

Disgust propensity-sensitivity and attitude towards homosexuals among parents

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World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews, 2023, 17(01), 537–544

Publication history: Received on 10 December 2022; revised on 16 January 2023; accepted on 19 January 2023

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30574/wjarr.2023.17.1.0093>

Abstract

The objective of the research study was to find the extent to which disgust propensity-sensitivity is related to attitude towards homosexuals among parents. This study included 160 participants who were parents ranging in age of 21 to 70 from urban and rural localities of India. The study was conducted using the tools, Disgust propensity and sensitivity scale – Revised (DPSS-R) and The Development of Attitudes towards Homosexuality Scale for Indians (AHSI). The study used a correlational research design and the statistical analyses used were correlation, independent sample t-test and regression analysis. The study tested eight hypotheses and found a negative correlation between disgust propensity-sensitivity and attitude toward homosexuals among parents. The findings also revealed that disgust propensity-sensitivity has a significant impact on attitudes toward homosexuals. The results also showed that there is significant gender difference in attitude towards homosexuals among parents. According to the study, as parents' disgust propensity-sensitivity increases, attitude toward homosexuals decrease. The study also found that mothers have a more favourable attitude toward homosexuals than fathers. This study may aid in raising parental awareness of homosexuality and to raise awareness on how controlling the feeling of disgust can help in betterment of attitude towards homosexuals

Keywords: Disgust; Disgust propensity; Disgust sensitivity; Homosexuality; Parents; Parents' attitudes

1. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to comprehend how parents view homosexuality and their tendency to be repulsed by them. Homosexuals are referred to those who have sexual attraction to other people of the same sex, which mostly refer to lesbian, gay, and bisexual people. It is an enduring tendency or disposition to have sexual, affectionate, or romantic attractions predominantly toward individuals of the same gender. There are three primary categories of sexual orientation which are homosexuality, bisexuality, and heterosexuality, which are all part of the heterosexual-homosexual continuum. The term "gay" is used to describe both men and women who are attracted to the same sex, while the term "lesbian" is more frequently used to refer to females. Bisexuality is defined as having an interest to both sexes and is viewed as the middle ground between heterosexuality and homosexuality. According to a Gallup survey from 2022, 7.1% of adult from America are identified to be belonging to the LGBT community. According to a 2006 research, 20% of the population anonymously acknowledged having homosexual feelings, with only a small percentage identifying as homosexual. Although people like to think that society is becoming increasingly self-aware (Dasgupta & Rivera, 2006), some individuals continue to experience societal marginalisation when they choose to identify as non-heterosexual. There are many ways that sexual orientation might be used as a basis for discrimination. Antigay prejudice is reflected in the high rate of violence and harassment against homosexual people in society. Numerous studies show that verbal abuse and harassment are almost always experienced by homosexual persons. In addition, it indicates that prejudice against homosexual persons is still pervasive at both jobs and at homes. Therefore, it is crucial to comprehend how people view homosexuals and what their attitude is towards them. The parents' perception of homosexuality and

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their attitude towards it are particularly crucial to be studied. The most daunting aspect of coming out for many LGBTQ children is confronting their parents. The cornerstone for a child's emotional and physical wellbeing has always been parental support. When LGBT youth come out to their parents, they are apprehensive and worried about being accepted. Although homosexuality and queer personality may be more acceptable to Indian youth now than ever before, there is still a war against LGBT individuals in families, homes, and schools and the youth is worried if they will be perceived disgusting. Disgust is a strong dislike or disapproval sparked by something repulsive or offensive. Although previous researches have shown that the "disgust-sensitive" people are having negative opinions of lesbian and gay people, these ideas' fundamental causes remain mostly unknown. According to a crosscultural research published in the journal 'Group Processes & Intergroup Relations', disgust-sensitive people are more probable to have negative conception about lesbian and gay individuals. Results indicate that pathogen avoidance is partly bound for prejudice against homosexuals. Van Leeuwen has explained that one cause for people's negative attitudes about homosexuality is that they link gay men with contagious diseases like HIV or other sexually transmissible diseases. Another possibility is that people identify homosexuality with disgusting sexual behaviour. Previous research into these reasons revealed that persons with a larger propensity to feel disgusted (those that are more disgust sensitive) exhibit more bias against homosexuals. However, in prior researches, the majority of participants were from the United States and Canada and not India.

1.1. Need for the study

There are increasing studies on the need to accept homosexuals among parents conducted in all parts of the world; but the studies relating to homosexuality and its relation to disgust are rarely conducted in India. Confronting their parents is often the most difficult part of coming out for LGBTQ children. Young people who identify as LGBT are nervous and concerned about being accepted when they come out to their parents. Though Indian youth may now accept homosexuality and queer personalities more than ever before, there is still a battle against LGBT people in families, and the youth is concerned that they would be viewed as repulsive. Being one of the fundamental human emotions, disgust has not been extensively researched in regard to attitudes against homosexuality. Thus, by completing this study, it will be possible to increase parents' awareness of how to alter their attitudes toward homosexuals by reducing their propensity and sensitivity to disgust.

2. Methodology

This study is conducted to understand the extent to which disgust propensity-sensitivity is related to attitude towards homosexuals among parents. The study also checks if disgust propensity-sensitivity has an impact on attitude towards homosexuals among parents. 160 parents (80 fathers and 80 mothers) from urban and rural localities from all parts of India were chosen for the study using convenient sampling. Participants ranged from 21 to 70 years of age were included in the study. The hypotheses of the study are:

- h01 – There is no significant relationship between disgust propensity-sensitivity and attitude towards homosexuals among parents
- h02 – There is no significant impact of disgust propensity-sensitivity on attitude towards homosexuals among parents
- h03 – There is no significant gender difference in attitude towards homosexuals among parents
- h04 – There is no significant gender difference in disgust propensity-sensitivity among parents
- h05 – There is no significant difference in locality in attitude towards homosexuals among parents
- h06 – There is no significant difference in locality in disgust propensity-sensitivity among parents
- h07 – There is no significant gender difference in disgust propensity among parents
- h08 – There is no significant gender difference in disgust sensitivity among parents

The study was conducted using the tools, Disgust propensity and sensitivity scale – Revised (DPSS-R) by van Overveld et al., (2006) which consisted of 16 statements and each item can be rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = Never and 5 = Always) and The Development of Attitudes towards Homosexuality Scale for Indians (AHSI) by Kanika Ahuja (2017) which consisted of 20 items on the scale that can be rated on a Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Statistical analyses used for the study were mean, range and standard deviation from descriptive statistics and Independent sample t-test, Correlation and Regression analyses from inferential statistics. The data was collected using online forms. Before filling out the questionnaire, informed consent was taken from the participants. The privacy and confidentiality of the responses, as well as the identities of the participants, were assured. Participants were reassured

that their responses would be evaluated as a group rather than individually. The subject was informed and made aware that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any moment without any penalty.

3. Result

Table 1 Socio-demographic details of the participants

		N	Percentage
Gender	Male	80	50%
	Female	80	50%
Location	Urban	83	51.9%
	Rural	77	48.1%
Age Group	21 – 31	52	32.5%
	32 – 41	52	32.5%
	42 – 51	40	25%
	52 – 61	15	9.4%
	62 – 70	1	0.6%

The table 1 shows the socio-demographic details of the participants. A total of 160 parents (N = 160) from urban and rural localities between the ages of 21 and 70 participated in the study, with 50% males and 50% females. The age ranges were 21-31, 32-41, 42-51, 52-61, and 62-70, with percentages of 32.5%, 32.5%, 25%, 9.4%, and 0.6%, respectively.

Table 2 The descriptive statistics of the study variables- Disgust propensity-sensitivity and Attitude towards homosexuals

Statistics		
	Disgust Propensity-Sensitivity	Attitude Towards Homosexuals
N	160	160
Mean	43.21	64.68
Std. Deviation	13.26	18.45
Skewness	0.581	0.16
Kurtosis	-0.369	-1.04

Table 2 shows the mean, median, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis of the study variables. It depicts that the mean and SD of Disgust propensity-sensitivity are 43.213 and 13.2624 respectively. The mean and SD of Attitude towards homosexuals are 64.68 and 18.452 respectively. Skewness values for all the study variables falls between the acceptable range of +1 and -1 and the kurtosis values falls between the acceptable range of +3 and -3. So, it is assumed that the data is normally distributed.

Table 3 Pearson product moment correlation for relationship between disgust propensity-sensitivity and attitude towards homosexuals

Variables	N	M	SD	1	2
Disgust propensity-sensitivity	160	43.21	13.26	-	-0.354**
Attitude towards homosexuals	160	64.68	18.45	-0.354**	-

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

Pearson correlation test produced the Pearson Correlation coefficient ‘r’ as statistically significant at 0.000 level. The mean and standard deviation of disgust propensity-sensitivity are 43.21 and 13.26 respectively and the mean and standard deviation of attitude towards homosexuals are 64.68 and 18.45 respectively. The correlation coefficient was found to be -0.354 indicates a weak negative correlation between disgust propensity-sensitivity and attitude towards homosexuals. As the p value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis h_01 is rejected which means that there is a significant relationship between disgust propensity-sensitivity and attitude towards homosexuals. As Disgust propensity-sensitivity decreases, Attitude towards homosexuals increases.

Table 4 Regression analysis for impact of disgust propensity-sensitivity on attitude towards homosexuals

Variable	R	R2	SE	β	F	t	p
Disgust propensity-sensitivity	0.35	0.12	0.10	-0.493	22.68	-4.76	0.001

Table 4 shows the results of linear regression analysis to assess the impact of Disgust propensity-sensitivity on Attitude towards homosexuals among parents. The adjusted R square value is found to be 0.120 with the $R^2 = 0.126$ which shows 12.6% variance in the data. The values are significant 0.000 level which is below 0.05 level which means the null hypothesis h_02 is rejected. There is a significant impact of disgust propensity-sensitivity on attitude towards homosexuals among parents.

Table 5 Independent Sample t test for the gender difference in attitude towards homosexuals among parents and disgust propensity-sensitivity

Logistic parameter	Father			Mother			t	p
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD		
Attitude towards homosexuals	80	60.24	19.65	80	69.11	16.09	-3.12	0.002
Disgust propensity-sensitivity	80	44.15	16.31	80	42.27	92.83	0.89	0.373

Table 5 shows the results of the independent sample t-test performed to compare Attitude towards homosexuals and disgust propensity-sensitivity in Males (fathers) and Females (mothers). In Attitude towards homosexuals, as the p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis h_03 is rejected. There is a significant difference in Attitude towards homosexuals between Males (fathers) with mean, $M = 60.24$, Standard deviation, $SD = 19.656$ and Females (mothers) with mean, $M = 69.11$, $SD = 16.095$; $t(158) = -3.125$, $p = .002$. Hence, Females (mothers) have better attitude towards homosexuals than Males (fathers).

In disgust propensity-sensitivity in Males (fathers) and Females (mothers), as the p-value is greater than 0.05, null hypothesis h_04 is accepted. There is no significant difference in disgust propensity-sensitivity between Males (fathers) with mean, $M = 44.150$, Standard deviation, $SD = 16.3111$ and Females (mothers) with mean, $M = 42.275$, Standard deviation, $SD = 9.283$; $t(158) = .894$, $p = .373$.

Table 6 Independent sample t-test for difference in locality in disgust propensity-sensitivity and attitude towards homosexuals among parents

Logistic parameter	Urban			Rural			t	p
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD		
Attitude towards homosexuals	83	66.27	17.55	77	62.96	19.34	1.13	0.259
Disgust propensity-sensitivity	83	40.81	9.74	77	45.79	15.88	-2.36	0.020

Table 6 shows the results of the Independent Sample t-test performed to compare Attitude towards homosexuals and Disgust propensity-sensitivity in Rural and Urban locality. In Attitude towards homosexuals, as the p-values are greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis h_05 is accepted. There were no significant difference in Attitude towards homosexuals in Urban locality with mean, $M = 66.27$, Standard deviation, $SD = 17.553$ and Rural locality with mean, $M = 62.96$, Standard deviation, $SD = 19.343$; $t(158) = 1.133$, $p = .259$.

In Disgust propensity-sensitivity, as p-values are greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis h_06 is accepted. There is no significant difference in disgust propensity-sensitivity in Urban locality with mean, $M = 40.819$, Standard deviation, $SD = 9.747$ and Rural locality with mean, $M = 45.792$, Standard deviation, $SD = 15.8897$; $t(124.284) = -2.364$, $p = 0.020$.

Table 7 Independent sample t-test for gender difference in disgust propensity and disgust sensitivity among parents

Logistic parameter	Father			Mother			t	p
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD		
Disgust propensity	80	21.28	8.65	80	19.50	5.44	1.554	0.123
Disgust sensitivity	80	22.88	8.21	80	22.78	5.20	0.092	0.927

Table 7 shows the results of the Independent Sample t-test performed to compare disgust propensity and disgust sensitivity in Males (fathers) and Females (mothers). In disgust propensity, as the p-value is greater than 0.05, the null hypotheses h_07 is accepted. There were no significant difference in disgust propensity in Males (fathers) with mean, $M = 21.28$, Standard deviation, $SD = 8.651$ and Females (mothers) with mean, $M = 19.50$, $SD = 5.440$; $t(133.034) = 1.554$, $p = .123$. In disgust propensity, as the p-value is greater than 0.05, the null hypotheses h_08 is accepted. There is no significant difference in disgust sensitivity in Males (fathers) with mean, $M = 22.88$, Standard deviation, $SD = 8.213$ and Females (mothers) with mean, $M = 22.78$, Standard deviation, $SD = 5.2$; $t(158) = 0.092$, $p = .927$.

4. Discussion

This is a type of non-experimental research design in which the researcher identifies two or more variables and measures the statistical relationship between them by trying to avoid the effect of extraneous variables.

The normality test was done by assessing the values of Skewness and kurtosis. As the values of Skewness falls in between -1 and +1 and the values of kurtosis falls in between -3 and +3, the data is normally distributed. The study proposed 8 objectives and hypotheses.

The first hypothesis, h_01 , asserts that there is no significant relationship between disgust propensity-sensitivity and attitude towards homosexuals among parents. As a result, correlation was performed to determine the relationship, and the results show that there is a weak negative correlation between Disgust propensity-sensitivity and Attitude towards homosexuals among parents, implying that as disgust propensity-sensitivity increases, so does the attitude toward homosexuals. This research backs up previous findings that disgust-sensitivity is associated with negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbian women (Florian van Leeuwen et. al., 2022). Another study supporting the statement is published in 2019 by Ruile Wang et al. titled 'The Association between Disgust Sensitivity and Negative Attitudes toward Homosexuality::The Mediating Role of Moral Foundations' which showed that disgust sensitivity was strongly related to negative attitudes about moral concerns in five dimensions (loyalty, fairness, care, authority, sanctity and authority);and homosexuality.

The second hypothesis, h_02 , states that there is no significant impact of disgust sensitivity and propensity on attitude towards homosexuals among parents and regression analysis was used to determine the impact. This study discovered that disgust propensity-sensitivity has a significant impact on attitudes toward homosexuals, and thus h_02 is rejected. This result is consistent with earlier research entitled "Disgust Sensitivity Predicts Intuitive Disapproval of Gays," which was published in 2009 by Yoel Inbar et al. The study discovered that the more disgust-sensitive people were, the more negative their automatic association with gay people was when compared to heterosexuals.

The third hypothesis h_03 states that there is no significant gender difference in attitude towards homosexuals among parents, and an independent sample t-test was used to determine the gender difference. The findings revealed that there is a significant gender difference in parental attitudes toward homosexuals, with mothers having a more positive attitude toward homosexuals than fathers. As a result, h_03 is rejected. This finding is consistent with the findings of an earlier study, 'Gender Differences and Attitudes Toward Homosexuality,' by Vivien K. G. Lim (2002), which found that women reported being more comfortable closely working with male homosexuals, whereas men reported the opposite. The study conducted by Florian van Leeuwen in 2022 titled 'Disgust sensitivity relates to attitudes toward gay men and lesbian women across 31 nations' have also found that men are more opposed to gay marriage and gay and lesbian sexual orientation. In 2012, Smith, Adam R conducted a research titled 'The Effects of Pathogen and Moral Disgust on Implicit and Explicit Attitudes Regarding Male Homosexuality' which found that the average male participant in the

study had a “strong” implicit bias against male homosexuals, whereas the average female participant had a “moderate” implicit bias against male homosexuals. This study also reveals that women (mothers) are more accepting of homosexuals than men (fathers).

The fourth hypothesis h_04 states that there is no significant gender difference in disgust propensity-sensitivity among parents and independent sample t-test was done to find the gender difference. The results also indicate that there is no significant gender difference and hence h_04 is accepted. This finding is not in par with the previous studies. The studies with contradicting results are as follows: A study by Pavol Prokop and Milada Jančovičová (2013) ‘Disgust Sensitivity And Gender Differences: An Initial Test Of The Parental Investment Hypothesis’ reveals that females are consistently more disgust sensitive than males. Several other researches have also found that females report stronger feelings of disgust than males (Schienle, Schäfer, Stark, Walter, & Vaitl, 2005; Gross & Levenson, 1995).

The fifth and sixth hypotheses, h_05 and h_06 , state that there is no significant difference in locality in attitude towards homosexuals among parents and disgust propensity-sensitivity among parents, respectively, and independent sample t-test results support the same. As a result, h_05 and h_06 are accepted. This demonstrates that parental attitudes toward homosexuals and disgust propensity-sensitivity do not differ between urban and rural areas.

The hypotheses h_07 and h_08 states that there is no significant gender difference in disgust propensity among parents and that there is no significant gender difference in disgust sensitivity among parents respectively and results of the independent sample t-test indicate the same. Hence, h_07 and h_08 are accepted. The study shows that disgust propensity and disgust sensitivity does not vary across genders.

5. Conclusion

The aim of the study is to understand the extent to which disgust propensity-sensitivity is related to attitude towards homosexuals among parents. The study included 160 participants (80 males and 80 females) who are parents in the age group of 21 – 70 across India. The study has two variables – Disgust propensity-sensitivity and Attitude towards homosexuals. To fulfill the study's objectives, the study employs a correlational research design. The study used convenient sampling as a sampling technique and statistical analysis techniques such as correlation, independent sample t-test, and regression analysis. According to the findings of this study, there is a weak negative correlation between Disgust propensity-sensitivity and Attitude towards homosexuals among parents and there is a significant impact of disgust propensity-sensitivity on Attitude towards homosexuals. The study also revealed that males (fathers) have poorer attitude towards homosexuals than females (mothers). Thus, efforts can be taken in improving the attitude of fathers towards the homosexual community. The study included male and female population to study the variables disgust propensity-sensitivity and attitude towards homosexuals but did not include the transgender population. The sample (N = 160) comprised responses from all throughout India, making it too small to generalize the findings. Because the study relies on self-reporting questionnaires, social desirability could have a significant impact on the findings. More research concerning the same variables in an Indian setting with a greater sample size can be conducted so that the findings and conclusions can be extended to a broader population. The study can also be made more specific in nature by focusing on attitude towards gays and lesbians separately and by measuring different aspects of disgust as well.

Limitations

The study's findings must be viewed in light of some limitations. The study's sample size is relatively small, so it cannot be generalized to the entire population. Though this study adds to the existing literature, the findings are limited to a specific age group from a few Indian states. Because the data was gathered from various online platforms, the results may have been manipulated. Another limitation of the study is that the responses can be changed according to their convenience for questions regarding homosexuality and the social desirability can affect the results as self-reporting questionnaire is used for the study. The study excluded the transgender population and only included males and females as genders. This study does not measure attitude towards gay and lesbians differently but as homosexuals in general, hence the results may not be very specific in nature.

Suggestions for further study

Data from a larger population can be collected in future studies. The current study's generalizability across the population is low due to the small sample size. As a result, gathering data from a larger population can be beneficial. To generalise the results, data can also be collected from all states of India as well. In the further studies, the information can be collected alongside other variables. There are previous studies that focused on the implicit and explicit attitudes toward male sexuality rather than attitudes toward homosexuals in general. The same study also focuses on different

types of disgust like pathogenic, sexual and moral disgust rather than disgust in general. There are prior studies where homosexual attitudes had been evaluated by four variables which included opposition to gay and lesbian sexual orientation, opposition to gay marriage, antipathy toward lesbian women and antipathy towards gay men and such studies can also be carried out in India as well. Other caregivers' attitudes, in addition to parents' can be added in the upcoming studies.

Implications

- The study shows that as disgust propensity-sensitivity increases, attitudes toward homosexuals among parents decrease. Hence, awareness can be given on controlling the propensity and sensitivity towards disgust to improve the attitude towards homosexuals.
- The awareness of the importance of having a good attitude towards homosexuals among parents can be provided. The study shows that males have poorer attitude towards homosexuals than females and this aspect can also be focused upon.

Compliance with ethical standards

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my Guide Dr. Lokesh L, HOD of the Psychology Department Dr. Molly Joy and also the Management for their support and guidance provided till the end.

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare. All authors have seen and agree to the content of the manuscript.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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