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Social Problems Of LGBT People In Turkey

Zümrüt Biçmen[a]*, Zafer Bekiroğulları[b]

a,bToros University, Mersin, 33140, Türkiye

Abstract

In this study, I examined the social problems LGBT individuals go through in their hometowns and later, in the places they move to. Data were collected using semistructured interviews that included thirty four open- and close-ended questions.

The sample is compossed of 18 male and 12 female participants which makes 30 in total, residing in any city in Turkey. The findings demonstrate that LGBT individuals are exposed to verbal harassment and physical abuse, they are not accepted and are not able to perform social activities in their hometowns or if they migrated, in the places they moved to.

Introduction

All around the world, throughout the history, anthropologist and historians defend that homesexuality and bisexuality exist. In some cultures it is regarded as something natural and a variation of human sexism and in some, sexual relations of same sexes are supported or those people had higher positions. However, in some cultures, homosexuality is still despised and treated in a bad way (Davies ,2012).

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +90 324 325 33 00; fax: +90 324 325 33 01.
E-mail address: zumrut.bicmen@toros.edu.tr

LGBT (lesbian, gay,bisexual,transgender) individuals will have to abandon the cities, countries they live in cases that they are not accepted by the society they live in, they are exposed to attacks, and they are limited or deprived regarding job opportunities.

LGBT individuals who basically have different sexual orientation, face discrimination, exclusion from the society, thus quite often, meet with obstacles to satisfy their needs. This exclusion and ostracism could vary from the simplest personal relations to the most general social ignorance, exclusion, ostracism, working simultaneously together, and can even violate the rights of life.

Throughout history, LGBT individuals had to pretend as heterosexuals or come out to gain a place in society. They had to pretend what they were not or took great risks by revealing their real identities. This is a procedure of acceptance or revealing her/ himself (Cormier-Otano,Davies,2012).

Heterosexualism is an ideological system which refuses and condemns every non-heterosexual attitude, behaviour, identity, relation and group (Herek, 1990:316).

Homophobia is described as the hatred or fear to homosexual individuals and homosexuality (Tuzer,2003;9). Homophobic individuals play an effective role in inferring with the lives of LBT individuals. They cannot supress their feelings of hatred and the fact that they cannot accept LGBT individuals. Thus, they harass LGBT individuals verbally or physically and expose them to violence. Such attitudes direct LGBT individuals to stress, dissatisfaction of the place they live in, exposure to physical disturbance, loneliness and ostracism.

In their study, Pilkington and D'Augelli(1995) found out that lesbian, gay and bisexual young people's psychological and physical wellbeing is endangered, and they develop negative outcomes such as physical injuries, behavioural and somatic reactions, attempt in interpersonal relations, blaming her/himself, coming out.

There are many elements direct LGBT individuals to stress and disturbance that emerge as a result of stress. Social oppression is one of the outstanding elements. Many people attempt to live in compliance with traditions, customs and the religious principles of the religion embraced by the vast majority. Negative attitudes towards LGBT individuals stem from the prejudice that they are mentally ill or sinners (Levine ve Leonard, 1984: 706).

Islam is the religion embraced by the vast majority in Turkey.

Islam, like other monotheistic religions, Christianity and Judism, interprets homosexuality as a sin and it is regarded as something forbidden. In all three monotheist holy scriptures, there are verses about the destruction Luut's people: "*And [We had sent] Lot when he said to his people, "Do you commit such immorality as no one has preceded you with from among the worlds? Indeed, you approach men with desire, instead of women. Rather, you are a transgressing people. But the answer of his people was only that they said, "Evict them from your city! Indeed, they are men who keep themselves pure. So We saved him and his family, except for his wife; she was of those who remained [with the evildoers]. And We rained upon them a rain [of stones]. Then see how was the end of the criminals. (Araf Surah, 80-84)*

In 2010, Society for Sexual Education Treatment and Research (CETAD) and the Psychiatric Association in Turkey made a common statement to the press and indicated that homosexuality, likewise heterosexuality and bisexuality, is one of the sexual orientation (They described three sexual orientation: homosexuality, heterosexuality and bisexuality) and initially, is a different orientation, not a disease. It is stressed that sexual orientation is not a choice therefore homosexuality is not a sexual choice and a phenomena beyond the will of individuals (Türkiye Psikiyatri Derneği Haber Bülteni [TPD], 2010).

In this sense, most of LGBT individuals residing in Turkey are exposed to social oppression, physical attack, jokes, swearwords, attitudinizing that psychologically hurt and hatred and mobbing in the workplaces (Demirdizen,Çınar,Kesici,2012).

"Hate crimes represent the most insidious manifestation of intolerance and discrimination, based on race, sex, language, religion or belief, national or social origin, sexual orientation, disability or other similar grounds. The violent expression of these biases may take the form of assault, murder, threats or property damage, such as arson, desecration or vandalism."(OSCE-ODIHR,2005)

The findings of the sample conducted on hate speech and crimes in Turkey demonstrated that hate speech rate is 79% and hate crime rate is 21%. Regarding hate crime stemmed from sexual orientation, this rate is 7% (Sosyal Değişim Derneği, 2010). It is determined that there is still not a positive attitude towards LGBT individuals elicits the tough, stressful and easy to get sick lives of them.

In today's Turkey, internal and external migration have increased on account of the situations LGBT individuals are exposed to. LGBT individuals have to leave their cities and countries in the cases that they ostracised from the social environment, exposed to attack, their job opportunities are limited and they are deprived of having their own enterprise.

In this study, it is aimed to find out the perspective of the society, religions and laws towards LGBT individuals, the social problems they encounter and their abilities to deal with such problems and when they can not, their inclination to migrate, and whether they experience the same problems in the places they move in.

Problem Statement

In a study conducted at Yale University to determine violence and discrimination towards lesbian, bisexual and gay individuals, it is found out that many individuals under the influence of various fears, hide their sexual orientation. However, they are still exposed to discrimination, psychological and/or physical violence. In another study conducted by students in Massachusetts, it is indicated that homosexual students are attacked physically one time more than the others, use alcohol four times and drugs ten times more, and 50% of them tried to commit suicide in the last year. Conducted studies demonstrate that there is a strong bond between homophobic attitudes and violence around the world (Sözen, 2009: 64).

In a study conducted with the participation of university students, homosexuality is regarded as a problem, disease, modelling in puberty and a choice (Çırakoğlu, 2006).

Today there are still psychiatrists, psychologists and academic structures emracing therapeutic practice that describe homosexuality as spiritual and behavioural disorder (Mert,2009:84)

Bekiroğulları (2012), in his study conducted in psychology department in a Muslim country, aimed to find out the students' attitudes towards LGBT individuals. It is pointed out that the very religious students stated that they react with hatred, shame, repulsion to LGBT individuals or with emotions to homosexuals.

Purpose

In this study, it is aimed to find out whether LGBT individuals residing in Turkey, encounter social problems related with the social oppression and if they had left their countries or cities due to this oppression, whether they experience the same social problems in their new places. The main purpose of this study is to investigate how LGBT individuals deal with the problems they encounter and when they are not able to cope with such problems and move to other cities or countries, whether they are faced with the same kind of problems and finally, how such problems affect LGBT individuals. The samples of this study contain 30 individuals of LGBT living in various cities in Turkey. Data are collected by the writer via the interviews.

Methods

In this study, I used qualitative research methods to assess LGBT individuals' perceptions of their hometowns and the problems they encountered in the places they moved later. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews that included thirty four open- and close-ended questions. The purposive sample was composed of 12 female and 18 male LGBT (*N* = 30) living in different cities in Turkey. The age of all participants were less than 38. Out of 30 LGBT individuals, 8 (27% of full sample) were bisexual, 8 (27%) gay, 10 (33%) lesbian and 4 (13%) transsexual. In this study all the questions were asked verbally and the answers were recorded and transcribed into written format directly. Those recorded answers were organized with codes and numbers. Additional questions were specified beforehand in order to obtain information or clarify previous questions. Throughout the interviews, after answering the question prepared before, for the reactions and the comments, participants were asked to write a summary limited with 100 words. Grouping was utilized to classify and encode the same reactions and comments and together with data collection, analysis was conducted with the assistance of these methods. In this research, 8 (27%) of the participants were bisexual , 8 (27%) of them were gay, 10 (33%) of them were lesbians and 4 (13%) of them were transsexual. The total number of the participants were 30 (N=30) .

Table 1. Percentages of the Participants According to their birth places

Birth Place	N	%
İstanbul	12	40%
İskenderun	2	7%
Uşak	2	7%
Samsun	2	7%
Bursa	2	7%
İzmit	2	7%
Mersin	2	7%
Konya	2	7%

In this research, the total number of the participants were 30 (N=30) and 12 (40%) of them were born in İstanbul,2 (7%) of them were born in İskenderun, 2 (7%) were born in Uşak,2 (7%) were born in Samsun,2 (7%) of the participants were born in Bursa,2 (7%) of them were born in İzmit,2 (7%)of them were born in Mersin, 2 (7%) of them were born in Konya.

Table 2.The percentages of the participants according to their marital status

Marital Status	N	%
Married	4	13%
Single	26	87%

In this research, 4 (13%) of the total participants were married and 26(87%) of them were single.

Table 3. The percentages of the Participants Regarding their Occupations

Occupation	N	%
Chief at a Textiel Factory	2	7%
Rayon Manager	2	7%
Student	8	27%
Not working	4	13%
Computer Repair Technician	2	7%
Accountant	2	7%
Sex worker	2	7%
Proprietor	4	13%
Electrical electronics engineers	4	13%

In this research, 2 (7%) of the participants were chiefs in the textile factories, 2 (7%) of them were rayon manager, 8 (27%) of them were students, 4 (13%) of them didn't work, 2 (7%) of them were the computer repair technicians, 2 (7%) of them were accountants, 2 (7%) of them were sex workers, 4 (13%) of them were proprietors and 4 (13%) of the participants were electrical electronics engineers. The number of the total participants were 30 (N=30).

Table 4. The percentages of the Participants Beliefs

Religious belief	N	%
Muslim	20	67%
Ateist	6	20%
Deist	4	13%

In this research, total number of the participants were 30 (N=30) and 20 (67%) of them were Muslim, 6 (20%) of them were ateist and 4 (13%) of them were deist.

Results

Item 1. Are you able tol ive your sexual orientation openly in the country you live in right now?
Percentages

Yes
7%
Sometimes
1%
No
80%

As it can be seen in Item 1, most participants (80%) , following the question whether they can live and express their sexual orientation claim that they cannot live their sexual identity openly.

Item 2. How LGBT is considered from the perspective of Islam ?	**Percentages**
Sin	57%
Bad	7%
They are silent when we are murdered or attacked	7%
Regarding sick and cursed	3 %
Burning in hell	13%
Forbidden	13%

As can be seen in Item 2., more than half of the participants (57%) consider LGBT individuals as "sin" according to Islam. Following this statement, the second most common statement (13%) is " burning in hell" and the third common statement(13%) is "forbidden."

Item 3. Have your colleagues threated you in a different way as you are LGBT?	**Percentages**
Yes	27%
They do not know my sexual orientation	67%
No	7%

As it can be seen in Item 3, more than half of the participants (67%) hided their real identities with the fear of receiving negative reaction from their colleagues.
The participants who revealed their sexual orientation to their colleagues(27%) are described as "pervert" and exposed to "Receive treatment" suggestion and homophobic jokes.

Item 4.Did you have friends or family members in your hometown who knew that you are LGBT individual?	**Percentages**
Yes	73%
No	27%

As Item 4. Demonstrates, more than half of the participants (73%) state that they had family members and friends who knew about the individual's sexual orientation.

Item 5. Who helped you in your hometown when you got sick and needed doctor or medicine? (flu, catching cold, illnesses etc)	Percentages
Myself	40%
My family	60%

As stated in Item 5', more than half of the participants (60%) denoted that their families assisted them when they got sick and needed doctor or medicine in there. Less than half of the participants (40%) when they got sick in their hometowns, they provided the doctor or the medicine themselves.

Item 6. In your hometown, socially, who supported you?	Percentages
Myself	40%
My family	27%
My friends	20%
My partner	13%

As Item 6 indicates, most of the participants stated that they did not receive assistant socially in their hometowns.

Item 7. In your hometown, , who supported you psychologically?	Percentages
Myself	60%
My family	13%
My friends	13%
I don't have psychological disorders.	13%

As can be seen in Item 7, more than half of the participants (60%) claimed that they did not receive psychological assistant in their hometowns. Furthermore, some participants (13%) stated that they do not have psychological disorders.

Item 8. How do you cope with loneliness?	Percentages
I don't stay alone	38%
I listen to music and read books	15%
I got used to being alone	8%
I can't cope with loneliness	8%
I watch movies	8%
I have friends and my partner	8%

As Item 8 states, most of the participants (38%) denoted that they do not stay alone.

Item 9. Do you feel lonely in the city you live in?	Percentages
Yes	33%
No	67%

As it can be seen in Item 9, more than half of the participants (67%) claimed that they do not fee lonely in the city they live in.

Item 10 . What should change for you to go back to your hometown?	Percentages
I don't want to go back	31%
I live in my hometown	23%
When they accept me as I am	23%
If I have a social environment, I may go back to my hometown	15%
If I have a job, , I may go back to my hometown	8%

As Item10 states, most of the participants (31%) did not desire to go back to their hometowns.

The results demonstrate that when they had health problems, 60% of them went to the hospital and the doctor and provided the necessary medicines themselves. 40% of them had support from their families. However, it is found out that 73% of them who were supported by their families were known to be heterosexual by their families and the social environment and their sexual orientations were unknown to those people.

'' Just because they like this, I don' have to be like them. I am a woman and I am in love with a woman. I want to marry her. Do I have to go to the Netherlands for this? Why don't we have that kind of marriage in our country? Is our country that barbaric?'' (Lesbian, living in Istanbul). The major social problem they encounter is to be exposed to pressure by the society.

"I am really sick of the fact that we cannot walk around hand in hand. What happens if we are lesbians? It is none of your business! I wish I could say this to everyone."

(Lesbian, living in İstanbul)

57% of the participants claim that, from the religious perspective, LGBT individuals are "sins". LGBT individuals dramatically feel not only the oppression of society but also the oppression of religion. Regardless of this result, 87% of them described themselves as "believers."

" What am I doing to people? I can't go out during the day. I am beaten by many people and have been hospitalized many times. Is any heterosexual beaten because she/ he is heterosexual? I don't know what is that difficult to understand and what is to judge. I am a human being like them. (Gay, living in Balıkesir). "My family accepted me but it took a long time. When I faced with the problems I can't cope with, I started using alcohol and drugs. I was a drug user for 6 years. Now I don't use and try to continue my life ignoring the others. (Lesbian, living in Bursa).

Conclusions

In this study, it is aimed to find out whether LGBT individuals' social problems vary according to their age, birth place, gender, marital status, where they spent most of their lives before moving to their current places, where they live now; their level of education, religious beliefs and occupations.

Following the examination of the literature, it is revealed that LGBT individuals living in Turkey are extremely influenced by the problems they encounter in social environments, and the ones who left their cities and moved to another place don't desire to move back to their hometowns. The reason for this is that LGBT individuals are exposed to psychlogical and physical pressure from their families and the social environments. Due to these problems, LGBT individuals are left alone at the moments they need assistance the most. At the beginning of the research, it was expected that the LGBT individuals' social problems would decrease since they leave their families and, thus, behave more comfortably in a positive way with such alterations. The influence of changing the city was visible with LGBT individuals who are away from their families. The findings demonstrate that LGBT individuals have been through the same social problems in the places they later moved.

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