

**UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENCES (THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY)**

**Sanchita Modi**

MA in Social Work final year student, Delhi School of Social Work (DSSW), Delhi  
University, Delhi

**Correspondence:** Sanchita Modi, email: sanchitamodi123@gmail.com

The LGBTQ+ community comprises individuals whose sexual orientations and gender identities do not conform to heterosexual and cisgender norms. It is a diverse group, encompassing various identities and experiences (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, and more). Even though the Honourable Supreme Court has scrapped IPC Section 377 decriminalizing adult gay relationships, we as a society still need to accept them fully and normally. This community has always been an area of concern for social workers, due to the immense challenges and daily life discrimination faced by them.

**CHALLENGES FACED BY THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY** – Discrimination and stigma are pervasive issues that affect LGBTQ+ individuals in various aspects of life. Their basic physical appearance and behaviour is often mocked. Constitutionally mandated life of dignity and self-respect is a distant dream for many of them. Societal pressures, constant rejection and harassment, sometimes by one's own family puts LGBTQ+ individuals at higher risk of mental health issues. Restrictions on whom to marry, how to behave or how to dress can be psychologically burdening. Social workers and psychiatrists provide counseling and support to address these mental health challenges. They create a safe environment to help them open up freely. Apart from these emotional and social issues, a significant number of LGBTQ+ youth lack basic economic support and living conditions. Many of them are homeless due to family rejection. Fear of

honor killing or remedial rapes also looms large. They can encounter barriers to accessing even basic healthcare, leading to health disparities. These barriers could be due to fear of being judged or even ignorance of medical professionals. This impacts not only reproductive health issues, but also general health issues of BP, diabetes, cardiac issues, etc. Even the economic disparities are high as being discriminated against heavily at work, the individuals of the community struggle to find proper jobs. Homelessness and no support from family means no access to education, leading to inaccessibility of higher paying jobs. Social workers work to connect them with safe housing and support networks.

**THE ROLE OF SOCIAL WORKERS** – Social workers within the LGBTQ+ community act as advocates, counselors, and support systems. They provide the necessary cushion for the community to fall back on whenever needed. After fighting for decriminalizing Section 377 of IPC, social workers still engage in policy advocacy to advance LGBTQ+ rights and combat discrimination at the systemic level. Legislative changes to promote protection are put forward by social work organizations. Counseling and therapy are also provided to help individuals navigate the challenges of coming out and self-acceptance. Social workers organize and facilitate LGBTQ+ support groups, creating safe spaces for individuals to connect and share their experiences which helps with the anxiety and depression issues. They connect LGBTQ+ individuals with legal services, housing

assistance, and healthcare providers that are inclusive and welcoming. Education and career-oriented help is also provided. Workshops to make people aware of the differences between gender & sexuality are also conducted as efforts towards community building. They help people to understand that it is the natural functioning of an individual's body, and not some mental construct. From a social worker's perspective, LGBTQ+ represents a population that requires a multi-pronged support strategy to address the challenges they face. **SOCIETAL IMPLICATIONS OF LGBTQ+ INCLUSION** – Inclusive policies and societal acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community benefit not only LGBTQ+ individuals but society as a whole. Embracing LGBTQ+ diversity contributes to a

more embracing and accepting society. Acceptance is important for an individual to live with dignity, security and to have opportunities to do better in life. Reduced stigma and discrimination lead to improved mental health outcomes for LGBTQ+ individuals. Feeling of relevance and usefulness to society is morally uplifting and leads to positivity in and around. LGBTQ+ equality can positively impact the economy as well. Individuals in the community are in millions, and can significantly help in reducing unemployment and poverty rates if provided with proper education and basic facilities. Inclusive communities are more cohesive and resilient. Cohesive communities look after each other and help reduce conflicts.

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