

# KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS SURVEY REPORT

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Sri Lankan society's views about sexuality and LGBT people's experiences in Sri Lanka

**Pradeep Peiris**

Social Scientists' Association

2021



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## **Acknowledgements and Disclaimer**

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The paper was written by Dr. Pradeep Peiris. The views expressed in the paper are those of the author, and not necessarily those of or endorsed by the UK Government, who do not accept responsibility for such views or information, or any reliance placed on them.

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# Executive Summary

The Social Scientists' Association undertook a survey of the knowledge, attitudes and perceptions of Sri Lankans about Sri Lankan LGBT persons<sup>i</sup>. A structured questionnaire, available in Sinhala, Tamil and English, was administered in late 2020 among 2130 individuals (respondents) in all of Sri Lanka's 25 districts. The sample was selected using a multi-stage stratified sampling technique comprising of respondents from different gender, age, education and religious groups.

This survey report<sup>ii</sup> examines and shares findings in a thematic way by reference to respondents'

answers. The survey findings have potential for further multiple level in-depth analyses for academic as well as for programmatic purposes. They may provide a snapshot of how Sri Lanka understands and views a range of matters related to Sri Lanka's LGBT community. It is hoped this report would encourage policy makers, advocacy groups and scholars to use the survey findings to inform their strategic and specific interventions to safeguard and respect the rights of Sri Lankan LGBT persons. A few selected highlights of the survey findings are as follow.

## Respondents' awareness and knowledge on LGBT persons

- A reasonable percentage said they had heard of the terms transgender (39.9%), lesbian and gay (25.6%) and bisexual (16.1%). 55% said they had not heard of any of the LGBT terms.
- Awareness of LGBT amongst younger, urban and the tertiary educated is slightly higher.
- A reasonable percentage said they personally knew someone who was transgender (27%), lesbian or gay (24%) and bisexual (21%).

## Respondents' attitudes towards LGBT persons

- Many respondents had positive attitudes towards LGBT persons in varied contexts. For instance, 59.7% said they will not be ashamed to travel next to a gay or lesbian person.
- Attitudes were mixed or negative in some contexts. On whether it would be shameful for a transgender person to be president of Sri Lanka, 49.5% agreed and 48% disagreed.

## Respondents' perceptions of and prejudices against LGBT persons

- Respondents' perceptions towards LGBT persons vary depending on the context in which a respondent and LGBT+ person are situated.
- Positive perceptions are evident in some contexts not seemingly immediately connected to a respondent's personal circumstances. 72.5% said a person living life as a LGBT person should not be punished; 65% said a LGBT person can do a job as well as any other person; 51.4% said they would support legislation to ensure the rights of LGBT persons.
- Negative perceptions are evident in some contexts closer or more personally relevant to a respondent. 59.5% said renting their house to a LGBT+ person would be a problem.
- In some personal contexts, respondents' views are mixed. 48.6% said it will not be shameful to have a LGBT child; 44.4% said it will be shameful.

*i) The survey was commissioned by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy under the Commonwealth Equality Project as part of a series of initiatives to fill gaps in research and evidence and work with and support the rights of LGBT communities and allies in Sri Lanka. Due to time and resource constraints, the survey focused specifically on LGBT rather than LGBTIQ+.*

*ii) Final report pending and will be available here: <https://www.wfd.org/network/sri-lanka/>*



- Respondents subscribe to many social prejudices tested in the survey against Sri Lankan LGBT persons. For instance, 51.4% said they go against my religion and 52.3% said association encourages a person to become like them; relevantly, upwards of 40% disagreed.

**Respondents' profile with positive or negative attitudes and perceptions could be as follows:**

**Table name**

<b>Respondents with positive attitudes and perceptions of LGBT persons</b>	<b>Respondents with negative attitudes and perceptions of LGBT persons</b>
Majority are less than 30 yrs or less	Majority are 30 years or more
Live mainly in urban localities	Live mainly in rural localities
Are educated to tertiary levels or higher	Are educated to secondary levels or lower
Higher level of awareness of LGBT identities	Lower level of awareness of LGBT identities
More interactions with LGBT persons	Fewer interactions with LGBT persons
More prevalent among those following Buddhism and Hinduism	More prevalent among those following Islam and Christianity

### Respondents' views on discrimination against LGBT

A vast majority of respondents acknowledge discrimination experienced by LGBT persons in different public and private contexts in Sri Lanka - irrespective of the respondents' awareness, attitudes and perceptions of LGBT. Examples of percentages of respondents who said Sri Lankan LGBT persons are discriminated or harassed, because they are LGBT persons include:

- 89% violence; on social media
- 87% finding rental housing; by students in school
- 69% in treatment by police



This report was funded through the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) and Kaleidoscope Trust (KT)'s Commonwealth Equality Programme (CEP) which ran from October 2020 to March 2021. CEP focused on fighting discrimination against women and girls, LGBTIQ+ people and other intersectionally disadvantaged groups in 16 Commonwealth countries in Africa, the Eastern Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific. The programme was funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) through the Conflict, Security and Stability Fund (CSSF) as part of its Commonwealth Equality Project.

The Global Equality Project (GEP), implementing between August 2021 to March 2022, will build on the accomplishments of the Commonwealth Equality Project (CEP) and ensure the momentum achieved can be sustained. Working in at least 18 countries and territories across Africa, the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific, GEP will strengthen the inclusion of women and girls, LGBT+ people, and other people with intersecting identities and experiences in democratic processes. The programme is funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).



# INTRODUCTION

Societal attitudes towards lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT<sup>1</sup>) individuals vary from one country to another. Across the world, many states have taken reformist steps to accommodate the concerns and redress, amend or repeal discriminatory policies and laws that impact the LGBT community. Despite numerous recent victories, in many parts of the world, members of the LGBT community continue to face intimidation, harassment, physical and sexual abuse, violence, and discrimination both in their offline and online lives<sup>2</sup>. People who violate gender norms, not just trans people, but also lesbian and bisexual women who are thought to look 'masculine' or gay and bisexual men who are thought to be 'not masculine enough', sometimes get targeted for abuse and discrimination. With archaic colonial legal structures and widespread societal prejudices, the Sri Lankan LGBT community also faces numerous forms of institutional discrimination and harassment including accessing employment, housing, and health services<sup>3</sup>. As the 2016 Human Rights Watch Report showed there is also widespread impunity for perpetrators - sometimes from state and non-state institutions, actors and individuals - of violence against LGBT persons<sup>4</sup>. For years, many Sri Lankan activists, either individually or as institutions, have been working tirelessly for decriminalization of laws affecting Sri Lanka's LGBT community and to advocate for their rights with policy makers, and there is no doubt about the salience of institutional reforms to ensure the rights of the LGBT community. However, in addition to institutional provisions, public support is helpful to pave the way for the introduction of positive policies and laws that are supportive of the LGBT community and create a positive social and cultural environment that allows LGBT persons to enjoy their rights and live without fear, intimidation, harassment and violence.

Anecdotal evidence shows that many Sri Lankans, including policy makers, view the term LGBT pejoratively including as a psychiatric disorder, an epidemic of Western origin, and destructive of cultural, religious, and traditional values of the country<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The report uses the term LGBT - instead of LGBT+ - as this survey specifically captured public opinion on lesbian and gay, bisexual and transgender communities.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.scribd.com/document/214827257/Not-Gonna-Take-It-Lying-Down-English>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2016/country-chapters/sri-lanka>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2016/country-chapters/sri-lanka>

<sup>5</sup> <https://lup.lub.lu.se/luur/download?func=downloadFile&recordId=8975740&fileId=8979999>

However, it is important to have scientifically collected and objectively assessed knowledge on how Sri Lankan society perceives its LGBT community. In that context, the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) commissioned the Social Scientists' Association (SSA) to administer a nation-wide Knowledge, Attitudes and Perception survey (KAPS) about the LGBT community and the discriminatory experiences they face. The survey findings, as the Westminster Foundation strongly believes, would empower engaging policy and law makers in a fruitful dialogue on the current condition of and challenges faced by the LGBT community in Sri Lanka. This report provides a brief and general overview of the findings of the survey. The survey was conducted amongst 2130 individuals across 25 districts across the country during the months of December 2020 to January 2021. Individuals from all main ethnic and religious groups, age and education brackets and localities participated in this survey. The survey captures five important aspects with regards to how the Sri Lankan public perceives its LGBT community. First, the survey attempted to capture how familiar respondents were with the terms 'lesbian and Gay' (Samarisi in Sinhala and thanpaal eerppullavar in Tamil), 'Bisexual' (Divirisi in Sinhala and irupaal eerppullavar in Tamil) and 'Transgender' (Sankranthi lingika in Sinhala and thirunar in Tamil) and their actual meanings. It also looked into whether or not the respondents knew individuals who challenge gender norms in these terms. Secondly, the survey attempted to capture the nature of public attitudes towards the LGBT community. Thirdly, people were asked to indicate to what extent they subscribe to prejudices prevalent in our society that frame the societal attitude towards the LGBT community. Fourthly, the survey attempted to assess public perception towards LGBT persons. Finally, the survey aimed to find out as to what extent people acknowledge discriminatory experiences the LGBT community face in the country. In addition, the survey captured the demographic information of respondents, allowing a structural analysis of the findings.

This report formulates its arguments solely on the quantitative survey findings to maintain

its commitment to objectivity in the analysis. However, for the benefit of readers, the findings are presented under five broad themes: i) Overview of the findings, ii) Awareness shaping attitudes towards LGBT persons, iii) Personal interactions and attitudes towards LGBT persons, iv) Perceived threat to the institution of family and v) Hope for the future. Although the survey data captured the intensity of the societal attitude towards the LGBT community, the limited qualitative interviews conducted across different communities helped to structure this report immensely. Each section is organised in a way to provide an objective analysis to highlight the struggles of the LGBT community. Therefore, this report captures not only the existing status of societal perceptions about the LGBT community, but also the structural conditions that contribute to it. We hope this report will be useful in formulating policy proposals as well as designing effective communication strategies to engage constructively diverse social groups in supporting the rights of the LGBT community.

I thank the Westminster Foundation for Democracy for their support for this survey project. This project would not have been possible without the enthusiasm and dedication of Priyanga Hettiarchchi, the Country Representative of the Westminster Foundation and Aingaran Kugathan, its local Programme Coordinator. The most difficult part of the survey was carried out by the SSA team. Shashik Danushka, Mark Schubert, Rebecca Surenthiraraj, Nuwan Sampath and the team deserve special mention for their valuable contribution to complete this survey, especially through a pandemic. I also would like to extend my heartiest gratitude to Hasini Lecamwasam, Sakina Moinudeen, Taniya Silvapulle and Kaushini Dammalage for their invaluable assistance in producing this report. A big thanks to the reference group, a panel of LGBTQ activists for the comments and critique offered to this study during our pre and post survey interactions to improve the rigor of the study. I am very grateful for the valuable comments and suggestions provided by Zainab Ibrahim which has helped to enhance the quality of this report. Thank you, too, Oshan Gunathilake, for elegantly designing this report on very short notice.



# THE STUDY

This survey was designed to capture public knowledge, attitudes and perceptions regarding the LGBT community in Sri Lanka. In addition, the survey aimed to examine the role that demographic and social structures play in influencing the views of the individual on the LGBT community. A total of 2130 respondents from 25 districts participated

in this survey. A total of 96 field investigators from Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim and Upcountry Tamil communities participated in administering the questionnaire using the face-to-face technique. The field work was conducted from December 2020 to January 2021. The detailed steps employed in this study are as follows.

- **QUESTIONNAIRE**

A carefully designed questionnaire is the key to a high-quality survey. Accuracy of measures and simplicity of language determine the precision of the findings. Since the subject of this survey is a taboo for many, designing the questionnaire was rife with challenges. In order to maintain the objectivity of the survey questionnaire, technical terms that are being used at the official level were used. However, the questionnaire was designed in a way that even those individuals who are not familiar with - and not aware of - the meaning of the terms used for lesbian and gay, bisexual and transgender could participate in the survey<sup>6</sup>. In order to capture attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions, the questionnaire used batteries of questions – propositions - with Likert scales. These propositions were developed based on the current debates on, for and against the LGBT community in Sri Lanka and abroad. The informal group discussions that were held with a group of teachers and community workers from five districts was also useful when designing those propositions. In addition, comments of the WFD team and the Reference Group were also incorporated into the questionnaire. The questionnaire that was originally designed in English was later translated to Sinhala and Tamil as the survey was administered in the language of the respondent.

- **PILOT STUDY**

A pilot test of the questionnaire was conducted among 30 respondents from Sinhala and Tamil speaking communities prior to the field deployment of the survey. In order to test the clarity of the language, sequence effect of the questions and relevance of the

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<sup>6</sup> Prior to proceeding to the attitudes, beliefs and perceptions section of the questionnaire, the meanings of the terms were explained to the respondents who did not know them.

answer categories, a pilot survey was conducted by a group of senior field supervisors. Based on the findings of the pilot study, the questionnaire was further improved.

### • ENUMERATOR TRAINING

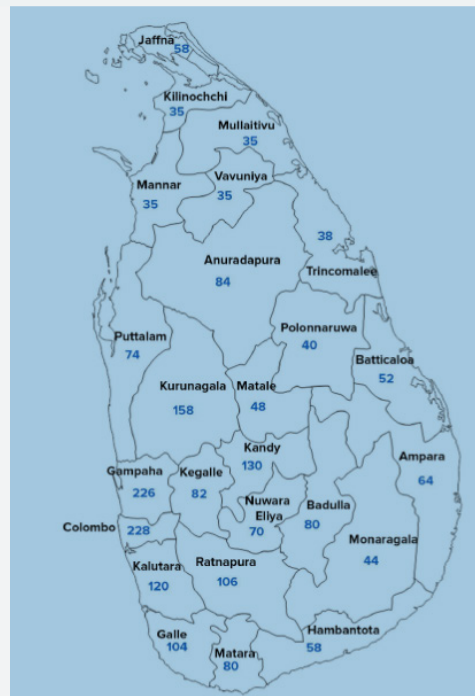
The Social Scientists' Association recruited 96 men and women from their field researcher pool and provided them a one-day comprehensive training before deploying them to conduct the field work for this study. During the field training, field enumerators were given a thorough understanding of the meaning of each question in the questionnaire in addition to the instructions on how to implement the questionnaire in the field. Field researchers were instructed to strictly confine to the original wording in the questionnaire and express no personal opinion, even implicitly, with the respondent during the interview. Although such instructions constitute standard practice in survey research, it was especially emphasized during the training to avoid any possibility of the survey findings coming under the influence of the field researchers' personal opinions. This way, the field researchers were able to administer the questionnaire in a manner that is respectful of the LGBT+ community while also respecting the opinion of the respondent.

### • SAMPLING

This survey was conducted using a form of multi-stage stratified random sampling method. A total of 2130 respondents were interviewed using the face-to-face interview technique across all 25 districts of the country. The distribution of the sample across the districts is graphically presented in Figure 1.

*Stages of sampling:*

- **First Stage:** The total sample was distributed across all 25 districts based on the Population Proportionate Sampling (PPS) method.
- **Second Stage:** Each district sample was further distributed across Local Authority Areas to capture the views of diverse communities within each district. Sample allocation at this stage also followed PPS method.
- **Third Stage:** Within each selected Local Authority Area, 2 GN Divisions were selected randomly. Within each GN Division, a starting point was randomly selected to initiate the random walk method to select the respondents randomly. This ensured that the sample within the local authority area is dispersed, rather than concentrated in one location.
- **Fourth Stage:** Households were selected in each GN division using the right-hand-rule<sup>7</sup>. However, a quota was introduced - 25% young (less than 30 years) men, 25% young women, 25% older (30 years or more) men, 25% older women- in order to ensure the survey represents multiple age and gender groups across all districts.



<sup>7</sup> The right-hand-rule is used for the selection of households in field research of household surveys. This rule states that after reaching the starting point, the investigator has to visit households falling on the right-hand side.

- **LIMITATION**

This survey provides a broader overview of Sri Lankan's knowledge, attitudes and perceptions of LGBT persons. However, this positivist research approach has its own limitations when capturing a sensitive subject such as attitudes and perceptions of LGBT persons. Limited discourse on LGBT rights through vernacular languages caused significant challenges to administer a questionnaire among respondents from different social and educational classes. As LGBT is considered a taboo subject for a majority of Sri Lankans, the survey could not completely prevent the effect of socially undesirability on the survey responses. No respondent, perhaps due to societal pressure, identifies themselves as a LGBT person.







# OVERVIEW OF THE FINDINGS

This section provides a general overview of the findings of the survey. The survey aimed to assess the level of familiarity and awareness of the terminologies referring to lesbian and gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) communities. In addition, the survey tried to capture the perceptions of and attitudes towards LGBT persons while assessing the extent to which people subscribe to existing societal prejudices about the same community. Further, the study captures differences in attitudes towards LGBT persons from respondents who belong to demographically different groups.

In general, the survey reveals that people's awareness of as well as exposure to the LGBT

community is very weak. The findings suggest that people exhibit more negative perceptions, in general, of LGBT persons, even though these attitudes towards people belonging to different sexuality and gender identities varies<sup>8</sup>. People exhibit more positive attitudes towards transgender persons than lesbian and gay persons. However, irrespective of their perceptions and attitudes, the majority who participated in this study readily accepted some of the existing prejudices against the LGBT community. The survey reveals diversity in the Sri Lankan society in terms of knowledge of, attitudes towards and perceptions of LGBT persons.

### *Familiarity, awareness, and exposure*

The survey aimed to examine the nature of the public's awareness of the three selected identities – lesbian and gay, bisexual, and transgender<sup>9</sup>. Numerous terms are used to refer to different genders and sexualities in the everyday language of our society. Some of these words are derogatory and discriminatory towards people from the LGBT community, and are used to attack, demean, and vilify. Such words not only signify various existing social prejudices towards those who challenge gender and sexual norms, but also often produce false conceptions. For example, in colloquial Sinhala, a gay man is referred to in terms like 'gal kaaraya' and 'kolu karaya', while in Tamil the equivalents are 'kambi kaaran'. Similarly, lesbians are called 'aappa' in Sinhala and 'aappam' in Tamil. These terms do not demonstrate a conception of sexuality as a secular, value neutral, and individual choice-based phenomenon concerning the

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*8 In this study the term attitude is used when referring to people's disposition towards a specific sexuality or gender identity, while term perception is used to refer to people's dispositions of LGBT persons in general.*

*9 This categorization on the basis of 1) same-sex attraction – lesbian and gay; 2) attraction to two sexes – bisexual; 3) gender identity – transgender*

person. Instead, they signal the popular understanding of LGBT identities as something lying outside of accepted sexual and gender norms. Often those popular terminologies seem to portray LGBT individuals as perpetrators, predators, and/ or as possessing problematic sexual desires. Therefore, in any form of serious discussion, it is of paramount importance to refer to lesbian and gay, bisexual and transgender individuals in formal terms no matter how unfamiliar they are to average citizens. In this context, the survey used the terms 'samarisi', 'divirisi', and 'sankranthi lingika' in Sinhala and 'thanpaal eerppullavar', 'irupaal eerppullavar', and 'thirunar' in Tamil to refer to the three communities it focuses on.

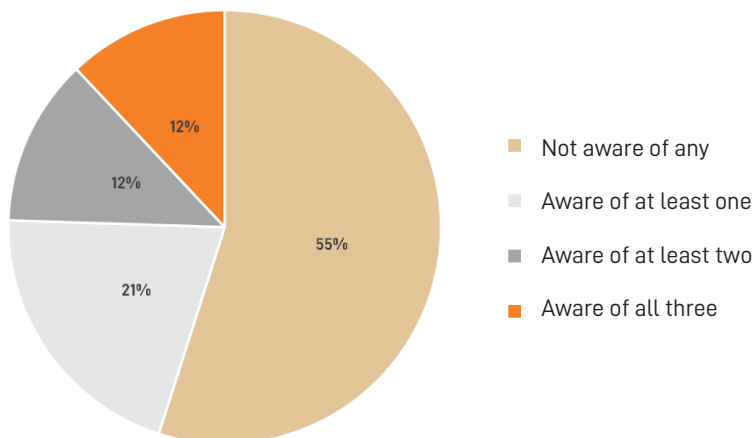
For the purpose of this study, the following definitions were used for:

- **Lesbian:** Sexual orientation of a woman whose primary sexual and romantic attraction is toward other women.
- **Gay:** Synonym in many parts of the world for homosexual; used here to refer to the sexual orientation of a man whose primary sexual and romantic attraction is towards other men.
- **Bisexual:** Sexual orientation of a person who is sexually and romantically attracted to both women and men.
- **Transgender:** Gender identity of people whose assigned gender (which they were declared to have upon birth) does not conform to their lived gender (the gender that they are most comfortable with expressing or would express given a choice). A transgender person usually adopts, or would prefer to adopt, a gender expression in consonance with their preferred gender, but may or may not desire to permanently alter their bodily characteristics to conform to their preferred gender.

The use of unfamiliar words results in ambiguity both in the question as well as in the answer. To avoid such, the survey asked a series of questions to assess the respondents' familiarity with these terms and their respective meanings. Further, respondents were asked whether they know of people with such identities, and whether that acquaintance is in a personal capacity. Answers to a list of such questions demonstrated the respondents' level of awareness of these identities.

Not everyone who claimed that they are familiar with the terms lesbian and gay, bisexual and transgender knew the meaning of those terms. Familiarity with the terms and knowing what they really mean are two different things. In this report, the term 'awareness' is used when someone claims to 'have heard of the term as well as knew its meaning'. The survey findings show that people are not equally aware of all types of gender and sexual identities considered in this report; some knew the term and meaning of all the terms, some only one or two. There were people who knew none of the formal terms for LGBT identities in any of the three local languages Sinhala, Tamil or English. According to the survey findings, a majority of respondents (55%) were unaware of the term lesbian and gay, bisexual and transgender. Further, 21% were aware of at least one term, 12% at least two terms, and only 12% indicated that they were aware of all the terms. Awareness was comparatively higher among men, youth, those more educated, and those who live in urban localities. Christians and Muslims show higher awareness compared to Buddhists and Hindus (see table 3.1).

**Figure 3.1: Awareness: Have heard of the term as well as knew the meaning**



**Table 3.1: Awareness of terminology on gender identity and sexual orientation by demographics (read row-wise)**

		Knew the term and its meaning				Base
		Not aware of any	Aware of at least one	Aware of at least two	Aware of all three	
1. Sex	Male	53.4%	19.9%	12.2%	14.5%	1061
	Female	56.4%	21.2%	12.8%	9.5%	1069
	Other	-	-	-	-	-
2. Age	18-24	46.4%	25.7%	15.0%	12.9%	575
	25-29	46.4%	20.7%	15.8%	17.1%	468
	30-39	55.7%	21.2%	11.6%	11.6%	415
	40-49	59.8%	19.0%	12.1%	9.2%	306
	50 and above	74.3%	12.8%	5.7%	7.1%	366
3. Religion	Buddhist	66.6%	16.5%	8.1%	8.7%	1420
	Hindu	31.1%	28.5%	26.8%	13.7%	351
	Islam	26.6%	33.1%	19.5%	20.7%	169
	Christian	36.8%	24.7%	12.6%	25.8%	190
4. Ethnicity	Sinhala	65.3%	16.8%	8.1%	9.8%	1508
	Tamil	31.5%	27.3%	24.2%	16.9%	384
	Upcountry Tamil	24.3%	32.4%	27.0%	16.2%	74
	Muslim	28.0%	34.1%	18.9%	18.9%	164

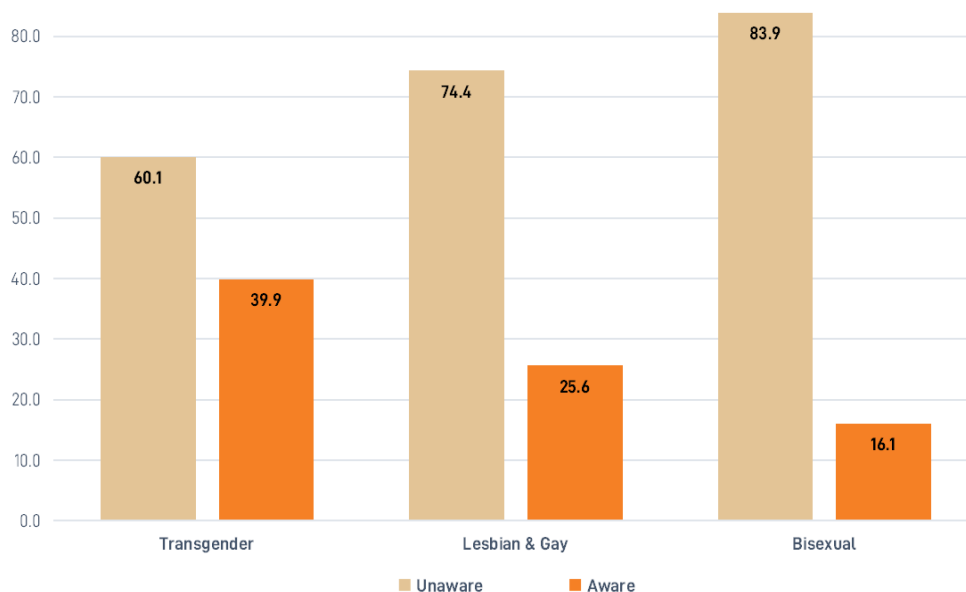
5. Education Qualification	Upto O/L	74.5%	17.0%	7.0%	1.5%	471
	O/L and A/L	56.5%	21.2%	11.5%	10.8%	1212
	Diploma and professional degree	34.4%	24.4%	19.4%	21.7%	180
	Degree and above	27.0%	21.3%	22.1%	29.6%	267
6. Locality	Urban	42.2%	21.2%	17.3%	19.3%	481
	Rural	58.6%	20.4%	11.1%	9.9%	1649

As depicted in the table above awareness varies by gender, age, religion, ethnicity, education and the locality of the respondent. More men were aware of LGBT identities than women. Young, educated and those who live in urban localities had more awareness than others. Compared to people from other religious groups, Christians and Muslims showed a higher level of awareness of LGBT identities. This is not surprising as homosexuality is strongly condemned in the more conservative interpretations of religious doctrines in Christianity and Islam. In addition to the scriptures, the religious institutions of both these Abrahamic religions openly denounce genders and sexualities that are outside of traditional norms. The findings show that those who speak Tamil as their mother tongue have a higher level of awareness (at least about one third of the community) than the Sinhalese. As highlighted in the qualitative interviews, the Tamil terms used for lesbian and gay, bisexual and transgender persons are

somewhat popular amongst the Tamil speaking community due to the influence of South Indian cinema.

While overall awareness varies across different demographic and social groups, the survey shows that people show different levels of awareness for each identity. Overall, people seemed to have a higher level of awareness of the term 'transgender' as opposed to the terms 'gay', 'lesbian', and 'bisexual'. About 40% of those who participated in this study were aware of transgender, while only about 26% and 16% were aware of the lesbian, gay, and bisexual categories. Whilst awareness of these identities was greater amongst the urban population in comparison to the rural population, the survey highlights that a person's level of education too, correlates with awareness. Furthermore, there does not seem to be any significant variation of the levels of awareness of these terms among women and men.

**Figure 3.2: Awareness of gender and sexual identities**



**Table 3.2: Awareness of LGBT identities by demographics (read row-wise)**

		Transgender		Lesbian & Gay		Bisexual		Base
		Unaware	Aware	Unaware	Aware	Unaware	Aware	
1. Sex	Male	59.1%	40.9%	71.3%	28.7%	81.9%	18.1%	<b>1061</b>
	Female	61.1%	38.9%	77.5%	22.5%	86.0%	14.0%	<b>1069</b>
	Other	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2. Age	18-24	53.7%	46.3%	69.6%	30.4%	82.4%	17.6%	<b>575</b>
	25-29	50.4%	49.6%	67.5%	32.5%	78.4%	21.6%	<b>468</b>
	30-39	61.9%	38.1%	74.9%	25.1%	84.1%	15.9%	<b>415</b>
	40-49	63.7%	36.3%	78.4%	21.6%	87.3%	12.7%	<b>306</b>
	50 and above	77.3%	22.7%	86.6%	13.4%	90.4%	9.6%	<b>366</b>
3. Religion	Buddhist	73.0%	27.0%	79.8%	20.2%	88.2%	11.8%	<b>1420</b>
	Hindu	33.0%	67.0%	64.7%	35.3%	79.2%	20.8%	<b>351</b>
	Islam	30.8%	69.2%	62.1%	37.9%	72.8%	27.2%	<b>169</b>
	Christian	39.5%	60.5%	62.6%	37.4%	70.5%	29.5%	<b>190</b>
4. Ethnicity	Sinhalese	71.4%	28.6%	78.8%	21.2%	87.4%	12.6%	<b>1508</b>
	Tamil	33.6%	66.4%	62.0%	38.0%	77.9%	22.1%	<b>384</b>
	Upcountry Tamil	28.4%	71.6%	70.3%	29.7%	66.2%	33.8%	<b>74</b>
	Muslim	32.3%	67.7%	64.6%	35.4%	74.4%	25.6%	<b>164</b>
5. Education Qualification	Up-to O/L	77.3%	22.7%	92.4%	7.6%	94.9%	5.1%	<b>471</b>
	O/L and A/L	61.8%	38.2%	76.1%	23.9%	85.6%	14.4%	<b>1212</b>
	Diploma and professional degree	43.3%	56.7%	55.0%	45.0%	73.3%	26.7%	<b>180</b>
	Degree and above	33.3%	66.7%	47.9%	52.1%	64.4%	35.6%	<b>267</b>
6. Locality	Urban	49.7%	50.3%	59.0%	41.0%	77.5%	22.5%	<b>481</b>
	Rural	63.1%	36.9%	78.8%	21.2%	85.8%	14.2%	<b>1649</b>

Although men seemed to possess slightly higher levels of awareness of each category than women, this difference is insignificant when compared to the differences of awareness among different age, religious, education and locality groups. Those below 30 years, belonging to Christian and Islam religions, possessing above Advanced Level educational qualifications, and living in urban localities clearly seemed to possess high levels of awareness of lesbian and gay, bisexual, and transgender persons. Generally, the Tamil speaking communities exhibit a comparatively higher level of awareness of LGBT persons. Their awareness of transgender persons was particularly high.

## Investigating awareness further

As already mentioned, the survey carried a series of questions to assess the respondents' level of awareness of the identities that this study focuses on: Has the respondent heard the terms? If so, do they know the meaning of them? For those who did not know the meaning of the terms, once it was explained to them, did they know of people who identified with any of these identities? Have they ever personally known people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender?

In terms of familiarity with the term 'transgender' – a majority (51%) claimed that they are aware; with a significant proportion among them (78.2%) indicating that they knew what it means to be transgender. The respondents appeared to be the least familiar with the term 'bisexual' with only 22.5% claiming that they were aware of it. Approximately 35% of the respondents indicated that they are familiar with the terms 'gay and lesbian'. Most of those who claimed that they

have heard of the term lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender knew their meanings. Once the respondents were briefed about the meanings of the terms, an overwhelming majority claimed that they knew of people who identified as 'transgender' and 'lesbian and gay'. Interestingly, even after describing the meaning of the term 'bisexual', a comparatively smaller number of respondents said they knew or knew of people who identify as 'bisexual'. According to the focus groups discussion, respondents felt the identity of transgender is comparatively easier as on the one hand often they can be identified from physical features – no matter how disrespectful it is – as it has been very much part of the South Asian cultures for a long time. On the other hand, respondents argued that for a person who is familiar with mainstream sexualities - lesbian, gay, and bisexual identities seem to be less recognizable due to their physical appearance.

**Table 3.3: Levels of awareness**

	Gay and Lesbian	Bisexual	Transgender
1. Familiar with the term	34.9%	22.5%	51.0%
2. Familiar with the term and knew its meaning	73.5%	71.3%	78.2%
3. Did not know the meaning but was able to recognize with help	79.6%	49.8%	83.4%
4. Personally knew someone who is LGBT	23.9%	21.3%	26.8%

The table shows that the transgender identity is more familiar to Sri Lankan society. More than half of the sample claimed to be familiar with the term and a significant majority of them acknowledged they know what that term means. Even among those who were not familiar with term, 83% identified the community once they were briefed. It is noteworthy to highlight that comparatively, the youth seemed to be more familiar with these identities than those from the adult population. Likewise, familiarity was higher amongst the urban population, whilst the rural population seemed to

be more familiar with the term 'transgender' as opposed to gay, lesbian, and bisexual.

In terms of the correlation between levels of education and awareness, it is evident that a significantly higher proportion among those who have obtained a diploma, professional degree and a postgraduate degree indicate that they are familiar with terms gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender as opposed to those who have been educated up to the Ordinary Level.

## Personal interaction with LGBT persons

The survey asked respondents about their personal interactions with people among their family, friends or community who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender. The findings showed that 27% of people said they personally knew someone who was transgender, 24% said

they knew someone who identified as lesbian, and 21% said they knew someone who was bisexual. More men than women among survey respondents, and those who had pursued an education beyond the Advanced Level, said they had met or knew someone who was LGBT.

**Table 3.4: Have you ever personally known someone who is a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender person?**

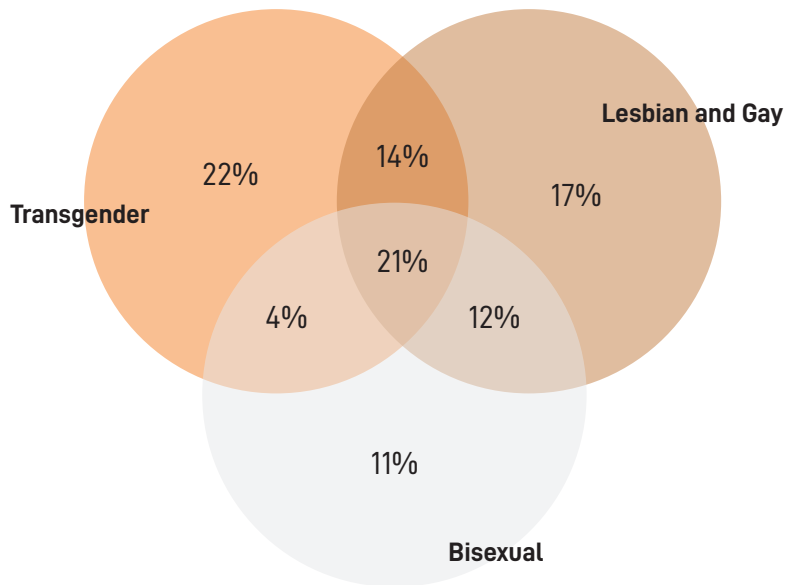
		Gay and Lesbian	Bisexual	Transgender
1. Sex	Male	30.9%	24.9%	28.7%
	Female	16.4%	17.1%	24.7%
	Other	-	-	-
2. Age	Youth (below 30yrs)	23.0%	20.4%	25.2%
	Older (above 30yrs)	24.9%	22.4%	28.3%
3. Locality	Urban	26.4%	21.4%	29.9%
	Rural	23.2%	21.3%	25.9%
4. Ethnicity	Sinhala	23.4%	18.7%	26.4%
	Sri Lankan Tamil	23.8%	26.2%	23.1%
	Upcountry Tamil	20.6%	50.0%	29.0%
	Sri Lankan Moor	32.1%	29.5%	37.0%
5. Education	Up to O/L	17.4%	18.5%	27.4%
	O/L – A/L	21.4%	19.7%	25.2%
	Diploma and Professional degree	33.9%	20.5%	29.8%
	Postgraduate degree	35.9%	32.2%	30.7%

During the focus group discussion, it was clear that people who spent time outside of their home environment, such as in boarding houses, either met, knew of or interacted more with people who did not conform to heteronormative roles in relation to gender and sexual orientation. In addition, men discussed the topic of sexuality more openly among their male friends than women did among theirs.

## Nature of interactions

Survey findings around awareness of respondents shows that, if someone is known to a person from one of the LGBT identities, there is a 51% chance that they might know someone else from among the other identities as well.

**Figure 3.3: Have you ever personally known someone who is a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender person?**



As illustrated in the Venn diagram above, of those who claimed that they have known someone from the lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender categories, 21% said they are known to people from all identities. According to the findings, 22% of the respondents reported that they are only known to someone from the transgender community, 17% known to someone from the lesbian and gay community but not from other groups, and 11% that they are known only to a person from the bisexual community.

### Attitudes towards lesbian, gay and transgender persons

The survey attempted to capture difference in people's attitudes towards lesbian and gay and transgender persons. The transgender identity, as mentioned before, is not alien to Sri Lankan society. Despite the inferior status accorded to them, transgender persons are very much part of Sri Lankan culture, as elsewhere in South Asia. Even to date, transgender persons perform in the annual processions of many prominent temples in the country. Hindi and Tamil cinema, which are popular among upper middle and working class Sri Lankans, often portray transgender characters in their movies. Compared to transgender persons, the discourse on lesbian, gay and bisexual persons

is limited in general and often concentrated in metropolitan, non-vernacular circles. As one of respondents who participated in the qualitative interviews stated, lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals are not absent in rural society. Instead, they are not open about their sexual orientation or practice their sexuality in secret. Although close friends are often aware of their friend's sexuality, there seems to be a consensus among them to not publicly talk about it. Outside of middle and upper middle classes, teachers and women who work at garment factories acknowledge associating with people who belong to the lesbian, gay and bisexual communities.



**Table 3.5: Attitudes towards LGBT persons**

Attitudes towards transgender people	Percentages				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Do not know
1. It will not be shameful if a transgender person were to be President of Sri Lanka	16.8	30.2	32.2	17.3	3.5
2. I will be ashamed travelling next to a transgender person on public transport (such as bus, train)	7.2	20.2	52.3	17.3	2.9
3. I will be ashamed if someone sees me speaking to a transgender person in public	7.8	25.7	47.9	15.9	2.6
4. I will not be ashamed if my neighbor were a transgender person	18.4	44.2	27.1	7.7	2.6
Attitudes towards gay and lesbian	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Do not know
5. It will not be shameful if a gay or lesbian person were to be President of Sri Lanka	10.1	25.2	38.7	21.8	4.1
6. I will be ashamed travelling next to a gay or lesbian person on public transport (such as bus, train)	10.8	25.8	48.2	11.5	3.7
7. I will be ashamed if someone sees me speaking to a gay or lesbian person in public	12.8	31.9	40.5	11.5	3.4
8. I will not be ashamed if my neighbor were a gay or lesbian person	13.1	39.3	33.1	10.9	3.5

The above table shows the respondents' agreement (or the lack of it) with certain statements that were read out to them, in order to assess their attitudes towards transgender persons. The statements capture the respondents' attitudes towards a range of scenarios, from macro political and representational issues to more everyday concerns. Except for having a transgender person as the President of the country, a majority of people (just above 50% of the sample) reported being fine with travelling next to a transgender person on public transport, being seen speaking to a transgender person in public, and having someone from the transgender community as a neighbour. As the previous section on awareness has also

highlighted, this may be due to the longstanding familiarity with fluid gender identities from pre-modern times in South Asia (and in fact much of the non-Western world) (Menon 2012, p. 53-54).

Things take a sharp turn when the issue involves homosexuality, however. A clear majority disagrees (or strongly disagrees) that it is not shameful to have a homosexual person as the country's President. It should be remembered that the 2019 and 2020 elections campaigns triggered very strong negative publicity for homosexuality as political parties and politicians verbally attacked their political opponents by claiming they were homosexuals. When the stakes are not so high, on

the other hand, this resistance seems to soften. For instance, 60% of the sample claimed that they will not be ashamed to travel next to a homosexual person on public transport. Just above half the sample claimed that they are fine with being seen talking to such a person in public, as well as that they will be fine with their neighbour being a

homosexual person. This is indicative of the terms on which many want to see the country's image being portrayed, which has much to do with their cultural conditioning and its resultant expectation that such an image be conservative and therefore 'acceptable'.

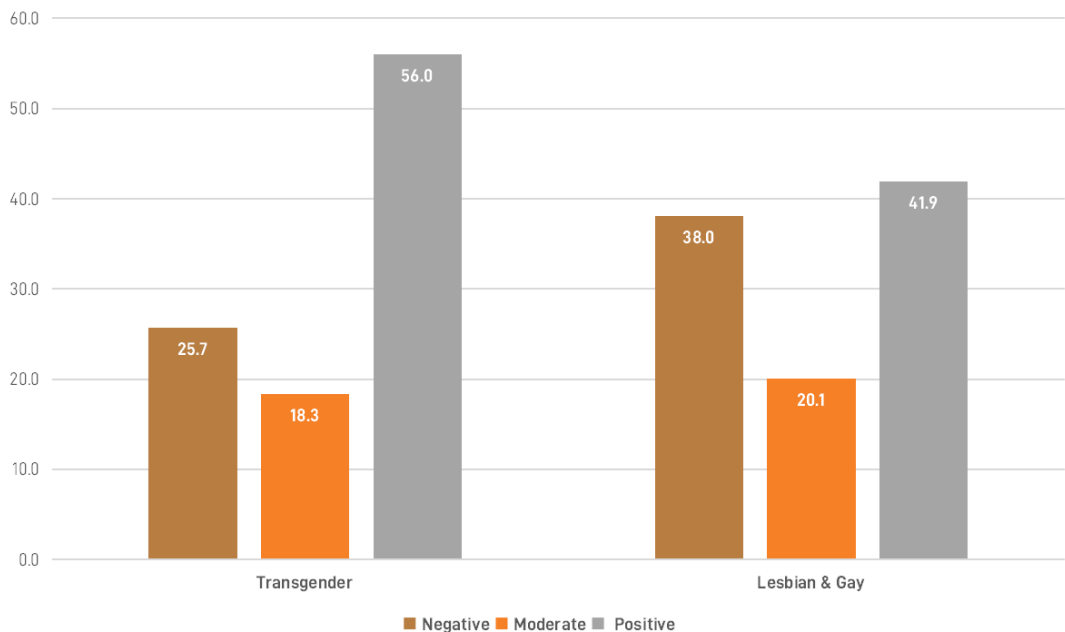
### Composite index for attitudes towards LGBT persons

The survey used a set of questions to capture the public's attitude towards persons of the LGBT community. Based on their answers to four statements, respondents were identified as having either 'Negative attitudes', 'Moderate attitudes', or 'Positive attitudes' towards LGBT persons. These categories were defined as follows:

**Positive attitudes:** Agreeing to three or four statements positively  
**Moderate attitudes:** Agreeing to two statements positively  
**Negative attitudes:** Agreeing to one statement positively

The graph below shows that attitudes towards transgender persons are somewhat different from the attitudes towards lesbian, gay and bisexual persons. More than half of the respondents expressed positive attitudes towards transgender persons, while they exhibited more mixed attitudes towards lesbian and gay persons.

**Figure 3.4: Attitudes towards LGBT persons – composite index**



**Table 3.6: Attitudes towards LGBT persons – composite index by demographics**

		Transgender (%)			Gay and Lesbian (%)		
		Negative	Moderate	Positive	Negative	Moderate	Positive
1. Sex	Male	25.0%	19.0%	55.9%	34.6%	19.8%	45.6%
	Female	26.3%	17.6%	56.1%	41.4%	20.1%	38.5%
	Other	-	-	-	-	-	-
2. Age	Youth (below 30yrs)	21.4%	16.7%	61.9%	34.1%	18.6%	47.3%
	Older (above 30yrs)	29.9%	19.9%	50.2%	41.8%	21.3%	36.9%
3. Locality	Urban	22.9%	14.3%	62.7%	35.6%	15.9%	48.5%
	Rural	26.5%	19.5%	54.0%	38.7%	21.2%	40.1%
4. Ethnicity	Sinhala	28.0%	20.5%	51.4%	33.8%	21.1%	45.1%
	Sri Lankan Tamil	14.5%	13.5%	72.0%	40.3%	18.1%	41.6%
	Upcountry Tamil	35.1%	10.8%	54.1%	77.0%	12.2%	10.8%
	Sri Lankan Moor	25.9%	13.0%	61.1%	54.8%	18.7%	26.5%
5. Education	Up to O/L	37.4%	19.9%	42.7%	50.4%	18.8%	30.8%
	O/L – A/L	26.8%	17.8%	55.3%	38.0%	20.1%	41.9%
	Diploma and Professional degree	12.3%	18.4%	69.3%	24.4%	18.3%	57.2%
	Postgraduate degree	9.4%	17.7%	72.9%	25.8%	22.5%	51.7%

The above table shows how respondents' attitudes towards transgender persons varies from their general attitudes towards lesbian, gay, and homosexual persons. Although attitudes of men and women towards transgender persons does not vary significantly, their attitudes towards the other categories shows a clear difference. Tamil, Upcountry Tamil, and Muslim communities clearly exhibit positive attitudes towards transgender persons, even though they do not show the same attitudes towards the other groups. This variation can be observed across almost all demographic categories. Therefore, the findings clearly suggest that the attitude of Sri Lankan society towards the LGBT community is not homogeneous.

## Social prejudices towards LGBT persons

Social prejudices are powerful structures that shape individual's choice and reasoning. These prejudices are constructed and sustained by numerous cultural institutions such as religion and education, in their doctrine as well as in their practices. There are many prejudices against LGBT

persons in our society, though not all are equally strong. The survey listed eight statements that capture some of the existing prejudices against LGBT persons to examine the extent to which the respondents subscribe to prejudices against LGBT persons.

**Table 3.7: Social prejudices and their popularity**

	Percentages				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Do not know
1. These are Western concepts	19.2	38.5	24.8	7.6	10.0
2. They go against nature	15.4	38.4	32.9	7.2	6.2
3. These are illnesses	10.9	36.2	32.8	10.1	10.0
4. These go against my religion	18.6	32.8	34.4	8.5	5.8
5. They become so due to karma/sin/satan	13.0	36.8	26.7	13.1	10.5
6. They are threat to our culture	22.9	45.7	23.1	5.2	3.1
7. Association with them encourages a person to become someone like them	13.9	38.4	31.6	7.8	8.3
8. There are more STDs among them compared to others	19.0	40.9	13.3	3.4	23.4

The understanding of the LGBT identity as pathology was evident in the overall response to the battery of questions asked under the 'prejudices' section. The survey findings demonstrate that a majority of the respondents are in agreement with the list of prejudices read out to them. The three least popular prejudices are 'these are illnesses', 'they have become so due to karma/sin', and 'these go against my religion'. The most popular prejudices are 'they are threat to our culture', 'there are more STDs among them compared to others', and 'these are Western concepts'. These findings mirror deep-

rooted prejudices in our society against LGBT persons. During the qualitative group discussions with groups of teachers and government servants, participants highlighted how various TV programmes on both private and government networks popularize various phobias against the LGBT community. They further explained how conservative medical professionals contribute to the spreading of misconceptions of LGBT persons. In addition, politicians who always make populist statements with a view to amass votes, also have contributed to creating a negative view about LGBT persons.

## General perceptions towards LGBT persons

One of the main objectives of the survey was to ascertain the nature of public perception of LGBT persons. To capture the complex picture of social perceptions of the LGBT community, the survey included 17 statements in the questionnaire.

**Table 3.8: Perceptions of LGBT persons**

	Percentages				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Do not know
1. Renting my house to a LGBT person will not be a problem to me	10.5	27.7	42.0	17.5	2.3
2. Renting houses to LGBT persons could threaten that community's way of life	15.6	50.9	23.6	6.8	3.1
3. I will be uncomfortable having a LGBT person at my office/workplace	10.0	32.0	42.2	11.1	4.7
4. LGBT persons can do any job just as well as other people	19.2	44.0	20.0	3.5	13.3
5. It would be not be a problem to me if my child's class teacher is a LGBT person	8.1	22.6	48.3	16.7	4.4
6. Having LGBT teachers in schools will ruin the next generation	14.0	44.8	27.3	7.7	6.2
7. If a LGBT student is in my child's class it will not be a problem to me	9.6	31.4	42.6	11.9	4.6
8. Having LGBT students in schools with other children could lead to problematic situations	16.3	58.1	17.9	3.7	4.0
9. It will be shameful to have a LGBT child	9.7	34.7	35.3	13.3	6.9
10. If LGBT persons are scolded on social media, it is a result of their fault	8.0	30.0	39.1	12.1	10.9
11. If LGBT persons are assaulted, it is a result of their fault	7.3	29.6	41.7	12.8	8.6
12. I will never cast my vote for a LGBT person at the Parliamentary election	20.5	35.6	27.3	11.0	5.6
13. LGBT persons are also suitable to be Prime Minister of the country	8.4	25.1	38.4	23.2	5.0
14. LGBT persons are also suitable be President of the country	7.6	25.1	38.3	23.8	5.1
15. I will not support specialised legislation which seeks to ensure the rights of LGBT persons	9.3	31.7	36.5	14.9	7.6
16. Living as a LGBT person should be a punishable offense	4.3	15.2	49.2	23.3	7.9
17. Our Constitution should guarantee that LGBT persons are also treated equally as other people	21.4	43.3	20.4	5.2	9.7

An interesting pattern emerges in relation to perceptions. Respondents seemed to generally demonstrate a greater level of comfort with the LGBT community when quizzed on a level that was not immediately relevant to their private life. For instance, a clear majority agreed that the Constitution should treat them on equal footing with others in society, while a clear majority also disagreed that being LGBT constitutes a punishable offense. However, when it came to more personally felt issues such as renting out one's house to a person who identifies as LGBT, having an LGBT person as the class teacher of

one's child, the perceived impact of the LGBT community on the more traditional way of life of heteronormative people in the community etc., a clear majority responded in terms that indicate a negative disposition towards the LGBT community. In addition, people were not on board with having someone from the LGBT community representing them as the key leaders of the state. This is important as it has implications for how much and on what levels acceptance of the LGBT identity may be found in society, which in turn can feed into any advocacy/ policy interventions on LGBT rights.

### Composite index on people's perceptions of LGBT persons

The composite index on perceptions collapses all the answers to the above 17 statements into one variable. This single variable indicates whether the respondent is someone with positive, moderate, or negative perceptions of LGBT persons. Although the classification is subject to the writer's discretion, it enabled objective comparisons across different demographic groups. The perceptions categories are defined as follows:

**Positive perceptions:** Agreeing to 11 or more statements positively  
**Moderate perceptions:** Agreeing to 6 to 10 statements positively  
**Negative perceptions:** Agreeing to less than 5 statements positively

**Table 3.9: Composite index of perceptions by demographics**

		Perceptions (%)		
		Negative	Moderate	Positive
1. Sex	Male	46.3%	29.3%	24.4%
	Female	51.6%	28.4%	19.9%
	Other	-	-	-
2. Age	Youth (below 30yrs)	40.8%	31.6%	27.6%
	Older (above 30yrs)	56.8%	26.2%	17.0%
3. Locality	Urban	43.9%	26.6%	29.5%
	Rural	50.4%	29.5%	20.0%
4. Ethnicity	Sinhala	49.1%	30.1%	20.8%
	Sri Lankan Tamil	41.1%	25.8%	33.1%
	Upcountry Tamil	70.3%	23.0%	6.8%
	Sri Lankan Moor	56.5%	27.3%	16.1%
5. Religion	Buddhist	48.8%	30.9%	20.3%
	Hindu	41.6%	27.1%	31.3%
	Islamist	55.4%	27.1%	17.5%
	Christian	58.4%	18.4%	23.2%

6. Education	Up to O/L	65.1%	22.1%	12.8%
	O/L – A/L	49.3%	30.7%	20.1%
	Diploma and Professional degree	38.9%	30.6%	30.6%
	Postgraduate degree	26.2%	31.5%	42.3%

The above table reiterates the general pattern that men, young, urban dwellers and educated individuals exhibit more positive perceptions than others. According to the composite index, Tamils and Sinhalese, compared to the other two ethnic groups, seemed to have more positive perceptions

of the LGBT community. In terms of religion, the Hindu community exhibited more positive perceptions than the other three religious groups in the country. As depicted in the above table, Christians and Muslims showed the highest level of negative perceptions.

### Acknowledging the existence of discrimination against LGBT persons

The fact that members of the LGBT community face discrimination on many different levels in society is something that many respondents readily accepted. Questions focusing on such discrimination in multiple places (like schools, hospitals, police, job market, real estate, etc.) all had a clear majority of the sample agreeing. An acknowledgment of the hardships faced by the LGBT community is evident here. However, one needs to keep in mind that this is still within the 'comfort zone' of the respondent, so to speak, in terms of how relevant the subject matter is to them personally, and therefore how politically correct they can afford to be. Since the difficulties

faced by the LGBT community are largely hypothetical questions to most respondents, and thus do not involve any personal stakes as such, they can be very accepting and accommodating. This is a pattern discernible in the responses given to questions on attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions as well, where respondents were more receptive of those of the LGBT community as long as the question remained abstract. The moment it touches on what is 'real' to the respondent (such as their own child, neighbourhood, or even the image of the country), this receptivity suffers a steep decline.

**Table 3.10: Acknowledging the existence of discriminations against LGBT people**

	Percentages				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Do not know
1. They find it difficult to obtain houses on rent because they are LGBT persons	27.3	60.2	8.2	1.7	2.6
2. They find it difficult to find jobs because they are LGBT persons	24.0	58.4	12.6	2.0	3.0
3. They are subjected to discrimination by the Police because they are LGBT persons	17.2	52.0	16.7	3.5	10.6
4. They are subjected to discrimination by the doctors because they are LGBT persons	9.2	32.4	39.0	9.5	9.8
5. They are subjected to discrimination by Nurses because they are LGBT persons	10.8	37.2	34.4	7.6	10.0
6. They are subjected to discrimination by the minor staff at hospitals because they are LGBT persons	15.0	49.6	21.6	4.3	9.4
7. They are subjected to discrimination by the teachers in schools because they are LGBT students	13.8	48.5	24.7	6.7	6.4
8. They are subjected to discrimination by other students in schools because they are LGBT students	26.3	61.1	6.9	1.2	4.5
9. They are subjected to harassment on social media because they are LGBT persons	21.1	57.9	10.2	1.7	9.1
10. They are subjected to violence because they are LGBT persons	21.6	57.8	10.5	1.7	8.3

■ ■ ■



# AWARENESS SHAPING ATTITUDES TOWARDS LGBT PERSONS

The report has already discussed widespread ignorance about LGBT persons. The existing discourse on the LGBT community is significantly tainted by various cultural prejudices. Therefore, the survey employed a number of questions to assess whether people really were aware of the terms used for identities such as lesbian and gay, bisexual, and transgender. The term 'awareness' is used in this study to denote the fact that a person was not only familiar with the term, but he/she also knew its meaning.

The survey clearly shows that awareness has a strong correlation with positive attitudes, beliefs and perceptions of the LGBT community. Those who were aware of the transgender identity tended to also harbour a comparatively higher level of positive attitudes towards the transgender community. In order to examine public attitudes towards the transgender community, the survey presented four statements and asked respondents to state their agreement or disagreement with them.

**Table 4.1: Attitudes towards LGBT persons**

Attitudes towards transgender		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Base
1. It will not be shameful if a transgender person were to be President of Sri Lanka	Unaware	11.8%	24.8%	38.3%	20.9%	1280
	Aware	24.4%	38.4%	23.1%	11.9%	850
2. I will be ashamed travelling next to a transgender person on public transport (such as bus, train)	Unaware	8.0%	22.6%	53.0%	12.3%	1280
	Aware	6.1%	16.6%	51.3%	24.8%	850
3. I will be ashamed if someone sees me speaking to a transgender person in public	Unaware	9.5%	29.9%	45.8%	11.3%	1280
	Aware	5.4%	19.4%	51.2%	22.8%	850
4. I will not be ashamed if my neighbor were a transgender person	Unaware	13.8%	42.5%	32.0%	7.7%	1280
	Aware	25.4%	46.7%	19.6%	7.8%	850

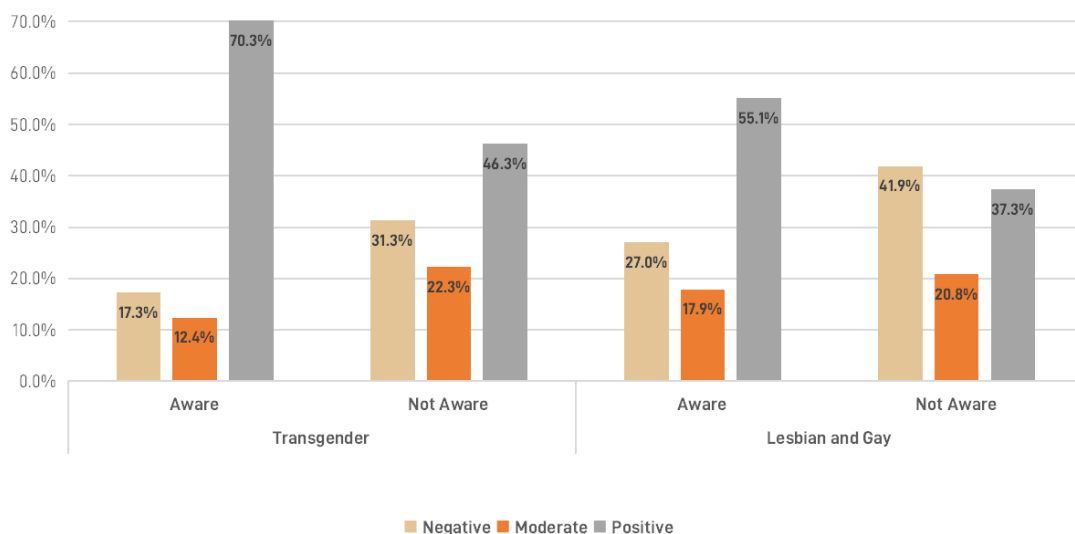
Attitudes towards gay and lesbian						
5. It will not be shameful if a lesbian or gay person were to be President of Sri Lanka	Unaware	8.5%	21.8%	42.7%	22.2%	1584
	Aware	14.7%	35.2%	27.3%	20.9%	546
6. I will be ashamed travelling next to a lesbian or gay person on public transport (such as bus, train)	Unaware	10.6%	28.9%	46.5%	10.1%	1584
	Aware	11.4%	17.0%	53.1%	15.6%	546
7. I will be ashamed if someone sees me speaking to a lesbian or gay person in public	Unaware	13.2%	35.2%	38.1%	9.8%	1584
	Aware	11.5%	22.2%	47.4%	16.5%	546
8. I will not be ashamed if my neighbor were a lesbian or gay person	Unaware	11.2%	37.6%	36.0%	11.3%	1584
	Aware	18.5%	44.3%	24.7%	9.9%	546

Although awareness is highly correlated with positive attitudes towards the transgender community, according to the results, the intensity of it is varied. As shown in table 4.1, awareness seemed to be more effective in improving attitudes towards situations such as living with a transgender neighbour, talking to a transgender person in public, and having a transgender person as the President. This pattern of influence of awareness holds for lesbian and gay persons as well. However, awareness seemed to make a comparatively greater influence on an individual's attitude towards a lesbian or gay President.

As discussed in the overview section, a composite index of attitudes provides a summarized picture of attitudes towards two different LGBT communities. In this index, 'positive attitudes' means the respondent has agreed with three or more positive statements out of four (please refer to overview section for a detailed explanation).

The figure below depicts that awareness has a strong correlation with positive attitudes towards LGBT persons. The impact of awareness is very strong on attitudes towards transgender persons than lesbian and gay persons. Once again, the findings confirm the fact that people do not see LGBT persons as one homogeneous group and they treat transgender people with a much more positive attitude.

**Figure 4.1: Composite index for attitudes towards LGBT persons**



## Awareness and social prejudices against LGBT persons

The survey findings highlight an interesting relationship between awareness of LGBT identities and the prejudices that people subscribe to regarding the LGBT community. Awareness has dispelled only some and obviously, not all the prejudices. A majority of the people who claimed to be unaware of any of the identities agree, to varying degrees, with all the prejudices tested in this survey.

The survey revealed that some respondents were aware about all the LGBT identities, while others were aware of only one or two identities. There were respondents who were unaware on any of the identities.

**Table 4.2: Beliefs about LGBT persons by awareness**

		Not aware of any term	Aware of only one term	Aware of two terms	Aware of three terms
1. These are Western concepts	Agree	68.3%	64.5%	59.9%	49.6%
	Disagree	31.7%	35.5%	40.1%	50.4%
	<b>Base</b>	<b>1030</b>	<b>391</b>	<b>242</b>	<b>254</b>
2. They go against nature	Agree	61.1%	57.9%	52.0%	45.8%
	Disagree	38.9%	42.1%	48.0%	54.2%
	<b>Base</b>	<b>1076</b>	<b>418</b>	<b>254</b>	<b>251</b>
3. These are illnesses	Agree	58.8%	52.2%	44.2%	32.8%
	Disagree	41.2%	47.8%	55.8%	67.2%
	<b>Base</b>	<b>1040</b>	<b>393</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>244</b>
4. These go against my religion	Agree	58.4%	53.0%	51.2%	43.4%
	Disagree	41.6%	47.0%	48.8%	56.6%
	<b>Base</b>	<b>1095</b>	<b>413</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>249</b>
5. They become so due to karma/sin/satan	Agree	69.1%	50.1%	34.3%	26.6%
	Disagree	30.9%	49.9%	65.7%	73.4%
	<b>Base</b>	<b>1046</b>	<b>381</b>	<b>236</b>	<b>244</b>
6. They are threat to our culture	Agree	70.0%	60.6%	53.0%	44.0%
	Disagree	30.0%	39.4%	47.0%	56.0%
	<b>Base</b>	<b>1131</b>	<b>424</b>	<b>259</b>	<b>250</b>
7. Association with them encourage a person to become someone like them	Agree	56.1%	63.9%	53.8%	52.5%
	Disagree	43.9%	36.1%	46.2%	47.5%
	<b>Base</b>	<b>1049</b>	<b>407</b>	<b>253</b>	<b>244</b>
8. There are more STDs among them compared to others	Agree	80.7%	79.6%	73.0%	71.0%
	Disagree	19.3%	20.4%	27.0%	29.0%
	<b>Base</b>	<b>880</b>	<b>324</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>224</b>

The findings suggest that awareness has some impact on blunting the sting of prejudices such as believing that LGBT 'sexualities are illnesses', or a 'result of past karma or sin', or that they 'go against the religion', or they 'go against the culture'. However, the ones who claimed to be aware of these sexualities also overwhelmingly agreed with beliefs such as 'there are more STDs among LGBT', and 'sexual relations should only be between a man and a woman'. Irrespective of awareness, people exhibited mixed opinions on the statement that 'association with the LGBT persons encourages a person to become someone like them'.

## Awareness and perceptions of LGBT persons

Those who possess greater awareness of LGBT identities, according to the survey, tend to have comparatively more positive perceptions of them as well. The 17 statements capture the various aspects of perceptions that people have of the LGBT community in general. The findings suggest, as discussed in the previous section too, that people express a high level of agreement towards perception statements that refer to the public sphere. People are somewhat cautious with statements that refer to their private sphere such as 'if the child's class teacher is a LGBT'. While the general pattern of perception continues, the survey shows that awareness of LGBT persons

could induce more positive perceptions of them. For example, while only 24% of the respondents who claimed to be unaware of any LGBT identity stated that *'It would be not a problem to me if my child's class teacher is such a person'*, 53% of the respondents who were aware of all three LGBT identities indicated their agreement with the same. Similarly, agreement with the statement, *'Such persons are also suitable to be President (and for the Prime Minister) of the country'* was at 30% among those who were aware of all three identities rather than the ones who were not aware of any of the LGBT identities.

**Table 4.3: Perceptions of LGBT persons by awareness**

	Agree with statements			
	Not aware of any term	Aware of only one term	Aware of two terms	Aware of four terms
1. Renting my house to a LGBT person will not be a problem to me	30.8%	43.0%	50.0%	58.8%
2. Renting houses to LGBT persons could threaten that community's way of life	74.7%	66.4%	62.5%	52.2%
3. I will be uncomfortable having a LGBT person at my office/workplace	50.7%	43.7%	35.5%	25.1%
4. LGBT persons can do any job just as well as other people	66.1%	74.5%	84.2%	88.0%
5. It would be not be a problem to me if my child's class teacher is a LGBT person	23.7%	34.8%	44.1%	53.2%
6. Having LGBT teachers in schools will ruin the next generation	70.0%	60.6%	53.0%	44.0%
7. If a LGBT student is in my child's class it will not be a problem to me	37.7%	41.4%	49.8%	61.8%
8. Having LGBT students in schools with other children could lead to problematic situations	83.3%	75.5%	73.8%	59.4%

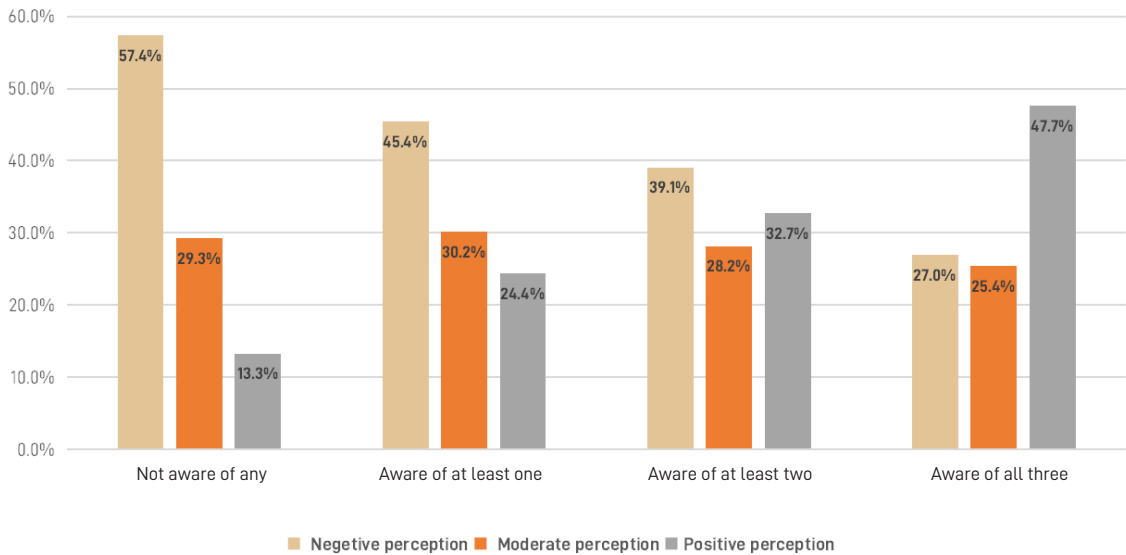
9. It will be shameful to have a LGBT child	57.2%	42.6%	35.3%	28.6%
10. If LGBT persons are scolded on social media, it is a result of their fault	46.2%	40.9%	42.0%	30.6%
11. If LGBT persons are assaulted, it is a result of their fault	44.1%	40.0%	36.7%	29.0%
12. I will never cast my vote for a LGBT person at the Parliamentary election	67.9%	57.2%	47.0%	39.0%
13. LGBT persons are also suitable to be Prime Minister of the country	25.2%	40.7%	49.0%	56.3%
14. LGBT persons are also suitable to be President of the country	24.8%	39.6%	48.4%	56.0%
15. I will not support specialised legislation which seeks to ensure the rights of LGBT persons	50.5%	43.2%	33.6%	30.9%
16. Living as a LGBT person should be a punishable offense	24.7%	20.6%	16.8%	11.4%
17. Our Constitution should guarantee that LGBT persons are also treated equally as other people	69.9%	70.4%	74.6%	78.4%

### *Composite perception by awareness*

The composite index of perceptions summarizes the reactions of the respondents to each of the 17 statements. Respondents who agreed with more positive statements were defined as individuals with 'positive perceptions'. Those who only agreed with five or less statements were labeled as individual with 'negative perceptions'. Others were labeled as ones with 'moderate perceptions'. As figure 4.2 demonstrates, positive perceptions increase as awareness increases. More than half of those who were unaware of any of the LGBT identities tested in this survey had negative perceptions towards LGBT persons.

Therefore, it is perhaps strategically wiser to promote awareness of multiple sexualities as it is more effective in facilitating a gradual transformation of perceptions towards the LGBT community in a more positive direction, rather than trying to debunk deep-rooted prejudices in society. As depicted in graph (4.2) below, there is a strong correlation between awareness and having positive perceptions towards the LGBT community. Similarly, a low level of awareness is also strongly correlated with negative perceptions.

**Figure 4.2: Perception by awareness**



Interestingly, awareness of LGBT identities shows a weak correlation to the respondent's acknowledgment of the existence of discrimination against LGBT persons. This warrants further investigation. This may reflect the understanding among the general public about our society where discrimination is the norm instead of the exception. However, this overwhelming acknowledgement of the prevalence of discrimination against LGBT persons provides a potential entry point to initiate a wider discussion on LGBT persons, their rights, and their social well-being.



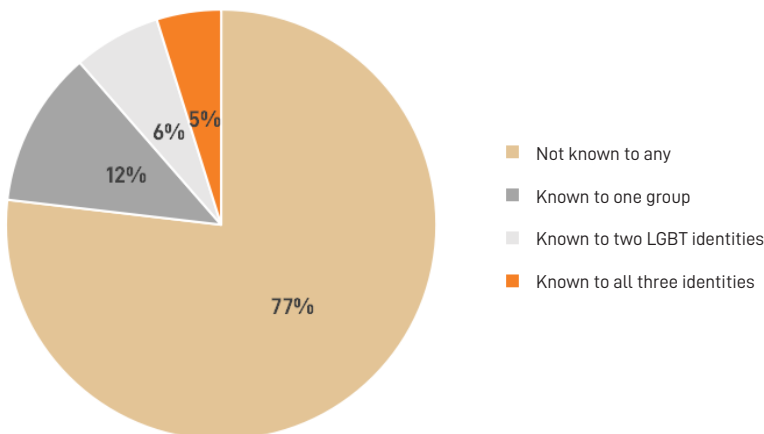
# PERSONAL INTERACTIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS LGBT PERSONS

This section of the study attempts to understand whether personal interactions with people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender, resulted in more progressive attitudes and perceptions among the survey respondents.

The survey findings show that if respondents knew someone personally from the LGBT community, this was generally associated with positive attitudes towards them.

The qualitative interviews indicated that people who have had personal interactions with people from the LGBT community, tend to be more tolerant, and accept the view that people with these identities have always been a part of Sri Lankan society. Conversely, the interviews also show that those who have limited or no personal interactions with people who are LGBT, struggled with the idea of genders and sexualities that fall outside of heterosexual and cisgender norms.

**Figure 5.1: Personally knows someone from the LGBT community**



A vast majority of the respondents (77%) said they did not personally know anyone from the LGBT community. Just above one fifth of the sample said that they personally knew at least one identity among the LGBT identities, while 6% and 5% claimed to personally know two and all three LGBT identities respectively.

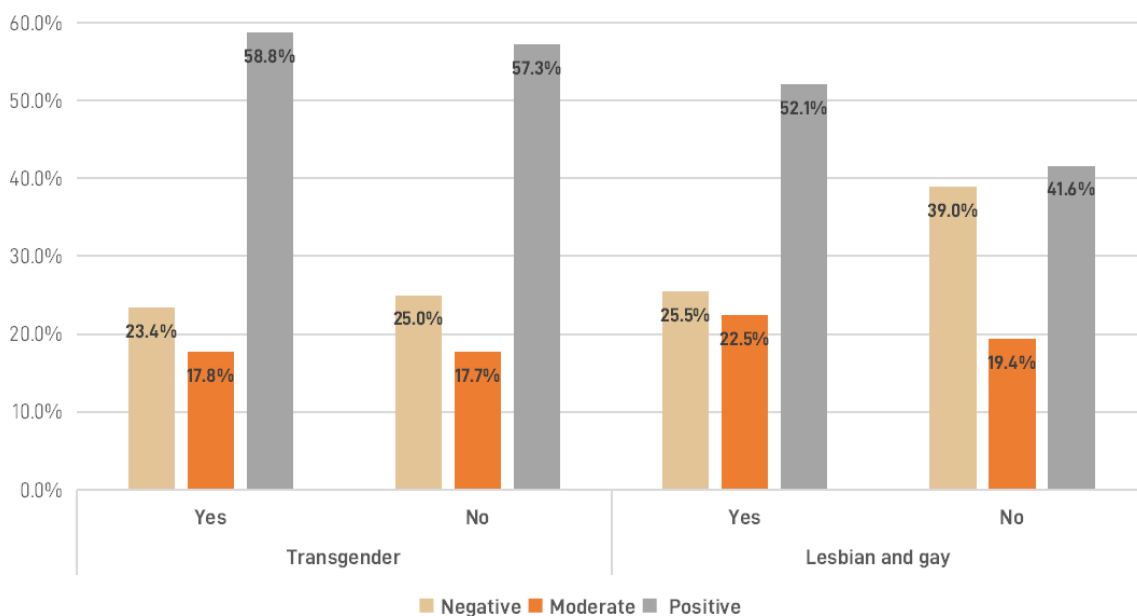
## Personal interaction with LGBT people vs. attitudes

The previous sections have already highlighted how people are more familiar with and aware about transgender persons than lesbian, gay, and bisexual persons, and hold more positive attitudes towards people who are transgender. However, as the following graph illustrates, the extent of personal interaction with people who are transgender made no difference to the attitudes that respondents held towards them. As discussed earlier, this possibly stems from South Asia's enduring familiarity with – and therefore acceptance of – the

transgender identity.

On the contrary, personal interaction with a person or people from the LGBT community did make a difference in the respondents' attitudes towards lesbian and gay people. This trend is depicted in the graph below. As discussed earlier, a respondent was categorised as having more positive attitudes if they agreed positively to three or more statements. A person who agreed with less than two positive statements was seen as holding negative attitudes.

**Figure 5.2: The relationship between exposure (composite index) and attitudes towards LGBT persons**



The qualitative interviews provided interesting insights with regards to the impact that personal interactions with people from the LGBT community have on respondents' attitudes. Those who know someone from the LGBT community personally, have a more direct experience and/or understanding of the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender people, and therefore have more empathy, even if the respondents may personally hold a different opinion or disagree with regards to their choices relating to gender and/or their sexual orientation.



## Personal interaction with LGBT people vs. social prejudices

Those who reported knowing someone from the LGBT community seemed to harbour comparatively fewer prejudices against them, as opposed to those who did not know anyone from the LGBT community. As already discussed, a majority of respondents who participated in this study agreed with all the prejudicial statements tested in the survey questionnaire. Nevertheless, there is a clear pattern of decreasing endorsement of negative beliefs about LGBT persons with increased levels

of personal interaction. This pattern held in all the statements tested except one ("there are more STDs among them compared to others"). On all these counts (other than the statement that "they become so due to karma/ sin/ satan"), there was a gap of at least 10% between those who reported absolutely no personal interaction with LGBT persons, and those who were personally known to all three (transgender and gay and lesbian) identities, in relation to subscription to these ideas.

**Table 5.1: Personal interaction vs. subscription to beliefs about LGBT people**

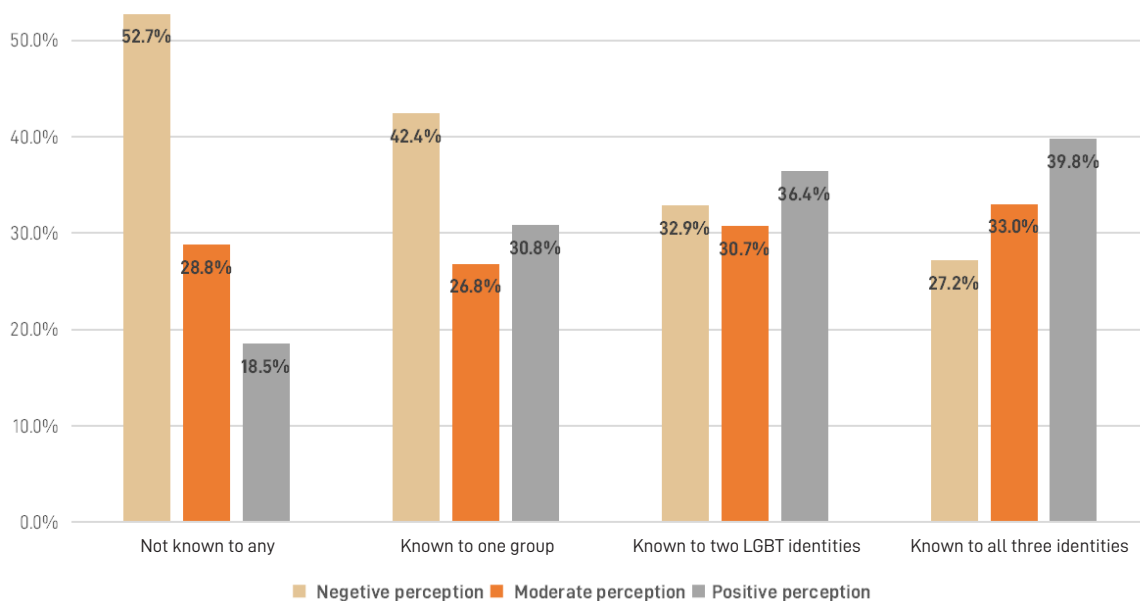
	Not known to any	Known to one group	Known to two LGBT identities	Known to all three identities	Diff between max and min exposure
1. These are Western concepts	68%	58%	51%	48%	20.0%
2. They go against nature	58%	62%	51%	43%	15.5%
3. These are illnesses	55%	49%	43%	37%	17.7%
4. These go against my religion	56%	55%	49%	45%	10.4%
5. They become so due to karma/sin/satan	58%	51%	46%	49%	8.6%
6. They are threat to our culture	73%	68%	62%	60%	12.3%
7. Association with them encourage a person to become someone like them	59%	53%	53%	42%	17.5%
8. There are more STDs among them compared to others	79%	78%	74%	78%	0.2%
<b>Base</b>	<b>512</b>	<b>423</b>	<b>345</b>	<b>248</b>	

Those who knew someone from the LGBT community clearly maintain a more accommodative position regarding statements such as 'these are Western concepts', 'These are illnesses', 'associating with them encourages a person to become someone like them'.

## Personal interaction with LGBT people vs. perceptions

We have already examined the respondents' perceptions on the LGBT community. We noted in the previous sections that a majority of the respondents support the statements representing negative perceptions of the LGBT community. To simplify the analysis, 17 statements of perceptions were reduced to one composite index that labels the respondent as an individual with positive, moderate and negative perceptions.

**Figure 5.3: Personal interactions with LGBT people vs. perceptions**



As the above graph shows, negative perceptions showed a decreasing trend as more people reported knowing someone from the LGBT community, while positive perceptions gradually increased as more people reported knowing someone who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.

A breakdown of the composite index of respondents perceptions according to the extent of their personal interaction with someone from the LGBT community vs age as well as education, highlights the trend discussed above. In table (5.2) below, knowing someone from the LGBT community seems to have a decisive impact on perceptions of LGBT individuals. In both age cohorts (below 30 years and 30 years and above), those who knew someone from the LGBT community recorded higher percentages in the 'positive perceptions' category, and conversely lower percentages in the 'negative perceptions' category, as compared with those of the same age cohort who did not know anyone from the LGBT community. There seems to be a variation by age

as well, in that the percentage of young people who knew someone from the LGBT community had more positive perceptions than their older counterpart. The same age variation was true for those who did not know anyone from the LGBT community. That is, those who were younger who did not know anyone from the LGBT community held generally negative perceptions of LGBT people, but relatively fewer than their older counterparts.

Meanwhile the percentage of young people who did not know anyone from the LGBT community but had generally positive perceptions of the LGBT community, was higher than their older counterparts. It stands to reason that this variation is largely due to the younger generation living in a fast changing and ever more integrated world where information about LGBT identities and their lived experiences is more readily accessible, and therefore more commonly consumed, possibly resulting in more positive perceptions than those respondents who are older.

**Table 5.2: Composite index of personal interaction and age vs perception**

Interaction and age	Perception towards LGBT			Total
	Negative perception	Moderate perception	Positive perception	
1. Young with interaction	36.5%	30.1%	33.3%	345
2. Young without interaction	43.0%	32.3%	24.7%	696
3. Old with interaction	46.7%	31.2%	22.1%	375
4. Old without interaction	62.2%	23.6%	14.2%	704
<b>Exposure and education</b>				
5. School Education with interaction	48.1%	30.8%	21.1%	513
6. School Education without interaction	56.1%	27.2%	16.7%	1160
7. Post School Education with interaction	26.1%	30.4%	43.5%	207
8. Post School Education without interaction	35.8%	31.7%	32.5%	240

Secondly, the nexus between knowing someone from the LGBT community vs. education, and perceptions, is also significant. As table 5.2 above shows, negative perceptions of the LGBT community are less prevalent among those with a school education and those who know someone from the LGBT community, than among those with a school education but don't know anyone from the LGBT community. The same pattern holds among those with a post-school education, while the reverse holds true for positive perceptions. There was a marked increase in positive perceptions

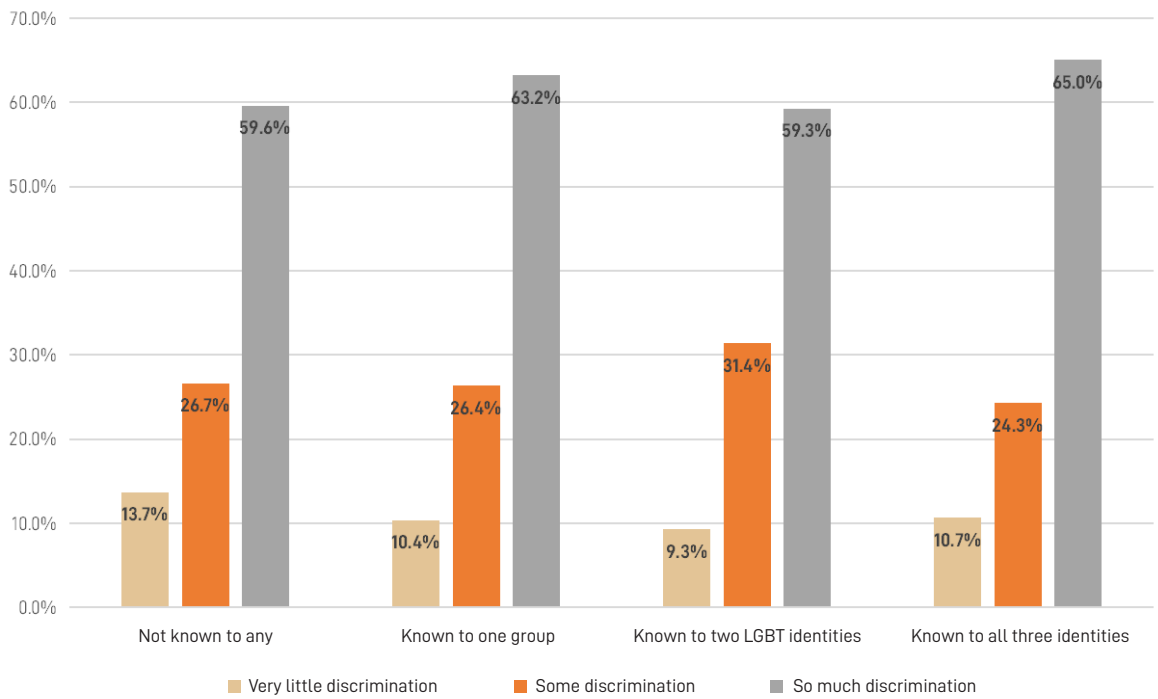
among respondents who had a post-school education and knew someone from the LGBT community compared to all other categories, along with a marked decrease in negative perceptions also compared to all other categories. In general, those with post-school education regardless of whether they knew someone from the LGBT community or not, demonstrated less negative perceptions and more positive perceptions of the LGBT community, as compared with the respondents who reported to have received education only up to the school level.

### Interaction and acknowledging discrimination against LGBT persons

As discussed previously, the discrimination faced by the LGBT community seemed to be commonly acknowledged, irrespective of the respondent's background – in this case, level of exposure. More than half the sample of all four exposure categories acknowledged that there is 'so much discrimination' against LGBT persons. Like other composite indexes of this report, 10 statements capturing discrimination against LGBT persons

were collapsed into three categories: Those who acknowledged the existence of seven or more types of discrimination were put into the category of those who believed there was 'so much discrimination', while those who acknowledged three or less types of discrimination were put into the category of those who believed there was 'very little discrimination'.

**Figure 5.4: Exposure and acknowledging discrimination against LGBT persons**



# PERCEIVED THREAT TO THE INSTITUTION OF FAMILY

The survey findings suggest a strong correlation between respondents' perception of the LGBT community and his or her marital status. As many scholars have argued, the family institution is predicated upon heteronormativity, or the idea that sexual relations are only permissible between members of opposite sexes who share a relationship of a specific, 'approved' kind (Oswald et al 2005<sup>10</sup>; Hudak and Giammatei 2014<sup>11</sup>; Allen and Mendez 2018<sup>12</sup>). These restrictions are geared towards demarcating the limits of "legitimate procreative sexuality" which in turn is linked to ensuring the "purity and continuation of crucial identities such as caste, race and religion" (Menon 2012, p. 5<sup>13</sup>). It is not difficult to see how homosexual preferences and fluid gender identities could challenge this arrangement. As Menon argues, even if homosexual couples have children by other means, that would still constitute a violation of the purity of the identity they represent in racial or religious terms. The sexual policing exercised by the heteronormative family, therefore, is at the core of the social order as we know it. The rules of this game are upheld and passed down through "performativity", or the constant repetition of conformist actions, words, and practices that naturalize them as given, and help in their gradual internalization (Butler 1990<sup>14</sup>).

The survey findings demonstrate how such dominant heteronormative conceptions of the world condition the individual's view of non-mainstream sexual identities and practices. The results are broken down by the respondents' civil status in order to glean whether being part of the family institution has a discernible impact on how they approach these issues. Overall, marriage does seem to exert some influence over the attitudes and perceptions of respondents, given that married respondents seemed to subscribe to negative stereotypes more, though admittedly this is not by a large margin. In general, the pattern was that married respondents agreed in more numbers with statements that were coined to be negatively reactive towards the LGBT community, compared to unmarried ones. The flip side was true of statements that contained positive reactions to the LGBT community. For instance, when asked whether it would

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10 Oswald, Ramona, Libby Blume, & Stephen Marks. (2005). *Decentering Heteronormativity: A Model for Family Studies*. In Bengston, Vern, Alan Acock, Katherine Allen, Peggye Dilworth-Anderson, and David Klein (Eds.), *Sourcebook of Family Theory and Research* (pp. 143-165). California: SAGE Publications

11 Hudak, Jacqueline & Shawn Giammatei. (2014). *Doing Family: Decentering Heteronormativity in "Marriage" and "Family" Therapy*. In Nelson, Thorana & Hinda Winawer (Eds.), *Critical Topics in Family Therapy* (pp. 105-115). New York and elsewhere: Springer

12 Allen, Samuel & Shawn Mendez. (2018). *Hegemonic heteronormativity: Toward a New Era of Queer Family Theory*. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 10(1), pp. 70-86

13 Menon, Nivedita. (2012). *Seeing Like a Feminist*. New Delhi: Zubaan

14 Butler, Judith. (1990). *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory*. In Sue-Ellen Case (Ed.), *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre* (pp. 270-282). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press

be fine for a transgender person to be President of Sri Lanka, more married persons disagreed than unmarried ones, and fewer married persons agreed than unmarried ones. Likewise, when asked whether they would be ashamed to be seen talking to a transgender person in public, more married persons agreed than unmarried ones, and less married persons disagreed than unmarried ones.

**Table 6.1: Composite index for attitudes with demographic disaggregation**

Demographic category	Transgender (%)			Gay and Lesbian (%)		
	Negative	Moderate	Positive	Negative	Moderate	Positive
1. Young unmarried male	22.8%	17.6%	59.6%	31.3%	19.6%	49.1%
2. Young unmarried female	15.5%	14.4%	70.2%	34.6%	17.3%	48.1%
3. Young married male	21.7%	21.7%	56.5%	30.4%	20.3%	49.3%
4. Young married female	30.6%	17.2%	52.2%	42.7%	17.8%	39.5%
5. Old unmarried male	23.2%	17.9%	58.9%	42.9%	17.9%	39.3%
6. Old unmarried female	17.2%	10.3%	72.4%	31.0%	24.1%	44.8%
7. Old married male	28.2%	20.4%	51.4%	37.5%	20.4%	42.1%
8. Old married female	33.2%	20.6%	46.2%	46.5%	22.8%	30.8%

\* Young – Less than 30 years, Old – 30 years and above

The above table confirms the broad differences in the attitudes toward those who identify as transgender, lesbian and gay. In addition, the table demonstrates the differences in the attitudes of married and unmarried respondents, men and women and young (less than 30 years) and old (30 years and above). However, this section focuses mainly on the role that heteronormative marriage plays in influencing people's attitude towards the LGBT community. The findings suggest that marriage changes the attitudes of women more than men, towards people from the LGBT community. For example, 70% of young unmarried women express positive attitudes towards

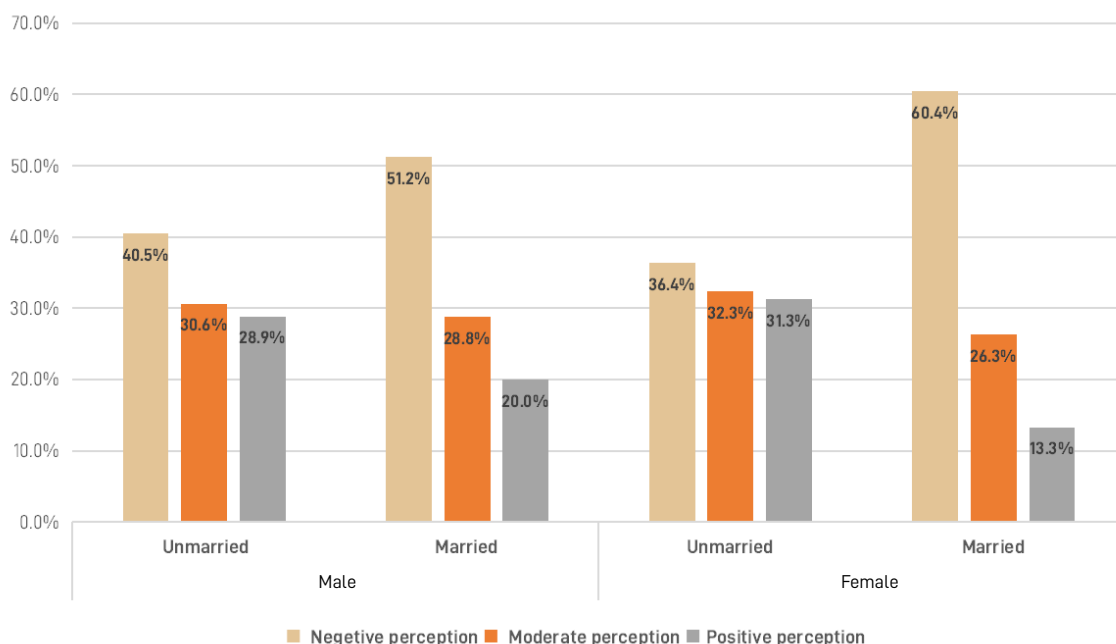
transgender people, while only 52% of married young women express the same positive attitude. Towards lesbian and gay persons, more unmarried young women (48%) extend positive attitudes than married young women (39%). Even among the people in the 30 years and above age bracket, more unmarried women extend positive attitude towards both transgender and lesbian and gay persons than unmarried women. In general, marriage does not seem to have made significant impact on the attitudes of the men, in all age brackets, towards the LGBT community. Therefore, the function of the marriage institution in conditioning women's worldview is confirmed in these findings.

**Table 6.2: Subscribing to prejudices by civil status**

	Male		Female	
	Unmarried	Married	Unmarried	Married
1. These are Western concepts	59.3%	64.3%	56.6%	71.6%
2. They go against nature	49.0%	62.3%	48.0%	64.8%
3. These are illnesses	46.1%	56.2%	40.7%	59.9%
4. These go against my religion	46.3%	56.4%	43.6%	64.3%
5. They become so due to karma/sin/satan	47.8%	59.6%	48.0%	62.3%
6. They are threat to our culture	63.7%	74.1%	60.9%	78.4%
7. Association with them encourage a person to become someone like them	51.8%	60.4%	47.4%	64.2%
8. There are more STDs among them compared to others	71.2%	82.9%	75.0%	81.4%
9. Sexual relation should only be a man and a woman	81.1%	89.1%	82.9%	94.4%
10. Marriage should only be a man and a woman	83.8%	90.4%	84.2%	96.0%

The table above clearly shows that married men and women agree with negative belief that exist in society towards LGBT persons, compared to unmarried women and men. These differences varied however between the statements that were tested in this study. For example, the difference in beliefs of married vs unmarried respondents were high for statements such as 'they go against my religion', 'they go against our culture', 'they go against nature' and 'they become so due to karma/sin'. There was less difference in beliefs between married and unmarried respondents for the statements such as 'they are Western concepts', and 'marriage should only be between a man and a woman'. The difference between married and unmarried women is significant relative to the difference between married and unmarried men.

**Figure 6.1: Composite index for perceptions of LGBT persons**



The above graph depicts a summary of people's perceptions of LGBT persons. The survey used 17 statements to examine the perceptions of people of people from the LGBT community. Based on the agreement extended to the statements, people were divided into three groups: people with negative perceptions, moderate perceptions and positive perceptions. As the graph depicts, majority of the respondents of this study hold negative perceptions of people from the LGBT community, and similar to the trend discussed above, married men and women exhibit more negative perceptions than unmarried ones. Similarly, positive perceptions of LGBT persons were high among unmarried individuals. Further, the graph also demonstrates that this trend is higher among women than men. Therefore, it reaffirms that marital status affects minds of women than men, with regards to sexuality and gender.

**Table 6.3: Composite index for perceptions by demographics**

Demographic category	Perceptions (%)		
	Negative	Moderate	Positive
1. Young unmarried male	39.5%	30.8%	29.7%
2. Young unmarried female	35.4%	31.9%	32.7%
3. Young married male	47.8%	33.3%	18.8%
4. Young married female	53.8%	32.3%	13.9%
5. Old unmarried male	48.3%	29.3%	22.4%
6. Old unmarried female	48.3%	37.9%	13.8%
7. Old married male	51.7%	28.1%	20.2%
8. Old married female	62.7%	24.2%	13.1%

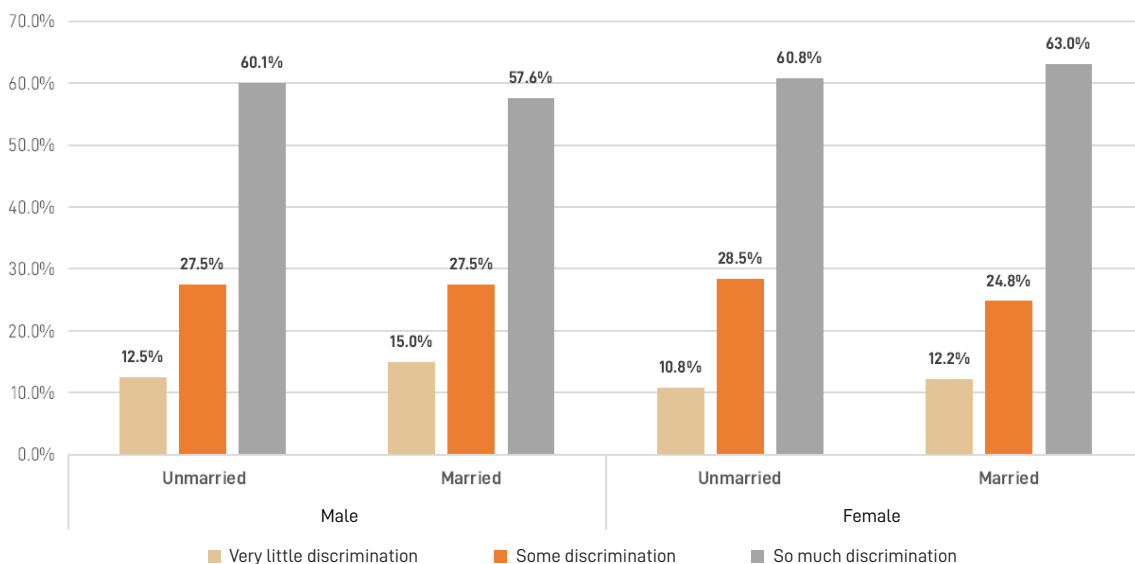


The above table shows how the effect of civil status on respondents' perceptions of LGBT people varies with his or her age. The negative perceptions, according to the survey findings, is highest among the category of old (30 years and above) married women and lowest among young unmarried women. This suggests that as a woman ages while traveling across traditional and heteronormative life roles – young girl, wife, mother, mother-in-law, grandmother – she become strongly attached to heteronormative ideas. This is not to say that men do not experience such a transformation, but compared to women, men experience a weak transformation. For example, while there is a difference of 27% between young unmarried woman and old married woman, the difference between young unmarried men and old married men is only 10%.

## Acknowledging prevailing discrimination against LGBT persons

As already seen in the previous sections, majority of the respondents acknowledge that people from the LGBT community experience discrimination in their daily life. Irrespective of their perceptions, beliefs, age, gender or marital status, the respondents of this study acknowledge the existence of discrimination against LGBT people in our society.

**Figure 6.2: Composite index for acknowledging discrimination against LGBT persons**



This chapter demonstrates the strong correlation between respondents' perceptions towards the LGBT community and his or her marital status. The findings clearly indicate that not only being married but also how long the person has lived in a marriage has a strong correlation with the person's attitudes towards LGBT persons. Butler's (1990) theory of performativity lends itself well to understanding this kind of pattern. Those in the marriage institution are particularly under pressure to maintain and preserve the heteronormative, binary-gendered status quo due to the expectations placed on them as, in most instances, they are also parents responsible for the 'proper' socialization of the future generation. Even in the case of married heterosexual couples with no children, the societal view of the marriage institution has conditioned their own views to a significant extent as parties to a 'legitimate' heterosexual arrangement (Ingraham 1999)<sup>15</sup>. The result is that these individuals end up reinforcing mainstream attitudes and perceptions regarding gender and sexuality in their own conduct, both as a way of gaining

<sup>15</sup> Ingraham, Chrys. (1999). *White weddings: Romancing heterosexuality in popular culture*. New York: Routledge

legitimacy in society, as well as an expression of their genuinely internalized belief system. As Butler would have it, performativity (our actions, words, and practices) is as much a result of our identity as it is a source of it. Thus, we see married respondents reacting to non-mainstream sexual identities in the way they are expected to, and in fact in the way they believe is right.



# HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

The survey findings clearly promise hope for a better future for the LGBT community. It is promising to see that younger people are more open to genders and sexualities outside of traditional heteronormative ideas, than their older counterparts. The survey findings indicate a possible transition of society in terms of its ideology towards sexuality. Of course, it may take many more decades to achieve a society that respects and treats people equally irrespective of their choice of gender and sexuality. However, the survey results raise hope for a better tomorrow. The other promising finding is the potential of education to be a catalyst for change in societal attitudes towards the LGBT community. In this context, this section attempts to examine how age and education influence people's awareness, attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of LGBT persons.

### *Age offers space for social transformation*

The findings of the survey suggest that the superstructure of society with regards to the LGBT community is in transition, as indicated by the higher levels of awareness of LGBT identities among younger respondents than older.

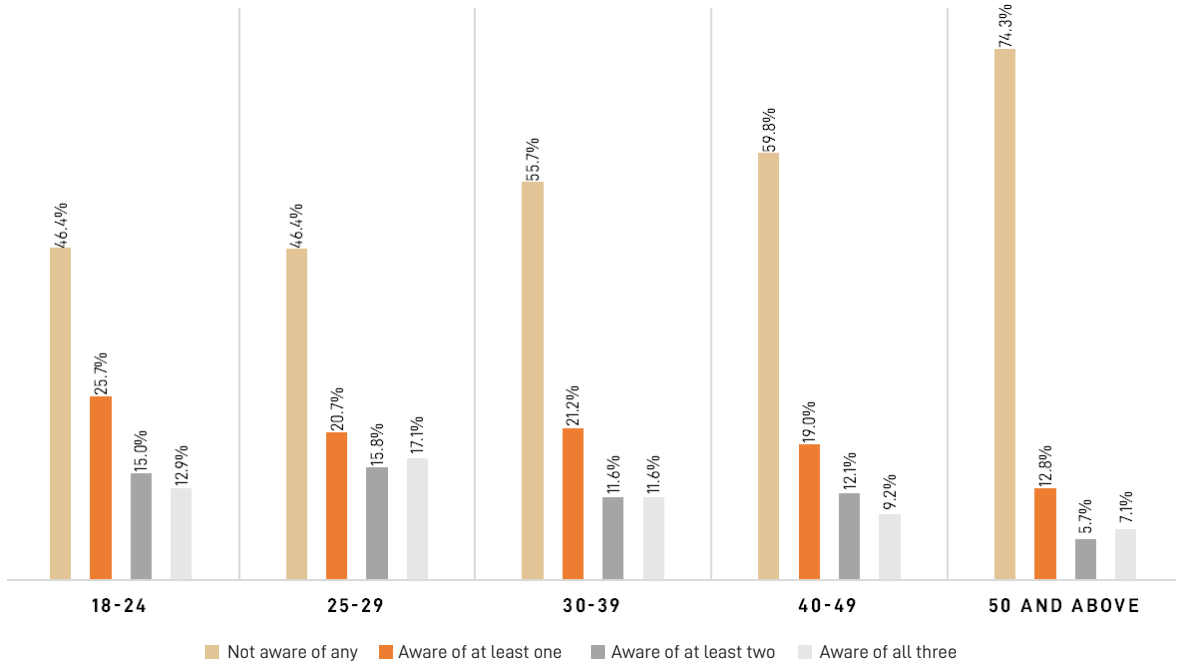
As we have already seen, 35% of the participants of this study claimed that they have heard of the term 'gay and lesbian'. The survey results show that 42% of the respondents below the age of 30 were familiar with the term gay and lesbian while there were only 28% of adults in this category. Comparatively, respondents demonstrated less familiarity with the term 'bisexual' compared to the terms 'gay and lesbian' and 'transgender'. According to the survey, 27% of the younger respondents were familiar with the term 'bisexual' while only 19% of the older respondents said they were familiar with the same. The term transgender

seemed to be the most familiar to most of the respondents. 58.4% of the younger respondents (less than 30 years) and 44.2% of those above 30 years stated they were familiar with the term transgender. In general, therefore, younger respondents seemed to be more familiar with the terminologies used to refer to lesbian and gay, bisexual and transgender than the older people.

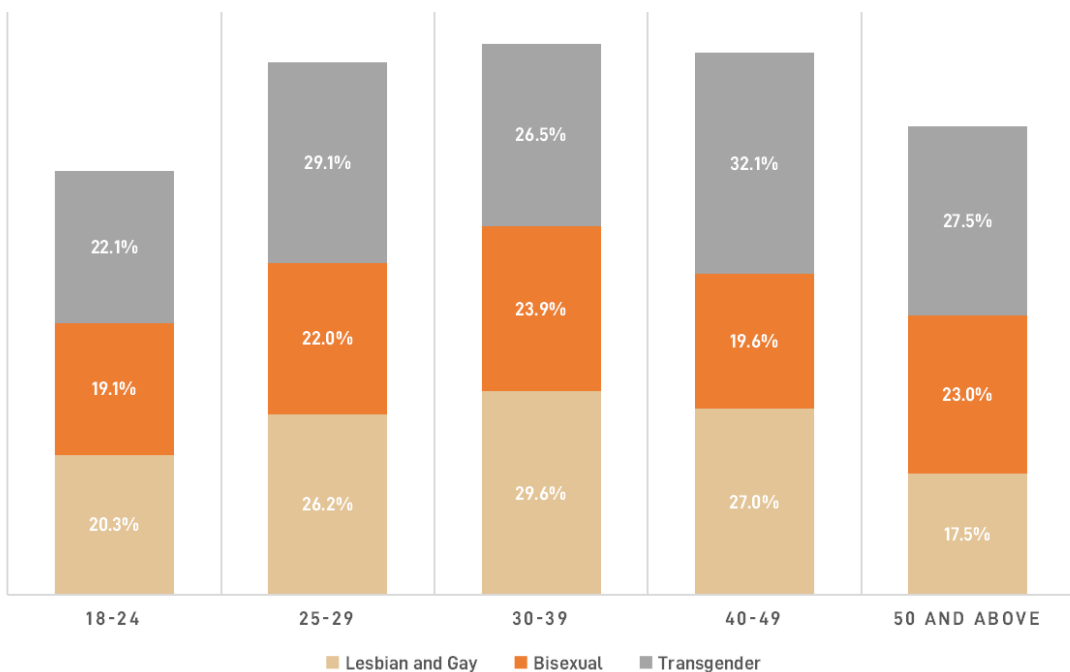
In addition to familiarity with the terminology, the survey attempted to find out actual awareness – familiarity with the term and knowing the correct meaning - of the LGBT identities. As discussed in the previous section, a few were aware of all three identities, while a majority knew none. As depicted in the following graph, lack of awareness was high across all age brackets. However, while lack of awareness was high among respondents above 30 years, it showed a gradual increase with the age

of the respondent. Three fourth of the respondents who were 50 years or above were unaware of any of them. This could also be due to unfamiliarity with the formal terms used in the survey. Awareness was high among the younger respondents, especially those of the 25 to 29 years age bracket.

**Figure 7.1: Awareness by age**



**Figure 7.2: Known to someone of the LGBT community personally vs. age**



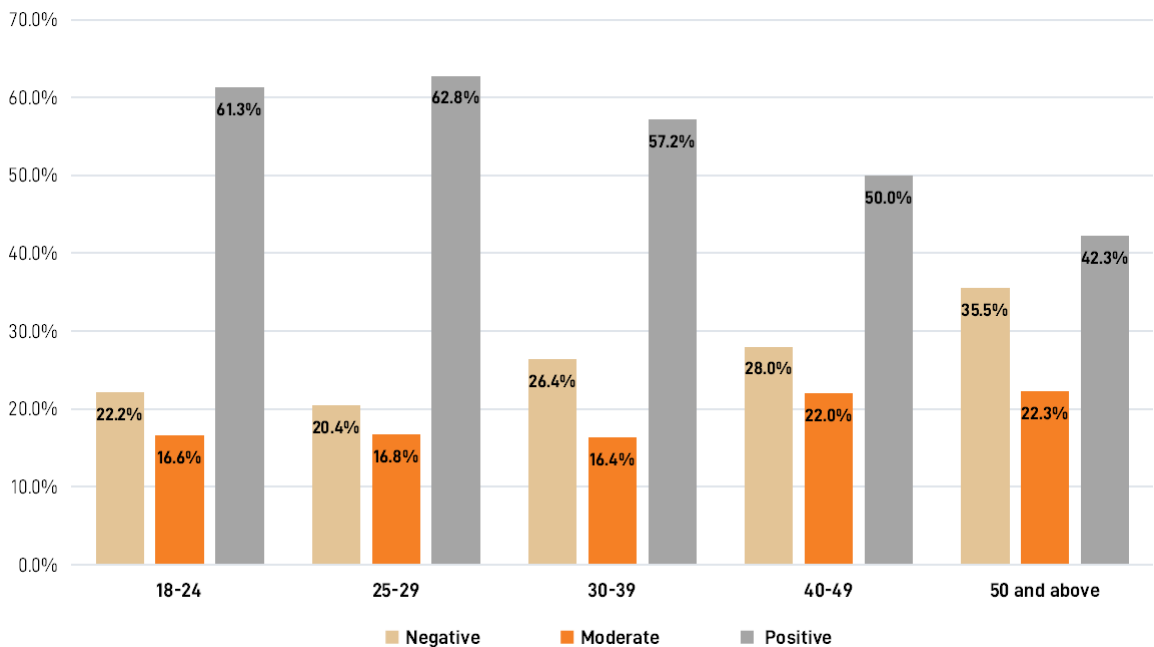
Roughly around one fifth of the respondents claimed to have known someone from the LGBT community personally, although they seemed to know fewer bisexual people. As shown in the following graph, exposure to LGBT people does not seem to vary by the age of the respondent. Respondents who were less than 24 years, as well as respondents who were over 50 years reported knowing fewer LGBT persons. This means that younger respondents had higher levels of awareness even when they did not know as many

people from the LGBT community. Therefore, the findings emphasize the important role that communication can play in raising awareness on non-normative gender and sexual identities. As demonstrated earlier (in chapter 4), awareness is associated with higher levels of positive attitudes and perceptions towards LGBT persons. However, the following sections examine how the age of a person correlates with their attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions towards LGBT persons.

### Relationship between age and attitudes

To understand the relationship between one's age with his or her attitude towards transgender and lesbian and gay persons, the survey results were disaggregated by age. A composite index was developed to summarize the respondents' attitudes towards transgender and lesbian and gay persons that was assessed using a battery of statements. The composite index collapses the responses given to four separate statements into one index with the following categories: negative, moderate, and positive.

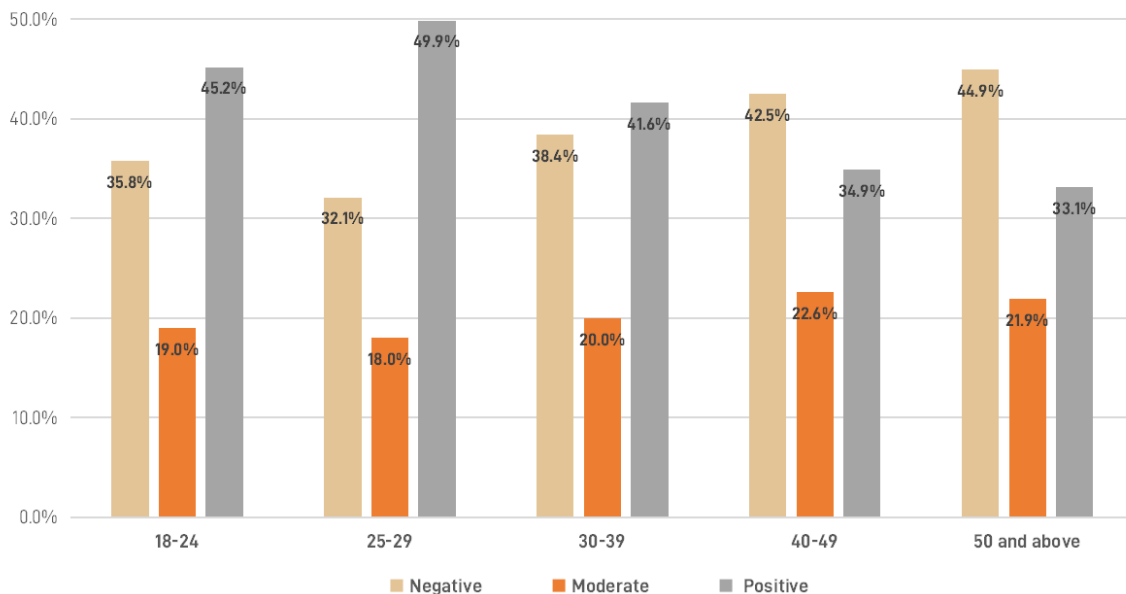
**Figure 7.3: Attitudes towards transgender persons by age**



Although the attitude towards transgender persons is generally positive, according to the above graph, this positive attitude is higher among younger respondents. As age increases, this positive attitude declines. The overwhelming majority of the respondents below the age of 50 years exhibit either positive or, at least, moderate attitudes towards transgender persons.

Figure 7.4 below shows the distribution of attitudes towards lesbian and gay persons across different age brackets. Although not as strong as with transgender individuals, the age of the respondent shows a negative correlation with attitudes towards lesbian and gay persons, in that positive attitudes seem to decline with age. As shown in this graph, respondents above 30 years seem to express mixed reactions when asked about their attitudes towards lesbian and gay persons.

**Figure 7.4: Attitudes towards lesbian and gay persons by age**



The following table provides a detailed picture of the age disaggregation of attitudes towards transgender and lesbian and gay persons. This table confirms the broader pattern discussed above, namely that the relationship between age and attitudes toward transgender persons is comparatively stronger than the one between age and lesbian and gay persons. As we have seen in the previous sections, despite this generally positive attitude, people seem to be somewhat hesitant to associate with transgender and lesbian and gay persons. Irrespective of the age bracket, a sizeable percentage of respondents expressed agreement with the statement that 'I will be ashamed if someone sees me speaking to a transgender/lesbian and gay person in public'.

**Table 7.1: Attitudes by age**

Attitudes towards transgender	Agree with the statement				
	18-24	25-29	30-39	40-49	50 and above
1. It will not be shameful if a transgender person were to be President of Sri Lanka	54.9%	54.6%	47.9%	44.4%	35.7%
2. I will be ashamed of travelling next to a transgender person on public transport (such as bus, train)	24.6%	22.7%	28.6%	33.8%	36.2%
3. I will be ashamed if someone sees me speaking to a transgender person in public	34.9%	27.9%	33.1%	36.9%	42.1%
4. I will not be ashamed if my neighbour were a transgender person	69.8%	68.0%	65.0%	59.1%	53.8%

Attitudes towards lesbian and gay					
5. It will not be shameful if a lesbian or gay person were to be President of Sri Lanka	41.3%	41.2%	36.7%	32.8%	27.4%
6. I will be ashamed of travelling next to a lesbian or gay person on public transport (such as bus, train)	37.9%	30.9%	40.0%	43.7%	40.3%
7. I will be ashamed if someone sees me speaking to a lesbian or gay person in public	45.5%	38.9%	47.3%	52.2%	50.7%
8. I will not be ashamed if my neighbour were a lesbian or gay person	58.3%	58.8%	55.5%	48.5%	45.6%

## Subscribing to prejudices

According to the findings of the survey, the older the person, greater the potential to subscribe to societal prejudices about the LGBT community. However, more than half of the men and women below 24 years of age subscribed to most of the listed statements about social prejudices on the LGBT community. While less than half of this group was ready to subscribe to the beliefs that 'these sexualities are illnesses', 'these sexualities go against my religion', and 'they become LGBT due to karma/sin', more than 60% of the men and women above 50 years subscribed to all the prejudices tested in this survey.

**Table 7.2: Agreement with societal beliefs about LGBT people vs. age of respondents**

	Agree with the statement				
	18-24	25-29	30-39	40-49	50 and above
1. These are Western concepts	61.6%	56.7%	66.8%	67.6%	71.8%
2. They go against nature	52.2%	48.2%	56.7%	64.6%	72.2%
3. These are illnesses	43.3%	45.7%	53.3%	64.7%	63.7%
4. These go against my religion	49.5%	45.2%	56.6%	67.7%	60.6%
5. They become so due to karma/sin/satan	49.6%	47.6%	56.4%	63.8%	67.2%
6. They are threat to our culture	65.4%	64.3%	73.4%	78.4%	78.7%
7. Association with them encourages a person to become someone like them	52.3%	50.9%	57.0%	64.8%	66.0%
8. There are more STDs among them compared to others	72.8%	73.2%	81.2%	83.1%	85.9%
9. Sexual relation should only be between a man and a woman	85.0%	81.8%	90.8%	90.1%	93.3%
10. Marriage should only be between a man and a woman	87.1%	84.0%	91.7%	92.4%	94.8%
<b>Base</b>	<b>512</b>	<b>423</b>	<b>345</b>	<b>248</b>	<b>274</b>

The following table illustrates a comparison between the order of importance of younger and older respondents in terms of their subscription to various societal prejudices against the LGBT community. As table 7.2 depicts, there is hardly a difference between younger (less than 25 years) and older (50 years

and above) respondents in terms of the attention they give to various social prejudices against LGBT. Both categories were worried about a perceived threat to their culture that they believed defines how the nature of civil unions and sexual relationships ought to be. Similarly, both age groups expressed serious reservations with ideas such as 'these sexualities are illnesses' and 'these sexualities go against my religion'.

**Table 7.3: Subscribing to social prejudices: a comparison of two age cohorts**

Subscribing to prejudices according to order of preference	
18 to 24 years old	50 years and above
1. Marriage should only be between a man and a woman	1. Marriage should only be between a man and a woman
2. Sexual relations should only be between a man and a woman	2. Sexual relations should only be between a man and a woman
3. There are more STDs among them compared to others	3. There are more STDs among them compared to others
4. They are a threat to our culture	4. They are a threat to our culture
5. These are Western concepts	5. They go against nature
6. Association with them encourages a person to become someone like them	6. These are Western concepts
7. They go against nature	7. They become so due to karma/sin/satan
8. They become so due to karma/sin/satan	8. Association with them encourages a person to become someone like them
9. These go against my religion	9. These are illnesses
10. These are illnesses	10. These go against my religion

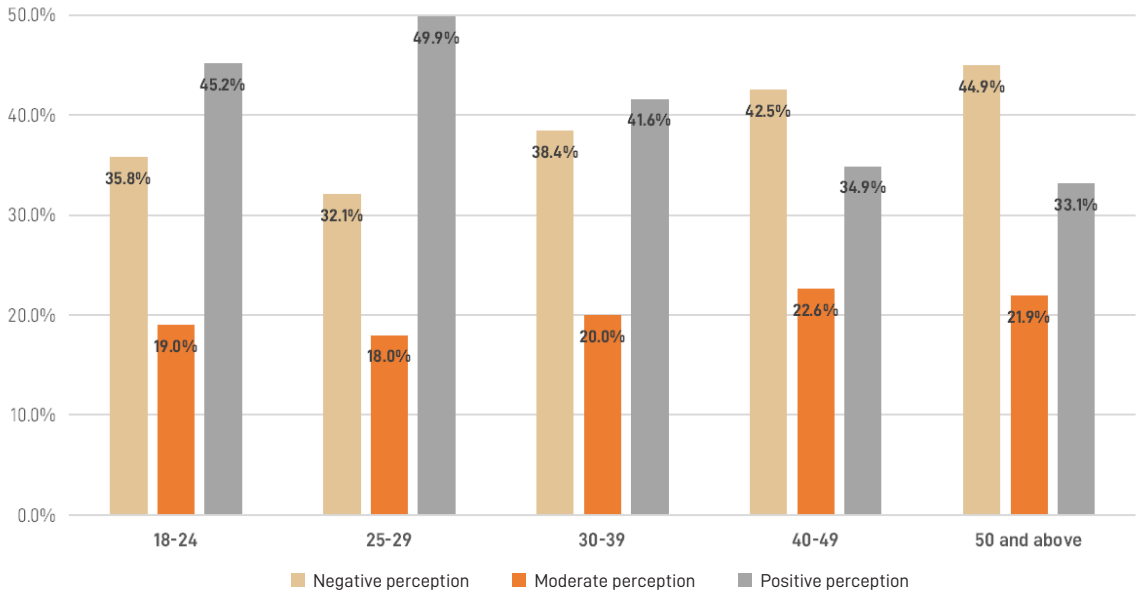
### *Perceptions of youth and adults:*

The survey shows that negative perceptions of LGBT persons are strongly correlated to the age of the respondent. Respondents were asked to express their agreement or disagreement with 17 statements that represented current perceptions towards LGBT persons. Agreement/ disagreement with each statement was combined and collapsed into one composite index for further analysis. As figure 7.5 shows, negative perceptions of LGBT persons increase with the age of the respondent. On the other hand, young men and women seemed to perceive LGBT persons more positively or at least moderately. Two possible explanations can be offered for the correlation between age and perceptions of the LGBT community. The

first among them is that people start their adult life with considerable openness but become less open further down the line due to societal pressure that forces them to perform certain societal roles – as spouses, parents, teachers, leaders, or grandparents. The second is that new generations have more access to information about different sexualities outside of cultural institutions such as church, temple, schools, and elders. It is also possible that both explanations are true. Irrespective of what explanation is more plausible, the findings signal the potential of youth to become strong catalysts for democratic social change.

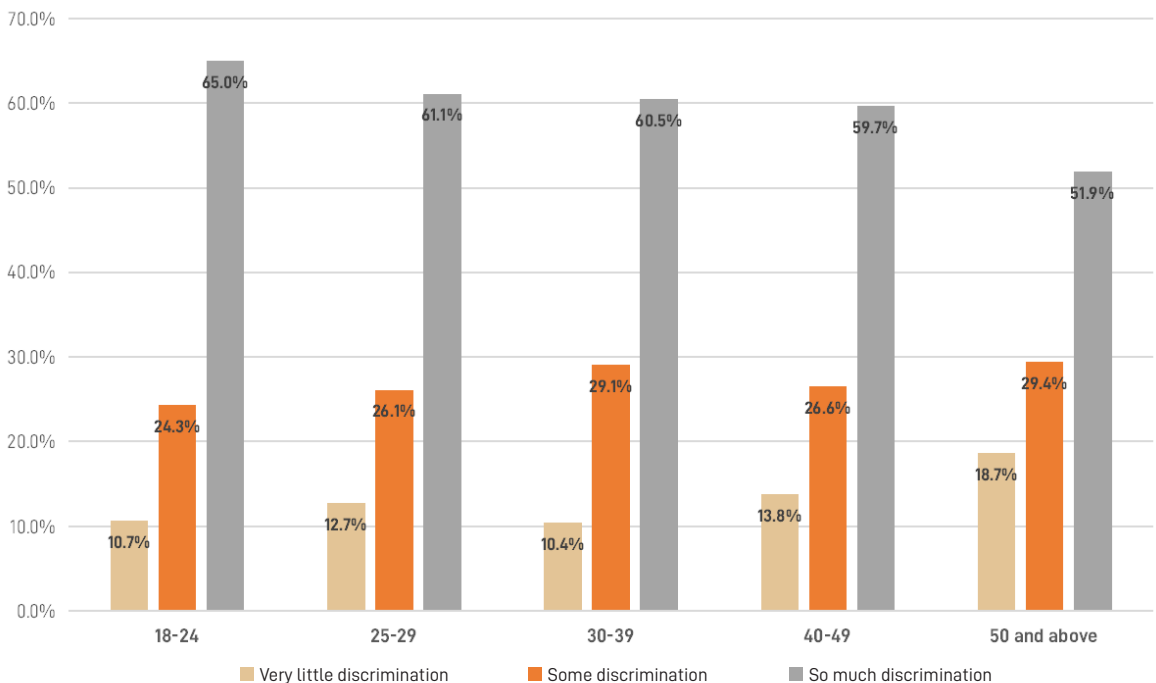


**Figure 7.5: Perceptions of the LGBT community by age**



As already noted, in general people acknowledge that the LGBT community is subject to various forms of discrimination in our society. The following table illustrates the summarized responses to various statements about existing forms of discrimination against them. Although acknowledgment is slightly higher among younger men and women, all respondents generally acknowledged the prevalence of discrimination against LGBT persons in different spheres of life.

**Figure 7.6: Acknowledgment of discrimination against LGBT persons by age**



## Education as a catalyst for social transformation

The survey results clearly demonstrate the important role education plays in achieving a society with more tolerance towards diverse genders and sexualities. Those who have received education beyond the Advanced Level showed a clear openness to diversity in gender and sexualities. They seemed to: possess a higher degree of awareness (of terminology related to gender and sexual orientation and their meanings); accommodate more positive attitudes towards lesbian, gay and transgender persons and less prejudices; perceive LGBT people more positively and were more inclined to acknowledge existing discrimination against LGBT people in our society. Unlike age, education is a condition that can be changed by human intervention. Therefore, this survey highlights not only the available potential in our society, but also avenues through which we can transform it to a better and more tolerant one.

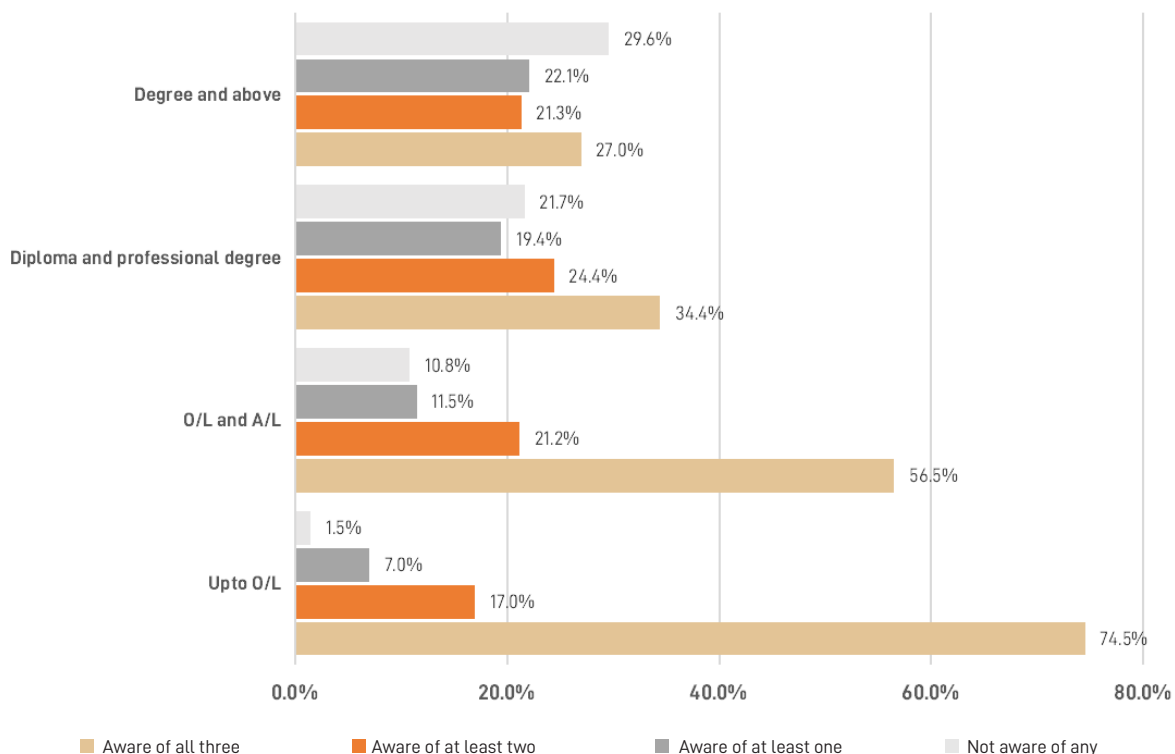
### *Level of education and awareness:*

The level of education has an impact on familiarity with the terms 'gay and lesbian', 'bisexual', and 'transgender'. Higher the level of education, the percentage of respondents who were familiar with these terms gradually increased. The percentages of the respondents who had received education up to the Ordinary Level examination who were familiar with the terms 'gay and lesbian', 'bisexual', and 'transgender' were 18, 12, and 40 respectively. Respondents who had received their education up to the Advanced Level examination showed more familiarity with the terms, with 34% having heard of the term 'gay and lesbian', and 20% and 47% having heard the terms 'bisexual' and 'transgender' respectively. The gradual increase continues in the same direction among respondents in different stages of their higher education. While 53% of the respondents who have the qualification of a diploma or professional degree said they were familiar with the term 'gay and lesbian', an even higher percentage of 58% of those with a postgraduate degree were familiar with the term. This trend could be seen in the familiarity with the term 'bisexual and transgender as well. Of the respondents with a diploma or professional degree, 33% had heard of the term 'bisexual', as

compared to 44% with postgraduate qualifications. Many of the respondents had heard of the term 'transgender' and a higher level of awareness was recorded. Familiarity with the term 'transgender' according to each education level was as follows: Ordinary Level examination- 40%, Advanced Level examination - 47%, Diploma and Professional degree - 66%, Postgraduate degree - 78%. This is a clear indication that although the term 'transgender' is widely heard of when compared to the other two terms, it varies according to the level of education. That is, when the level of education is higher, the percentage of respondents who have heard of the term 'transgender' also correspondingly increases.

Not all who were familiar with the terminology knew the meanings of lesbian and gay, bisexual, and transgender identities, however. This report uses the term 'aware' to indicate 'familiarity with the term, with knowledge of its meaning'. As discussed earlier, a majority who participated in this survey were not aware of any of the three aforementioned identities. The following graph clearly shows that men and women with higher education experience are the ones who possess higher levels of awareness of such identities.

**Figure 7.7: Level of awareness by education**



It is also evident that higher the respondent's educational level, it is more likely that they personally know someone from the LGBT community. The following table shows the percentage of each educational group who knew someone from the lesbian and gay, bisexual and transgender communities.

**Table 7.4: Knowing someone personally from the LGBT community vs. respondents' level of education**

Educational qualification	Known personally		
	Lesbian and Gay	Bisexual	Transgender
1. Up to O/L	17.4%	18.5%	27.4%
2. O/L – A/L	21.4%	19.7%	25.2%
3. Diploma and Professional degree	33.9%	20.5%	29.8%
4. Postgraduate degree	35.9%	32.2%	30.7%

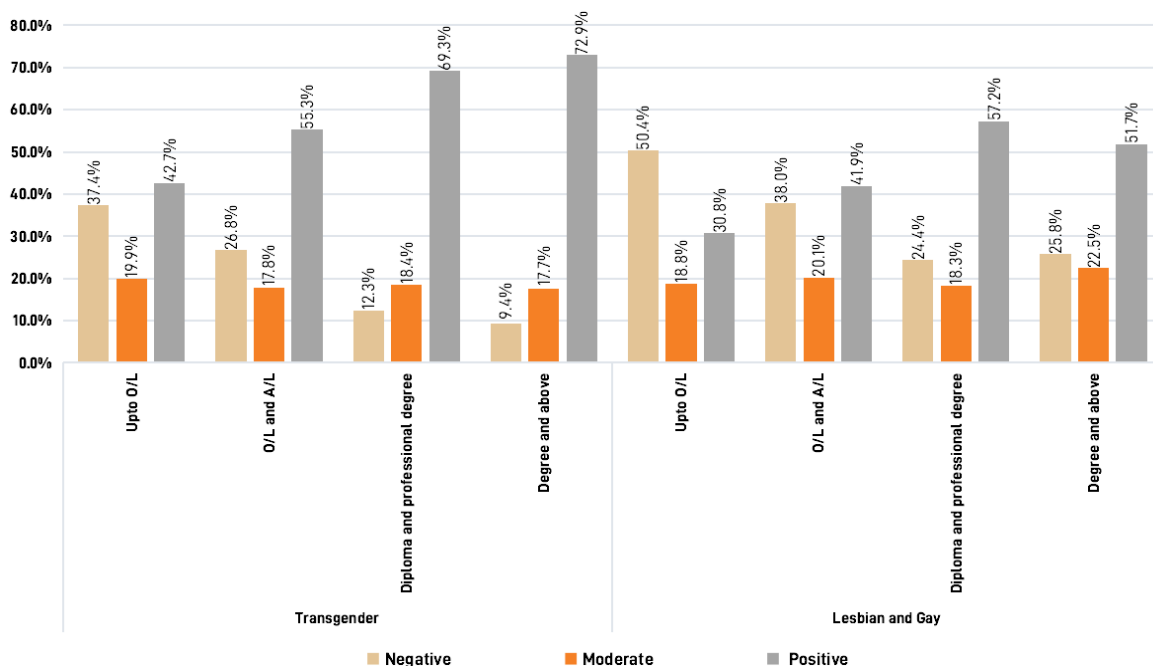
As shown in the above table, about one third of the men and women who have postgraduate qualifications claimed to know someone from the LGBT community. Those with up to Ordinary Level education showed relatively fewer connections to the LGBT community. However, they seemed to know more people from the transgender community than the other two groups.

## Education and attitudes

According to the findings of the survey, education clearly contributes to positive attitudes towards transgender and lesbian and gay persons. Attitudes towards transgender people are strongly correlated with the respondents' level of education. Although education shows a positive correlation with the respondents' attitudes towards lesbian and gay persons, this correlation is not as strong

as the correlation between education and positive attitudes towards transgender persons. While 9% of those who possess postgraduate qualification expressed negative attitudes towards transgender persons, 26% of the same group expressed negative attitudes towards the lesbian and gay community.

**Figure 7.8: Attitudes towards transgender, lesbian, and gay persons by education**



## Impact of education on beliefs

The survey findings demonstrate that education also influences one's beliefs about the LGBT community. People with relatively low levels of educational seemed to have more propensity to subscribe to social prejudices against LGBT persons. Similarly, people with graduate and post-graduate educational qualifications were less like to agree with existing social prejudices against the LGBT community. More than half of those with graduate and post-graduate educational qualifications refused to agree to six out of ten social prejudices tested in this survey. However, even among the educated respondents, there was

significant acceptance of ideas such as 'there are more STDs among them compared to others', 'sexual relations should only be between a man and a woman', and 'marriage should only be between a man and a woman'. Except for one statement, there were more than 20 points of difference between the opinions of those who have 'up to O/L' and 'graduate and above' level qualifications. Irrespective of the respondents' education level, a significant majority agreed that 'there are more STDs among them (LGBT people) compared to others.'

**Table 7.5: Subscription to societal prejudices against the LGBT community by education**

	Up to O/L	O/L and A/L	Diploma and professional degree	Degree and above
1. These are Western concepts	72.9%	65.5%	57.0%	49.4%
2. They go against nature	69.4%	58.5%	47.1%	39.5%
3. These are illnesses	65.8%	54.6%	31.5%	34.1%
4. These go against my religion	70.0%	53.2%	40.6%	42.6%
5. They become so due to karma/sin/satan	68.6%	56.4%	38.0%	40.9%
6. They are threat to our culture	83.7%	70.6%	59.9%	57.3%
7. Association with them encourage a person to become someone like them	67.4%	58.3%	48.8%	39.4%
8. There are more STDs among them compared to others	80.1%	80.4%	69.8%	70.7%
9. Sexual relation should only be a man and a woman	95.5%	89.7%	77.7%	70.8%
10. Marriage should only be a man and a woman	97.0%	91.4%	78.9%	73.9%
<b>Base</b>	<b>471</b>	<b>2212</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>267</b>

### *Education and perceptions of the LGBT community*

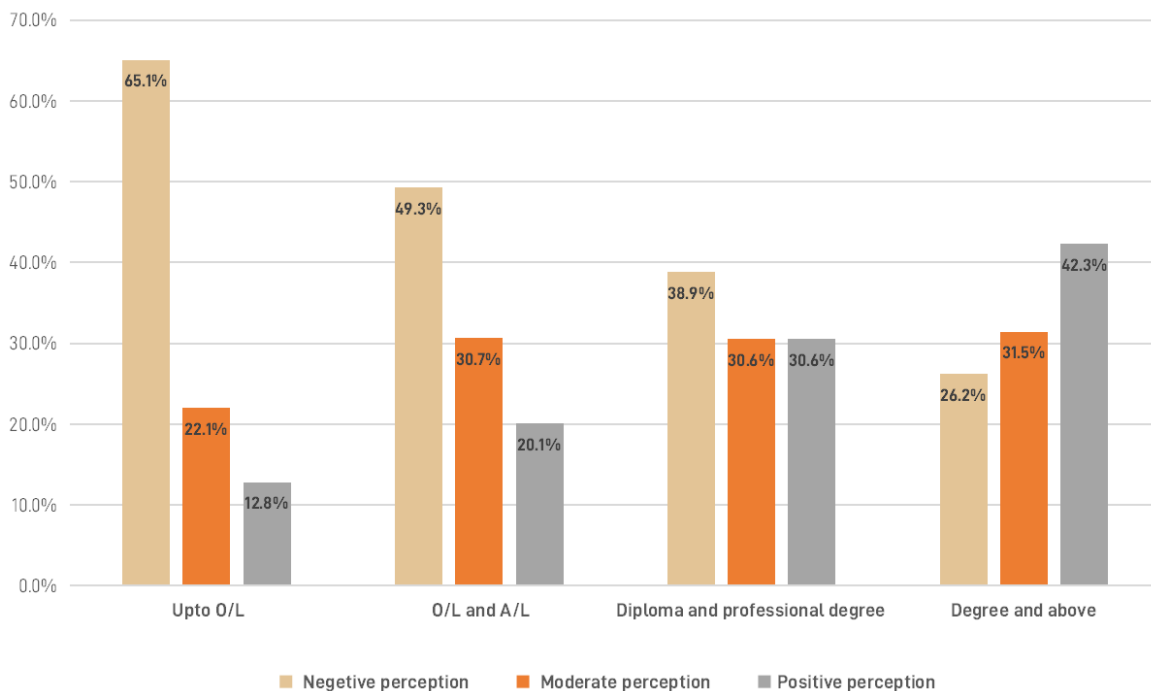
Education is a powerful means by which to influence the way people view the outside world. The survey results have shown that the percentage of the respondents with negative perceptions gradually declined with their educational qualifications. For example, while 65% of the respondents who have pursued their education up to the Ordinary Level examination had negative perceptions towards the LGBT community, only 26% of the respondents with a postgraduate degree held negative perceptions. This is proven further as a higher percentage of 42% with a degree and postgraduate level educational qualifications had positive perceptions of the LGBT community, while only 13% of the respondents with Ordinary Level qualifications had positive perceptions.

Therefore, the survey findings confirm the potential of education to be a catalyst for the liberal democratic transformation of our society. The main dividing line here is school education.

These findings suggest that those who only had a primary and/or secondary school education tend to be less tolerant towards diverse genders and sexualities than those who have a professional and university education. This difference could be the result not only of what one learns, but also how s/he experiences education. For instance, school education usually does not require one to step outside of their comfort zone, because many receive it while still being based at home. The maximum exposure this experience enables is through peer interaction. Since the school curriculum largely upholds the status quo, and students are not exposed to exogenous elements much, school education can be seen as largely contributing to the nurturing of a society that is not very receptive to non-normative genders and sexualities. Post-secondary education such as vocational and university education, on the other hand, usually requires students to relocate to an outside environment where they have more space to interact with people of all walks of life.

This could partially account for the greater tolerance among those with higher education that is clearly visible in this survey. The good news is that if one initiates an effective process of reform for primary and secondary education as recommended by the proposal for Comprehensive Sexuality Education<sup>16</sup>, there is a great deal of potential for changing societal attitudes towards accepting diverse gender and sexual identities from a very early age.

**Figure 7.9: Composite index for perceptions by education**



<sup>16</sup> UNFPA, 2019. *Population Matters, Policy Issue 08: UNFPA*. [https://srilanka.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Policy\\_Brief\\_08-FINAL\\_0.pdf](https://srilanka.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Policy_Brief_08-FINAL_0.pdf)



Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) is the UK public body dedicated to supporting democracy around the world. Operating directly in over 40 countries, WFD works with parliaments, political parties, and civil society groups as well as on elections to help make countries' political systems fairer, more inclusive and accountable.

Kaleidoscope Trust is the UK's leading organisation working to uphold the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT+) people in countries around the world where they are discriminated against or marginalised due to their sexual orientation, gender identity and/or gender expression.