

# Navigating Gender Norms and Identity among LGBTQ Youth in India

**RUBY K.R.\*<sup>1</sup> AND PREMA B. PATIL<sup>2</sup>**

Department of Human Development and Family Studies, College of Community Science  
University of Agricultural Science, Dharwad (Karnataka) India

\*Corresponding Author

## ABSTRACT

This study examines how LGBTQ youth in India navigate gender norms and develop their identities within a predominantly conservative and heteronormative society. The research focuses on understanding the unique challenges faced by this marginalized population in the context of social expectations, family pressures, and institutional barriers. A mixed-methods approach was employed with a sample of 30 self-identified LGBTQ youth aged between 18 and 25, residing in urban and semi-urban regions of India. To quantitatively assess experiences related to minority stress and resilience, the Gender Minority Stress and Resilience (GMSR) scale was administered. This scale measures key dimensions such as distal stress (discrimination, victimization), proximal stress (internalized stigma, identity concealment), and resilience factors (community connectedness, pride). The study aims to explore the interplay between individual identity development and external societal pressures, while also investigating how LGBTQ youth construct personal coping strategies. By focusing on the socio-cultural context of India, where traditional gender norms remain deeply rooted, the research seeks to provide comprehensive insights into identity affirmation processes, the impact of minority stress, and the role of support systems. The findings are expected to inform policy development, sensitization programs, and culturally sensitive interventions that promote inclusion and well-being for LGBTQ youth in India.

**Keywords:** Gender norms, Identity development, Proximal stress, Identity concealment, Resilience, Community connectedness, Mental health, Coping strategies, Social exclusion

## INTRODUCTION

Gender norms in Indian society have traditionally been rigid and deeply rooted in cultural, religious, and social practices. These norms dictate clear expectations regarding gender roles, behaviors, and identities, often promoting a binary understanding of male and female roles. In this context, LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer) youth face unique challenges as they attempt to explore and express their authentic identities (Russell and Fish, 2016; Das and Govindappa, 2023; Dua and Bakhru, 2025). India's socio-cultural environment tends to marginalize non-heteronormative identities, which results in stigma, discrimination, and exclusion, especially in family, educational, and workplace settings (Fish *et al.*, 2019).

Although India has made progressive legal advancements, such as the decriminalization of same-sex relationships in 2018 (Section 377), societal attitudes toward LGBTQ individuals remain largely conservative. Many LGBTQ youth experience minority stress, internalized stigma, and social isolation, which can negatively impact their mental health and identity development (Kiperman *et al.*, 2022; Kosciw *et al.*, 2018). Moreover, the pressure to conform to heteronormative standards leads many to conceal their identity, delaying self-acceptance and contributing to psychological distress.

This study focuses on understanding how LGBTQ youth in India navigate these gender norms and negotiate their identities amid such challenges. It uses a mixed-methods approach combining in-depth interviews and the

**How to cite this Article:** Ruby, K.R. and Patil, Prema B. (2026). Navigating Gender Norms and Identity among LGBTQ Youth in India. *Internat. J. Appl. Home Sci.*, 13 (1 & 2) : 51-54.

Gender Minority Stress and Resilience (GMSR) scale to capture both personal narratives and quantitative measures of stress and resilience. The research aims to explore their lived experiences, coping strategies, and support mechanisms, while highlighting the systemic barriers they face (Toomey *et al.*, 2018). Ultimately, this study seeks to contribute to the development of inclusive support frameworks and policy interventions that promote acceptance and mental well-being for LGBTQ youth in India (Lawrence *et al.*, 2024; Sunil and Mohammadnezhad, 2024).

## METHODOLOGY

### Participants:

The study was conducted with a sample of 30 self-identified LGBTQ youth, aged 18 to 25 years, residing in urban and semi-urban areas of India. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling, using LGBTQ support groups, online communities. The sample included diverse identities across the LGBTQ spectrum (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer individuals) to capture a broad range of experiences. All participants voluntarily agreed to participate in the study and provided informed consent. Care was taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, given the sensitive nature of the topic.

### Measures:

#### *Gender Minority Stress and Resilience (GMSR) Scale:*

The GMSR Scale was used to quantitatively assess minority stress factors, including internalized stigma, concealment of identity, discrimination experiences, and resilience. The scale consists of multiple subscales, providing standardized measures of stress and coping mechanisms relevant to LGBTQ individuals. Participants completed the scale in a secure and private environment, and scores were analyzed to examine correlations between minority stress, resilience, and identity outcomes.

### Procedure:

The study recruited 30 self-identified LGBTQ youth aged 18 to 25 from urban and semi-urban areas of India through LGBTQ support groups. After obtaining informed consent, participants completed the Gender Minority Stress and Resilience (GMSR) scale in a private and safe environment, either online or in person, based on

their preference. The scale measured experiences of discrimination, internalized stigma, identity concealment, and resilience factors. Participants' responses were kept anonymous, and no personal identifiers were collected. Emotional support resources were provided if needed. The collected data were securely stored for analysis, focusing on understanding minority stress and coping mechanisms.

### Data analysis:

The data collected using the Gender Minority Stress and Resilience (GMSR) scale were analyzed through descriptive and correlation methods. Descriptive statistics were calculated to examine the average levels of distal stress, proximal stress, and resilience among the participants. The mean score for distal stress was 3.8 (SD = 0.7) on a 5-point scale, indicating that participants frequently experienced discrimination and victimization in different settings. The proximal stress score averaged 3.5 (SD = 0.8), showing that many participants faced internalized stigma and often concealed their identities. The resilience factor showed a mean of 2.9 (SD = 0.6), reflecting moderate levels of community connectedness and personal pride. Correlation analysis showed a significant negative relationship between resilience and proximal stress ( $r = -0.52$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), and between resilience and distal stress ( $r = -0.45$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). These results highlight that higher resilience is associated with lower experiences of minority stress, supporting healthier identity development among LGBTQ youth in India.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the Gender Minority Stress and Resilience (GMSR) scale provided important insights into the experiences of LGBTQ youth in India. The mean score for distal stress was 3.8 (SD = 0.7) on a 5-point scale, indicating that most participants frequently encountered discrimination, victimization, and exclusion across various social contexts, including family, educational institutions, and workplaces. These experiences reflect the structural barriers and societal prejudice commonly faced by LGBTQ youth in a conservative cultural environment (Table 1).

The proximal stress mean score was 3.5 (SD = 0.8), demonstrating significant internal struggles among participants. Many reported feelings of internalized stigma, shame, and the need to conceal their gender or

**Table 1 : Descriptive Statistics of Minority Stress and Resilience Variables (N = 30)**

Construct	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Distal Minority Stress (Discrimination, Victimization)	3.8	0.70
Proximal Minority Stress (Internalized Stigma, Identity Concealment)	3.5	0.80
Resilience (Community Connectedness, Personal Pride)	2.9	0.60

**Table 2 : Pearson Correlation Matrix Between Resilience and Minority Stress Variables**

Variable Pair	Pearson's r	Significance (p-value)
Resilience – Proximal Stress	-0.52	p < 0.01
Resilience – Distal Stress	-0.45	p < 0.05

sexual identity to avoid social rejection or harm. These internal conflicts often affected their mental health and self-esteem, contributing to anxiety and depressive tendencies.

The resilience factor showed a mean score of 2.9 (SD = 0.6), suggesting that while participants exhibited moderate levels of personal pride and community connectedness, these resilience resources were not as strong as the minority stress factors. Correlation analysis revealed a significant negative correlation between resilience and proximal stress ( $r = -0.52, p < 0.01$ ), as well as between resilience and distal stress ( $r = -0.45, p < 0.05$ ). This indicates that participants with higher resilience were better able to cope with internalized stigma and discrimination (Table 2).

Overall, the results emphasize that despite high minority stress, resilience plays a crucial role in promoting identity affirmation and mental well-being. However, the moderate resilience levels suggest a need for stronger support systems and interventions aimed at improving the well-being of LGBTQ youth in India.

The findings of this study offer significant insights into how LGBTQ youth in India navigate gender norms, identity development, and the impact of minority stress within a predominantly conservative and heteronormative society. The results indicate that participants experience high levels of both distal and proximal minority stress. The elevated mean score for distal stress ( $M = 3.8$ ) reflects frequent exposure to discrimination, victimization, and social exclusion, particularly in family, educational, and workplace settings. These experiences align with existing literature, which highlights the systemic barriers and social stigma faced by sexual and gender minorities in India.

Proximal stress scores ( $M = 3.5$ ) suggest that many LGBTQ youth internalize societal prejudice, resulting in identity concealment and internalized stigma. These internal conflicts can significantly impact mental health,

contributing to anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. The moderate resilience level ( $M = 2.9$ ) indicates that while participants demonstrate some degree of community connectedness and personal pride, these protective factors are not sufficiently strong to fully counteract the experienced stress.

Importantly, the significant negative correlations between resilience and both proximal ( $r = -0.52, p < 0.01$ ) and distal stress ( $r = -0.45, p < 0.05$ ) underscore the critical role of resilience in mitigating minority stress. This suggests that LGBTQ youth who develop stronger resilience are better equipped to manage internal stigma and external discrimination, thereby supporting healthier identity development and psychological well-being.

The findings call for urgent action in developing culturally sensitive support systems, including family and peer support, mental health services, and inclusive educational policies. Strengthening resilience through awareness programs and safe community spaces could significantly improve the well-being of LGBTQ youth and promote identity affirmation in the Indian socio-cultural context.

**Conclusion:**

This study highlights the complex experiences of LGBTQ youth in India as they navigate deeply rooted gender norms and social expectations. Findings indicate that participants face high levels of both distal and proximal minority stress, including discrimination, victimization, internalized stigma, and identity concealment. Despite these challenges, resilience manifested through community connectedness and personal pride plays a crucial role in mitigating stress and supporting positive identity development. The significant negative correlations between resilience and minority stress underscore the protective function of coping resources in promoting mental well-being. Overall, the study emphasizes the need for culturally sensitive

interventions, inclusive policies, and supportive networks to enhance resilience, reduce minority stress, and foster social acceptance. By addressing systemic barriers and creating safe environments, families, educators, and policymakers can contribute to the holistic development, mental health, and identity affirmation of LGBTQ youth in India.

## REFERENCES

- Das, H.K. and Govindappa, L. (2023). Anxiety, depression and social support among LGBTIQ individuals during COVID-19 in Kerala, India. *Journal of Public Health Research*, **69** (8) : 1971-1978.
- Dua, K. and Bakhru, K.M. (2025). Psychosocial needs of LGBTQ + and gender-nonconforming juveniles in India: A data-driven perspective on inclusion, law, and mental health. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, **13**(3) : 4231-4247.
- Fish, J.N., Baams, L., Wojciak, A.S. and Russell, S.T. (2019). Are sexual minority youth overrepresented in foster care, child welfare, and out-of-home placement? Findings from nationally representative data. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, **89** : 203-211.
- Kiperman, S., Schacter, H.L., Judge, M. and DeLong, G. (2022). LGBTQ+ youth's identity development in the context of peer victimization: A mixed-methods investigation. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, **19**(7) : 3921.
- Kosciw, J.G., Greytak, E.A., Zongrone, A.D., Clark, C.M. and Truong, N.L. (2018). The 2017 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of LGBTQ youth in schools. GLSEN Research Report.
- Lawrence, L.L., Sasidharan, A., Ajitha, C. and Kunhikoyamu, A.M. (2024). Depression, anxiety, and stress among the LGBTQIA+ population in Northern Kerala: A cross-sectional study. *Kerala Journal of Psychiatry*, **37** (2) : 120-128.
- Russell, S.T. and Fish, J.N. (2016). Mental health in lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, **12** : 465-487.
- Sunil, S. and Mohammadnezhad, M. (2024). Mental health disparities among LGBTQ+ youth and the strategies to promote their well-being. *Journal of Public Health International*, **7**(2) : 12-24
- Toomey, R.B., Ryan, C., Diaz, R.M. and Russell, S.T. (2018). Coping with sexual orientation-related minority stress. *J. Homosex*, **65**(4) : 484-500.

\*\*\*\*\*