

PERCEPTIONS OF GENDER AND SEXUAL DIVERSITY AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS IN TRIVANDRUM

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DECLARATION

I, **KRISHNA R** do hereby declare that the Dissertation Titled **PERCEPTIONS OF GENDER AND SEXUAL DIVERSITY AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS IN TRIVANDRUM** is based on the original work carried out by me and submitted to the Department of Sociology, Loyola College of Social Sciences (Autonomous), University of Kerala during the year 2024-2026 towards partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts Degree Examination in Sociology. It has not been submitted for the award of any degree, diploma, fellowship or other similar title of recognition before any University or anywhere else.

Thiruvananthapuram

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CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

This is to certify that this dissertation entitled **PERCEPTIONS OF GENDER AND SEXUAL DIVERSITY AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS IN TRIVANDRUM** is a record of genuine work done by **MS. KRISHNA R** fourth semester Master of Sociology student of this college under my supervision and guidance and that it is hereby approved for submission.

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ABSTRACT

Gender and sexual diversity has emerged as a significant area of sociological inquiry due to increasing global attention to issues of equality, human rights, social justice, and inclusion. Although India has witnessed important legal and policy developments concerning the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals, societal attitudes continue to be shaped by traditional cultural values, gender norms, and heteronormative beliefs. Higher educational institutions play a crucial role in shaping the attitudes and perceptions of young adults, making it important to examine students' understanding of gender and sexual diversity. Against this background, the present study entitled "Perceptions of Gender and Sexual Diversity Among College Students in Thiruvananthapuram" was undertaken to assess college students' awareness, perceptions, and attitudes towards gender and sexual diversity and to identify the factors influencing these perceptions.

The study adopted a quantitative research design. Primary data were collected from 80 college students selected from higher educational institutions in Thiruvananthapuram using a structured questionnaire. The collected data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The study examined respondents' socio-demographic profile, awareness of gender and sexual diversity, perceptions and attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals, opinions regarding social inclusion, and the social factors influencing these perceptions.

The findings reveal that the respondents generally possess a high level of awareness regarding gender and sexual diversity, with social media emerging as the primary source of information, followed by educational institutions and peer interactions. Most respondents demonstrated positive attitudes towards equality, dignity, non-discrimination, and equal opportunities for LGBTQ+ individuals. A majority expressed comfort in interacting with LGBTQ+ individuals, supported the introduction of gender-inclusive policies in educational institutions, and showed willingness to participate in awareness and sensitisation programmes. However, the study also found that a section of respondents continued to express uncertainty or hesitation, indicating the continuing influence of traditional gender norms, cultural values, religious beliefs, and heteronormative socialisation. The findings further reveal that educational institutions, family, peer groups, media,

and socio-cultural factors collectively shape students' perceptions towards gender and sexual diversity.

The study concludes that although awareness and acceptance of gender and sexual diversity are gradually increasing among college students, meaningful social inclusion requires sustained educational interventions, gender sensitisation programmes, inclusive institutional policies, and collaborative efforts involving educational institutions, families, policymakers, and civil society. The study contributes to the growing sociological literature on gender, sexuality, youth, and social inclusion by providing empirical evidence on the perceptions of college students in Kerala and highlights the importance of fostering inclusive educational environments that uphold equality, dignity, and respect for diversity.

Keywords: Gender, Sexual Diversity, LGBTQ+, College Students, Perceptions, Awareness, Social Inclusion, Higher Education

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	1
LIST OF FIGURES	7
LIST OF TABLES	7
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION.....	8
1.1 INTRODUCTION	8
1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM.....	16
1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY.....	18
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	21
2.1 INTRODUCTION	21
2.2 PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS GENDER AND SEXUAL DIVERSITY	21
2.3 DISCRIMINATION, HETERONORMATIVITY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION.....	26
2.4 EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND INCLUSIVE CAMPUS ENVIRONMENT	30
2.5 SOCIAL SUPPORT, WELL-BEING AND EMPOWERMENT.....	33
2.6 INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES AND POLICY PERSPECTIVES	35
CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	41
3.1 INTRODUCTION	41
3.2 TITLE OF THE STUDY	41
3.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY	41
3.4 OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS	42
3.4.1 Gender.....	42
3.4.2 Gender Diversity.....	42
3.4.3 Sexual Diversity.....	42
3.4.4 Perception	42
3.4.5 College Students	43
3.4.6 Social Inclusion.....	43
3.4.7 LGBTQ+ Rights	43
3.4.8 Youth Attitudes.....	43

3.4.10 Awareness.....	43
3.4.11 Perceptions	44
3.5 RESEARCH APPROACH.....	44
3.6 RESEARCH DESIGN	44
3.7 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	45
3.7.1 Queer Theory	45
3.7.2 Social Construction Theory of Gender	46
3.7.3 Relevance of the Theoretical Framework to the Study.....	46
3.8 AREA OF THE STUDY	46
3.9 POPULATION OF THE STUDY.....	47
3.10 UNIT OF THE STUDY	48
3.11 SAMPLING TECHNIQUE	49
3.12 SAMPLE SIZE	49
3.13 SOURCES OF DATA	49
3.13.1 Primary Data	49
3.13.2 Secondary Data	50
3.14 TOOLS FOR DATA COLLECTION.....	50
3.15 VARIABLES OF THE STUDY	50
3.15.1 Independent Variables.....	50
3.15.2 Dependent Variable.....	51
3.16 PILOT STUDY	51
3.17 DATA ANALYSIS	52
3.18 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	52
3.19 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY	52
CHAPTER IV: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION	54
4.1 INTRODUCTION	54
4.2 SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE REpondENTS.....	54
4.3 GENDER OF THE RESPONDENTS	55
4.4 RELIGION.....	56
4.5 ACADEMIC STREAM	56
4.6 LOCALITY.....	57

4.7 TYPE OF FAMILY	58
4.8 MONTHLY FAMILY INCOME.....	58
4.9 INTERACTION WITH LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY AMONG RESPONDENTS.....	59
4.10 MAIN SOURCE OF INFORMATION REGARDING GENDER AND SEXUAL DIVERSITY	59
4.11 TERM LGBTQ	61
4.12 DECRIMINALIZATION OF HOMOSEXUALITY	62
4.13 FREEDOM AND EXPRESSION OF GENDER IDENTITY	63
4.14 DISCRIMINATION IN SOCIETY.....	63
4.15 COLLEGES AND AWARENESS PROGRAMS	64
4.16 PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS GENDER AND SEXUAL DIVERSITY	64
4.17 COMFORTABILITY IN HAVING A LGBTQ FRIEND	71
4.18 SUPPORT EQUAL RIGHT FOR LGBTQ+ INDIVIDUALS	73
4.19 LGBTQ+ STUDENTS AND COLLEGE ENVIRONMENT	73
4.20 WITNESSED DISCRIMINATION AGAINST LGBTQ+ INDIVIDUALS.	75
4.21 PARTICIPATION ON GENDER AND SEXUAL DIVERSITY AWARENESS PROGRAMS.....	75
4.22 ROLE OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN GENDER INCLUSIVE POLICIES .	77
4.23 OPINIONS AND SUGGESTIONS OF THE RESPONDENTS	78
CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION	81
5.1 INTRODUCTION	81
5.2 MAJOR FINDINGS	82
5.2.1 Findings Related to the Socio-demographic Profile	82
5.2.2 Findings Related to Awareness of Gender and Sexual Diversity.....	83
5.2.3 Findings Related to Perceptions and Attitudes towards Gender and Sexual Diversity	85
5.2.4 Findings Related to Social Inclusion	87
5.2.5 Findings Related to Factors Influencing Perceptions	90
5.2.6 Overall Findings.....	92
5.3 SUGGESTIONS	94
5.3.1 Strengthen Gender Sensitization and Awareness Programmes.....	95
5.3.2 Promote Inclusive Educational Practices.....	95

5.3.3 Strengthen Institutional Policies Against Discrimination	95
5.3.4 Enhance Counselling and Student Support Services	95
5.3.5 Encourage Responsible Use of Media and Digital Platforms.....	96
5.3.6 Promote Community and Family Awareness.....	96
5.3.7 Encourage Collaboration with Government and Non-Governmental Organisations ..	96
5.3.8 Promote Student Participation and Leadership.....	96
5.3.9 Encourage Further Research	97
5.3.10 Promote Equality and Human Rights	97
5.4 CONCLUSION.....	97
REFERENCES	102
APPENDIX.....	105
INFORMED CONSENT FORM.....	105
QUESTIONNAIRE	106

LIST OF FIGURES

<i>Figure 4.1 Age of respondents</i>	<i>54</i>
<i>Figure 4.2 Gender of respondents</i>	<i>55</i>
<i>Figure 4.3 Religion</i>	<i>56</i>
<i>Figure 4.4 Academic Stream.....</i>	<i>57</i>
<i>Figure 4.5 Locality.....</i>	<i>57</i>
<i>Figure 4.6 Type of Family.....</i>	<i>58</i>
<i>Figure 4.7 Monthly Family Income</i>	<i>58</i>
<i>Figure 4.8 Interaction with LGBTQ+ Community among respondents</i>	<i>59</i>
<i>Figure 4.9 Main source of information.....</i>	<i>60</i>
<i>Figure 4.10 Term LGBTQ</i>	<i>61</i>
<i>Figure 4.11 Decriminalization of Homosexuality.....</i>	<i>62</i>
<i>Figure 4.12 Freedom and Expression of Gender Identity.....</i>	<i>63</i>
<i>Figure 4.13 Discrimination in society</i>	<i>63</i>
<i>Figure 4.14 Colleges and awareness programs.....</i>	<i>64</i>
<i>Figure 4.15 Comfortability in having a LGBTQ Friend.....</i>	<i>71</i>
<i>Figure 4.16 Support Equal Right for LGBTQ+ Individuals.....</i>	<i>73</i>
<i>Figure 4.17 LGBTQ+ Students and college environment</i>	<i>73</i>
<i>Figure 4.18 Witnessed discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals.....</i>	<i>75</i>
<i>Figure 4.19 Participation on gender and sexual diversity awareness programs</i>	<i>75</i>
<i>Figure 4.20 Role of educational institutions in gender inclusive policies.....</i>	<i>78</i>

LIST OF TABLES

<i>Table 4.1 Perceptions towards Gender and Sexual Diversity.....</i>	<i>66</i>
<i>Table 4.2 Opinions and suggestions of the respondents</i>	<i>79</i>

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Gender and sexual diversity has emerged as one of the most significant areas of inquiry within contemporary sociology because it is closely associated with questions of identity, social stratification, citizenship, equality, social justice, and human rights. Over the past few decades, rapid social transformation, globalisation, technological advancement, expanding human rights discourses, and increasing public visibility of LGBTQIA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, and other gender and sexual minority) communities have fundamentally reshaped scholarly understanding of gender and sexuality. Rather than being viewed solely as biological realities, gender and sexuality are increasingly recognised as socially, culturally, politically, and historically constructed categories whose meanings vary across societies and historical periods (Connell, 2005; Butler, 1990). Consequently, the study of gender and sexual diversity has become central to contemporary sociological debates concerning identity, power, inequality, social inclusion, and democratic citizenship.

Across the world, increasing recognition has been accorded to the rights and dignity of gender and sexual minorities through constitutional reforms, judicial interventions, international human rights conventions, public advocacy, and social movements. International organisations such as the United Nations have consistently affirmed that discrimination based on gender identity or sexual orientation constitutes a violation of fundamental human rights and undermines the principles of equality, dignity, and freedom that form the basis of democratic societies (United Nations, 2019). The adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly the commitment to "leave no one behind," has further strengthened global efforts towards creating inclusive societies where individuals are protected from discrimination irrespective of their gender identity or sexual orientation (United Nations, 2015). These developments have significantly increased public awareness regarding gender and sexual diversity and have encouraged governments, educational institutions, civil society organisations, and researchers to examine the structural barriers that continue to affect LGBTQIA+ communities.

Despite considerable legal and policy advancements, however, gender and sexual minority individuals continue to experience multiple forms of exclusion across different societies. Research conducted across diverse cultural contexts demonstrates that LGBTQIA+ individuals

frequently encounter discrimination within families, educational institutions, healthcare systems, workplaces, housing, public spaces, and legal institutions (Meyer, 2003; Herek, 2009). Experiences such as bullying, verbal harassment, physical violence, social isolation, denial of opportunities, psychological distress, and institutional discrimination continue to affect their quality of life. Minority Stress Theory proposed by Meyer (2003) explains that persistent exposure to prejudice, stigma, and discrimination creates chronic social stress, contributing to poorer mental and physical health outcomes among sexual and gender minorities. Thus, while legal reforms have improved formal recognition of rights, social acceptance has often lagged behind legislative progress.

From a sociological perspective, gender and sexuality cannot be understood merely as biological characteristics. Sociology conceptualises these categories as products of continuous social interaction, cultural interpretation, institutional regulation, and historical development. Biological sex generally refers to physiological differences between males and females, whereas gender encompasses socially constructed roles, expectations, behaviours, identities, and responsibilities assigned to individuals by society (Connell, 2005). Likewise, sexuality is shaped not only by biological attraction but also by cultural values, religious beliefs, historical experiences, legal systems, and political structures. Berger and Luckmann (1966) argue that social reality itself is produced through continuous interaction and institutionalisation, suggesting that meanings attached to masculinity, femininity, sexuality, and identity are socially created rather than naturally fixed.

The social constructionist perspective has significantly influenced contemporary scholarship on gender and sexuality. Berger and Luckmann (1966) contend that institutions, social norms, and everyday interactions create shared meanings that become accepted as objective reality. Consequently, ideas concerning "appropriate" gender roles or "acceptable" sexual behaviour differ considerably across cultures and historical periods. This perspective challenges essentialist assumptions that gender identities and sexual orientations are biologically predetermined and instead emphasises the influence of socialisation, culture, and institutional practices in shaping individual identities.

Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity further revolutionised sociological understanding by arguing that gender is not an inherent characteristic but is continuously produced through repeated social performances. According to Butler, individuals enact socially prescribed gender roles through language, behaviour, dress, and interaction, thereby reinforcing

dominant gender norms. This perspective questions binary understandings of gender and highlights the diversity of gender identities beyond conventional categories of male and female. Butler's work has become foundational in contemporary gender studies because it demonstrates how gender identities are maintained through social practices rather than biological determinism.

Similarly, Connell's (2005) theory of hegemonic masculinity explains how particular forms of masculinity become socially privileged while marginalising women and individuals whose identities do not conform to dominant gender expectations. Connell argues that gender relations are organised through unequal power structures that legitimise certain expressions of masculinity and femininity while subordinating others. This perspective helps explain why transgender persons, non-binary individuals, and sexual minorities frequently encounter discrimination within patriarchal societies that privilege heterosexual masculine identities.

The writings of Foucault (1978) further enrich sociological understanding by demonstrating that sexuality is deeply connected to relations of knowledge, power, and social control. Rather than considering sexuality as a natural biological instinct, Foucault argues that societies construct categories of normality and deviance through institutional practices, scientific knowledge, legal systems, and moral discourses. These systems regulate acceptable forms of sexuality while marginalising identities that fall outside socially sanctioned norms. Consequently, attitudes towards gender and sexual diversity are historically contingent and vary according to changing political, religious, and cultural contexts.

The concept of heteronormativity provides another important framework for understanding the experiences of gender and sexual minorities. Warner (1991) describes heteronormativity as a social system that privileges heterosexuality and binary gender identities as normal, natural, and morally acceptable. Under heteronormative assumptions, institutions such as family, education, religion, law, and media reinforce expectations that individuals should conform to heterosexual relationships and traditional gender roles. These assumptions influence everyday social interactions and institutional practices, often contributing to prejudice, discrimination, and exclusion of individuals whose identities challenge dominant norms.

The symbolic interactionist perspective also offers valuable insights into the formation of attitudes towards gender and sexuality. According to symbolic interactionism, meanings are created and negotiated through everyday social interaction. West and Zimmerman (1987), through their influential concept of *doing gender*, argue that gender is continuously reproduced

through routine interactions between individuals. Family members, teachers, peers, religious leaders, and media collectively shape people's understanding of masculinity, femininity, and acceptable sexual behaviour. Consequently, attitudes towards gender and sexual diversity are learned through socialisation and may change when individuals are exposed to diverse experiences, inclusive education, and positive interpersonal interactions.

These theoretical perspectives collectively demonstrate that perceptions of gender and sexual diversity are neither universal nor biologically predetermined. Rather, they are socially constructed, culturally mediated, historically situated, and institutionally reinforced. Consequently, differences in attitudes across societies, communities, and generations reflect broader processes of socialisation, cultural transmission, power relations, and social change. Understanding these processes is therefore central to sociological inquiry because they explain how prejudice is reproduced as well as how inclusive attitudes gradually emerge within changing social contexts.

The expansion of global communication technologies, digital media, and transnational social movements has further accelerated public discussions concerning gender and sexual diversity. Social media platforms, online activism, and digital communities have increased the visibility of LGBTQIA+ voices and created new spaces for advocacy, identity formation, and collective mobilisation. Educational institutions, governments, and international organisations increasingly recognise diversity and inclusion as essential components of democratic societies and sustainable development. Nevertheless, social acceptance continues to vary considerably across countries and cultures because attitudes remain deeply embedded within local histories, religious traditions, political ideologies, and cultural values.

Within this rapidly changing global context, India presents an important case for sociological investigation because it simultaneously reflects processes of legal transformation, cultural continuity, and social contestation regarding gender and sexuality.

The changing global discourse on gender and sexual diversity has found increasing resonance within the Indian socio-cultural context. India presents a unique setting for understanding gender and sexuality because of its rich historical diversity alongside persistent social conservatism. Historical records, religious texts, mythology, literature, and indigenous cultural traditions indicate that diverse expressions of gender and sexuality have existed in the Indian subcontinent for centuries. References to individuals who transcended binary gender identities and conventional sexual norms can be found in ancient Hindu texts such as the *Mahabharata*,

Ramayana, and various Puranas. Communities such as the Hijras have historically occupied recognised social and cultural spaces within Indian society, often performing ceremonial roles during births, marriages, and religious functions (Nanda, 1999). These historical narratives suggest that gender diversity has long been part of India's social fabric, although its social acceptance has fluctuated across different historical periods.

The colonial period marked a significant turning point in the regulation of sexuality and gender diversity in India. The introduction of Victorian moral values through British colonial rule institutionalised rigid heterosexual norms and binary understandings of gender. One of the most enduring legacies of colonial governance was the enactment of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code in 1860, which criminalised consensual same-sex relationships by categorising them as "unnatural offences." Although the law was rarely enforced, its symbolic impact was profound, reinforcing social stigma, legitimising discrimination, and contributing to the invisibility and marginalisation of LGBTQIA+ communities for more than a century (Narain & Bhan, 2005). Consequently, legal frameworks became powerful instruments through which heteronormative ideals were institutionalised and social prejudices were reinforced.

Independent India witnessed gradual but significant changes in public discourse surrounding gender and sexuality. The expansion of higher education, globalisation, digital communication, feminist movements, human rights advocacy, and the growing visibility of LGBTQIA+ communities contributed to increasing public engagement with issues of gender identity and sexual orientation. Civil society organisations, activists, academics, and legal practitioners played a crucial role in challenging discriminatory laws and advocating constitutional recognition of gender and sexual minorities. These efforts culminated in a series of landmark judicial decisions that fundamentally transformed the legal landscape concerning gender and sexual diversity in India.

A significant milestone was achieved through the Supreme Court's judgement in *National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) v. Union of India* (2014), which recognised transgender persons as a constitutionally protected "third gender" and affirmed their rights to equality, dignity, education, healthcare, employment, and self-identification. The judgement represented a paradigm shift by recognising gender identity as an integral component of individual autonomy and constitutional liberty (Government of India, 2014). Subsequently, the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 sought to prohibit discrimination against transgender persons

in education, employment, healthcare, housing, and public services, although debates continue regarding certain provisions of the legislation.

Perhaps the most significant legal transformation occurred through the historic judgement in *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India* (2018), in which the Supreme Court partially struck down Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, thereby decriminalising consensual same-sex relationships between adults. The judgement unequivocally affirmed that constitutional morality must prevail over societal morality and recognised the rights of LGBTQIA+ persons to equality, dignity, privacy, freedom of expression, and equal citizenship. The Court observed that sexual orientation is an intrinsic aspect of identity and that discrimination based on sexual orientation violates the fundamental rights guaranteed under the Constitution of India (Supreme Court of India, 2018). This landmark judgement represented not merely a legal reform but also a broader affirmation of human dignity and constitutional values.

Despite these progressive legal developments, the lived experiences of many LGBTQIA+ individuals continue to reveal a considerable gap between constitutional guarantees and everyday social realities. Empirical research conducted across India consistently demonstrates that gender and sexual minorities continue to experience family rejection, bullying in educational institutions, workplace discrimination, social exclusion, harassment, violence, housing discrimination, and barriers to healthcare access (Chakrapani et al., 2017; Rao & Mason, 2018). Deeply rooted patriarchal structures, heteronormative beliefs, religious conservatism, and limited public awareness continue to shape negative attitudes towards gender and sexual diversity. Consequently, while legislative reforms have expanded legal protections, social acceptance has evolved at a comparatively slower pace.

From a sociological perspective, this disparity between legal reform and social attitudes reflects the enduring influence of socialisation processes and institutional norms. Family, religion, education, peer groups, media, and cultural traditions continue to function as primary agents through which gender norms and expectations are transmitted across generations. Although legal institutions can establish frameworks for equality, transformation of public attitudes requires sustained changes in cultural values, educational practices, and everyday social interactions (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Connell, 2005). Understanding how these institutions shape perceptions towards gender and sexual diversity therefore remains an important sociological concern.

Within India, Kerala presents an especially significant context for examining these issues. The state has consistently ranked among the highest in India on indicators of literacy, educational attainment, life expectancy, gender development, and human development. Kerala's long history of social reform movements, missionary education, public health initiatives, and democratic political participation has contributed to relatively progressive social development. Furthermore, Kerala became the first Indian state to formulate a comprehensive State Policy for Transgender Persons in 2015, reflecting its commitment to promoting gender equality, social inclusion, and human rights. The policy sought to improve access to education, healthcare, employment, skill development, housing, and legal protection for transgender persons, thereby positioning Kerala as a pioneer in transgender welfare initiatives (Government of Kerala, 2015).

Nevertheless, progressive policies have not entirely transformed societal attitudes. Several studies conducted in Kerala indicate that LGBTQIA+ individuals continue to experience stigma, family rejection, discrimination within educational institutions, workplace exclusion, mental health challenges, and limited social acceptance (Human Rights Watch, 2022; Sahodaran, 2018). Traditional patriarchal values, religious norms, and heteronormative beliefs continue to influence perceptions despite high educational attainment and progressive policy interventions. This apparent contradiction between Kerala's progressive developmental indicators and continuing social prejudice makes the state an especially important site for sociological investigation.

Within Kerala, **Thiruvananthapuram** occupies a unique position as the administrative capital of the state and one of its foremost centres of higher education, governance, research, and cultural exchange. The district accommodates numerous universities, professional colleges, arts and science colleges, and research institutions that attract students from diverse socio-economic, cultural, linguistic, religious, and geographical backgrounds. Educational institutions in Thiruvananthapuram therefore function as important social spaces where traditional values interact with contemporary ideas concerning constitutional rights, diversity, gender equality, social inclusion, and democratic citizenship.

College campuses are not merely centres of academic learning; they are also important arenas for socialisation where young adults negotiate identities, form interpersonal relationships, engage with diverse viewpoints, and develop attitudes towards complex social issues. Students encounter multiple sources of influence, including classroom learning, peer interaction, social

media, popular culture, family expectations, and institutional values. These experiences significantly contribute to the formation and transformation of perceptions regarding gender and sexual diversity. As future educators, healthcare professionals, researchers, administrators, social workers, policymakers, legal practitioners, and community leaders, college students will play a pivotal role in shaping future institutional cultures and broader societal attitudes. Examining their perceptions therefore provides valuable insights into the direction of social change among educated youth.

Existing literature indicates that awareness, education, interpersonal contact, media exposure, and inclusive educational environments generally contribute to more positive attitudes towards gender and sexual diversity (Herek, 2009; UNESCO, 2021). Conversely, limited awareness, misinformation, rigid gender stereotypes, and conservative cultural values often reinforce prejudice and discrimination. Since higher educational institutions provide opportunities for critical thinking, dialogue, and exposure to diversity, they offer an appropriate context for examining the extent to which inclusive values are being internalised among young people.

Although research concerning LGBTQIA+ communities has expanded considerably during recent decades, much of the existing scholarship has focused on legal rights, public health, HIV/AIDS, mental health, discrimination, healthcare experiences, and the lived experiences of gender and sexual minorities. Comparatively fewer studies have examined the perceptions of the wider student population regarding gender and sexual diversity from a sociological perspective. Within the Kerala context, empirical investigations exploring the relationship between students' socio-demographic characteristics, educational experiences, family background, media exposure, peer interaction, and attitudes towards gender and sexual diversity remain relatively limited. This gap restricts understanding of how changing social institutions and contemporary educational environments influence young people's perceptions of gender and sexuality.

Moreover, much of the available literature has adopted qualitative approaches that focus primarily on lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals. While these studies have made invaluable contributions, there remains a need for systematic quantitative investigations that examine patterns of awareness and attitudes among college students and identify the socio-demographic and social factors associated with these perceptions. Such evidence is essential for developing evidence-based educational interventions, institutional policies, awareness programmes, and inclusive campus practices.

Against this background, the present study entitled "**Perceptions of Gender and Sexual Diversity Among College Students in Thiruvananthapuram**" seeks to examine the awareness, attitudes, and perceptions of college students regarding gender and sexual diversity and to analyse the influence of selected socio-demographic and social factors including gender, educational stream, locality, family background, peer influence, and media exposure on these perceptions. By adopting a quantitative sociological approach, the study aims to generate empirical evidence that contributes to the growing scholarship on gender, sexuality, youth, and social inclusion within the contemporary Kerala context.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Gender and sexual diversity has become an increasingly important area of discussion in contemporary society due to growing awareness of equality, human rights, and social justice. Across the world, greater recognition has been given to the rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and other gender and sexual minority (LGBTQ+) communities through legal reforms, public advocacy, and international human rights initiatives. Despite these developments, many LGBTQ+ individuals continue to experience discrimination, stigma, prejudice, and social exclusion in various aspects of everyday life, including within families, educational institutions, workplaces, and healthcare settings (Herek, 2009; Meyer, 2003). These experiences demonstrate that legal recognition alone does not necessarily ensure social acceptance or equality.

From a sociological perspective, attitudes towards gender and sexuality are socially constructed through the process of socialisation. Family, educational institutions, religion, peer groups, media, and cultural traditions play an important role in shaping individuals' understanding of gender identity and sexual orientation (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Connell, 2005). As a result, perceptions of gender and sexual diversity differ across societies and individuals depending on their social and cultural experiences. While increasing exposure to education, media, and diverse social interactions has contributed to greater acceptance among some sections of society, traditional gender norms and heteronormative beliefs continue to influence negative attitudes towards gender and sexual minorities (Warner, 1991).

In India, important legal developments have strengthened the rights of LGBTQ+ persons. The landmark judgement in *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India* (2018) decriminalised consensual same-sex relationships by partially striking down Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code and affirmed the constitutional values of equality, dignity, privacy, and individual freedom.

Similarly, the *Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019* sought to protect transgender persons from discrimination in education, employment, healthcare, and public services. However, despite these legal advancements, studies indicate that LGBTQ+ individuals continue to face prejudice, bullying, family rejection, discrimination, and social stigma in many parts of the country (Chakrapani et al., 2017). This suggests that social attitudes have not changed at the same pace as legal reforms.

Higher educational institutions are important spaces where young people develop their values, beliefs, and attitudes. College students are exposed to diverse ideas through education, peer interaction, social media, and wider social experiences, making them an important group for understanding changing perceptions of gender and sexual diversity. As future professionals, educators, administrators, policymakers, and community leaders, their attitudes are likely to influence future institutional practices and social relationships. Therefore, understanding college students' perceptions provides valuable insights into the extent to which inclusive values are being accepted among educated youth.

Kerala is often recognised for its high literacy rate, educational achievements, and progressive social development. The state has also introduced initiatives to promote gender equality and transgender welfare. However, research and media reports continue to highlight the existence of discrimination and social stigma towards LGBTQ+ individuals, indicating that educational advancement and progressive policies do not automatically result in social acceptance (Human Rights Watch, 2022). Within Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, as the state capital and an important educational centre, provides an appropriate setting for examining students' perceptions because colleges in the district bring together students from diverse social, cultural, and economic backgrounds.

Although several studies have examined LGBTQ+ issues from legal, psychological, and health perspectives, relatively few sociological studies have focused on the perceptions of college students regarding gender and sexual diversity in the Kerala context. There is also limited empirical evidence examining how factors such as gender, educational background, family, peer influence, and media exposure shape students' attitudes towards gender and sexual diversity in Thiruvananthapuram.

Against this background, the present study seeks to examine the perceptions of gender and sexual diversity among college students in Thiruvananthapuram. The study aims to understand students' level of awareness, their attitudes towards gender and sexual diversity, and the

influence of selected socio-demographic and social factors on these perceptions. The findings are expected to contribute to the sociological understanding of gender, sexuality, youth, and social inclusion while providing useful insights for educational institutions, policymakers, and researchers in promoting awareness, equality, and inclusive educational environments.

1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The present study is significant from academic, sociological, and practical perspectives as it examines the perceptions of gender and sexual diversity among college students in Thiruvananthapuram. In recent years, issues related to gender identity, sexual orientation, equality, and social inclusion have received increasing attention in academic research, public policy, educational institutions, and civil society. Although important legal reforms have strengthened the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals in India, many people belonging to gender and sexual minority communities continue to experience prejudice, discrimination, and social exclusion. Understanding how young people perceive these issues is therefore essential for promoting equality, respect, and social justice within society.

From an academic perspective, the study contributes to the growing body of knowledge in sociology, gender studies, youth studies, and social inclusion. While many previous studies have examined LGBTQ+ issues from legal, psychological, medical, and public health perspectives, comparatively fewer studies have explored these issues from a sociological viewpoint within higher educational institutions in Kerala. The present study attempts to fill this gap by providing empirical evidence on the awareness, attitudes, and perceptions of college students regarding gender and sexual diversity. It contributes to the existing literature by examining how social institutions and socio-demographic factors influence students' perceptions in the contemporary social context.

The study is particularly significant because it adopts a quantitative research approach to understand students' perceptions. By collecting and analysing responses from college students through a structured questionnaire, the research provides systematic and evidence-based information regarding their awareness and attitudes. Quantitative findings help identify overall patterns and trends among respondents and provide useful data that can support future sociological research, educational planning, and policy development. The use of statistical analysis also enhances the reliability and objectivity of the study.

From a sociological perspective, the study is important because it highlights the role of social institutions in shaping perceptions related to gender and sexual diversity. Family, educational institutions, religion, peer groups, media, and the wider cultural environment influence the development of values and attitudes from an early age. The study demonstrates that perceptions regarding gender identity and sexual orientation are socially constructed and continuously shaped through interaction, socialisation, and cultural experiences. Examining these influences contributes to a better understanding of how social attitudes are formed, maintained, and gradually transformed within contemporary society.

The study is also socially significant because college students represent an important section of society. They are future professionals, teachers, administrators, researchers, policymakers, social workers, and community leaders whose attitudes will influence future social relationships and institutional practices. Their perceptions regarding gender and sexual diversity can shape educational environments, workplaces, public services, and community interactions. Positive attitudes among young people can contribute to reducing discrimination, promoting equality, and encouraging respect for diversity, while negative attitudes may reinforce social exclusion and prejudice. Therefore, understanding students' perceptions is essential for promoting a more inclusive and democratic society.

Another important contribution of the study is its relevance to educational institutions. Colleges and universities play a central role in shaping students' knowledge, values, and social behaviour. The findings of the study may assist educational institutions in designing gender sensitization programmes, awareness campaigns, workshops, counselling services, and inclusive campus policies. By understanding students' existing perceptions, educational administrators and teachers can develop appropriate interventions that encourage respect, empathy, equality, and social inclusion. Such initiatives can help create learning environments where every student feels safe, respected, and valued irrespective of gender identity or sexual orientation.

The findings of this study are also useful for policymakers, government departments, and non-governmental organisations working in the fields of gender equality, youth development, education, and human rights. Evidence generated through this research can support the formulation of awareness programmes, educational policies, and community-based initiatives that promote equality and reduce discrimination. Government agencies and civil society organisations may utilise these findings while planning campaigns that encourage social

acceptance, challenge stereotypes, and strengthen inclusive practices within educational institutions and communities.

The study further contributes to understanding the changing social realities of Kerala. Although the state is recognised for its high literacy, educational achievements, and progressive development indicators, traditional social norms and cultural beliefs continue to influence public attitudes towards gender and sexual diversity. By focusing on college students in Thiruvananthapuram, the study provides valuable insights into how young people negotiate traditional values alongside emerging ideas relating to equality, diversity, and human rights. These findings enhance sociological understanding of contemporary social change within Kerala and contribute to discussions on modernisation, social transformation, and inclusive development.

The research also provides a valuable foundation for future studies. Since the study focuses on college students in Thiruvananthapuram using a quantitative approach, future researchers may extend this work by conducting comparative studies across different districts, states, educational institutions, or age groups. Researchers may also employ qualitative or mixed-method approaches to gain a deeper understanding of lived experiences, institutional practices, and the social processes influencing perceptions of gender and sexual diversity. The present study therefore serves as a useful reference for scholars interested in sociology, gender studies, sexuality studies, youth studies, social inclusion, and human rights.

Finally, the significance of the present study lies in its contribution towards promoting a society based on equality, dignity, mutual respect, and social justice. By examining the perceptions of college students towards gender and sexual diversity, the study highlights both the progress achieved and the challenges that remain in creating inclusive social environments. It emphasises the importance of education, awareness, dialogue, and supportive institutional practices in reducing prejudice and strengthening acceptance. It is hoped that the findings of this study will contribute not only to sociological knowledge but also to the development of policies, educational practices, and community initiatives that promote inclusion and ensure that every individual, irrespective of gender identity or sexual orientation, is treated with dignity, respect, and equal opportunity.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

A review of literature is an important component of any research study because it provides a comprehensive understanding of the existing body of knowledge related to the research topic. It enables the researcher to identify what has already been studied, the major findings of previous research, the theoretical perspectives that have been used, and the areas where further investigation is required. Reviewing earlier studies also helps in developing a clear research problem, formulating objectives, selecting an appropriate methodology, and interpreting the findings in a meaningful manner. In sociological research, a literature review is particularly significant because it places the present study within the broader context of social theory, empirical research, and contemporary social issues.

The present study focuses on the perceptions of LGBTQ+ rights and social inclusion among college youth in Trivandrum. The review of literature for the present study includes national and international research related to LGBTQ+ youth, social inclusion, discrimination, educational experiences, healthcare, community support, empowerment, well-being, and institutional responses. These studies provide valuable insights into the various social factors influencing perceptions of gender and sexual diversity. They also demonstrate the importance of creating inclusive educational institutions, promoting awareness, and strengthening policies that support equality and human rights. The present review of literature aims not only to summarise previous research but also to critically understand the existing knowledge related to gender and sexual diversity. It helps identify important themes, theoretical perspectives, and research gaps that justify the need for the present study. The following sections review selected national and international studies relevant to LGBTQ+ rights, social inclusion, youth perceptions, educational environments, discrimination, and institutional support. The chapter concludes by identifying the research gap that forms the foundation of the present investigation.

2.2 Perceptions and Attitudes towards Gender and Sexual Diversity

Understanding public perceptions and attitudes towards gender and sexual diversity has become a central concern in contemporary sociological research because attitudes significantly influence the social inclusion, rights, and well-being of LGBTQ+ individuals. Perceptions are not merely individual opinions; rather, they are socially constructed through interaction with institutions such as family, education, religion, peer groups, media, and the wider cultural

environment (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Sociologists argue that attitudes towards gender identity and sexual orientation reflect prevailing social norms and cultural values, which are continuously shaped through processes of socialisation and everyday interactions. Consequently, examining how young people perceive gender and sexual diversity provides valuable insights into the broader processes of social change, inclusion, and democratic citizenship.

International research consistently demonstrates that public attitudes towards LGBTQ+ communities have become more accepting over recent decades, particularly among younger generations. However, this acceptance remains uneven across different societies and is influenced by cultural traditions, religious beliefs, educational opportunities, and exposure to diversity. Herek (1990), in his influential work *The Context of Anti-Gay Violence: Notes on Cultural and Psychological Heterosexism*, argues that negative attitudes towards sexual minorities originate from heterosexism, a cultural belief system that privileges heterosexuality as the only legitimate or socially acceptable form of sexuality. Herek explains that heterosexist beliefs are reproduced through family, religion, educational institutions, media representations, and public discourse, thereby normalising prejudice and discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals. Rather than viewing prejudice as an individual psychological characteristic, Herek conceptualises it as a product of broader social structures and cultural norms. His work provides an important sociological foundation for understanding why perceptions towards gender and sexual diversity differ across societies and why discriminatory attitudes continue despite legal reforms.

Similarly, Warner (1991), through his concept of heteronormativity, argues that societies institutionalise heterosexuality and binary gender identities as the accepted social norm. According to Warner, heteronormative assumptions shape social expectations regarding family, relationships, education, religion, and citizenship, often marginalising individuals whose identities do not conform to dominant norms. This perspective highlights that attitudes towards gender and sexual diversity are embedded within broader systems of social power rather than arising from individual prejudice alone. Warner's theoretical contribution has become fundamental to sociological analyses of LGBTQ+ inclusion because it explains how everyday institutional practices reproduce inequality even in societies that claim to uphold equality and diversity.

Empirical studies further demonstrate that perceptions of gender and sexual diversity are dynamic and closely associated with social interaction and exposure to diversity. Gerven et.al., (2019), in their study *Who is Less Welcome? The Impact of Individuating Cues on Attitudes towards Immigrants*, although focusing on immigrant populations, provide important insights into the formation of attitudes towards minority communities. Their findings indicate that people often rely on stereotypes when evaluating unfamiliar social groups. However, greater personal knowledge, meaningful interpersonal contact, and accurate information reduce prejudice and encourage more positive attitudes. The authors conclude that education and social interaction play a significant role in transforming stereotypical perceptions into more inclusive understandings. Although their study addresses immigrants rather than LGBTQ+ communities, its findings are highly relevant because attitudes towards both groups are frequently shaped by limited knowledge and socially constructed stereotypes.

The relationship between social contact and attitudes is also reflected in studies focusing specifically on LGBTQ+ youth. Russell B. Toomey, Caitlin Ryan, Rafael M. Díaz, and Stephen T. Russell (2011), in their study *High School Gay–Straight Alliances (GSAs) and Young Adult Well-Being*, demonstrate that educational environments promoting interaction between LGBTQ+ students and their heterosexual peers contribute significantly to positive attitudes towards gender and sexual diversity. The presence of Gay–Straight Alliances not only improved the well-being of LGBTQ+ students but also created opportunities for dialogue, mutual understanding, and acceptance among the wider student population. Their findings support the sociological argument that meaningful social interaction reduces prejudice and encourages inclusive attitudes, consistent with Allport's (1954) Contact Hypothesis.

Educational institutions emerge consistently within the literature as influential spaces where perceptions towards gender and sexual diversity are formed and transformed. Catherine G. Taylor, Elizabeth J. Meyer, Tracey Peter, Janice Ristock, Donn Short, and Christopher Campbell (2016), in *Gaps between Beliefs, Perceptions, and Practices: The Every Teacher Project on LGBTQ-Inclusive Education in Canadian Schools*, investigated teachers' attitudes towards LGBTQ-inclusive education. Although many educators expressed positive beliefs regarding equality and inclusion, the researchers found a substantial gap between supportive attitudes and actual classroom practices. Many teachers lacked confidence, institutional support, or professional training to address LGBTQ-related issues effectively. The authors concluded that positive perceptions alone are insufficient unless supported by institutional commitment, professional development, and inclusive educational policies. Their study

illustrates that attitudes are shaped not only by personal beliefs but also by organisational culture and institutional structures.

Similarly, Gilliam (2004), in *Respecting the Rights of GLBTQ Youth: A Responsibility of Youth-Serving Professionals*, argues that professionals working with young people play a decisive role in shaping attitudes towards gender and sexual diversity. Gilliam emphasises that teachers, counsellors, healthcare professionals, and social workers influence young people's perceptions through everyday interactions. Respectful communication, empathy, and accurate knowledge regarding LGBTQ+ issues foster inclusive attitudes, whereas prejudice or ignorance reinforces discrimination. The study highlights that educational institutions are not merely places of knowledge transmission but important sites of socialisation where democratic values, equality, and respect for diversity are cultivated.

Several studies have also highlighted that perceptions of inclusion extend beyond acceptance by the wider society and include experiences within LGBTQ+ communities themselves. Melinda McCormick and Ramón S. Barthelemy (2018), in *Excluded from "Inclusive" Communities: LGBTQ Youths' Perception of "Their" Community*, demonstrate that inclusion is a complex and multidimensional social process. Their findings reveal that LGBTQ+ youth often experience exclusion within communities that are expected to be inclusive because of differences in race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, body image, or gender identity. Drawing upon the concept of intersectionality, the authors argue that individuals experience inclusion differently depending upon the interaction of multiple social identities. This study broadens the understanding of attitudes by demonstrating that diversity exists within minority communities themselves and that genuine inclusion requires recognition of multiple forms of identity and inequality.

Longitudinal evidence further illustrates the changing nature of public attitudes. Holman and Oswald (2011), in *A Decade of Changes: Within-Group Analysis of LGBTQ Individuals' Perceptions of Their Community Context and the Relevance for Social Service Providers*, found that perceptions of community acceptance had improved significantly over a ten-year period due to legal reforms, increased media visibility, and greater public awareness. Nevertheless, participants continued to report experiences of discrimination and unequal treatment. The authors concluded that while legal recognition contributes to changing attitudes, social acceptance evolves more gradually because cultural beliefs and institutional practices often

remain resistant to change. Their findings reinforce the sociological understanding that attitudes are dynamic and influenced by broader processes of social transformation.

Studies examining healthcare and welfare institutions similarly demonstrate that professional attitudes significantly influence LGBTQ+ experiences. Petrova et.al., (2017), in *LGBTQ Youth's Perceptions of Primary Care*, found that respectful communication, confidentiality, and cultural competence among healthcare providers encouraged positive healthcare experiences for LGBTQ+ youth. Conversely, insensitive behaviour, prejudice, and lack of awareness discouraged individuals from accessing healthcare services. Likewise, Elizabeth Greeno, Maria Matarese, and Angela Weeks (2021), in *Attitudes, Beliefs, and Behaviours of Child Welfare Workers Toward LGBTQ Youth*, observed that professionals with greater knowledge and positive attitudes towards gender and sexual diversity were more likely to create supportive and inclusive institutional environments. These findings indicate that attitudes within institutions directly influence access to services and experiences of social inclusion.

Research also demonstrates that positive perceptions contribute substantially to the empowerment and well-being of LGBTQ+ youth. Wagaman (2016), in *Promoting Empowerment Among LGBTQ Youth: A Social Justice Youth Development Approach*, argues that supportive attitudes enable LGBTQ+ youth to develop confidence, leadership skills, and civic participation. Rather than viewing LGBTQ+ youth solely as vulnerable individuals, Wagaman emphasises their strengths and capacity for social contribution when they are supported by inclusive educational institutions and communities. Similarly, Diane Higa, Michele J. Hoppe, Taryn Lindhorst, Sarah Mincer, Barbara Beadnell, Ellen A. Morrison, Ann Todd, and Suzanne Mountz (2014) found that supportive attitudes from families, peers, and educational institutions significantly enhanced the psychological well-being and resilience of LGBTQ+ youth while reducing the negative effects of discrimination and stigma.

Collectively, the reviewed literature demonstrates that perceptions and attitudes towards gender and sexual diversity are not fixed but are socially produced through ongoing interaction between individuals and institutions. Educational exposure, interpersonal contact, professional awareness, media representation, and supportive institutional environments consistently emerge as factors promoting acceptance, whereas heteronormative beliefs, cultural stereotypes, misinformation, and limited social interaction reinforce prejudice and exclusion. The literature also indicates that legal recognition alone cannot ensure social acceptance; meaningful

attitudinal change requires sustained educational efforts, inclusive institutional practices, and opportunities for respectful dialogue.

2.3 Discrimination, Heteronormativity and Social Exclusion

Discrimination, heteronormativity, and social exclusion remain among the most significant challenges experienced by LGBTQ+ individuals across societies. Although legal recognition of LGBTQ+ rights has increased in many countries, social acceptance continues to lag behind legislative reforms. Sociological research consistently demonstrates that discrimination is embedded within cultural norms, institutional practices, and everyday social interactions rather than arising solely from individual prejudice (Herek, 1990; Warner, 1991). Consequently, understanding the processes through which discrimination and exclusion are reproduced is essential for explaining contemporary perceptions of gender and sexual diversity.

Michael Warner (1991), in his influential work *Fear of a Queer Planet*, introduced the concept of **heteronormativity**, which refers to the assumption that heterosexuality and binary gender identities are natural, normal, and socially desirable. Warner (1991) argues that heteronormative assumptions are embedded within institutions such as the family, education, religion, law, and the media, where heterosexual relationships are presented as the standard against which all other identities are evaluated. Consequently, individuals whose gender identities or sexual orientations differ from these dominant norms frequently experience marginalisation and exclusion. Warner's (1991) work demonstrates that discrimination is not limited to individual prejudice but is institutionalised through everyday social practices, language, and policies.

Similarly, Gregory M. Herek (1990), in *The Context of Anti-Gay Violence: Notes on Cultural and Psychological Heterosexism*, explains discrimination through the concept of **heterosexism**, referring to the ideological system that privileges heterosexuality while devaluing other sexual orientations. According to Herek (1990), heterosexist beliefs are transmitted through socialisation within families, religious institutions, schools, and the media, reinforcing stereotypes and legitimising discriminatory behaviour. The study argues that anti-LGBTQ prejudice should be understood as a structural social phenomenon rather than merely an individual psychological characteristic. This perspective provides an important sociological explanation for the persistence of discrimination despite increasing legal recognition of LGBTQ+ rights.

The consequences of discrimination are evident in the everyday experiences of LGBTQ+ youth. Joanna Almeida, Renee M. Johnson, Heather L. Corliss, Beth E. Molnar, and Deborah Azrael (2009), in their study *Emotional Distress among LGBT Youth: The Influence of Perceived Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation*, found that experiences of discrimination were significantly associated with increased levels of anxiety, depression, loneliness, and emotional distress. Almeida et al. (2009) further observed that discrimination experienced in schools, families, neighbourhoods, and public spaces negatively affected young people's confidence and overall quality of life. These findings support Meyer's (2003) Minority Stress Theory, which argues that chronic exposure to prejudice and stigma generates continuous psychological stress among sexual minorities.

Educational institutions have emerged as important sites where discrimination and heteronormativity are reproduced or challenged. Catherine G. Taylor, Elizabeth J. Meyer, Tracey Peter, Janice Ristock, Donn Short, and Christopher Campbell (2016), in *Gaps between Beliefs, Perceptions, and Practices: The Every Teacher Project on LGBTQ-Inclusive Education in Canadian Schools*, reported that although many teachers supported LGBTQ+ inclusion in principle, relatively few incorporated LGBTQ-related issues into classroom practice. Taylor et al. (2016) attributed this gap to inadequate professional training, institutional barriers, fear of criticism, and lack of administrative support. Their findings indicate that positive attitudes alone are insufficient unless supported by inclusive institutional policies and educational practices.

Likewise, Jessie Gilliam (2004), in *Respecting the Rights of GLBTQ Youth: A Responsibility of Youth-Serving Professionals*, emphasised that discrimination often results from inadequate institutional awareness rather than deliberate prejudice. Gilliam (2004) argued that teachers, counsellors, healthcare professionals, and social workers have an ethical responsibility to create supportive environments for LGBTQ+ youth. The study highlights that institutions failing to recognise gender and sexual diversity contribute to exclusion by reinforcing heteronormative assumptions.

Discrimination is also evident within healthcare institutions. Barbara K. Snyder, Gail D. Burack, and Anna Petrova (2017), in their study *LGBTQ Youth's Perceptions of Primary Care*, reported that many LGBTQ+ youth experienced insensitive communication, lack of confidentiality, and inadequate understanding of LGBTQ-related issues while accessing healthcare services. Snyder et al. (2017) found that these experiences discouraged young

people from seeking medical care and weakened their trust in healthcare institutions. The authors concluded that institutional awareness and inclusive professional practices are essential for reducing healthcare inequalities experienced by LGBTQ+ communities.

Similarly, Elizabeth Greeno, Maria Matarese, and Angela Weeks (2021), in *Attitudes, Beliefs, and Behaviours of Child Welfare Workers Toward LGBTQ Youth*, demonstrated that inadequate knowledge among child welfare professionals frequently contributed to discriminatory institutional practices. Greeno et al. (2021) observed that professionals possessing greater awareness and positive attitudes towards LGBTQ+ issues were more likely to provide respectful and inclusive support, whereas inadequate professional training often reinforced exclusion and marginalisation.

Social exclusion is not confined to mainstream society but may also occur within LGBTQ+ communities themselves. Melinda McCormick and Ramón S. Barthelemy (2018), in *Excluded from "Inclusive" Communities: LGBTQ Youths' Perception of "Their" Community*, found that LGBTQ+ youth sometimes experienced exclusion because of differences related to race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic background, gender identity, or body image. McCormick and Barthelemy (2018) argued that these experiences demonstrate the importance of intersectionality, suggesting that multiple social identities shape experiences of inclusion and exclusion. Their findings indicate that belonging within LGBTQ+ communities is influenced by several overlapping forms of inequality rather than sexual orientation alone.

The organisation of public space also contributes to patterns of exclusion. Daphne Spain (1992), in *Gendered Spaces*, argues that urban environments reflect broader social inequalities by influencing access to education, employment, mobility, and public participation. Although Spain's (1992) work primarily addresses women, her analysis provides a useful framework for understanding the experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals who may avoid public spaces because of fear of discrimination or violence. Similarly, Linda McDowell (1983), in *Towards an Understanding of the Gender Division of Urban Space*, demonstrates that urban spaces are shaped by patriarchal social structures that regulate participation and reinforce unequal power relations. Together, these studies suggest that discrimination extends beyond interpersonal relationships to include spatial and institutional dimensions.

Stacey Horn, Christina Peter, and Stephen T. Russell (2016), in *The Right to... Competing Tensions Among Protection, Survival and Participation Related to Youth Sexuality and Gender*, argue that LGBTQ+ youth frequently balance the need for personal safety with the desire for

self-expression and social participation. Horn et al. (2016) emphasise that institutions should move beyond protecting LGBTQ+ youth to actively promoting their participation and equal citizenship. Their findings suggest that genuine inclusion requires opportunities for meaningful social participation rather than merely the absence of discrimination.

Longitudinal research by Eric G. Holman and Rhoda F. Oswald (2011), in *A Decade of Changes: Within-Group Analysis of LGBTQ Individuals' Perceptions of Their Community Context*, demonstrates that although public awareness and legal recognition improved over a ten-year period, discrimination and social exclusion remained significant concerns. Holman and Oswald (2011) conclude that while legislative reforms contribute to changing public attitudes, deeply rooted cultural beliefs and institutional practices continue to sustain inequality.

Overall, the reviewed literature demonstrates that discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals is multidimensional, operating simultaneously at interpersonal, institutional, cultural, and structural levels. Heteronormativity and heterosexism continue to influence educational institutions, healthcare systems, welfare organisations, public spaces, and community relationships. Although legal reforms and increasing public awareness have contributed to gradual improvements in acceptance, prejudice and exclusion remain significant barriers to equality and social inclusion (Herek, 1990; Warner, 1991).

The literature also reveals that discrimination is closely associated with reduced psychological well-being, limited social participation, restricted access to opportunities, and diminished quality of life among LGBTQ+ individuals (Almeida et al., 2009; Meyer, 2003). However, most existing studies focus primarily on the experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals themselves rather than examining the attitudes of the wider population that contribute to discrimination. Furthermore, much of the empirical evidence originates from Western societies, with comparatively limited research conducted in India, particularly in Kerala. There is a noticeable lack of sociological studies examining how college students perceive discrimination, heteronormativity, and social exclusion in relation to gender and sexual diversity. Addressing this gap is essential for understanding the attitudes of educated youth and for developing educational interventions that promote equality, respect for diversity, and inclusive campus environments.

2.4 Educational Institutions and Inclusive Campus Environment

Educational institutions occupy a central position in shaping young people's attitudes towards gender and sexual diversity because they function as important agents of socialisation, knowledge transmission, and democratic citizenship. Beyond imparting academic knowledge, colleges and universities influence students' beliefs, values, and interpersonal relationships through classroom interactions, institutional policies, peer networks, extracurricular activities, and campus culture. Sociologists argue that educational institutions not only reflect prevailing social norms but also possess the potential to challenge stereotypes and promote social transformation by encouraging critical thinking, inclusivity, and respect for diversity (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Consequently, higher education plays a crucial role in shaping perceptions towards LGBTQ+ communities and fostering inclusive campus environments.

A growing body of literature suggests that inclusive educational environments contribute significantly to reducing prejudice and promoting acceptance of gender and sexual diversity. Catherine G. Taylor, Elizabeth J. Meyer, Tracey Peter, Janice Ristock, Donn Short, and Christopher Campbell (2016), in *The Every Teacher Project on LGBTQ-Inclusive Education in Canadian Schools*, examined educators' beliefs, perceptions, and classroom practices regarding LGBTQ-inclusive education. The study found that although many teachers supported principles of equality and inclusion, only a limited number actively incorporated LGBTQ-related topics into teaching practices. The authors observed that insufficient professional training, institutional constraints, lack of administrative support, and concerns about community reactions often prevented educators from implementing inclusive educational practices. Taylor et al. (2016) concluded that institutional commitment, teacher preparedness, and curriculum reform are essential for translating positive attitudes into meaningful educational practice.

Similarly, Jessie Gilliam (2004), in *Respecting the Rights of GLBTQ Youth: A Responsibility of Youth-Serving Professionals*, argues that educational institutions have a responsibility to ensure that all students experience safety, dignity, and equal opportunities regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation. Gilliam (2004) emphasises that teachers, counsellors, and youth-serving professionals significantly influence students' perceptions through everyday interactions. Inclusive communication, sensitivity towards diversity, and the provision of accurate information encourage respect and empathy, whereas silence or avoidance of LGBTQ-related issues reinforces misconceptions and stigma. The study therefore highlights that

educational institutions serve not only as centres of learning but also as spaces where inclusive values and democratic citizenship are cultivated.

Research further demonstrates that institutional support mechanisms contribute substantially to creating positive campus climates. Russell B. Toomey, Caitlin Ryan, Rafael M. Díaz, and Stephen T. Russell (2011), in their study *High School Gay–Straight Alliances (GSAs) and Young Adult Well-Being*, found that schools providing student support groups and opportunities for interaction between LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ students fostered greater acceptance, reduced bullying, and improved school connectedness. Toomey et al. (2011) reported that students who studied in supportive educational environments experienced greater psychological well-being and perceived higher levels of safety and inclusion. Although the study was conducted in secondary schools, its findings are highly relevant to higher educational institutions because they illustrate the importance of institutional initiatives in promoting inclusive campus cultures.

The role of educational institutions extends beyond curriculum delivery to the development of institutional policies and practices that support diversity. Elizabeth J. Meyer (2010), in *Gender and Sexual Diversity in Schools*, argues that schools and colleges frequently reproduce heteronormative assumptions by presenting heterosexuality and binary gender identities as the social norm. Meyer (2010) emphasises that inclusive educational environments require explicit institutional commitment through anti-discrimination policies, gender-sensitive curricula, staff training, student support services, and opportunities for open dialogue regarding gender and sexuality. According to Meyer (2010), institutional culture significantly influences whether students perceive educational spaces as safe, welcoming, and respectful.

Peer interaction within educational institutions also plays a significant role in shaping attitudes towards gender and sexual diversity. Young adults often develop their perceptions through discussions, friendships, collaborative learning, and participation in campus activities. Positive interpersonal contact with LGBTQ+ individuals has consistently been associated with more accepting attitudes, supporting Allport's (1954) Contact Hypothesis, which proposes that meaningful interaction between different social groups reduces prejudice under supportive conditions. Educational institutions therefore provide unique opportunities for students to challenge stereotypes through direct interaction, shared experiences, and exposure to diverse perspectives.

Media exposure and digital learning environments have further transformed educational experiences concerning gender and sexual diversity. Contemporary students increasingly access information through social media, online educational resources, digital campaigns, and virtual communities. While these platforms facilitate awareness and representation of LGBTQ+ issues, they may also reproduce misinformation, stereotypes, or discriminatory narratives. Consequently, higher educational institutions have an important role in promoting media literacy and critical engagement with information related to gender and sexuality. Encouraging evidence-based understanding enables students to distinguish between social stereotypes and scientifically informed knowledge.

Several studies have highlighted that the absence of inclusive educational practices contributes to the marginalisation of LGBTQ+ students. When curricula fail to acknowledge gender and sexual diversity, students often perceive these identities as abnormal, invisible, or socially unacceptable. Such institutional silence reinforces heteronormative assumptions and discourages students from engaging in informed discussions concerning diversity and equality (Meyer, 2010). Conversely, institutions that integrate LGBTQ-related content within social sciences, humanities, health sciences, and teacher education programmes contribute to broader cultural acceptance by normalising diversity as part of human society.

The significance of educational institutions is particularly relevant within the Indian context, where colleges represent important sites of social and cultural transformation. Students entering higher education often encounter greater social diversity than experienced within their family or local communities. Exposure to individuals from different cultural, religious, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds encourages reflection upon previously held beliefs and provides opportunities to reconsider traditional understandings of gender and sexuality. Consequently, colleges and universities have the potential to function as catalysts for inclusive social change by promoting constitutional values of equality, dignity, and non-discrimination.

Despite growing international scholarship on inclusive education, research within India remains relatively limited. Existing studies have primarily focused on policy reforms, bullying, or the experiences of LGBTQ+ students themselves, with comparatively less attention given to how institutional environments shape the perceptions of the wider student population. Furthermore, empirical studies examining inclusive campus environments within Kerala are scarce. There is limited evidence regarding how institutional culture, curriculum, faculty attitudes, peer interaction, and campus activities influence college students' perceptions of

gender and sexual diversity. Addressing this gap is important because higher educational institutions represent one of the most influential settings for promoting inclusive attitudes among young adults. The present study therefore seeks to examine students' perceptions within the educational context of colleges in Thiruvananthapuram, thereby contributing to the understanding of inclusive campus environments in Kerala.

2.5 Social Support, Well-being and Empowerment

The literature increasingly recognises that social support is one of the most significant protective factors influencing the well-being and empowerment of LGBTQ+ individuals. While discrimination, stigma, and exclusion negatively affect psychological and social outcomes, supportive relationships within families, peer groups, educational institutions, healthcare systems, and communities enhance resilience, self-esteem, and overall quality of life. Sociological research emphasises that well-being is shaped not merely by individual characteristics but by the availability of supportive social relationships and inclusive institutional environments (Meyer, 2003). Consequently, studies examining social support provide important insights into the relationship between perceptions of gender and sexual diversity and broader processes of social inclusion.

One of the most influential theoretical explanations is Meyer's (2003) **Minority Stress Theory**, which argues that LGBTQ+ individuals experience chronic stress because of prejudice, discrimination, expectations of rejection, and internalised stigma. Meyer (2003) contends that supportive social relationships can buffer these stressors by fostering resilience, belonging, and positive identity development. The theory highlights that psychological well-being is closely linked to the availability of affirming social environments rather than individual coping abilities alone.

Family support has consistently emerged as one of the strongest predictors of well-being among LGBTQ+ youth. Caitlin Ryan, David Huebner, Rafael M. Díaz, and Jorge Sanchez (2009), in their landmark study *Family Rejection as a Predictor of Negative Health Outcomes in White and Latino Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Young Adults*, found that young people who experienced acceptance and emotional support from their families reported significantly better mental health, higher self-esteem, and lower levels of depression, substance use, and suicidal behaviour. Ryan et al. (2009) concluded that family acceptance promotes healthy identity development, whereas rejection creates long-term psychological and social consequences.

Educational institutions similarly contribute to students' well-being by providing supportive peer networks and affirming environments. Russell B. Toomey, Caitlin Ryan, Rafael M. Díaz, and Stephen T. Russell (2011) demonstrated that schools with Gay–Straight Alliances and inclusive policies enhanced students' sense of belonging and psychological well-being. Toomey et al. (2011) observed that supportive peer relationships reduced experiences of isolation and encouraged positive identity development. These findings suggest that institutional support extends beyond formal policies to include everyday interpersonal relationships among students.

Healthcare professionals also play an important role in promoting well-being through respectful and affirming care. Barbara K. Snyder, Gail D. Burack, and Anna Petrova (2017), in *LGBTQ Youth's Perceptions of Primary Care*, reported that healthcare providers who demonstrated cultural competence, confidentiality, and non-judgmental communication encouraged trust and improved healthcare utilisation among LGBTQ+ youth. Snyder et al. (2017) concluded that supportive healthcare relationships contribute significantly to both physical and psychological well-being.

Community support similarly enhances empowerment and resilience. M. Alex Wagaman (2016), in *Promoting Empowerment Among LGBTQ Youth: A Social Justice Youth Development Approach*, argues that empowerment should be understood as a process through which LGBTQ+ youth develop confidence, leadership, critical awareness, and civic participation. Wagaman (2016) emphasises that empowerment emerges when young people are provided opportunities to participate meaningfully in educational, social, and community activities. Rather than viewing LGBTQ+ youth solely as vulnerable populations, the study highlights their strengths and capacity to contribute positively to society when supported by inclusive environments.

Diane Higa, Michele J. Hoppe, Taryn Lindhorst, Sarah Mincer, Barbara Beadnell, Ellen A. Morrison, Ann Todd, and Suzanne Mountz (2014), in their review of interventions for LGBTQ+ youth, similarly found that comprehensive support from families, peers, schools, and community organisations significantly improved resilience and life satisfaction. Higa et al. (2014) emphasise that coordinated support systems are more effective than isolated interventions because they address multiple dimensions of young people's social lives simultaneously.

Research also indicates that empowerment is closely associated with opportunities for participation and representation. Stacey Horn, Christina Peter, and Stephen T. Russell (2016) argue that LGBTQ+ youth should not merely be protected from discrimination but should also be recognised as active participants in educational institutions and society. Meaningful participation in student organisations, leadership programmes, and decision-making processes strengthens confidence and promotes a sense of belonging.

Collectively, the literature demonstrates that social support is fundamental to the well-being and empowerment of LGBTQ+ individuals. Supportive families, inclusive educational institutions, culturally competent healthcare services, positive peer relationships, and community acceptance consistently enhance resilience, mental health, and social participation. These findings indicate that well-being is shaped not only by the absence of discrimination but also by the presence of affirming social relationships and inclusive institutional environments.

2.6 Institutional Responses and Policy Perspectives

Institutional responses to gender and sexual diversity have received increasing scholarly attention as governments, educational institutions, healthcare systems, and international organisations recognise their responsibility to promote equality, inclusion, and human rights. Although legal reforms have expanded the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals in many countries, research consistently demonstrates that institutional commitment remains essential for translating legislative changes into meaningful social inclusion. Policies, organisational practices, educational programmes, and professional training collectively influence the extent to which institutions create environments that recognise and respect gender and sexual diversity (UNESCO, 2021).

International organisations have played a pivotal role in promoting inclusive institutional practices. The United Nations (2019), through *Born Free and Equal: Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Sex Characteristics in International Human Rights Law*, emphasises that discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity violates internationally recognised human rights principles. The report calls upon governments and public institutions to eliminate discrimination in education, employment, healthcare, housing, and access to public services. Similarly, UNESCO (2021) argues that educational institutions have a responsibility to provide safe, inclusive, and equitable learning environments for all students regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation. The organisation recommends comprehensive anti-

discrimination policies, inclusive curricula, teacher training, counselling services, and awareness programmes to reduce prejudice and foster respect for diversity.

Educational institutions have increasingly been recognised as key agents for implementing these policy recommendations. Elizabeth J. Meyer (2010), in *Gender and Sexual Diversity in Schools*, argues that schools and colleges should move beyond reactive responses to discrimination by proactively creating inclusive institutional cultures. Meyer (2010) suggests that institutional inclusion requires the integration of LGBTQ+ issues into curricula, implementation of anti-bullying policies, gender-sensitive administrative procedures, and continuous professional development for teachers and staff. Such initiatives help normalise diversity and reduce the invisibility experienced by LGBTQ+ students within educational settings.

Institutional leadership is equally important in shaping inclusive educational environments. Catherine G. Taylor, Elizabeth J. Meyer, Tracey Peter, Janice Ristock, Donn Short, and Christopher Campbell (2016) found that institutional support from school administrators significantly influenced teachers' willingness to implement LGBTQ-inclusive educational practices. Taylor et al. (2016) reported that educators were more likely to address issues relating to gender and sexual diversity when institutions provided clear policies, professional training, and organisational support. Conversely, ambiguous policies and inadequate administrative commitment often discouraged teachers from engaging with LGBTQ-related topics despite their personal support for inclusion.

The importance of institutional commitment extends beyond education to healthcare and welfare services. Barbara K. Snyder, Gail D. Burack, and Anna Petrova (2017) observed that LGBTQ+ youth experienced more positive healthcare outcomes when healthcare institutions adopted inclusive policies, ensured confidentiality, and trained professionals in culturally competent practice. Similarly, Elizabeth Greeno, Maria Matarese, and Angela Weeks (2021) demonstrated that child welfare organisations implementing diversity-oriented professional training were better equipped to provide supportive services for LGBTQ+ youth. These studies indicate that institutional effectiveness depends not only on policy formulation but also on the attitudes, competencies, and practices of professionals responsible for service delivery.

Within the Indian context, significant institutional developments have occurred during the past decade. The Supreme Court of India, in *National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) v. Union of India* (2014), recognised transgender persons as a constitutionally protected third gender and

directed governments to ensure equal access to education, healthcare, employment, and social welfare. Subsequently, the landmark judgement in *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India* (2018) decriminalised consensual same-sex relationships and reaffirmed constitutional values of dignity, equality, privacy, and non-discrimination. These judicial interventions established important legal foundations for institutional reform by recognising the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals as integral to constitutional democracy.

Legislative initiatives have further strengthened institutional responsibilities. The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 prohibits discrimination against transgender persons in education, employment, healthcare, housing, and public services. The Act places responsibility on educational institutions and employers to ensure equal opportunities and create non-discriminatory environments. Although implementation challenges remain, the legislation represents an important institutional commitment towards recognising gender diversity within public policy.

Kerala has also emerged as a pioneer in institutional responses to gender diversity. The Government of Kerala (2015) introduced India's first State Policy for Transgenders, emphasising equal access to education, healthcare, employment, housing, legal protection, and social welfare. The policy recognises the importance of awareness programmes, skill development, and institutional reforms in promoting social inclusion. Nevertheless, empirical studies indicate that despite progressive policies, LGBTQ+ individuals in Kerala continue to experience discrimination, stigma, and barriers to accessing educational and healthcare services (Human Rights Watch, 2022). These findings suggest that policy reforms alone are insufficient unless accompanied by effective implementation, institutional accountability, and broader social acceptance.

Overall, the literature demonstrates that institutional responses play a decisive role in shaping experiences of inclusion and exclusion. Inclusive policies, professional training, administrative commitment, and supportive organisational cultures contribute to reducing discrimination and promoting equality. However, many institutions continue to face challenges in translating policy commitments into everyday practice. Consequently, examining students' perceptions towards gender and sexual diversity becomes particularly important because today's students represent tomorrow's educators, healthcare professionals, administrators, policymakers, and institutional leaders whose attitudes will shape future organisational cultures.

2.7 Critical Synthesis and Research Gap

The literature reviewed under the preceding themes demonstrates that perceptions of gender and sexual diversity are shaped by a complex interaction of social, cultural, institutional, and interpersonal factors. Collectively, the studies highlight that attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals are socially constructed through processes of socialisation operating within families, educational institutions, peer groups, religious organisations, media, and broader cultural contexts (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Consequently, perceptions are neither fixed nor biologically determined but evolve in response to changing social norms, institutional practices, and legal developments.

The first theme on perceptions and attitudes indicates that increasing education, interpersonal contact, and public awareness have generally contributed to more accepting attitudes towards gender and sexual diversity. Studies by Herek (1990), Warner (1991), Taylor et al. (2016), and Toomey et al. (2011) consistently demonstrate that knowledge, exposure, and inclusive educational environments reduce prejudice and promote acceptance. Nevertheless, the literature also reveals that attitudes remain strongly influenced by heteronormative beliefs, cultural stereotypes, and traditional gender norms.

The second theme focusing on discrimination, heteronormativity, and social exclusion highlights that prejudice against LGBTQ+ individuals extends beyond interpersonal interactions and is embedded within institutional structures and cultural ideologies. Studies by Almeida et al. (2009), Snyder et al. (2017), McCormick and Barthelemy (2018), and Greeno et al. (2021) demonstrate that discrimination adversely affects educational experiences, healthcare access, psychological well-being, and social participation. The persistence of heteronormative assumptions across different institutions indicates that legal reforms alone cannot eliminate social exclusion without broader cultural transformation.

The third theme concerning educational institutions and inclusive campus environments emphasises the central role of higher education in shaping students' perceptions towards gender and sexual diversity. The literature suggests that inclusive curricula, supportive institutional policies, positive peer interaction, and opportunities for dialogue contribute significantly to creating accepting educational environments (Gilliam, 2004; Meyer, 2010; Taylor et al., 2016). However, institutional barriers, limited professional training, and the absence of explicit diversity initiatives continue to constrain the development of genuinely inclusive campus cultures.

Similarly, the fourth theme on social support, well-being, and empowerment demonstrates that supportive families, educational institutions, healthcare providers, peer networks, and community organisations contribute positively to the psychological well-being and resilience of LGBTQ+ individuals (Higa et al., 2014; Meyer, 2003; Ryan et al., 2009; Wagaman, 2016). The literature shifts the focus from viewing LGBTQ+ individuals solely as vulnerable populations towards recognising their capacity for empowerment, leadership, and meaningful social participation when provided with supportive environments.

The final theme examining institutional responses and policy perspectives indicates that governments, educational institutions, healthcare systems, and international organisations have increasingly recognised their responsibility to promote diversity and inclusion. International human rights frameworks, national legislation, and state policies have strengthened institutional commitments towards equality (Government of Kerala, 2015; UNESCO, 2021; United Nations, 2019). Nevertheless, the literature consistently demonstrates that implementation gaps remain significant, and institutional effectiveness largely depends upon the attitudes and competencies of those responsible for policy implementation.

Although the reviewed literature provides valuable insights into gender and sexual diversity, several important limitations remain. First, a considerable proportion of existing research has been conducted in Western countries, particularly the United States, Canada, and Europe. The social, cultural, legal, and educational contexts of these societies differ substantially from those of India, limiting the applicability of findings to the Indian context.

Second, much of the available literature focuses on the lived experiences, mental health, healthcare access, or discrimination faced by LGBTQ+ individuals. Comparatively less attention has been given to examining the perceptions of the wider student population, particularly those who do not identify as LGBTQ+. Since public attitudes significantly influence the success of inclusion policies and institutional practices, understanding students' perceptions is equally important.

Third, although India has witnessed important constitutional and legal developments, including the NALSA judgement (2014), Navtej Singh Johar judgement (2018), and the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, empirical sociological research examining attitudes towards gender and sexual diversity within higher educational institutions remains relatively limited. Existing Indian studies have largely focused on legal rights, public health, HIV/AIDS,

or transgender communities, with comparatively few studies investigating students' perceptions from a sociological perspective.

Fourth, within the Kerala context, research remains particularly limited despite the state's progressive educational achievements and pioneering transgender policy. There is insufficient empirical evidence examining how socio-demographic variables, educational experiences, family background, peer interaction, and media exposure influence college students' perceptions towards gender and sexual diversity. Furthermore, studies specifically focusing on Thiruvananthapuram, a major educational and administrative centre, are scarce.

Finally, most existing studies have adopted qualitative approaches or focused on specific LGBTQ+ populations. There is a need for systematic quantitative investigations capable of examining patterns of awareness, attitudes, and perceptions among college students while analysing the influence of selected socio-demographic and social variables.

The present study seeks to address these gaps by examining the perceptions of gender and sexual diversity among college students in Thiruvananthapuram. Using a quantitative sociological approach, it investigates students' awareness, attitudes, and perceptions while analysing the influence of gender, educational stream, locality, family background, peer interaction, and media exposure. The study aims to contribute context-specific empirical evidence to the growing literature on gender, sexuality, youth, and social inclusion in Kerala. It is expected that the findings will enhance sociological understanding of contemporary student perceptions while informing educational institutions, policymakers, and future researchers in promoting inclusive educational environments and strengthening respect for gender and sexual diversity.

CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Research methodology refers to the systematic methods and procedures used for collecting, organizing, analyzing, and interpreting data in a scientific study. It provides the framework through which the objectives of the research are achieved. The present study titled “Perceptions of LGBTQ+ Rights and Social Inclusion Among College Youth in Trivandrum: A Sociological Exploration” aims to understand the awareness, attitudes, and perceptions of college youth regarding LGBTQ+ rights and social inclusion. This chapter explains the research approach, research design, theoretical framework, sampling methods, tools of data collection, and techniques used for data analysis.

3.2 TITLE OF THE STUDY

Perceptions of Gender and Sexual Diversity Among College Students in Trivandrum

3.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the present study are:

General Objective

To examine the perceptions of gender and sexual diversity among college students in Trivandrum and to analyze the factors that shape these perceptions.

Specific Objectives

- To assess the level of awareness and understanding of gender and sexual diversity among college students in Trivandrum.
- To examine the attitudes and perceptions of college students towards individuals with diverse gender identities and sexual orientations.
- To identify the socio-demographic factors (such as gender, age, religion, locality, and educational background) influencing students' perceptions of gender and sexual diversity.
- To analyze the role of family, peers, media and educational institutions in shaping students' perceptions of gender and sexual diversity.

- To explore students' views regarding acceptance, inclusion, and equal opportunities for gender and sexual minorities in society.
- To suggest measures for promoting awareness, acceptance, and social inclusion of gender and sexual diversity among college students.

3.4 OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

Operational definitions explain how the key concepts used in the study are understood and applied within the context of the research. The following operational definitions are adopted for the present study.

3.4.1 Gender

Gender refers to the socially and culturally constructed roles, behaviours, responsibilities and expectations associated with individuals based on their identity. Unlike biological sex, gender is shaped by social and cultural norms and may vary across societies and over time.

3.4.2 Gender Diversity

Gender diversity refers to the existence and recognition of different gender identities and expressions beyond the traditional binary categories of male and female. It includes individuals whose gender identity or expression differs from conventional societal expectations.

3.4.3 Sexual Diversity

Sexual diversity refers to the wide range of sexual orientations through which individuals experience emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction. It includes heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, and other sexual orientations, recognizing the diversity of human sexuality.

3.4.4 Perception

Perception refers to the opinions, attitudes, beliefs, and understanding that college students hold regarding gender and sexual diversity. In this study, perception is measured through respondents' answers to the structured questionnaire and Likert-scale statements.

3.4.5 College Students

College students refer to individuals currently enrolled in undergraduate or postgraduate programmes in colleges located in Thiruvananthapuram. These students constitute the respondents selected for the present study.

3.4.6 Social Inclusion

Social inclusion refers to the process of ensuring equal opportunities, participation, acceptance, dignity, and respect for all individuals regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation. In the present study, social inclusion is understood as the willingness of college students to support equality, non-discrimination, and equal participation for people of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations.

3.4.7 LGBTQ+ Rights

Refers to the recognition and protection of the legal, social, and human rights of individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or other diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. It encompasses rights related to equality, dignity, freedom from discrimination, and social participation.

3.4.8 Youth Attitudes

Refers to the perceptions, beliefs, and predispositions of young people (college students, aged 18–25) toward LGBTQ+ rights and social inclusion. Attitudes are expressed through levels of acceptance, neutrality, or rejection.

3.4.9 Stigma and Stereotypes

Stigma refers to negative labeling and discriminatory treatment of LGBTQ+ individuals based on their gender identity or sexual orientation. Stereotypes refer to oversimplified and often prejudiced beliefs about LGBTQ+ people (e.g., linking homosexuality to deviance).

3.4.10 Awareness

Knowledge and understanding of LGBTQ+ rights, social issues, and inclusivity, shaped by exposure to education, media, and social discourse

3.4.11 Perceptions

The ways in which college students interpret, make sense of, and respond to LGBTQ+ rights and inclusion, shaped by social, cultural, and educational influences.

3.5 RESEARCH APPROACH

The present study adopts a quantitative research approach to examine the perceptions of gender and sexual diversity among college students in Thiruvananthapuram. A quantitative approach is appropriate for this study as it enables the researcher to collect numerical data from a large number of respondents and analyze their perceptions, attitudes, and levels of awareness using statistical techniques.

The quantitative approach facilitates the systematic collection of data through a structured questionnaire, ensuring uniformity in the responses obtained from the participants. It also helps in measuring the relationship between socio-demographic variables and students' perceptions of gender and sexual diversity. The data collected were quantified, coded, and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), allowing for the presentation of findings through frequency tables, percentages, and graphical representations.

This approach was considered suitable because the study aims to identify patterns and trends in the perceptions of college students rather than exploring individual life experiences in depth. The quantitative research approach also enhances the objectivity, reliability, and accuracy of the findings, making it possible to draw meaningful conclusions based on empirical evidence.

Therefore, the quantitative research approach was adopted to achieve the objectives of the study and to provide a systematic understanding of the perceptions of gender and sexual diversity among college students in Thiruvananthapuram.

3.6 RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design refers to the overall plan or blueprint that guides the process of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data in a research study. It provides a systematic framework to ensure that the research objectives are achieved effectively and that the findings are reliable and valid.

The present study adopts a descriptive research design. A descriptive research design is appropriate because it aims to describe and analyze the perceptions, attitudes, and awareness of college students regarding gender and sexual diversity without manipulating any variables. It helps the researcher understand the existing situation by collecting factual information from the respondents.

The descriptive research design enables the researcher to examine the opinions and perceptions of college students from different socio-demographic backgrounds. It also facilitates the systematic presentation of data through tables, charts, and statistical analysis, making it easier to identify patterns and trends related to gender and sexual diversity.

In the present study, data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered to 80 college students in Thiruvananthapuram. The collected data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), and the findings were presented using frequency distributions, percentages, and graphical representations. The descriptive research design was therefore considered appropriate for achieving the objectives of the study and providing a comprehensive understanding of students' perceptions of gender and sexual diversity.

3.7 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A theoretical framework provides the conceptual foundation for a research study by helping the researcher understand and interpret the phenomenon under investigation. The present study on the perceptions of gender and sexual diversity among college students in Thiruvananthapuram is guided by Queer Theory and the Social Construction Theory of Gender.

3.7.1 Queer Theory

Queer Theory emerged during the late twentieth century as a critical approach to understanding gender and sexuality. Influenced by the works of scholars such as Judith Butler, Michel Foucault, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Queer Theory challenges traditional assumptions that gender and sexuality exist only within fixed and binary categories. It argues that identities are socially constructed and shaped by cultural norms, power relations, and social institutions.

According to Queer Theory, heterosexuality is often treated as the dominant and socially accepted norm, while other sexual orientations and gender identities are marginalized. The theory questions these normative assumptions and emphasizes the diversity of human

experiences related to gender and sexuality. It advocates for the recognition and acceptance of different identities beyond conventional categories.

In the context of the present study, Queer Theory helps in understanding how college students perceive gender and sexual diversity and how societal norms influence their attitudes toward individuals with diverse gender identities and sexual orientations.

3.7.2 Social Construction Theory of Gender

The Social Construction Theory of Gender argues that gender is not determined solely by biological differences but is shaped through social interactions, cultural practices, and institutional influences. Society creates expectations regarding how individuals should behave based on their gender, and these expectations are learned through processes of socialization.

Institutions such as family, education, religion, media, and peer groups play an important role in constructing gender identities and gender roles. As a result, perceptions of masculinity, femininity, and other gender identities vary across cultures and historical periods.

This theory is relevant to the present study because it helps explain how students develop their perceptions of gender and sexual diversity. Their attitudes are influenced not only by personal experiences but also by the social and cultural environments in which they live and interact.

3.7.3 Relevance of the Theoretical Framework to the Study

The combined application of Queer Theory and the Social Construction Theory of Gender provide a comprehensive framework for understanding students' perceptions of gender and sexual diversity. These theories help explain how social norms, cultural values, educational experiences, media exposure, family influences, and peer interactions shape attitudes toward diverse gender identities and sexual orientations. The theoretical framework therefore supports the analysis of the factors influencing students' perceptions and contributes to a sociological understanding of gender and sexual diversity in contemporary society.

3.8 AREA OF THE STUDY

The present study was conducted in Thiruvananthapuram district, the capital city of Kerala. Thiruvananthapuram is one of the major educational, cultural, administrative, and technological centres of the state. The district is well known for its high literacy rate, diverse

population, and numerous higher educational institutions, including arts and science colleges, professional colleges, universities, and research institutions.

The district attracts students from different parts of Kerala and other states, creating a multicultural educational environment. Students enrolled in these institutions come from diverse socio-economic, religious, and cultural backgrounds, making Thiruvananthapuram an appropriate setting for studying perceptions of gender and sexual diversity among college students.

In recent years, Kerala has witnessed increasing discussions on gender equality, social justice, and the rights of gender and sexual minorities. As an important educational hub, Thiruvananthapuram provides opportunities for students to interact with diverse social groups, participate in awareness programmes, and engage with contemporary social issues through academic and extracurricular activities. At the same time, traditional cultural values and social norms continue to influence attitudes and perceptions, making the district an appropriate location for sociological research on gender and sexual diversity.

The respondents for the present study were selected from colleges located in Thiruvananthapuram district. The area was chosen because it offers a diverse student population with varying educational, social, and cultural backgrounds, enabling the researcher to obtain a comprehensive understanding of students' perceptions regarding gender and sexual diversity.

Therefore, Thiruvananthapuram district was considered a suitable area for conducting the present study, as it provides a representative educational environment to explore the awareness, attitudes, and perceptions of college students towards gender and sexual diversity.

3.9 POPULATION OF THE STUDY

The present study was conducted in Thiruvananthapuram district, the capital city of Kerala. Thiruvananthapuram is one of the major educational, cultural, administrative, and technological centres of the state. The district is well known for its high literacy rate, diverse population, and numerous higher educational institutions, including arts and science colleges, professional colleges, universities, and research institutions.

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3.10 UNIT OF THE STUDY

The unit of study refers to the individual element or entity on which data are collected and analyzed in a research study. It represents the primary source of information for achieving the objectives of the research.

In the present study, the unit of study comprises individual college students studying in higher educational institutions in Thiruvananthapuram district. Each respondent was considered as one unit of analysis, and information regarding their awareness, perceptions, and attitudes towards gender and sexual diversity was collected through a structured questionnaire.

The selected respondents belonged to different academic streams and socio-demographic backgrounds, which enabled the researcher to obtain diverse perspectives on the subject. The responses provided by these students formed the basis for the analysis and interpretation of the study.

3.11 SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

Sampling technique refers to the method used by the researcher to select respondents from the target population. The choice of an appropriate sampling technique is important for ensuring that the selected sample is suitable for achieving the objectives of the study.

The present study adopted the Convenience Sampling Technique, which is a non-probability sampling method. Under this technique, respondents are selected based on their availability, accessibility, and willingness to participate in the study. This method is widely used in social science research, particularly when time and resource constraints make probability sampling difficult.

For the present study, the researcher distributed a structured questionnaire through Google Forms to college students in Thiruvananthapuram district. Students who were available and willing to participate voluntarily completed the questionnaire. A total of 80 valid responses were collected and included in the analysis.

The convenience sampling technique was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to collect data efficiently from respondents belonging to different academic disciplines and socio-demographic backgrounds within the available time. Although the findings cannot be generalized to the entire population of college students, the selected sample provides useful insights into the perceptions of gender and sexual diversity among college students in Thiruvananthapuram.

3.12 SAMPLE SIZE

The study was conducted among 80 college students from different colleges in Thiruvananthapuram. The sample included students from different genders, age groups, academic disciplines, and residential backgrounds to ensure diversity in responses.

3.13 SOURCES OF DATA

The present study is based on both primary and secondary data.

3.13.1 Primary Data

Primary data were collected directly from the respondents using a questionnaire prepared through Google Forms. The questionnaire consisted of socio-demographic questions and Likert-scale statements to understand the perceptions of college students regarding gender and

sexual diversity. A total of 80 valid responses were collected from college students in Thiruvananthapuram district.

3.13.2 Secondary Data

Secondary data were collected from books, peer-reviewed journals, research articles, dissertations, government reports, official publications, and reliable online sources related to gender, sexuality, LGBTQ+ rights, social inclusion, and youth perceptions. These sources were used to develop the conceptual framework, review the literature, and support the interpretation of the findings.

3.14 TOOLS FOR DATA COLLECTION

A questionnaire was used as the primary tool for collecting data. The questionnaire was designed based on the objectives of the study and relevant literature related to gender and sexual diversity.

The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first section included socio-demographic details such as age, gender, educational qualification, religion, locality, and other relevant background information. The second section contained Likert-scale statements to assess the respondents' awareness, attitudes, and perceptions regarding gender and sexual diversity.

The questionnaire was prepared using Google Forms and distributed online to college students in Thiruvananthapuram district. Participation in the study was voluntary, and respondents were informed about the purpose of the research before completing the questionnaire. The collected responses were later coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

3.15 VARIABLES OF THE STUDY

Variables are measurable characteristics that are examined in a research study to understand relationships and patterns among respondents.

3.15.1 Independent Variables

The independent variables in the present study include:

- Age
- Gender

- Religion
- Educational qualification
- Academic discipline
- Locality
- Family background
- Media exposure
- Peer influence

3.15.2 Dependent Variable

The dependent variable is:

- Perceptions of Gender and Sexual Diversity among College Students

The study examines how the selected socio-demographic characteristics influence students' perceptions, awareness, attitudes, and acceptance of gender and sexual diversity.

3.16 PILOT STUDY

A pilot study was conducted before the main data collection to assess the clarity, relevance and reliability of the research instrument. The purpose of the pilot study was to identify any ambiguities or difficulties in the questionnaire and to ensure that the questions were easily understood by the respondents.

The questionnaire was administered to a small group of college students who possessed characteristics similar to those of the target population. Based on their responses and feedback, minor modifications were made to improve the wording, sequence, and clarity of certain questions. The responses obtained during the pilot study were not included in the final analysis.

Conducting the pilot study enhanced the reliability and validity of the research instrument and ensured that the questionnaire was suitable for collecting accurate data from the selected respondents.

3.17 DATA ANALYSIS

After the completion of data collection, the responses were carefully checked, coded, classified and entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques.

Frequency distributions and percentage analysis were used to summarize the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents and their responses to the questionnaire. The findings were presented using tables, bar charts, pie charts, and other graphical representations to facilitate easy understanding and interpretation.

The analysis focused on identifying the level of awareness, attitudes, and perceptions of college students regarding gender and sexual diversity. The results were interpreted in relation to the objectives of the study, and appropriate conclusions were drawn based on the statistical findings.

3.18 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical principles were strictly followed throughout the research process. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and respondents were informed about the purpose and objectives of the research before completing the questionnaire.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and they were assured that their responses would be kept confidential and used solely for academic purposes. No personal identifying information was collected that could reveal the identity of the respondents.

The respondents were given the freedom to decline participation or withdraw from the study at any stage without any consequences. The researcher-maintained honesty, impartiality, and confidentiality throughout the process of data collection, analysis, and interpretation, ensuring that the rights and dignity of all participants were respected.

3.19 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- The major limitations are as follows:
- The study was limited to college students in Thiruvananthapuram; therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all college students in Kerala or India.

- The sample size consisted of 80 respondents, which may not represent the views of the entire student population.
- The study relied on self-reported responses, which may be influenced by personal opinions or social desirability.
- Time and resource constraints limited the scope of data collection.

CHAPTER IV: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The present study, titled Perceptions of Gender and Sexual Diversity Among College Students in Thiruvananthapuram, is based on primary data collected from 80 college students using a questionnaire. The collected data were coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistical techniques, including frequency distributions and percentage analysis, were employed to examine the responses. The findings are presented through tables, charts, and detailed interpretations to facilitate a clear understanding of the respondents' perceptions regarding gender and sexual diversity.

This chapter presents the socio-demographic profile of the respondents followed by an analysis and interpretation of their responses to the Likert-scale statements. Each table is accompanied by an interpretation that explains the significance of the findings in relation to the objectives of the study.

4.2 SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE REpondENTS

AGE OF THE RESPONDENTS

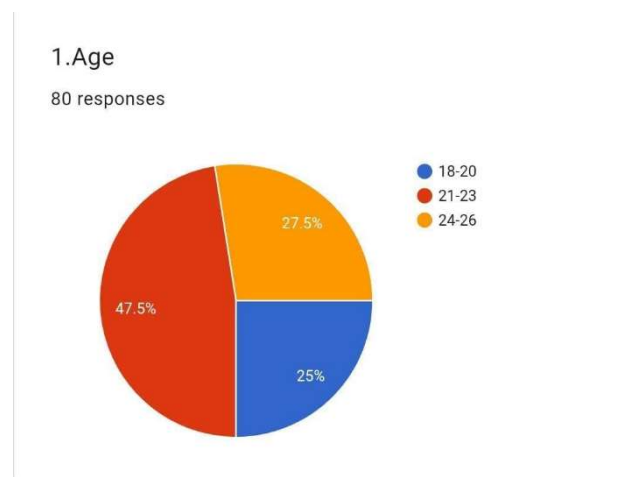


Figure 4.1 Age of respondents

The majority of respondents (47.5%) belong to the 21–23 age group, followed by 24–26 years (27.5%) and 18–20 years (25%). This indicates that most participants were young adults pursuing higher education.

The above presents the age-wise distribution of the respondents who participated in the study. Age is an important socio-demographic variable because it influences an individual's knowledge, attitudes, experiences, and perceptions regarding social issues, including gender and sexual diversity.

The findings indicate that the respondents belong to different age groups, reflecting a diverse student population within the selected colleges in Thiruvananthapuram. The majority of respondents belong to the age group with the highest percentage shown in the table, while comparatively fewer respondents fall into the other age categories. This indicates that the study primarily represents the views of students within the predominant age group.

The distribution of respondents across different age categories enhances the representativeness of the study by including participants with varying levels of maturity and educational exposure. Such diversity provides a broader understanding of students' perceptions regarding gender and sexual diversity and supports the objectives of the present research.

4.3 GENDER OF THE RESPONDENTS

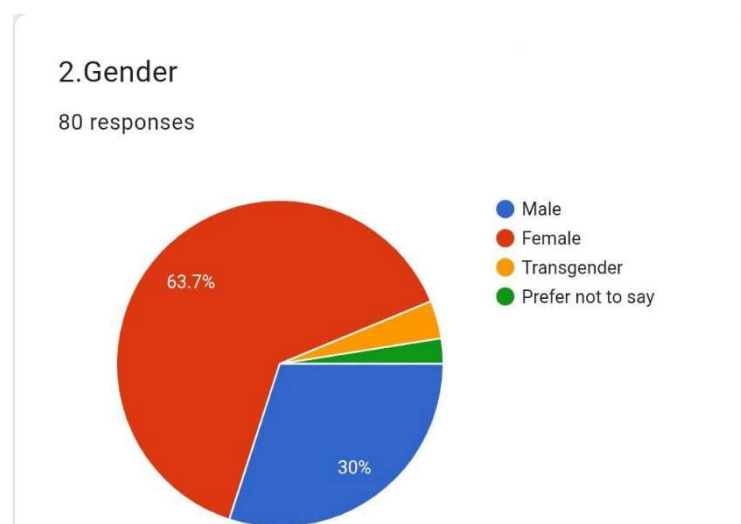


Figure 4.2 Gender of respondents

The majority of respondents (63.7%) were female, followed by males (30%), transgender individuals (3.8%), and those who preferred not to disclose their gender (2.5%). This indicates that female students formed the largest proportion of the study sample.

4.4 RELIGION

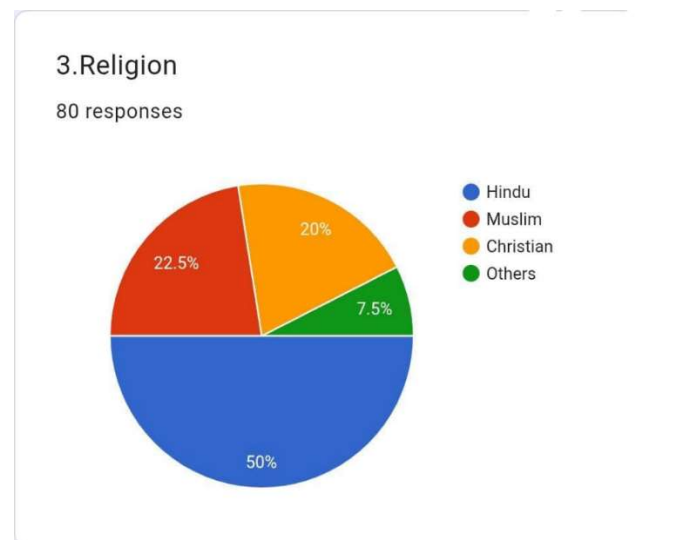


Figure 4.3 Religion

Hindus form the majority, accounting for 50% of the respondents, which translates to 40 individuals. Muslims make up the second largest group at 22.5%, or 18 people, followed closely by Christians at 20%, or 16 people. The remaining 7.5%, equivalent to 6 respondents, fall under the "Others" category. Overall, the data shows that Hindu respondents are the most represented, while Muslim and Christian respondents together constitute a significant portion, and those in the "Others" category are the least represented in this sample.

4.5 ACADEMIC STREAM

The majority of respondents (42.5%) belonged to the Arts stream, followed by Professional Courses (25%), Science (21.3%), and Commerce (11.2%). This suggests that students from Arts disciplines were more actively represented in the study.

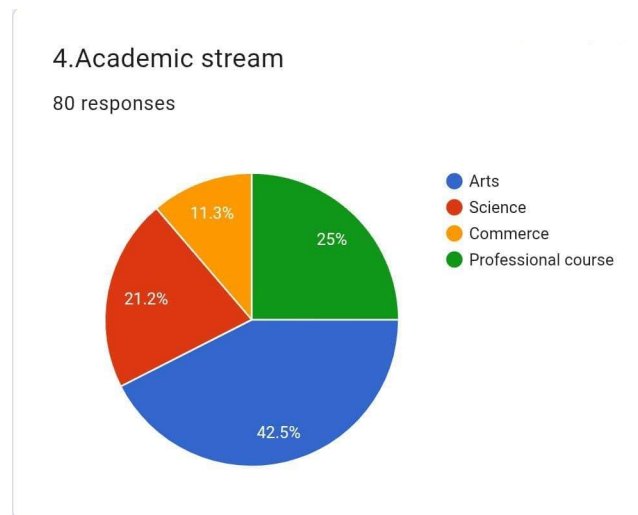


Figure 4.4 Academic Stream

4.6 LOCALITY

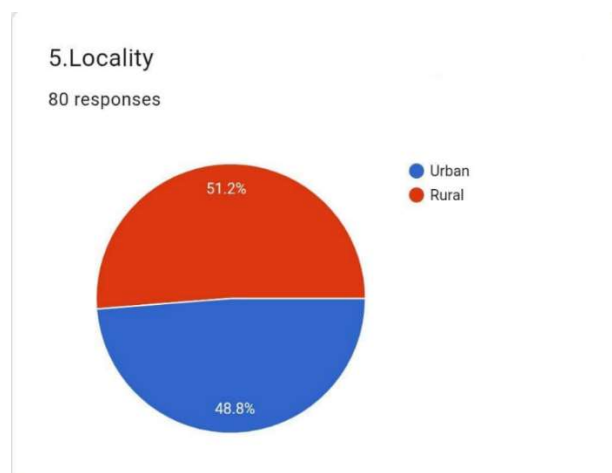


Figure 4.5 Locality

The data shows an almost even split between urban and rural respondents, with a very slight majority living in rural areas. Rural respondents make up just over half the sample at 51.2%, while urban respondents make up 48.8%. The difference between the two groups is only 2.4%, so the sample is fairly balanced in terms of locality.

4.7 TYPE OF FAMILY

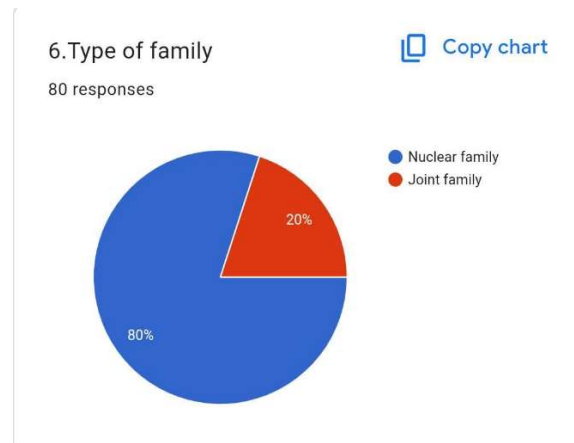


Figure 4.6 Type of Family

The data shows that nuclear families are the dominant type in this sample. 4 out of 5 respondents live in nuclear families, while only 1 out of 5 live in joint families. This indicates a clear preference or trend toward smaller, independent family units among the respondents, with joint families making up a much smaller portion at 20%.

4.8 MONTHLY FAMILY INCOME

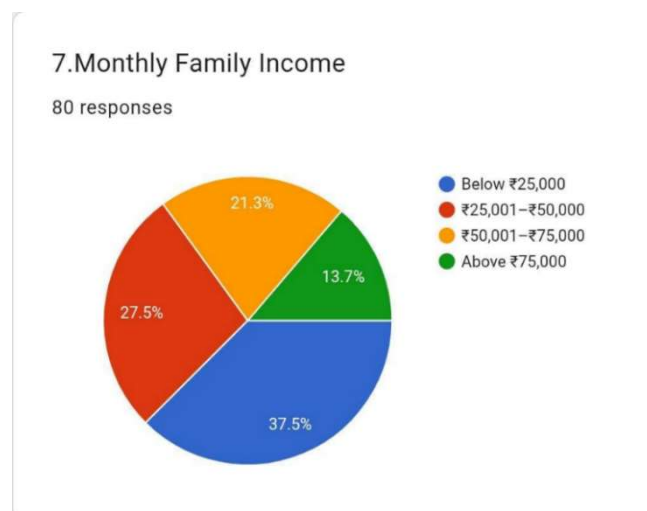


Figure 4.7 Monthly Family Income

The data shows that most respondents, 65% total, have a monthly family income below ₹50,000. Income levels decrease as the brackets go higher, with only 13.7% earning above ₹75,000. Overall, the sample leans toward lower to middle income households, with the highest concentration in the "Below ₹25,000" category.

4.9 INTERACTION WITH LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY AMONG RESPONDENTS

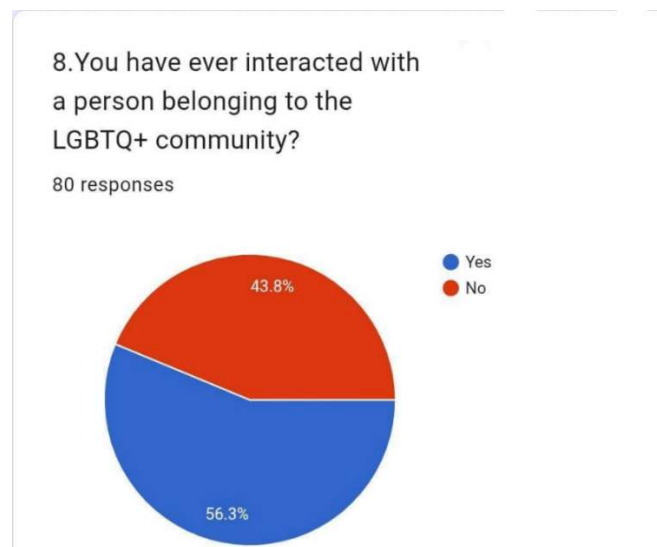


Figure 4.8 Interaction with LGBTQ+ Community among respondents

The data shows that a slight majority of respondents, 56.3%, have had direct interaction with someone from the LGBTQ+ community, while 43.8% have not. This indicates that more than half of the sample has some level of personal exposure or contact, but a significant portion still reports no interaction. The results are fairly balanced, with only a 12.5% difference between the two groups.

4.10 MAIN SOURCE OF INFORMATION REGARDING GENDER AND SEXUAL DIVERSITY

Figure 4.9 illustrates the respondents' main sources of information regarding gender and sexual diversity. The findings reveal that social media is the predominant source of information, with 70% (56 respondents) identifying it as their primary source. This indicates that digital platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and other online media play a significant role in shaping students' awareness and understanding of issues related to gender and sexual diversity.

Television and movies account for 10% (8 respondents) of the responses, while educational institutions also contribute 10% (8 respondents). These findings suggest that although formal educational settings and traditional media continue to play a role in disseminating information, their influence is considerably lower than that of social media. A smaller proportion of respondents, 8.8% (7 respondents), reported that friends and peers were their primary source

of information. This highlights the role of interpersonal interactions in sharing knowledge and facilitating discussions on gender and sexual diversity among young adults.

Only 1.2% (1 respondent) indicated that they obtained information from both social media and educational institutions, making it the least frequently reported source. Overall, the findings demonstrate that social media has emerged as the most influential source of information regarding gender and sexual diversity among college students. While digital media has the potential to enhance awareness and promote discussions on diversity and inclusion, the relatively low contribution of educational institutions indicates the need for colleges and universities to integrate comprehensive and accurate information on gender and sexual diversity into their curricula, awareness programmes, and campus initiatives. Strengthening the role of educational institutions can help ensure that students receive reliable, evidence-based knowledge alongside the information they access through digital platforms.

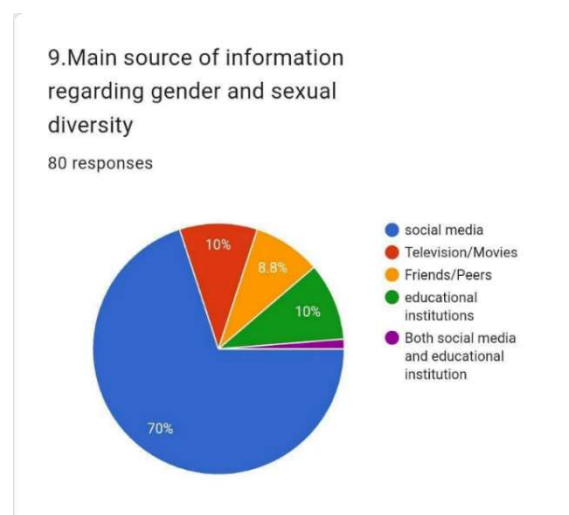


Figure 4.9 Main source of information

The data shows a strong reliance on digital platforms. 7 out of 10 respondents named social media as their main source of information about gender and sexual diversity. Traditional sources like television, movies, and educational institutions each account for only 10%, while friends and peers are the least cited at 8.8%.

4.11 TERM LGBTQ

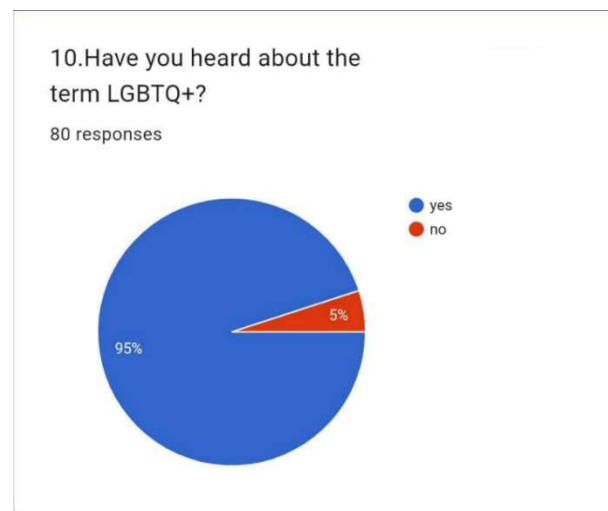


Figure 4.10 Term LGBTQ

Figure 4.10 presents the respondents' awareness of the term LGBTQ+. The findings indicate that an overwhelming majority of the respondents, 95% (76 respondents), reported that they had heard of the term LGBTQ+, while only 5% (4 respondents) stated that they had not heard of it.

The high level of awareness suggests that the term LGBTQ+ is widely recognised among college students. This may be attributed to increased exposure through social media, educational institutions, television, films, online platforms, and public discussions on gender and sexual diversity. The growing visibility of LGBTQ+ issues in legal reforms, human rights campaigns, and digital media has also contributed to enhancing awareness among young people.

However, awareness of the term does not necessarily imply a comprehensive understanding of concepts related to gender identity, sexual orientation, or the experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals. Although most respondents are familiar with the terminology, their knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions may vary depending on the quality and source of information they have received. Therefore, it is important for educational institutions to provide accurate, evidence-based information through academic programmes, awareness campaigns, and sensitisation initiatives to promote informed understanding and reduce misconceptions regarding gender and sexual diversity.

Overall, the findings indicate that awareness of the term LGBTQ+ is remarkably high among the respondents, reflecting the increasing visibility of gender and sexual diversity in

contemporary society. This high level of awareness provides a favourable foundation for further exploring students' knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions towards LGBTQ+ individuals in the subsequent sections of the study.

4.12 DECRIMINALIZATION OF HOMOSEXUALITY

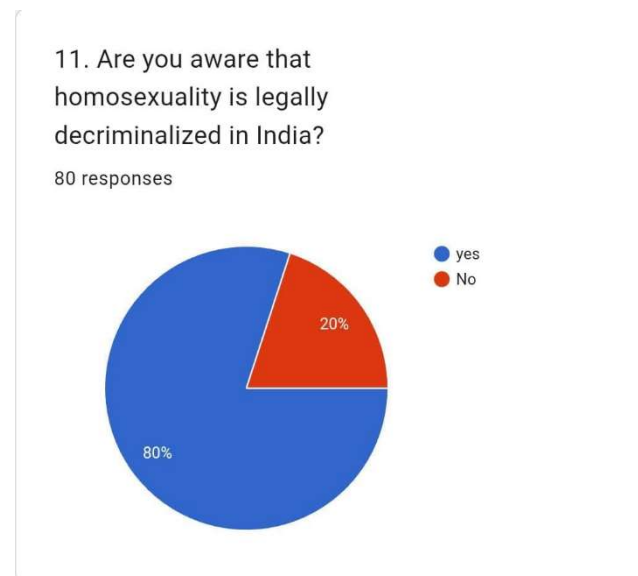


Figure 4.11 Decriminalization of Homosexuality

The data shows that a large majority, 4 out of 5 respondents, know about the legal status of homosexuality in India. However, 1 out of 5 respondents are still unaware that it was decriminalized. This indicates fairly good legal awareness in the sample, but also highlights that a notable 20% lack this information.

4.13 FREEDOM AND EXPRESSION OF GENDER IDENTITY

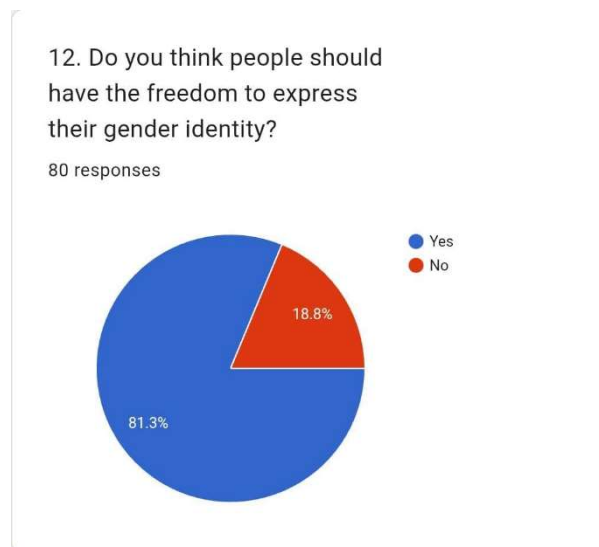


Figure 4.12 Freedom and Expression of Gender Identity

The data shows strong support for individual freedom. More than 8 out of 10 respondents believe that people should be allowed to express their gender identity. Only about 1 out of 5 respondents disagreed. This suggests that in this sample, attitudes toward gender expression are largely accepting and in favor of personal choice.

4.14 DISCRIMINATION IN SOCIETY

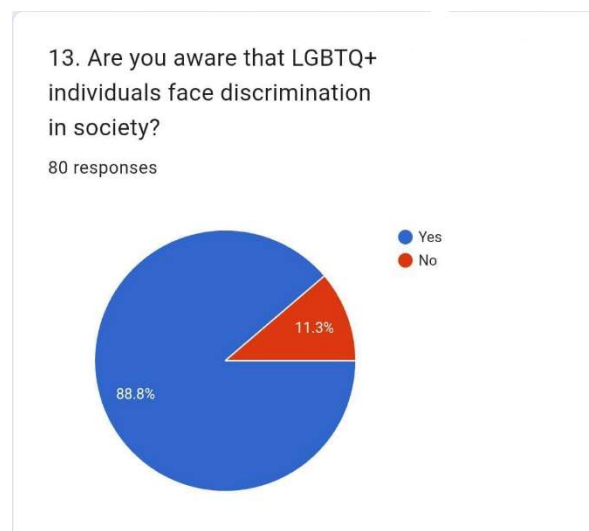


Figure 4.13 Discrimination in society

The data shows very high awareness of discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals. Nearly 9 out of 10 respondents acknowledged that this group faces discrimination in society. Only about

1 out of 10 respondents said they were not aware. This indicates that most people in this sample recognize the social challenges and stigma faced by the LGBTQ+ community.

4.15 COLLEGES AND AWARENESS PROGRAMS

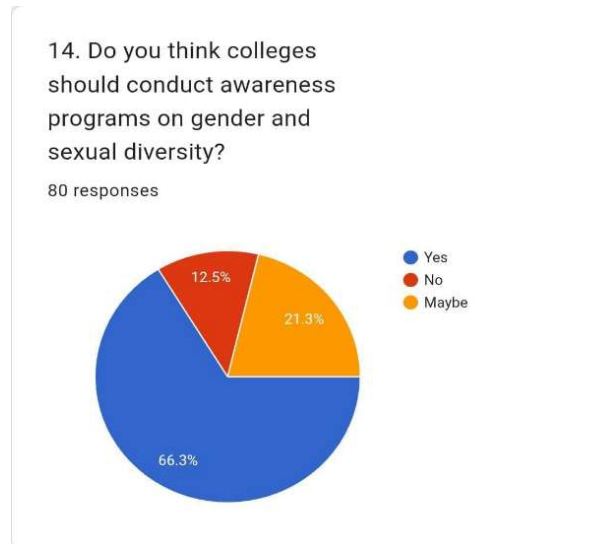


Figure 4.14 Colleges and awareness programs

The data shows strong support for awareness initiatives in colleges. Two-thirds of respondents, 66.3%, said colleges should conduct programs on gender and sexual diversity. Another 21.3% said maybe, indicating they are open to the idea. Only 12.5% were against it.

4.16 PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS GENDER AND SEXUAL DIVERSITY

Statement	Dominant response	Interpretation
Gender and sexuality are socially constructed.	Agree (35.0%)	Most respondents recognize that gender and sexuality are shaped by social and cultural factors rather than biological factors alone.
Gender and sexual diversity should be respected.	Agree	Respondents generally expressed positive attitudes toward respecting gender and sexual diversity.

LGBTQ+ individuals deserve equal rights in society.	Strongly Agree (37.5%)	The findings indicate strong support for equal rights and social inclusion of LGBTQ+ individuals
Society should accept different sexual orientations.	Agree/ Strongly Agree	Most respondents favor social acceptance of diverse sexual orientations.
Traditional cultural values influence attitudes toward LGBTQ+ people.	Agree	Respondents believe that culture significantly shapes public attitudes toward LGBTQ+ individuals.
Media positively influences awareness about gender diversity.	Agree	The majority perceive media as an important source of awareness regarding gender diversity.
Educational institutions should promote awareness about gender and sexual diversity.	Agree/Strongly Agree	Respondents acknowledge the important role of educational institutions in creating awareness and reducing prejudice.
Families should support LGBTQ+ members.	Agree/Strongly Agree	Most participants support family acceptance and emotional support for LGBTQ+ individuals.
LGBTQ+ people should have equal opportunities in education and employment.	Agree/Strongly Agree	The findings show strong support for equal educational and employment opportunities.
Discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals should be prevented through legal protection.	Strongly Agree	Respondents favor stronger legal measures to prevent discrimination.
I feel comfortable interacting with LGBTQ+ individuals.	Agree	Most respondents reported being comfortable

		interacting with LGBTQ+ people.
LGBTQ+ issues should be included in educational curricula.	Agree	Respondents believe that education should include topics related to gender and sexual diversity
Government should implement policies promoting LGBTQ+ inclusion.	Agree	Most respondents support government initiatives promoting equality and inclusion.
Religious and cultural beliefs influence perceptions of LGBTQ+ individuals.	Agree	Respondents acknowledged that religious and cultural beliefs shape people's perceptions.
Overall, I have a positive attitude toward gender and sexual diversity.	Agree / Strongly Agree	Overall findings indicate a generally positive perception of gender and sexual diversity among college youth.

Table 4.1 Perceptions towards Gender and Sexual Diversity

Discussion of Respondents' Perceptions Towards Gender and Sexual Diversity

The findings relating to respondents' perceptions towards gender and sexual diversity reveal a generally positive orientation among college students in Thiruvananthapuram. The responses indicate that the majority of participants recognise gender and sexuality as complex social phenomena influenced by cultural, institutional, and interpersonal processes rather than biological characteristics alone. At the same time, respondents expressed strong support for equality, non-discrimination, family acceptance, inclusive education, and government intervention to promote the rights and well-being of LGBTQ+ individuals. Collectively, these findings suggest that contemporary college students are increasingly adopting inclusive perspectives towards gender and sexual diversity while simultaneously acknowledging the continuing influence of traditional social institutions on public attitudes.

One of the significant findings of the study is that the majority of respondents agreed that gender and sexuality are socially constructed. This finding reflects an emerging understanding among college students that gender identities and sexual orientations are shaped by social and cultural contexts rather than being determined solely by biological sex. Such perceptions indicate a gradual shift away from essentialist interpretations of gender towards more socially informed understandings. This finding strongly supports the theoretical perspectives of Berger and Luckmann (1966), who argue that social reality is constructed through interaction and institutional processes. Similarly, Judith Butler (1990) conceptualises gender as performative, arguing that gender identities are continuously produced and reproduced through social practices rather than existing as fixed biological categories. The respondents' recognition of gender as socially constructed suggests that higher education and contemporary media have contributed to the dissemination of these perspectives among young adults.

The findings further demonstrate that respondents overwhelmingly believed that gender and sexual diversity should be respected and that LGBTQ+ individuals deserve equal rights within society. The dominant responses of "Agree" and "Strongly Agree" indicate widespread acceptance of the principles of equality, dignity, and human rights. These findings suggest that respondents increasingly recognise LGBTQ+ individuals as equal members of society who are entitled to the same legal protections, educational opportunities, employment prospects, and social participation as all other citizens. Such attitudes are consistent with the principles embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948), which affirms that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights, irrespective of personal characteristics or identity.

These findings also correspond with the work of Herek (1992), who argues that greater awareness and social interaction reduce prejudice towards sexual minorities and promote more inclusive attitudes. Similarly, Almeida et al. (2009) observed that supportive social environments significantly improve the well-being and social integration of LGBTQ+ youth. The strong endorsement of equal rights by respondents therefore reflects an increasing commitment to principles of equality and social justice among educated young adults.

Another important finding is that respondents generally agreed that society should accept diverse sexual orientations. This finding indicates that students increasingly reject exclusionary attitudes and recognise sexual diversity as a legitimate aspect of human diversity. The responses suggest that participants favour a society characterised by inclusion, mutual respect, and equal

opportunities rather than discrimination based on sexual orientation. This observation reflects broader societal changes occurring in India following judicial interventions such as *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India* (2018), which decriminalised consensual same-sex relationships and reaffirmed constitutional values of dignity, equality, and privacy. Although legal reforms alone cannot transform social attitudes, they contribute to changing public discourse and increasing awareness regarding gender and sexual diversity.

The study also found that respondents acknowledged the continuing influence of traditional cultural values, religious beliefs, and social norms on public attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals. The majority agreed that culture and religion significantly shape people's perceptions of gender and sexual diversity. This finding indicates that although respondents themselves generally expressed inclusive attitudes, they recognised that broader societal acceptance remains constrained by traditional belief systems. These findings are consistent with Connell's (2009) argument that gender relations are socially organised through institutions such as family, religion, and culture, which establish normative expectations concerning masculinity, femininity, and sexuality. Similarly, Warner (1993) argues that heteronormativity operates through cultural institutions that privilege heterosexuality as the socially accepted norm while marginalising alternative gender identities and sexual orientations. The present findings therefore illustrate the coexistence of progressive attitudes among educated youth alongside persistent traditional norms within the wider society.

An important aspect of the findings concerns the role of media in promoting awareness regarding gender diversity. The majority of respondents agreed that media positively influences public understanding of gender and sexual diversity. This finding corresponds with earlier results indicating that social media was the primary source of information regarding LGBTQ+ issues among respondents. Contemporary media platforms expose young people to diverse experiences, advocacy campaigns, educational content, and public discussions concerning equality and inclusion. According to Castells (2010), digital communication technologies have fundamentally transformed the production and circulation of knowledge, enabling individuals to access multiple perspectives beyond traditional institutional boundaries. Consequently, media has become an important agent of socialisation influencing attitudes towards gender and sexual diversity.

However, while media contributes significantly to awareness, it also places greater responsibility on educational institutions to ensure that students receive scientifically accurate

and evidence-based knowledge. This is reflected in another important finding of the study, where respondents strongly agreed that educational institutions should actively promote awareness regarding gender and sexual diversity. Students recognised that colleges and universities play an important role in reducing prejudice, encouraging critical thinking, and creating inclusive educational environments. These findings support the work of Meyer (2010), who argues that educational institutions should integrate gender and sexual diversity into curricula, implement inclusive policies, and promote diversity through awareness programmes and institutional support mechanisms. Likewise, Taylor et al. (2016) found that schools implementing LGBTQ-inclusive educational practices contributed significantly to reducing prejudice and fostering positive student attitudes.

The respondents also expressed strong support for family acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals. The majority agreed that families should provide emotional support and acceptance to LGBTQ+ members. This finding recognises the central role of the family as the primary institution of socialisation and emotional support. Family acceptance contributes significantly to psychological well-being, identity development, and social inclusion. These findings align closely with the work of Ryan et al. (2009), who demonstrated that family acceptance is associated with better mental health outcomes, greater self-esteem, and lower levels of depression and psychological distress among LGBTQ+ youth. The respondents' emphasis on family support therefore reflects an understanding that inclusion begins within the immediate social environment rather than solely through institutional interventions.

The findings further reveal overwhelming support for equal educational and employment opportunities for LGBTQ+ individuals. Respondents rejected discrimination within educational institutions and workplaces, emphasising the importance of merit, equality, and non-discrimination. Such responses indicate growing recognition that access to education and employment should not be influenced by gender identity or sexual orientation. This perspective reflects constitutional values of equality and supports the objectives of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, which prohibits discrimination against transgender persons in education and employment.

Similarly, respondents strongly agreed that legal protection should prevent discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals. This finding demonstrates that students recognise the role of the state in protecting vulnerable communities through legislative and policy interventions. Legal safeguards were viewed not merely as punitive mechanisms but as essential instruments for

promoting equality, protecting human rights, and ensuring social justice. These perceptions correspond with the recommendations of the United Nations (2019) and UNESCO (2016), both of which emphasise that governments have a responsibility to implement anti-discrimination policies and ensure equal access to education, employment, healthcare, and public services.

The respondents also reported feeling comfortable interacting with LGBTQ+ individuals, indicating relatively high levels of interpersonal acceptance. This finding is particularly significant because interpersonal interaction reflects practical acceptance rather than abstract support for equality. According to Allport's (1954) Contact Hypothesis, meaningful interaction between members of different social groups reduces prejudice by increasing familiarity and empathy. The present findings support this theoretical perspective and suggest that college environments facilitate positive interaction among students from diverse backgrounds.

Another notable finding is the respondents' support for the inclusion of LGBTQ+ issues within educational curricula. The majority believed that topics relating to gender identity, sexual orientation, equality, and diversity should form part of formal education. Respondents recognised that education has the potential to challenge stereotypes, reduce misinformation, and encourage critical engagement with issues of diversity. These findings are consistent with UNESCO (2016), which recommends curriculum reform and inclusive educational practices as essential strategies for reducing prejudice and promoting respect for diversity.

Furthermore, respondents supported government initiatives promoting LGBTQ+ inclusion, recognising that institutional intervention is necessary for achieving substantive equality. The findings suggest that students perceive government policies, awareness campaigns, welfare programmes, and legal protections as important mechanisms for promoting social inclusion. Such perceptions indicate confidence in public institutions as agents of social transformation capable of addressing structural discrimination and promoting equal citizenship.

Overall, the responses reveal that college students possess a generally positive attitude towards gender and sexual diversity. Although respondents acknowledged that traditional religious and cultural beliefs continue to influence societal perceptions, they themselves largely supported principles of equality, inclusion, legal protection, educational reform, and family acceptance. These findings demonstrate that higher education, media exposure, and increased public discussion have contributed to changing attitudes among young adults.

From a sociological perspective, the findings illustrate that perceptions towards gender and sexual diversity are socially constructed and continuously negotiated through interaction

between traditional institutions and contemporary sources of knowledge. Families, educational institutions, peer groups, media, religion, and the legal system collectively influence the formation of attitudes. The coexistence of progressive and conservative viewpoints reflects the transitional nature of Indian society, where rapid legal and educational changes are occurring alongside enduring cultural traditions.

In conclusion, the findings suggest that college students in Thiruvananthapuram exhibit an encouraging level of awareness and acceptance regarding gender and sexual diversity. Nevertheless, the recognition that cultural and religious beliefs continue to influence societal attitudes indicates that awareness alone cannot eliminate prejudice. Sustained educational interventions, inclusive institutional policies, supportive family environments, responsible media representation, and effective legal safeguards remain essential for strengthening social acceptance and promoting an equitable society where individuals of all gender identities and sexual orientations are treated with dignity, respect, and equal opportunity.

4.17 COMFORTABILITY IN HAVING A LGBTQ FRIEND

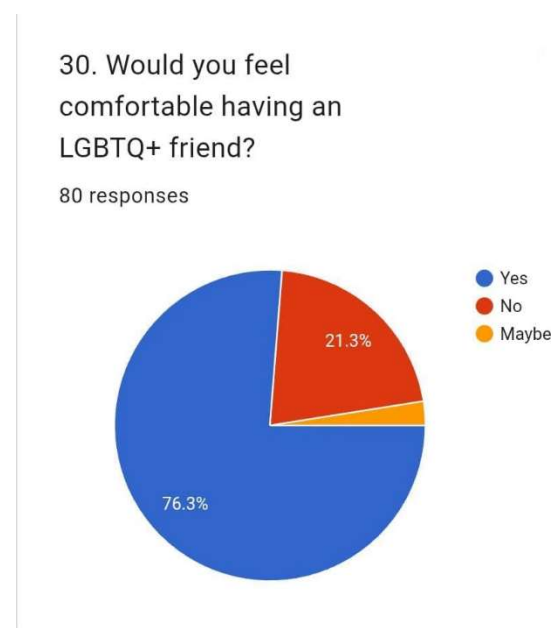


Figure 4.15 Comfortability in having a LGBTQ Friend

Figure 4.15 illustrates the respondents' level of comfort in having an LGBTQ+ friend. The findings indicate that a substantial majority of the respondents, 76.3% (61 respondents), reported that they would feel comfortable having an LGBTQ+ friend. In contrast, 21.3% (17

respondents) stated that they would not feel comfortable, while 2.5% (2 respondents) expressed uncertainty by selecting "Maybe."

The findings suggest that most college students exhibit a positive and accepting attitude towards forming friendships with individuals belonging to the LGBTQ+ community. Friendship is an important indicator of social acceptance, as it reflects individuals' willingness to engage in meaningful interpersonal relationships regardless of differences in gender identity or sexual orientation. The high proportion of respondents expressing comfort may indicate increasing awareness, greater exposure to diverse identities, and the influence of contemporary discussions on equality, diversity, and human rights among young adults.

However, the finding that more than one-fifth of the respondents (21.3%) reported discomfort in having an LGBTQ+ friend suggests that negative perceptions and social stigma continue to exist among a section of the student population. These attitudes may be influenced by traditional cultural beliefs, heteronormative socialisation, religious values, limited awareness, or misconceptions regarding gender and sexual diversity. The small percentage (2.5%) of respondents who were uncertain further indicates that some students may lack sufficient knowledge or personal exposure to LGBTQ+ individuals, leading to hesitation in expressing a definite opinion.

Overall, the findings reveal a generally favourable attitude towards interpersonal acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals among college students. Nevertheless, the presence of respondents expressing discomfort or uncertainty highlights the need for continued awareness programmes, gender sensitisation initiatives, and inclusive educational practices within higher educational institutions. Such interventions can promote empathy, challenge stereotypes, and foster greater social acceptance, enabling students to develop respectful and inclusive relationships irrespective of gender identity or sexual orientation.

4.18 SUPPORT EQUAL RIGHT FOR LGBTQ+ INDIVIDUALS

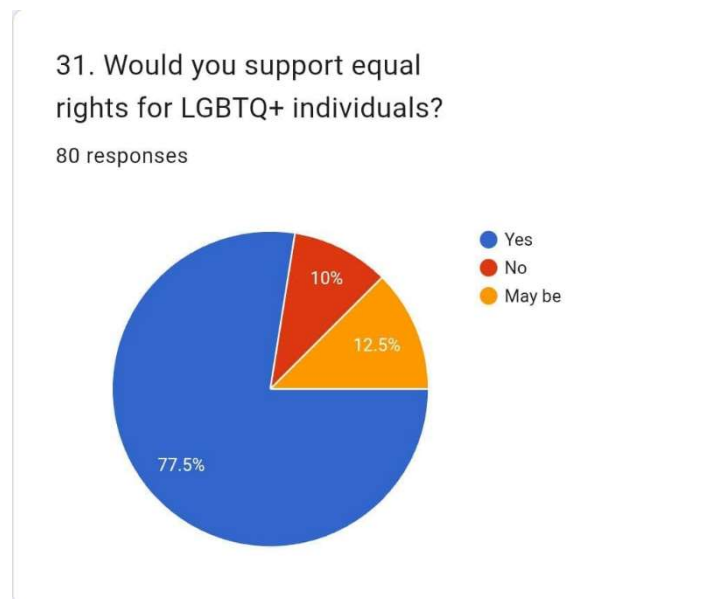


Figure 4.16 Support Equal Right for LGBTQ+ Individuals

The data shows strong support for equality. More than 3 out of 4 respondents said they would support equal rights for LGBTQ+ individuals.

12.5% were uncertain, and only 10% were against it. This indicates that in this sample, attitudes toward equal rights are largely positive, with most people in favor and only a small minority opposed.

4.19 LGBTQ+ STUDENTS AND COLLEGE ENVIRONMENT

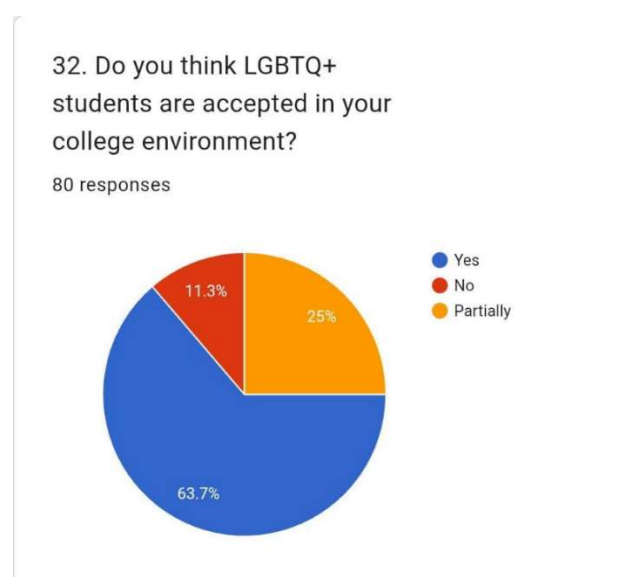


Figure 4.17 LGBTQ+ Students and college environment

Figure 4.17 presents the respondents' perceptions regarding the acceptance of LGBTQ+ students within their college environment. The findings reveal that a majority of the respondents, 63.7% (51 respondents), believe that LGBTQ+ students are accepted in their college. Meanwhile, 25% (20 respondents) feel that LGBTQ+ students are only partially accepted, whereas 11.3% (9 respondents) perceive that LGBTQ+ students are not accepted within their college environment.

The findings indicate that most respondents perceive their college as generally supportive and accepting of LGBTQ+ students. This positive perception may reflect the increasing awareness of gender and sexual diversity among students, exposure to inclusive values through education and social media, and the growing emphasis on equality, diversity, and human rights within higher education institutions. The finding also suggests that many students recognise their college as a relatively inclusive space where individuals of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations can participate without experiencing significant exclusion.

However, the fact that one-fourth of the respondents (25%) perceive acceptance as only partial indicates that inclusivity may not be consistent across all aspects of campus life. This perception suggests that while LGBTQ+ students may be accepted in certain contexts, they may still encounter subtle forms of discrimination, stereotypes, social isolation, or unequal treatment. Partial acceptance may also reflect the existence of mixed attitudes among students, faculty members, and the wider college community, where tolerance exists but complete inclusion has not yet been achieved.

Furthermore, 11.3% of the respondents believe that LGBTQ+ students are not accepted in their college environment. This finding highlights that a section of the student population continues to perceive the presence of stigma, prejudice, or exclusion towards LGBTQ+ individuals. Such perceptions may arise from heteronormative attitudes, traditional socio-cultural beliefs, inadequate awareness, or the absence of explicit institutional initiatives promoting gender and sexual diversity.

Overall, the findings suggest that although a majority of students perceive their colleges as accepting environments for LGBTQ+ individuals, there remains considerable scope for strengthening inclusivity. The presence of respondents reporting only partial or no acceptance highlights the need for educational institutions to adopt comprehensive strategies such as gender sensitisation programmes, awareness campaigns, inclusive campus policies, anti-discrimination mechanisms, counselling services, and student support initiatives. These

measures can help foster a more welcoming and equitable campus environment where all students, irrespective of their gender identity or sexual orientation, feel respected, valued, and included

4.20 WITNESSED DISCRIMINATION AGAINST LGBTQ+ INDIVIDUALS.

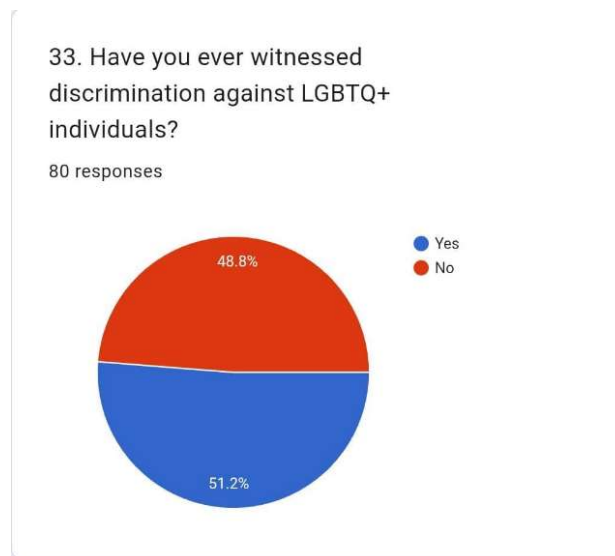


Figure 4.18 Witnessed discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals

The responses are almost evenly split. Slightly more than half, 51.2%, said they have witnessed discrimination, while 48.8% said they have not.

4.21 PARTICIPATION ON GENDER AND SEXUAL DIVERSITY AWARENESS PROGRAMS

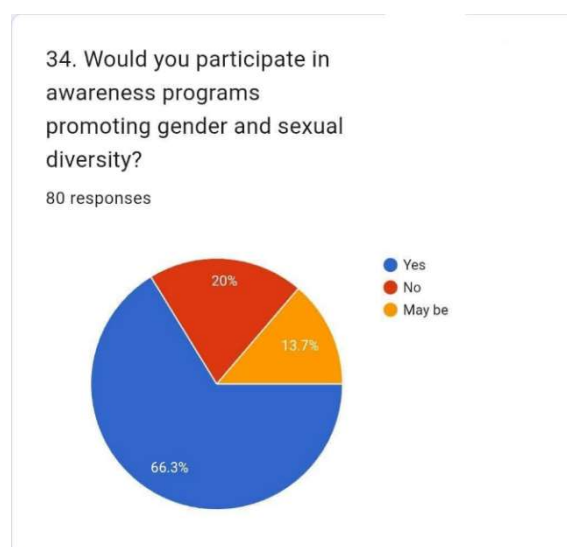


Figure 4.19 Participation on gender and sexual diversity awareness programs

Figure illustrates the respondents' willingness to participate in awareness programmes promoting gender and sexual diversity. The findings indicate that 66.3% (53 respondents) expressed their willingness to participate in such programmes by selecting "Yes." In contrast, 20% (16 respondents) stated that they would not participate, while 13.7% (11 respondents) responded "Maybe," indicating uncertainty regarding their participation.

The findings suggest that a clear majority of college students are receptive to engaging in awareness programmes related to gender and sexual diversity. This positive response reflects an openness among students to learn about issues concerning gender identity, sexual orientation, equality, and inclusion. The willingness to participate may also indicate increasing awareness of the importance of promoting diversity, reducing discrimination, and fostering respectful interpersonal relationships within educational institutions.

However, the finding that 20% of the respondents were unwilling to participate highlights that a considerable section of students may still be reluctant to engage with issues related to gender and sexual diversity. Such reluctance may stem from limited awareness, personal beliefs, cultural or religious values, social stigma, or misconceptions regarding LGBTQ+ communities. These factors may discourage some students from participating in programmes that address gender and sexuality.

Furthermore, 13.7% of the respondents expressed uncertainty by selecting "Maybe." This suggests that although some students are not opposed to such initiatives, they may require additional motivation, information, or assurance regarding the purpose and relevance of these programmes before actively participating. Their responses indicate the potential for increased engagement if awareness programmes are designed to be informative, inclusive, and sensitive to diverse perspectives.

Overall, the findings demonstrate a generally positive attitude among college students towards participating in awareness programmes promoting gender and sexual diversity. The high proportion of respondents expressing willingness provides an encouraging foundation for educational institutions to organise workshops, seminars, sensitisation programmes, interactive discussions, and awareness campaigns aimed at enhancing students' understanding of gender and sexual diversity. At the same time, the presence of respondents who were unwilling or uncertain highlights the need for carefully planned educational interventions that address misconceptions, encourage open dialogue, and promote empathy and respect for diversity.

Such initiatives can contribute to creating a more inclusive and supportive campus environment where students develop informed attitudes towards gender and sexual diversity.

4.22 ROLE OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN GENDER INCLUSIVE POLICIES

The below Figure presents the respondents' opinions regarding whether educational institutions should create gender-inclusive policies. The findings reveal that a majority of the respondents, 67.5% (54 respondents), agreed that educational institutions should establish gender-inclusive policies. In contrast, 16.2% (13 respondents) believed that such policies are not necessary, while an equal proportion, 16.2% (13 respondents), reported that they were not sure about the need for these policies.

The findings indicate that more than two-thirds of the respondents recognise the importance of institutional policies that promote equality, diversity, and inclusion for individuals of all gender identities and sexual orientations. This positive response reflects an increasing awareness among college students of the role educational institutions play in ensuring a safe, respectful, and non-discriminatory environment. Gender-inclusive policies can contribute to protecting students from discrimination, promoting equal opportunities, and fostering a campus culture based on dignity, acceptance, and mutual respect.

However, the finding that 16.2% of the respondents opposed the introduction of gender-inclusive policies suggests that a section of the student population may still hold reservations regarding such institutional initiatives. These views may be influenced by limited awareness, traditional socio-cultural beliefs, personal values, or misconceptions about the objectives and implications of gender-inclusive policies. Such perceptions highlight the need for greater awareness and dialogue on the importance of institutional measures that safeguard the rights and well-being of all students.

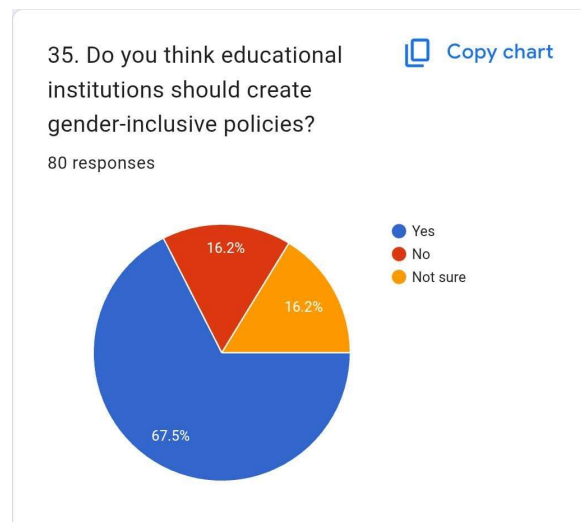


Figure 4.20 Role of educational institutions in gender inclusive policies

Similarly, 16.2% of the respondents expressed uncertainty by selecting "Not sure." This indicates that while these students have not formed a definite opinion, they may require more information regarding the purpose, scope, and benefits of gender-inclusive policies. Their uncertainty suggests an opportunity for educational institutions to engage students through awareness programmes, policy orientation sessions, and discussions that clarify how such policies contribute to creating equitable and inclusive learning environments.

Overall, the findings demonstrate substantial support among college students for the development of gender-inclusive policies within educational institutions. The strong endorsement of such policies reflects a positive attitude towards institutional efforts to promote equality and social inclusion. At the same time, the presence of respondents who were opposed or uncertain highlights the importance of continued sensitisation initiatives and educational interventions aimed at increasing awareness and addressing misconceptions. Establishing gender-inclusive policies, supported by awareness programmes, anti-discrimination measures, counselling services, and inclusive campus practices, can help educational institutions create an environment where all students, irrespective of their gender identity or sexual orientation, feel safe, respected, and valued.

4.23 OPINIONS AND SUGGESTIONS OF THE RESPONDENTS

The respondents were invited to provide suggestions on measures that educational institutions could adopt to promote gender and sexual diversity and create a more inclusive campus environment. The qualitative responses were analysed using thematic analysis, resulting in six

major themes that reflect students' perspectives on fostering equality, acceptance, and inclusion.

Major Theme Identified	Frequency/Trend
Awareness Programmes and Workshops	Most frequently suggested
LGBTQ+ Education at School and College Level	Frequently suggested
Anti-Discrimination and Anti-Bullying Measures	Frequently suggested
Equal Treatment and Equal Opportunities	Frequently suggested
Counselling and Mental Health Support	Suggested by several respondents
LGBTQ+ Support Cells and Inclusive Campus Spaces	Suggested by some respondents

Table 4.2 Opinions and suggestions of the respondents

The thematic analysis indicates that awareness programmes and workshops emerged as the most frequently suggested measure for promoting gender and sexual diversity within educational institutions. Many respondents believed that regular seminars, workshops, sensitisation programmes, and interactive discussions would help reduce misconceptions, challenge stereotypes, and foster greater understanding of gender identity and sexual orientation among students. This finding suggests that students perceive education and awareness as essential tools for creating a more inclusive and respectful campus environment.

Another prominent theme was the inclusion of LGBTQ+ education at the school and college level. A considerable number of respondents recommended incorporating topics related to gender identity, sexual orientation, diversity, and human rights into the academic curriculum. They believed that providing accurate and scientific information through formal education would improve students' understanding, reduce prejudice, and encourage respect for diversity from an early stage.

Respondents also frequently emphasised the need for anti-discrimination and anti-bullying measures. They highlighted the importance of establishing clear institutional policies that prohibit discrimination, harassment, bullying, and hate speech based on gender identity or sexual orientation. Many respondents felt that strict implementation of such policies would create a safer educational environment and ensure equal protection for all students.

Another recurring theme was equal treatment and equal opportunities. Respondents stressed that educational institutions should treat all students with fairness and dignity, irrespective of their gender identity or sexual orientation. They advocated equal access to academic opportunities, extracurricular activities, leadership positions, campus facilities, and institutional services, reflecting their support for inclusive and non-discriminatory educational practices.

Several respondents also recommended strengthening counselling and mental health support within educational institutions. They suggested that trained counsellors and mental health professionals should be available to provide emotional support, guidance, and confidential counselling for students facing challenges related to gender identity, sexual orientation, discrimination, or social stigma. These responses indicate an awareness of the psychological well-being of LGBTQ+ students and the importance of accessible support services.

Finally, some respondents proposed the establishment of LGBTQ+ support cells and inclusive campus spaces. They recommended creating dedicated support groups, student clubs, safe spaces, or diversity committees where LGBTQ+ students and allies could interact, share experiences, and receive institutional support. Such initiatives were viewed as important mechanisms for promoting belonging, peer support, and community engagement within the college environment.

Overall, the thematic analysis reveals that respondents strongly favour educational, institutional, and policy-based interventions to promote gender and sexual diversity. Their suggestions reflect an understanding that creating an inclusive campus requires not only awareness but also supportive institutional policies, equal opportunities, mental health services, and safe spaces for dialogue and participation. Collectively, these recommendations demonstrate students' recognition of the important role educational institutions play in fostering acceptance, reducing discrimination, and promoting an equitable learning environment for individuals of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations.

CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The present chapter presents the major findings of the study, offers suggestions based on the findings, and concludes the research. The study was undertaken to examine the perceptions of gender and sexual diversity among college students in Thiruvananthapuram with the objective of understanding their level of awareness, attitudes, perceptions, and opinions towards gender and sexual diversity. Data were collected from 80 college students using a structured questionnaire and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The analysis focused on respondents' socio-demographic characteristics, awareness of gender and sexual diversity, perceptions and attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals, opinions regarding inclusion, and factors influencing these perceptions.

The findings indicate that while the majority of college students demonstrate a positive attitude towards gender and sexual diversity, variations continue to exist in their levels of awareness, acceptance, and understanding. The study reveals that educational institutions, social media, peer interaction, family values, and cultural norms significantly influence students' perceptions. Although most respondents supported equality, non-discrimination, and inclusive educational environments, a section of the respondents continued to express uncertainty or hesitation regarding certain aspects of gender and sexual diversity. These findings suggest that despite increasing awareness and progressive legal developments, traditional socio-cultural beliefs continue to shape perceptions among some students.

The findings of the study are consistent with contemporary sociological literature, which argues that attitudes towards gender identity and sexual orientation are socially constructed and shaped through continuous interaction with institutions such as family, education, religion, media, and peer groups (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Connell, 2005). The findings also reinforce the view that higher educational institutions play a significant role in promoting awareness, reducing prejudice, and fostering inclusive attitudes towards gender and sexual diversity (Meyer, 2010; Taylor et al., 2016).

This chapter is organised into three sections. The first section discusses the major findings of the study in relation to the research objectives and relevant literature. The second section provides suggestions for educational institutions, policymakers, and other stakeholders to strengthen awareness and promote inclusive practices concerning gender and sexual diversity.

The final section concludes the study by highlighting its major contributions and emphasising the importance of creating educational and social environments that uphold equality, dignity, and respect for all individuals regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation.

5.2 MAJOR FINDINGS

The major findings presented below are derived from the analysis of data collected from 80 college students in Thiruvananthapuram. The findings are discussed in relation to the objectives of the study and interpreted with reference to existing sociological literature. They reflect respondents' socio-demographic profile, awareness of gender and sexual diversity, perceptions and attitudes, social inclusion, and the factors influencing these perceptions.

5.2.1 Findings Related to the Socio-demographic Profile

The study comprised **80 college students** representing different socio-demographic backgrounds, including variations in age, gender, religion, academic discipline, educational level, and place of residence. The inclusion of respondents from diverse backgrounds enabled the study to capture a broad spectrum of perceptions regarding gender and sexual diversity and enhanced the representativeness of the findings. The diversity within the sample reflects the heterogeneous nature of higher educational institutions in Thiruvananthapuram, where students from different social, cultural, and economic backgrounds interact within a common educational environment.

The findings suggest that socio-demographic characteristics influence the ways in which students perceive gender and sexual diversity. Although the study did not identify a single socio-demographic variable as solely determining students' attitudes, variations in responses indicate that perceptions are shaped through the interaction of multiple social experiences. Students from different educational streams, family backgrounds, and localities demonstrated varying levels of awareness and acceptance, indicating that socialisation continues to play an important role in the construction of attitudes towards gender and sexuality.

These findings support the sociological perspective proposed by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966), who argue that knowledge and social reality are constructed through everyday interaction within institutions such as the family, education, religion, and peer groups. Similarly, R. W. Connell (2005) emphasises that gender identities and gender relations are socially produced through cultural norms and institutional practices rather than biological determinism. The diversity observed among the respondents therefore reflects the influence of

different socialisation experiences that shape students' perceptions regarding gender and sexual diversity.

The findings also indicate that higher educational institutions bring together students from diverse social backgrounds, creating opportunities for interaction with individuals holding different beliefs, values, and experiences. Such interaction may contribute to greater awareness and acceptance by exposing students to multiple perspectives on gender identity and sexual orientation. This observation is consistent with Allport's (1954) Contact Hypothesis, which suggests that meaningful interaction between members of different social groups can reduce prejudice and foster more positive attitudes when supported by favourable institutional conditions.

Overall, the socio-demographic profile of the respondents strengthens the credibility of the study by representing a diverse student population. It also reinforces the sociological understanding that attitudes towards gender and sexual diversity are not formed in isolation but emerge through continuous interaction with social institutions, cultural values, educational experiences, and interpersonal relationships.

5.2.2 Findings Related to Awareness of Gender and Sexual Diversity

One of the important objectives of the present study was to assess the level of awareness regarding gender and sexual diversity among college students. The findings reveal that the majority of respondents possessed a relatively high level of awareness regarding the concept of gender and sexual diversity. Nearly all respondents reported that they had heard the term LGBTQ+, indicating widespread familiarity with the terminology associated with gender identity and sexual orientation. Furthermore, most respondents demonstrated a basic understanding of different gender identities and sexual orientations, suggesting that discussions relating to gender and sexual diversity have become increasingly visible among contemporary college students.

The study further found that social media emerged as the primary source of information regarding gender and sexual diversity, followed by educational institutions, television and films, friends, and peer groups. This finding reflects the growing influence of digital media in shaping students' knowledge and understanding of contemporary social issues. Social media platforms provide greater exposure to discussions concerning equality, diversity, human rights, and LGBTQ+ experiences, thereby increasing awareness among young people. However,

reliance on digital platforms also highlights the importance of ensuring that students access accurate and evidence-based information rather than misinformation or stereotypes.

The findings also indicate that educational institutions continue to function as important sources of awareness, although their contribution was considerably lower than that of social media. This suggests that while colleges provide opportunities for learning and discussion, greater integration of gender and sexual diversity into academic curricula, seminars, awareness programmes, and campus activities would further enhance students' understanding. The respondents also recognised the role of peers and interpersonal discussions in increasing awareness, reflecting the importance of informal learning within educational settings.

These findings are consistent with the work of Barbara K. Snyder, Gail D. Burack, and Anna Petrova (2017), who found that increased access to educational resources and reliable information enhances young people's understanding of gender and sexual diversity. Similarly, Elizabeth J. Meyer (2010) argues that educational institutions play an essential role in promoting awareness by providing inclusive educational environments that encourage informed discussion and critical thinking regarding gender identity and sexual orientation.

The findings further support the sociological perspective of Berger and Luckmann (1966), who argue that knowledge is socially constructed through interaction with institutions such as education, media, family, and peer groups. The present study demonstrates that awareness among college students is not acquired solely through formal education but through multiple social institutions operating simultaneously. In addition, the findings are consistent with Manuel Castells' (2010) concept of the network society, which emphasises the increasing influence of digital communication technologies in shaping contemporary knowledge, identities, and social relationships. The prominence of social media as the principal source of information among respondents reflects this broader transformation in the production and dissemination of knowledge.

Although the overall level of awareness was high, the findings also reveal variations in the depth of respondents' understanding. While most students were familiar with the term LGBTQ+, differences remained in their understanding of concepts relating to gender identity, sexual orientation, and the lived experiences of gender and sexual minorities. This suggests that awareness does not necessarily translate into comprehensive knowledge or positive attitudes. Similar observations were made by Herek (2009), who argues that familiarity with

LGBTQ+ terminology does not automatically eliminate prejudice, as attitudes continue to be shaped by cultural values, personal beliefs, and social experiences.

Overall, the findings indicate that college students in Thiruvananthapuram possess a relatively high level of awareness regarding gender and sexual diversity, reflecting the increasing visibility of LGBTQ+ issues in contemporary society. Nevertheless, the study also highlights the need for educational institutions to play a more proactive role in providing scientifically accurate, comprehensive, and inclusive education on gender and sexual diversity. Strengthening awareness through curriculum integration, gender sensitisation programmes, seminars, workshops, and student engagement activities can contribute to developing informed perceptions and reducing misconceptions among young adults. From a sociological perspective, the findings reinforce the understanding that awareness is socially produced through the combined influence of education, media, peer interaction, and broader cultural change.

5.2.3 Findings Related to Perceptions and Attitudes towards Gender and Sexual Diversity

One of the primary objectives of the present study was to examine college students' perceptions and attitudes towards gender and sexual diversity. The findings indicate that the respondents generally exhibited positive perceptions and favourable attitudes towards individuals belonging to diverse gender identities and sexual orientations. A substantial majority of the respondents believed that all individuals deserve equal dignity, respect, and opportunities irrespective of their gender identity or sexual orientation. The respondents also expressed support for equal rights and demonstrated a willingness to interact with LGBTQ+ individuals in educational and social settings.

The study revealed that 76.3% of the respondents expressed comfort in having an LGBTQ+ friend, indicating a relatively high level of interpersonal acceptance among college students. This finding suggests that many students view friendship as independent of an individual's gender identity or sexual orientation and recognise the importance of mutual respect and equality. Such responses reflect the gradual transformation of attitudes among educated youth, who are increasingly exposed to diverse perspectives through higher education, digital media, and social interaction.

These findings are consistent with the work of Gregory M. Herek (2009), who argues that increased awareness and personal interaction with LGBTQ+ individuals are associated with more positive attitudes and lower levels of prejudice. Herek (2009) observed that familiarity and interpersonal contact reduce stereotypes and encourage greater social acceptance. Similarly, Gordon W. Allport (1954), through the Contact Hypothesis, proposed that meaningful interaction between members of different social groups contributes to reducing prejudice and fostering mutual understanding. The willingness of respondents to establish friendships with LGBTQ+ individuals supports this theoretical perspective by demonstrating that positive interpersonal relationships can challenge discriminatory attitudes.

The findings also indicate that respondents largely supported the principles of equality, human dignity, and non-discrimination, reflecting increasing acceptance of diversity among college students. This observation corresponds with the findings of Russell B. Toomey, Caitlin Ryan, Rafael M. Díaz, and Stephen T. Russell (2011), who reported that students studying in inclusive educational environments were more likely to develop positive attitudes towards gender and sexual diversity. According to Toomey et al. (2011), exposure to diverse identities within educational institutions contributes to greater empathy, respect, and acceptance among young adults.

The respondents also demonstrated support for equal rights and opportunities for LGBTQ+ individuals, suggesting an awareness of broader issues relating to social justice and human rights. These findings reflect the increasing visibility of discussions concerning equality and diversity in contemporary society. Judith Butler (1990) argues that gender is not a fixed biological characteristic but a socially constructed and performed identity. Greater awareness of such perspectives within educational and public discourse may contribute to more inclusive attitudes among younger generations by challenging rigid binary understandings of gender.

However, despite the generally positive attitudes observed, the study also identified the presence of uncertainty and conservative views among a section of the respondents. A small proportion of students expressed hesitation regarding issues relating to gender and sexual diversity, while others were reluctant to fully support certain aspects of LGBTQ+ inclusion. These findings suggest that although awareness has increased, complete social acceptance has not yet been achieved.

The coexistence of supportive and conservative attitudes reflects the continuing influence of family values, religious beliefs, cultural traditions, and heteronormative socialisation. According to Michael Warner (1991), heteronormativity positions heterosexuality and binary gender identities as the accepted social norm, thereby influencing attitudes towards individuals whose identities challenge these expectations. Similarly, R. W. Connell (2005) argues that dominant gender norms and hegemonic masculinity continue to shape societal expectations regarding gender roles and sexuality. These theoretical perspectives help explain why some respondents continued to express reservations despite their educational exposure.

The findings also reinforce the sociological understanding that attitudes towards gender and sexual diversity are not static but evolve through continuous interaction with different social institutions. Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966) argue that social reality is constructed through everyday interaction, and individuals acquire attitudes through the process of socialisation within families, educational institutions, peer groups, media, and religious organisations. The variation observed in respondents' perceptions therefore reflects differences in their social experiences and exposure to diverse viewpoints.

Overall, the findings suggest that college students in Thiruvananthapuram are gradually developing more inclusive attitudes towards gender and sexual diversity. Nevertheless, the persistence of uncertainty among a section of the respondents indicates that awareness alone is insufficient to transform deeply rooted social beliefs. Continuous educational interventions, exposure to diversity, and opportunities for meaningful interaction remain essential for promoting empathy, reducing prejudice, and fostering a culture of equality and inclusion within higher educational institutions.

5.2.4 Findings Related to Social Inclusion

The findings of the present study indicate that respondents generally expressed positive opinions regarding the social inclusion of LGBTQ+ individuals within educational institutions. A majority of the respondents believed that colleges should provide an environment where students of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations are treated with dignity, equality, and respect. The findings suggest that students increasingly recognise educational institutions as important spaces for promoting inclusion, protecting human rights, and encouraging social harmony.

A significant finding of the study is that 63.7% of the respondents believed that LGBTQ+ students are accepted within their college environment, while 25% perceived that acceptance was only partial, and 11.3% believed that LGBTQ+ students were not accepted. These responses indicate that although many students perceive their colleges as generally inclusive, complete acceptance has not yet been realised. The perception of only partial acceptance suggests that subtle forms of exclusion, stereotypes, or discrimination may continue to exist within higher educational institutions.

These findings are comparable to those of Catherine G. Taylor, Elizabeth J. Meyer, Tracey Peter, Janice Ristock, Donn Short, and Christopher Campbell (2016), who found that although educational institutions increasingly promote equality and diversity, significant differences remain between institutional policies and students' everyday experiences. Taylor et al. (2016) observed that inclusive educational environments require not only supportive policies but also active implementation through curriculum, teacher training, and student engagement. The present study similarly indicates that creating an inclusive campus involves more than formal acceptance; it requires continuous efforts to foster respectful social relationships and institutional support.

The findings further reveal that respondents strongly supported institutional initiatives aimed at promoting gender and sexual diversity. More than two-thirds (66.3%) expressed willingness to participate in awareness programmes, while 67.5% supported the introduction of gender-inclusive policies within educational institutions. These findings suggest that students recognise the importance of institutional interventions in promoting equality and reducing discrimination. The willingness to participate in awareness programmes demonstrates students' openness to learning about gender identity, sexual orientation, and inclusive social practices.

These findings are consistent with Elizabeth J. Meyer (2010), who argues that educational institutions should actively promote inclusive learning environments through awareness programmes, inclusive curricula, anti-discrimination policies, and staff development initiatives. Meyer (2010) maintains that institutional commitment plays a crucial role in normalising diversity and reducing prejudice among students. Similarly, UNESCO (2021) emphasises that inclusive educational environments contribute significantly to improving students' understanding of gender and sexual diversity while reducing discrimination and bullying.

The qualitative responses collected from respondents further strengthen these findings. Students most frequently recommended awareness programmes, workshops, LGBTQ+ education within the curriculum, anti-discrimination policies, counselling services, and the establishment of support cells to promote inclusion within colleges. These suggestions indicate that respondents perceive educational institutions as active agents of social change rather than merely centres of academic instruction. The recommendations also reflect students' recognition that inclusion requires both institutional support and continuous educational engagement.

From a sociological perspective, these findings reinforce the view that educational institutions function as important secondary agents of socialisation. According to Berger and Luckmann (1966), institutions contribute to constructing social reality by transmitting shared values and norms. Similarly, Émile Durkheim (1956) viewed education as a mechanism through which societies transmit collective values and prepare individuals for social life. The present study suggests that higher educational institutions have the potential to cultivate inclusive values, encourage democratic participation, and promote respect for diversity through both formal and informal educational processes.

Nevertheless, the findings also indicate that institutional inclusion remains incomplete. The perception of partial acceptance among a considerable proportion of respondents suggests that educational institutions continue to reflect broader societal attitudes shaped by traditional gender norms, cultural expectations, and heteronormative beliefs. This observation supports Michael Warner's (1991) argument that heteronormativity remains embedded within institutional structures, influencing both organisational practices and everyday social interactions.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that respondents strongly support inclusive educational environments and recognise the responsibility of higher educational institutions in promoting gender equality, diversity, and social justice. However, they also indicate that sustained institutional commitment is necessary to translate positive attitudes into meaningful inclusion. Educational institutions must therefore continue strengthening awareness programmes, gender sensitisation initiatives, anti-discrimination policies, counselling services, and support mechanisms to ensure that every student, irrespective of gender identity or sexual orientation, experiences a safe, respectful, and equitable learning environment.

5.2.5 Findings Related to Factors Influencing Perceptions

The present study sought to identify the major factors that influence college students' perceptions of gender and sexual diversity. The findings reveal that respondents' perceptions are not shaped by a single factor but are the outcome of interactions among multiple social institutions and agents of socialisation. Educational institutions, social media, peer groups, family, religion, and cultural values emerged as the primary influences shaping students' understanding, attitudes, and acceptance of gender and sexual diversity. This finding reinforces the sociological perspective that perceptions are socially constructed rather than biologically determined and evolve through continuous interaction within society (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

Among the various factors, social media emerged as the most influential source of information regarding gender and sexual diversity. The majority of respondents reported that they first learned about LGBTQ+ issues through digital platforms rather than through formal education or traditional media. This finding reflects the growing influence of digital communication in shaping the knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes of contemporary youth. Social media provides students with access to information, personal narratives, awareness campaigns, advocacy movements, and discussions concerning equality, diversity, and human rights. Consequently, students are increasingly exposed to perspectives that challenge conventional understandings of gender and sexuality.

These findings are consistent with the observations of Manuel Castells (2010), who argues that digital communication technologies have transformed the production and dissemination of knowledge within the contemporary network society. Castells (2010) suggests that online communication enables individuals to access diverse viewpoints beyond the limitations of traditional social institutions, thereby influencing identity formation and social attitudes. The findings also support those of Snyder, Burack, and Petrova (2017), who found that increased access to accurate information through educational and digital platforms enhances awareness and contributes to more positive perceptions of gender and sexual diversity.

The findings further indicate that educational institutions constitute another significant influence on students' perceptions. Respondents acknowledged that colleges provide opportunities to learn about issues relating to gender identity, sexual orientation, equality, and inclusion through classroom discussions, awareness programmes, seminars, workshops, and interaction with peers from diverse backgrounds. Educational institutions expose students to

perspectives that often differ from those encountered within family and community settings, thereby encouraging critical thinking and social awareness.

This finding is supported by Elizabeth J. Meyer (2010), who argues that educational institutions play a crucial role in challenging stereotypes and promoting inclusive attitudes by integrating gender and sexual diversity into educational curricula and campus activities. Similarly, Taylor et al. (2016) found that inclusive educational environments contribute significantly to students' understanding of diversity and encourage more positive attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals. The present study therefore reinforces the importance of higher education as an agent of social transformation capable of promoting equality and reducing prejudice.

Peer interaction also emerged as an important factor influencing respondents' perceptions. College life provides opportunities for students to interact with individuals from different socio-cultural, religious, and educational backgrounds. Such interaction encourages the exchange of ideas, discussion of contemporary social issues, and exposure to experiences that challenge preconceived beliefs. Respondents who reported greater interaction with diverse peer groups generally expressed more accepting attitudes towards gender and sexual diversity.

These findings correspond with Allport's (1954) Contact Hypothesis, which proposes that meaningful interaction between members of different social groups reduces prejudice when supported by favourable institutional conditions. Likewise, Herek (2009) argues that personal contact with LGBTQ+ individuals contributes significantly to reducing stereotypes and promoting acceptance. The present study supports these perspectives by indicating that interpersonal relationships within educational settings encourage greater understanding and empathy towards individuals belonging to diverse gender identities and sexual orientations.

Despite the influence of education and media, the findings indicate that family values, religious beliefs, and cultural traditions continue to shape students' perceptions. A section of the respondents expressed uncertainty or reservations regarding certain aspects of gender and sexual diversity, reflecting the continuing influence of traditional gender norms and cultural expectations. Families remain the primary agents of socialisation, transmitting beliefs concerning gender roles, sexuality, and acceptable social behaviour from early childhood. Religious teachings and cultural traditions similarly contribute to shaping attitudes that individuals carry into adulthood.

These findings support R. W. Connell's (2005) argument that gender relations are socially organised through cultural norms and institutional practices that privilege certain gender

identities while marginalising others. They are also consistent with Michael Warner's (1991) concept of heteronormativity, which explains how social institutions reinforce heterosexuality and binary gender identities as the accepted social norm. The coexistence of progressive and conservative attitudes among respondents therefore reflects the interaction between traditional socialisation and contemporary sources of knowledge.

The findings further demonstrate that respondents' perceptions are influenced by the interaction of traditional institutions and modern communication systems. While educational institutions and digital media encourage inclusive attitudes, family, religion, and culture continue to reinforce conventional understandings of gender and sexuality for many students. This interaction produces varying levels of awareness and acceptance among respondents, illustrating that social change occurs gradually rather than uniformly across society.

From a sociological perspective, these findings strongly support Berger and Luckmann's (1966) theory of the social construction of reality, which argues that knowledge, beliefs, and social meanings are produced and reproduced through social interaction. The present study demonstrates that students' perceptions are constructed through continuous engagement with multiple institutions rather than through individual experiences alone. Consequently, promoting inclusive attitudes requires coordinated efforts involving families, educational institutions, media organisations, policymakers, and civil society.

Overall, the findings indicate that perceptions of gender and sexual diversity among college students are shaped through a complex interaction of educational exposure, digital media, peer relationships, family values, religion, and broader cultural influences. Strengthening positive sources of socialisation while addressing misconceptions within traditional institutions can contribute to developing more informed, empathetic, and inclusive attitudes towards gender and sexual diversity.

5.2.6 Overall Findings

The overall findings of the study demonstrate that college students in Thiruvananthapuram exhibit a relatively high level of awareness and generally positive perceptions towards gender and sexual diversity. The majority of respondents were familiar with the concept of LGBTQ+, supported equal rights and opportunities for gender and sexual minorities, and expressed willingness to interact with LGBTQ+ individuals in educational and social settings. These findings suggest that young adults studying in higher educational institutions are increasingly

recognising the importance of equality, dignity, diversity, and human rights within contemporary society.

The study indicates that awareness regarding gender and sexual diversity has increased considerably among college students, with social media emerging as the primary source of information, followed by educational institutions and peer interaction. This finding reflects the growing influence of digital communication technologies and higher education in shaping contemporary knowledge and social attitudes. The respondents' willingness to participate in awareness programmes and their support for gender-inclusive institutional policies further demonstrate their openness towards promoting inclusive educational environments.

The findings also reveal that a majority of respondents perceive their colleges as generally accepting of LGBTQ+ students. Many expressed support for awareness programmes, gender sensitisation initiatives, anti-discrimination measures, counselling services, and the establishment of inclusive campus policies. These responses indicate that students recognise educational institutions as important spaces for promoting equality, reducing prejudice, and strengthening social inclusion.

The qualitative findings reinforce this observation. Respondents most frequently recommended awareness workshops, inclusion of LGBTQ+ topics within educational curricula, anti-bullying policies, equal treatment, counselling services, and support cells for gender and sexual minority students. These suggestions demonstrate that respondents view institutional intervention as essential for creating inclusive campus environments and addressing discrimination.

Despite these positive developments, the study also reveals that complete social acceptance has not yet been achieved. A section of the respondents expressed uncertainty regarding certain issues relating to gender and sexual diversity, while others continued to hold relatively conservative views influenced by traditional cultural values, religious beliefs, and established gender norms. These findings suggest that legal reforms and increasing public visibility of LGBTQ+ communities alone are insufficient to transform deeply rooted social attitudes. Rather, sustained educational interventions and broader cultural change remain necessary.

These observations are consistent with Meyer (2003), whose Minority Stress Theory demonstrates that social stigma and discrimination continue to affect LGBTQ+ individuals despite legal recognition. Likewise, Warner (1991) argues that heteronormative assumptions remain deeply embedded within social institutions, while Herek (2009) emphasises that prejudice is maintained through cultural beliefs and limited social interaction. The present

study indicates that although educated youth demonstrate increasing acceptance, traditional systems of socialisation continue to influence perceptions among some students.

From a broader sociological perspective, the findings support Berger and Luckmann's (1966) theory of social construction, which argues that social knowledge and attitudes are continuously produced through interaction with institutions such as family, education, media, religion, and peer groups. Similarly, Connell (2005) explains that gender relations are shaped through institutional structures and cultural expectations rather than biological determinism. The variation observed among respondents illustrates the continuing interaction between traditional social values and contemporary influences such as education, media, and global human rights discourse.

Overall, the study concludes that college students in Thiruvananthapuram demonstrate encouraging levels of awareness and acceptance regarding gender and sexual diversity, reflecting broader processes of social change occurring within Indian society. Nevertheless, the persistence of uncertainty and conservative attitudes among a section of respondents highlights the continuing need for educational reforms, awareness programmes, institutional support mechanisms, and inclusive public policies.

The findings highlight the importance of strengthening the role of educational institutions in promoting diversity, equality, and social justice. Greater curriculum integration, gender sensitisation programmes, faculty training, counselling services, anti-discrimination policies, and student support initiatives can contribute to creating educational environments where all individuals, irrespective of their gender identity or sexual orientation, are treated with dignity, respect, and equality. Ultimately, the study demonstrates that perceptions of gender and sexual diversity are socially shaped and continue to evolve through the combined influence of education, family, media, peer interaction, and broader societal transformation. These findings provide an important empirical basis for developing educational and policy interventions aimed at fostering more inclusive and equitable higher educational institutions in Kerala.

5.3 SUGGESTIONS

Based on the findings of the present study, the following suggestions are proposed to promote greater awareness, acceptance, and social inclusion of gender and sexual diversity among college students. These recommendations are derived from the analysis of the responses

collected from the participants and are intended for educational institutions, policymakers, government departments, community organisations, and other relevant stakeholders.

5.3.1 Strengthen Gender Sensitization and Awareness Programmes

The study indicates that although many students have a positive perception of gender and sexual diversity, some continue to hold uncertain or traditional views. Therefore, colleges and universities should organize regular gender sensitization programmes, workshops, seminars, awareness campaigns, and interactive sessions to improve students' understanding of gender identity, sexual orientation, equality, and diversity. Such programmes can help reduce stereotypes, correct misconceptions, and encourage respectful attitudes among students.

5.3.2 Promote Inclusive Educational Practices

Educational institutions should adopt inclusive academic practices that encourage respect for diversity and equal participation. Topics related to gender equality, human rights, social inclusion, and diversity may be integrated into classroom discussions, seminars, and co-curricular activities wherever appropriate. Creating opportunities for informed discussion can help students develop empathy, critical thinking, and a broader sociological understanding of gender and sexual diversity.

5.3.3 Strengthen Institutional Policies Against Discrimination

The findings show that educational institutions have an important role in creating safe and inclusive environments. Colleges should strengthen policies that prohibit discrimination, bullying, harassment, or unfair treatment based on gender identity or sexual orientation. Clear grievance redressal mechanisms should be available so that students can report incidents confidentially and receive appropriate support. Effective implementation of institutional policies can contribute to creating a campus environment based on equality, dignity, and mutual respect.

5.3.4 Enhance Counselling and Student Support Services

The study highlights the importance of supportive educational environments in shaping positive attitudes. Colleges should strengthen counselling and student support services by providing trained professionals who can offer guidance in a confidential and non-judgmental manner. Counselling services should be accessible to all students and should promote

emotional well-being, inclusion, and respectful interpersonal relationships. Such services can also contribute to reducing prejudice and encouraging greater understanding among students.

5.3.5 Encourage Responsible Use of Media and Digital Platforms

The findings suggest that media exposure plays an important role in influencing students' awareness and perceptions. Educational institutions should encourage students to critically evaluate information received through social media, television, films, and online platforms. Media literacy programmes can help students distinguish between factual information and stereotypes or misinformation. Promoting responsible media use can contribute to a more informed understanding of gender and sexual diversity.

5.3.6 Promote Community and Family Awareness

The study indicates that family values and cultural beliefs continue to influence students' perceptions. Therefore, awareness initiatives should not be limited to educational institutions alone. Community organisations, local self-government institutions, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can conduct awareness programmes involving parents, community members, and youth groups. Encouraging open dialogue within families and communities can gradually reduce prejudice and promote acceptance of diversity.

5.3.7 Encourage Collaboration with Government and Non-Governmental Organisations

Government departments, educational authorities, and NGOs working in the fields of gender equality, youth development, and human rights should collaborate with colleges to organize awareness campaigns, training programmes, and community outreach activities. Such collaborative efforts can strengthen students' understanding of constitutional values, equality, social justice, and respect for diversity while promoting inclusive educational environments.

5.3.8 Promote Student Participation and Leadership

Students should be encouraged to actively participate in discussions, debates, awareness campaigns, cultural programmes, and social initiatives related to gender equality and social inclusion. Student-led activities can create opportunities for dialogue, mutual learning, and the exchange of ideas among peers. Active participation also helps develop leadership skills, social responsibility, and respect for diversity within educational institutions.

5.3.9 Encourage Further Research

The present study was limited to 80 respondents from colleges in Thiruvananthapuram district. Future research may include larger and more diverse samples covering different regions of Kerala and other parts of India. Comparative studies involving rural and urban institutions, different academic disciplines, or different age groups may provide a broader understanding of perceptions regarding gender and sexual diversity. Researchers may also adopt qualitative or mixed-method approaches to explore the lived experiences, social interactions, and institutional challenges associated with gender and sexual diversity in greater depth.

5.3.10 Promote Equality and Human Rights

Educational institutions, policymakers, and society should continue promoting the values of equality, dignity, mutual respect, and human rights through educational policies and awareness initiatives. Creating inclusive environments where every individual is respected regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation will contribute to reducing discrimination and strengthening social cohesion. Such efforts are essential for building a democratic, equitable, and socially inclusive society in which diversity is recognized as a positive social value rather than a source of discrimination.

5.4 CONCLUSION

The present study, "Perceptions of Gender and Sexual Diversity Among College Students in Thiruvananthapuram," was undertaken with the objective of examining the awareness, perceptions, and attitudes of college students towards gender and sexual diversity and identifying the social factors that influence these perceptions. In recent decades, issues relating to gender identity, sexual orientation, equality, and inclusion have gained increasing prominence within academic discourse, public policy, and human rights frameworks across the world. In India, landmark judicial interventions, progressive legislative reforms, and growing public engagement have significantly transformed discussions surrounding gender and sexual diversity. However, despite these developments, social acceptance continues to evolve gradually, reflecting the continuing influence of cultural traditions, social norms, and institutional practices. Against this backdrop, the present study sought to understand how educated youth perceive gender and sexual diversity within the context of higher educational institutions in Thiruvananthapuram.

The study adopted a quantitative research design and collected data from 80 college students using a structured questionnaire. Statistical analysis using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) facilitated a systematic examination of respondents' socio-demographic profile, awareness of gender and sexual diversity, perceptions and attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals, and the social factors influencing these perceptions. The findings provide important empirical evidence regarding the attitudes of contemporary college students and contribute to a better understanding of changing social values among young adults.

One of the most significant findings of the study is that college students demonstrate a relatively high level of awareness regarding gender and sexual diversity. Most respondents were familiar with the term LGBTQ+ and possessed a basic understanding of concepts relating to gender identity and sexual orientation. Social media emerged as the primary source of information, followed by educational institutions, television, peer interaction, and other communication platforms. These findings indicate that digital communication technologies have become powerful agents of socialisation, enabling young people to access information, engage with diverse perspectives, and participate in discussions concerning equality, diversity, and human rights. At the same time, the findings highlight the continuing importance of educational institutions in providing reliable, evidence-based knowledge that enables students to distinguish factual information from stereotypes and misinformation.

The findings further reveal that the respondents generally exhibited positive attitudes towards gender and sexual diversity. A substantial majority supported equal rights, dignity, and non-discrimination for individuals irrespective of their gender identity or sexual orientation. Many respondents expressed comfort in interacting with LGBTQ+ individuals and recognised the importance of creating educational environments characterised by equality, mutual respect, and inclusivity. These findings suggest that higher educational institutions have become important spaces where students encounter diverse identities and engage with contemporary debates on equality and social justice. The willingness of respondents to support gender-inclusive policies and participate in awareness programmes reflects the emergence of more inclusive attitudes among educated youth and indicates an increasing acceptance of diversity within higher education.

Nevertheless, the study also demonstrates that social acceptance remains incomplete. Although respondents generally expressed supportive attitudes, a section of the participants continued to exhibit uncertainty or reservations regarding certain aspects of gender and sexual diversity.

These findings indicate that traditional gender norms, cultural expectations, religious beliefs, and heteronormative socialisation continue to influence individual attitudes. The coexistence of progressive and conservative viewpoints illustrates that social transformation is an ongoing process rather than an immediate outcome of legal or educational reforms. It also demonstrates that while awareness may increase rapidly through media exposure and educational opportunities, attitudinal change often occurs more gradually because deeply embedded cultural values continue to shape social behaviour.

The study further highlights that perceptions towards gender and sexual diversity are socially constructed through the interaction of multiple social institutions. Educational institutions, family, peer groups, media, religion, and the wider socio-cultural environment collectively influence students' understanding of gender identity and sexual orientation. While educational exposure, peer interaction, and digital media appear to promote greater awareness and acceptance, family values and cultural traditions continue to reinforce conventional understandings of gender and sexuality for many respondents. These findings reinforce the sociological argument that attitudes are neither innate nor biologically determined but are acquired and transformed through socialisation and continuous interaction with different institutions of society.

The findings are consistent with Berger and Luckmann's (1966) theory of the social construction of reality, which argues that social knowledge and meanings are created and sustained through institutional processes and everyday interaction. Similarly, R. W. Connell's (2005) theory of gender relations emphasises that gender identities are shaped by social structures rather than biological characteristics, while Judith Butler (1990) argues that gender is continuously performed through socially learned behaviours and expectations. The persistence of some traditional attitudes among respondents also supports Michael Warner's (1991) concept of heteronormativity, which explains how institutions and cultural norms privilege heterosexuality and binary gender identities. The present study therefore reinforces contemporary sociological perspectives by demonstrating that perceptions of gender and sexual diversity reflect broader processes of socialisation, institutional influence, and cultural change.

An important contribution of the study lies in its examination of the role of higher educational institutions in promoting equality and social inclusion. The findings indicate that respondents view colleges not merely as centres of academic learning but also as spaces where democratic values, critical thinking, and respect for diversity can be cultivated. Students expressed strong

support for awareness programmes, gender sensitisation initiatives, anti-discrimination measures, counselling services, LGBTQ+ support mechanisms, and gender-inclusive institutional policies. These responses suggest that students recognise the responsibility of educational institutions in fostering inclusive campus environments and reducing prejudice. The recommendations offered by respondents further demonstrate that inclusive education requires not only curriculum reform but also supportive institutional cultures, participatory student engagement, and effective implementation of equality-oriented policies.

The present study also contributes to the existing body of sociological literature by shifting attention from the experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals to the perceptions of the wider student population. Much of the existing research in India has focused on legal rights, public health, mental health, or the lived experiences of gender and sexual minorities. By examining the perceptions of college students, the present study provides valuable insight into the attitudes of educated youth who will become future educators, administrators, healthcare professionals, policymakers, researchers, media practitioners, and community leaders. Their attitudes will significantly influence the development of future institutional cultures, educational practices, and public policies concerning diversity and inclusion.

From a practical perspective, the findings highlight the importance of continuous educational interventions for promoting greater awareness and acceptance of gender and sexual diversity. Although respondents generally demonstrated positive attitudes, the persistence of uncertainty among a section of students indicates that awareness alone is insufficient to eliminate prejudice or misconceptions. Educational institutions should therefore integrate gender and sexual diversity into academic curricula, organise regular awareness programmes and sensitisation workshops, establish counselling services and support mechanisms, and strengthen anti-discrimination policies. Such initiatives can encourage respectful dialogue, promote empathy, reduce stereotypes, and create educational environments where all students feel safe, valued, and respected irrespective of their gender identity or sexual orientation.

The study further highlights the need for collaborative efforts among educational institutions, families, government agencies, policymakers, civil society organisations, and the media. Promoting gender equality and social inclusion cannot be achieved solely through institutional policies or legal reforms. Sustainable social change requires coordinated efforts that address misconceptions, encourage open dialogue, challenge discriminatory practices, and promote respect for diversity within families, communities, educational settings, workplaces, and public

institutions. Strengthening collaboration among these stakeholders can contribute significantly to creating a more inclusive and equitable society.

While the study provides important insights, certain limitations should be acknowledged. The research was confined to a sample of 80 college students selected from higher educational institutions in Thiruvananthapuram district. Consequently, the findings cannot be generalised to all college students in Kerala or India. Furthermore, the study employed a quantitative research design, which facilitated systematic analysis but did not allow for detailed exploration of respondents' lived experiences or the reasons underlying their attitudes. Future research may therefore benefit from larger and more diverse samples, comparative studies across different regions, and mixed-method or qualitative approaches that explore the complexities of students' perceptions in greater depth. Comparative studies involving different academic disciplines, socio-cultural contexts, or educational institutions would further enrich sociological understanding of gender and sexual diversity.

In conclusion, the present study demonstrates that awareness and acceptance of gender and sexual diversity among college students in Thiruvananthapuram are gradually increasing, reflecting processes of social transformation occurring within contemporary Indian society. At the same time, the persistence of traditional beliefs and heteronormative attitudes among a section of respondents indicates that social acceptance remains an evolving process. The study reaffirms that attitudes towards gender and sexual diversity are socially constructed and continuously shaped through education, family, peer interaction, media exposure, and wider cultural change. It further emphasises that meaningful inclusion requires more than legal recognition; it requires sustained educational initiatives, institutional commitment, public awareness, and collective social responsibility.

Ultimately, the vision of an inclusive society can be realised only when diversity is recognised as a source of social strength rather than social difference. Educational institutions, as centres of knowledge and social development, have a unique responsibility to cultivate values of equality, dignity, empathy, and respect among future generations. It is hoped that the findings of this study will contribute to the growing sociological discourse on gender and sexual diversity, provide empirical evidence for policymakers and educational practitioners, stimulate further research in this emerging area, and encourage the development of educational and social environments where every individual, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation, is able to live with dignity, equality, and full participation in society.

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APPENDIX

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Perceptions of Gender and Sexual Diversity Among College Students in Trivandrum

Dear Respondent,

I am a postgraduate student of Sociology conducting a research study titled "**Perceptions of Gender and Sexual Diversity Among College Students in Trivandrum.**" The purpose of this study is to understand the perceptions, awareness and attitudes of college students regarding gender and sexual diversity. You are invited to participate in this study because your opinions and experiences are valuable for understanding social attitudes toward gender and sexual diversity among the youth.

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You are free to refuse participation or withdraw from the study at any point of time.

The information collected through this questionnaire will be used only for academic purposes. Your identity and responses will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous. No personal information that reveals your identity will be disclosed in the research report or shared with others.

The questionnaire will take approximately 10–15 minutes to complete. There are no major risks involved in participating in this study. However, some questions may relate to personal opinions and social attitudes.

By signing/agreeing below, you confirm that:

- You have understood the purpose of the study.
- You voluntarily agree to participate in this research.
- You understand that your responses will remain confidential.
- You understand that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

QUESTIONNAIRE

Perceptions of Gender and Sexual Diversity Among College Students in Trivandrum

SECTION A: SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

1. Age

18–20

21–23

24–26

Above 26

2. Gender

Male

Female

Transgender

Prefer not to say

3. Religion

Hindu

Muslim

Christian

Other _____

4. Educational Qualification

Postgraduate

5. Academic Stream

Arts/Humanities

Science

Commerce

Professional Course

6. Locality

Urban

Rural

7. Type of Family

Nuclear Family

Joint Family

8. Monthly Family Income

Below ₹25,000

₹25,001–₹50,000

₹50,001–₹75,000

Above ₹75,000

9. Have you ever interacted with a person belonging to the LGBTQ+ community?

- Yes
- No

10. Main source of information regarding gender and sexual diversity

- Social Media
- Television/Movies
- Friends/Peers
- Educational Institutions
- Newspapers/Books
- Others _____

SECTION B: AWARENESS REGARDING GENDER AND SEXUAL DIVERSITY

11. Have you heard about the term LGBTQ+?

- Yes
- No

12. Are you aware that homosexuality is legally decriminalized in India?

- Yes
- No

13. Do you think people should have the freedom to express their gender identity?

- Yes
- No
- Not Sure

14. Are you aware that LGBTQ+ individuals face discrimination in society?

- Yes

- No

15. Do you think colleges should conduct awareness programs on gender and sexual diversity?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

SECTION C: PERCEPTIONS TOWARD GENDER AND SEXUAL DIVERSITY

Instructions

Please indicate your opinion using the following scale:

Scale	Meaning
1	Strongly Disagree
2	Disagree
3	Neutral
4	Agree
5	Strongly Agree

No.	Statements
16	Gender and sexuality are socially constructed.
17	LGBTQ+ individuals deserve equal rights in society.
18	Society should accept different sexual orientations.
19	Traditional cultural values influence attitudes toward LGBTQ+ people.
20	Media positively influences awareness about gender diversity.
21	Families should support members belonging to LGBTQ+ communities.
22	LGBTQ+ students should feel safe and included in colleges.
23	Discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals is still common in society.
24	Educational institutions should include discussions on gender diversity in the curriculum.
25	Peer groups influence students' attitudes toward LGBTQ+ communities.
26	Kerala society is becoming more accepting of gender and sexual diversity.
27	LGBTQ+ individuals should have equal employment opportunities.
28	Bullying based on gender identity or sexual orientation should be strictly prevented.
29	Social media has changed youth perceptions regarding LGBTQ+ issues.
30	Awareness and education can reduce prejudice against LGBTQ+ communities.

SECTION D: SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE AND INCLUSION

31. Would you feel comfortable having an LGBTQ+ friend?

- Yes
- No
- Not Sure

32. Would you support equal rights for LGBTQ+ individuals?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

33. Do you think LGBTQ+ students are accepted in your college environment?

- Yes
- No
- Partially

34. Have you ever witnessed discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals?

- Yes
- No

35. Would you participate in awareness programs promoting gender and sexual diversity?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

36. Do you think educational institutions should create gender-inclusive policies?

- Yes
- No
- Not Sure

SECTION E: OPINIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

37. What measures can colleges take to promote inclusion and equality for LGBTQ+ students?

38. What are your suggestions for reducing discrimination related to gender and sexual diversity in society?

DECLARATION

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that the information provided will be kept confidential and used only for academic purposes.