

**TITLE: ACCEPTANCE OF HOMOSEXUALITY AMONG
HINDUSTANI IN THE NETHERLANDS**

Topic: Modes of integration

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ABSTRACT

In this study we explored the factors that influence the social acceptance of homosexuality among Hindustani in the Netherlands. The study includes factors on individual, family and community level.

The used methodology are literature study and interviews with key informers and respondents. The respondents are homosexual men and women, all are Surinamese Hindustani living in the Netherlands.

The results show that the social acceptance of homosexuality is not a religious matter among Hindustani, but a cultural matter related to concepts of honour and status within the own community. Acceptance within the family partly depends on the success accumulation of the homosexual person and his/her nuclear family. These successes are associated with honour and status within the broader community. Acceptance of homosexual relatives is more probable in nuclear families that enjoy status. Hence acceptance is negotiable.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last century the Netherlands developed into a country that attaches great importance to self-determination. In 2001 the Netherlands became the first country in the world where civil marriage was legalized for homosexuals (Mepschen, 2009). With a gay negativity of 9% in 2010 the Netherlands is the country with the most positive attitude towards homosexuality within Europe

(Kuyper et al., 2013; Keuzenkamp, 2010). Closer analysis however shows that ethnic minorities are not well represented in the study of the abovementioned percentage of gay negativity (Huijnk, 2014; Keuzenkamp, 2010). Huijnck (2014) gives more insight in the acceptance of homosexuality among several ethnic groups. According to him half of the Turkish and Moroccan Dutch believe that homosexuality is wrong and three quarters would have problems accepting a gay child. This contrasts with the native Dutch, among who one in ten finds homosexuality wrong and one in six would have problems accepting a gay child.

Surinamese Hindustani Dutch take an intermediate position (Huijnk & Dagevos 2012). Huijnk (2014) concludes that two in five Hindustani would have problems accepting a gay child. Regardless of the relatively high acceptance, Keuzenkamp (2010) notes that it's not easy for Hindustani to share a homosexual orientation within their community. Fact remains that the acceptance of homosexuality among Hindustani is significantly higher than among Turkish and Moroccan Dutch. An interesting question is what positively influences the acceptance of homosexuality among the Hindustani population.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The research questions of this study is: **Which factors influence social acceptance of homosexuality among Hindustani in the Netherlands positively?**

This study is limited to the Surinamese Hindustani – from this point called Hindustani - who form the largest group of Hindustani in the Netherlands. The migration history and related upbringing context distinguish this group from other Hindustani in the Netherlands.¹

¹ Hindustani differ from one another by their socialization in different countries. The Surinamese Hindustani are the largest Hindustani group in the Netherlands. Their exact number is estimated at 125,648 (36% of the Surinamese of the first and the second generation in 2016) (Choenni & Harmsen, 2007).

METHODS

We used three research methods: literature study, interviews with key informants and biographic interviews with homosexuals. The literature study focused on the upbringing, success definitions and consequences of standard deviation.

The 12 key informants have professional experience with Hindustani homosexuals. They provided additional information on the broader context of the upbringing and honour based habits among Hindustani. Interviews with key informants also gave a basis for the topic list for the interviews with respondents and for the coding of the interviews.

The 18 respondents (10 men and 8 women) are Hindustani homosexuals living in the Netherlands. The biographic interviews were conducted by two researchers. The duration of the interviews varied from one hour to eight hours. The locations range from the living room of the respondent's home to an office or a (street) restaurant, depending on the preference of the respondents.

The interviews with the key informers and respondents were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Two researchers coded the transcriptions and made the analyses in Atlas-Ti7.

LITERATURE ON THE CONTEXT OF THE UPBRINGING

After migration, the upbringing in Hindustani families in the Netherlands largely took place in 'modified extended families' in which nuclear families live geographically separate, but have frequent and intensive contact (Nanhoe, 2012; Brouwer et al., 1992). The main upbringing goals in Hindustani families are a marriage and high performances regarding education and job positions (Nanhoe, 2012). These central objectives in the upbringing are associated with an increase in status within the own community (Nanhoe, 2012; De Koning & Bartels, 2005). Marriage is a social duty for children, but also for parents (Nanhoe et al, 2016; De Koning & Bartels, 2005). Parents and other relatives therefore anticipate on the marriageable age, for example by match making (Nanhoe et al., 2016).

Educational purposes are a legitimate reason to delay a marriage for both boys and girls. But with the oncoming marriageable age the ambient pressure for a

marriage increases. Homosexuality does not fit with the future expectations and is often associated with honour damage (Hira, 2011).

Honour in migration context

The upbringing of Hindustani should be considered in a broader context of migration, mobility aspiration and honour. Surinamese Hindustani in the Netherlands have a history of repeated migration (Majumder, 2010). Their ancestors migrated as indentured labourers from British India to Suriname between 1873 and 1917. The largest migration from Suriname to the Netherlands took place in the seventies of the previous century (ibid). Mobility aspiration lies at the heart of their migration motives and the objective is that children live up these aspirations better than the parents managed (Nanhoe, 2012). The mobility aspirations resulted in a rat race, focused on status, with deployment of multiple successes (ibid). The heterosexual marital status, reproduction, educational qualifications, job positions, entrepreneurship, material progress and religious development are all (intended or unintended) part of a competition for a high(er) status within the community (Nanhoe et al., 2016). The more successes, the more status the nuclear family enjoys within the Hindustani community. The opposite is also true: the fewer successes, the less status the family enjoys in the Hindustani community. Deviant behaviour usually has negative consequences on the status of the family (ibid).

Religion in the upbringing

Religion and religious scriptures can play an important role in the upbringing and socialization. Various studies have shown a negative relationship between religion and the acceptance of homosexuality (Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009; Burdette et al, 2005; Rowatt et al., 2006; Olson et al., 2006; Schulte & Battle, 2008). Adamczyk & Pitt (2009) conclude that religious writings address homosexuality negatively and that religious people are more cognitively tenacious.

Different religions are common among Hindustani, but most Hindustani adhere to Hinduism, Islam or Christianity (Nanhoe & Omlo, 2017). Hinduism

acknowledges sexual diversity as a societal fact and acknowledges gay marriage as a marriage type that does not need a marriage ceremony or parental consent (Nanhoe & Omlo, 2017; Wilhelm, 2010). De Islamic and Christian scriptures have passages that reject homosexual intercourse (Nanhoe & Omlo, 2017; Loader, J.A., 1990).

Reactions on the coming out

Nanhoe & Omlo (2017) conclude that reactions of Hindustani on the coming out of a gay relative vary from complete acceptance to complete rejection. So it happens that gay relatives are smoothly accepted. But the researchers conclude that the first response of relatives is usually a shock reaction, after which, different ways of dealing with the (new) information follow.

The initial reaction on a coming out first of all depends on the familiarity with and perception on homosexuality (Nanhoe & Omlo, 2017). Some Hindustani don't know what homosexuality is. Others regard it as a (symptom of a) mental illness, activating them to find a cure. But of course there are also Hindustani that regard homosexuality for what it is: a sexual orientation (ibid).

When relatives experience homosexuality as a threat for their honourable position, they may try to limit the honour damage (Nanhoe & Omlo, 2017; Nanhoe et al, 2016). For example by means of pressure to end a gay relationship and/or to agree with a heterosexual marriage. Even in cases of acceptance relatives might prefer to limit the coming out to a small circle. Or ban the homosexuality to a double life, possibly alongside a heterosexual family life or an image as an eternal bachelor (Nanhoe & Omlo, 2017).

In some families consensus is not possible. Parents can feel faced with the dilemma to outcast their child for the sake of their honourable position within their community (Nanhoe et al, 2016). Outcasting usually is the most severe measure among Hindustani. Moreover it's often not a definitive measure, though it's not clear in advance whether and when the involved people will repair their

relationship. While parents explicitly outcast their child, other relatives usually use a subtle way. For example, by silencing the person.

KEY INFORMANTS AND RESPONDENTS ON FACTORS THAT INFLUENCED SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE

The interviews with the key informants and respondents show a broad range of reactions on coming out. But they also show that most close relatives (in time) accepted the homosexual orientation. We first describe some respondent characteristics, followed by the factors that influenced the acceptance positively over time according to the key informants and respondents.

Respondent characteristics

The respondents in this study are 10 men and 8 women. During the recruitment we searched for homosexuals. But during the interviews we found that two respondents identify themselves as homosexual, but feel attracted to both sexes. Five women and four 4 men were born in the Netherlands and the others (3 women and 6 men) in Suriname. One women was born in the Netherlands, raised in Suriname and moved to the Netherlands during her early adulthood. Five respondents migrated to the Netherlands because of their sexual orientation.

When we look at religious affiliation we see that 13 respondents are Hindu, 2 are Muslim and 2 are Christian. One respondent is not religious. The ages of the respondents during the interview vary from 16 to 63 years (see Table 1).

Table 1: Ages and gender of the respondents

	Women	Men	Total
11-20 years	0	1	1
21-30 years	3	4	7
31-40 years	3	2	5
41-50 years	2	2	4
61-70 years	0	1	1
Total	8	10	18

Education, financial position

Three respondents enjoyed secondary education (see Table 5.1.c.). Five respondents enjoyed community college, six have a college education and 4 have a university education. Four respondents are still students, 9 have a job and 5 don't have a job or education as a daily routine, they receive social welfare benefits.

Table 5.1.c.: Educational level and gender

	Women	Men	Total
Secondary education	0	3	3
Community college (student)	3	2	5
College level (student)	4	2	6
University (student)	1	3	4
Total	8	10	18

Family of origin

Five respondents grew up in a single-parent family. The other 13 respondents grew up in families with both parents. When we look at the number of children, we see that 1 respondent is a sole child, 8 have one sibling and 9 respondents have 3 or 4 siblings.

Nine respondents have parents with primary or secondary education. Three respondents have at least 1 parent with a university or college degree. The others have at least 1 parent with a secondary education. The occupation of the parents ranges from entrepreneurship to jobs. Three respondents have self-employed parents. Four respondents grew up with unemployed parent(s).

Factors that positively influence social acceptance

The interviews show us factors that positively influenced the social acceptance. We'll describe factors on nuclear family level, influence of siblings (brothers and/or sisters), factors on the extended family level, religion, individual achievements and time related factors.

Factors on nuclear family level

An honourable status within the Hindustani community depends on the successes of the nuclear family members: the so called success accumulation (see also Nanhoe, 2012). According to the key informants, homosexuality is often associated with honour damage. They also point out that the damage has less impact in families with multiple successes and that it's less difficult for families with status to accept a gay relative.

But educational success and a good job position also influence people's familiarity with and opinion about homosexuality, as people interact with others and run into different views on homosexuality. This helps developing an opinion. We see that almost all working parents were familiar with homosexuality. Two respondents have parents with an average or higher education and subsequent jobs. These parents accepted the homosexuality from the very beginning. On the other hand we see two mothers, both housewives, who initially typified homosexuality as an illness. They searched for different ways to cure their child, including therapists, religious leaders and traditional healers.

In addition to education and employment, financial independence also affects parents' acceptance of a gay child. According to some respondents, financial independence provided their parents with more space to act according to their own views, without experiencing too much pressure from other relatives. Their parents embraced their homosexual orientation. These parents were not so much concerned with the acceptance by the extended family, but rather with the safety and wellbeing of their child.

Influence of siblings

Siblings can influence the acceptance both in a supporting or an undermining way. In some cases siblings initially rejected the homosexuality, as did their parents. But other respondents could rely on practical, emotional and social support of their siblings. One respondent's brother, for example, supported her

coming out towards their mother. He also supported their mother in processing the news.

Respondent: “My brother was there, a neutral person, to support both of us, because she was emotional, but so was I. I wanted to say: “Okay mom, I’ll try it with a boy.” I needed my brother to tell me not to say that. He said that it would take time. And that if I’d give in, I’d only make it more difficult.”

(Sunita, 23 years)

The place in the birth order also influences the acceptance. The key respondents mentioned that the eldest children in families often serve as examples for the younger children. One respondent’s coming out in her nuclear family was aggravated by her position as the eldest of the children. All children in this family were still unmarried. The acceptance is less difficult when all siblings are already married, as we can see in the case of another respondent, who was accepted without problems by her family of origin.

A special situation occurs when a sibling is also homosexual. One respondent has an older homosexual brother. His parents already went through an acceptance process and had no difficulty accepting the homosexuality of a younger son. But not every family has the same ease with multiple gay children. The single mother of another respondent had difficulty accepting two gay children and doubted her own upbringing.

The wider family context

The key informants note that the wider family circle has a considerable influence from an early age. Almost all respondents told about the enthusiastic family discussions about expected wedding receptions. A homosexual orientation was often not regarded as a possibility and, in case noticed, banned to the taboo spheres. As one respondent said about her grandmother: “*She said that I shouldn’t talk about it.*” This respondent conformed her life to her family’s expectations and eventually got married. In her twenties, when she came out, her children,

father and siblings accepted her sexual orientation. But more than half of her extended family disappeared from her life. Another respondent also told about the early interaction with the extended family.

Respondent: “My aunt asked what kind of boys I like. So I said: “I don’t like boys.” Then I said that I like X, but that was her daughter. I was so pure. But they criticized what I said.” (Aruna, 41 years)

This respondent’s lesbian feelings were discouraged by relatives. But her parents let her have her development and later in life accepted her girlfriend with silence. As a result, the wider family also chose the silent mode.

Other respondents also told about the influence of parents on the acceptance by the extended family. As one respondent said: “*If your parents support you, the extended family will more likely accept you.*” In case of supportive parents, members of the extended family feel likely to accept or tolerate the homosexuality.

Families with other homosexuals already experienced an acceptance process. One respondent, with a gay uncle on his maternal side, was accepted without difficulty by his mothers’ family. He thinks this positive attitude is influenced by the previous experience of his family. Parents with gay children can also experience support from each other. The mothers of one respondent and his gay nephew get along well.

But previous experiences of the family don’t always guarantee a positive attitude. The family of one respondent, for example, assumed that his stepbrother’s homosexuality was a result of the respondent’s bad influence.

Religion

According to most key informants religion has an important role in the social acceptance. Some respondents come from religious families that actively participate in the gatherings of their religious (sub)community. These respondents

fear their parents' exclusion from their socio-religious networks. They also fear that they themselves will be outcasted by their nuclear families.

One respondent grew up in an actively religious Hinduistic family and in several religious networks. She leads a double life. Her considerations are not so much religious in nature, but rather based on the culture within the networks she and her family are part of.

Another female respondent (also Hindu) talked about religious standards: "*My whole family is very religious Hinduistic. So you really have to get married, bear children, and so forth.*" When asked what Hinduism says about sexual diversity, she responds that she doesn't know, but assumed women should marry men because it's as it should be. A Muslim respondent told something similar. In her family homosexuality was not an option. This respondent's decision to live a heterosexual life is not based on religion. She wished to prevent honour loss of her parents. She expected to be outcasted by her parents, extended family and friends. We time and again notice that the arguments are not religious, but rather cultural in nature, namely the culture of a (religious) subgroup.

Individual achievements

The key informants and 6 respondents mention that both rejection and acceptance of homosexuals can be based on honour considerations. Some respondents, who were initially outcasted were again accepted by their family after obtaining educational qualifications, successful job-positions and/or financial success.

When people enjoy an honourable position based on their (multiple) successes, the negative association with homosexuality becomes less important. So even an initially rejecting family may in time embrace the person because of his/her individual increase in status.

Three respondents pointed out that success is not only defined by financial, educational or job achievements. Visibility through migrant organizations and media also add to a successful image.

Respondent: "It was in 2009 when they started talking to me again. I had been on TV and on the radio, what was very important to them. It gave me

status and ensured that I would be accepted. I had an academic degree that also brought status. My parents, who bent their head for years because of my homosexuality, now stood behind me. Like they were saying “This is my daughter”. It ensured that I got accepted.” (Sandra, 35)

Some respondents use this insight in an anticipatory way. They origin from wealthy families, that enjoy high status within the community. Above that, they have high ambitions regarding their education and career. For example, one of these respondents wants to become a surgeon, a profession that will give him much respect: *“I’m already from a well-known family from Suriname, a wealthy family. But if I’m a surgeon above that, I know that it will give me even more status.”* Six respondents explicitly state that the importance of homosexuality diminishes as they become more successful.

Time related changes

The interviews with key informants and respondents’ show that the acceptance by relatives often increases over time. They simply need time to process the information and to replace existing expectations with new ones.

Six respondents also mentioned that the contacts with the extended family weakened over time because of daily activities in education, work and nuclear family life. In some cases, the extended family geographically spread in and outside the Netherlands. As contacts weakened, so did the social control and family pressure. As a result both the acceptance and the non-acceptance have less impact on the daily well-being of the homosexual person and his/her nuclear family.

Respondent: “I don’t know what they think about it. (...) It’s a huge family. Some live in the Netherlands, a part lives in America. And there is a few my mother has frequent contact with. I see those. My aunt and uncle in The Hague, they are very relaxed.” (Anand, 50 years)

Further, when parents have fulfilled their parental task to marry all their children, they feel more space to accept deviant behaviour from their children. One respondent for example, came out after she and all her siblings were married. Her family of origin made no objections.

Another timer related factor, already described, is the success accumulation over time on both individual and nuclear family level.

CONCLUSIONS

The factors that positively influence the social acceptance of homosexuality among Hindustani are mostly related to honour and status within the Hindustani community. Thus the success accumulation of the homosexual person and his/her nuclear family have a major influence. The financial independence of the nuclear family, supportive siblings, familiarity with other homosexual relatives and weakening contacts with extended family members also influence acceptance positively.

We conclude that acceptance of homosexuality in general is not a religious matter for Hindustani in the Netherlands, but more so a cultural matter related to concepts of honour and status within the own community and (sub)networks. This conclusion is in contrast with findings of Huijnk (2014; 2010) stating that the more religious people are, the more they tend to reject homosexuality. Among Hindustani it's not the religion, but the social pressure that influences the acceptance.

The success accumulation of the homosexual person and his/her nuclear family is highly associated with honour and status within the broader community. Acceptance of homosexual relatives is more probable within nuclear families that enjoy status. This conclusion is in line with the finding of Huijnk (2014) that a higher education explains a higher social acceptance among Iranian Dutch. As more and more Hindustani are successful regarding educational qualifications, entrepreneurship, job positions and financial independence, the acceptance of homosexuality shows large steps forward.

A limitation of this study is that it lacks the perspective of parents in their acceptance process. Since the acceptance by parents is of great importance for all respondents in this study, research should be conducted into this acceptance process. Such a study should offer insight in the support parents need to accept the homosexuality of their child.

Another limitation is that this study was conducted in the Netherlands, where sexual diversity is legal and emancipation of LGBTI's² is part of government policy. The findings can't be generalized to other diaspora countries. A similar study in other diaspora countries could give insight in light of integration processes in different societies.

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² LGBTI: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersexual.

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