luxembourg (2014) Sweden (2009) Canada (2005) Malta (2017) Colombia (2016) , Uruguay (2013), Denmark (2012) The Netherlands (2000) England / Wales (2013) New Zealand (2013),Finland (2015) Norway (2008),France (2013) Portugal (2010)

Germany (2017) Scotland (2014)

<sup>316</sup> Countries That Allow Gay Marriage Around The World | Pew ... [www.pewforum.org/.../08/gay-marriage-around-the-world-2013](http://www.pewforum.org/.../08/gay-marriage-around-the-world-2013)



After years of political jockeying and fierce public debate, Australia's Parliament voted to legalize same-sex marriage<sup>317</sup>. In response to the LGBT social movement, some countries, Brazil amongst them, began to consider the specific needs of this group. Homophobia has been responsible for the killing of 2,403 gays, lesbians, and transvestites in Brazil within the last two decades<sup>318</sup>. At the end of 2003, the government launched health policies programme such as the Brazil without Homophobia Program and in 2010 the preliminary version of the National Comprehensive LGBT Health Plan<sup>319</sup>.

This was a historic moment for the advancement of homosexuals' human rights. Despite the fact that advances were identified, one still observes the difficulties faced by LGBT people in accessing the health system as a result of prejudicial and discriminatory behaviour that is often adopted by health professionals.<sup>320</sup>

In contrast, Japan's combination of evolving social attitudes and competition for talent has forced the business world to adapt. Yet the reality for gay Japanese workers is only starting to shift and unspoken expectations of secrecy remain the norm. The government, which is dominated by conservatives, has mostly steered clear of the issue. Gay marriage has received no serious political debate. In 2016, at the urging of an activist group the northern city of Sapporo began issuing partnership certificates to same-sex couples, a first for a Japanese city. The move followed the introduction of a similar system in the Shibuya ward of Tokyo in 2015. Although the certificates carry no legal weight in Japan as marriage law is determined by the national government, the certificates does provide a degree of official sanction to the emerging equality movement and has brought some tangible benefits. Public housing authorities in Sapporo and Shibuya, for example, are required to recognize as spouses any tenants who have acquired the certificates<sup>321</sup>.

Internet activism also burgeoned, whilst many of the public spheres and gathering spaces that once defined LGBT activism (bars, bookstores, and women's music festivals) began to vanish, and the usage of "queer" replaced lesbian identification for many younger women

<sup>317</sup> Australia legalizes same-sex marriage – CNN [www.cnn.com/2017/12/07/asia/australia-same-sex-marriage...](http://www.cnn.com/2017/12/07/asia/australia-same-sex-marriage...)

<sup>318</sup> Rede Social de Justiça e Direitos Humanos [www.social.org.br/relatorio2004ingles/relatorio028.htm](http://www.social.org.br/relatorio2004ingles/relatorio028.htm)

<sup>319</sup> Barbosa RM, Facchini R. Access to sexual health care for women who have sex. *Cad Saude Publica*. 2009; 25:291–300. doi: 10.1590/S0102-311X2009001400011.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid.

<sup>321</sup> [www.nytimes.comct/...Gay in japan and no longer visible .October 16, 2017 business/japan-work-gay.html](http://www.nytimes.comct/...Gay%20in%20japan%20and%20no%20longer%20visible%20.October%2016,%202017%20business/japan-work-gay.html)

activists.<sup>322</sup> Unfortunately while the attention shifted to global activism in the U.S, gains has not been matched by similar equal rights laws in the 75 other countries where homosexuality remains illegal. As of 2016, LGBT identification and activism was still punishable by death in ten Muslim countries include Iran, Iraq, Mauritania, Nigeria, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda and Yemen<sup>323</sup>.

## **INCREASED TOLERANCE OF HOMOSEXUALITY**

Globally, in recent years, there has been a positivity in attitudes towards homosexuals and other members of the LGBT community. Except for South Korea, in the United States and Canada, the percentage of acceptance of homosexuality by society has grown by at least ten percentage points since 2007. These are amongst the key findings of a new survey by the Pew Research Centre conducted in 39 countries among 37,653 respondents from March 2 to May 1, 2013<sup>324</sup>. The survey also found that acceptance of homosexuality is particularly widespread in countries where religion is less central in people's lives and amongst the richest countries in the world.

One of the striking examples is Australia. Same-sex marriage has been on the political agenda in Australia for several years as part of the broader debate about the legal recognition of same-sex relationships. Australia inherited anti-gay laws from British settlers, who arrived in the late 1700s. Until 1949 the death penalty remained on the statute books for sodomy in the southern state of Victoria, but change did eventually come in 1975, when South Australia declared that male homosexuality would no longer be a crime<sup>325</sup>. Finally In November 2017, Australia voted to approve gay marriage after a majority of the population voted 'yes' in a historic postal survey on same-sex unions. Close to eight million people - representing 61.6 per cent of the population voted.<sup>326</sup> The country is now the 24th in the world to allow same-sex couples to marry, according to Pew Research<sup>327</sup>.

<sup>322</sup> Donn Short, *Don't Be So Gay! Queers, Bullying, and Making Schools Safe*, UBC Press, 2013

<sup>323</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/11/21/new-pope-new-hope-lgbt-activists>

<sup>324</sup> (The Global Divide on Homosexuality Greater Acceptance in More Secular and Affluent Countries, [www.pewglobal.org](http://www.pewglobal.org)

<sup>325</sup> <https://www.voanews.com/a/australia-weeks-away-from-legalizing-gay-marriage/4122352.html>

<sup>326</sup> (<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-5079049/Marriage-equality-results-Australia-votes-Yes.html#ixzz4zSvWAYwu>)

<sup>327</sup> Australia legalizes same-sex marriage – CNN, [www.cnn.com/2017/12/07/asia/australia-same-sex-marriage](http://www.cnn.com/2017/12/07/asia/australia-same-sex-marriage).

By contrast, in poorer countries where religion and religious beliefs are more prevalent, few believe homosexuality should be accepted by society<sup>328</sup>. A 2017 book by Professor Amy Adamczyk, shows that these cross-national differences in acceptance can be explained by three factors: the strength of democratic institutions, the level of economic development, and the religious context of the places where people live.<sup>329</sup> Age is also a factor in several countries; younger respondents have more tolerant views than older respondents. And whilst gender differences are not prevalent, in those countries where they are, women are consistently more accepting of homosexuality than men<sup>330</sup>.

Another study echoed these findings of increased acceptance in [insert where]. The dichotomized variable of homosexuality defined as either wrong or not wrong over the time period between 1973 and 1994 was analysed. The intent of this new analysis is to follow-up those trends and explores regional differences, as they currently exist. The findings indicated an increase trend in the belief that homosexuality was not wrong. The percentage increased from a low of 19% in 1973 to 31% by 1994, and with the exception of the late 1980s (when AIDS deaths were at a peak in the United States), the trend has been in the direction of increasing tolerance of homosexuality over time<sup>331</sup>. Data from the GSS were used again in a secondary analysis to determine current trends.<sup>332</sup> The GSS utilized probability-sampling techniques and large sample sizes; the data set also included the additional years of 1996 and 1998. In 1996 and 1998, the percentage of respondents stating 'homosexuality is not wrong' rose to 33% and 34%, respectively<sup>333</sup>.

According to the British Social Attitudes, the biggest survey of its kind, the transformation in attitudes to homosexuality ranks as the most dramatic change in British public opinion in a generation. For example, 25 years ago, almost two thirds of the British public opposed same-sex relationships because they believed they were inherently morally "wrong" and in the early 1980s more than half the population did not think it was "acceptable" for a gay or lesbian person to be a teacher and more than four out of ten people did not believe they

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<sup>328</sup> Ibid

<sup>329</sup> Adamczyk, Amy (2017). *Cross-National Public Opinion about Homosexuality: Examining Attitudes across the Globe*. University of California Press. pp. 3–7

<sup>330</sup> *The Global Divide on Homosexuality" (PDF)*. Pew Research Centre. 4 June 2013. Retrieved 8 December 2014

<sup>331</sup> Sullivan & Wodarski (2002), Social alienation in gay youth. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 5 (1), 1-17. Page 4

<sup>332</sup> Davis, James A. and Smith, Tom W., *General Social Surveys, 1992- 1991: cumulative Codebook*. Chicago: NORC, 1991.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid.

should hold a “responsible position in public life”. In contrast the latest British Social Attitudes survey 2013 showed that only one in five now disapproves of gay or lesbian relationships. The speed of change is all the more striking given that during the 1980s the number of people who objected to homosexuality was on the rise. In contrast, this latest survey found that 56 per cent of those polled supported gay marriage, which is now on the Statute Book<sup>334</sup>.

### **What has caused the difference in attitude and acceptance?**

Jean Twenge, Professor of Psychology at San Diego State University and author of the book "Generation Me," states that this change towards acceptance took place over generations, not just time, where a younger generation moved in to replace an older one and brought a new perspective to the forefront<sup>335</sup>. She has asserted that the generational acceptance is in line with the most prominent cultural changes of the last few decades akin with individualism<sup>336</sup>. Plausibly this has resulted in increased individual freedom and less group authority as witnessed in less religious affiliation, the push for legal marijuana, tolerance for differences, and more open attitudes around sexuality. That can mean more self-focus, but it can also mean more tolerance towards others who are different.

Although attitudes towards same-sex relationships have generally become more favourable<sup>337</sup>, nevertheless there remains a great deal to be accomplished in freeing many millions of gays and lesbians from the tyranny of fear of discovery, of actual and potential economic disenfranchisement, of the burden of ridicule, shame, and scorn, and sanctions for alleged criminal behaviour. Laws and government officials often provide the justification for this maltreatment<sup>338</sup>. Amnesty International (2001) reports rapes, beatings, and life imprisonment for alleged “crimes against the order of nature” in such countries as Uganda, Zimbabwe, Romania, Malaysia, the Caribbean, Russia, China, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Afghanistan,. In fact, at least 78 countries criminalize same-gender relationships and some

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<sup>334</sup> John Bingham, Social Affairs Editor Revolution in attitudes to homosexuality is biggest change in ...[www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/10297205/Revolution-in](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/10297205/Revolution-in)

<sup>335</sup> Twenge, J.M., 2014. Generation me-revised and updated: Why today's young Americans are more confident, assertive, entitled--and more miserable than ever before. Simon and Schuster.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid.

<sup>337</sup> Avery, D.R., McKay, P.F, & Wilson, D.C. (2007) “Engaging the aging workforce: The relationship between perceived age similarity, satisfaction with co-worker and employee Engagement”, Journal of Applied Psychology, Vol. 25 No.9, pp. 1542-1556.

<sup>338</sup> Amnesty International. (2001). Crimes of hate, conspiracy of silence. Oxford, United Kingdom: The Alden Press

countries punish offenders with flogging or the death penalty. Ken Livingstone, a left-wing London politician with a strong record on gay rights, had in the past welcomed Yusuf al-Qaradawi, an America-bashing Muslim cleric from Egypt who supports the death penalty for homosexuality. Trump abruptly announced a ban on transgender people serving in the military ostensibly for the “tremendous medical costs and disruption” of transgender service members<sup>339</sup>.

The tragic fact remains that many LGBT people have no count and there is no legitimate way of protection which court or police offer.

### ***What's going on in Islamic Countries?***

Whilst homosexuality has gained greater social acceptance in many Western societies, it remains highly stigmatized and, in most cases, forbidden in Islamic countries<sup>340</sup>. The changing attitudes towards the LGBT community around the world have not been witnessed in the Middle East. It remains the most resistant to change. In many parts of the Middle East, even homosexuality as a topic of discussion is shunned, which makes it very difficult for LGBT advocacy groups to form and to affect change?<sup>341</sup> In a large-scale international study of global attitudes towards homosexuality conducted by the Pew Research Centre, it was found that less than 5% of the people surveyed in Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan, Pakistan, the Palestinian Territories, and Tunisia believe that society should accept homosexuality, compared to 80% of the Canadians and 76% of the Britons surveyed. The only Muslim-majority countries that expressed greater support were Malaysia (9%), Turkey (9%) and Lebanon (18%), in which Islam arguably plays a less central role in social and political life<sup>342</sup>.

Most Islamic countries prohibit homosexuality and in many of these countries it is sanctioned by death. In Islamic societies, both judicial and extra-judicial measures taken against homosexuality communicate a clear message to society that homosexuality is wrong, immoral and illegal and thus, punishable. The Islamic Republic of Iran, ruled by Shari law,

<sup>339</sup> See also Trump Says Transgender People Will Not Be Allowed in the Military, By Julie Hirschfeld Davis and Helene Cooper, July 26, 2017 NY Time

<sup>340</sup> Homosexuality and Islam | Rusi Jaspal - Academia.edu  
[www.academia.edu/6868516/Homosexuality\\_and\\_Islam](http://www.academia.edu/6868516/Homosexuality_and_Islam)

<sup>341</sup> Whitaker, Brian. Unspeakable Love: Gay and Lesbian Life in the Middle East. Berkeley: University of California, 2006

<sup>342</sup> Homosexuality and Islam | Rusi Jaspal - Academia.edu  
[www.academia.edu/6868516/Homosexuality\\_and\\_Islam](http://www.academia.edu/6868516/Homosexuality_and_Islam)

has a particularly harsh legal stance on homosexuality including lashes and death penalty. Iranian law dictates that two unrelated men lying under the same bed cover will be punished with 60 lashes; that homosexual relation without anal penetration carries a penalty of 100 lashes; and that anal intercourse will be punished with death by hanging<sup>343</sup>. According to Sharia law individuals can be convicted of homosexuality only if they confess four times or if four “righteous” Muslim men testify they witnessed a homosexual act taking place.

None of the Islamic countries can be said to offer social or legal environments that are supportive of LGBT, at least not at the present time. There is a lack of social community support mechanisms in place or affirmative Islamic organizations for the LGB that can provide the social and psychological comfort so desperately needed.<sup>344</sup> Whilst the public display of ISIS' persecution has attracted international attention over the past year, as in Syria, the situation was already precarious long before ISIS took control. Indeed, the situation began to rapidly deteriorate for Iraq's LGB community after the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003. Islamist groups emerged from this political chaos and began targeting gay people, killing an estimated 200 LGBT people in 2012 alone. Today, these same groups have partnered with the Iraqi government in the fight against ISIS, giving them the freedom to continue persecuting sexual minorities.

With the exception of confined local efforts, there are no signs of an imminent change to the social or legal standing of LGBT in Egypt. In Lebanon, the emergence of pro-LGBT organizations has been a crucial step in their fight for social and legal rights; plausibly this has led to a shift in attitudes towards some SGNs. This shift is interpreted as a product of socio-political factors that have been favourable to the introduction and emergence of new subjectivities in Lebanon.

Although being LGB is prohibited and punishable in the majority of the Muslim countries, there are some exceptions flourishing. Only a handful of Islamic or Muslim-majority countries (e.g. Jordan) have legalized homosexuality, but even within these societies there is little legal support for LGBT individuals and extra-judicial punishments may happen.

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<sup>343</sup> Parnian, H. (2006). The sexual rights of women and homosexuals in Iran. In S. Seidman, N. Fischer & C. Meeks (eds.), *Handbook of the new sexuality studies* (pp.348-352). London: Routledge.

<sup>344</sup> Jaspal, R. & Breakwell, G.M. (Eds) (2014). *Identity Process Theory: Identity, Social Action and Social Change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

The world's largest Muslim country Indonesia has a vibrant transgender culture and tradition, which is broadly tolerated by the Indonesian public<sup>345</sup>. Homosexuality and gay sex are not illegal in Indonesia. Paradoxically transgender men and women are recognized and accepted in many Islamic cultures around the world. In fact, the idea of a man or woman identifying as a member of the opposite gender is more likely to be accepted than that of a man or woman expressing sexual desire for someone of their own gender.

Not entirely hopeful, but there are some steps have been taken to facilitate the “T” of LGBT in Egypt and Iran. As early as 1988, gender reassignment surgery was declared acceptable under Islamic law by scholars at Egypt's Al-Azhar, the world's oldest Islamic university. In Iran, in 1987, Ayatollah Khomeini declared transgender surgical operations allowable. The basis for this attitude of acceptance is the belief that a person is born transgender but chooses to be homosexual, making homosexuality a sin. Nevertheless, many transgender Muslims after reassignment surgery still suffer from verbal and physical violence and social and culture rejection in their own communities as they remain in their place of origin. Many are simply unable to flee or relocate to another country where they are unknown. Undoubtedly it is also highly plausible that many opted for the surgery under pressure (See Chapter 5 for an in depth discussion on the perils of transgender surgical operations).

LGBT activism in Lebanon has allowed organizations like HELEM, the Arab world's leading LGBT group, to provide legal and health services for LGBT. HEML is the Arabic acronym of “Lebanese Protection for Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals and Transgender. Lebanon is considered to be the country most tolerant to alternative sexual lifestyles. HELEM has enough acceptance and influence in Lebanon to regularly host events on LGBT issues, and has even gone to the streets to protest violence against the LGBT community in Lebanon. Yet whilst Beirut is more liberal than its neighbouring countries and cities, it is still far less tolerant than Western societies<sup>346</sup>. HELEM's services have arguably only succeeded in protecting a limited number of individuals, typically the more affluent members of society, whilst ignoring – and, in some cases, even harming – those from marginalized and disadvantaged groups, who either do not or cannot identify with the ideas promoted by LGBT

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<sup>345</sup> The sudden intensity of Indonesia's anti-gay onslaught. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-35657114>. [Accessed December 27<sup>th</sup>, 2017]

<sup>346</sup> “Leave or be killed,” The Sydney Morning Herald, July 6, 2010

organizations<sup>347</sup>. Scholars such as Massad, for example, argue that it is foreign and foreign-funded organizations, like ILGA and HELEM respectively that are helping to create gay communities in Lebanon by promoting Western sexual epistemologies and identity categories. This, according to the author, problematizes LGBT behaviour and subsequently elicits further intervention to support those communities<sup>348</sup>.

This issue has garnered the attention of the Iraqi and Arabic media. For example, in Baghdad, Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr publicly advocated a humanitarian stance toward the LGBT community, saying they should not be subjected to violence<sup>349</sup>. As clerics have the moral right to intervene in all state's affairs and in the minute details of people's social lives, it is noteworthy to mention that clerics in Iraq are the most prominent and influential players in opinion formation by influencing and orienting public opinions. Sadr's statement has generated controversy because it contrasts with the positions of other clerics and religious institutions, namely, other Shiite scholars in Iraq as well as in Iran. Whilst clerics in both states preach that Islam forbids homosexuality, the difference lies in the way to address it<sup>350</sup>.

The majority of the population in Iraq denounce homosexuality but do not support violence against homosexuals. In Iraq and Lebanon punishment for homosexuality is not stipulated by the law. This is not the case for Iran where the situation is starkly different. Iran's Sharia-based constitution holds homosexuality to be a crime punishable by death. Lesbians, can be punished with 100 lashes under Iranian law.

### ***A Look to the Future***

The societal oppression faced by LGBT persons vary considerably from country to country, with levels of violence, discrimination, and stigma reflecting the prevailing local contexts. At the same time, individual communities may have values, norms, customs, language, perceptions and approaches to development challenges that can be useful in understanding how best to approach LGBT issues. One major positive global trend emerging from the current discourse is that sexual diversity and orientation have gained significant visibility and international attention across the globe. The increasing visibility of LGBT identities,

<sup>347</sup> Makarem, G. (2011) 'The Story of HELEM', *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 7.3: 98–112

<sup>348</sup> Massad, J. (2015) *Islam in Liberalism*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press

<sup>349</sup> <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/09/homosexuality-lgbt-iraq-iran-muqtada-sadr.html>.

Accessed: October 16, 2017

<sup>350</sup> Ibid.



movements and discourses has led to a proliferation of international human rights organizations that have become attuned to documenting and addressing violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity across the world<sup>351</sup>.

The Internet and social media outlets have provided forums for positive information about LGBT identities. The Internet has also created an enabling environment propelling legislative protection for the rights of sexual minorities, at least on paper. In countries where being ostracized and labelled as a non-heterosexual is dangerous, people are reaching out to other LGBTIs via the Internet. Whilst often a tool of the privileged, it does nevertheless provide a channel for exchange and solidarity. The interactive nature of the Internet creates spaces through which communities are formed and communication and discussions occur. The online and offline worlds afford opportunities for individuals to socialise, provide support, build movements and engage in information-sharing techniques of survival. In Iran's case, the Iranian government blocks websites that it deems politically, religiously or morally dangerous. Many people in Iran do, however, have access to anti-filtration software that allows them to circumvent the censorship<sup>352</sup>.

A narrow conception of 'Asian Values' is promoting by some Asia Pacific governments in order to marginalize LGBT communities. that emphasizes homogenous rather than diverse societies where the only acceptable norm is heterosexuality<sup>353</sup>. More generally, Muslim States have consistently opposed the notion of sexual orientation as having no legal foundation in international law and being contrary to Islamic teaching<sup>354</sup>. The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation has been the central forum through which objections have been coordinated<sup>355</sup>.

In Iran, LGB individuals are consistently subjected to harassment. The laws are rigid and strict against them; they are vulnerable to harassment, abuse and violence from their families and society. One glimmer of hope comes from recent films, documentaries, music and other art focused on LGB Iranians, offering a new perspective that may change attitudes. For example, the 2011 Iranian movie "Facing Mirrors—Ayenehay-e Rooberoo" shows the

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<sup>351</sup> (LGBT Rights in Iran by Shima Houshyar, published October 21, 2015).

<sup>352</sup> LGBT Rights in Iran by Shima Houshyar | published October 21, 2015

<sup>353</sup> Oslo Conference Report, supra n 6 at 20; cf. the Asian values debate, supra n 274

<sup>354</sup> See Baderin, *International Human Rights and Islamic Law* (2003) at 117.

<sup>355</sup> So too concerning the campaign on defamation of religions, see Langer, *Religious Offence and Human Rights: The Implications of Defamation of Religions* (2014)

possibility of gradual attitude transformation towards sexual minorities by religious people. About it tells us the story of Eddie, a young transgender man as he struggles to escape a family who are forcing him into a marriage in order that they may maintain their family 'honour'<sup>356</sup>. In the film, a traditional religious woman initially shows strong aversion and repulsion towards a transgender woman. Later, by observing the transgender woman's suffering as she experiences violence by her father, the religious woman eventually comes to the conclusion that inflicting such pain and suffering on others is the embodiment of "evil" in a religious sense. Facing Mirrors does not claim to have found a solution to this problem but it does try to take on a humanistic look at this dark corner of society in a dramatic way in order to support the idea that "denying or ignoring these people, is not the answer".

In comparisons to Iran, in recent years, South Africa and Ecuador became the first countries to expand the basis for discrimination to include sexual orientation, and to incorporate anti-discrimination provisions in their Constitutions<sup>357</sup>. However ambivalent one might feel about the inclusion of LGBT personnel in the military or the struggle for "gay marriages," several countries now recognize same-sex couples' civil partnerships. For instance, Europe was home to the three countries that adopted marriage equality in 2014. In Luxembourg, parliament overwhelmingly voted to approve marriage and adoption by same-sex couples<sup>358</sup>, and Finland's parliament voted to allow same sex marriage<sup>359</sup>. In the United Kingdom, regional Scottish legislators voted overwhelmingly to join England and Wales in legalizing marriage equality<sup>360</sup>. In 2015 Ireland became the first country to endorse marriage equality by popular referendum and at 62 per cent the vote was not even close. That same year, Ireland passed the Gender Recognition Bill legislation that made it only the fifth country in the world to allow Trans people to change their legal gender markers based solely on the truth in their

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<sup>356</sup> Facing Mirrors: The Story of Eddie a Trans Man in Iran: <https://mediadiversified.org/2014/03/04/facing-mirrors-trans-marriage-and-honour/> [Accessed December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2017]

<sup>357</sup> Internationalist, New. "The World Guide: An alternative reference to the countries of our planet." (2001).

<sup>358</sup> "Luxembourg Approves Gay Marriage," Huffington Post, June 19, 2014. Accessed: October 16, 2017, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/06/19/luxembourg-gay-marriage- n\\_5511360.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/06/19/luxembourg-gay-marriage- n_5511360.html)

<sup>359</sup> "Finnish Parliament approves same-sex marriage," Yle, Nov. 28, 2014. Accessed: October 16, 2017, [http://yle.fi/uutiset/finnish\\_parliament\\_approves\\_same-sex\\_marriage/7657759](http://yle.fi/uutiset/finnish_parliament_approves_same-sex_marriage/7657759).

<sup>360</sup> "Scotland's same-sex marriage bill is passed," BBC, Feb. 4, 2014. Accessed: October 16, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-25960225>.

hearts, rather than requiring medical intervention<sup>361</sup>. Although these countries are overwhelmingly Western, activists in Vietnam and Mexico are lobbying for similar changes.

Activists were also successful in their efforts to broaden the human rights agenda so that it began to incorporate various violations faced by LGBT individuals. Since 1991, mainstream human rights organizations have taken note of LGBT persecutions and harassments. For example, Amnesty International's mandate includes the protection of individuals persecuted on the grounds of their sexual orientation. Created in 1978, Human Rights Watch, an international non-governmental organization that conducts research and advocacy on human rights, now has a dynamic LGBT program<sup>362</sup>.



Recently, LGBT individuals located in predominantly Muslim contexts have begun organizing. Speaking out publicly on a social forum is a means for LGBT individuals to tell their own stories. This naturally takes a bit longer, particularly for those individuals who live within politically homophobic and socially repressed societies. Sometimes, it is blatant discrimination that triggers resistance. However, the strategy of reclaiming public space requires not only seasoned risk assessment but also courage that strengthens over time. For example, Lambda Istanbul, although active since 1993, organized its first Pride March in the Turkish capital a decade later—and at that time only 50 pioneers dared join<sup>363</sup>.

Exposing LGBT visibility often carries a steep price of a high level of mental trauma and physical torture. Lesbian activism is even more of a challenge, but some are paving the way, such as newcomer Aswat in Palestine,<sup>364</sup> an organization composed of lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, questioning and queer Palestinian women who came together in 2002. Aswat established a home for Palestinian LBtQI women to allow safe, supportive and empowering spaces to express and address: personal, social and political struggles as a

<sup>361</sup> Transition, and Mine - The New York Times, [www.nytimes.com/2017/10/18/opinion/ireland-gay](http://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/18/opinion/ireland-gay)

<sup>362</sup> HRW, 2013. [https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/wr2013\\_web.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/wr2013_web.pdf). Accessed: October 16, 2017

<sup>363</sup> Hélie, Anissa. "Threats and survival: the religious right and LGBT strategies in Muslim contexts." WOMEN IN ACTION-ROME THEN MANILA- 1 (2006): 19.

<sup>364</sup> <http://www.aswatgroup.org/en>. Accessed: October 16, 2017

national indigenous minority living inside Israel; women in a patriarchal society and as LGBTQ women in a wider hetero-normative<sup>365</sup> culture<sup>366</sup>.

Despite the risks, support groups are now sprouting, although some still cannot operate openly. Over the last few years, Muslim LGBTI people are coalescing in places as diverse as Morocco, Indonesia, Turkey, Malaysia, Jordan, Lebanon, Jerusalem, South Africa, Nigeria, Palestine, Dubai, and Saudi Arabia as well as in countries with large indigenous Muslim communities such as India.

Interestingly, the most repressive regimes are not necessarily the worst as far as expression of gender identity is concerned. Transsexuals in Jordan and Iran seem to be able to turn the strict gender binary division of society to their advantage, with some individuals actually getting support (including financial) from fundamentalist clerics for sex change operations<sup>367</sup>. Unfortunately, there is always the very real pressure to undergo sex reassignment procedures, and subpar medical treatment associated with such procedures.

Although the international LGBT community is slowly gaining official recognition from governments and societies; in the Middle East, the situation for the LGBT community remains stagnant and dismal.<sup>368</sup> Across the Middle East, the LGBT community faces varying degrees of repression, both because of laws directed against its members and the wider social stigma. With the exception of Israel, most Middle Eastern countries openly condemn the LGBT community. Consequently, the LGBT community in the Middle East exists underground, and members of the community often live in fear of being discovered<sup>369</sup>. Barring a few exceptions, the outlook for LGB individuals in the Middle East is bleak, or even outright deadly. Many LGB individuals face major struggles just in their quotidian lives and many of their struggles are social in origin, such as being bullied in school or disowned, beaten or raped by family members or feeling compelled to run away from home, a phenomenon known in most parts of the world, including the United States. These abuses are often not reported to authorities due to the threat of additional violence from officials

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<sup>365</sup> Ibid.

<sup>366</sup> <http://www.aswatgroup.org/en>. Accessed: October 16, 2017

<sup>367</sup> McDowall, A. & Khan, S. (2004). The Ayatollah and the transsexual. *The Independent* (UK), p. 34

<sup>368</sup> LGBT Rights in Iran by Shima Houshyar, published October 21, 2015

<sup>369</sup>

themselves. Security officers often raid the parties and other gatherings of LGBT Iranians, sometimes leading to arrests and detainment<sup>370</sup>.

The Kurds stand apart from their fellow Muslim-majority neighbours because of their progress on women's equality — boasting the only all-female units taking on ISIS — but it is too soon to say whether or not the Kurdish jurisdictions could someday translate into a haven of relative sanctuary for LGBT people. Nevertheless, the waves of changes could be felt in Islamic world in 2015. The leading Kurdish party in Turkey had its first-ever openly gay candidate for Turkish parliament. Mr Sulu, has campaigned on a message of equal rights for gay rights in Turkey for 17 years, and stands on a platform of promoting LGBT rights.

Still even amongst some relatively secular families, the tribal underpinnings of Kurdish culture, which are more pronounced in rural areas, can strongly limit social behaviour. Tribes still retain and adhere to their own conservative honour code, even if religion is one of the many driving forces behind the lack of tolerance.

In Iran, the new Islamic Code of Criminal Procedure ratified by the Guardian Council in 2013 with a 5-year probation period has been waiting to go into effect since October 2014<sup>371</sup>. According to the document referenced at the preamble, the new Code of Criminal Procedure has been updated in accordance with the state's policy to "Islamize" the legal system in Iran. Nevertheless, the new Iranian Code of Criminal Procedure includes amendments, which offer better protection for individuals charged with homosexual conduct<sup>372</sup>. According to the Iranian Penal Code there are serious risks of being sentenced to capital punishment for those charged with same-sex relations. Because of this, lawyers and defendants must be informed of these revisions and the potential opportunities provided in the new Code of Criminal Procedures to protect LGBT individuals from being detained or convicted of same-sex "crimes"<sup>373</sup>.

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<sup>370</sup> LGBT Rights in Iran by Shima Houshyar, published October 21, 2015

<sup>371</sup> Based on a bill currently considered by the Iranian parliament, there is a possibility that 40 articles of this law may be changed, and their implementation postponed.

<sup>372</sup> <https://www.amnestyusa.org/reports/flawed-reforms-irans-new-code-of-criminal-procedure/> [Accessed December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2017]

<sup>373</sup> Details can be found "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights in Iran Analysis from Religious, Social, Legal and Cultural Perspectives" by "INTERNATIONAL GAY AND LESBIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

Since ISIS has come to prominence, it has set about persecuting religious minorities, women and others whose identities and lifestyles are anathema to its puritanical creed. The various degrees of brutality, ostentatious isolation and targeted deliberate social stigma is quite already debilitating. But under the so called Islamic State, things took a devastating turn. In areas under Islamic State control, its fighters have issued edicts against homosexual behaviour and flashy hairstyles and promised death for anyone caught in the act of sodomy. In a single day in September, the Islamic State killed nine men for homosexual acts and a 15-year-old boy in a Syrian town who had been accused of sodomy. ISIS-appointed courts have declared gay sex a capital offense and have sentenced brutal punishments in line with an extremist reading of Sharia.

This is but one case of how ISIS exploits pre-existing religious and social biases against gay people amongst the populace under its control in order to justify their persecution, a practice that has reportedly continued into 2017, despite territorial losses<sup>374</sup>. The litanies of punishments are cruel, barbaric and defy comprehension. One of the most common punishments has been to throw individuals off of buildings. Those who survive the fall are then stoned to death by waiting crowds, which also include children. In July 2015, two men suffered the same fate in the Syrian city of Palmyra, then controlled by the Islamic State. They were shoved off the roof of a hotel after an Islamic State official ruled that they must be executed for being homosexual<sup>375</sup>.

In January 2017, ISIS executed a 17-year-old boy in Mosul, Iraq, by throwing him off a building. Another unidentified young man was thrown off a Mosul roof in March. The waiting crowd below reportedly stoned the man until he died. Fuelling fear ISIS has publicized images of both murders through affiliated accounts on social media.<sup>376</sup> In January 2015, a media wing of the extremist group released images that appeared to show fighters pushing men accused of homosexuality off a building in the Iraqi city of Mosul.

Over the long term, there are tiny seeds of change. In 2002, Iraqi Kurdistan repealed Saddam Hussein-era laws which had severely limited the ability of authorities to prosecute those

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<sup>374</sup> Sources: ARA News, Iraqi News, Daily Mail

<sup>375</sup> The Islamic State's shocking war on gays - The Washington Post [www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016](http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016)

<sup>376</sup> Ibid

conducting honour violence. By 2007, Iraqi Kurdish Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani launched special commissions with special-purpose law enforcement to combat and track honour violence against women, and banned village elders from deciding legal cases outside of the court system. This is indeed a first step towards combatting the human rights violations on many grounds, including LGBT. Over recent years, the Kurdistan Regional Government — the autonomous authority in Iraq's northernmost provinces — appears to have quietly shifted from ignoring police who punish gays, to taking a more hands-off approach.<sup>377</sup> In comparison Israel is the most progressive country in the Middle East in terms of safeguarding LGBT rights. LGBT rights are formally recognized, and members of the LGBT community may obtain a civil union with rights that are almost on par with heterosexual couples. Other countries or areas worth mentioning include Iraq, Jordan, and Palestine where having sexual intercourse with a same-sex partner is not considered illegal<sup>378</sup>. In Lebanon, despite the fact that homosexuality remains illegal, the country's escalating LGBT community is becoming more visible. Particularly in Beirut, LGBT people have established a healthy, albeit underground, community<sup>379</sup>.

### ***Conclusion***

This research study is an attempt to enable researchers and activists to reflect upon and ponder over the modes of survival in which LGBT lives can be improved in Iran operate. The main challenge LGB in Iran is eradicating societal negative view that staunchly advocates intolerance, discrimination and prosecution. This negative view becomes even more acute as Iranian laws and regulations approve and reinforce the unflinching un-acceptance of LGBT's existence. Raising awareness and fighting hate is the primordial goal of NGOs social activists. The initiation of LGBT campaigns in Iranian society and having a more active presence on social media and platforms enhances positive public perception on LGB people. This would greatly contribute to resolving and ameliorating many issues they face.

The multitude of issues, as outlined earlier, need to be taken into account. Equally, the challenges associated with their lives, the problematic issues of definition and categorisation, and the language used to describe LGBT people need to be addressed. Despite the odds

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<sup>377</sup> In ISIS' Shadow, LGBT Kurds Take A Stand | HuffPost, [www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/in-isis-shadow-lgbt-kurds](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/in-isis-shadow-lgbt-kurds)

<sup>378</sup> ILGA the International LGBTI Assoc. "Lesbian and Gay Rights in the World." IGLA. May 2010

<sup>379</sup> Zoepf, Katherine. "What Happened to Gay Beirut?" The New York Observer, 16 Aug. 2007

against them, even in the harshest of Middle Eastern countries, there exist underground LGB gatherings that continue to flourish notwithstanding local popular opinion, cultural norms, and religious institutions that continue to denigrate and discourage Middle Eastern LGB communities from asserting their rights.

As we come upon the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the growing pressure for inclusion of LGBT rights in the Middle East from external sources: e.g. international human rights groups, foreign governments, expatriates and the international LGBT community is a reckoning force<sup>380</sup>. The rising chorus of international condemnation on the treatment of the LGBT community in the Middle East can no longer be shoved aside.

What is readily apparent, especially for a group that has been and continues to be stigmatized, are the broad societal mechanisms that play a key role in understanding the differences in levels of perceived discrimination across countries. This research study surmised that social acceptance is such a crucial element that many studies have sought to understand the role of social acceptance. Understanding this phenomenon immediately becomes relevant to explain the levels of perceived discrimination amongst LGB individuals. Future studies of social acceptance would thus do well to further expand its scope and impact.

On a final note, this research study demonstrates the acute need for further methodological and theoretical undertakings to propel change and induce an understanding on such an important societal issue. As the research study highlights, LGB individuals chronically face much stigma and discrimination, which crucially impacts both their physical and mental health. Learning how to reduce this stigma and discrimination are key elements in improving the lives of LGB individuals. This research study demonstrates the importance of addressing the social acceptance of homosexuality and the value of a more theory-driven, cross-national approach to explain the different levels of perceived discrimination across countries.

However, meaningful action can only happen within a favourable environment with open minded policy makers, politicians and the political elite. This includes alteration of traditional ideology and rigid norms. In Iran, where homosexuality is still criminalized and sanctioned by death, projects to support the social and economic inclusion of sexual minorities are either

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<sup>380</sup> GME Gay Middle East." Gay Middle East. 2011.; "Amnesty International; Canada." Amnesty International. 2011



impossible to implement, or unlikely to make a significant difference. By emphasizing that LGB exclusion affects everyone, we can hopefully help countries to realise that putting an end to discrimination will reap a wide range of benefits.

Research demonstrates that the excluding LGB communities is a leading cause of poverty and a hurdle in development<sup>381</sup>. LGB exclusion is very much a developmental issue not only due to its residual consequences on individual lives and impoverishes levels of an entire group, but also due to its adverse impact on economies and societies at large. Achieving inclusive development will require increasing the integration of LGBT issues in processes, policies, and programming where windows of opportunity arise which can capitalize on lessons learned from prior work in this area, beginning with economic and health sector<sup>382</sup>.

Over 31 percent of Iran's 80 million populations are between 15 to 29 years old and this very young demographic profile represents an opportunity for change, a new political dynamic and potentially a new vision on sexuality. Moving this generational vision forward will require compiling and sharing knowledge and formulating a learning agenda centered on LGB inclusion in all walks of life. Progress in addressing the key needs of the LGB community in Iran will be accelerated by: closing information gaps; by tapping into existing data and gathering more robust baseline data; by supporting research, testing new and innovative ideas; and by subjecting programming to rigorous evaluation. When the results of these efforts are shared in an open and transparent manner, the growing community of practice engaged in this work will be able to build on up to date successes and avoid repeating mistakes or missteps.

However, this is worthwhile to mention here that the society has strict reservations against the LGB population and community at large oppose the people with other than heterosexuals, therefore, the government in Middle East generally and in Iran Particularly doesn't need to do anything. The pressure of denying and opposing has taken by the society, civil organizations, and family institutes which has made the government burden free and indifferent. This is quite evident from the movements across Middle East that people has lack of tolerance when

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<sup>381</sup> Hylton, E., 2011. Developing work in and with communities. *Occasional Paper Volume 4*, p.55.

<sup>382</sup> Mulé, N.J., Ross, L.E., Deeprose, B., Jackson, B.E., Daley, A., Travers, A. and Moore, D., 2009. Promoting LGBT health and wellbeing through inclusive policy development. *International journal for equity in health*, 8(1), p.18.

it comes to supporting LGB individuals. In that scenario, government bodies enjoy a laid back position.

The changing landscape and worldwide recognition of LGBT rights is demanding a change.

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