

Demographic Factors Influencing Tolerance towards LGBT Individuals among Malaysians¹

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of demographic characteristics on tolerance towards LGBT in Malaysia. The specific aspects studied were: (1) views on LGBT sexual orientation; (2) views on rights of LGBT individuals; and (3) relationships between demographic characteristics and views on LGBT sexual orientation and rights. Questionnaire data were collected from 413 respondents living in Malaysia (88.1% heterosexuals; 11.9% LGBT). A majority of respondents were degree holders (82.8%) in their twenties (82.3%) and of Chinese descent (71.7%). The results showed moderate tolerance towards LGBT sexual orientation where some respondents felt that heterosexuality is best because of religion and morality, while others believed that people are born with LGBT tendencies and need not keep their sexual orientation a secret. Interestingly, the respondents were receptive towards LGBT rights, including the right to organise public events, adopt a child, and have same-sex marriage. ANOVA results showed that age, ethnic group, religious background, and sexual orientation influenced tolerance towards LGBT sexual orientation and rights. Older individuals, Malay and Sabah indigenous, Muslims, Christians, and heterosexuals seemed to be the least supportive of LGBT. The study suggests that openness towards LGBT is growing among the younger generation.

Keywords: *LGBT, tolerance, heterosexual, sexual orientation, demographic factors*

Introduction

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) persons are known as sexual minorities who represent a subset of the general population. Social acceptance of LGBT people in different settings vary, ranging from acceptance to rejection (Herek, 2007). Acceptance helps in generating respect for LGBT individuals, acknowledgement of LGBT rights, and promotion of equality in laws and policies (Flores, 2019). Rejection is reflected in exclusion of LGBT people from various dimensions of community life (Herek, 2009). Moreover, anti-LGBT stigma has caused LGBT people to be misfits in society along with other negative consequences, such as discrimination and unfair treatment by laws and policies (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2009). Whether people have positive or negative beliefs about LGBTs is influenced by religion, tradition, family upbringing, and media (Adamczyk, 2017).

Recently, attitudes toward LGBT communities have shifted. For example, in Southeast Asia, Taiwan became the first Asian country to legalise same-sex marriage in 2018 (Lee & Lin, 2020). In Malaysia, LGBT remains a sensitive issue ethically, culturally and religiously. Some segments of society believe that LGBT culture will affect human civilisation, the family structure, health, and education (Abdullah & Amat, 2019). Furthermore, same-sex marriage is considered a crime punishable by Syariah laws and the Penal Code, Sections 377(A) and 377(B). Islam, being the official religion in Malaysia, also prohibits same-sex relationships (Abdullah & Amat, 2019; Mokhtar et al., 2019). In fact, LGBT is often a taboo topic among Malaysians (Cheah & Singaravelu, 2017).

In addition, the Malaysian media is not supportive of LGBT. Media framing studies by Ting et al. (2021) found negative portrayals of LGBT, particularly in local news reports. However, using textual analytics, Ting et al. (2021) revealed that some alternative newspapers and The Star Online balanced negative and positive coverage of LGBT. The negative coverage focussed on the legal, moral and religious issues confronting LGBTs, whereas the positive coverage highlighted LGBT rights. If media coverage is an indication of societal attitudes towards LGBTs, it is not surprising that LGBT

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individuals encounter rejection and discrimination. Felix (2014) reported that many LGBT people constantly face prejudice and harassment in different social contexts. Jerome et al.'s (2021a) interviews with LGBT individuals revealed their wish to be treated with respect and to be accepted on the basis that they are human beings. Religious background influenced tolerance towards LGBT. Yeo et al.'s (2021) interviews also showed that Muslims and Christians are more inclined to reject LGBTs than Buddhists. Individual differences and cultural backgrounds are additional factors that influence attitudes towards LGBTs (Jerome et al., 2021b). In addition, Jerome et al. (2021b) identified relationships and experiences with LGBT individuals as a powerful factor that enables heterosexuals to look beyond their normative religious beliefs to accept LGBT as fellow human beings (see also Jerome et al., 2021c). Thus far, these studies on LGBTs in Malaysia were small-scale; there is a need to understand the prevailing attitudes towards LGBTs on a larger scale, and the influence of demographic factors.

Research on how various factors influence tolerance towards LGBTs has focussed on religion, age, and beliefs regarding sexual orientation. In studies about LGBT attitudes from Christian and Muslim perspectives, researchers found a relationship between being Christian and lower tolerance towards LGBTs (Holland et al., 2013), but others found no association (O'Pry, 2012). Similarly, some studies showed an association between being Muslim and non-acceptance of homosexuality (Abdullah & Amat, 2019; Foong et al., 2019; Muhammad, 2000; Özdemir & Büyükgöze, 2016), but Astuti and Kurniati (2018) did not find an association. As for age, studies have consistently shown greater tolerance towards LGBT among the younger people in Western countries (Copp & Koehler, 2017; Helms & Waters, 2016; Herek, 2002; Horn, 2006) and in Southeast Asia (Manalastas et al., 2017), with the exception of Vijay et al. (2018). As for sexual orientation, there are different beliefs on the origins of homosexuality (Sheldon et al., 2007), but the beliefs can be divided into biological origins and choice. Research has shown that people who hold biological beliefs are more tolerant of LGBT compared to those who believe that homosexuality is a choice (Antoszewski et al., 2007; Hegarty & Pratto, 2001; Horn & Heinze, 2011; Jayaratne et al., 2006). These findings on factors influencing tolerance towards LGBT were mostly conducted outside of Malaysia. The studies in Malaysia mostly focused on either the LGBT experiences (Felix, 2014; Jerome et al., 2021a; Owoyemi & Sabri, 2013; Sahri et al., 2014; Teh, 2001) or the heterosexuals' reactions to LGBT (Yeo et al., 2021). Little is known about the influence of demographic backgrounds on tolerance towards LGBTs.

Therefore, this study examined the influence of demographic characteristics on tolerance towards LGBT individuals among Malaysians. The specific aspects studied were: (1) views on LGBT sexual orientation; (2) views on rights of LGBT individuals; and (3) relationships between demographic characteristics and views on LGBT sexual orientation and rights.

The hypotheses tested in the study were:

*H*₁: There is a difference in tolerance toward LGBT sexual orientation among different age groups.

*H*₂: There is a difference in tolerance toward LGBT sexual orientation among different ethnic groups.

*H*₃: There is a difference in tolerance toward LGBT sexual orientation among respondents from different religious backgrounds.

*H*₄: There is a difference in tolerance toward LGBT sexual orientation among respondents with different educational levels.

*H*₅: There is a difference in tolerance toward LGBT sexual orientation among respondents with different sexual orientations.

*H*₆: There is a difference in tolerance toward LGBT sexual orientation among respondents with different gender identities.

*H*₇: There is a difference in tolerance toward LGBT rights among different age groups.

*H*₈: There is a difference in tolerance toward LGBT rights among different ethnic groups.

*H*₉: There is a difference in tolerance toward LGBT rights among respondents from different religious backgrounds.

H_{10} : There is a difference in tolerance toward LGBT rights among respondents with different educational levels.

H_{11} : There is a difference in tolerance toward LGBT rights among respondents with different sexual orientations.

H_{12} : There is a difference in tolerance toward LGBT rights among respondents with different gender identities.

Literature Review

Tolerance towards LGBT people indicates the degree to which the public shows support for this minority group and by “allowing” the *other* (LGBTs) to exist without full recognition of their rights and protection (Arat & Nunez, 2017). In this paper, past literature on the influence of religion, age, and beliefs about sexuality are reviewed.

Religion and Tolerance of LGBTs

In terms of religion, past studies (Reygan & Moane, 2014; Woodford et al., 2012) have shown that religion significantly affects views on LGBT individuals. Specifically, Islam and Christianity have been the two major religions linked to low tolerance for LGBTs.

There have been mixed findings on the association between Christianity and low tolerance of LGBTs. Holland et al. (2013) found that among college students in the United States, students who identified as non-religious or non-Christian reported greater tolerance towards homosexual individuals. However, O’Pry (2012) found no association between Christianity and tolerance of LGBT youth among Louisiana social workers, but there was a significant relationship between religious commitment and homophobia and transphobia.

As for Islam, findings have also been inconsistent regarding Muslims’ tolerance for LGBTs. In Turkey, Özdemir and Büyükgöze (2016) found that Muslim pre-service teachers did not accept homosexuality as normal, and they also lacked interaction with LGBT individuals. Abdullah and Amat’s (2019) study in Malaysia showed that the college students viewed LGBT culture as illegal and against Islamic teachings on God’s creation of man and woman for reproduction. Also, LGBT is considered a taboo topic to be discussed in Malaysia’s social media platforms, as LGBT values were against the Islamic principles and seen as illegal in an Islamic country (Muhammad, 2000; as cited in Zawawi, 2020). However, Astuti and Kurniati’s (2018) study among teenagers from a small village in Indonesia showed Islamic beliefs did not cause a negative stigma and perception of LGBT.

Other researchers have suggested that it is insufficient to study a person’s religious affiliation, because it is the depth of one’s religiosity that affects perceptions of LGBTs. Ryan et al. (2010) reported respondents with childhood religious affiliation and born in highly religious families had lower acceptance towards LGBT adolescents. The stronger the religious adherence, the more negative the attitude towards LGBTs (Roggemans et al., 2015). Arli et al. (2019) did not study the influence of specific religions on attitudes towards gays and lesbians but examined religiosity. They found that Indonesians with intrinsic religiosity (focussing on a close spiritual relationship with God) were more negative towards gays, but not lesbians. Arli et al. (2019) also found that extrinsic religiousness (participating in religious activities) did not influence perceptions of LGBT individuals, while religious fundamentalism was associated with viewing LGBTs as immoral and dangerous.

Age and Tolerance of LGBTs

As age increases, views on LGBT rights become more conservative (Helms & Waters, 2016). This hypothesis was supported by several past studies indicating that younger individuals were more positive towards LGBT civil rights compared to middle-aged and older individuals (Herek, 2002). In Horn’s (2006) study, older respondents (aged 16 to 26) were more accepting towards gay and lesbian peers, and more comfortable interacting with homosexual peers in school. Copp and Koehler (2017) found that undergraduates’ attitudes towards LGBTs improved with the time spent at the university.

Moreover, in Southeast Asia, Manalastas et al. (2017) reported that an older age predicted more homonegative attitudes in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand, but not in

Vietnam. However, Vijay et al. (2018) found that age is not a relevant factor in influencing medical doctors' intent to discriminate against transgender patients in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Beliefs about Sexuality and Tolerance of LGBTs

In regards to beliefs about sexuality, it has been long debated whether people are born LGBT or if it is a conscious choice made by LGBT individuals. People who believe that individuals are born with homosexual tendencies have more positive attitudes towards LGBTs than those who believe that homosexuality is a choice (Hegarty & Pratto, 2001; Jayaratne et al., 2006). Antoszewski et al.'s (2007) study in Poland found that college students who believed that transgenderism is a natural expression showed rather positive attitudes toward transgender individuals compared to those who believed transgenderism is caused by environmental factors. Eliason (1997) found mixed responses towards biphobia among heterosexual undergraduate students.

In America, Sheldon et al. (2007) showed that participants had different beliefs about the origins of homosexuality, including genetics, upbringing, bad experiences, the influence of other homosexuals, and personal choice. Horn and Heinze (2011) found that adolescents who attributed homosexuality to biological beliefs reported less sexual prejudice towards LGBTs.

In Malaysia, transgender individuals receive minimal acceptance from society, especially from their families (Teh, 2001), with discrimination in the workplace or from authorities (Sahri et al., 2014). Owoyemi and Sabri (2013) stated that transgenderism is commonly misunderstood, with allegations that such sexual orientation and identity are abnormal and unethical. Also, Owoyemi and Sabri (2013) claimed that transgenderism is due to environmental factors, such as contact with the "wrong circle" and lack of religious practices. However, these factors were inferred and not directly studied.

Methodology

This current study took a descriptive approach, and it involved 413 respondents aged 18–60 living in different states in Malaysia, consisting of 88.1% heterosexuals and 11.9% LGBTs. Purposive sampling was carried out, whereby the first researcher invited Malaysians in her social networks to participate in this study. A majority of the respondents were degree holders (82.8%) in their twenties (82.3%) and of Chinese descent (71.7%). Table 1 shows the demographic background of respondents. Admittedly, the sample does not proportionally reflect the general Malaysian population where the majority are Malay and Muslims, and this limits the generalisability of the results.

Table 1 Demographic Backgrounds of Respondents (N = 413)

Demographic Variable	Details	Percentage
Age (year range)	18–20	3.9
	21–30	82.3
	31–40	7.3
	41–50	1.5
	51–60	4.1
	61–70	1.0
Ethnic Group	Chinese	71.7
	Indian	2.2
	Malay	18.6
	Others	1.7
	Sabah indigenous	1.2
	Sarawak indigenous	4.6
Educational Background	Degree	82.8
	Diploma	8.5
	Form 3/PT3/PMR/LCE	1.7
	Form 5/SPM/MCE/Certificate	4.1
	Form 6	2.7
	Primary 6 or lower	0.2

Table 1 Demographic Backgrounds of Respondents (Cont.)

Demographic Variable	Details	Percentage
Religion	Buddhism	30.8
	Christianity	42.4
	Hinduism	1.7
	Islam	19.6
	No religion	5.1
	Others	0.5
Sexual Orientation	Heterosexual (Female or Male)	88.1
	Lesbian	1.9
	Gay	2.7
	Bisexual	3.4
	Other	3.9
Gender Identity	Female	68.0
	Male	31.0
	Intersex Female	0.2
	Transgender Male	0.2
	Other	0.5

The questionnaire on tolerance towards LGBTs was formulated with reference to other instruments (Bidell, 2005; Friedman et al., 2014; Herek, 1988; Hill & Willoughby, 2005; Lannutti & Lachlan, 2007; Larsen et al., 1980; Passani & Debicki, 2016; Raja & Stoke, 1998). In the questionnaire, the term “LGBT” was used although other researchers used “homosexual,” “gay,” “lesbian,” “bisexual,” and “transgender” in their questionnaires. The questionnaire comprised three sections eliciting demographic information, views on LGBT individuals (13 items), and views on LGBT rights (nine items). The items were seven-point Likert scale to enhance granularity in assessing respondents’ views (Bertram, 2007). The questionnaire was examined by content experts in LGBT research for content validity, following Thorn and Deitz (1989). The pilot test of the questionnaire yielded a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.931 and 0.970 respectively for two sections.

For data collection, the questionnaire was constructed through Google Forms with the consent form provided on the first page. The link to the questionnaire was distributed nationwide through different online platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp. Besides posting the link on public platforms, the first researcher also sent the link personally to people in her social network to obtain a higher response rate.

For the data analysis, SPSS v26 was used to calculate mean scores, standard deviations, a one-way ANOVA test, and post hoc analyses.

Results

This section presents the descriptive results on respondents’ views of LGBT sexual orientation and rights of LGBT individuals. On a seven-point Likert scale, mean scores above four are considered high, and mean scores below four are considered low.

Respondents’ Views on LGBT Sexual Orientation

The results showed mixed responses, with an average mean score of 3.97 ($SD = 1.55$); please see Table 2 on the following page. Some respondents were heteronormative, feeling that being heterosexual (i.e. being either female or male) is the best ($M = 5.54$), as they believed that LGBT tendencies are not a trait that a person is born with ($M = 4.37$). Given that 62% of the respondents were Christians and Muslims, and another 33% had other religious beliefs, many of them believed LGBT practices are against religion ($M = 4.85$) and sex-change operations are against morality ($M = 4.33$). These results suggest that religious beliefs influence tolerance towards LGBTs.

Given that most respondents were heteronormative, results on marginal agreement that individuals should get out of LGBT tendencies were expected. The respondents agreed that LGBT

individuals should control their feelings from becoming LGBT ($M = 4.16$). They also believe that LGBT individuals should go through counselling to change their orientation back to either male or female again ($M = 4.10$). Besides, in terms of relationship recognition, the idea of same-sex couples marrying is marginally acceptable ($M = 4.10$). The results point to a lack of tolerance for LGBTs, and beliefs that being heterosexual is normative.

Table 2 Respondents' Views on LGBT Sexual Orientation ($N = 413$)

Item (7-point Likert Scale)	Mean	SD
1. Heterosexuality (i.e. being either female or male) is the best.	5.54	1.75
2. LGBT sexual orientation is against religion.	4.85	2.25
3. People are (not) born with LGBT tendencies. ^R	4.37	1.83
4. Sex-change operation is against morality.	4.33	2.31
5. LGBT individuals should overcome their feelings of wanting to be LGBT.	4.16	2.18
6. LGBT individuals should go through counselling so that they can be either male or female.	4.10	2.25
7. Same-sex couples marrying is (not) acceptable. ^R	4.10	2.42
8. LGBT sexual orientation is (not) a natural expression of sexuality. ^R	3.89	2.04
9. Being LGBT is a temporary phase in the lives of LGBT individuals.	3.55	1.93
10. LGBT sexual orientation is a kind of mental health condition.	3.49	2.14
11. LGBT sexual orientation is not a problem but society makes it a problem. ^R (LGBT sexual orientation is a problem, but it is society that makes it not a problem)	3.31	2.25
12. LGBT individuals should keep their sexuality or gender identity a secret.	3.28	1.88
13. LGBT individuals cannot fit into society.	2.67	1.80
Average	3.97	1.55

Notes: ^R signifies that the item was reverse coded, and the word (not) has been added to the item in brackets to show the meaning after reverse-coding.

On a Likert-scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), the mid-point is 4 (*neutral*).

Next, the results with mean scores below four are reported, reflecting the LGBT-supportive beliefs. Table 2 results show that there is slight disagreement that LGBT sexual orientation is not a natural expression of sexuality ($M = 3.89$), suggesting that some respondents believed that one is born with LGBT orientation. Therefore, they disagreed that being LGBT is a temporary phase ($M = 3.55$) since sexual orientation cannot be changed. The respondents also marginally disagreed that LGBT is a kind of mental illness ($M = 3.49$). LGBT orientation is not a problem since LGBT individuals are normal like anyone else. With such beliefs, the respondents agreed that it is society which has made it a problem ($M = 3.31$). Therefore, LGBT individuals are encouraged to come out without keeping their gender identity a secret ($M = 3.28$). These results are consistent with their beliefs that LGBT individuals are not misfits in society ($M = 2.67$). Being the only item with a mean score below three, it was suggested that the respondents did not believe in ostracising LGBT individuals. However, the mean scores of the other items are all between three and four, which showed that support for LGBTs is only marginal.

Respondents' Views on Rights of LGBT Individuals

Table 3 (please see following page) shows that the respondents were generally supportive of the rights of LGBT individuals ($M = 4.69$). This result is surprising considering that there was a portion of heteronormative respondents who believed that it is better to be heterosexual (as described earlier).

The results in Table 3 show that the respondents believed in LGBT rights, ranging from holding public events to same-sex marriage. Nine statements on LGBT rights were presented to respondents, and the most positive response was their right to organise events in the neighbourhood ($M = 5.03$). The respondents also agreed that LGBT individuals should be free to live the life they want to live ($M = 4.98$), including dating whoever they want ($M = 4.86$), expressing their views on media such as national television ($M = 4.85$) and standing up for their own rights ($M = 4.67$), suggesting that the Malaysian respondents are rather supportive towards LGBT rights.

Table 3 Respondents' Views on LGBT Rights (N = 413)

Item	Mean	SD
1. LGBT individuals should have the right to organise events in the neighbourhood.	5.03	2.02
2. LGBT individuals should be free to live the life they want to live.	4.98	1.97
3. LGBT individuals should be free to date whoever they want.	4.86	2.07
4. LGBT individuals should have right to express their opinions on Malaysian TV.	4.85	2.01
5. LGBT individuals should stand up for their rights.	4.67	1.97
6. LGBT couples should have the right to adopt a child.	4.66	2.22
7. LGBT couples should have the same rights as heterosexual couples (i.e. male-female couples).	4.62	2.20
8. LGBT individuals should be free to have sex with whoever they want.	4.30	2.32
9. LGBT couples should be allowed to get married legally.	4.21	2.42
Average	4.69	1.92

Note: On a Likert-scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), the mid-point is 4 (neutral)

While the respondents were open in supporting LGBT rights, they were more reserved in supporting their sexual relationships. The results showed that they agreed with LGBT couples adopting children ($M = 4.66$) LGBT couples deserve the same rights as other heterosexual couples ($M = 4.62$). In comparison, items that made direct mention of sexual relationships showed lower agreement levels, although the reported attitudes were positive. The respondents marginally agreed that LGBT individuals should be free to have sex with whoever they wanted ($M = 4.30$) and get married legally ($M = 4.21$). The earlier results also showed minimal approval of same-sex marriage ($M = 4.10$, Table 2). It can be surmised that most of the respondents felt uncomfortable with LGBTs having sexual relationships. People were rather supportive towards LGBT rights rather than towards LGBT behaviour itself (Lambert et al., 2006; Passani & Debicki, 2016; Woodford et al., 2013).

Influence of Demographic Characteristics on Views towards LGBT

Table 4 shows the ANOVA test results on the relationship between demographic characteristics and respondents' views on LGBT sexual orientation, whereas Table 5 focusses on respondents' views on LGBT rights.

For Hypotheses 1–6, the ANOVA results showed that there were significant differences in tolerance toward LGBT sexual orientation among respondents from different age groups ($F[5,407] = 3.616, p = 0.003$), ethnic groups ($F[5,407] = 13.375, p < .001$), religious groups ($F[5,407] = 34.046, p < .001$), and sexual orientations ($F[4,408] = 15.283, p < .001$). Educational level did not have a significant influence on tolerance towards LGBT sexual orientation (Table 4).

Table 4 ANOVA Test of Tolerance toward LGBT Sexual Orientation and Demographic Characteristics

Demographic Characteristics	Statistical Test	p-value	Result
Age	One-way ANOVA	.003**	Significant
Ethnic Group	One-way ANOVA	.000***	Significant
Religion	One-way ANOVA	.000***	Significant
Educational Level	One-way ANOVA	.290	Not significant
Sexual Orientation	One-way ANOVA	.000***	Significant
Gender Identity	One-way ANOVA	.018*	Significant

*p-value < .05; **p-value < .01; ***p-value < .001

Next, the Tukey post hoc test suggested that tolerance toward LGBT sexual orientation decreased with an increase in the age of Malaysian respondents. Younger respondents were more tolerant towards LGBT than older respondents. In addition, the Tukey post hoc test showed that Malay and Sabah indigenous groups, and Muslims and Christians, were less tolerant toward LGBT sexual orientation compared to other ethnic and religious groups. Since Malays are also Muslims, it is

understandable that these social groups were identified as being less receptive towards LGBTs. The Muslims were less tolerant, compared to Christians. Put simply, older Sabah indigenous and Malay Muslims and Christians were the least tolerant towards LGBTs.

Although sexual orientation and gender identity are not demographic characteristics, we conducted statistical tests to determine if these characteristics significantly influenced tolerance towards LGBT sexual orientation. The results showed that respondents with heterosexual sexual orientation were less likely to express tolerance toward LGBT sexual orientation than respondents with LGBT orientation, and this was expected. In addition, there was a significant difference between gender identity and tolerance toward LGBT sexual orientation ($F[2,410] = 4.064, p = .018$). The Tukey post hoc test showed that both male and female respondents expressed moderate tolerance toward LGBT sexual orientation compared to the other gender identities, who expressed greater tolerance. These results suggested that heterosexual individuals were less tolerant towards LGBTs than other gender identities, and these results were also expected.

Next, for Hypotheses 7–12, the ANOVA test results showed that there were significant differences in tolerance toward LGBT rights among different age groups ($F[5,407] = 4.133, p < .01$), ethnic groups ($F[5,407] = 15.837, p < .001$), religious backgrounds ($F[5,407] = 34.673, p < .001$), and sexual orientations ($F[4,408] = 9.853, p < .001$). Educational level and gender identity did not have a significant influence on tolerance towards LGBT rights (Table 5).

Table 5 ANOVA Test of Tolerance toward LGBT Rights and Selected Demographic Characteristics

Demographic factors	Testing	p-value	Result
Age	One-way ANOVA	.001**	Significant
Ethnic group	One-way ANOVA	.000***	Significant
Religious background	One-way ANOVA	.000***	Significant
Educational level	One-way ANOVA	.449	Not significant
Sexual orientation	One-way ANOVA	.000***	Significant
Gender identity	One-way ANOVA	.103	Not significant

*p-value < .05; **p-value < .01; ***p-value < .001

The Tukey HSD post hoc test showed that age had a significant influence on tolerance towards LGBT rights, where tolerance toward LGBT rights decreased with an increase in age. The 51–60 age group had the lowest mean score, indicating the least tolerance of LGBT rights. The Tukey HSD post hoc test also showed that Malay and Sabah indigenous groups, Muslims, and respondents with heterosexual sexual orientation were less likely to express tolerance toward LGBT rights. The results suggest that older Malay Muslims were the least tolerant of LGBT rights.

Furthermore, we were also interested in knowing whether sexual orientation and gender identity affected respondents' views on LGBT rights. The Tukey post hoc test showed that sexual orientation had a significant influence on tolerance of LGBT rights. Respondents with heterosexual orientation were less likely to show tolerance toward LGBT rights than respondents with LGBT orientation.

Discussion

This study showed that there was an overall moderate tolerance among Malaysians towards LGBT individuals. These views are reflective of those who are highly educated, young, and of Chinese descent because a majority of respondents in the study were from these groups. However, the findings on moderate tolerance do not mean that each respondent held mild views on LGBT sexual orientation and rights. The computation of group mean scores balanced out the different levels of tolerance of those who held favourable and unfavourable attitudes towards LGBT. There were heteronormative respondents comprising mostly Christians and Muslims who believed that God created only male and female. At the other end of the continuum, there were LGBT-supportive respondents who believed that LGBT sexual orientations are natural expressions.

The study also showed that religious background, age, and ethnic group influenced tolerance towards both LGBT sexual orientation and LGBT rights. The results indicated that older Sabahan indigenous and Malay Muslims and Christians were the least tolerant towards LGBTs, whether in terms of their sexual orientation or rights. In addition, respondents with heterosexual orientation and female/male gender identity were less tolerant of LGBT sexual orientation and rights. These findings on the influence of demographic characteristics on tolerance towards LGBTs will now be discussed with reference to related findings. The finding that Muslims and Christians are less tolerant of LGBTs concurs with findings previously obtained in Malaysia (Abdullah & Amat, 2019; Foong et al., 2019; Ng et al., 2015; Yeo et al., 2021) and other countries (Arli et al., 2019; Woodford, 2013). Religious beliefs often form the basis of moral and biological reasoning against the acceptability of LGBTs in Malaysia (Yeo et al., 2021).

Other Malaysian studies have not explored age, but our study showed that older Malaysians are more negative towards LGBTs. On the contrary, Horn's (2006) study in the United States found that younger adolescents were less likely to accept homosexuals. Young people like college students are not necessarily receptive towards same-sex marriage, as indicated by Lambert et al.'s (2006) study, where only about 43% of the respondents agreed that homosexual couples should be allowed to get married. As the younger respondents in the study were more tolerant of LGBT, it is likely that openness towards LGBTs is growing among the younger generation. Alternative newspapers and some mainstream newspapers offering a balanced representation of LGBTs in the media, including issues of LGBT rights, may have contributed towards greater tolerance towards LGBTs. Moreover, Juaini et al. (2017) found that information on the LGBT movement disseminated in social media had increased acceptance towards LGBT in Malaysia. With the growth of liberalism and human rights, it is likely that views of LGBT as abnormal human sexuality may diminish (Owoyemi et al., 2013).

Our findings on certain ethnic groups being less tolerant of LGBT (Sabahan indigenous and Malay) confirm Foong et al.'s (2019) – seemingly the only other study investigating ethnic background and LGBT attitudes. Their findings showed that Malaysian trainee doctors were positive towards LGBT individuals. The most positive were Indians, followed by Chinese, and Malays were the least positive.

As for sexual orientation, these findings on heterosexuals being less tolerant of LGBT concur with findings in Western contexts (Copp & Koehler, 2017) and Korea (Jung, 2020). Among heterosexuals, Herek (2002) found that heterosexual women had more positive attitudes than heterosexual men on employment and adoption rights for gay people. In the present study, there were no obvious differences between heterosexual female and male respondents' tolerance towards LGBTs.

Conclusion

The study revealed that there is moderate tolerance towards LGBT sexual orientation and rights among Malaysians, particularly among the highly educated, young, and Chinese groups. The study also produced new findings on educational level being not a factor influencing tolerance towards LGBTs, but older, Sabahan indigenous and Malay, Muslims and Christians who were less tolerant of LGBTs; educational level was not an influencing factor. Nevertheless, the findings are only generalisable to young Chinese degree-holders because this group formed the majority of the respondents. The over-representation of Chinese and the under-representation of Malays in this study in the context of the Malaysian population constitutes a limitation. It is possible that this is due to the respondents solicited through the first researcher's social network because she is Chinese. Future studies should seek a more representative ethnicity ratio in the sampling. Future studies should also examine religiosity and LGBT attitudes. Such studies will offer more insights than those that pinpoint only Islam and Christianity as the main religions that disapprove of the LGBT community. Among adherents, some may barely practise their nominal beliefs, while others strictly adhere to their religious teachings. By studying levels of religiosity, it may be possible to explain the mixed findings on whether there is an association between Christianity or Islam and tolerance of LGBTs (e.g., Astuti & Kurniati, 2018; O'Pry, 2012). Another area for further investigation is the relationship between contact with LGBT individuals

and tolerance towards LGBTs, particularly how the intergroup contact may modify views on LGBT sexual relationships.

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