

China's Conservatism and Its Impact on LGBT+ Teenagers

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Abstract: This research paper examines China's conservatism and its impact on LGBT+ teenagers, a group facing significant challenges due to the conservative attitudes towards LGBT+. The research analyzed the predicaments experienced by LGBT+ youths in China, encompassing instances of prejudice, disconnection from society, and familial disapproval. Furthermore, this study thoroughly examined the difficulties that LGBT+ teenagers in China confront, including discriminatory attitudes, social exclusion, and family disapproval. Additionally, the research delineated prospective measures for augmenting the mental health and general well-being of LGBT+ adolescents, such as family-focused interventions and community-based support initiatives. The study also provides practical suggestions for better policies and interventions to address their health and well-being. Overall, this investigation advances the understanding of the challenges faced by LGBT+ teenagers in China and underscores the importance of offering them adequate support and resources to enhance their quality of life.

Keywords: LGBT+, Teenagers, Mental health, Family-focused interventions

1. Introduction

China's conservatism stems from its deeply ingrained cultural traditions prioritizing conformity, collectivism, and social harmony [1]. The country's political system and media censorship limit public discourse and awareness about LGBT issues. Chinese society still holds conservative views towards non-heterosexual orientations, and there are no legal provisions to protect LGBT+ individuals from discrimination. Despite some progress, such as the decriminalization of homosexuality in 1997 and the removal of it from the list of mental illnesses in 2001, there is still a long way to go before the LGBT+ community in China can enjoy the same level of legal protection and societal acceptance as in some Western nations.

During the crucial stage of identity exploration and seeking a sense of belonging, discrimination and stigma can devastate LGBT+ teenagers. The adverse impact of such prejudice can impede their emotional and social growth, resulting in heightened anxiety, depression, and even suicidal thoughts [2]. Neglecting the unique predicaments faced by LGBT+ teenagers perpetuates social inequality and impedes progress toward a more equitable and accepting society.

Despite previous research examining LGBT behavior among adolescents, the focus has primarily centered on aspects like smoking, alcohol consumption, and school environment, with little attention devoted to investigating the distinct encounters of LGBT+ youth within these settings [3]. This paper aims to examine the LGBT of Chinese adolescents from the perspective of family and social influence.

This study seeks to advocate for enhanced social acceptance and equitable legal protection for the LGBT+ community in China. Ultimately, the objective is for this research to facilitate the creation of a more comprehensive and encouraging society that is inclusive of all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

2. Family Influences on LGBT+ Teenagers in China

The LGBT community in China has faced long-standing oppression and social discrimination, resulting in inequitable treatment regarding education, employment, and familial relationships. Studies indicate that a considerable proportion (42%) of Chinese LGBT+ youth experience family rejection after disclosing their sexual orientation, which can lead to depression and anxiety [2, 4]. This is likely due to traditional family values in China, which can result in negative attitudes toward LGBT+ adolescents. As a result, many LGBT+ teenagers in China struggle with gaining acceptance from their families regarding their sexual orientation or gender identity.

According to traditional Chinese views, the issue of homosexuality is deeply influenced by cultural and religious beliefs. The significance of family continuity, linked with filial piety, and the promotion of heterosexual marriage as a vital societal norm is stressed in China. These beliefs are deeply ingrained and transmitted through generations [1]. Chinese cultural and religious beliefs have always emphasized the importance of family continuity, filial piety, and heterosexual marriage as crucial societal norms [1]. Nevertheless, these convictions may not be compatible with homosexuality, leading to stigmatization and discrimination against gay men in Chinese society [2, 5]. The stigmatization of homosexuality in China is influenced by various factors, including social status and relationships, attitudes toward family values, perceptions of immorality and abnormality, and gender stereotypes of masculinity [6]. These traditional beliefs shape attitudes towards homosexuality within Chinese families, which may result in rejecting LGBT+ children [6].

Family acceptance or rejection can significantly impact the mental health of LGBT+ teenagers in China. For example, a study conducted by Chen et al. found a significant association between family rejection and elevated levels of depression and anxiety among Chinese adolescents who identify as sexual and gender minorities [4]. The research surveyed 611 Chinese LGBT+ youth and identified family rejection as a crucial predictor of symptoms of depression and anxiety among these individuals.

Indeed, the importance of family acceptance cannot be overstated, especially when promoting positive mental health outcomes for LGBT+ teenagers in China. Adolescence is a critical period in which individuals develop their sense of self and form their identities. Self-discovery and coming out can be extraordinarily challenging and anxiety-inducing experiences for LGBT+ teenagers. For these youth, family acceptance is critical in providing a sense of safety and security as they navigate this difficult journey. Studies have indicated that family acceptance can protect against depression and anxiety in LGBT+ teenagers [7]. In the face of prevalent stigma and discrimination against the LGBT+ community in many aspects of Chinese society [8], family support and acceptance can help counteract such prejudice's adverse effects. By creating a safe and welcoming environment, families can promote the mental health and well-being of their LGBT+ children, enabling them to flourish and reach their full potential.

Indeed, research has shown that interventions promoting family acceptance can significantly impact the mental health outcomes of LGBT+ individuals in China. One such intervention is cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), which effectively reduces family rejection and improves the mental health outcomes of Chinese LGBT+ individuals, according to a study by Li et al. (2017). According to the research, cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) can be crucial in promoting positive attitudes toward homosexuality and fostering a supportive home environment for LGBT+ individuals and their families [2]. Along with CBT, family-based interventions like family therapy and support groups for parents of LGBT+, teenagers are effective in promoting family acceptance and decreasing

family rejection of LGBT+ individuals in China. These interventions can equip families with the necessary resources and support to comprehend and accept their LGBT+ children, leading to a more welcoming and supportive family environment [9].

3. Social Influences on LGBT+ Teenagers in China

Chinese society is partly due to the strong presence of traditional Confucian ideology, which places particular value on family obligation (getting married and producing offspring to maintain the family's bloodline). Many individuals who self-identify as LGB in China keep their sexual orientation a secret to avoid discrimination and victimization. The marginalization and lack of acceptance of LGB individuals in China may have contributed to the recent rise in HIV rates among gay men, exacerbating this population's already challenging circumstances. Thus, it is crucial to provide adequate support and resources for Chinese sexual and gender minority adolescents who encounter significant hurdles in their daily lives. Addressing the underlying causes of their mental health concerns can lead to a better quality of life for these individuals, promoting happiness, wellness, and fulfillment. This highlights the pressing need for action to improve the social and cultural conditions for LGB individuals in China [4].

Firstly, Chinese people are very conservative toward sex and sexual orientation. Even well-educated college students in China view homosexuality as psychologically abnormal or immoral. Secondly, due to the high level of collectivism in Chinese society, individuals are closely connected to their families and community. As a result, being an LGB person may be viewed as bringing disgrace and stigma to the family's reputation and social standing, according to research [3].

According to a study conducted by Chen et al. (2017), Compared to their heterosexual counterparts, sexual and gender minority adolescents in China often experience greater levels of social isolation, leading to heightened feelings of loneliness and compounding the existing mental health challenges already faced by LGBT+ teenagers in the country [4]. Social isolation can occur due to various factors, including stigma, discrimination, and lack of social support. Social isolation may be a common experience for LGB individuals in China, stemming from a fear of being rejected or discriminated against by family, friends, and community members who hold negative attitudes towards homosexuality. This sense of isolation can contribute to feelings of loneliness and worsen the already poor mental health outcomes frequently observed among LGBT+ teenagers in China.

The stigma associated with sexual orientation and HIV/AIDS can severely affect LGB individuals, including discrimination, exclusion, and violence. This stigma can also lead to internalized homophobia, shame, and low self-esteem, which can further exacerbate the already poor mental health outcomes experienced by this population [3]. Due to societal stigma, many sexual minorities hide their identity to avoid discrimination and stigmatization of their family. However, the concealment of sexual identity can cause psychological pressure. Chinese LGB students face a range of stressors that can contribute to poor mental health outcomes. Firstly, they may experience isolation, verbal and physical threats, and other forms of bullying from their peers due to their sexual orientation. Secondly, traditional Confucian values emphasizing the importance of marriage and procreation to maintain the family bloodline are deeply ingrained in Chinese culture, leading to intolerance towards sexual minorities who do not conform to these norms. Finally, pressure from society, family, and school to conform to these traditional values can create additional stress and negatively impact the mental health of LGB students.

4. Challenges Faced by LGBT+ Teenagers in China

Acknowledging that LGBT+ teenagers in China confront social isolation, discrimination, and the absence of legal protections is crucial. The lack of laws that forbid discrimination based on sexual

orientation or gender identity makes these individuals more susceptible and restricts their access to resources and support. This legal vacuum exacerbates their already challenging circumstances and can intensify feelings of hopelessness and despair, further harming their mental health.

It is essential to recognize that discrimination, social isolation, and family rejection significantly contribute to the unfavorable mental health outcomes observed in LGBT+ teenagers in China. Generally, social attitudes towards LGBT+ individuals are conservative, resulting in their frequent exposure to discrimination, bullying, and social isolation [1]. Research has substantiated that these experiences may lead to depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts among Chinese sexual and gender minority adolescents [4].

LGBT+ teenagers in China face challenges that can negatively impact their mental health and overall well-being. One of the most significant challenges is social isolation, which can be exacerbated by peer discrimination and bullying. Studies have found that heterosexual teenagers in China have more social connections than their LGBT+ peers, indicating that LGBT+ teenagers are more likely to experience social isolation, loneliness, and poor mental health outcomes due to their marginalized status in society [4].

Another challenge faced by LGBT+ teenagers in China is family rejection. Traditional Chinese views on homosexuality prioritize family continuity, filial piety, and heterosexual marriage as essential societal norms. As a result, many Chinese families may struggle to accept their LGBT+ children, leading to rejection or even disownment in some cases [4]. The impact of family acceptance or rejection on the mental health of LGBT+ teenagers cannot be overstated. Research has demonstrated that family acceptance plays a critical role in the mental health outcomes of LGBT+ teenagers. Family rejection is linked to increased risks of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. In contrast, families supporting and accepting their LGBT+ children can promote positive mental health outcomes and foster resilience [7,8].

In addition to these social challenges, LGBT+ teenagers in China face legal barriers that limit their access to resources and support. In China, LGBT+ individuals do not enjoy the same legal rights and protections as their heterosexual counterparts due to the lack of recognition of same-sex marriage. This exclusion from legal protection can lead to feelings of marginalization and contribute to poor mental health outcomes. Additionally, the absence of anti-discrimination laws aimed at protecting LGBT+ individuals in China leaves them vulnerable to discrimination and harassment in various areas of their lives [10].

The mental health challenges experienced by Chinese LGBT+ teenagers can be attributed, in part, to the lack of societal support and legal protection they receive, which can exacerbate feelings of stigmatization and discrimination [8]. Interventions to promote social inclusion and reduce stigma and discrimination are essential in supporting the mental health and well-being of Chinese LGBT+ youth. Policy recommendations to address these challenges include implementing anti-discrimination laws, offering comprehensive sex education that covers LGBT+ issues, and funding community support programs tailored to the needs of LGBT+ youth [10]. Such interventions can help to reduce legal barriers, promote social inclusion, and support the mental health and well-being of LGBT+ individuals in China.

5. Strategies for Supporting LGBT+ Teenagers in China

Interventions that support the families of LGBT+ teenagers provide community support programs, and promote comprehensive sex education can help improve the mental health and well-being of Chinese LGBT+ youth. These interventions can work to reduce the stigma and discrimination faced by LGBT+ individuals in China and promote a more inclusive and accepting society [8]. Such interventions can help families understand and get their LGBT+ children, fostering a more supportive and nurturing environment.

Schools in China have an essential role to play in the experiences of LGBT+ teenagers. However, many schools lack policies that protect these students from bullying and discrimination [4]. Inadequate sex education that ignores LGBT+ issues also adds to the challenges faced by these teenagers.

To address these challenges, education and awareness initiatives can play a critical role in reducing stigma and discrimination against LGBT+ individuals in China. These initiatives can increase public knowledge about LGBT+ issues and promote empathy and understanding [9].

Community support programs, such as LGBT+ youth centers and peer support networks, can provide a safe and supportive environment for LGBT+ teenagers in China [10]. These programs can help reduce social isolation and promote mental health and belonging among LGBT+ youth.

To improve the lives of LGBT+ teenagers in China, policy recommendations include implementing anti-discrimination laws, providing comprehensive sex education that includes LGBT+ issues, and funding community support programs designed explicitly for LGBT+ youth.

6. Conclusion

This paper discusses the challenges faced by LGBT+ teenagers in China, focusing on the influence of family and society. Traditional family values in China, emphasizing family continuity and filial piety, can result in negative attitudes towards LGBT+ adolescents. Family rejection due to these values can lead to depression and anxiety in LGBT+ teenagers, highlighting the importance of family acceptance for positive mental health outcomes. Social influences, including the strong presence of traditional Confucian ideology and societal discrimination, can lead to marginalization and lack of acceptance of LGBT+ individuals in China. The paper suggests interventions, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy and family-based interventions, to promote family acceptance and decrease family rejection. Ultimately, creating a more comprehensive and inclusive society that accepts all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, is essential for progress towards a more equitable and accepting society in China. Based on the paper, future research can explore the effectiveness of specific interventions mentioned, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy and family-based interventions, in promoting family acceptance and decreasing family rejection of LGBT+ teenagers in China. Additionally, research can delve deeper into the impact of societal discrimination and traditional Confucian ideology on the mental health and well-being of LGBT+ individuals in China, and propose strategies to mitigate their negative effects.

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