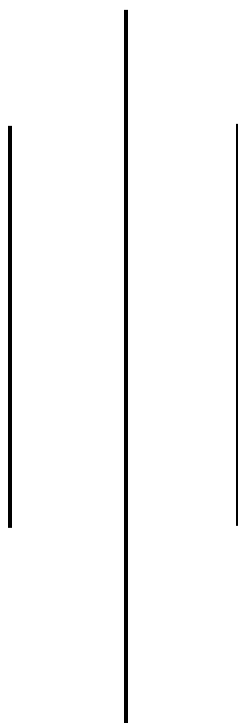


Lived Experiences of people from LGBTIQ community who were
schooled in Kathmandu Valley and
Perception of Teachers and Non-teaching staffs



Study conducted by:

Blue Diamond Society
Kathmandu, Nepal
2019

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Objectives of this research.....	2
Methodology	2
Study Tools.....	2
Limitation of the study.....	3
Findings and Analysis	3
Quantitative data	3
Qualitative data	11
Conclusion and Recommendation	14
References	16

List of Figures and Tables

Figures

Figure 1 Education Level	4
Figure 2 Participation in Sports.....	4
Figure 3 School environment	5
Figure 4 School Drop-out Rate.....	6
Figure 5 Experience of violence/discrimination	6
Figure 6 Type of violence/discrimination experienced.....	7
Figure 7 Perpetrator of violence	8
Figure 8 Discrimination for using restroom in school.....	9
Figure 9 Expression of feelings.....	10
Figure 10 Ignorance	10

Tables

Table 1 Average age when the participants experienced violence	8
Table 2 Average age when the participants identified their sexual orientation	11

Abbreviations

AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
BDS	Blue Diamond Society
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HST	The Humsafar Trust
LGBTIQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SOGI	Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity

Introduction

Although Nepal is a very tolerant country regarding gender identity and diverse sexual orientations, it is also a highly patriarchal society. Caste, class, economy, and gender among others largely shapes the attitude of the people towards gender and sexuality. Notable achievement regarding LGBTIQ issues in the country include the introduction of Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity (SOGI) affirmative courses at the university level and information given about sexual and gender diversity in the syllabus for grades 7-9 in school level, making Nepal the second country in Asia(after Mongolia) to have these issues incorporated in school curriculums¹.

Nevertheless, lack of LGBTIQ-friendly environment in educational settings are some of the issues that Nepali LGBTIQ community have been reiterating. Anecdotal evidence from the members of LGBTIQ community recapitulate that they did not have a conjugal environment during their school years. This argument matches with the available evidence from all regions of the world which suggests the scale of the problem regarding homophobia in educational institutions is significant. Literature on homophobia in educational institutions also suggests that there is a lack of research and evidence based work in this issue.

In this regard, Blue Diamond Society (BDS) has attempted to carry out this study which intends to contribute to the literature regarding the lived experiences of people from LGBTIQ community during their school years in Kathmandu, Nepal. BDS is a non-governmental organization (NGO) in Nepal, registered in 2001. As a community based organization, BDS exists to improve the sexual health, human rights and well-being of sexual/gender minorities in Nepal. BDS is the first Nepali non- governmental organization working with and for sexual/gender minorities on social justice, human rights, sexual health and HIV/AIDS. BDS seeks to encourage and support networks for sexual/gender minorities all over Nepal. To this end, BDS has already established networks in more than 26 municipalities/districts in Nepal.

Under the NOREC project, The Humsafar Trust (HST) facilitated a community-based research workshop on May 22–25, 2019, as an initiative to strengthen research capacities at BDS. An

¹UNDP, USAID (2014). Being LGBT in Asia: Nepal Country Report. Bangkok

interest to carry out a small scale community based research was proposed by the participants of BDS in the workshop. Therefore, this research is an outcome activity of the interest generated in the community based research workshop.

Objectives of this research

The first objective of this study was to learn about the experiences faced by LGBTIQ people during their school years. Secondly, this research also notes what teaching and non-teaching staff expressed about their experience regarding LGBTIQ issues.

Methodology

This section presents the methodology of this study. Following is the methodology that this research has employed.

A mixed method approach was used in this research to collect the data. In other words, both quantitative and qualitative methods are used to collect the data.

For Quantitative data collection a survey was conducted with the members of LGBTIQ community who were enrolled in different schools within Kathmandu Valley. Key Informant Interviews with teaching and non-teaching staffs working in various schools in Kathmandu was conducted to collect the qualitative data. The location where survey and interviews were conducted was within the Kathmandu Valley. An informed consent form was developed and written consent was taken prior to engaging with all the respondents.

Anonymity is adhered to all the participants of this study.

Study Tools

To collect quantitative and qualitative data, this study has used following tools.

- Survey Questionnaire for survey
- Guiding questions for interviews
- Informed consent form was used for both

Limitation of the study

The data for this study was generated from a survey with the 50 people who identify themselves as members of the LGBTIQ community and qualitative interviews with 5 school teachers and non-teaching staffs in Kathmandu. Time and resource were one of the limitations to carry out this study as the study team had less time and was conducted within Kathmandu Valley. The budget to carry out the study was also minor, which is why a large scale survey conducting various tests were not feasible. Therefore, conclusions derived from this study cannot be generalized to all the LGBTIQ people in Nepal.

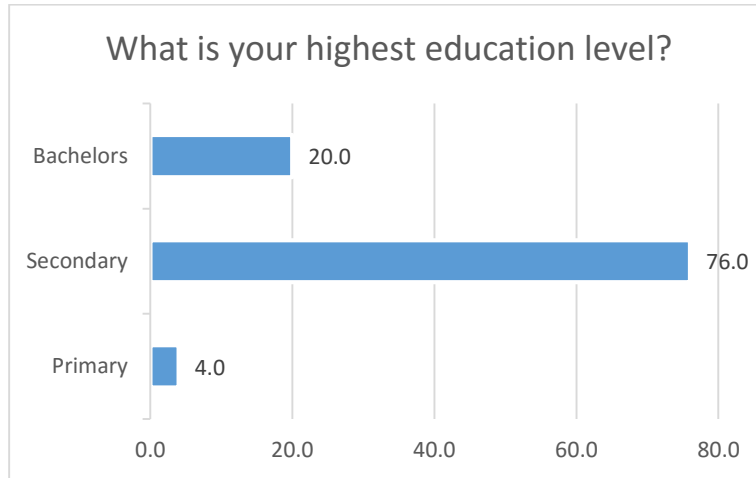
Findings and Analysis

Following are the quantitative and qualitative findings of this research. Survey results are presented in the form of charts and figures. Data is descriptive in nature. Qualitative data is presented in the form of excerpts from the interviews.

Quantitative data

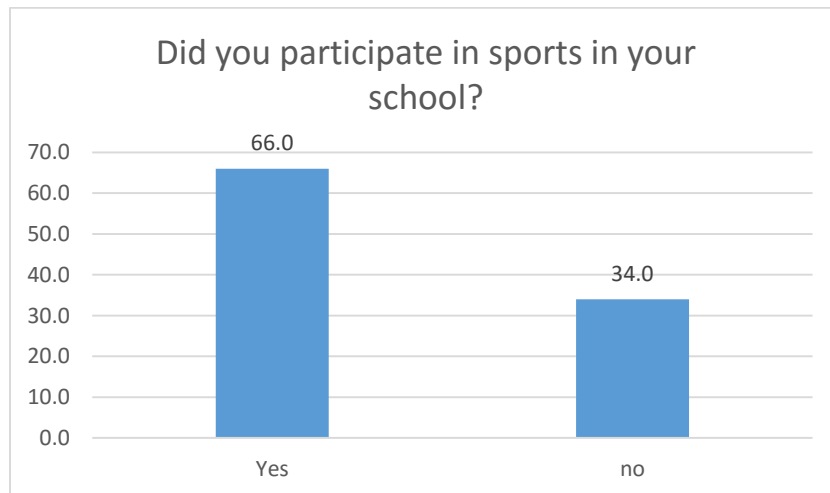
Cases have been reported in South Asia and in Latin America of students being denied access to school and education because of their gender and sexual orientation. However, our survey result shows that Secondary Level is highest Level of Education of majority of our participants (76 percent). In addition, our survey result shows that 20 percent of our participants were either studying or have completed bachelor's level education. Figure 1 below shows the level of education of our study participants.

Figure 1 Education Level



Our survey respondents were adult human beings with mix genders and with variety of sexual orientation. Majority of our survey respondents (66 percent) reported that they participated in sports during their school years.

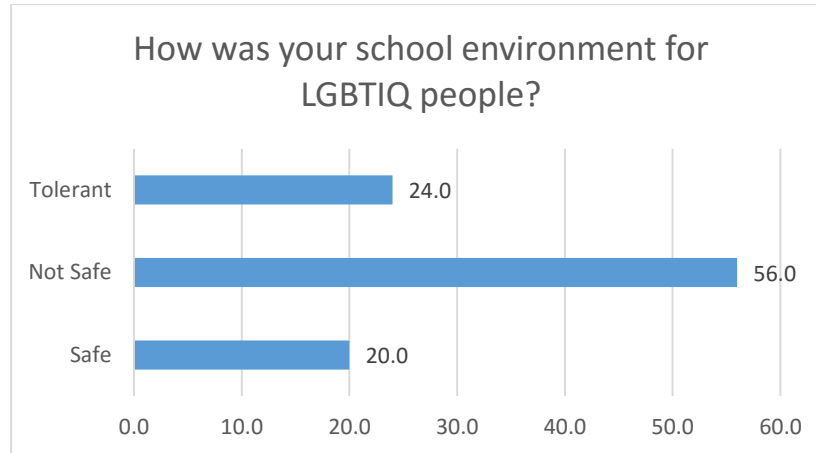
Figure 2 Participation in Sports



Although 24 percent of our respondents believed that their school environment was tolerant and 20 percent believed that it was safe, majority of our survey respondents (56 percent)

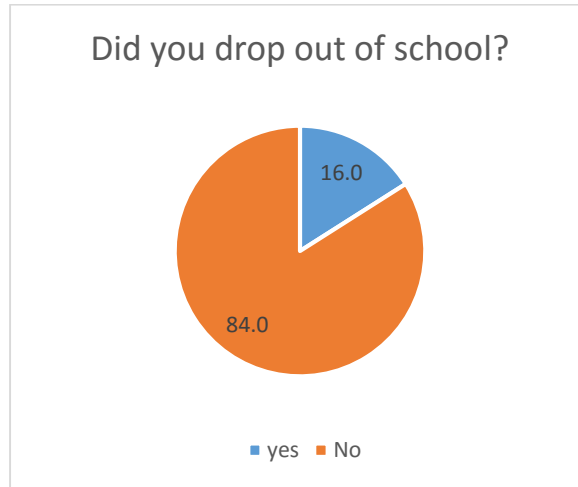
reported that their school environment was not safe for LGBTIQ people. Figure 3 below shows the response of our survey participants regarding their school environment for LGBTIQ people.

Figure 3 School environment



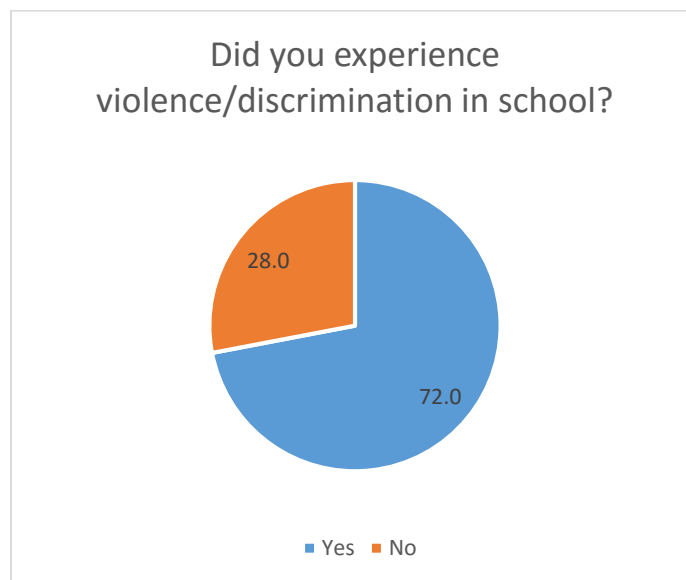
Among our survey participants, 16 percent were school drop-outs. But, majority of them (84 percent) did not drop-out from their schools. When we asked the drop-outs why they dropped-out from school, some responded that they were not interested in studies. However, some also reported that they faced violence and discrimination in school which is why they dropped-out from their school.

Figure 4 School Drop-out Rate



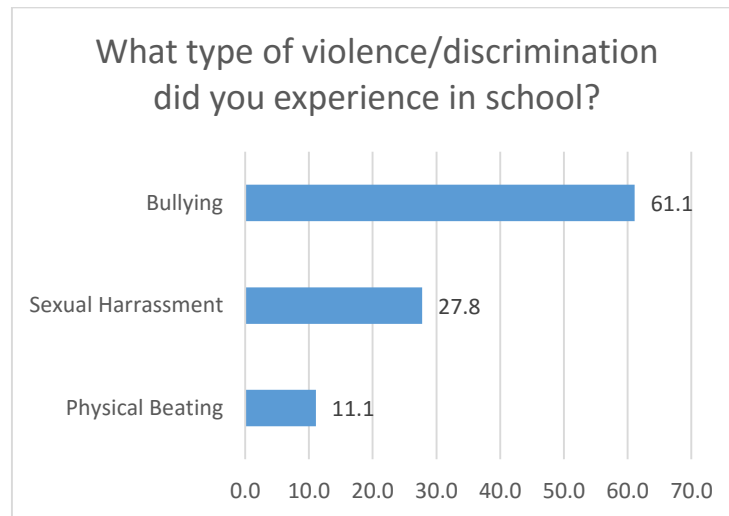
Being open about their sexuality and identifying themselves as a member of LGBTIQ community, majority of our survey respondents (72 percent) reported that they had experienced some kind of violence or have faced discrimination in their schools. See figure 5 below regarding the response on experience of violence/discrimination that they faced in school.

Figure 5 Experience of violence/discrimination



Among those who answered that they have faced violence or any kind of discrimination in their schools, majority (61.1 percent) reported that they were bullied in their schools. Although sexual harassment (27 percent) and physical beating (11.1 percent) were also reported.

Figure 6 Type of violence/discrimination experienced



While some believed that society (2.8 percent) is the perpetrator of violence that they faced, majority of our survey respondents (80.6 percent) reported that they were bullied by their own classmates and school friends.

Research indicate that verbal bullying is the most popular method of bullying members of the peer group as it is the easiest to carry out and is also reported to be the most painful². In terms of homophobic bullying³, it is usually perpetrated by peer individuals or groups but, in some cases teachers or other staff can also be the perpetrators.

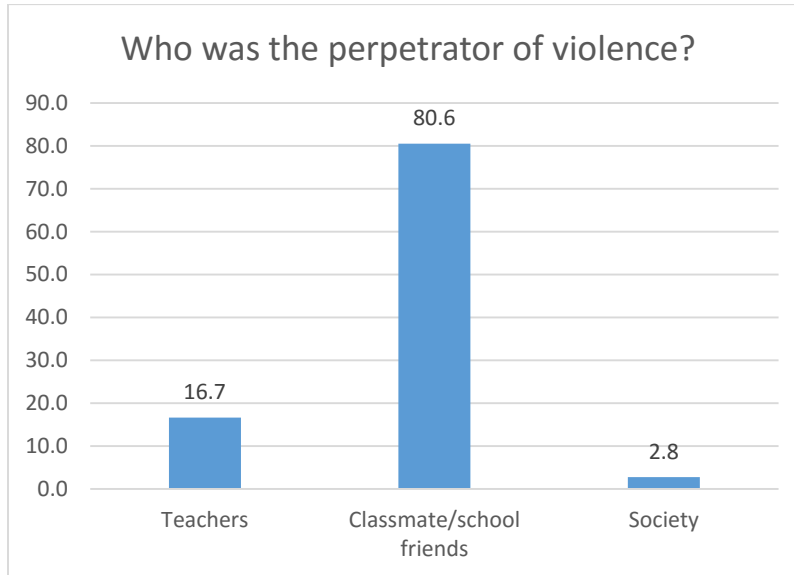
Our survey result also shows that among those who answered that they have faced violence or any kind of discrimination in their schools, 16.7 percent have reported that Teachers were the

²Niti Rana (2008). School Bullying: Peer Victimization and How to Deal with it. Jagadamba Press

³UNESCO, "Education Sector Responses to Homophobic Bullying", (Paris: UNESCO, 2012)

perpetrator. See figure 7 below for the data on perpetrator of violence faced by our survey participants.

Figure 7 Perpetrator of violence



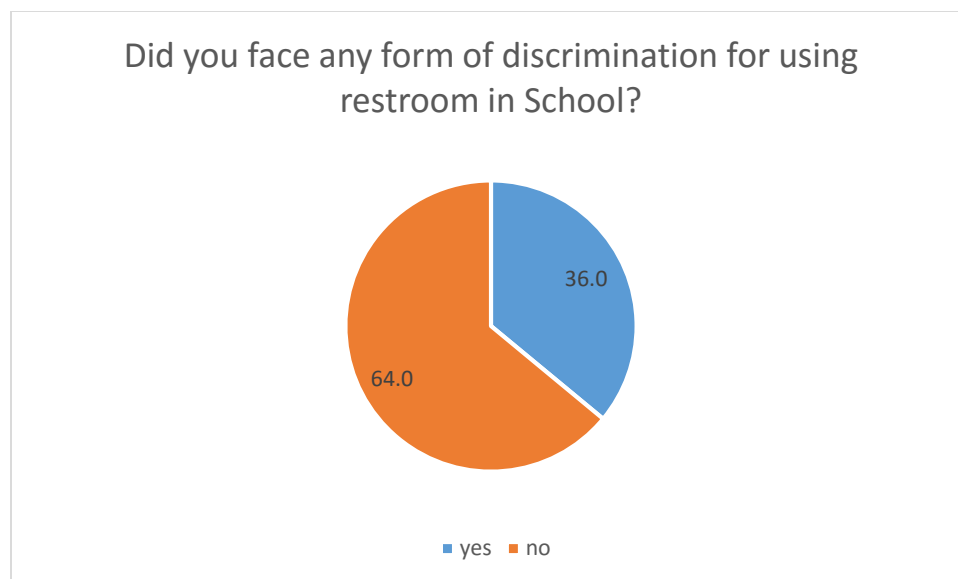
Our survey result shows that 13.7 years is the average age that our respondents experienced violence or discrimination in their lives. This age is close to time when people enter their adolescence and start studying in secondary level schools. Violence is a traumatic experience and those who have even heard about violence is a disturbing feeling. It has massive physical as well as psychological effects to those who are directly involved in violence such as the victim, the perpetrator and those who are witness or are bystanders.

Table 1 Average age when the participants experienced violence

S. N.	Experience of violence/discrimination	
1	Mean Age	13.7
2	Std. Deviation	2.7
3	Minimum Age	9
4	Maximum Age	20

Almost all schools in Kathmandu (and elsewhere) have policies that are binary in terms of gender relations and sexual orientation. For instance, school uniform policy and sanitation facilities in educational institutions are constructed either for Male or for Female students only. It causes a particular problem for transgender students⁴. Thirty six percent of our survey participants reported that they were discriminated for using restroom in their schools. However, in the context to discrimination on using sanitation facilities, majority of our survey participants (64 percent) reported that they were not discriminated for using restroom in their school (See figure 8 below). Other studies have shown that training and anti-discrimination laws for teachers and staff in schools are needed to ensure the physical safety and mental well-being of LGBTIQ youth⁵.

Figure 8 Discrimination for using restroom in school



We had asked our survey participants if they were able to express their feelings to anyone during their school years and majority of them (80 percent) reported that they were not able to share what they were going through in school.

⁴UNESCO, "Education Sector Responses to Homophobic Bullying", (Paris: UNESCO, 2012)

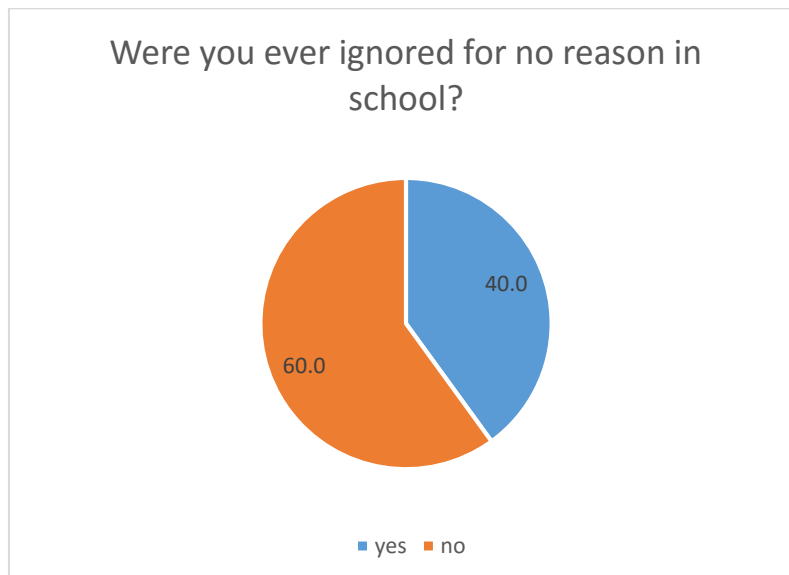
⁵UNDP, USAID (2014). Being LGBT in Asia: Nepal Country Report. Bangkok

Figure 9 Expression of feelings



When majority of our participants couldn't express their feelings during their school years, they felt ignored. This is evident as 60 percent of our respondents stated that they felt ignored in school (See figure 10 below). Ignorance and isolation can lead an individual to many psychological problems such as depression and anxiety when confronted with other individuals.

Figure 10 Ignorance



Our survey result shows that 14.3 was the average age of our survey respondents when they started knowing and exploring more about their sexual orientation. This age is the time when a person is in their adolescence. In this age, people are more curious and want to explore about their bodies and their sexuality. The human body in this age change rapidly and people experience different kinds of emotional and physical changes during this time. This is the age when parents, teachers, and close family and friends should feel responsible, and give good care and educate adolescents about what they are experiencing.

Table 2 Average age when the participants identified their sexual orientation

S. N.	Sexual orientation identified age	
1	Mean	14.3
2	Std. Deviation	3.3
3	Minimum	8
4	Maximum	22

In this study, we had asked people engaged in the field of education about their experiences on issues of LGBTIQ as teachers and school management staff. Excerpt of the interviews with them are given below.

Qualitative data

Ganesh is a High School teacher in Kathmandu. He was asked about different issues faced by children going to his school who belong to LGBTIQ community. According to him, the students who belong to this community face more violence because students don't have support or get protected which make them fearful. Nevertheless, he feels that this could be improved in schools if teachers are friendly and knowledgeable about these issues. The major responsibility of teacher should be to provide an environment for all the students to speak freely and tell their problems. He feels at least his school is LGBTIQ friendly. The school has been collaborating with NGOs to raise awareness and also to give proper environment for the students to avoid physical and psychosocial problems. However, he also shared that in his school neither has he encountered any student belonging to LGBTIQ community nor got any complains in complaint

box till now regarding issues. Additionally, he also restated that he tries to make sure that no students are bullied or harassed in the school. We need to understand that students might try to hide their identity but we make sure that we give space to students if they want to speak about their identities. Ganesh acknowledged the fact that he was unaware of these issues and LGBTIQ was itself a new concept for him till NGOs advocating about this issue came and did awareness session in the school. Other factors such as media, friends and seminar in the school also helped him to understand and gain empathy for the LGBTIQ members. He feels his own perceptions have also changed and he is more aware of the issue.

Prabhakar is a non-teaching staff of one of the schools in Kathmandu. He shared that the he only had basic knowledge about the LGBTIQ community and heard about the community. He had been also getting information from TV, newspaper and also encountered some members in Gaijatra festival. These encounters and information had changed his own perception about the community and shared that he didn't have negative feeling towards them. He remarked that it was important for his school to create environment where the students belonging to LGBTIQ community felt safe and comfortable and teachers needed to be aware of such issues. Even though in his school he had not encountered any complaints regarding the issue or met any student belonging to the community, he felt that if students in other schools were facing violence and unable to express, the responsibility needed to be taken by teachers. It might have occurred due to ignorance of the teachers or the fear of students for not being accepted. However, he felt that in today's time and day no students needed to feel scared because of their identity. Thus, he strongly believed that it was the role of teachers to encourage, support and counsel the students not to feel isolated or neglected.

Tej is a High School teacher in Kathmandu. He feels that his school is relatively friendly for LGBTIQ community as most of the stakeholders (investors, board) are aware of the issues as NGOs have been organizing awareness and interactions programs in the school. The school is also giving psychosocial counseling to the students instead of punishing them. The few things that Tej suggested to make a school LGBTIQ friendly are, schools be able to make teachers aware on the issue, the classroom ought to be comfortable, creating of gender neutral sports and gender neutral washroom etc. Last but not the least would be to ensure that teachers take

the issue brought up by the students very seriously. One of the reasons he thinks that the students are unable to share about the violence they face is that students and teachers don't share comfortable relationship and teachers don't encourage students to communicate about the problem. He feels that a separate teacher with expertise on gender and sexuality needs to be hired to talk with the students and help the students express themselves. **Tej also shared that he did encounter a student from LGBTIQ community earlier. But due to lack of communication among student, parents and teachers, the student changed the school and took SLC exam from another school.** Due to this incident, they have become more aware of such issue and try to be vigilant of students' behavior, habit and if other students are making fun of those students. However, he also feels that the reasons for not getting any complaints on complaint box related to LGBTIQ issues could be also that students are not aware of their gender. But, he share that if they did get such complaints, they as school administrators would sit together to find the solution.

Sulochana is a High School teaching staff in Kathmandu. She believes that she had a biased perception about LGBTIQ community before gaining knowledge from her gender studies class. At present, she shared that people with information have responsibility to create friendly environment for everybody. **She had once taught a student belonging to the community when the student was in class 7. The student had wanted to become a boy but her parents had not accepted her.** She believed that students belonging to LGBTIQ community experience violence and harassment when they talk about their feelings with others which might be different than their peers which cause harassments. Thus, Sulochana remarked it was the role of teachers to make students comfortable and to help them realize that they were not any different than others. She also believed that school administrators and parents also needed to be collaborated. She was not sure if her school was completely gender/LGBTIQ friendly school but she believed the school environment was quite welcoming for any student who belonged to LGBTIQ community. Even though in their complaint box they had only got complaints of body shamming and not of LGBTIQ issue, one of the reasons she expressed for students for not being able to express the violence faced in school could be unfriendly behavior from teachers. Thus, according to Sulochana teachers must interact with students not only in classrooms but also

outside classrooms to make friendly relationship with students and to teach them to respect everybody.

Pal is a non-teaching staff of a Higher Secondary School in Kathmandu. He shared that he had never met a person belonging to LGBTIQ community; however he had got information about the community via television, radio and newspaper. He shared that neither him nor his school had any biased perceptions towards the people belonging to the community and he and his school believed in education for all. Additionally, he felt more awareness programs needed to be organized to make teachers aware of such issues and teachers needed to be helpful both inside and outside the classrooms. As far as he was informed, he hadn't heard of complaints being dropped at complaint box on issues related to LGBTIQ by the students. But, he also felt that one of the reasons for students not being able to express the violence they faced was due to fear and confusion. Thus, he felt it was imperative of teachers to create family like environment in school to encourage student to come and speak about their problems.

Conclusion and Recommendation

General conclusion derived from this study conducted with the members of LGBTIQ community and high school teachers as well as non-teaching staffs are as follows;

- Secondary level is highest level of education of majority of the participants.
- Majority of our survey respondents believe that their school environment was not safe for LGBTIQ people.
- Some respondents reported that they faced violence and discrimination in school which is why they dropped-out from their school.
- Many reported that they were bullied; although sexual harassment and physical beating were also reported.
- Some reported that teachers were the perpetrator of violence that they faced in school.
- The average age our survey respondents experienced violence or discrimination is 13.7 years. Qualitative interviews show that students belonging to LGBTIQ community

experience violence and harassment when they talk about their feelings with others which might be different than their peers which cause harassments. Therefore, the major responsibility of teacher should be to provide an environment for all the students to speak freely and tell their problems. This is the reason why more awareness programs should be organized to make teachers as well as school management and staffs aware of such issues. Also, our findings suggest that teachers needed to be helpful both inside and outside the classrooms.

- Majority of our respondents reported that they were not able to share what they were going through and thus, felt ignored in school. Qualitative interview with a teacher notes that students in schools were facing violence and are unable to express because they don't share comfortable relationship and teachers don't encourage students to communicate about the problem that students are facing.
- The average age of our survey respondents when they started knowing and exploring more about their sexual orientation was 14.3 years. Qualitative interviews with teachers and non-teaching staffs note that students are not aware of their sexuality and gender identity during their school years. Our respondents have noted that one of the reasons for students not being able to express the violence they face was due to fear and confusion.

In Conclusion, our study shows that our participants have experienced some form of discrimination and violence during their school years. Although, most of them did not drop out from school, the highest level of education that most have achieved is Secondary Level. A Human Rights based approach to education for all states, "Physical and other forms of humiliating and abusive treatment are not only a violation of the child's right to protection from violence, but also highly counterproductive to learning". Therefore, for every human being to be able to live a life with dignity, independence, and freedom, education system (specifically, school environment) need to be safe and productive. Although in Nepal about a decade ago a student was able to start school as an openly transgender student at the Durbar High School in Kathmandu, teachers in many private as well as public schools still needs to be trained and educated so that they can effectively tackle issues regarding gender

identity and sexual orientation of students. With adequate knowledge and resources teachers will be able provide comfort, care and protection for any students in their schools. For this, education policies should be improved and various programs such as awareness programs for students regarding gender identities and sexual orientation, teachers training programs, and school improvement projects need to be carried out by the concerned stakeholders by making periodic and systemic plan.

References

- Niti Rana (2008). School Bullying: Peer Victimization and How to Deal with it. Jagadamba Press
- UNDP, USAID (2014). Being LGBT in Asia: Nepal Country Report, Bangkok
- UNESCO, “Education Sector Responses to Homophobic Bullying”, (Paris: UNESCO, 2012)