




Aging with Diversity: Understanding the Challenges and Needs of LGBTI Elders in Nepal

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Abstract

This study examines the unique challenges faced by Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex elders who are marginalized groups due to the intersection of age, sexual orientation, and gender identity. Despite advancements in life expectancy and legal recognition of LGBTI rights, these individuals often encounter discrimination, social isolation, and healthcare barriers. The Senior Citizens Act 2006 defines "senior citizens" as those aged 60 and above, but LGBTI elders frequently experience premature aging due to factors such as inadequate diet, social isolation, and informal sector labor conditions. Mapping of 100 LGBTI elders in 2024 was conducted across all seven provinces of Nepal. Among them, 20 core respondents were selected using purposive sampling with qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews with LGBTI elders and key informant interviews with experts. The study explores discrimination, access to healthcare, social support and perceptions of aging while secondary data sources include policy documents, reports, publications, media and research articles and video documentation. Findings reveal compounded challenges including economic insecurity and exclusion from social benefits, exacerbated by legal and policy gaps. The study advocates for explicit legal recognition, inclusive policies, and collaborative interventions to address these disparities and promote the rights of LGBTI elders in Nepal. It emphasizes the need to address the unique challenges faced by LGBTI elders in Nepal.

Keywords: aging with diversity, gender identity, intersectionality, LGBTI elders, sexual orientation



1. Introduction

The lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, asexual, and other gender and sexual minorities (LGBTIQ+) community represents a diverse group that has faced persistent social, cultural, and institutional challenges (UN Women, 2023). Historically, homosexuality was viewed as a societal and cultural threat by traditionalists and moralists worldwide. Alarmingly, psychiatrists also regarded homosexual orientation as a ‘mental disease’. It was only in 1970 that the American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association acknowledged their error in labeling homosexuality as a ‘disease or ailment’ (Chhetri, 2017). However, homosexuality remained on the World Health Organization’s (WHO) list of mental disorders until May 1990, when it was finally removed (Women’s Centres Connect, 2023).

This historical stigmatization reflects the broader societal perspective on individuals with Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Expression, and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC) identities, often seen as ‘problems’ for not conforming to binary gender categories. The Yogyakarta Principles provide a framework for applying human rights standards to sexual orientation and gender identity issues (Yogyakarta Principles, 2007). These principles define sexual orientation as a person’s capacity for profound emotional, affectional, and sexual attraction to individuals of a different gender, the same gender, or more than one gender. Gender identity is understood as a deeply felt internal experience of gender, which may or may not align with the sex assigned at birth, and may involve modifications to the body or other gender expressions, such as dress, speech, and mannerisms (Yogyakarta Principles, 2007).

The adoption of the initialism LGBTIQ+ emphasizes efforts to acknowledge and celebrate diversity within sexuality and gender identity cultures. Despite growing visibility and progressive legislation, the lived realities of LGBTIQ+ individuals often differ significantly from their theoretical rights. Discrimination, violence, and marginalization remain pervasive. This gap is especially evident in Nepal, where constitutional guarantees for LGBTI rights coexist with societal and institutional barriers. LGBTI individuals, particularly elders, experience compounded discrimination due to the intersectionality of ageism and their sexual and gender identities, facing heightened challenges in healthcare access, social support, and economic opportunities (K.C. et al., 2023). This study aims to understand the challenges and needs of LGBTI elders by conducting in-depth interviews with 20 selected respondents and by analyzing secondary data exploring issues related to discrimination, healthcare, social support, legal gaps among others.

Aging with diversity recognizes that the aging population comprises individuals with varied identities, backgrounds, and experiences. The Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) perspective highlights the unique challenges faced by elders in gender and sexual minority communities. LGBTI elders often endure double discrimination stemming from both ageism and prejudice linked to their sexual orientation or gender identity. Over a lifetime, these individuals have often faced systemic stigma, discrimination, and social exclusion, which intensifies as they age.

Intersectionality within the LGBTI population refers to how various aspects of identity, such as age, race, caste, religion, physical ability, and geographic location, intersect to shape individual experiences. These intersecting identities can amplify discrimination and

marginalization in complex ways. Addressing these unique needs requires understanding intersectionality to create inclusive and equitable solutions for diverse subgroups.

Nepal has been hailed as a progressive leader in South Asia, being the first country in the region to decriminalize homosexuality and enshrine LGBTI rights in its constitution. Articles 12, 18, and 42 of Nepal's 2015 Constitution guarantee citizenship based on descent and gender identity, equality rights, and social justice for marginalized groups (Constitution of Nepal, 2015). However, the implementation of these rights remains challenging. LGBTI elders, especially in rural and socioeconomically disadvantaged areas, face systemic inequities, including denial of citizenship, exclusion from senior citizen benefits, and lack of access to age-friendly and LGBTI-friendly healthcare services. The study shed light on the unique challenges of LGBTI elders in Nepal informing policymakers, service providers and advocacy groups to support and address their rights and contributes to nuanced understanding of aging with diversity within marginalized communities. The study focuses on 20 purposively selected LGBTI elders across seven provinces of Nepal which may limit the findings to the broader population. Additionally, it emphasizes the qualitative data and secondary sources without including quantitative measures or longitudinal analysis.

Patriarchal norms and entrenched heteronormativity exacerbate the struggles faced by LGBTI elders. They are stigmatized for their age and nonconformity to traditional gender roles, leading to social and economic isolation. Many conceal their identities out of fear of discrimination, while others are coerced into heterosexual marriages, living lives of invisibility and unrecognized contributions. Intergenerational divides within the LGBTI community, marked by limited understanding or acceptance between younger and older members, further alienate elders (Mitini Nepal, 2022).

1.1 Literature Review

Nepal's domestic laws inadequately address intimate partner violence (IPV), particularly for LGBTIQ individuals, despite commitments to international human rights. The National Civil Code (2017) limits protections like marriage, divorce, and marital rape to opposite-sex couples, while the Domestic Violence Act 2009 fails to recognize same-sex or non-heteronormative relationships, leaving LGBTIQ individuals, including elders, without adequate legal protection against IPV (Mitini Nepal, 2021). Systemic challenges persist for LGBTIQ elders, as highlighted in a video by Mitini Nepal (2022). Despite constitutional provisions for equality (Articles 12, 18, and 42), weak implementation excludes LGBTIQ elders from social services, such as old age and single women's allowances, due to restrictive eligibility definitions. Lack of marriage equality and workplace discrimination exacerbate their economic insecurity and mental stress, while their absence of political participation perpetuates marginalization (Mitini Nepal, 2022). Similarly, a fact sheet by Mitini Nepal (2023) emphasizes the profound challenges older LGBTI persons face, with 65% feeling unsafe due to lifelong discrimination in housing, employment, and public services (K.C. et al., 2023). Studies show that several misuse hazards are common in elderly people in the world and Nepal (Nepal, 2023). This status is much heightened in the case of gender and sexual minorities. The absence of legal recognition for relationships and systemic exclusion from financial support further isolates LGBTI elders, necessitating urgent policy reforms to safeguard their rights and dignity. Additionally, a video by Mitini Nepal (2024) highlights the exclusion of elder single

lesbian women from state-provided allowances, as the Social Security Act 2018 definition of "helpless single woman" excludes LGBTI individuals, depriving them of vital benefits. Addressing these gaps is critical to ensuring equitable access to social protections for LGBTI elders in Nepal.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, LGBTI elders in Nepal faced severe challenges including eviction, homelessness, lack of family support, and denial of essential services due to gender identity mismatches on official documents (Mitini Nepal, 2023). Despite the Constitution of Nepal 2015 recognizing gender and sexual minorities, gaps in policies such as the Social Security Act 2018 and Senior Citizens Act 2006 exclude LGBTI elders from social security benefits based on their sexual orientation and gender identity. For example, single lesbian women are excluded from receiving the "single woman allowance" due to restrictive definitions of single women. Also, the Government of Nepal has categorized senior citizens, helpless senior citizens, and incompetent senior citizens based on prescribed criteria and provides allowances or facilities accordingly including Dalit and Karnali Province elders starting at age 60. However, LGBTI elders are excluded from this provision despite lacking family support and often aging prematurely due to poor diets and strenuous labor. Challenges with identity documentation further restrict access to healthcare and relief materials, while limited census representation in 2021 hinders data-driven inclusion.

"Minorities" means ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups whose population is less than the percentage specified by the Federal law, and includes groups that have distinct ethnic, religious, or linguistic characteristics, aspirations to protect such features, and are subjected to discrimination and oppression. However, while the 2021 Nepal population census counted gender and sexual minorities as 2,928 means 0.01% of the total population (Central Statistics Office, 2021), they are not included under the legal definition of "minority" yet. Although Nepal has made strides in LGBTI rights, including a 2023 Supreme Court order for temporary same-sex marriage registration (Onlinekhabar, 2023) systemic reforms are urgently needed for full legal and social protections. The LGBTI+ elders facing discrimination and challenges today were pioneers of the LGBTI+ movement, laying the foundation for progress for future generations. Despite their contributions, they remain among the most vulnerable (The Kathmandu Post, 2025).

The lack of empirical research on the experiences of LGBTI elders in Nepal compounds these challenges. Most studies focus on younger demographics or general aging populations, overlooking the intersectional challenges of older LGBTI individuals. This research aims to bridge this gap by exploring the lived realities of LGBTI elders, analyzing socio-cultural and economic factors affecting their well-being, and assessing the effectiveness of existing policies and programs.

2. Methods

The study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the multifaceted experiences and challenges of LGBTI elders in Nepal. It aims to gain in-depth insights into the intersectional issues faced by this demographic by employing methods such as interviews, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), alongside a systematic review of secondary data. The population of this study comprises LGBTI elders aged 50 and above across seven provinces of Nepal

particularly those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex individuals. A purposive sampling design was utilized to select participants relevant to research objectives. From the larger mapping of 100 LGBTI elders, 20 core respondents were selected for in-depth interviews. Additionally, four Key Informant Interviews (KII) were conducted with experts from related field. The primary data for this study was collected in 2024 where the area of data collection includes all seven provinces of Nepal providing comprehensive representation of diverse contexts. The selection of area of data collection was motivated to capture the regional diversity in the experiences of LGBTI elders. Secondary data was obtained from multiple sources including a systematic review of policy documents, reports, publications, media and research articles and video documentation. Different literature was reviewed, focusing on themes such as discrimination, healthcare access, economic insecurity, legal frameworks, and intersectional marginalization. The collected data was analyzed thematically to identify recurring challenges and insights. Ethical guidelines were followed, with informed consent and confidentiality maintained throughout.

3. Results

The aging LGBTIQ+ population in Nepal faces multidimensional challenges rooted in the intersection of age, sexual orientation, and gender identity. The findings reveal that financial instability, social exclusion, and family rejection are compounded by systemic gaps in legal protections and inclusive policies. The absence of marriage equality, inheritance rights, and recognition of relationships leaves LGBTI elders isolated and reliant on community organizations or chosen families for care, often without adequate resources. Health disparities, including higher rates of mental health issues and chronic diseases, are prevalent, while systemic barriers such as mismatched gender identity on official documents limit access to essential services. The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated these vulnerabilities, exposing weaknesses in state support and amplifying the risks faced by this marginalized group.

3.1 Forms of Discrimination Faced by LGBTI Elders

LGBTI elders in Nepal often endure familial rejection, which profoundly impacts their emotional and social well-being. A 72-year-old elder transgender woman from Koshi Province shared that her family's rejection after revealing her identity left her feeling resigned and lonely, expressing, "Respect now seems irrelevant after a lifetime of neglect." Similarly, a 55-year-old transgender woman from the same Province recounted decades of societal and familial discrimination that left lasting emotional scars.

Insights from Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) further highlight these challenges. A representative from the Ministry of Women, Children, and Senior Citizens, explained, "The peer groups of senior citizens from sexual and gender minority communities are less likely to accept them compared to younger generations." He noted that this lack of acceptance often isolates LGBTI elders during a stage in life when they need support the most. On the other hand, another representative from Ageing Nepal observed that from birth, LGBTI elders faced family and societal prejudice, which left them unsupported and vulnerable in old age.

Economic hardships and financial discrimination pose another critical challenge for LGBTI elders. A 54-year-old elder lesbian woman from Lumbini Province, highlighted the financial impact of familial rejection, explaining that once elders can no longer provide financial support, families often withdraw emotional and material support. “Without money to give, I’m nothing to them,” she shared. Government initiatives aimed at housing and financial assistance for disadvantaged groups exist but often fail to address the needs of LGBTI elders. She called for these programs to be extended inclusively. On this, a representative from Mitini Nepal emphasized that employment discrimination and limited job opportunities lead to financial instability among LGBTI elders, further compounding their vulnerability. Mitini Nepal noted that these forms of discrimination often intersect with ageism, further deepening feelings of loneliness and exclusion. This marginalization significantly impacts mental health, leading to increased rates of depression and anxiety among LGBTI elders. What emerges consistently from KIIs is that systemic discrimination, compounded by ageism, undermines the dignity and quality of life for LGBTI elders. “These intersecting forms of discrimination leave individuals battling on all fronts, with no facet of life free from struggle,” observed a representative from Forum for Women, Law and Development.

To improve the well-being of LGBTI elders in Nepal, it is essential to address familial rejection, societal isolation, and economic hardships. Inclusive social support networks, policies ensuring financial aid, housing, and equitable employment, along with advocacy to combat prejudice, are vital for fostering dignity, security, and respect as they age.

3.2 Access to Healthcare

Access to quality healthcare remains a significant issue for LGBTI elders in Nepal, with many reporting biased treatment from healthcare providers. A 55-year-old transgender woman from Koshi Province recounted avoiding medical facilities unless necessary due to discriminatory attitudes. Another respondent from the same province echoed similar concerns, stating that such biases deter her from seeking care even for aging-related health issues.

Similarly, a 58-year-old transgender elder from Koshi Province highlighted financial barriers in accessing life and health insurance. The lack of affordable health treatments and services creates significant obstacles for LGBTI elders, necessitating special provisions in health policies to ensure equitable care.

KIIs reinforced these findings. A representative from the Forum for Women, Law and Development, stated, “LGBTI elders frequently encounter discrimination in healthcare, including being denied services or receiving inadequate care due to provider biases.” This creates a reluctance among elders to seek medical attention, further exacerbating health disparities. Another representative from Ageing Nepal emphasized that these barriers, coupled with a lack of training among healthcare providers, often leave LGBTI elders without access to quality care.

A 54-year-old single lesbian woman from Gandaki Province highlighted the lack of awareness and gaps in coverage within healthcare policies. Despite having private health insurance, she still encounters out-of-pocket expenses and struggles to access necessary medications at government hospitals, pointing to systemic inadequacies in public health provisions.

Another Gender Non-Conforming elder from Bagmati Province revealed that many LGBTI elders are excluded from both public and private health insurance schemes, especially after the age of 60. This exclusion leaves them vulnerable, particularly as they often live solitary lives due to family rejection. A similar experience was echoed by a 50-year-old transgender woman from Gandaki Province, who faces not only healthcare challenges but also pervasive housing discrimination, further compounding her vulnerabilities.

Key Informant Interviews reinforced these findings. A representative from the Ministry of Women, Children, and Senior Citizens noted that while initiatives like the "Bipanna Nagarik Kosh" as medical treatment of deprived citizens initiated by the Ministry of Health and Population aim to support economically disadvantaged citizens, LGBTI elders are frequently excluded due to a lack of recognition in these programs. The National Health Policy 2019 includes provisions for marginalized communities, but the specific needs of senior citizens with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities remain unaddressed.

Representatives from Ageing Nepal and FWLD also emphasized the need for comprehensive policy reforms, including explicit inclusion of LGBTI elders in health initiatives, targeted training for healthcare providers on LGBTI-specific health issues, and measures to outlaw discrimination within healthcare systems. Additionally, Mitini Nepal's analysis stressed the importance of tailored outreach programs, culturally competent care, and data collection on health disparities affecting LGBTI elders to inform future interventions.

Nepal's healthcare system falls short in addressing the unique needs of LGBTI elders, compounded by discrimination, limited awareness, and inadequate access to inclusive programs. Equitable healthcare requires inclusive policies, unbiased provider training, and stigma-reducing awareness campaigns. Collaborative efforts among government, advocacy groups, and healthcare providers are crucial to building a supportive framework that ensures LGBTI elders can access services with dignity and respect.

3.3 Need for State Recognition and Support Systems

State recognition and support systems for LGBTI elders in Nepal remain inadequate, leaving this marginalized community vulnerable to systemic neglect. A 50-year-old transgender woman from Gandaki Province emphasized the need for the government to acknowledge the struggles and contributions of LGBTI elders. She called for resource allocation tailored to their unique challenges to ensure that they do not remain excluded from societal progress.

Social and housing insecurities compound these struggles. A 57-year elder from Lumbini Province pointed out that discrimination in healthcare, employment, and housing perpetuates systemic inequalities. The lack of recognition in legal frameworks and outdated policies further marginalize LGBTI elders, highlighting the need for urgent revisions and measures to promote inclusion and equality.

From the perspective of a 55-year-old intersex elder from Koshi Province shed light on the critical need for societal acceptance. Ostracized by family and rejected in housing, many intersex elders face temporary living arrangements and constant hostility. This underscores the importance of combating stigma and fostering societal change to ensure LGBTI elders live with dignity.

A 52-year-old transgender woman from Bagmati Province called for tailored government provisions, including old-age allowances beginning at age 60, aligned with their preferred gender identity. She also highlighted the role of organizations in offering social support to address safety concerns and enhance the overall well-being of LGBTI elders.

A 66-year-old transgender woman from Sudurpaschim Province emphasized the urgent need for safe, gender-sensitive shelter homes tailored to the unique needs of LGBTI elders. She stressed the importance of sustainability in these initiatives and advocated for targeted income-generation programs to empower elders and ensure support aligns with their diverse capabilities.

A representative from the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens noted that while social security allowances as old age allowances exist for all senior citizens of age 68 and above there are no specific provisions addressing the unique needs of LGBTI elders. The absence of explicit recognition in policies means that this community often remains invisible within state support systems. According to a representative from Ageing Nepal, local governments must maintain data on LGBTI elders and prioritize them in state-provided services. The organization also stressed that policies must explicitly outline the facilities and services offered to this community.

Forum for Women, Law and Development representative added that societal stigma and discrimination limit the effectiveness of existing support systems. They called for heightened community education, legal reforms to address discriminatory laws, and expanded support services to mitigate these challenges. Mitini Nepal highlighted that informal networks currently provide critical support but underscored the need for formalized and tailored systems, including support systems from the government and non-discrimination clauses in senior citizen policies.

A comprehensive approach is needed to ensure state recognition and support for LGBTI elders in Nepal. Policy reforms must safeguard sexual orientation and gender identity, guaranteeing equal rights and protections. Tailored social security measures, affordable healthcare, and community education initiatives are essential to combat stigma and promote inclusivity. Collaboration among policymakers, advocacy groups, and communities is vital to bridging systemic gaps and fostering equity for LGBTI elders.

3.4 Impact of COVID-19 on LGBTI Elders

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the socio-economic vulnerabilities and well-being of LGBTI elders in Nepal, magnifying pre-existing challenges such as discrimination, limited access to healthcare, and economic insecurity. The isolation brought by pandemic-induced restrictions severely impacted mental health, with many reporting heightened anxiety and stress due to their already marginalized status. Economic hardships intensified as job losses in both formal and informal sectors left many financially insecure, struggling to afford necessities such as food, housing, and healthcare.

An in-depth interview with a 56-year-old transgender woman from Bagmati Province revealed the grueling challenges faced in the workforce during the pandemic. She described working long hours in difficult conditions for very low pay, being tasked with all kitchen responsibilities despite being promised a more limited role during the pandemic. She

emphasized that the physical strain and meager pay underscored the challenges faced by transgender individuals in finding dignified employment.

Similarly, a 57-year-old transman from Lumbini Province, explained that LGBTI elders often endure the dual hardships of precarious informal work and inadequate care, particularly during the pandemic. He highlighted that these experiences demonstrate the resilience of the community while emphasizing the need for inclusive opportunities and compassionate support to ensure dignity in aging.

Another a 55-year-old transgender woman from Sudurpaschim province, pointed out how lifelong discrimination compounded the challenges of the pandemic. She shared that discrimination begins in childhood and continues into old age, making it difficult to secure good job opportunities due to a lack of proper education. As a result, meeting basic needs becomes increasingly challenging with age.

Findings from KIIs further supported these experiences. A representative from Mitini Nepal explained that systemic discrimination during the pandemic excluded many LGBTI elders from relief efforts, leaving them especially vulnerable. Without familial support, some experienced homelessness or abandonment. Meanwhile, a representative from Ageing Nepal highlighted the role of community organizations during the crisis, which stepped in to provide essential services.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the vulnerabilities of LGBTI elders, who faced unique challenges due to their marginalized identities. Their resilience and the support provided by community organizations underscored the strength within the LGBTI community. However, to ensure they are not left behind during future crises, there is an urgent need for targeted policies, legal protections, and the expansion of social support systems that recognize the specific needs of LGBTI elders.

3.5 Policy and Implementation Gaps

The absence of comprehensive legal protections exacerbates the discrimination faced by LGBTI elders, preventing them from accessing public services and asserting their rights. A 58-year-old transgender woman from Koshi Province described how difficulties in securing housing were compounded by the lack of recognition of her gender identity in official documents. Similarly, a 56-year-old transgender woman highlighted the pervasive societal scorn and marginalization faced by the community, underscoring the urgent need for grassroots awareness campaigns to foster respect and acceptance. A 70-year-old transgender elder from the same region emphasized the lack of outreach to neglected areas, calling for targeted laws addressing the specific needs of LGBTI elders.

The necessity for gender-friendly healthcare facilities was also underscored by a 54-year-old transgender woman from Koshi Province, who pointed out that existing health policies often neglect the specific needs of the third-gender community. The call for separate, inclusive hospitals and adequately trained health professionals echoes the broader demand for gender-sensitive healthcare solutions.

Another 57-year-old transgender elder expressed frustration over the lack of legal provisions to support LGBTI elders, while a 55-year-old trans-woman from Koshi Province aptly summarized the urgency of these issues, stating that meaningful progress requires both

legislative amendments and a shift in societal attitudes to make their issues remain visible in existing policies.

A representative from the Ministry of Women, Children, and Senior Citizens noted that while the National Gender Equality Policy 2021 does not restrict access to services for sexual and gender minorities, no specific policies or laws address their unique needs. The representative emphasized the need for policy reforms to address issues related to marriage, property rights, and social security allowances. Specific recommendations included providing life allowances upon identity recognition, offering discounts on health services, and including LGBTI elders in reservation lists to improve representation.

Additionally, a representative from Ageing Nepal suggested skill development programs tailored to LGBTI elders, akin to the Women Enterprise program, as well as legislation to ensure state accountability for their care. They also advocated for integrating non-discrimination clauses into senior citizen protection laws, ensuring equitable access to healthcare and social services. Similarly, a representative from the Forum for Women, Law, and Development stressed the importance of sensitizing law enforcement and service providers to address the unique challenges faced by LGBTI elders, along with amending legislation to guarantee inclusive services. Mitini Nepal highlighted the need for aging services, such as support groups and housing options that specifically address the distinct needs of LGBTI elders. They also noted the importance of community inclusion in reservation lists and providing comprehensive healthcare that is culturally competent and sensitive to their identities.

There is a critical gap in existing policies and their implementation for LGBTI elders in Nepal. Existing frameworks often overlook this marginalized group, leaving their unique challenges unmet. Addressing legal and policy gaps is crucial for ensuring the protection and well-being of LGBTI elders.

4. Discussion

The study highlights that LGBTI elders in Nepal face multifaceted discrimination and violence, including physical abuse, verbal harassment, and social rejection, significantly impacting their mental and physical health. Socio-cultural stigmas and economic barriers further exacerbate their exclusion from essential services such as healthcare and social support, leaving many vulnerable to financial insecurity and inadequate care. Intergenerational issues within the LGBTI community, such as a lack of understanding and acceptance between younger and older members, contribute to social isolation and diminish the well-being of older individuals. The research reveals significant shortcomings in current policies and programs, which fail to address the unique needs of LGBTI elders, particularly in areas such as legal recognition, inheritance rights, and access to inclusive healthcare and social security benefits.

The findings of this study highlight the compounded discrimination and exclusion faced by LGBTI elders in Nepal due to the intersectionality of age, sexual orientation, and gender identity. Despite constitutional provisions guaranteeing equality and social justice (Constitution of Nepal, 2015), gaps in policy implementation leave LGBTI elders vulnerable to socio-economic and health disparities. These challenges resonate with global research, which also underscores the marginalization of aging gender and sexual minorities. For instance,

studies in the United States and Europe indicate similar issues, such as economic insecurity, healthcare discrimination, and social isolation (Choi & Meyer, 2016; Shippee et al., 2023). These parallels suggest that LGBTI elders globally remain overlooked in social and legal protections, despite regional variations in policy frameworks.

Violence and discrimination are pervasive among LGBTIQ+ individuals in Nepal, similar to female students (Sharma et al., 2023; Sharma et al., 2024), and female sex workers (Saud et al., 2024). A study by UN Women Nepal, *Addressing Violence Against LGBTIQ+ People in Nepal*, reveals that four in five LGBTIQ+ respondents have experienced at least one form of violence in their lifetime. The report underscores the need for inclusive legal reforms and tailored support services for vulnerable groups, including older LGBTIQ+ adults (UN Women, 2023). Cultural dynamics further compound these challenges; Bhatta's *Everyday Lives of LGBTI in Kathmandu Valley* highlights social exclusion and a disconnect between personal identities and societal perceptions, advocating for their inclusion in Nepal's social development (Bhatta, 2017).

One significant finding in this study is the exclusion of LGBTI elders from social security programs, particularly in Nepal's Social Security Act 2018 and Senior Citizens Act 2006. This aligns with Mitini Nepal's (2023) observation that restrictive eligibility definitions exclude single LGBTI individuals from allowances and benefits. Similar exclusions have been documented in other countries where laws fail to recognize non-heteronormative relationships or diverse family structures (Baskaran & Hauser, 2022). The absence of marriage equality in Nepal further exacerbates the financial and emotional insecurity of older LGBTI individuals, a recurring theme in the literature on LGBTI aging globally (UN Women, 2023).

The intersectionality of identity adds complexity to the experiences of LGBTI elders. In Nepal, patriarchal norms and heteronormativity amplify discrimination, as observed in other South Asian contexts where traditional family structures dominate (Sharma & Gurung, 2023). Older LGBTI individuals often face compounded stigma due to their age and sexual orientation, leading to greater social isolation compared to their heterosexual counterparts (Chen et al., 2020). This finding reflects broader literature that identifies intersectionality as a critical lens for understanding the unique challenges faced by minority populations (Yogyakarta Principles, 2007).

Healthcare access is another critical concern for LGBTI elders, who frequently report discriminatory treatment or denial of care. The findings echo Choi and Meyer's (2016) research, which highlights how fear of stigma leads many LGBTI elders to delay or avoid seeking healthcare. Nepal's lack of inclusive policies and training for healthcare providers mirrors these global trends, underscoring the urgent need for systemic reform. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the precariousness of LGBTI elders' living situations in Nepal, with many facing homelessness and lack of access to essential services due to gender identity mismatches in official documents (Mitini Nepal, 2023).

This study also underscores the importance of accurate data collection to address the needs of LGBTI elders. Nepal's 2021 National Population Census failed to adequately represent gender and sexual minorities, reflecting a broader trend of erasure in policy-making processes (Kathmandu Post, 2023). Inclusive data collection practices are critical for informing policies that genuinely address the needs of diverse populations, as emphasized in other global studies (Chen et al., 2020).

The findings of the study align with previous research studies highlighting the multifaceted challenges faced by LGBTI elders. Financial instability emerges as major concern with systemic exclusions from inheritance rights, marriage equality and social benefits. Previous studies have similarly emphasized economic insecurity noting that restrictive definitions in existing policies such as Social Security Act 2018 and Senior Citizens Act 2006 exclude LGBTI elders from crucial social support. Social exclusion and family isolation further exacerbate their vulnerability as many hide their gender identities and are forced into heterosexual marriages due to societal pressures. Patriarchal norms and intergenerational divides within the LGBTI community deepens loneliness as noted by Mitini Nepal (2021).

While most of the prior research studies prioritizes the general aging population, this study distinctly focuses on diverse aging population, particularly LGBTI elders who are marginalized and vulnerable against by family, society and the state due to their sexual orientation and gender identity. Unlike other studies which predominantly address health-related issues, this study explores a broader array of intersectional challenges delving into different forms of discrimination, relationship dynamics support system, healthcare accessibility, impact of COVID-19, societal assumptions and existing policy and implementation gaps within the Nepali context.

Health disparities are another recurring issue, with this study reporting higher rated of mental health challenges and chronic illness among LGBTI elders. Similar concerns have been documented in previous research especially during the pandemic when LGBTI elders faced eviction, loneliness, homelessness and denial of essential services due to identity documentation issues (Mitini Nepal, 2023). While legal and policy gaps further marginalize this group, however constitution remains progressive though lacks robust implementation mechanisms. Definition of minority in the constitution exclude gender and sexual minorities while it defines minority as 'ethnic', 'linguistic' and 'religious' groups only whose population is less than the percentage specified by the federal law (Constitution of Nepal, 2015, Part 34).

On the other hand, this study underscores the intersectionality of age, gender, caste, religion, geography and socioeconomic status which compounds the challenges faced by LGBTI elders. These findings mirror those of Mitini Nepal (2023) which stressed the absence of intersectional approaches in policy frameworks exacerbating disparities for LGBTI elders from rural or disadvantaged backgrounds.

Furthermore, this research highlights the ironic plight of LGBTI elders who were the pillars of the LGBTI movement in Nepal, as they now face some of the hardest situation and neglect in their old age (The Kathmandu Post, 2025). Addressing these disparities requires comprehensive reforms, including inclusive policies, robust social services, and targeted awareness campaigns. Future research should build on these findings to develop sustainable solutions that ensure the dignity, rights and well-being of LGBTI elders in Nepal. Bridging gaps between constitutional guarantees and lived realities is significant.

5. Conclusion

This study underscores the profound intersectionality of challenges faced by LGBTI elders in Nepal, revealing the compounded effects of ageism, societal stigma and lifelong discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Despite Nepal's progressive

constitutional framework, which includes guarantees of equality and social justice, the lived realities of LGBTI elders highlight critical gaps in implementation and inclusivity.

LGBTI elders in Nepal remain invisible in policy discussions and social programs, facing barriers in accessing healthcare, social security and age-friendly inclusive services. Socially, patriarchal norms and entrenched heteronormativity perpetuate isolation, rejection and vulnerability. Economically, systemic workplace discrimination and exclusion from inheritance and senior citizen benefits leave many in financial insecurity. Legally, the absence of marriage equality, restrictive definitions in social security laws and inadequate protections in domestic violence legislation exacerbate their marginalization. The study also found that intergenerational divides within the LGBTI community, coupled with societal stigma, prevent many elders from seeking formal support. These issues are further amplified during crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, where legal gaps and societal neglect exposed LGBTI elders to eviction, homelessness and heightened vulnerability.

To bridge these gaps, the study advocates for the explicit legal recognition of LGBTI elders in minority and social security laws, including revisions to the Senior Citizens Act and Social Security Act to ensure their inclusion in social benefit schemes. Additionally, LGBTI-inclusive healthcare policies, anti-discrimination measures, and the establishment of safe spaces and support networks are critical to ensuring the dignity, rights and well-being of this marginalized group. Ultimately, this research highlights the urgent need for intersectional approaches and inclusive policies that recognize and address the unique challenges of LGBTI elders in Nepal. Collaborative efforts among policymakers, civil society, healthcare providers, and the LGBTI community are essential to creating an equitable and inclusive society where aging with dignity is a reality for all.

6. Declaration

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