

Mapping and some aspect of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Objective of this paper is to present the results of a pioneering mapping survey on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) people in Sri Lanka. Conducting research on LGBT has been limited by social and cultural restrictions. In the recent parliamentary discussion in early January 2017 on the amendment to the existing article 365A, there was a deep disagreement on the acceptance of the same-sex relations/homosexuality. However, this contradictory debate has made the payment for making a platform on development of human right action plan with an addendum. At present, there is a growing coming out of LGBT citizen via hotspots gathering, social media and social meeting. This pilot study concludes the need for more social and legal avenues on the establishment of the freedom of LGBT people delimiting to postcolonial social and administrative system

Key Words; LGBT, mapping, postcolonial administration

Introduction

For many years, studies of the LGBT people in Sri Lanka, especially on the mapping surveys are scant by the departments of socio-anthropology in the national universities. This is as a result of the cultural fear of being labelled as a same sexual man or woman (Jinadasa, 2015b). Necessity of conducting this mapping has been drawn by the growing expression of LGBT people in Sri Lanka. They are enjoying a substantial freedom secretly, particularly via the channels of social media (Facebook has been the most popular mode) (Jinadasa, 2016a; 2016b), and hide places where they are mutually understood for their own meeting. On the contrary, their social freedom for same sex relations has been both legally and culturally banned by the colonial legal constitution (2015a) and postcolonial social cultures (2015c). Hence, this current study critically investigates the results of this mapping study of LGBT people. The study conducted with special reference to selected four districts; Colombo, Kandy, Nuwara Eliya and Matara on the representation of visible geographical and socio-cultural characteristics.

In Sri Lanka, the two aspects of sexuality; freedom for LGBT peoples and the social & cultural acceptance for sexual diversity, need to be initially materialized in new legislative reforms. As Carroll (2016) states in Sri Lanka same- sex activity could be reasoned to illegal Penalty: Fine up to 10 years

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imprisonment. Even in South Asia, it is only the Nepal, who receives the legal provisions for same sex-relations from 2007 with the United Nations declarations signed.

In the recent parliamentary discussion in early January 2017 on the amendment to the existing article 365A, there was a deep disagreement on the acceptance of the same-sex relations/homosexuality. However, this contradictory debate has made the payment for making a platform on further development of human right action plan with an addendum. However, sexual orientation has to be agreed in modern democratic governance.

1. Review of Literature

In Sri Lanka, It is difficult to find a thorough scientific study of mapping LGBT people.

Nichols has made a paper on “Intersections of Gender and Sexuality in Police Abuses Against Transgender Sex Workers in Sri Lanka” (2014) for the Handbook of LGBT Communities, Crime and Justice. In this he pointed out how Sri Lanka Police abuses Transgender people in their duties, and also as these local transgender people as sarcastically degraded as *Ponnaya* and how they are called *Nachchi* by their own social communication are substantially discussed by this study.

In UNDP report (2013) on “Sri Lanka Advocacy Framework HIV, Human Rights and Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity.” Special attention was paid on Male sex with Male (MSM) and Transgender people on their sexual knowledge and health protection, while its legal limitation was also discussed to some extent. Chandrathilaka and Mahanama(2015) are also highlighting the pathetic situation of law and its enactment with LGBT people in the face of modern developed society, while it was early constructed by the ambitions of colonial rulers under the framework of Victorian morality. However, in the present context while United Kingdom has achieved to make the legal provisions for LGBT people in their constitution, Sri Lanka is yet to be run by the colonial drives by local administration policies that deeply dominant by local religious and cultural normative is also contrastively discussed by this paper.

Though these studies deserve some sociological perspective on sex workers, however, study considering a broad perspective of modern cultural studies amalgamating diverse fields of multidisciplinary action of inquiry into covering all the segments of LGBT people could not be yet found. Fortunately, a growing academic interest has been receiving into the domain of LGBT studies by some recent more industrial researches conducted on the support of Equal Ground- Sri Lanka, a non-governmental social development organization. In that context, Priya Thangarajah has conducted a situation analysis consisting both qualitative and quantitative approaches, but more on the qualitative perspective on “Strengthening of Legal Protection for LGBT in Sri Lanka: road to decriminalization.”(2013). In this, she has considered the role and practice of existing law reference to Sri Lanka Penal code section 365, and how does it really practiced by Sri Lanka Police with inappropriate awareness of the diversity of human sexuality, so that many LGBT individuals have had to face many victimizations and criminalizations as a result of conventional police practices dominating in the country.

Another study recently issued by Equal Ground, “Towards a Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transsexuals and Transgendered (LGBT) stigma and Discrimination Index for Sri Lanka” (2012) has made a platform to scrutinize the existing forms of stigma related to social and psychological limitations and barriers towards the required freedom for LGBT people in Sri Lanka. “Struggling against Homophobic Violence and Hate Crimes” is another study report compiled by Equal Ground (2011), has contributed more on the excavation of violence towards lesbian and bisexual women in Sri Lanka. External and internal homophobic aspects were also discussed to some extent by this informative inquiry.

Again Miller & Nichols (2012) made a paper to the journal of sexualities on Sri Lankan commercial sex industry, and its gender identity was much elaborated by his field observation. Aspects of nachchi were highly described, and how Sri Lankan police misconduct their duties in the face of nachchi the transgender people was substantially discussed by this work.

On average, about 3.5% of People in the United States identify as LGBT, a percentage that varies by state (Gates & Newport, 2013). Approximately eight million people in the nation's workforce identify as LGBT (Pizer, Sears, Mallory, & Hunter, 2012). However, in Sri Lanka, it is difficult to calculate such definite statistics as it is difficult to find a thorough mapping on LGBT in Sri Lanka that recently conducted considering current cross-currents. Hence, this study tried to redress this gap by conducting mapping LGBT with special reference to a selected four districts.

2. Methodology.

The purpose of this mapping is to identify the number of the each groups of LGBT populations in the respective districts, while it seeks to understand the challenges and developmental aspects of their behaviors. To explore their present scenario of same sex relations in the face of heterosexual social set up which is limited by the conservative religious and cultural norms and values is another objective.

Survey started on 15th January, 2017 to 15th April, 2017 for a three months period. There was an extension up to mid-July after first drafting of the mapping for more qualitative data with further scrutinizing cases from garment industries of Free Trade Zone and academic societies of universities in the respective districts. As the tools of data collection, this study utilised series of equipment; First, the hotspots, where LGBT people are used to gather were identified using an existing data sheet of a mapping research conducted by Minnesota University, USA in 2013. In order to verify this data, this current study applied a set of techniques; Group discussions, Facebook (FB) Online survey, and wall writing in public toilets of the towns, industrial institutions and universities. Group discussions were conducted by the use of the existing data of the hotspots. FB survey was conducted in two streams; (01) using original addresses of the members of the research team, (02) creative fake FB addresses to identify more LGBT people, who have been secretly conducting their relations with peers. We found mobile phone numbers of many gay and bisexual people and less transgender people over this FB survey. It was identified that the fact that messaging their phone numbers via messenger has been instrumental in further verification as well as more identification of new comers of LGBT people.

First We got the total population of each districts covering from age 20 to 80 or more as depicted in census final report of 2012 conducted by the government department of census and statistics of Sri Lanka. (For an example; for Colombo the population in total is 1644598. This was divided by 6% ($1644598 \times 0.06 = 98670$). 6% is the percentage that is known as the population of LGBT in Sri Lanka as known by the Equal Ground (EG) in their previous researches (This indication was accepted by the staff members of the EG at the phase of proposal discussion before this current research). Then this value was calculated by 1% ($98670 \times 0.01 = 986$), and that result was again divided by 10%. ($986 \times 0.1 = 98$). These both 1% and 10% were used to minimize our study sample in terms of the practical challenges. This final value (98) was our sample for Colombo district, so that 98 was distributed by the number of 20 for 2 Group discussions, 30 for the Facebook online survey, 30 for toilet surveys and another 18 for Hotspot visits.

In line with this calculation, 54 (Kandy), 32 (Matara), and 27 (Nuwara Eliya) numbers of sample were selected by the use of this same calculation. So, 54 units were selected 10 for 1 group discussion, 15 Facebook addresses, 15 toilet units, and 14 hotspot units were selected by the sample of Kandy district.

For Matara 32 units were respectively 10 (1 group discussion), 8, 8, and 6. While for Nuwara Eliya 27 units were selected by 10 (1 group discussion), 6, 6, and 5 serially. However, more identifications could be found using these limited numbers as a result of our participatory observation in group discussions, Facebook on line survey and toilet information , so, snow ball method was used. Mostly mobile phone and Facebook were two fundamental equipment of more new identification of LGBT people.

3. Results and Discussion

Based on the data analysis and discussion following chart shows the counted numbers of LGBT population based on the sample.

Number of LGBT				
	colombo	kandy	matara	Nuwara Eliya
lesbian	92	20	14	15
gay	348	75	106	88
bisexual	412	255	208	139
transgender	225	124	62	11
Total	1077	484	390	253

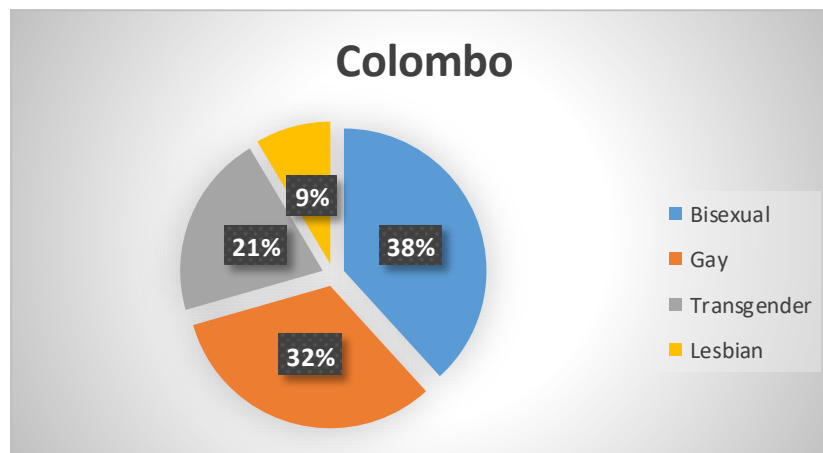
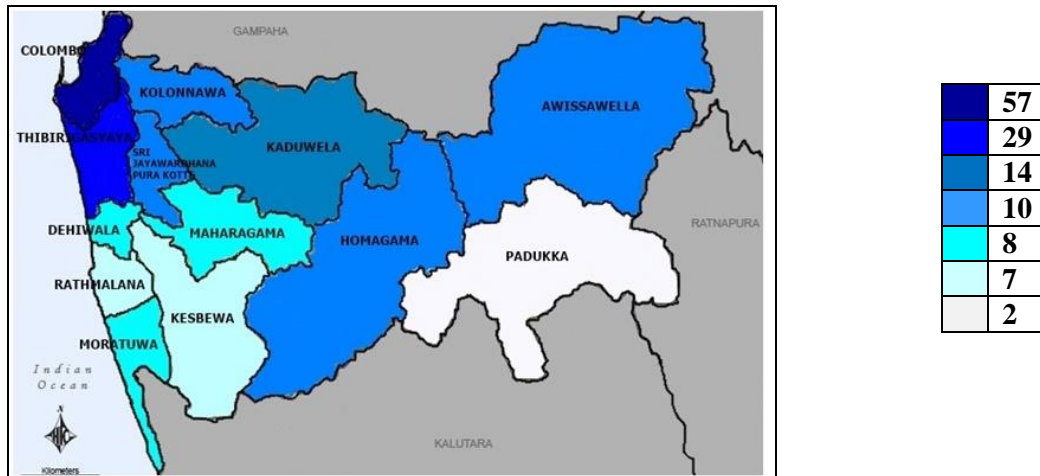


Chart 01. Distribution of LGBT in Colombo district

Nos.	Sexual Orientation	Number	Percentage
1.	Lesbian	92	09%
2.	Gay	348	32%
3.	Bisexual	412	38%
4.	Transgender	225	21%
	LGBT Total	1077	100%

Table 01. LGBT Population in Colombo District



Colombo Thematic Map 01.

This current mapping found that maximum number of LGBT could be found in Colombo district by total of 1077, while Nuwara Eliya remains in less identified LGBT population by total of 253. The majority of the people are bisexual in almost all the districts as 255(Kandy), 208 (Matara) and 253 (Nuwara Eliya) while Colombo reached to the significant highest level of 412 bisexual people. Approximately half of the LGBT people found in this study counts for bisexual people in each districts. Colombo is the place for more social freedom in LGBT interactions among their peers is well-evident by the representation of maximum number of the people in each LGBT categories, while Kandy reached to the subsequent second place from the same statistics. This exciting feature could be explained as Colombo and Kandy which are main urban city areas are open to discussions and awareness with LGBT information as well as the availability for more LGBT relations with their own identities.

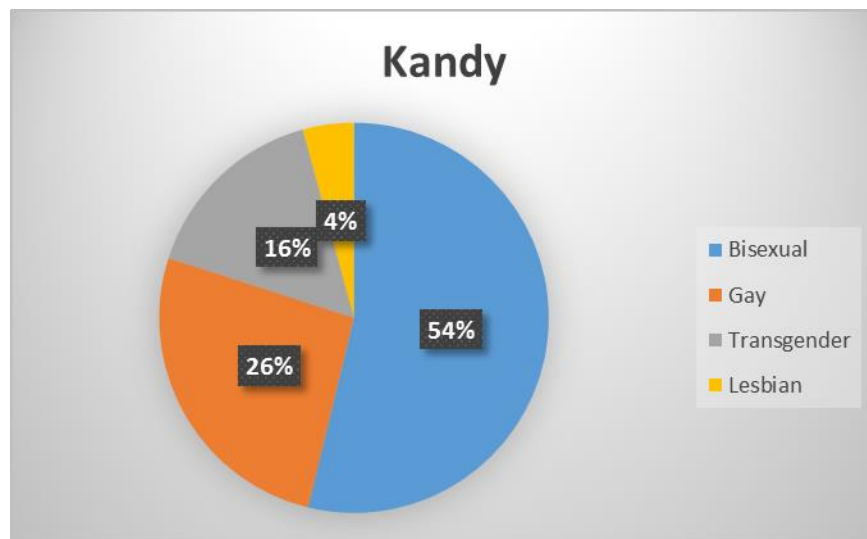
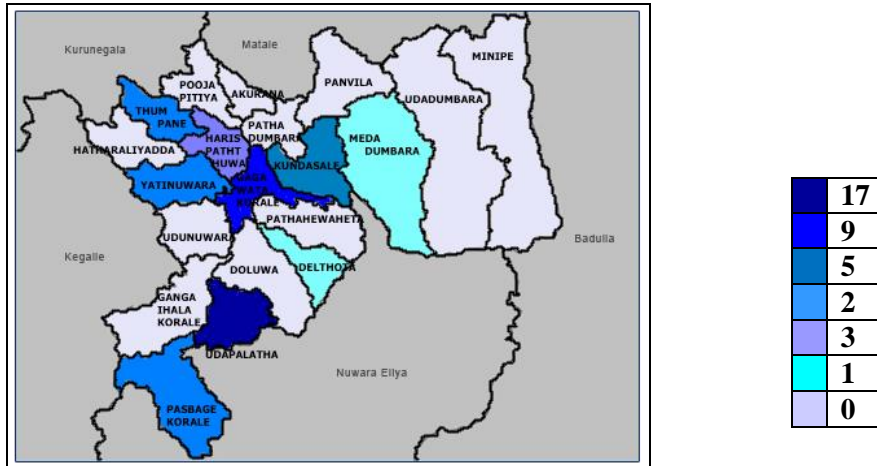


Chart 01. Distribution of LGBT in Kandy District

Nos.	Sexual Orientation	Number	Percentage
1.	Lesbian	20	04%
2.	Gay	124	26%
3.	Bisexual	255	54%
4.	Transgender	75	16%
	LGBT Total	474	100%

Table 01. LGBT Population in Kandy District



Kandy Thematic Map 01.

In addition, there is a significant growth in coming out of their sexual identities specially using the social media platforms (FB), and mobile phone connections. Much credible as well as fake relations can be identified in their use of on line communication. However, in teen cultures, more gay relations are occurring than Lesbian relations, while Lesbian are not that much of open and social in their same sex relations.

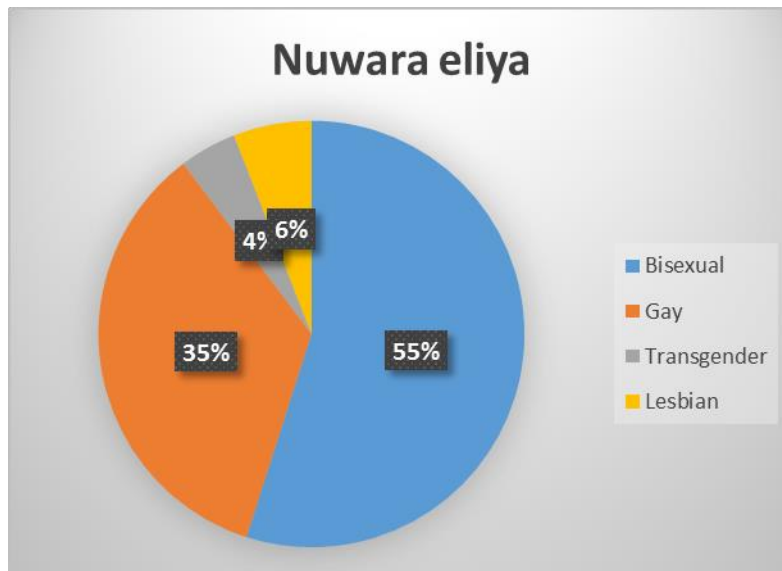
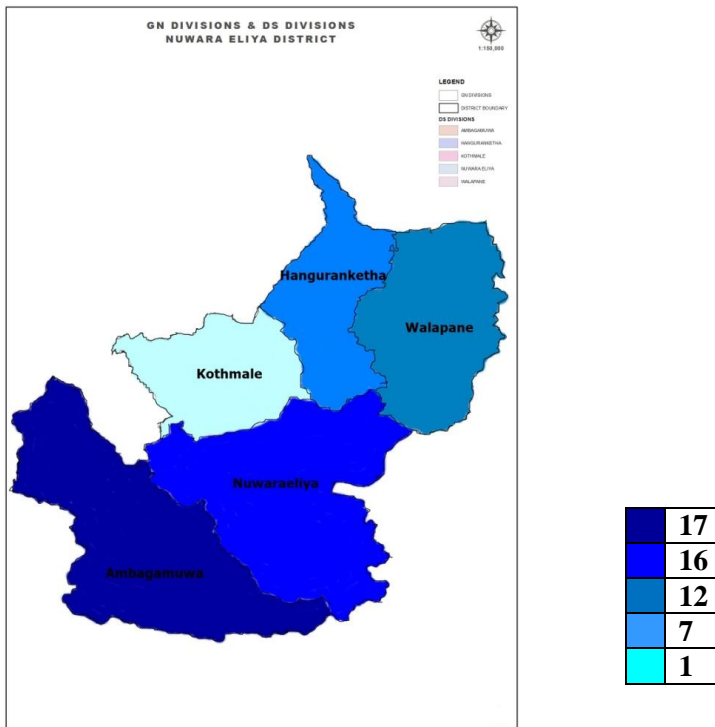


Chart 01 Distribution of LGBT in Nuwara Eliya District

Nos.	Sexual Orientation	Number	Percentage
1.	Lesbian	15	06%
2.	Gay	88	35%
3.	Bisexual	139	55%
4.	Transgender	11	04%
	LGBT Total	253	100%

Table 01. LGBT Population in Nuwara Eliya District



Nuwara Eliya Thematic Map 01

Moreover, more Lesbian relations were found in far remote rural areas than urban town places, Walapane in Nuwara Eliya is much interesting in this findings. Lesbian relations in upper middle class were found in Colombo and Kandy, while they are elite in maintaining their societies. However, gay relations are open in comparison to lesbian relations. More transgender people were found in town shares, especially Colombo was so significant in this finding. However, Matara was the highest percentage of transgender people out of all districts.

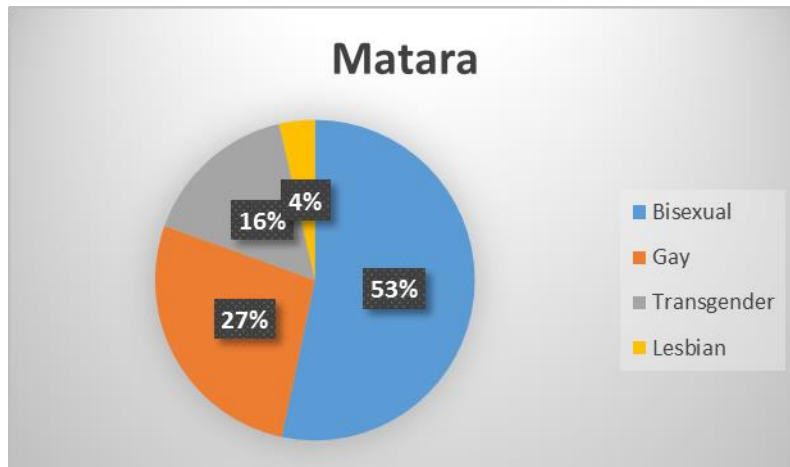
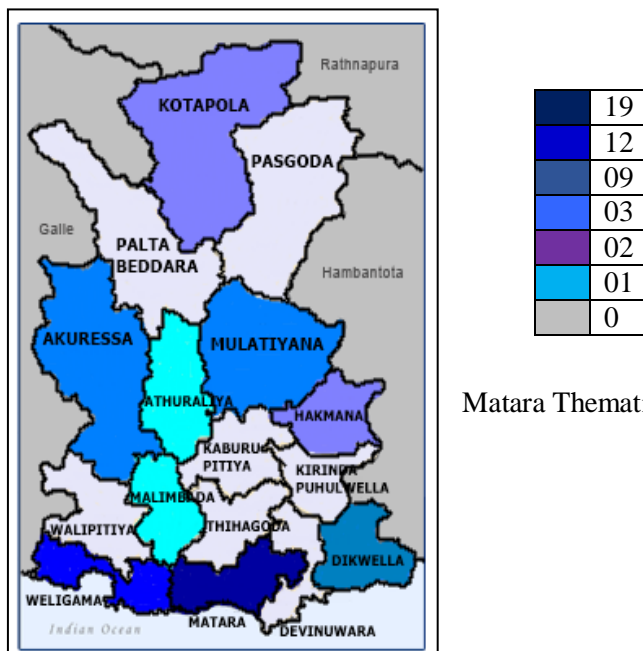


Chart 01. Distribution of LGBT Population in Matara District

Nos.	Sexual Orientation	Number	Percentage
1.	Lesbian	14	04%
2.	Gay	106	27%
3.	Bisexual	208	53%
4.	Transgender	62	16%
	LGBT Total	390	100%

Table 01. LGBT Population in Matara District



Matara Thematic Map 01.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on these findings, this mapping could be made following recommendations;

As town areas were more informed about LGBT as a result of ongoing awareness and educational program, it is recommend to conduct more scientific awareness programs of human sexuality in the perspectives of Biology and Anthropology.

Support of Police officers could be effectively received by the development and expansion of more educational program of human sexuality, so more medical doctors' and psychologists' help could be drawn by this awareness campaigning.

As this current research found, more family planning program have been misused by some of the regional non- governmental organizations for their narrow purposes, it was expected to increase more attention and monitoring for such programs by respective authorities and other social organizations.

Adults should be aware of the value of the non- hetero sexual people in their societies. In order to get the sufficient level of information and understanding, education curricula should be free to adopt the sexuality studies in their school curricula, as a vantage point, more university undergraduates as well as academics could be informed by the relevant workshops, finally it is expected to develop a center for sexuality studies by the support of both government and non-governmental sectors. This could be used as a pre equipment for the long process of legislative amendments for LGBT rights to the existing constitutional reforms.

However, before directly go to address the requirement for the amendment of the article 365 on the incorporation of LGBT rights, this research findings firmly recommend a social dialogue of the crisis of family in the context of same sex. Thus, media should play a crucial role in bridge making contradictory opinion towards LGBT community.

Finally it is not the fact that amount of the existing population of LGBT people that matters the prerequisite for a constitutional amendment for accepting LGBT rights. However, use of media propaganda using talk shows on LGBT people in the perspectives of human Biology and Anthropology are essential to change the existing limitations.

Limitation of the Study

This current study was limited by the fact that the calculation of sample. Social and cultural constraints of rigid religious norms and cultural values of the postcolonial society that rejects to open discussion about same sexual relations was another limitation.

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