

## Victimization against Non-Heterosexual Male Adolescents in Bangkok: A Qualitative Study

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*This qualitative study explores Bangkok male non-heterosexual high school students' experience of victimization – being treated unfairly or wrongly in ways that induced physical, social, emotional or psychological harm. Twenty-five in-depth interviews were conducted with purposive sampling of 20 non-heterosexual and five heterosexual male adolescents in June-July 2013. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, coded and analyzed through thematic analysis with investigator triangulation. We found that non-heterosexual adolescents experienced victimization due to their sexual identity in three major environments: at home, at school and in public. At home, they experienced different levels of rejection from parents ranging from verbal insults to physical assaults such as punching. At school, they encountered occasional bullying and name-calling by intolerant peers. They also reported some teachers insulting their homosexuality and treating them differently, as well as school policies which discriminate against their sexual identity. In public, insulting, name-calling and gossiping from strangers were common. However, respondents also reported that they felt increasing acceptance towards their sexual identity at school and in public in recent years, while perceiving more pressure against their sexual identity at home. Such discrepant pressure between home and school/public might have led to a phenomenon where non-heterosexuals adopt two different personas, one at home and the other at school; some respondents indicated that they have to tone down their personality at home or when parents are around. The negative experiences may also have, arguably, led to internalized stigma for many non-heterosexuals.*

**Keywords:** sexual identity; gender identity; non-heterosexual; victimization; male; adolescents

### Introduction

Thailand is generally perceived as a country of tolerance and acceptance towards homosexuality. However, while homosexuality is not prohibited by law in Thailand, marriage between people of the same sex is not recognized by the state, and a wide range of cultural

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sanctions operate to stigmatize homosexual men and women (Jackson, 1998). Many studies have demonstrated that discrimination and victimization account for the association between sexual identity and depressive symptomatology (Almeida, Johnson, Corliss, Molnar & Azrael, 2009; Burton, Marshal, Chisolm, Sucato & Friedman, 2013; Mays & Cochran, 2001; Williams, Connolly, Pepler & Craig, 2005). This research raises concern about the serious issue of non-heterosexual adolescents' mental well-being.

Adolescent years are a critical period, and mental disorders in adolescence can go on to affect one's adulthood (Kessler et al., 2005; McEwan, Waddell, Barker & Kirby, 2007). Thus, experiencing discrimination and/or victimization during adolescence can be considered a threat to one's health and well-being even after reaching adulthood. International studies have shown that non-heterosexual adolescents are prone to be targets for victimization (Rivers & Ryan, 2003). They are also more likely to suffer from depression and suicidality (Almeida, Johnson & Corliss, 2009; Consolacion, Russell & Sue, 2004; Fergusson, Horwood, Ridder & Beautrais, 2005; Garofalo, Wolf, Wissow, Woods & Goodman, 1999; Remafedi, Farrow, Deisher & Farrow, 1991; Russell & Joyner, 2001; Warner et al., 2004). In Thailand, a study about bullying by UNESCO (2014) suggested that more than half of self-identified LGBT students (grades 7 to 12) had been bullied because of their sexual identity, and that bullied LGBT students were more likely to miss classes, be depressed, and have attempted suicide than those who were not bullied or bullied for reasons other than sexual identity.

This paper reports on the initial qualitative phase of a mixed-method study, which investigates the mental health status and experiences of victimization, including but not restricted to bullying, among male non-heterosexual adolescents in Bangkok. The objective of this qualitative phase was to gain insights on how male adolescents perceived their own sexual identity and whether or not they had experienced victimization in any environment or context in the past year. Findings from the study were used to inform the questionnaire that was used in the subsequent quantitative phase. However, beyond its function as formative research, findings from this qualitative phase provide helpful narratives on male non-heterosexual adolescents' perception of their sexual identity and their experience of victimization.

In this study, victimization refers to experiences of being treated unfairly or wrongly that induce physical, social, emotional or psychological harm. Whether a certain experience is victimization or not was considered and judged by the authors of this study, since victimization may not be perceived as such by the victims, who tend to blame themselves for the incidents. Victimization may also be an act conducted by persons who generally believe they care or have good will towards the victims, including parents, teachers and close friends. In agreement with the objectives of this study, we especially explored victimizations based on the respondents' sexual identity, a factor we believe is one of the most important motives for victimization towards non-heterosexuals in Thailand.

## Methodology

The target population for the study is male adolescents attending high schools in Bangkok, Thailand who hold Thai citizenship. In this qualitative phase, both heterosexual and non-heterosexual adolescents were recruited. Considering the sample size of five to 25 respondents potentially needed to achieve thematic saturation (Creswell, 2012), five heterosexual respondents and 20 non-heterosexual adolescents were recruited. Recruitment was done by purposive sampling through three channels: (1) coordinative recruiters in Bangkok; (2) an advertisement in a gay community website; and (3) snowball sampling through the respondents themselves. The recruiters included a researcher who previously conducted research with high school students and a tutor. The majority of the respondents were recruited through the recruiters and other respondents, except for two of the non-heterosexual respondents who were recruited through the advertisement in a gay community website.

Twenty-five semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted. Respondents chose the place for the interview themselves, in places where they felt comfortable to talk. These included a classroom in a tutorial school, food courts in department stores, a study area in a museum, cafés and a school canteen. The interview topics included respondents' perception of male sexual identity and experiences or observations on homophobic victimization. We pursued respondents' perception of sexual identity by asking them to identify their own sexual identity and to classify male sexual identities that they know. Furthermore respondents were asked to explain the differences between each sexual identity. Consequently, we asked them to talk about their experiences at school and at home, focusing on gender- and sexual identity-based victimization and discrimination. We also asked them to discuss other homophobic experiences they had encountered outside of the context of their home and school.

In-depth interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the respondents. Respondents were asked to use pseudonyms during the interviews, so that no names or other personal information that could lead to identify respondents were recorded on the research materials. Immediately after the end of each interview, the audio files recorded during the session were transferred to the researcher's computer; files were protected by a password, and only accessible by the researcher in charge of the study. Once the audio files were transferred to the computer, they were immediately deleted from the audio recorders.

In-depth interview recordings were transcribed with pseudonyms assigned to each entry. The transcripts along with the recordings and notes taken during the interviews were analyzed by content analysis. Transcripts were coded and analyzed through thematic analysis with investigator triangulation.

The research protocol for the study was reviewed and approved by the Committee for Research on Human Subjects at Kyoto University, Japan as well as by the Institute for Population and Social Research Institutional Review Board at Mahidol University, Thailand. Research

information sheets were submitted to respondents prior to the interviews along with a parental/proxy consent form. Written consent was obtained from each respondent's parents or a proxy prior to the interview. All respondents were informed about the importance of their participation and their right to refuse or discontinue participation at any time during the study at will. They were also assured of the study's strict confidentiality protocols.

## Limitations of the study

The non-heterosexual respondents in this study were recruited through a recruiter and networks of respondents. Thus, all respondents in this study were at least open about their sexual identity to someone. Hence, the experience of those who still keep their sexual identity a secret was not included in this study. In addition, as this study exclusively focused on the male high school students, it does not include sets of experience of other groups of male adolescents such as vocational school students or out-of-school youth.

## Results

### *Demographics and sexual identity*

The majority (80%) of the respondents were 16 or 17 years old (Table 1). Most of them attended a public single-sex education school.

Before describing the self-identified sexual identity of the respondents, some explanation is needed of the findings on the definition of common terms used to describe sexual identity in Bangkok. According to Shively and De Cecco (1977), sexual identity consists of four components: biological sex, gender identity (whether one sees him- or herself as male, female, or any other gender), gender expression (being feminine or masculine; termed as 'social sex-role' by Shively and De Cecco) and sexual orientation (one's sexual preference for sexual partners). When perceiving the sexual identity of themselves and others, respondents took into account not only sexual orientation, but also his or her gender expression, including appearance and/or personality. In general, 'gay' is used to describe someone regarded as a male who is interested in males sexually, but who looks or acts similar to a 'straight' person (generally defined as a man who has a sexual orientation towards women or a heterosexual man). On the other hand, someone who looks or acts effeminately is called a '*thud*' (young gay/transgender) or '*katoey*' (transgender). Generally, the difference between *thud* and *katoey* according to respondents was that a *katoey* can be considered to be transgender, looking or behaving more like a woman (including but not restricted to having long hair, breasts, wearing makeup and wearing women's clothes). A *katoey* also behaves more 'properly' than a *thud*, who is regarded as immature. The distinction between gay and *thud* is also a blurred line, as some participants mentioned that gay men can be, to some extent, effeminate and can wear a little makeup. Although some respondents were not familiar with the term, a 'bisexual' is regarded as someone who can be sexually/romantically interested in both males and females. Interestingly, a heterosexual man who has dated a *thud* or *katoey* is still regarded as 'straight' by respondents.

Thus while sexual orientation does not exclusively determine one's sexual identity for these respondents, both gender expression and sexual orientation are considered, upon the fundament of biological sex. Gender identity however was not included, probably due to its personal nature and the fact that it cannot be easily recognized by others.

Among the 20 non-heterosexual respondents, nine identified their sexual identity as gay, six were young gay/transgender (*thud*), three were transgender (*katoey*), one was bisexual, and one described himself as 'questioning' (Table 1).

**Table 1:** Demographics and sexual identity of the respondents

Variable		Heterosexual (%) (n=5)	Non-heterosexual (%) (n=20)
Age	15 or younger	1 (20)	4 (20)
	16	2 (40)	9 (45)
	17	2 (40)	6 (30)
	18 or older	0 ( 0)	1 ( 5)
School Type	Public	3 (60)	16 (80)
	Private	2 (40)	4 (20)
Education	Single-sex education	3 (60)	15 (75)
	Co-education	2 (40)	5 (25)
Grade	10 <sup>th</sup>	1 (20)	5 (25)
	11 <sup>th</sup>	2 (40)	12 (60)
	12 <sup>th</sup>	2 (40)	3 (15)
Sexual Identity (Self-identified)	Heterosexual (Straight)	5 (100)	0 ( 0)
	Gay	0 ( 0)	9 (45)
	Young gay/transgender ( <i>thud</i> )	0 ( 0)	6 (30)
	Transgender ( <i>katoey</i> )	0 ( 0)	3 (15)
	Bisexual	0 ( 0)	1 ( 5)
	Questioning	0 ( 0)	1 ( 5)

### *Victimization*

Victimization experienced by non-heterosexual respondents could be classified by the environments in which it took place, which were (1) Home (2) School and (3) Public. Within these three environments, non-heterosexual respondents encountered victimization in various forms and degrees.

#### *(1) Home*

In their home environment, non-heterosexual respondents were victimized mostly by their parents and relatives. The degree to which they experienced victimization varied from merely implicit verbal remarks hinting dissatisfaction towards their sexual identity, to explicit verbal abuse expressing hatred against them. Although many reported that their parents somewhat

accepted their sexual identity, some also mentioned that their parents felt sad about their sexual identity. Some mentioned they may not be fully accepted yet by their parents.

*Well, there was the time that big-eyed contact lenses were popular. My teacher called my mom and told her that I'm using the big-eyed contact lenses, so my mom took a look inside my bag. When she saw them, she asked me, 'So, you are (homosexual)?' I said 'yes.' Then she said, 'I'll try to accept this.' But, she cried. She said she felt sad, that she had only one son, and that she's afraid that I will have to struggle.*

(Transgender, age 17)

*My father called me, and asked, 'You like boys?' Then I said, 'Yes, I like boys. I do not like girls anymore.' Then he said, 'It's okay, as long as you're a good person.' But it seemed to me that he forced himself to say it.*

(Gay, age 15)

Those who experienced hard times with their parents due to intolerance towards their sexual identity reported feeling sorry for having disappointed their parents.

*I feel sorry that I have disappointed them (parents), but there's nothing I can do about it (my sexual identity). So, I'll just try to behave the best way I can.*

(Transgender, age 17)

Many respondents mentioned that their parents had told them to tone down their effeminate personality, or to act more masculine.

*He (Father) would say, 'Walk like a man!', 'Act more like a man!', 'Don't be a sissy.' Well, I'm quite a shy person. So he would say, 'You're too shy. And when you're outside, you look so sissy, just like a thud. Don't be so shy. Be confident!'*

(Transgender, age 16)

Some were told by their parents that they wish their son were heterosexual, and that they'd rather have him "go back" to being heterosexual if that is possible.

*He said he wanted me to go back to being heterosexual because he's afraid I'd struggle.*

(Transgender, age 17)

Another strategy that parents used in hopes that their sons would become more masculine is forcing them to participate in the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) program.

*Actually, my mom must have been very sad. I can tell that they wanted a son. My dad forced me to study in the ROTC because he wants me to be a guy.*

(Young gay/transgender, age 15)

The experiences mentioned by our respondents above showed that their parents were trying to cope with the fact that their sons are not heterosexual. Although not yet successful, some did try to accept their sons' sexual identity. However, many still tried to compromise by telling their children to act more masculine, or to "turn back" to being heterosexual. By asking their children to turn back to being a man, it could be inferred that many parents still believed that sexual identity is a choice that can be deliberately decided.

Though not in the majority, some respondents reported harsh verbal remarks made by both of their parents after they knew about their sexual identity, as described by one gay respondent:

*Well, they found a photo which I took with a guy. Then my mom said to me, 'I gave you this one life, and you behave like this? Your life is such a waste!' My dad also said to my mom that 'He became like this because of a curse. Somebody must have cursed him. That's why he's like this.'*

(Gay, age 16)

Note that for many respondents, the process of coming out to their parents was not necessary, as their effeminate personality can be obvious. For some, the coming out experience was more like a confirmation to their parents. However, some of our respondents were not as effeminate, and were still keeping their sexual identity secret from their parents. These respondents felt they needed to be very careful about everything they do or say when they are at home.

*I'd be very stiff at home. I need to be careful so that my father won't know. When he asks me about a girlfriend, I'd try to keep it cool, otherwise he'll suspect.*

(Gay, age 17)

Although none of our respondents reported being physically assaulted, one did mention he had witnessed such an incident. According to him, one of his friends was assaulted by his parent after contraceptive pills were found in his bag. These are generally used by many non-heterosexual adolescents who wish to have their body become more female-looking.

*There is a friend of mine whose father really dislikes the fact that his son is a thud. One day, his father found contraceptive pills in his bag, so he (father) punched him (son) in the face. My friend came to school the next day with bruises on his face.*

(Young gay/transgender, age 16)

On the other hand, some of the heterosexual respondents mentioned being warned by parents not to become, or not to associate with gay or transgender youth.

*My parents said that they (katoey) are half-demon-half-human, that they were born with one gender but want to change it. They used to tell me not to associate with them, but I'm okay with them.*

(Heterosexual, age 17)

## (2) *School*

The school environment is more complicated than home, since there are more people involved. Non-heterosexual respondents' experiences regarding violence or victimization in school varied between schools. Even respondents from the same school reported having different experiences. Most respondents reported being victimized by their heterosexual peers, and also by their teachers. Furthermore, the school's policies could also act to violate non-heterosexuals' right to express their identity as discussed below.

### *Peer Students*

Most of the non-heterosexual respondents reported a welcoming atmosphere by their student peers in their school. However some did mention being victimized by verbal remarks, or physical deeds, especially for respondents with effeminate personalities.

*When you're a thud, it is a weak sexual identity. And when you're weak, you become a victim of the ones who are stronger.*

(Gay, age 15)

Many reported name-calling from their heterosexual peers, but regarded the experience as 'playing,' or 'teasing,' rather than taking the experience as victimization. Many reported that they felt discomfited and sad when they confronted such events in junior high school years, but had now grown to ignore such name-calling.

Despite noting that peers at school are mostly understanding, many respondents also mentioned being confronted by questions or verbal remarks about their sexual identity.

*There was one time that I was asked by a friend. He said, 'What are you thinking? What's good about being gay?' So I said, 'Don't bother me. This is not your business. As long as I'm not causing trouble to you or the society, then it's nothing.'*

(Gay, age 16)

In addition, many reported an 'anti-thud' group within their own school, which was regarded as a group of heterosexual peers who were prone to bully or make hateful remarks towards non-heterosexual students.

*They're the minority though, the bad ones. They don't like (thud). They act like they're disgusted. When people of the third sex go to play with them, they would call names. They would say, 'Go away, I hate thud.'*

(Gay, age 16)

*Mostly, they are heterosexual guys. I don't know what's their problem, but I heard from one of my friends that they do not like this (gay or thud). They think it's wrong or weird.*

(Gay, age 17)

Even respondents who were not open about their sexual identity to everyone in their schools faced situations that were similar to those who are totally open. They also experienced name-calling, along with getting confronted by questions about their sexual identity.

*Since I get along well with girls, someone might be suspicious if I'm a thud or not. Some would come to me and say, 'Hey, thud!' But I cannot be panicked. I'd have to keep it cool. Sometimes, someone would come up to me and ask, 'Are you thud?', or 'So, you're gay?' One time one of my friends said 'Sigh, those thud, their lives are such a waste.'*

(Gay, age 17)

Similar to name-calling, respondents also described what could be considered as sexual harassment by their heterosexual peers (e.g., touching their bottom or chest, as playing or teasing). The feelings towards such events were mixed, as some non-heterosexual respondents liked to be touched, while some expressed clearly that they were annoyed by such events. Although most respondents did not take such harassment seriously, there was one participant who had experienced sexual abuse by his/her peer at school.

*Some would put their hands in my clothes. And there was one time that I was pushed and forced into a toilet. Then he opened his pants' zip and tried to make me give him a blowjob. Then I screamed very loudly, so he went away.*

(Transgender, age 17)

None of the heterosexual respondents said they dislike non-heterosexual peers. Although most of them admitted having teased gay or transgender friends, these were regarded as acts of endearment or playing among friends.

Nevertheless, non-heterosexual identities, such as gay or *thud*, were used among the heterosexual students to make fun of one another.

*When you're talking with someone who's thud or when you are too close to a guy, you might be called thud or gay by your friends, but they're just teasing*

(Heterosexual, age 15)

*I used to leave my phone, and my friend used it to post something on my Facebook status like 'I'm gay,' or 'I'm lonely. I want to find some guy to hold me.' But I also have teased my friend that way too.*

(Heterosexual, age 17)

### *Teachers and School Policies*

Although no physical abuse by teachers was reported, respondents reported verbal abuse varying in degrees. They also reported being treated differently by teachers because of their sexual identity. What set teachers apart from their peers was the authority held by teachers. Some teachers utilized school policies to limit gender expression for the non-heterosexual respondents, in order to make them conform to gender norms.

Attitudes of teachers towards non-heterosexual students varied among different schools. However, most respondents reported having witnessed or directly experienced verbal abuse by their teachers. According to our respondents, verbal remarks by teachers ranged from merely teasing to offensive remarks.

*The reason I don't like some of the teachers is that some of them often say that, 'You're lucky to be born as man. This is such a waste of one's life.'*

(Transgender, age 17)

When non-heterosexual students made mistakes or broke the school's rules, their sexual identity could be used against them by their teachers, even if the issues were unrelated to sexual identity.

Non-heterosexual respondents were also more likely to be suspected as culprits by their teachers. When something bad happened, or when a discipline check-up was conducted, non-heterosexual students would be the first group to be suspected or targeted.

*When there are school activities, this group (gay or thud) will be watched by the teachers so that nothing too much will be done. Also when they check our hair and uniform, thuds and gays will be the first group to be called out to be checked.*

(Gay, age 17)

Respondents also reported teachers trying to have them limit or tone down their personalities, or to "man up" their appearances. And while many non-heterosexual respondents wore make-up at school, they also got warnings from their teachers. Sometimes they would be told to wash off their makeup, even though no formal school policy prohibited wearing make-up. Cross-dressing for school dramas or activities was also restricted in some schools.

*The principal at my school doesn't like students to be like this (gay or thud). In some school activities, the seniors wanted to showcase dancing in girl outfits. But he (the principal) doesn't allow that. He said that a man, no matter what, needs to be a man. So he opposed it. There are other teachers as well who doesn't like us to be like this. They want us to be men.*

(Young gay/transgender, age 15)

Students' sexual identity and their gender expression were also used against them, preventing them from participating in some school activities, such as school trips. In addition, in some schools, non-heterosexual students were denied the right to get scholarships due to their sexual identity.

*When we apply for scholarships, they will not give it to us. It's written (in the conditions) that you need to be straight (in order to apply for the scholarship). And also for the school trips, if you wear shorts that are like girl's shorts, you will not be allowed to go.*

(Gay, age 16)

One 16-year-old gay respondent also had run for president of the student council in his school. He won the election, but one of the teachers at his school disagreed with the result and appointed someone else for the post.

*I was running for president of the student council, and I won. But, after I knew the result, one of the seniors came in and told me that they'd recounted the votes, and found additional voided ballots which voted for me. He said that was why I lost. Afterwards, I spoke to him again and asked for the truth. He told me that actually I won the election. But because I'm like this (gay), they were afraid that I'd bring shame to the school, because it's not appropriate. So then, they appointed another guy as the president.*

(Gay, age 16)

### **Others**

Although not as regularly, respondents also encountered victimization at school by other groups of people, including their school's graduates and other students' parents.

As in the case mentioned above, the school's reputation was brought up as the reason to ignore his rights to be the president of the student council. This respondent was not the only one facing the issue, as 'for the sake of school's reputation' was often used to frame non-heterosexual respondents' behaviors and personalities.

*I was passing by someone who has already graduated from my school a long time ago. Then he said 'your presence is ruining our school's reputation.'*

(Transgender, age 16)

One participant, who self-identified as a *thud*, reported being confronted by his/her boyfriend's mother, trying to convince him/her to break up with her son.

*My boyfriend's mom called me on the phone and asked me to break up with her son. She thought it was because her family is not a warm-hearted one that her*

*son started to go out with me. She said that we might be happy now, but when we get old, we might not be happy anymore. Then she told me she slapped her son and threatened to take him out of this school if we would continue dating.*

(Young gay/transgender, age 16)

### (3) Public

Apart from school and home, non-heterosexual respondents also faced negative experiences in public. Although mentioning that the public was becoming more welcoming towards them in recent years, most respondents with effeminate personalities still felt uncomfortable when noticing people in public pointing and gossiping about them.

Many also reported offensive verbal remarks by total strangers in public, including name-calling, swear words and negative comments on their sexual identity.

*When I go out in public, some guys (strangers) would call me 'Faggot.' It's like they're having fun. They like to humiliate. Some are over 40 years old; some are still in high school. Girls usually wouldn't say that stuff. They would secretly gossip, but I know they are gossiping about me. When I passed by, they would tell their friends to look at me, and start chatting. I don't know what they talk about though. Sometimes, if I'm close to them, and they still gossip and look at me, I'll directly ask them, 'What? What are you gossiping about?' Some would say 'no.'; some would laugh and treat me like a joke.*

(Transgender, age 16)

Another public space where respondents spend a lot of their time is virtual space in social media. Many witnessed negative comments on Facebook, which is the platform that most allows contact with the public. Some of the comments described homosexuality as 'disgusting,' or said that it's a waste of one's life to be gay or transgender. One participant also regarded seeing an anti-homosexuality page there.

*On Facebook, I would see someone from my Facebook friends who I don't really know post comments about how being gay is such a waste of one's life, or 'Why were you born in the first place?'*

(Gay, age 17)

## Discussion

Overall, non-heterosexual respondents experienced victimization in all three environments: at home, at school and in public spaces. However, the degree of pressure perceived by respondents is heaviest at home. With some exceptions, name-calling and sexual harassment by peer students was generally taken as teasing, which was not considered to be as serious or as negative by respondents. Many also mentioned that the public has become more accepting over

the past few years. The heavy pressure at home may have led to a phenomenon where one participant reported having two personalities: being more straightforward and sociable at school, while being more silent and estranged from parents at home. Although not as extreme, many others also reported that they tone down their effeminate personality when their parents are around.

The difference in pressure felt by non-heterosexual respondents in different environments is consistent with the results from a study conducted at a university in northern Thailand by Matzner (2001). Matzner found that acceptance towards transgender students was context-dependent, and concluded that sexual identity alone is not negatively perceived by friends and strangers. Rather, friends and strangers judge transgender students based on their appearances and behavior, and generally find them fun or entertaining. Matzner also found that, for parents and family members, being transgender alone is enough to provoke negative feelings. This was confirmed by our study, according to both non-heterosexual and heterosexual respondents' reports of their parents' antipathy towards non-heterosexuality. Furthermore, surprisingly, from this study we found that even a respondent who identified him/herself as transgender did not wish to have a son who is anything but heterosexual.

*I would feel awful (if my son would date a katoey). It takes a lot of effort to raise a child. And then he's gonna date a katoey? There's no way that love between a guy and a katoey will last long, to when they are old.*

*(Transgender, age 17)*

Although Matzner's study was based on attitudes towards transgender persons, it is generally conceivable that to some extent a similar situation holds true for the non-heterosexual in general in Thailand.

According to Matzner's model of complexities of acceptance, it is possible for non-heterosexual adolescents to conform to the expectation of their friends and society in order to be accepted. On the other hand, the only way for them to be accepted by their families is to deny their own sexual identity. Such denial, or wish to deny, could be seen from ubiquitous remarks by non-heterosexual respondents that they would, if possible, choose to "turn back" to be heterosexual, or sometimes think that they'd rather be born as heterosexual boys or girls.

*It's horrible that I was born like this. For other people, they don't have to be in my position. I didn't want to be born like this. I want to be a straight guy or girl. It's very hard when you like someone if you're like this. And the society is not that accepting.*

*(Young gay/transgender, age 15)*

However, as it is unlikely for one to deliberately change his/her own sexual identity, many respondents thought they needed to compensate for their sexual identity by working harder at school, or becoming better in other aspects than their heterosexual peers.

*Being a katoey is really tough. You need to take care of yourself. You need to be better than straight guys and girls. You need to do better at school, so that nobody can say anything bad about you. You need to be very well behaved. You also have to look beautiful, so they can't say being katoey is ugly.*

(Transgender, age 16)

Such ideas as the wish not to have a non-heterosexual son, or the thought that non-heterosexuality is something that needs to be compensated for in other ways, arguably reflect respondents' internalized stigma. Here, internalized stigma is defined, based on the definition of internalized stigma of people with mental illness by Drapalski et al. (2013), as a phenomenon where a person cognitively or emotionally accepts stigmatizing assumptions and stereotypes about something he/she is identified with, and comes to believe and apply them to him/herself or to other people with the same identity. Internalized stigma such as feeling that being non-heterosexual is something wrong or is inferior to heterosexuality could have been developed as the non-heterosexual participants were exposed to negative remarks and reactions or to double standards towards their sexual identity throughout their lives, especially from their own family members.

Internalized stigma was also reflected through common comments indicating respondents' ideas of heteronormativity. 'Half-woman-half-man' was often used by respondents to describe their sexual identity, representing the respondents' concept of gender dualism in which heterosexual males and females are seen as 'normal,' while anything other than that is regarded as 'defying nature,' as mentioned by one of our non-heterosexual respondents.

Although most respondents mentioned feeling more pressure at home than at school, inconsistent school policies exist that discriminate against non-heterosexual students. For instance, we found that non-heterosexual students in some schools are being prevented from participating in some school activities, applying for scholarships or running for president of the student council. According to a study by Sandfort, Bos, Collier and Metselaar (2010), such inconsistencies in school policies are significantly associated with mental health problems among non-heterosexual students. Although a causal relationship was not confirmed by the study, the current situation in which such discriminating rules exist to traumatize non-heterosexual adolescents leads to a potential concern for their mental well-being (Almeida et al., 2009; Burton et al., 2013; Mays & Cochran, 2001; Williams et al., 2005).

In conclusion, we found that non-heterosexual adolescents were being victimized by their family members, friends and teachers in various forms and in varied degrees. As already discussed above, such situations could possibly lead to decreased self-respect and other compromises regarding mental well-being. We believe this study helps to better understand the situation that non-heterosexual adolescents are facing, and forms a basis for further investigation of their mental well-being.

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