A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON OVERCOMING HETEROSEXIST HARASSMENT AT WORK: INDIAN CASES

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ABSTRACT

The Purpose of this paper is to understand the heterosexist harassment faced by Lesbian and Gay employees at the workplace in an Indian context where gender stereotypes are rooted throughout society. It also aims at exploring the coping mechanisms used by these gay/lesbian employees to deal with this harassment. In-depth interviews of six lesbian/gay employees from the NCR region of India were conducted for collecting data and information through open-ended questionnaire. The samples were selected through purposive non-probability sampling technique. Each interview has been explained through a case study by identifying themes and patterns based on cross-case synthesis, pattern matching and explanation building among them. The results revealed that the Lesbian/gay employees frequently experienced bullying, unwanted jokes, discrimination based on sexual orientation, sexual assault, dismissal from the job, social ostracism and isolation. Several coping strategies were identified which help the lesbian/gay employees to deal with these heterosexist harassments at workplace. Four broad categories of coping strategies were identified as support seeking, confrontation, inaction, and quitting. It was also revealed that participants resorted to secrecy and withdrawal as a way of managing labeling and stigma and to further avoid the subsequent heterosexual abuse. The findings of the study will advance the knowledge in the heterosexist harassments and coping mechanism used by lesbian/gay employees at workplace. The results contribute to meaningful social change to build safe work environments for Lesbian and gay employees.

Keywords: Heterosexist Harassment**;** Coping mechanisms**;** Lesbian and Gay employees; Workplace; Social change

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1. INTRODUCTION

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender (LGBT) are members of every community. They are diverse, come from different walks of life; they include people from all ethnicities, races, all socioeconomic statuses and are spread across the globe. LGBT community is that stigmatized group of the society that is prone to disapproval (Liyanage & Adikaram, 2019), Social Ostracism (Logie et al., 2018), discrimination, bullying and physical victimization (Drydakis 2014), diminished social support and verbal and physical abuse (Olsen 2018) due to that "immutable characteristic" which leaves a person feeling vulnerable. These acts of discrimination, bullying, social ostracism and disapproval have gradually crept into the workplaces with research indicating that 78% of the LGBT employees have been bullied and physically abused at work and nearly 48% have been denied hiring or promotion because of their gender (Grant et al., 2011).

A recent survey published on the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia found that every 7 out of 10 LGBT people have been sexually assaulted at work there by calling it a "hidden epidemic". Infact, Hoel et al., (2017) bring to the forefront that "LGBT employees are twice more likely to be bullied and harassed at work that other heterosexual employees".

Extant research related to the harassment at work faced by the LGBT employees, majority of the researches have majorly focused on the occurrence of mental abuse and harassment instead of the coping mechanisms being adopted by the sufferers (Liyanage & Adikaram, 2019). Not much is known about the coping strategies being used by the LGBT community to manage such workplace stress and abuse (Liyanage & Adikaram, 2019; McDavitt et al., 2008).

Also the coping techniques used by LGBT employees towards bullying or harassment will be more complex than those of the heterosexual employees of the organization because of lower self-esteem that LGBT people hold for themselves. Moreover if the victim has not disclosed his identity that he/she is homosexual, he/she always stays in an additional fear of their identity getting revealed and being exposed due to harassment.

So, not much has been studied about these complexities involved in coping with harassment. Extant research has focused on how LGBT employees manage stress at workplace due to harassment, how they manage to hide their identities (Chung 2001,

McDavitt et al., 2008) but little is known about the coping mechanisms adopted by LGBT employees to manage this workplace harassment. This paper aims at identifying the workplace issues faced by LGBT employees and the coping mechanisms employed by them to tackle such workplace stress and ostracism. Not only this, the paper also concentrates on discussing the diverse perspectives and coping strategies employed by various groups of Gay and Lesbian employees within the LGBT community.

Studies in the past have concentrated on harassment of sexual minorities at workplace in the western context (Anteby & Anderson, 2014; Chrobot-Mason et al., 2001; Ozeren, 2014) but there are very few of them have been conducted in Asian context (Pryor & McKinney, 1995). The experience and behavior of these minorities vary from country to country because of the culture, the norms, beliefs, social structures and the legal system prevalent in that country. Therefore, it becomes important to understand how the coping mechanisms of these social minorities are going to differ in a country other than the west (In our case, India) so as to gain a deeper understanding of this problem present in the society.

In addition, not much is known about the unique experiences of different LGBT Community Groups (Liyanage & Adikaram, 2019; Gates & Viggiani, 2014). Like some researches bring to the forefront that Lesbian employees are more likely to experience unwanted touching and they are sexually assaulted at work (Lloren & Parini, 2017) but in case of Gay men, they are more bullied and discriminated (Haggerty, 2013; Rodgers, 2009). Researchers (Gates & Viggiani, 2014; Grossman et al., 2009) have recognized this gap in literature and have proposed potential research into the diverse experiences of different groups of sexual minorities.

In view of the above context, we plan to examine what kind of coping mechanisms gay and lesbian workers within the LGBT community are using against the discrimination they experience at their workplace. Also what influence does the society and culture have on these coping mechanisms in a country like India. Indian culture reflects a patriarchal system in which gender stereotypes are rooted throughout society.

India's Supreme Court in 2017 granted the LGBT community in India the right to express their sexual orientation in a protected manner. Therefore the sexual orientation of a person is protected under the right to privacy law of the country. Also, on 6 September 2018 the Supreme Court of India legalized consensual gay sex. Despite this, much social, mental, physical and economic violence is faced by the LGBT community in India. Many such cases

relating to harassment are not reported in the country lacking help from family, community or police. Therefore in line with the above discussion, following research questions are framed:

- RQ1: What are the types of harassments faced by the LGBT community at the workplace in India?

- RQ2: What are the coping mechanisms used by the victims to handle the harassment faced at workplace?

The next section of the paper explains the background of the study by highlighting various types of harassment faced by LGBT community at workplace. Thereafter we discuss the methodology used for the study followed by the findings, conclusion and future scope of the study.

2. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

This part of the paper focuses on past researches to identify the various types of harassment faced by LGBT employees at workplace. Heterosexist harassments are defined as "verbal, physical, and symbolic behaviors that convey hostile and offensive attitudes about one's actual or perceived lesbian, gay, or bi-sexual identity" (Konik & Cortina, 2008). Heterosexist harassments at workplace could be in the form of name calling (Birkett & Espelage, 2015), antigay statements, heterosexist or homophobic jokes (Hemmasi et al., 1994), innuendos (Correia & Kleiner, 2001). It could also be in the form of poor pay for work, biases in hiring, job terminations, poor evaluation and job promotions (Correia and Kleiner, 2001), sexual coercion (Fitzgerald et al., 1988; Konik & Cortina, 2008), sexual harassments (McDonald, 2012) and sexual assault (Freedner et al., 2002).

Extant research brings to the forefront that LGBT employees are twice as much victimized as a result of harassment faced by them (Berrill & Herek, 1990). Along with that, the harassment gets multiplied when their homosexual identity gets revealed because of the primary harassment faced by them at workplace. As a result, their friends, family, peer groups all start responding in a negative manner towards the LGBT employee. That employee, who was once considered "Normal" is now looked down upon and that is where harassment starts taking shape.

Though little has been previously revealed, however it paints a blur picture that many LGBT employees have been reporting negative treatment towards them in the workplace in the form of verbal abuse, name calling and bullying (Birkette & Espelage, 2015; Hoel et al.,

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2017). Taking evidence from European studies, which show that LGBT employees are more prone to the risk of bullying leading to social exclusion and social ostracism(Elmslie & Tebaldi, 2007; Hoel et al., 2017).

Logie et al., 2018 in his study puts forth that LGBT people have to deal with discrimination on a daily basis. At times LGBT employees experience covert discrimination in the form of giving looks and being avoided by their colleagues. Grant et al., 2010 reports that 78% of the LGBT employees have been sexually harassed at work, while 48% have been discriminated in terms of hiring, job promotion and job retention. Along with sexual assault, Haggerty (2013) states that LGBT employees also experience disapproval in the organizations, they are a host to physical violence and oppression too. Along this discussion there definitely are more researches identifying such factors leading to workplace issues for LGBT as presented in Table 1.

The insights presented in literature helps in exploring the various types of harassment at workplace, which further helps us in identifying the coping mechanisms used by LGBT employees to tackle workplace issues.

Table 1: Types of Harassment face by LGBT employees at workplace

Authors, Year	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Goffman (1963)	✓						
Rodgers (2009)	✓			✓		✓	
Logie et al. (2018)		✓	✓			✓	
Fassinger (1991)				✓			
Ozbelgin and Pomppers (2014)				✓			
Drydakis (2014)		✓			✓	✓	
Daugeli (1989)	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Haggerty (2013)	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Elmslie and Tebaldi (2007)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Grant et al. (2011)		✓			✓	✓	
Hoel et al. (2017)		✓	✓			✓	✓
McDavitt et al. (2008)		✓	✓				
Birkette and Espelage (2015)		✓				✓	✓

Note: 1-Disapproval, 2- Sexual Harassment, 3- Social Exclusion and Ostracism, 4- Oppression, 5- Violence, 6- Discrimination, 7- Verbal abuse, name calling and bullying

3. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

3.1. Data collection

Open ended interview questions were used for the purpose of collecting the data as it would give the respondent an opportunity to express his/her thoughts freely about the types of harassment they face at their workplace and also what mechanisms they adopt to cope with

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the issues faced by them. The sample questions were prepared well in advance as it would help in initiating the conversation and will lead the conversation with the respondents in a proper direction keeping in view the objectives of the study (Montague, 2017; Agrawal et al., 2020).

After the preparation of sample questions, they were given to 9 experts for assessing their accuracy. The opinions of the experts were incorporated and were used for the purpose of pretesting to ensure the credibility of the questions (Olson 2010, Agrawal et al., 2020). The experts included six academicians with more than ten years of experience, three LGBT employees. The number of experts was considered sufficient in line in with previous researches (Presser & Blair, 1994; Olson, 2010). On the basis of the opinions received by experts, the sample questions were formulated (see Appendix A) and the remaining questions were developed based on the response received by the respondents.

3.2. Data Collection

Data was collected through in-depth personal interviews conducted online from Gay and Lesbian employees who have been employed for atleast one year in the Delhi-Northern Capital region (NCR) region. The National Capital Region is a central planning region centered upon the National Capital Territory (NCT) in India. It encompasses the entire NCT of Delhi and several districts surrounding it from the states of Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. Garnering over one-fourth share of the total number of new jobs generated across India, Delhi-NCR emerged on top with over 2.6 lakh new jobs created during January to March 2016-An ASSOCHAM report.

Thus, Delhi-NCR account for a maximum share of more than 30.1% in job creation. This is why the choice of Delhi-NCR was considered appropriate for the study. The duration of the study was January 2020- March 2020. This was the time period when the entire country of India was struck by a Global Pandemic COVID-19, hence all interviews were conducted face to face through an online mechanism.

The samples were selected through purposive non-probability sampling technique (Gaur & Anand, 2020). It was difficult to approach the participants directly as most of them were closeted and it was difficult to identify gay/lesbian individuals. Thus, initial connections were made with these workers through an LGBT activist associated with the LGBT community. The LGBT activist contacted the willing participants for the research after lengthy and thorough explanations about the research and assurance of confidentiality and

privacy of the participants' identities and the information provided. Snowball sampling was used further to recruit more participants. Participants were informed of the study's intent and their consent was received.

This process of identifying and approaching gay/Lesbian employees who were willing to participate in the study became a very difficult process since most gay/lesbian employees either were closeted or were not willing to participate in the study due to various reasons. However, the respondents selected had to fulfill the reliability and the validity standards. Table 2 illustrates the demographic profile of the respondents.

Primary data for the study was collected through face to face interviews conducted online with six LGBT employees. It has been observed during the interviews that more respondents have hardly added any new information; rather it results in saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). There are no standard criteria for deciding the acceptable sample size in qualitative research; it depends on the time, resources and objectives under examination. (Malhotra & Das, 2008; Patton, 2002). The sample size is sufficiently large to provide legitimacy and yet small enough to effectively concentrate the experience of each respondent (Agrawal et al., 2020; Agarwal & Lenka, 2016; Bertaux & Crable, 2007; Montague, 2017; Yin, 2009).

Before beginning with the interview, respondents consent was taken for video recording. Some of them agreed while for those who did not, data was collected by noting down their important points. The methodology of the study is represented in Figure 1.

Table 2: Respondents' Profile

Respondent	Age	Gay/ Lesbian	Job Title	Company/Industry	Closeted/Open	Years of experience
A	31	Gay	Plant Manager	Automobile Industry	Closeted	4
B	27	Lesbian	Digital Marketing Executive	Media and entertainment industry	Closeted	2
C	29	Lesbian	Marketing Executive	FMCG industry	Closeted	3
D	33	Lesbian	Manager	IT Industry	Closeted	7
E	37	Gay	Assistant Manager	Banking Industry	Closeted	10
F	25	Lesbian	Receptionist	Hotel Industry	Closeted	1

3.3.   Ethical issues

In qualitative research, ethical problems would certainly occur in order to protect the confidentiality and privacy of the respondents' identity, so that they feel free to answer the questions and provide all the information necessary for study. To maintain their

confidentiality, respondents were listed as A, B , C , D, E and F (Agrawal et al., 2020, Malhotra & Das, 2008). The respondents' demographic profile is presented in Table 2.

General questions were used to begin the Interview, like "How long have you been working for this organization", "When did you realize that you are a gay/lesbian", "Is your family aware of it". The respondents were encouraged to talk freely about their experience as a Gay/Lesbian. After initial questions, unstructured format was used that allowed the respondent to continue with the discussion, enabling them to elaborate on their workplace harassment experiences and the type of coping strategies they used to address the harassment.

It was also observed that respondents were uncomfortable answering certain questions. In such cases they were not probed further. In interview ethics it is stated that "respondents should not be pushed beyond a point to make so as to make them uncomfortable" (Malhotra and Das ,2008). Special emphasis has been laid upon the use of words in the whole process, the pitch and clarity of the query incase the respondent faced a problem of understanding. All questions were asked in English language. The cooperation of the respondents was acknowledged after the completion of the interview process.

3.4. Data Preparation

After the personal interview the interaction with LGBT workers was recorded. The case study approach is considered to be the most suitable with a restricted geographical area and a limited sample size (Agrawal et al., 2020). The case study approach stresses the analysis and clarification of real-life events as to how they interpret such environmental factors (Patton, 2002). Each interview has been explained through a case study. Six interviews "leading to the development of six case studies by identifying themes and patterns based on cross-case synthesis (similarities and differences), pattern matching and explanation building among them" (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Yin (2009) in his research defines the method of case research as, "An analytical investigation which investigates a contemporary phenomenon in its context of reality; where the limits between phenomenon and context are not clear; and where multiple information sources are used". Here, six case studies are used to achieve the study's objectives and to further discover the theory development and to improve the reliability and validity of the data (Riege, 2003). The steps for methodology of the study are presented in Figure 1.

3.5.   Reliability and Validity

It is possible to improve the reliability and validity of a qualitative study by integrating findings from various case studies, audio-video interviews and document analysis (Yin, 2009). Construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability were employed to ascertain the quality of research through case study approach (Reige, 2003).

Data integrity and reliability are also ensured in qualitative research by the collection of data from various sources for cross-checking. This process is known as "triangulation" (Reige, 2003). Thus, to avoid any kind of biases and erroneous information in the process of gathering data from lesbian and gay employees, the data was checked over and over again. The collection of primary and secondary data allowed the triangulation of the data thus making the study more convincing, valid and reliable (Hewapathirana, 2011).

It is said that if any information has some kind of built-in prejudices, then the whole investigation goes waste (Simmons & McCall, 1985). Hence a truthful, thorough and comprehensive description of the methodology and the study's purpose makes it more credible and reliable. Infact, the interviews were conducted again in the month of May 2020 to inquire about the sample questions using the same method and thus get the same answers, which further reinforced the study's reliability and validity. The reliability and validity are presented in Figure 2 and figure 3 respectively.
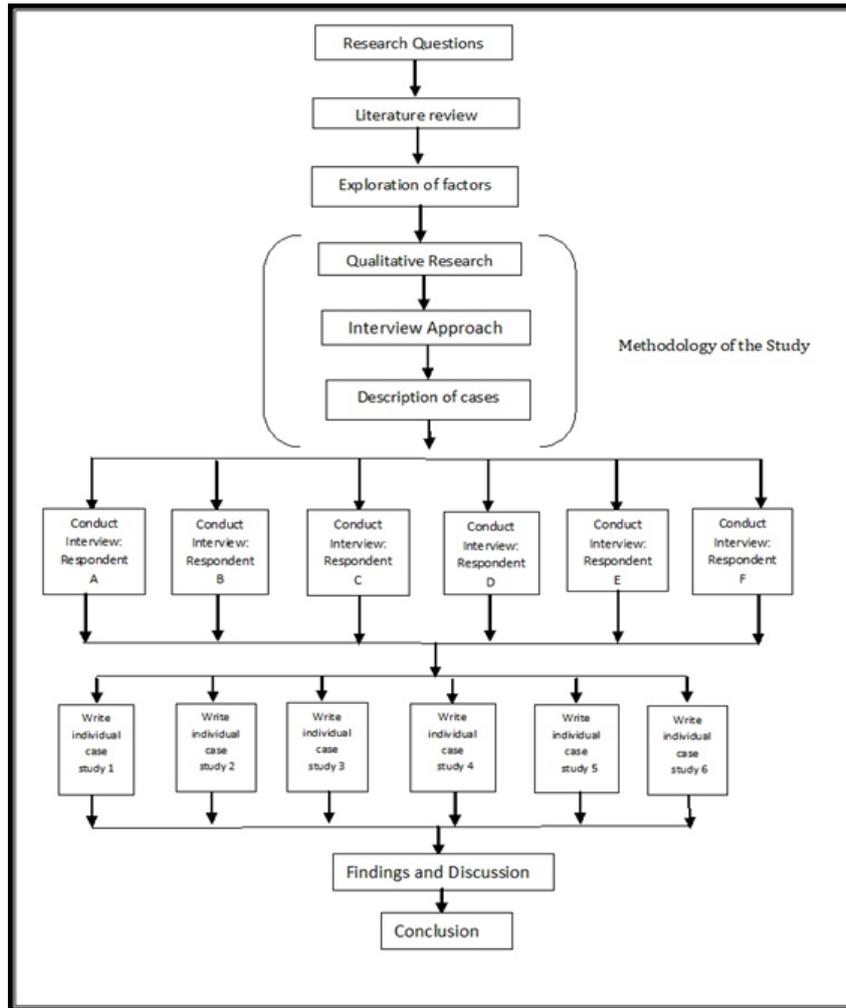
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Figure 1: Steps for Methodology of this study
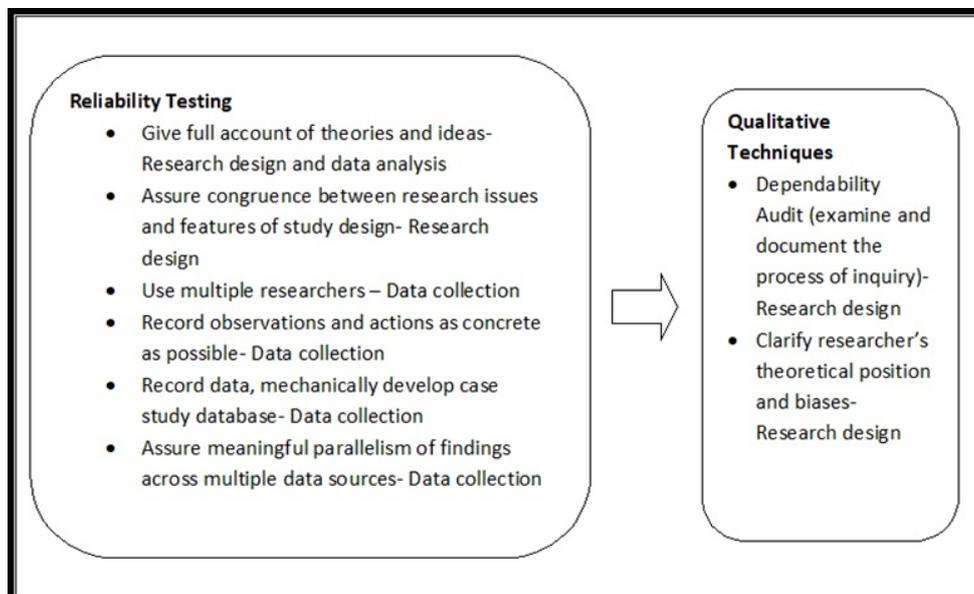Source: Modified from Agrawal et al., 2020

Figure 2: Reliability testing
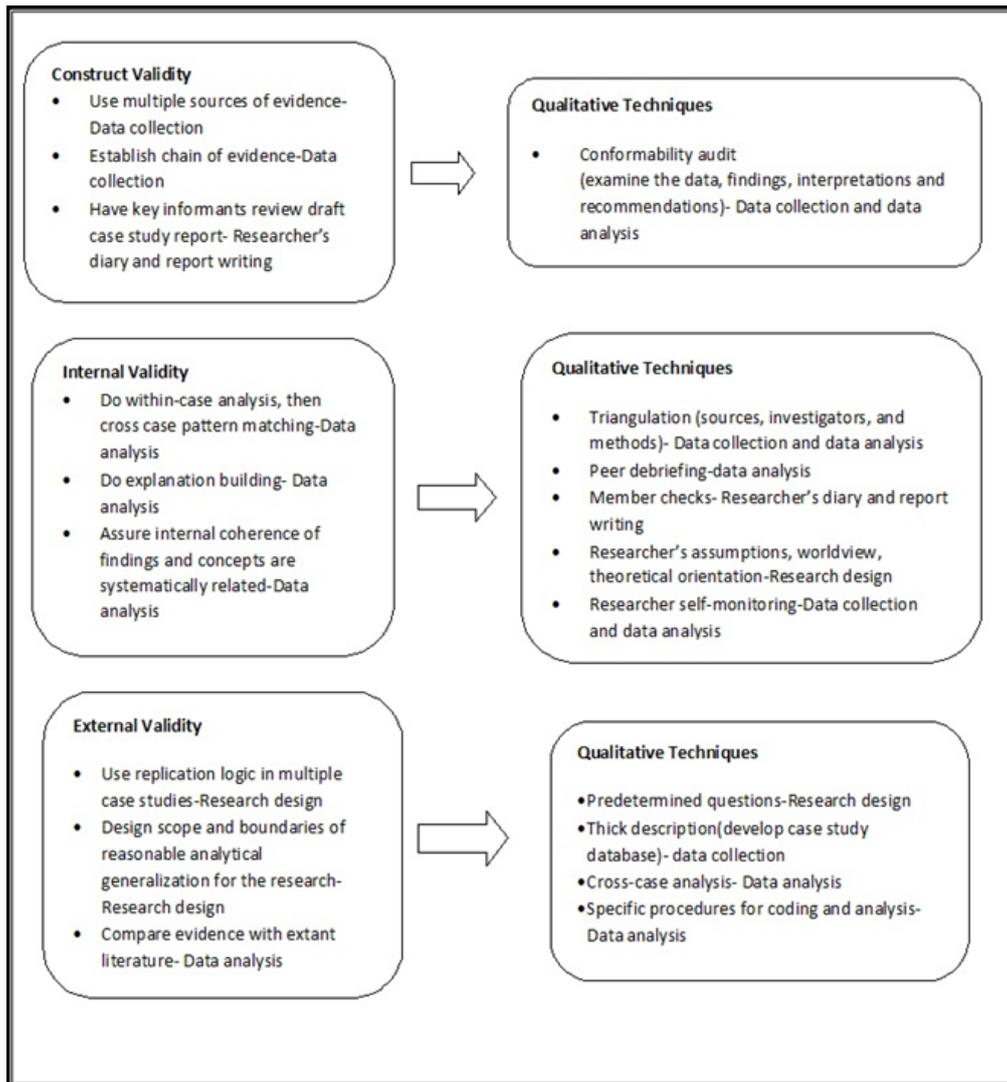Source: Modified from Reige, 2003

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Figure 3: Validity Testing
Source: Modified from Reige, 2003

4. DESCRIPTION OF RESPONDENTS

4.1. Case study 1

Mr. A, works as a plant manager for a leading multinational corporation in Gurgaon. He has been associated with this organization for more than 4 years now. He is a closeted gay. He has been enjoying a good stay with the current organization but recalls the time when he was bullied at his previous organization where he was a part of the operations team. That is what led him to quit his job and come to the present organization.

In a regular meeting his idea was dismissed by another person saying "Your idea is so gay", trying to target his identity. "These frequent unwanted jokes id what lead me to switch my organization, I could not take it anymore", he added.   Always his ideas were looked down upon and he encountered similar kind of comments. Adding a bit of positivity he said,

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"At times I think, such comments could have been a result of intense competition and stress prevalent in the industry rather than sexual orientation…but then I could not convince myself and gave up".

For the purpose of coping with this harassment that he faced at his workplace he always resorted to his friends for the support. He mentioned "Since I have a huge network of gay friends and since I am open to them, I have an avenue to release my stress, and I share my experiences with them. So, it is a huge emotional support for me. If I am experiencing such a thing (harassment and discrimination), normally what I do is just tell about the incident to one of my gay friends who is close to me. I have that network." His friends always acted as a support system for him.

4.2.   Case study 2

Ms. B, works as a digital marketing executive for a leading media house in Noida. She has been the bestowed with an award of the most promising employee of the organization. Her friends and family are aware that she is a Lesbian. It was a year back when she was new to the company that one of the superior used to touch, pat and even squeeze her at unwanted places. Initially she stayed quiet and tolerated everything but then the frequency of such assaults increased and she started being threatened from her superior to enter into sexual relationship with him.

It was as that time that she resorted to complain. On making a complaint to the HR of the organization things went unexpected and she was dismissed from her job. She said, "So, they dismissed me. It was a dismissal and discrimination based on my sexual orientation. Once awarded by the company, now dismissed. I guess this is how they treat their best employee. After that I filed a case in the court. Unfortunately, the case was dismissed by the court. I did not receive a protection even from the court. Now I have written to the Prime Minister asking for justice. I am not going to give-up the case. And also, few NGOs [non-governmental organizations] are helping me. And I have complained to the human rights also. With the help of the NGO, I am going to appeal to the higher courts". The case is still on and she is adamant for justice.

4.3.   Case Study 3

Ms. C explains how it has been difficult for LGBT workers to find a job and further sustain in that job. The problem is because of the discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. As there are no workplace protections for LGBT workers, many

experience countless hardships and barriers. Ms. C works as marketing executive with one of the FMCG companies in Gurgaon. This is her first job and she has devoted close to three years with this company.

Although Ms. C wanted to provide a good living to her family, she says that she ends up spending most of the days crying on her way to and from work. She recalls an incident and explains how she is subjected to name calling and social ostracism at workplace. She says "One of the staff members of another department, a boy, is always murmuring to his friend when I pass them. Once I heard that he was telling, she is a lesbo (frequently used in place of Lesbian) and her photo has been shared on social media and likewise.

I did not tell anything to this person. I looked at him and smiled and then I came out of the department. I do not want to justify my sexual orientation and say look here, I do not know why you are concerned about me being a lesbian? Because I do not know you. I do not have a problem. Because I do not know him, I do not care about him, I am not working for him and he is not the person who is paying me my salary. The company is paying me. Thus, I resort to ignoring such comments at workplace".

She explains how she pretends to be firm at workplace but deep within it does hurt her as none of her colleagues want to sit with her, or work in teams with her. Thus, she frequently experiences isolation at workplace, with no one to talk to and share her thoughts. That is what leads her to vent out her feelings through crying.

4.4.   Case Study 4

Ms. D, wears no feminine jewellery or makeup. She dresses mostly in men's suits and in men's shoes. She identifies herself as a woman though she is gender non-conforming. She says, that's nobody's business. She works for a leading computer firm in Noida, selling technology to big corporations and helping them to set up it. But she says she had a rough time moving up at the computer company and was given a lengthy period of training, while colleagues were being promoted.

She said as she gave presentations she was called out names and laughed at by the co-workers. She recalls her supervisor telling her frequently that, "people have to like you for you to be able to do this job. I am very often questioned by my colleagues, why do I not dress like females or why am I not getting married and like. I generally lie to them [those who inquire] and my common answer is that I had an affair and now it is broken. So, I cannot think about a new relationship at the moment so that none of them will ask any more on that.

This way I have been able to keep it a secret that I am a woman, into a relationship with another woman, but I cannot disclose that."

4.5.   Case Study 5

Mr. E works as a manger in a private sector bank in New Delhi. He has been employed with the bank for more than eight years now and he says that there is not a single day when he does not have to pretend to be someone that he is not. He cannot speak to his colleagues about his sexual orientation otherwise his survival in the bank would be difficult. He recalls an incident where his colleagues came to know about the identity of one of the office staff working at the insurance division of the bank.

How his colleagues used to verbally abuse him and avoid him when he visited the bank for any work. None used to assist him in his work, infact he was made feel terrible in the bank. Mr. E says, "I felt heartbroken but I could not do anything as I did not want to lose my job. If my colleagues came to know that I am also a gay, I will have a similar treatment. So, I behave normally like other men do. When I am with my male colleagues and if there is an attractive girl, generally the others would awe at her. I would also use the same expressions in front of my male colleagues though I do not feel any attraction towards that colleague at all". This is how maintaining secrecy helps E to avoid any kind of stigma that he would face if his identity as a gay gets revealed.

4.6.   Case study 6

Ms. F used to work as a receptionist for a hotel chain in Gurgaon. It had been only one year since she has been employed there and things were going good. She did not reveal any one about her being a lesbian. Her boss used to praise her for being a hard working girl and kept motivating her to continue working with such zeal and dedication and she would soon move the managerial level.

Everything was going good until one day when the manager sighted a picture on Ms. F's cell phone of Ms. F and her girlfriend kissing each other on Christmas eve. "Then he fired me. I was escorted back to my desk, told to clean it out, then marched out of the building…I was devastated", she added. She, who was once a highly praised employee was fired from her job giving her no reasons. She says, "I did not lose my job because I was lazy, incompetent, or unprofessional.

Quite the contrary, I worked hard and did my job very well. However that was all discarded when my boss discovered I am a lesbian. In a single afternoon, I went from being a

highly praised employee, to out of a job." Ms. F and her girlfriend have moved from Gurgoan to Delhi, in search for a new job. They have both faced such incidences in the past and the best possible way to come over it is by sharing it with each other. Ms. F says that her friend is her biggest confidante and she can open her heart in front of her.

Her family does not support her, so her biggest support system is her friend. She says, "My being in relationship with another woman was not affecting the hotel's business in anyways…then why was I asked to leave my job? At times this is disheartening that you cannot live freely in your country and exercise your rights to freedom."

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

5.1. Findings

A qualitative analysis based on case analysis was used to achieve the study's objectives. The data were collected by interviewing the LGBT employees working with various industries in India's Delhi-NCR area, using open-ended questions. Snowball sampling, a sort of purposive sampling technique was used to approach the respondents using multiple case study method. The objectives of the study were analyzed and presented in Table 3, using cross case comparison, explanation building and pattern matching (Eisenhardt, 1989; Patton 2002).

Centered on the case descriptions and study, it discussed the forms of harassment experienced by LGBT workers at work and what coping strategies they used to handle the harassment. Thus, the findings offer fresh perspectives, enrich existing literature and information about the abuse and coping meachnisms that LGBT workers have embraced.

Table 3: Findings- Types of Harassment faced and coping mechanisms adopted

Respondent	Type of Harassment faced	Coping mechanism used
A	-Bullying -Frequented unwanted jokes -Offensive comments about sexual orientation. -Discrimination	-Seeking social support from friends - Quitting from job
B	-Touching, patting and squeezing -Sexual assault -Threats or bribes in exchange of sexual favors -Dismissal from job	-Inaction (Initially) - Confrontation and Legal Action (on issues getting intense)
C	-Discrimination -Name calling -Social Ostracism and isolation -Offensive comments about sexual orientation	-Inaction
D	-Biasness at job -Name calling and ridiculing	-Inaction -Secrecy

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E	-Verbal abuse	-Inaction and secrecy
	-Social Ostracism	
F	-Dismissal from Job	-Confrontation
		-Seeking social support from friends

5.2.   Discussion

Interviews with gay workers showed a variety of harassments they encountered at work and how they coped with their experiences as sexual minorities in special and individual ways. Although all respondents reported different experiences of harassment they experienced in the workplace, Table 3 records the harassment faced and coping mechanisms used by six respondents in the workplace, providing the framework for understanding the context of their coping strategy.

The unusual ways in which the harassed participants coped with primary victimization, and prevented secondary victimizations while coping with stigma and labeling was also apparent. While the coping strategies used by the participants were not straightforward or basic acts of dealing with abuse, but more nuanced activities involving psychological and psychosocial facets, playing the centre stage of labeling, shame and identity management.

Four broad categories of coping strategies were identified as support seeking, confrontation, inaction and quitting. One of the most widely mentioned coping mechanisms in the literature on harassment is seeking social support (Chung, 2001; Kanetsuna & Smith, 2002; Fox & Tang, 2017). Social support refers to "sharing the harassment experience with the individuals who are perceived to be supportive and attempting to get their support to cope with harassment" (Chung, 2001).

These individuals who render support are commonly identified as family, friends, co-workers, superiors or counselors. Van et al., (2019) mention "how victims would also seek support from other individuals who had similar experiences and share similar identities".

It was also interesting to notice how a lesbian employee had gone so far as to take legal action, a very public action, in dealing with discrimination at the risk of disclosing her sexual identity. Confrontation was described as a coping mechanism seldom used by victims in the handling of harassment (Salin et al., 2014). Confrontation has also been found in the present study to be an unusual response of the participants to violence. Just one of the participants actively responded to their encounters by challenging the harassers.

According to previous studies (Chung, 2001; Salin et al., 2014), inaction to disregard a harassing activity, disregard the harasser or staying quiet appears to be a popular coping

mechanism. Although inaction is obviously not an effective method for coping with harassment, many victims of harassment view it as a normal method. Inaction also appeared to be popular among the study participants, where they mainly resorted to ignoring the harassing behavior, ignoring abuse and being silent.

According to Berrill and Herek (1990), "an individual would quit the job when the harassment is unbearable". Again, it was important to notice how one of the workers resigned from their work, at the risk of losing their living, instead of resorting to other coping strategies such as appealing to the management or finding help from others. Once again, low self-esteem, lack of faith in organizational processes and management, and lack of social support networks can be described as factors that require further study about participants' coping mechanisms.

According to Link et al. (1989), "when the labeled believe that they will be devalued and discriminated because of their label, they will resort to strategies such as secrecy, withdrawal and educating others". Also in the present study, how participants resorted to secrecy and withdrawal as a way of managing labeling and stigma and to further avoid the subsequent heterosexual abuse was revealed. However, none of the participants seemed to have participated in educating others as a way of addressing and preventing the effects of stigma and labeling.

5.3.   Conclusion

The study revealed that the Lesbian/gay employees frequently experienced bullying, unwanted jokes, discrimination based on sexual orientation, sexual assault, dismissal from the job, social ostracism and isolation. Several coping strategies were identified which help the lesbian/gay employees to deal with these heterosexist harassments at workplace. Four broad categories of coping strategies were identified as support seeking, confrontation, inaction, and quitting. It was also revealed that participants resorted to secrecy and withdrawal as a way of managing labeling and stigma and to further avoid the subsequent heterosexual abuse.

The coping mechanisms of the participants reflect management's incompetence and inefficiency in their treatment, and the lack of confidence and expectation of the participants that management would assist them, as well as the unjust and discriminatory actions of the management. In this context, it was not surprising that the participants primarily attempted to deal with abuse on individual and personal grounds without seeking organizational assistance.

Therefore, as the participants coped with the violence they encountered at work, they were often coping with being both labeled and stigmatized, making the processes for coping more complex and nuanced.

The results can contribute to meaningful social change through qualitative research to build safe work environments for LGBT people. The results demonstrate what LGBT workers are looking for in a work setting. For example, they want policies and procedures to be developed that ensure cultural sensitivity, fair treatment and protection in order to express who they are at work. The findings will assist leaders in introducing new policies and initiatives to support LGBT personnel.

Those who apply the techniques will help set up conducive environment and improve the corporate culture, increase retention rates, promote growth (individual and organizational) levels, and increase competitive advantage in the marketplace. When employees feel valued, a dynamic effect occurs with colleagues and subordinates across the organization. Subordinates can promote supportive working relationships with LGBT workers in a trickle-down effect, which contributes to the creation of inclusive cultures for all personnel.

Also this study can affect social change by demonstrating how leaders should create, mentor and reward employees. By building awareness and appreciation of the LGBT community and culture, corporate leaders enhance the opportunity to develop a link with LGBT workers, allowing leaders to create environments that represent the best interests of all workers and provide the ability to attract and retain the most talented individuals. As workers feel respected and appreciated, their level of dedication and efficiency towards the organization increases.

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APPENDIX A-QUESTIONS ASKED DURING INTERVIEW

- Q1. How long have you been working with the current organization?

- Q2. Have you ever felt that you had to hide your sexual orientation at the workplace? And why?

- Q3. Does any of your co-workers know about your sexual orientation?

- Q4. Are your comfortable with the work environment in your current organization?

- Q5. What challenges do you face at your workplace because of your sexual orientation?

- Q6. When you face any untoward incident (because of your sexual orientation) how do you manage to deal with it?