

## **Impact of Knowledge Towards Attitudes and Perception of the LGBTQ Community Among Young Adults in Malaysia**

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Date Received: 10 March 2023 Revised: 17 September 2023 Accepted: 29 September 2023

### **Abstract**

The focus of this study was to examine existing knowledge of Malaysian youths towards LGBTQ related concepts and issues, and how this knowledge affected their perception towards the LGBTQ communities. A customised version of the California State University, Northridge, Survey of Attitudes toward LGBT issues was used to gather data on 264 participants' current attitudes and perception towards the LGBTQ community, and five interviewees were selected to understand the extent of their knowledge on concepts and issues about LGBTQ. Thematic analysis was used to assess qualitative data, with a subsequent cross analysis to examine the impact of their knowledge towards their attitudes and perception of the LGBTQ community. The findings of this study showed that there was a weak but positive change in attitudes and perception about LGBTQs, and that religion and cultural values remained the major factors contributing to participants' overall attitudes, perception, and viewpoints towards the LGBTQ community. There is huge potential to promote more accepting and inclusive attitudes towards the LGBTQ community by increasing knowledge and understanding of LGBTQ related issues and concepts.

**Keywords:** *LGBTQ, youth, religiosity, cultural values, Malaysia*

### **Introduction**

Discourse surrounding those with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) identities remains taboo in Malaysia, due to social and legal condemnation despite the increasing visibility of LGBTQ communities and allies (Mokhtar et al., 2019). As a result, a large portion of Malaysian youths hold negative, biased, inaccurate, and harmful attitudes towards the LGBTQ communities (Asian-Pacific Resource & Research Centre for Women, 2020). The general disapproval towards the community has resulted in skewed understanding and stigmatisation that inhibits LGBTQ youths from expressing themselves. This particularly affects youths who identify as members of LGBTQ communities, as they often face difficulties when constructing and expressing their gender or sexual identities, for society generally forbids their existence (Jerome et al., 2021a).

Several recent studies on public attitudes, perception, and reception towards the LGBTQ communities in Malaysia have utilised different approaches and yielded results that provide new points of views that attempt to study factors affecting Malaysians' degree of acceptance, attitudes, and perception towards the LGBTQ communities. Despite the legal and social sanctions towards LGBTQ, recent studies on public attitudes and perception of LGBTQ have indicated an opposite trend where the level of sensitivity to LGBTQ in the country is gradually dissipating with an increasing number of LGBTQ individuals merging into the socio-political side of Malaysian society, both online and offline (Jerome et al., 2021a, b, c). For example, Jerome et al., (2021b) revealed that LGBT and non-LGBT individuals hold discrepant views on societal receptivity towards the LGBT phenomenon in Malaysia, citing individual differences and cultural influences as core influencing factors. This discrepancy is evidence that, while non-heteronormative behaviours are generally shunned by society and punishable by law, LGBTQ phenomenon is undeniably slowly being accepted by certain segments of society, due to "the increased visibility of and people's acceptance towards LGBT individuals" (Jerome et al., 2021b, p. 62). Furthermore, participants from the studies above each cited different factors that contributed to their attitudes and perception, among them were social media influences and exposure to LGBTQ individuals. Social media is often treated as a safe portal for emotional support, LGBTQ related information, general education, and exchange of experiences amongst LGBTQ youths (Craig et al., 2021; Tuah & Mazlan, 2020).

Studies in Western countries have shown a positive correlation between knowledge and perception (Gorrotxategi et al., 2020; Wahlen et al., 2020). People in Western settings presumably have better knowledge of LGBTQ issues and individuals because homosexuality has its footing in society. Conservative societies like Malaysia and its neighbouring countries present different challenges to the LGBTQ community. A study involving university students in Indonesia found they judged LGBT individuals as not normal, sinners, as candidates to be treated and embraced, and rightfully not be acknowledged in all fields (Octavia & Erlangga, 2022). On the other hand, Chandra et al. (2022) found that academic discipline, contact, empathy, religion, and university characteristics affected students' prejudices. Even though Thailand has a global reputation for LGBT+ tolerance, Newman et al. (2021) found that LGBT+ individuals in Thailand still faced many forms of social exclusion, discrimination, and stigma across multiple domains in the society. Meanwhile in Singapore, over half of the full-time students surveyed had experienced bullying/discrimination within their educational institutions, and that bullying or discrimination in educational institutions and workplaces was significantly associated with low WHO-5 scores (Toh et al., 2023). A study by Monika and Gogoi (2022) found that while most youth in Manipur (India) had average knowledge about the LGBTQ community, they were psychologically less flexible and had biases towards it. These studies showed that the level of acceptance, even among youths themselves, differs across neighbouring countries. Exposure or knowledge of LGBTQ does not lead to equal acceptance.

This research study explored the existing knowledge of Malaysian youths, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation, towards LGBTQ related concepts and issues, and how their knowledge affected their perception towards the LGBTQ communities. Specifically, the objectives were to:

1. Determine the scope of understanding that Malaysian youths have towards LGBTQ related concepts and issues such as gender identity, intersectionality between race, religion and identity, transgenderism, discrimination and inequality towards LGBTQ members.
2. Investigate whether Malaysian youths' knowledge towards LGBTQ related concepts and issues play a role in shaping their perception and attitudes towards LGBTQ communities.

## **Literature Review**

A key basis of attribution theory is that there are reasons that justify an individual's action, and people have reasons for developing their impressions of others. The theory can be used to dissect interpersonal relationships and determining people's stigmatising attitudes and discriminatory behaviours (Reyna et al., 2014). Several studies have suggested that attributions for sexual orientation are fundamental in driving public opinion about homosexuality and transgenderism (Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2008; Reyna et al., 2014; Whitehead, 2014). A study by Reyna et al. (2014) proposed that besides religious orientation and political conservatism, attributions were more effective in predicting anti-gay attitudes.

From a social perspective, same-sex relations, gender nonconformity, transgenderism, and non-cisheteronormative behaviour are generally not accepted and frowned upon by Malaysian society (Tan et al., 2021). This phenomenon can be attributed to the fact that Malaysian culture centres largely around religion, especially Islam and Christianity, where homosexuality is often viewed negatively and chastised in religious teachings. As a Muslim majority country that generally holds conservative views on gender, sexuality issues and gender binary are often upheld and enacted without contestation, and this furthers the stigmatization of the LGBTQ communities in Malaysia (Luhur et al., 2020).

Mitchell and Fries (2016) stated that public sentiment towards homosexual behaviour and homosexuality is based on demographics of gender, race, age, religion, education level, and political party affiliation. A study by Collier et al. (2012) revealed that interpersonal contact with homosexuals can influence the attitudes toward homosexuals. This finding is in line with other Malaysian literature. For example, Ling and Ting (2022) reported that interpersonal contact with individuals who identified as LGBTQ was related to the acceptance and positive attitudes shown toward LGBTQ individuals.

## Methods

This descriptive study involved 264 participants. Table 1 shows the participants' demographic details, specifically their age, identified sex or gender, and their identified sexuality. Young adults aged 18–27 were the majority (73.1%). Individuals of Chinese ethnicity contributed the most to this survey (47.5%), followed by Malays (36.2%).

**Table 1** Demographic Background of Participants (N = 264)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
<b>Age</b>	18–27	193	73.1
	28–37	48	18.2
	38–47	23	8.7
<b>Racial Background</b>	Bumiputera	28	10.6
	Chinese	126	47.7
	Indian	14	5.3
	Malay	96	36.4
<b>Sex Assigned at Birth</b>	Female	102	38.6
	Male	160	60.6
<b>Gender Identity</b>	Androgynous	4	1.5
	Female/Woman	96	36.4
	Genderfluid	1	.4
	Male/Man	155	58.7
	Non-Binary	6	2.3
	Transsexual	1	.4
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	Asexual	12	4.5
	Bisexual	18	6.8
	Gay	21	8.0
	Lesbian	4	1.5
	Pansexual	8	3.0
	Queer	4	1.5
	Questioning	13	4.9
	Heterosexual	181	68.6
	<b>Highest Level of Education</b>	Bachelor's Degree	142
Diploma		29	11.0
Foundation		11	4.2
Master's Degree		19	7.2
PhD		7	2.7
SPM		30	11.4
STPM		12	4.5
<b>Religion/Religious Beliefs</b>	Agnostic	12	4.5
	Atheist	51	19.4
	Buddhist	55	20.8
	Christian	37	14.1
	Hindu	6	2.3
	Muslim	96	36.4
	Taoist	4	1.5
<b>Political Ideology</b>	Conservative	32	12.1
	Extremist	1	0.4
	Liberal	106	40.2
	Marxist Leninist	1	0.4
	Moderate	118	44.7
	Not sure	1	0.4
	Progressive	1	0.4
	Socialist	4	1.5

Male participants predominated (60.4%) and the remainder were females (38.5%). Heterosexuals dominated the sexual orientation found in the survey (68.6%), who were followed by gay participants (8.0%), bisexuals (6.8%), and asexuals (4.5%). The majority were degree holders (53.8%). Most were Muslims (36.4%), followed by Buddhists (20.8%), atheists (19.4%), and Christians (14.1%). In terms of political ideology, 44.7% considered themselves moderates, 40.2% liberals, while 12.1% labelled themselves as conservatives.

The data on current stance and attitudes towards the LGBTQ communities were collected using two instruments. An online questionnaire on attitudes towards LGBTQ issues was adapted from California State University, Northridge (CSUN) (n.d.). The questionnaire included basic demographic details such as age, racial background, gender assigned at birth, current gender, sexual orientation, the highest level of education, present education status, religion, and political ideology. The questionnaire covered 10 domains about beliefs, attitudes, and practices using a five-point Likert scale. The domains had further sub-questions, including questions about the religiosity of the participant and household; belief in traditional gender roles; level of comfortableness while interacting in person with people belonging to LGBTQ community; knowledge about LGBTQ people; about the origin of sexuality and gender; attitudes toward issues pertaining on LGBTQ people; changes our institute should do for LGBTQ people; their religion and its view on LGBTQ community; their families' and friends' view on LGBTQ; and the number of LGBTQ people among their family, friends, and workplace. The questionnaire data were tabulated and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 26.0.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted where participants were asked about their understanding of LGBTQ, their gender identity and sexual orientation, whether LGBTQ communities were accepted by Malaysian society, and the challenges faced by LGBTQ in Malaysia. The five interviewees were recruited from of the 264 participants based on their willingness to be interviewed (Table 2). The full purpose of the study was explained to the participants, followed by assurances of the participants' confidentiality regarding disclosed information, and an explanation that their involvements were voluntary, and they could withdraw from participation at any time. The audio of the interview was recorded once consent was obtained, for transcription and analysis purposes. The interviews were analysed based on Creswell's (2014) qualitative analysis procedures in examining interview data. Thematic analysis was employed to explore how acquired knowledge on LGBTQ related concepts and issues influenced their attitudes and perception towards the LGBTQ community, and the analysed data was cross-examined to explore any potential relationships or correlation that may have contributed to their attitudes and perception towards the LGBTQ community.

**Table 2** Summary of Participants' Demographic Background

Code	Age	Sex/Gender	Sexuality	Political Ideology
Participant 1 (P1)	24	Male	Heterosexual	Liberal
Participant 2 (P2)	24	Female	Heterosexual	Liberal
Participant 3 (P3)	25	Female	Homosexual	Moderate
Participant 4 (P4)	28	Female	Heterosexual	Moderate
Participant 5 (P5)	29	Male	Homosexual	Liberal

## Results and Discussion

The nine variables from the CSUN Attitudes Survey on LGBT issues survey were analysed for correlation and found to be significant, and so can be used to study the relationship between each variable. A summary of the correlation matrix for the nine variables is presented in Table 3.

Pearson's correlation analysis revealed that there were positive relationships between religiosity and the remaining variables except Gender and Sexuality (Positive relationships involved Gender Roles, Interaction with LGBTQ, General Views Towards LGBTQ, Civil Rights, Religious Acceptance,

LGBTQ Education, and Environment). Religiosity had strong positive relationship with Gender Roles ( $r = .532, p < .01$ ), General Views towards LGBTQ ( $r = .579, p < .01$ ), and Civil Rights ( $r = .555, p < .01$ ). This statistic shows that religiosity was positively related to conservatism or conservative viewpoints and attitudes, which was in line with the works of Jerome et al. (2021a & b). In these investigations, it was concluded that religion and cultural norms contributed significantly towards public views expressed regarding acceptance or rejection of LGBTQ in Malaysia. The participants in these two studies were also Malaysians. Taken together, these findings suggest that in Malaysia, where Islam is the official religion, religiosity shapes views towards LGBTQ.

**Table 3** Summary for the Matrix for Correlation of the Nine Variables ( $N = 264$ )

Variable	R	GR	I	GV	GS	CR	RA	LE	EN
R	1								
GR	.532**	1							
I	.399**	.569**	1						
GV	.579**	.810**	.686**	1					
GS	.012	.075	.012	.144*	1				
CR	.555**	.777**	.704**	.838**	.127*	1			
RA	.446**	.344**	.332**	.401**	-.021	.358**	1		
LE	.212**	.438**	.506**	.487**	.088	.581**	.109	1	
EN	.332**	.349**	.328**	.412**	.011	.330**	.485**	.155**	1

Code. R = Religiosity; GR = Gender Roles; I = Interaction with LGBTQ; GV = General Views towards LGBTQ; GS = Gender and Sexuality; CR = Civil Rights; RA = Religious Acceptance; LE = LGBTQ Education; EN = Environment; \* significant at the .05 level (2-tailed), \*\* significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

Gender and Sexuality revealed weak positive relationships with Religiosity ( $r = .012, p < .01$ ), Gender Roles ( $r = .075, p < .01$ ), Interaction with LGBTQ ( $r = -.12, p < .01$ ), General Views towards LGBTQ ( $r = .144, p < .05$ ), Civil Rights ( $r = .127, p < .05$ ), LGBTQ Education ( $r = .088, p < .01$ ), and Environment ( $r = .011, p < .01$ ). This shows that the participants' views towards Gender and Sexuality contributed minimally towards their attitudes towards LGBTQ communities. As the subsections of the questionnaire contained items on opinions about gender and sexuality, their response on the Likert scale does not necessarily correspond to their political ideology, but instead reflect their own perception and understanding towards the topic. Particularly, their political ideology may not contribute to their understanding towards gender and sexuality. This can be explained with the idea that their own personal understanding and knowledge contributed minimally towards their attitudes and perception towards the LGBTQ community. The result confirms that religion and conservatism had more influence on the acceptance or rejection of LGBTQ in Malaysia compared to personal understanding and knowledge.

### **Understanding of LGBTQ, Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation**

In this section, the interview results on the participants' understanding of LGBTQ, gender identity, and sexual orientation are presented. All the participants generally had a firm grasp of what LGBTQ means. One notable aspect from the interview was that all responses reflected a neutral and accepting attitude towards the LGBTQ community, and their perspective acknowledged and included the support for equality, inclusivity and respect for all individuals regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. This is indicated by the responses of two participants as follows: "For me I think that LGBTQ is a group of people that created a society that is different from being straight. I mean for me, there's nothing wrong, just that it's a community that is not straight" (P1)

and “To me, LGBTQ is a group of people that identifies outside of the sexuality of the social norm” (P5).

Both Participant 1 and Participant 5 had a neutral stance towards the community, acknowledging it as different from the heterosexual norm. However, Participant 2 highlighted that not everyone fitted within the traditional understanding of sexual orientation and gender identity, and referred to LGBTQ as “these kinds of people.” The full statement was as follows: “That’s about my understanding about the LGBTQ, it’s not something people accept as a social norm since the beginning, so that’s why this community exist, to specifically cater to these kinds of people with these kinds of sexual orientation.”

Participant 2 suggested that the LGBTQ community exists because non-cisheteronormality is something that is out of the social norm, hence a specific support group is needed as a response to societal rejection, and the community serves as a safe and supportive space for them.

Next, gender identity refers to an individual's sense of their own gender, which may or may not align with the sex they were assigned at birth as indicated by Participant 2.

So, for gender identity, from my understanding it’s something that, the sex you refer yourself to, and it does not necessarily have to be the same as your assigned sex. Like if you’re born as a female, but you prefer yourself as a male because you feel like you lean more towards the masculine side, or like some people they’re biologically a male, but in the end, they prefer themselves as a female.

It is widely considered as a personal and subjective experience and can vary widely among individuals, and this idea was brought up by Participant 1 as follows: “And sexual orientation is how do you identify your own gender towards people, like how you dress, how you act, or how you perceive yourself.” Participant 5 commented, “Gender identity is the gender that you personally identify with .... As for sexual orientation, I think it’s about the gender you are attracted to.” This participant was able to tell the difference between gender identity and sexual orientation. Sexual orientation, on the other hand, refers to a person's emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attraction to others. It is not necessarily linked to how someone presents themselves or perceives themselves, but rather to whom they are attracted (HRC Foundation, 2022).

All participants interviewed were able to distinguish between gender identity and sexual orientation and provide brief explanations for both concepts, except for Participant 1 where there were partial inaccuracies in describing sexual orientation.

### ***Opinions on Acceptance of LGBTQ in Malaysian Society***

The general consensus was that while the community had limited acceptance across the country and was heavily stigmatised, there were signs of progress and change. Participant 1 stated that the change was small (“... to some extent, yes. Some people do think that LGBTQ can be accepted in the society now but only to certain extent”). Participant 3 highlighted the ongoing challenges discrimination faced by the LGBTQ community in Malaysia, using the lesbian couple caught in Terengganu as the example: “I would say no, it is not accepted by the society. .... Generally, many things are banned, especially LGBTQ, and there were many cases about the LGBTQ, like the lesbian couple who were caught in Terengganu and received punishment.”

Participant 4 highlighted the generational divide in the acceptance of the LGBTQ community in Malaysia (“Not really. Actually, for the younger generation, I think it’s accepted but for the older generation would be difficult”). Younger generations tend to be more accepting and open-minded compared to older generations, who may hold more traditional views and beliefs. This is a common trend in many societies around the world, where younger generations tend to be more accepting of diversity and are more likely to support LGBTQ rights. Participant 2 and Participant 5, in statements recorded below, expressed similar notions that acceptance of LGBTQ varies depending on the area and location. Participant 2 observed that Sarawak generally was more accepting of LGBTQ community as compared to Peninsular Malaysia. The attribution of the differences of acceptance between locations remain an area to be explored.

I can feel that there is a big difference in the level of so called “acceptance” between these two places. I would say in Peninsular; they don’t really accept or even tolerate LGBTQ as compared to in Sarawak, from what I see. (P2)

Personally, I would say yes and no. If we are talking about Malaysian society at large, it is still not accepted ... However, depending which area you live in, LGBTQ people can actually exist in peace within the heteronormative society in Malaysia. (P5)

### ***Opinions on Challenges Faced by LGBTQ in Malaysian Society***

Generally, all interviewees (except Participant 2) agreed that legality was the main challenge confronting the LGBTQ community. Participant 4 said of LGBTQ individuals: “Yes, I feel like there are no LGBTQ rights in Malaysia .... There is no way to talk about LGBTQ stuff freely, and it is still difficult for that discussion to happen.”

Participant 5 highlighted, in the statement given below, that the dominance of religion in Malaysia creates a challenging environment for the LGBTQ community and that it is often unable to express itself freely and be what it wishes to be. The strict societal norms and expectations in a conservative country, combined with the lack of legal protections, can make it difficult for LGBTQ individuals to fully participate in society, both in the workforce and in their personal lives. Participant 5 also brought up themes of violence, bullying and hate crimes, citing the incident at Rex KL as evidence that LGBTQ people are still facing that challenge. According to Participant 5, LGBTQ individuals find it hard to access essential services and rights, such as adoption, marriage, and healthcare, which are significant challenges faced by the community.

Being in a country where religion trumps all others, it can be difficult for LGBTQ people to express themselves and be who they are freely. .... Even in workforce, they will have to keep their gender identity and expression “under control” if it doesn’t conform to the societal norm, otherwise they risk being discriminated or treated unfairly. Also, the recent raids in Rex KL, with the usual harassment, bullying, violence and hate crimes against the LGBTQ is still a problem in many areas in Malaysia. And there is still no legal protection and recognition, so LGBTQ people can have trouble accessing adoption, marriage or even healthcare.

Participant 2 saw some hope in the situation, as indicated in the quote below. Participant 2 suggested that while there is limited acceptance of the LGBTQ community in Malaysian society, the level of hostility towards this community had decreased. Thus, while a significant portion of society may still not accept homosexuality, they are less likely to actively harm or discriminate against LGBTQ individuals.

In terms of the society’s acceptance level, I think our society are slowly accepting this community, like they don’t have hostility towards them.... So, I think on a societal level, they don’t face much challenges, like, they are still people who are against LGBTQ but a large part of the society is not against the community, sort of like they don’t accept, but they don’t do anything to harm them also.

However, it is important to note that significant challenges still remain. Participant 3 said “Yes, of course there are a lot of challenges. .... You might be discriminated against, and they might isolate you, but it depends on the environment as well.” This statement recognised that LGBTQ individuals suffer from isolation, which can be imposed by people around them. The situation for the LGBTQ community in Malaysia is far from ideal. The limited acceptance, combined with the ongoing criminalization of homosexuality, the lack of protections, and the widespread stigma, continue to create significant challenges and obstacles for the LGBTQ community.

The statements from all five of the participants express similar notions that LGBTQ community is not accepted by the society, government, religion and country, and that poses as a big challenge for the community. However, the depth of understanding and perspective that the interviewees had on the topic of LGBTQ societal challenges differed. Participants 1, 3, 4, and 5 believed that there are ongoing legal and rights challenges for the community, while Participant 2 felt that there was an indication of acceptance that had eased the challenges faced by the LGBTQ community.

### **Cross Analysis between Questionnaire Results and Thematic Analysis**

The cross analysis between questionnaire results (Table 3) and thematic analysis can provide a deeper understanding of knowledge and perception towards the LGBTQ community. In Table 4, the shaded columns represent participant's scores on Religiosity, Religious Acceptance, and Environment. This represents their religious values, contact with religious establishments, and their environment's acceptance of LGBTQ people.

**Table 4** Participants' Survey Result, Tabulated With Mean Values

<b>Participant: Parameter</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>GR</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>GV</b>	<b>GS</b>	<b>CR</b>	<b>RA</b>	<b>LE</b>	<b>EN</b>
R1: Religiosity	4.33	2.00	1.00	2.00	2.60	1.33	4.33	1.00	4.00
R2: Religious Acceptance and Environment	3.33	2.00	1.00	1.00	2.20	1.33	2.33	1.00	2.50
R3: General Views towards LGBTQ	3.00	3.20	1.00	2.00	2.80	1.60	3.33	1.00	3.00
R4: Civil Rights of LGBTQ	2.00	2.80	1.00	1.33	2.20	1.33	3.33	1.80	3.00
R5: LGBTQ Education	1.67	1.20	1.00	1.00	2.40	1.00	4.67	1.00	3.00

*Code.* R = Religiosity; GR = Gender Roles; I = Interaction with LGBTQ; GV = General Views towards LGBTQ; GS = Gender and Sexuality; CR = Civil Rights; RA = Religious Acceptance; LE = LGBTQ Education; EN = Environment.

From the findings, it can be seen that the variables of Religiosity, Religious Acceptance, and Environment have higher overall means compared to other variables. Interaction with LGBTQs had the lowest mean, which indicates that all five participants were comfortable interacting with members of the LGBTQ community. For the variable of General Views towards LGBTQ, Civil Rights of LGBTQ, and LGBTQ Education, they also displayed mean values less than three, which indicates a liberal leaning. This shows that all five participants had experiences and contact with religion, but evidently it contributed minimally to their attitudes towards the LGBTQ community. This finding is in contrast with the correlation analysis, a finding possibly due to all five participants having moderate to liberal political ideology, and two of the five participants being members of the LGBTQ community.

From both the quantitative and qualitative findings, it can be concluded that the participants' knowledge of LGBTQ related issues and concepts does play a role in shaping perception and attitudes towards the LGBTQ communities. Within the context of these five participants, religious background did not significantly impact their attitudes and perceptions towards the LGBTQ community. Instead, the knowledge and understanding of LGBTQ related issues and concepts played a more significant role in forming their attitudes and perceptions towards the LGBTQ community. The conclusion is based on a lack of correlation between religious background, attitudes and perceptions towards the LGBTQ community, as well as the additional qualitative findings from the study.

However, it should be noted that this conclusion is limited by the small sample size ( $N = 5$ ) and may not necessarily be representative of the larger population. Further research with a larger and more diverse sample is needed to establish a stronger correlation and to support the findings. Additionally, other factors beyond knowledge and religious background may also influence attitudes and perceptions towards the LGBTQ community and should be considered in future studies.

The extent of knowledge, observations and perception that Malaysian youths currently hold towards issues and concepts concerning the LGBTQ communities in Malaysia can be described as one with insufficient depth. Nonetheless, all interviewees exhibited a firm understanding of related LGBTQ concepts, such as sexual orientation and gender identity, and what LGBTQ is. However, they remained partially uninformed on the ongoing challenges that the community faces in Malaysian



society. This lack of depth in their knowledge and understanding may contribute to limited empathy and support for the community. Furthermore, the quantitative part of this study revealed that on a larger scale, there is still a strong correlation between religiosity and attitudes and perception towards the LGBTQ, which is in alignment with past works along similar lines (Manalastas et al., 2017; Tan et al., 2021). This suggests that religion continues to play a significant role in shaping attitudes and perceptions towards the LGBTQ community in Malaysia, even among the younger generation. This correlation highlights the need for religious leaders and institutions to engage in open and inclusive discussions about LGBTQ issues to promote greater understanding and acceptance of the community.

The findings of the study (both quantitative and qualitative) showed that acquired knowledge plays a role in shaping attitudes towards the LGBTQ community, which supports and validates the second research question. The analysis of questionnaire results indicated that a significant proportion of participants held negative attitudes towards the LGBTQ community, while thematic analysis of individual stories and experiences can help to shed light on the reasons behind these attitudes. This phenomenon is in line with the works of Jerome et al. (2021a & b), where it was found discrepant views exist towards the LGBTQ community that can be influenced by a variety of external and internal factors, such as interaction with LGBTQ people, intrinsic religiosity, gender roles beliefs, or cultural values. Considering the results of past literature on the topic of attitudes and perception towards LGBTQ, it can be said that the lack of proper education on the diversity of sexuality, gender, and LGBTQ contributed to current attitudes and perception towards the LGBTQ communities (Tan et al., 2021).

## Conclusions

The study shows the importance of education and exposure to LGBTQ issues in shaping attitudes and perceptions towards the LGBTQ community. When knowledge and understanding of LGBTQ related issues and concepts increase, it will promote more accepting and inclusive attitudes towards the LGBTQ community. This is particularly important in societies where there may be limited exposure to LGBTQ issues and where cultural norms may be hostile towards the LGBTQ community. By promoting greater education and understanding of LGBTQ issues, it may be possible to reduce discrimination and marginalization and to create a more inclusive and supportive society for all individuals, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

The findings of this study have the potential to inform the development of education and media initiatives that promote greater understanding and acceptance of the LGBTQ community. By exploring the role of acquired knowledge in shaping attitudes, this study will contribute to our broader understanding of how we can promote social justice and equality for all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. In conclusion, the findings of this study highlighted the need for continued efforts to promote greater understanding, empathy, and support for the LGBTQ community in Malaysia. By increasing knowledge and awareness about LGBTQ issues and concepts, it is possible to break down barriers and promote greater acceptance of the community. However, a limitation of this study is that the level of knowledge and perception held by the five interviewees surveyed may not be representative of all Malaysian youths. Further studies need to be conducted on the views of religious leaders to gain a better understanding of the personal and religious stance of various religions on LGBTQ in Malaysia.

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