



Impacts of Age Discrimination on
OLDER LGBTI PERSONS
in Nepal



Lesbian, gay, bisexual, third gender/transgender and intersex (LGBTI) older people in Nepal have experienced lifelong discrimination that encompasses their physical appearance which includes gender expression, family status, and negative perceptions about their health conditions and contribution to society. Most LGBTI elders have limited or no formal schooling. They face employment discrimination, have worked underpaid jobs usually in the informal sector, and continue struggling with economic insecurity. Most LGBTI elders have limited or no access to senior citizen benefits. Many LGBTI elders are in heterosexual marriages, hide their sexual orientation and gender identity, and struggle with family non-acceptance and often also violence. Many older people in Nepal who are LGBTI are invisible under the law.

In Nepal, cultural and social traditions emphasize respecting and caring for elders, but discrimination based

on age, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) makes it challenging for older LGBTI persons to find a supportive community. These challenges can lead to lower self-esteem, anxiety and depression, thereby making it challenging for LGBTI elders to participate in social activities and have meaningful relationships.

The findings in this fact sheet¹ are based on a 2022 landscape survey² conducted in person and on the phone with 100 LGBTI people in Nepal, ages 50 to 75, living in Province 1, Province 2, Bagmati Province, Gandaki Province, Lumbini Province and Sudurpaschim Province. Focus groups were also convened in the provinces with 31 LGBTI people, ages 50 to 70.

The information below presents a landscape view of the lives of LGBTI elders in Nepal. Percentages are either rounded up or down to the nearest percent.

SUMMARY OVERVIEW



56%

lived in urban areas



44%

lived in rural areas



50%

were ages 50 to 54

41%

were ages 55 to 69

9%

were ages 70 to 75



68%

self-identified as transwomen/ third gender



9%

self-identified as transmen/ third gender



83%

were assigned male at birth



16%

were assigned female at birth



1%

were intersex



77%

were from indigenous communities, specifically, Janajati and Madhesi castes



8%

self-identified as lesbians



9%

self-identified as bisexuals



88%

had Nepali citizenship

8%

did not have Nepali citizenship

4%

did not respond

22%

were from Brahmin, Chhetri, Thakhuri, and Dalit castes, and from the Nepali Muslim community

1%

did not identify their caste or ethnicity



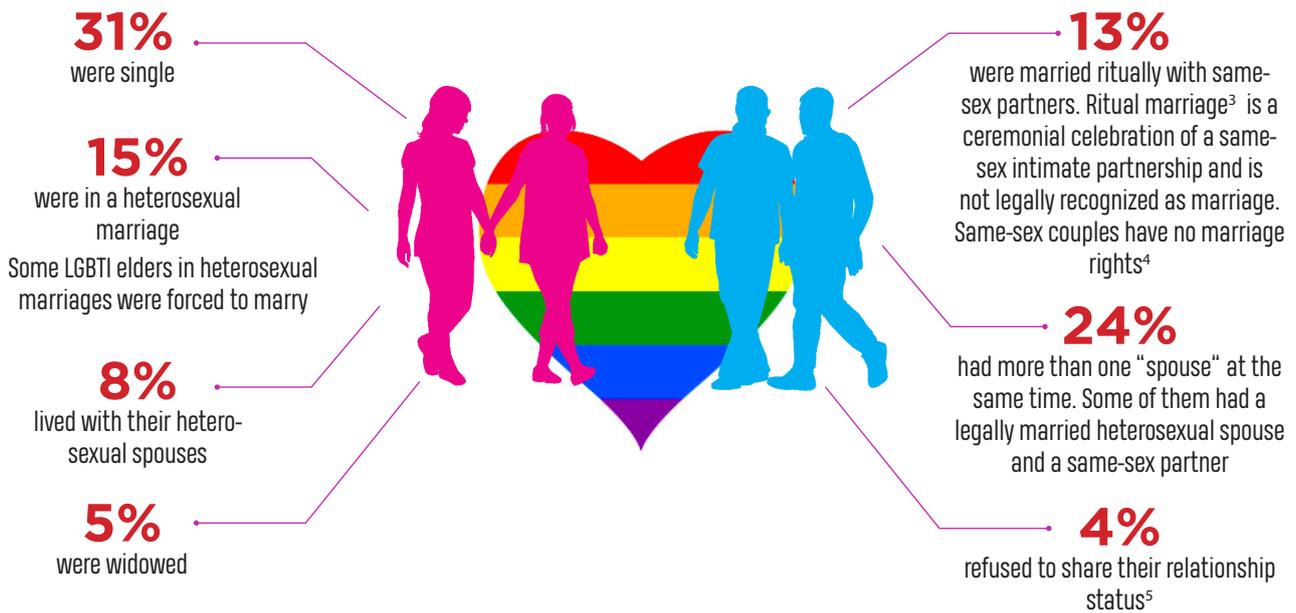
6%

self-identified as gay

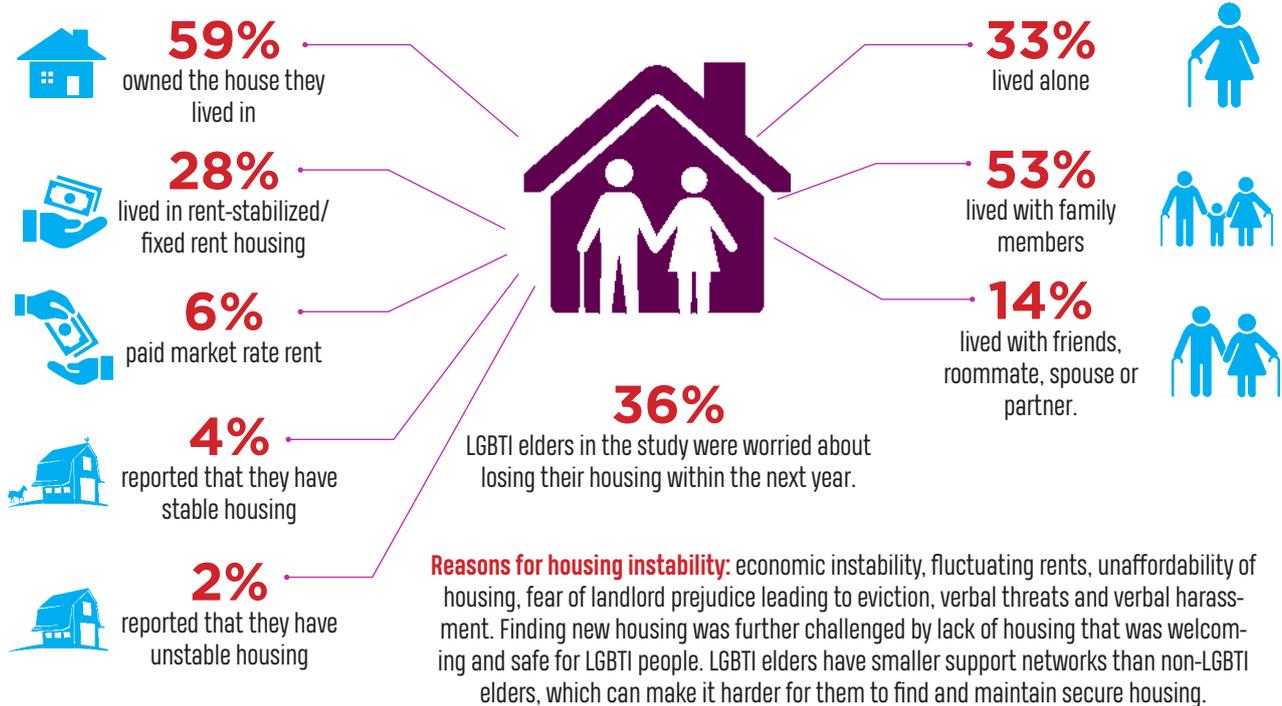
1. Sarita K.C., Bimala Gurung, Grace Poore, "Impacts of Age Discrimination on Older LGBTI Persons in Nepal," [Fact Sheet] May 2023.
2. The survey was conducted by Mitini Nepal with assistance from Outright International and SAGE USA for the LGBTI Elders Advancing Project.

RELATIONSHIP STATUS OF LGBTI ELDERS

In Nepal, marriage is legally and socially recognized as a union between two individuals of opposite sexes or genders (heterosexual marriage). Findings below show diverse relationship status.

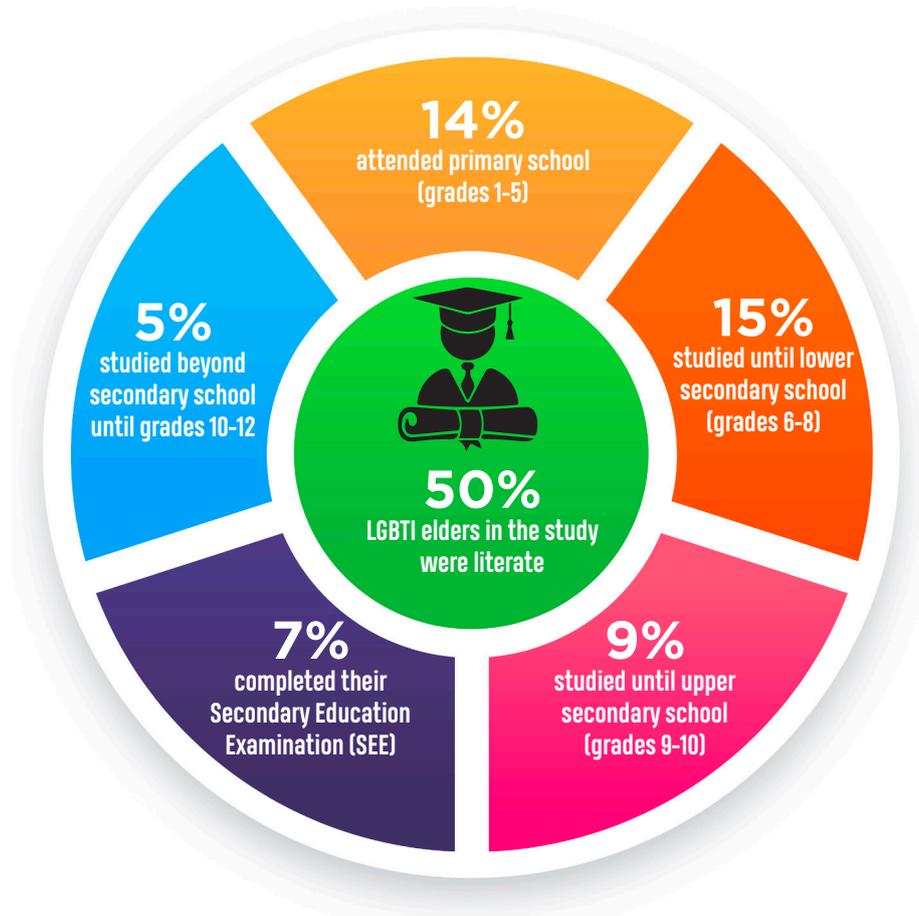


LIVING ARRANGEMENTS & HOUSING FOR LGBTI ELDERS



- Some religious and cultural groups in Nepal perform ritual marriages for same sex couples as a way of recognizing and celebrating their love and commitment. But ritual marriage is not legally recognized and same sex couples in a ritual marriage have no valid claims to marital rights under the law.
- Although homosexuality was decriminalized in Nepal in 2007 and same sex couples were allowed to cohabit in 2012, same sex marriage is still not recognized under the law and same sex couples have no marital rights. In March 2023, the Supreme Court acknowledged that Nepal's definition of marriage discriminated against gender and sexual minorities. It directed the federal government to initiate legislation that recognized the identity and rights of gender and sexual minorities, including the right to marry.
- In Nepal, polygamy is a criminal offense punishable by law. Some religious and ethnic minority groups such as Muslim and Tharu are exempt from the polygamy law.

EDUCATION & LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR LGBTI ELDERS



INCOME GENERATION & FINANCIAL STATUS OF LGBTI ELDERS

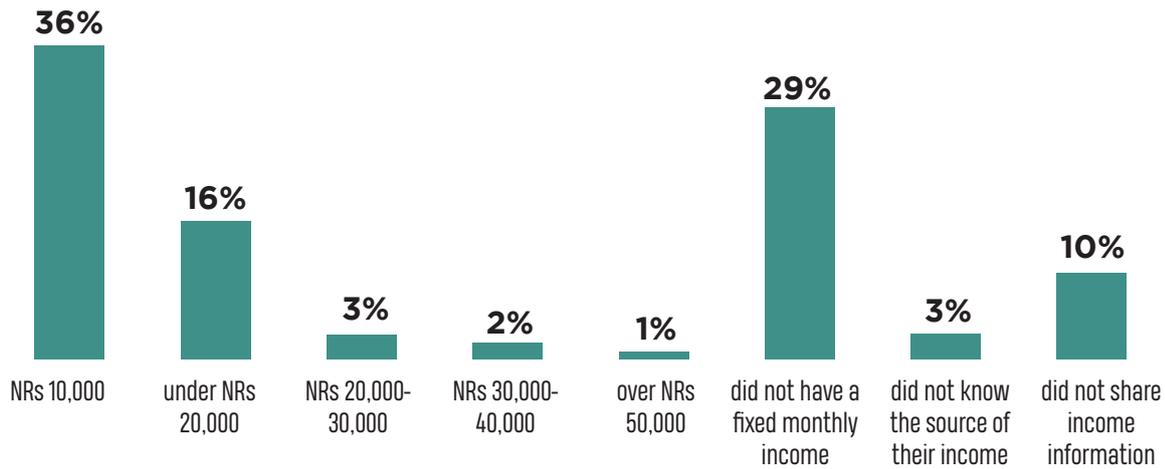


- **23%** had paid full-time employment
- **51%** had paid part-time employment
- **13%** who had full-time employment were doing full-time sex work and were between 50 to 60 years in age

Most LGBTI elders worked in the informal labor sector, doing agriculture work, construction site labor, household/domestic work, gardening, and sales, including working in teashops, betelnut shops, cosmetics shops, and street vending. They also worked as singers and dancers for special occasions such as birthday parties, weddings and Bratabandha (religious Hindu ceremony).

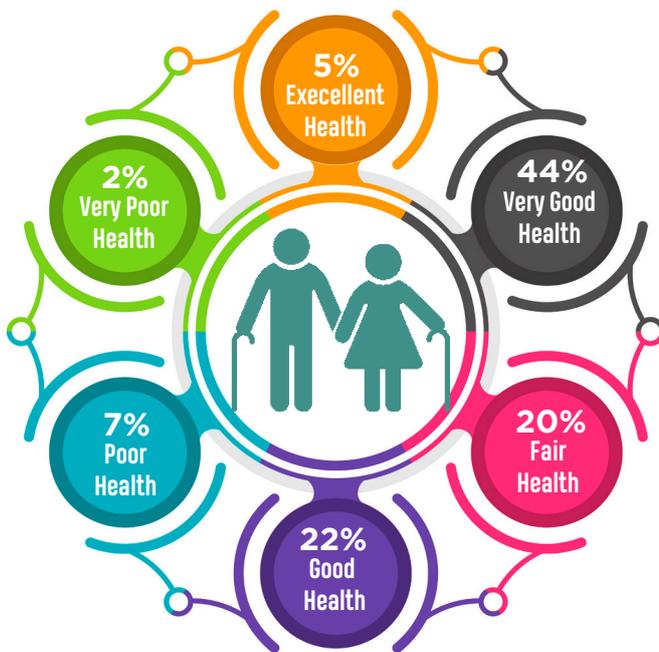
- **18%** depended on financial support from same-sex partners, friends, and other LGBTI community members
- **6%** lived on their savings
- **1%** received a senior citizen allowance
- **1%** received a pension
- LGBTI elders also relied for food on small farms owned by their families

Monthly income levels of LGBTI elders varied widely.⁶

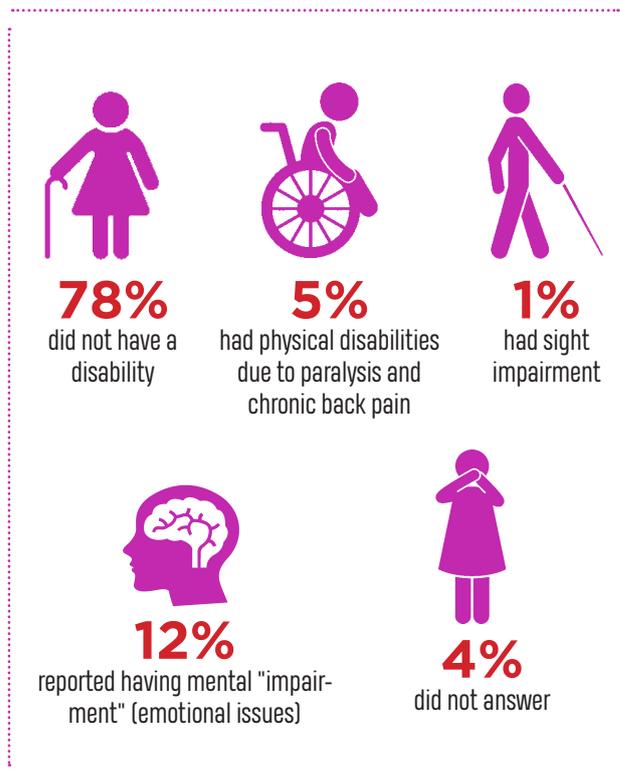


WELL-BEING & HEALTH OF LGBTI ELDERS

Survey and interview respondents were asked to select all options that applied to their well-being and health.

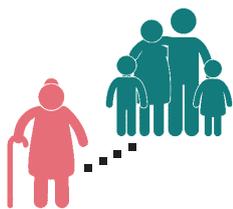


POOR PHYSICAL HEALTH was attributed to diabetes, hypertension, lack of nutrition, lack of exercise, lack of sleep, falls, reduced immunity, and lack of access to health services.



6. The present exchange rate is about 132 Nepali Rupees for one US dollar.

Many LGBTI elders in the study curtailed their social activities with family and friends due to emotional and mental health issues:



33%
slightly limited their social activities for up to four weeks

13%
moderately limited their social activities for up to four weeks

9%
extremely limited their social activities for up to four weeks

The key emotional support systems for LGBTI elders were:



35%
friends

23%
heterosexual spouses or same sex partners

14%
other family members

15%
neighbors

Other sources of emotional support for LGBTI elders included:



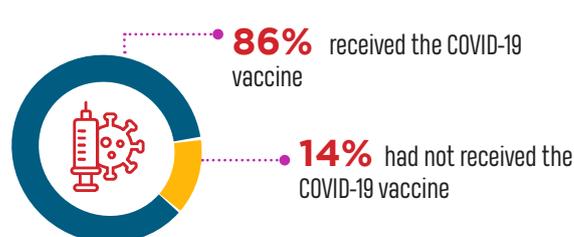
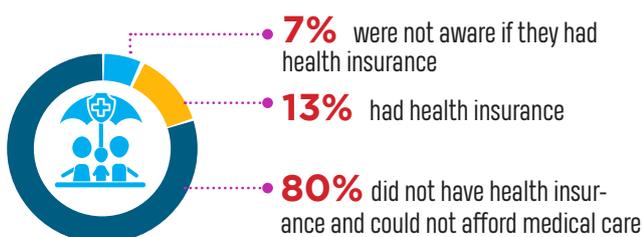
7%
spiritual/religious community

1%
mental health counselors, social workers or therapists

3%
online communities

1%
LGBTI supportive community centers or senior centers

BARRIERS TO HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES FOR LGBTI ELDERS



Reasons included: Lack of awareness about vaccination eligibility, limited availability of vaccine in their provinces, fear of discrimination for being LGBTI, lack of information about vaccine safety and efficacy, impaired mobility due to physical disability, pre-existing health conditions, mobility issues (e.g., difficulty walking long distances), lack of free or low fare public transport, and inability to afford private transport for those on fixed incomes.



50%
had difficulty accessing social services and/or benefits during the COVID pandemic from the central government, provincial government, or NGOs.



36%
were denied treatment in a healthcare setting because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.



• **14%** received a pension and social security allowance or have public service employment

• **86%** did not receive state benefits, such as single woman allowance, social security allowance, microfinance assistance for marginalized groups, safe senior housing, medical insurance and senior citizen transportation discount services. They also did not receive ageing services from NGOs or the private sector (religious organizations).



25%
experienced disrespectful treatment and unfriendly verbal interactions from health and social service providers because of their trans/third gender identity and gender expression. Other discriminatory experiences with health and social service providers were attributed to elders' sexual orientation, class, or ethnicity.

DISCRIMINATION & VIOLENCE EXPERIENCED BY LGBTI ELDERS



WHAT DO LGBTI ELDERS IN NEPAL WANT?

“The Constitution of our country should provide equal rights and protections to all individuals, including gender and sexual minorities, and it is the state's duty to ensure these rights are effectively implemented and upheld.”

Manoranjan Kumar Vaidya

64, Gender-Non-Conforming, Mitini Elders Advisory Committee, Bagmati Province

“There are specific issues that affect LGBTI elders and it is imperative that we work towards creating new laws that directly address their unique needs... that our laws and policies are enforced in a meaningful way. [For this to happen] the state must recognize the political participation of LGBTI elders.”

Shila Gurung

54, transman, Mitini Elders Advisory Committee, Lumbini Province

“The state must recognize and value the contributions of our LGBTI elders and allocate a budget for their advancement. We cannot leave our elders behind, and we must ensure that they receive the support and resources they need to live a fulfilling life.”

Kim Bahadur Gurung

50, transwoman, Gandaki Province



“Organizations that work for elders must ensure that LGBTI elders have access to the same rights, protections, and services as their non-LGBTI elders. Training them can help create a more inclusive and equitable world for all.”

Govinda Chaudhary

68, transwoman, Madhesh Province

“I am reminded every day that society values the relationship status of cis-hetero women over my own. I am left to navigate this world alone without any government support or recognition of the loss of my partner of over 30 years. I am a single woman [now] but since state has not legally recognized same-sex marriage, I am deprived of single woman allowance even after my partner's demise.”

Sukmaya Magar

52, lesbian, Bagmati Province

MITINI NEPAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Nepal's central government must mainstream gender sensitive approaches to address LGBTI elder issues including LGBTI friendly infrastructure, spaces, and economic opportunities.
- Nepal's provincial governments must address urgent, immediate needs of LGBTI elders and develop programs that support LGBTI elders to live dignified lives. LGBTI elders must be consulted and involved in the design of these programs.
- Nepal's parliamentarians and legislators must stipulate regulations for enforcing existing laws that protect LGBTI rights and for LGBTI inclusive implementation of social security programs.
- Nepal's NGOs for senior citizens must ensure that LGBTI elders are provided with inclusive and culturally sensitive services and support to address their unique needs and challenges.
- Nepal's women's rights activists and National Women's Commission must advocate for inclusive policies and programs that address the unique challenges faced by LGBTI elders, and promote their access to healthcare, housing, and social services.
- Nepal's civil society, NGOs, and relevant government agencies must monitor and assess whether LGBTI elders are able to exercise their right to food, right to health services, right to information, and right to non-discrimination on grounds of their gender and sexual minority status.
- Nepal's media must increase positive coverage of LGBTI elders, increase their visibility, and challenge stereotypes about LGBTI older people.
- Nepal's LGBTI groups and organizations must promote better understanding and acceptance of older people and elders in LGBTI communities.
- Nepal's stakeholders must ensure that LGBTI elders are included in the agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), included in development of SDG programs, and can access SDG program benefits, including but not limited to programs that address needs of Nepal's marginalized communities.



For more information, contact:

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