Resilience of the Rainbow in the Cyberspace: Exploring How the Queer Population Copes with Cyberbullying in India

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ABSTRACT

Background: Cyberbullying is one of the many damages that has come in via the advancement of technology. The growth of usage of online digital platforms influences indirectly the culture of cyberbullying. The most in jeopardy are the struggling minorities such as LGBTQ+ population present in India. This study is aimed to shed light on the experiences of cyberbullying faced by the queer population in India and identifies the various coping strategies implemented by them.
Materials and Methods: Through purposive sampling ten participants belonging to the queer community in India were a part of this study. A qualitative research design was utilized where data was obtained through interviews and later coded for inference.
Results: The findings identified derogatory remarks on social media and name-calling as the most general cyberbullying experience followed with individual prominent in intracommunity cyberbullying. The findings surrounding coping strategies used by the Indian queer population to overcome cyberbullying were noted to be both positive and negative in nature.
Conclusion: The findings of this study highlight the unique challenges that the Indian queer population goes through when it comes to cyberbullying. The results also show us the various coping strategies used by them. However, the effectiveness of those strategies was mostly short-term.

Keywords: Cyberbullying, LGBTQ+, Indian Queer Population, India

INTRODUCTION

Cyberspace is ever-growing and has become a life-changing tool for many. From young adults to the geriatric population, everyone is on the internet, be it for voicing opinions or for understanding concepts that are too complicated to get through in a classroom setting. However, with the existence of cyberspace, comes the risk of cyberbullying. In today's world, the conversations surrounding cyberbullying highlight the wrecking terror and havoc it causes. Ever since the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a rise in incidences of cyberbullying brought on by people using social media more frequently (Kee, D. M. H. et al., 2022).

1.1 Overview of Cyberbullying

For years, it has been hard to define the concept of cyberbullying. The term "cyberbullying" was first defined by a

Canadian named Bill Belsey (Belsey, 2004). However, the multidimensionality of the concept has created several difficulties in streamlining it into a proper definition. The most widely known and accepted definition states it to be a harmful and intentional communication activity exploiting any form of technological devices, such as the Internet or mobile telephones (Belsey, 2006; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). According to Wong-Lo and Bullock, 2011, cyberbullying is a category of bullying that occurs in the digital realm or medium of electronic text. According to Min Lan, Nancy Law and Qianqian Pan (2022), any behaviour performed through electronic or digital media by individuals or groups that repeatedly communicate hostile or aggressive messages intended to inflict harm or discomfort on others is defined as cyberbullying. Several research studies which are correlational in nature (Li, 2005; Raskauskas& Stoltz, 2007) have concluded that cyberbullying is an extension of the traditional form of bullying.

We can divide cyberbullying into two types- direct (which includes sending insulting messages or photos to a person directly) and indirect (which involves spreading rumours and fake news) (Hinduja and Patchin, 2014; Vandebosch and Van Cleemput, 2009). But on a more detailed level, there are several forms in which cyberbullying can take place. Special Educator Nancy Willard was one of the first people to address the idea through her books. Willard's taxonomy of cyberbullying focuses on 8 types: flaming, harassment, denigration, impersonation, outing, trickery, exclusion, and cyberstalking. Recently literature has identified the sharing or posting of dangerous memes as a form of cyberbullying (Jaiswal, 2021; Nandi et al., 2022; Sharma et al., 2022).

The prevalence of cyberbullying being harmful has never been undermined even with multiple definitions. According to The Cyberbullying Research Center in 2019, 36.5% of the 5,000 middle and high school students questioned in the United States stated that they had at least once been the victim of cyberbullying. In context to India, Comparitech's 2022 report states India is at the top in reference to children experiencing cyberbullying in the country. Giving attention to the gender and sexual orientation statistics of cyberbullying, the Cyberbullying Research Center (2022) noted that LGBTQ+ youth are much more likely to be a target of cyberbullying when compared to straight peers. In a survey by the research centre, results showed that the rate of cyberbullying victimization among LGBTQ+ youth was 50% higher than that of non-LGBTQ youth. It was concluded that 31.7% of queer youth experience cyberbullying while only 21.8% of the heterosexual youth experience it. The percentage of cyberbullying among LGBTQ+ youth ranges between 10.5% and 71.3% across studies (Abreu RL, Kenny MC, 2017).

1.2 Queer Individuals in India

According to the American Psychological Association (2015), all non-heterosexual and non-cisgender sexual and gender minorities are included under the catch-all word 'queer'. The term is continuously evolving and is currently progressing to be recognized as an individual sexual identity within the broadening spectrum of non-traditional sexual and gender minority identities, which includes asexual, pansexual and others, in addition to traditional identities (here it refers to lesbian, gay or bisexual) (Russell, Clarke, & Clary, 2009; Smalley, Warren, & Barefoot, 2016; Watson, Wheldon, & Puhl, 2019). The contrast between the queer population and LGBT has been well stated by Callis (2014) but, the umbrella still exists for the ever-evolving gender spectrum as it does for the stated traditional identities.

In India, the decriminalization of consensual homosexual activities between adults is newfangled making the conversations surrounding the LGBTQ+ population illicit in many ways. Although discrimination based on sexual orientation is a violation of

the Indian Constitution, talking about the queer community is often considered taboo and informal to gain much traction. The challenges that the queer population face in India is not well documented due to the aforementioned reasons. Most of the research in this domain is health-based, concerning HIV and sexually transmitted diseases leaving non-communicable diseases as well as issues surrounding mental health untouched.

Nonetheless, in light of growing awareness regarding the LGBTQ+ community in the Indian subcontinent, some documentation concerning the challenges faced by the sexual minority in the country has surfaced. Findings note that the queer population experience social rejection and structural disregard in India due to which they suffer stigma, which impacts their physical, psychological, and sexual health (Saraff et al, 2022). The same study findings note other challenges in regard to self-blame, low self-worth, guilt, identity confusion and loneliness. The interpersonal factors include a lack of knowledge and sensitivity regarding this community and not being accepted by family members partners or peers. According to Warren Kealy-Bateman (2018) depression, anxiety, and suicide are far greater in LGBT individuals in India with the rates of suicidal ideation and attempts in the transgender group being extremely high.

Additionally, the emerging issues surrounding queer rights in India also play a significant role in India. Even with the decriminalization of homosexuality in 2018 and the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act being introduced in 2019, India still has some pressing issues when it comes to the queer community.

1.3 Cyberbullying in India
The definition of cyberbullying doesn't change much in the Indian context. Notable criminologist and the Founding Father of the academic discipline cyber criminology, Dr K Jaishankar, has defined cyberbullying as abuse/ harassment by teasing or insulting the victims' body shape, intellect, family background, dress sense, mother tongue, place of origin, attitude, race, caste, or class using modern telecommunication networks such as mobile phones and Internet in this book Cyber Bullying: Profile and Policy Guidelines. Similarly, the rampant negative impact that cyberbullying causes in the Indian context only makes the act worse.

According to a Times of India news article published in 2023, cyberbullying in India is growing and is steadily becoming a pressing concern for parents and educators alongside the victims who are suffering. The report stated some heavy statistics concerning the matter which noted India to have the highest rate of cyberbullying worldwide with over 85% of children reporting it. The poll inferred from the news had several other conclusions including the fact that Indian children reported cyberbullying someone twice as often as children worldwide. When globally 17% of children reported cyberbullying a stranger, Indian children reported 46%. When it came to people they know, the statistics for other nations was 21% compared to India which was at 48%. The predominant form of cyberbullying in the nation was noted to be spreading false rumours at 39% followed by being excluded from chats or groups at 35% with name-calling being the third one at 34%.

1.4 Theoretical Framework on Stress and Coping
Emotions and the feelings associated with them play a fundamental role in defining an individual's meaning-making process, perception, cognitive behaviour and more that amounts to producing the individual differences in human beings making each one unique and special in their own way. In the context of cyberbullying one of the primary emotional responses to the act is stress, followed by depression and anxiety (Ybarra and Mitchell, 2004). In today's world, the World Health Organisation defines stress as "a state of worry or mental tension caused by a difficult situation. stress is a natural human response that prompts us

to address challenges and threats in our lives."

Stress is a dynamic process which is best explained through Lazarus' Transactional Model of Stress giving rise to two conceptual lenses. One is cognitive appraisal (an individual's evaluation of the significance of what is happening for their well-being) and, the other is coping, (individuals' efforts in thought and action to manage specific demands) (Lazarus 1993). To put it together, the theory revolves around how an individual appraises a stressor which plays a quintessential role in determining how the individual copes with the stressor at hand.

The theory proposes that a stressor gives rise to a primary appraisal followed by a secondary appraisal and thereafter, a coping response is generated. During the primary appraisal, the individual determines if the stressor poses a threat. There are three components of primary appraisal: goal relevance, goal congruence and ego-involvement. Meanwhile, the secondary appraisal focuses on coping options. When the secondary appraisal occurs, the individual evaluates the coping strategies present that can be used to address the perceived threats. The process of reappraisal is continuous. During this time, one constantly understands the nature of the stressor as well as the strategies for coping at their disposal.

Coping is the cognitive and behavioural efforts made to master, tolerate, or reduce external and internal demands and conflicts among them (Folkman and Lazarus, 1980). This implies that the process of coping encompasses all the behavioural and cognitive reactions present in an individual. It is a simultaneous occurrence and the actions associated with it can be distinguished by their focus on different elements of a stressful encounter (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Lazarus and Folkman's appraisal literature divides coping into two categories: problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. These are also called active and passive coping styles, respectively (Jex, Bliese, Buzzell, & Primeau, 2001).

The term "minority stress" becomes essential while talking about stress in the queer community. The term first appeared in the book Minority Stress in Lesbian Women by Winn Kelly Brooks. The theory appeared later with the term 'Minority Stress Theory' being coined by Illan Meyer in 1995. Since then, the theoretical framework around this proposed model has been referenced in various queer community studies and is very inclusive of the LGBTQ+ population and the unique stressors they explore. Studies surrounding African Americans, women and various other minority communities have also used this theory.

The Minority Stress Model suggests that chronic exposure to the stigma that is both internalized and experienced by others, as well as experiences of discrimination and violence, creates cumulative psychological distress (Meyer, 1995). It focuses on the discrepancy and conflict that arises due to the difference in the values of the minority group and the dominant culture or society (Meyer, 2003). Following the theory, one can deduce that sexual minorities end up facing unique and hostile stressors because they belong to the minority population.

The model focuses on distal and proximal stressors. Distal stressors are experiences including but not limited to discrimination and victimization. On the other hand, proximal stressors are more internalized and a by-product of distal stressors in nature such as homonegativity. Due to their minority status, these two stressors have a heavy impact on the minority population and they may end up suffering from severe health impacts because of the exposure. Under this model, there are five types of minority stress: victimization, discrimination, heteronormative cultural norms, stereotyping and prejudice, and systematic bias.

Coping strategies are ways in which one can deal with or build a resilient side in content with the situation. According to the

American Psychological Association, a coping strategy can be defined as "an action, a series of actions, or a thought process used in meeting a stressful or unpleasant situation or in modifying one's reaction to such a situation." Taylor and Stanton in 2007 defined coping strategy as the "conscious volitional efforts to regulate emotion, thought, behaviour, physiology and the environment in response to stressful events or circumstances".

These strategies often involve a conscious and direct approach that is aimed at resolving the distress caused by the problems at hand. This works in contrast to ego defence mechanisms which are employed unconsciously by human beings when they perceive stressful and threatening scenarios around them. It is important to note that coping strategies are also different from coping mechanisms which can be both conscious as well as nonconscious and is used to decrease the anxiety or stress evoked during certain situation.

On a broad level, we can divide coping strategies into two categories: positive coping strategies and negative coping strategies. Positive coping is tackling problems directly and rationally whereas negative coping is ignoring, retreating from, or disputing the issue at hand (Jia et al., 2004).

When it comes to cyberbullying, researchers have found that coping strategies are perceived to be effective when it comes to stopping or decreasing the victimization caused by cyberbullying (Hensler-McGinnis, 2008; Macháčková, Černá, Ševčíková, Dědková, & Daneback, 2013). There is an influence in dealing with stigma, discrimination and aggressive behaviours through different pathways using coping strategies (Baillien et al., 2011). The research is done on coping with bias-based cyberbullying, which targets genuine or perceived sexual identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation (GLSEN et al., 2013; Fong, 2013; Rivers, 2013) yielded results that align with the objectives of the present study. Researchers have noted

that a more active coping strategy is used by the members of the LGBTQ+ community when it comes to cyberbullying researchers, with seeking support from the community being the most common one (Mishna et al. 2008). On the other hand, research by Greene et al. in 2014 revealed that passive and self-harming coping strategies were more prominent when it came to traditional forms of bullying faced by LGBTQ+ members. The trends in the coping strategies denote the active coping strategies to be more effective. Although the passive coping strategies are more favourable used by the said population.

1.5 The Current Study

In India, the decriminalisation of homosexuality occurred in 2018, yet there is a lack of social acceptance leading to a chronic crisis in the mental health status of the Indian LGBTQ population. There is a predominance of studies surrounding Western countries in this context. As there is a massive cultural and historical difference in the social acceptance of sexual minorities in India, there is a need for an exclusive study on the Indian Queer population. There isn't enough literature to support the understanding of the emotional, behavioural and other patterns in the queer population when it comes to facing cyberbullying, especially in the Indian context. Most importantly, this research will make for a worthy and unique contribution to the field of research and education by promoting inclusivity and raising awareness on a topic that has always been in the dark.

The present study aims to explore and probe the following two objectives:

1. The Cyberbullying Experience of the Indian Queer Population
2. The Various Coping Strategies Employed by the Indian Queer Population When Cyberbullied

MATERIALS & METHODS

The present study employed a two-step process to gather the desired data. The

sampling technique for the study was purposive sampling.

The first step of data collection was formulating a screening tool in through a Google form where people who fall under the inclusion criteria and are willing to partake in the study can list out their socio-demographic details for the researcher to reach out to them.

Through the use of the online forms, 10 individuals were contacted for the second round which included in-depth interviews. The interview consisted of semi-structured, open-ended questions. The mode of conduction was telephonic with each participant finishing the interview in approximately 30 minutes to 40 minutes.

The qualitative approach was applied to analyze and evaluate the data extracted from the participants. A conceptual qualitative content analysis was performed where the interviews were transcribed into verbatims and specific codes were generated.

During the analysis, content codes were generated for each domain. For the first objective 'to understand the cyberbullying faced by queer population', the three domains include a general overview of the cyberbullying experience, community-specific cyberbullying experience and personal view or experience on cyberbullying. For the second objective 'to examine the ways/styles of coping used by the queer population when cyberbullied', the three domains include an overview of the coping experience, general coping strategies and community-specific coping strategies. The codes generated from the interviews were defined along with dialogue-based examples. The frequency of the codes occurring was also marked to identify an emerging pattern of cyberbullying experience and the coping styles related to it in the queer population of India.

The study consisted of 10 people from the Indian population. The age range of the participants was between 21 to 27 years old. The ten individuals who were a part of this study constituted one 21-year-old who identified as genderfluid (A), one 21-year-old who identified as a non-binary woman (B), one 22-year-old who identified as a transwoman (C), one 22-year-old who identified as bisexual woman (D), one 24-year-old who identified as queer female (E), one 25-year-old who identified as a lesbian (F), one 26-year-old who identified as a queer man (G), one 26-year-old queer female (H), one 27-year-old identified as non-binary (I). The real initials of the participants have not been marked to maintain the anonymity of the participants as the initials serve as identifying information when put together with the mentioned age and gender. Alphabets (A to I) were assigned to the participants to help in the transcription of the required verbatims.

Inclusion Criteria
- Individuals 18 years of age and above.
- Individuals who belong to the Indian subcontinent.
- Individuals who have gone through at least one instance concerning cyberbullying.

Exclusion Criteria
- Individuals who publicly identify as a member of the queer community but are not out on social media.
- Individuals who don't consent or agree with the ethical principles of the research.

RESULT
For 6 aspects, a total of 20 codes were finalized through data collection which is summarized in **Table 1.** To understand the general cyberbullying experience faced by the Indian queer population, the codes devised were 'harassment', 'derogatory', 'hostile' and 'social media'. 2 codes were identified under the domain of community-specific cyberbullying, where members from within the community end up bullying other members in the cyberspace. The 2 codes are 'misgendering' and 'personal attack'. Concerning the participants' personal experience of cyberbullying, the codes 'common occurrence', 'virus' and

'name-calling' emerged. Under the overview of the coping experience, the information was coded as 'isolation', 'stress', 'anxiety', 'low self-esteem' and 'self-harm'. The general coping strategies gave birth to the codes 'report and block', 'support', 'legal action' and 'shaming'. When the individuals were cyberbullied by the members of the queer community, the finalized codes for the coping strategies were 'education' and 'retaliation'.

In analysing the cyberbullying experience faced by the queer population in India and the coping strategies predominately adopted by them, it was important to look into the repetitive verbal cues and content presented by the participants during the interviews. Delving into a critical evaluation of the interviews, it was found that there are various levels of frequency in which certain codes were used by the participants. The frequency is denoted on three levels. If the content code appeared in 80% to 90% of the interviews, it is coded as 'typical'. If the content code appeared in more than 50% of the interviews, it is coded as 'variant'. The term 'rare' is used to code words or phrases that appeared in less than 30% of the interviews but held subjective significance and were unique.

For codes 'harassment', 'derogatory', 'hostile', 'social media', personal attack', 'common occurrence', 'name-calling', anxiety', 'report and block', 'support', 'education' and 'retaliation' the frequency is typical. For codes 'misgendering', 'isolation', 'stress' and 'shaming', the frequency is variant. The rare content codes in this study are 'virus', 'low self-esteem', 'self-harm' and 'legal action'.

Table 1: Summary of Content Codes with Supporting Interview Statements

Aspect		Content Code	Example/Statement	Frequency
Overview of general cyberbullying experience	a)	Harassment	"Use of social media platforms to harass, intimidate, or harm individuals."	Typical
	b)	Derogatory	"Derogatory comments are usually passed when you don't conform to the society's idea of gender."	Typical
	c)	Hostile	"I feel that the hostility has increased on social media, so bullying is more frequent." "Intragroup discrimination creates hostility."	Typical
	d)	Social Media	"Facebook and Instagram are the most common social media places where I face and see cyberbullying."	Typical
Community specific Cyberbullying Experience	a)	Misgendering	"There is deliberate misgendering or the refusal to use the correct pronouns because I don't look the part."	Variant
	b)	Personal Attack	"When there is disagreement and conflicts among community members, personal attacks are done on social media."	Typical
Personal Experience with Cyberbullying	a)	Common Occurrence	"It is so common nowadays, happens to almost everyone I feel." "A common occurrence, happens to you be it for your gender, skin colour, anything…"	Typical
	b)	Virus	"Cyberbullying is a virus, a plague that has infected my life."	Rare
	c)	Name-Calling	"The most common cyberbullying nowadays is name-calling."	Typical
Overview of Coping Experience	a)	Isolation	"I like to withdraw from online and offline spaces due to cyberbullying."	Variant
	b)	Stress	"I feel anxious and stressed out."	Variant.
	c)	Anxiety	"There is this constant feeling of anxiety like I do not feel good, heart rate is also increased."	Typical
	d)	Low-Self Esteem	"Due to the harassment I sometimes question my worth."	Rare
	e)	Self-Harm	"I think of suicide, self-harm also at times."	Rare
Coping Strategies	a)	Report and Block	"Usually I change privacy settings. I also report the accounts that bully me. Blocking is also something that helps."	Typical
	b)	Support	"I reach out to friends. Some people I have seen putting screenshots and calling out the bullies, so that kind of support is also there."	Typical
	c)	Legal Action	"Once I got a restraining order but, that was the only time when cyberbullying got out of my control and I took legal action."	Rare
	d)	Shaming	"I want to call out and publicly shame them, in extreme cases, of course."	Variant
Community-specific coping strategies	a)	Education	"I try to educate people because honestly, it feels like a betrayal."	Typical
	b)	Retaliation	"Sometimes I consider bullying them back, like a retaliation."	Typical

DISCUSSION

The conceptual qualitative content analysis addressed the two objectives raised in this study. The first objective of this study was to understand the cyberbullying faced by the queer population in India. The analysis yielded 9 codes. 7 out of the 9 codes were typical in frequency and had been addressed by most of the participants during the interview. It included generalizing the cyberbullying experience that they faced as something which is 'common', 'derogatory' and 'hostile'. It involved 'harassment', 'name-calling', 'personal attack' and occurring mostly on 'social media'. Most of the terms were spoken with either negative connotations or were attributed to a negative experience.

Participants described their experiences in the following ways.
"...it is so hostile, just going on social media and finding yourself bullied just because you are different. People just want to harass people sometimes. There is nothing personal, just pure evil. Most of these cyberbullies don't even know us in real life… (H, 26 years old, queer female)."

Another participant (G, 26 years old, queer man) talked about their experience, stating,
"...name-calling, degrading, doxing, you have no idea the ways cyberbullying happens to a queer man. You don't confine to the definition of man the society wants you to be, you get called out in the most humiliating manner ever…."
Participants also shared their personal experiences in regard to cyberbullying. One of the participants (C, 22 years old, transwoman) candidly stated,
"I receive daily vulgar DMs and degrading messages, the messages by people clearly show that they see queer people as low-class people who don't have self-respect. For example, once I received a message in which a person asked for sexual favours in exchange for money, and when I said no, he casually said – "you are trans, you should like it, it's your work." Apart from that I also face daily unwanted video calls on Instagram, earlier it used to be Facebook Messenger calls because of this I have kept their notification off."
There was a variance noticed in regards to 'misgendering' that was specific to the cyberbullying faced by the participants from within the community.

For the question 'Do you feel there is cyberbullying within the queer community?', one participant (B, 21 years old, non-binary woman) answered,
"....it is more common than one would like to believe. It really angers me at times. The most bothersome is when misgendering happens. As a transwoman, I face it on an everyday basis. I know some non-binary women who also go through the same. It is upsetting because the community you are a part of, you represent is unable to accept you and ends up hurting you on social media by using wrong pronouns deliberately."

Another statement by C, 22 years old, transwoman, read,
"Yes, I haven't faced it much, but sometimes some queer people actually irritate me, it's just I go for safety first so haven't faced it, but the messages that I get feel suspicious at times."

Another response to the same question yielded a different answer. I, 27 years old, non-binary participant said,
"I don't think so, or I don't know. The LGBTQIA+ community has a strong front. I have not personally faced it. But I will not put it past certain people to bully other people. Especially on social media, you know, where you can get away with these things without any consequences."

One code that was rare but instrumental in the progress of the study was the use of the word 'virus'. Participants also used words like plague and poison to denote how being cyberbullied has personally impacted them. One verbatim that stood out, read,

"…..it is like a virus that has infected my life and I do not know how to move on from it. I don't know how to get rid of the things it has left me with…" (G, 26 years old, queer man).

The emerging pattern from the content codes to explore the first objective gives prominence to cyberbullying as a common phenomenon that the Indian queer population go through. The negative aspects of the experience vary from person to person. However, there were commonalities of the experiences being aggressive and menacing in nature. Additionally, responses also suggested that some participants experience cyberbullying from within the queer community while some do not.

The second objective of the study was to examine the ways of coping used by the queer population when cyberbullied. 11 codes were derived from the content analysis. 'Anxiety' was used as a code which was typical in every participant when they tried coping. The most typical coping strategies used by the participants were 'report and block', seeking 'support', 'education' and 'retaliation'.

Talking about the general coping experience, the answer to the question, "What do you do when you feel affected by a cyberbullying incident?" by a participant (A, 21 years old, genderfluid) was:
"Anxious. Anxiety kicks in the moment I see those demeaning comments on my socials. block and report. But that feeling of anxiety stays with me for the longest time."

The variant codes for this objective were found to be 'isolation', 'stress' and 'shaming'. Not all the participants devised these coping strategies but, the ones who used it said it to be effective for them.
D, 22 years old, bisexual woman stated,
"Going away from social media, isolating myself is the most helpful…"

H, 26 years old, queer female mentioned,

"….oh how I love to report and block people. These bullies don't deserve my attention honestly…"

An insightful learning came from few other participants.
"…I have two ways- either shame them or aim to make them learn. Both of these require dedication. You cannot choose to shame or educate half heartedly, whatever you do, needs to be done to the fullest…..try it out, you will see where I am coming from…" (G, 26 years old, queer man).

A different participant mentioned
"Once I got a restraining order but, that was the only time when cyberbullying got out of my control and I took legal action. But, it did not solve everything. Just helped in short term, like a quick fix…" (F, 25 years, lesbian).

A, 21 years old, genderfluid participant stated,
"I like going to my friends. They understand me. They support me. I am grateful for them."

There were three rare but crucial codes marked from the interviews: 'low self-esteem', 'self-harm' and 'legal action'. Only two participants stated these words during the interviews.
"….am I not worthy? I get that feeling. I get the urge to harm myself. It really affects my esteem. Some days I am unable to look myself in the eye…." (F, 25 years old, lesbian).

H, 26 years old, queer female opened up to share a detailed account of her coping journey when faced with cyberbullying. She said,
"I like to believe that hard times are for everyone. But it is sad that my hard time is because of what I am, who I truly feel. It is sad that people don't let people be who they are…..My coping involves going to friends, seeking support. However, it is not without the moments when I feel like I have lost

everything. Some comments, some humiliation leave such a deep mark on you that you have nothing left. The first moments are the hardest.......If I am being truthfully no coping is long term when the bullying is done for who you are and choose to be..."

The responses show that most of the coping strategies used by the Indian queer population to combat cyberbullying were positive in reducing the stress caused by the experience in their life. However, the coping strategies were mostly used to tackle the immediate adversity at hand and do not have a long-term benefit. Responses suggested that even with the use of effective and adaptive coping strategies, the emotional and cognitive harm the experiences cause stay with the individuals for a very long time.

The participants' words in the study suggested that the cyberbullying they face borders on harassing, hostile behaviour and is a common occurrence.

The study identified that the general cyberbullying experiences included receiving derogatory remarks on social media and name-calling. There were individual differences noted when it came to being cyberbullied by fellow queer community members. However, it was noted that misgendering and invasive personal attacks were made when it came to community-specific cyberbullying.

The findings surrounding coping strategies used by the Indian queer population when overcome with cyberbullying were noted to be both positive and negative. Under positive coping strategies support seeking, spreading awareness via education, reporting and blocking of the cyberbullies and reaching out for legal aid were most commonly seen. The negative coping strategies are identified based on the strategy's ability to either reduce the stressful effects of the experience without safeguarding the individual's emotional well-being or their indulgence in risky behavior. The results indicated that individuals retaliate and shame their cyber

bullies as a method of coping. Self-harm was also seen as a coping strategy during the course of this study.

An important finding of this study proposes that both the positive and the negative coping strategies are not able to resolve the issues surrounding cyberbullying as a whole. All the participants indicated that the anxiety and low self-esteem caused by cyberbullying constantly hampered their psychological well-being.

CONCLUSION
Envisioning a safer digital space requires collective efforts and progressive measures. Through this study we are able to raise awareness about cyberbullying, and coping strategies associated with it and focus on the queer population, promoting inclusivity. It gives recognition to the sexual minorities of the Indian population bridging a social gap. Along with promoting inclusivity, we also get an overview of cyberbullying the queer community faces as a whole and the coping strategies predominately used in the community in the Indian context.

Understanding the positive and negative impacts of the coping strategies allows us to make strategic intervention plans to help the Indian queer population cope with cyberbullying in a manner which helps them resolve the issue while also catering to their overall well-being. The results being consistent with the existing literature on the rise of cyberbullying incidents concerning the sexual minorities can help in creating an LGBTQIA+ friendly environment and implementing zero tolerance policies that can tackle cyberbullying. As the findings are qualitative in nature, there is a deeper understanding of the issue and can facilitate the foundation of a legal framework dedicated to cyberbullying with sub-sections on helping the queer population in India.

The study comes with its own set of strengths and limitations. There is a visible goodness of fit between the research topic, the set of participants involved and the methodology involving qualitative analysis when it comes to the present study. Due to

the qualitative approach adopted by the study, the data obtained is enriching and can be inspected in detail. The use of semi-structured, open-ended questions with the flexibility of using probing questions when necessary has provided rich data that has benefited the quality of the study. Moreover, the interpersonal dynamic established and interview skills used for the study were individualized resulting in a generous collection of data. Lastly, the study investigates an area in the field of mental health which hasn't been explored much. It explores the impact of cyberbullying on the Indian queer community and identifies an emerging pattern used by the members of the community when it comes to their desired coping strategies. With a sample size of only 10, the generalizability of the data collected is limited although there is consistency in the findings. The participants' list consisted only one queer man, one lesbian and one genderfluid individual, there was a lack of representation that limits the findings to a certain extent. There is restricted external and internal validity of the questionnaire used to derive the data.

The current study can be interpreted as one of the initial steps taken towards understanding cyberbullying and associated coping strategies from the lens of the Indian queer population. However, due to the small sample size, the results of this study should be treated with caution. There is also a lack of socio-demographic details concerning the participants involved in the study as only the participant's ages and gender were noted. Further research on this area can include a larger sample size with a more detailed socio-demographic intake to understand how demographics play a role in cyberbullying being experienced by members of the LGBTQIA+ and how they cope with it.

Future research can be done in the field to understand where the coping strategies used by the queer population in India when faced with cyberbullying come from. The longevity and long-term impact of the coping strategies can be studied in a more detailed manner.

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