



## Turkish nurse educators knowledge regarding LGBT health and their level of homophobia: A descriptive–cross sectional study

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Attitudes toward LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transsexual) individuals displayed by nurse educators, who aim to educate students with a philosophy of providing equal and high-quality care to all individuals, the necessity of knowledge regarding LGBT individuals, and the inclusion of the issues related to LGBT individuals into the nursing curriculum are gaining importance nowadays.

**Objectives:** 1. What levels of homophobia do the nurse educators have? 2. What are the knowledge requirements for nurse educators regarding the health issues encountered by LGBT individuals? 3. Are the topics related to LGBT individuals incorporated into the curriculum by the nurse educators, and what are the barriers encountered while including such topics in the education?

**Methods:** In the present descriptive study – cross sectional, all the nurse educators teaching undergraduate nursing programs in 96 universities in Turkey, who were accessed using their e-mail addresses, constituted the study population (N = 996). The nurse educators who agreed to participate in the study (n = 61) comprised the study sample. Data were collected online, using questionnaire developed by researchers and the Homophobia Scale.

**Results:** The present study revealed that a significant proportion of participants (59%, n = 36) require knowledge regarding the health requirements of the LGBT individuals, and a great majority of the participants (77%, n = 47) did not find content related to the healthcare issues of LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual) individuals in the education they delivered. Assessment of the homophobia scale demonstrated that high levels of homophobia existed among half of the nurse educators and that the homophobia levels did not vary with age, tenure, or title (p > 0.05).

**Conclusions:** The results of the present study demonstrated that there is a lack of knowledge regarding the health issues of the LGBT individuals among the nurse educators in Turkey, and little efforts are put to acquire this knowledge. The high levels of homophobia reported among half of the nurse educators surveyed demonstrated the necessity of reviewing the nursing curriculum in a country such as Turkey, where sensitivity is required to be displayed to the marginal groups.

### 1. Background

It has been previously reported that the proportion of LGBT individuals among the total adult population varies between 3% and 6.5% in different countries (Gates, 2011). According to informal data sources [although no exact number has been reported], it is estimated that there are around 3 million LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual) individuals in Turkey. It is considered that the LGBT individuals, who are together defined as a vulnerable group, represent a significant proportion of the general population (Yilmaz, 2013; Yilmaz İ, 2014).

Similar to the rest of the world, negative attitudes toward the LGBT

people are widespread in Turkey. Although the cultural structure of the nation has been altered in recent years with the advent of modernization, the traditional values and norms associated with gender roles and sexuality nonetheless determine the attitudes toward people with different sexual orientation. Homosexuality and transgenderism is not a criminal offense under Turkish law; however, the attitude of the public toward the LGBT individuals is overwhelmingly negative (Kohut et al., 2013). It has been stated previously that developed or secular countries are able to accept homosexuality comparatively easily, than the undeveloped or Muslim countries which are less likely to accept homosexuality (Kohut et al., 2013).

Turkey is a secular and democratic state, with the vast majority of

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its population being Muslim. Homosexuality and transgenderism is not a criminal offense under Turkish law, and awareness toward the LGBT individuals in Turkey has increased in recent years (Yılmaz and Demirbaş, 2015). However, the LGBT individuals are nonetheless experiencing difficulties concerning the rights of their community, and their conduct is viewed as immoral and unnatural. Hence, LGBT individuals may experience discrimination, stigma, and violence in several areas of their lives, especially in education, employment, housing, and healthcare (Engin, 2015). This situation causes them to hide their identity in society, and for this reason, the estimated population of the LGBT group is not known with certainty in Turkey (Kohut et al., 2013).

The term homophobia has been widely used to describe any kind of prejudice, discrimination, or violence against sexual minorities. Homophobia is seen as a reaction to the actual or perceived violation of the gender norms. This concept also implies a lack of awareness regarding the fact that individuals with different sexual orientations are not included in the social structures or are subjected to discrimination. A homophobic approach adopted by individuals' results in the LGBT individuals encountering discrimination in several areas of their lives, including the discrimination encountered in healthcare organizations (Irwin, 2007).

Turkey has been ranked near the bottom of the index [at position 47 among 49 countries] on LGBT equality in a report by the European Region of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association (ILGA-Europe, 2013). However, in the same report, it has been stated that homophobic attitude against LGBT individuals continues in several European nations. Recent surveys conducted in Turkey demonstrated that the negative attitudes toward the homosexuals are considerably high. A decrease in the negative attitudes has been observed in recent years, although the decrease is low. Intolerance among the general public toward the homosexuals remained at 84% in 2011, while it was 93% in 1990 (Esmer, 2011).

It has been reported that LGBT individuals are among the high-risk groups those experience healthcare inequalities (Sanders, 2012). Studies have demonstrated that LGBT individuals encounter obstacles in accessing healthcare (Tjepkema, 2008), in using preventive services, and in communicating with healthcare professionals (Roberts and Fantz, 2014). Sufficient data on the health of LGBT individuals and their access to healthcare services in Turkey are not available, except for a few studies (Göçmen and Yılmaz, 2017; Yağcınoğlu and Önal, 2014) which have revealed that these individuals have problems accessing and demanding healthcare services. Such challenges encountered by the LGBT individuals in attempting to access sensitive and holistic healthcare indicate the concept of homophobia, which is a predominant issue within the healthcare system itself (Irwin, 2007). Studies have indicated that a significant majority of nurses and other healthcare professionals exhibit a homophobic approach at an alarming level (Smith, 1993). Beehler (2001) observed that one-fourth of the medical personnel possess negative opinions regarding the LGBTs in the United States (Beehler, 2001). Fisch (2007) reported that LGBTs experience greater negative attitudes compared to heterosexuals and/or cis-gender people in accessing the healthcare services in the UK. In a comprehensive study conducted with the LGBT individuals in Turkey, it was demonstrated that most of the individuals could not access the sexual health services, while a significant majority of them did not receive treatment or delayed access to healthcare due to the fear of being discriminated (Yılmaz İ, 2014). Uysal Toraman and Kundakci revealed that the LGBT individuals utilized family health centers to a limited extent (Uysal Toraman and Kundakci, 2018). The research aimed at evaluating the homophobic approach prevalent among nurses in Turkey is limited. In a descriptive study conducted by Bostancı Daştan in an attempt to determine the attitude of nursing students toward the LGBT individuals in Turkey, it was revealed that the students exhibited moderate levels of homophobic approach (Bostancı Daştan, 2015).

Considering this situation, it is argued that the development of the cultural competence approach and involving content related to LGBT

individuals into the course might affect the knowledge and attitudes of the nurse educators toward the LGBT individuals (Eliason et al., 2010), as nurse educators are the people who would be able to shape the attitudes toward the LGBT individuals through educational content and practices. However, in the literature, studies conducted with nurses regarding this subject have demonstrated that this subject is hardly included in the educational content (Carabez et al., 2015). At the same time, it is important to note that this issue is not covered adequately in nursing textbooks (De Guzman et al., 2018; McCann and Brown, 2018). This may be an indicator of homophobic attitudes of the nurse educators toward LGBT individuals. However, it is noteworthy that a few studies are available in the literature on the subject of the attitudes and homophobia toward the LGBT individuals displayed by the nurse educators who otherwise aim to educate students with the philosophy of giving equal and qualified care to all individuals in an indiscriminate manner. Such studies, although limited in number, have revealed that the majority of the nurses exhibit a negative attitude toward the LGBT individuals (Randall, 1989). On the other hand, the nurses, who were reported to exhibit a positive attitude in these studies, were reported to adopt a homophobic approach in the clinical settings (Gray et al., 1996). Other studies conducted on this subject demonstrated that the majority of the nurse educators exhibited a positive attitude toward LGBT individuals, although their knowledge regarding these individuals was inadequate (Boch, 2012; Sirota, 2013). As for Turkey, no previous study has so far investigated this subject in terms of nurse educators.

### 1.1. Theoretical framework

The concept of homophobia was first introduced by psychotherapist George Weinberg in 1972, and it was defined as the fear, hostile attitudes, and behaviors toward the homosexuals. Although it has been stated that the individual processes such as personality, self-perception, and cognitive structures exert greater influence in the development of homophobia during the early years, it is considered more appropriate to approach the concept of homophobia in a specific social-cultural context. It is emphasized that social processes should be addressed in the studies conducted on the subject of how the concept of homophobia is learned in society (Herek, 1984). In this context, the present pilot study was based on the social learning theory, a theory commonly applied to understand the behavior of individuals (Bandura, 2001). Social learning, as theorized by Albert Bandura, is based on the idea that people learn through observation, replication, and the display of behaviors and ideas. The theory brings to front the behaviorist ideas and connects them with cognitive learning theories in order to understand the motivations for the behaviors.

For example, Gabriele Prati attempted to utilize the social learning theory for understanding the aggression toward LGBT people in order to provide an insight into the construction of negative attitudes toward homosexuals (Prati, 2012). This is because social learning perspectives propose that there is always a combination of social and psychological factors that influence a person to demonstrate violent behaviors toward the homosexuals.

Homophobia is an intergroup process influenced by social and cultural contexts and accompanied by stereotypes of individual processes and external groups. In other words, the norms, values, and beliefs established in the society in which someone is born homophobically is effective in the development of this approach. The present study was aimed at determining the manner in which the homophobic approaches of nurse educators, who educate nurses and prepare them for this profession, are reflected in the education process.

### 1.2. Problem

Nurses have greater contact with the individuals in the community in comparison to the other health professionals, and therefore, it is the

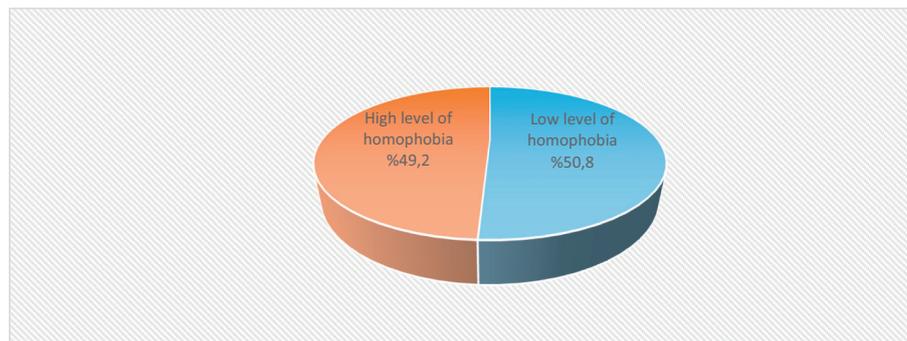


Fig. 1. Homophobia level of nurse educators.

responsibility of the nurses to be sensitive to differences and stand against discrimination (Boch, 2012). In regard to the extent to which nurses are able to provide culturally-competent and responsive care, nurse educators serving as role models exert a significant impact as the rest of the education received. Considering this situation, it is believed that determining the attitude of the nurse educators toward LGBT individuals, and the levels of their knowledge requirements regarding the health issues related to the LGBT individuals are important.

### 1.3. Aim

The aim of the present study was to identify the levels of homophobia present in the nurse educators, their knowledge requirements regarding the health of LGBT individuals, and the status of integration of these LGBT health-related topics into the content of the education by the nurse educators.

### 1.4. Ethical consideration

Prior to the study, ethical approval for conducting the study was obtained from the Hacettepe University Noninvasive Research Ethics Board (No.: GO 16/128–14).

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Design and participants

In the present descriptive study, all the nurse educators teaching in 96 universities with an undergraduate nursing program in Turkey, accessible via e-mails, were invited for the participation in the study (N = 996). The nurse educators who agreed to participate in the present study (n = 61) comprised the study sample.

### 2.2. Collection tools

Online socio-demographic questionnaire and homophobia scale were used in the study. The socio-demographic questions were designed to collect the socio-demographic data of the nurse educators, and to identify their knowledge requirements regarding the health issues related to LGBT individuals and the opinions of the former regarding the inclusion of the LGBT-related health topics into the content of education (Boch, 2012; F. Lim et al., 2015; Sirota, 2013). The 24-item index of the homophobia scale, a scale originally developed by Hudson & Ricketts in 1980, and adapted by Sakallı and Uğurlu in Turkish in 2001, was used to determine the levels of homophobia among the nurse educators toward the LGBT individuals. Cronbach's alpha value of 0.90 was reported for the original index, and a high internal consistency was obtained for the Turkish version with Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.94 (Sakalh and Ugurlu, 2002). In the evaluation of the scale, the individuals who scored below the average score were defined as 'the individuals with low levels of homophobia', and the ones scoring above

the average score value were defined as 'the individuals with high levels of homophobia'.

### 2.3. Data collection

The present study targeted all nurse educators working in the undergraduate nursing programs in Turkey. Therefore, the study accessed the academic cadres (N = 996) in the related programs in 96 universities through the web pages of the latter, and the nurse educators were subsequently contacted via e-mails. The study was completed with the nurse educators who agreed to participate in the survey and responded with the completed questionnaire (n = 61). Reminder emails were sent three times.

### 2.4. Data analysis

Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS version 23. The categorical variables used in the analyses were expressed as number (n) and percentage (%). Normality of the distribution of continuous variables was examined using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests. The Chi-Squared test was used for testing the relationships between categorical variables, and the significance levels were set at  $p < 0.05$ .

## 3. Results

### 3.1. The Index of Homophobia Scale

The levels of homophobia among the participants according to the scores they obtained in the evaluation of the Index of Homophobia Scale are presented in Fig. 1. The figure reveals that 50.8% of the participants (n = 31) exhibited low levels of homophobia, while 49.2% of the participants (n = 30) exhibited high levels of homophobia. When evaluating whether the homophobia levels differ depending on the socio-demographic characteristics of the nurse educators, no significant differences were observed between the homophobia levels of the nurse educators with different sex, age, marital status, tenure, and title (Table 3).

### 3.2. Search for information regarding LGBT individuals and the knowledge requirements, and integrating these issues into the content of education

Table 1 enlists a few socio-demographic characteristics of the 61 nurse educators who participated in the present study, which was aimed at evaluating the knowledge requirements of the nurse educators regarding LGBT individuals and to assess the levels of homophobia in their approaches. The vast majority of participants were female (Table 1).

Table 2 presents the opinions regarding accessing the information related to LGBT individuals, the knowledge resources, and the inclusion of topics related to the LGBT individuals into the content of education.

**Table 1**  
Sociodemographic characteristics of nurse educators.

	Number (n)	Percent (%)
Gender		
Female	55	90.2
Male	6	9.8
Age		
23–30	23	37.7
31–38	18	29.5
> 39	20	32.8
Marital status		
Married	40	65.6
Single	21	34.4
Title		
Research assist.	24	39.3
Assistant professor	25	41.0
Associate professor	12	19.7
Experience (year)		
1–5	25	41.0
6–11	12	19.7
12–16	21	34.4
> 16	3	4.9
Total	61	100

**Table 2**  
Reading articles on healthcare of LGBT individuals, requiring information, and preparing course contents.

	Number (n)	Percent (%)
Reading articles on healthcare of LGBT individuals		
Yes	16	26.2
No	45	73.8
Total	61	100
Requirement of information on health needs of LGBT individuals		
Yes	36	59.0
No	25	41.0
Total	61	100
Most attentive issues regarding the healthcare of LGBT individuals		
Access to healthcare	17	47.2
Issues related to sexuality	10	27.8
Prevention from diseases	9	25.0
Total	36	100
Thinking about the importance of issues of LGBT individuals in nursing education		
Yes	32	52.5
No	21	34.4
Not sure	8	13.1
Total	61	100
Included information on LGBT individuals when preparing course content		
Yes	14	23
No	47	77
Total	61	100
Subjects included in course content		
HIV-AIDS	7	11.5
Homophobia	3	4.9
Sexuality	2	3.3
Violence	2	3.3
Total	14	22.9
Why do LGBT individuals have no place in the course content		
Lack of sufficient information about LGBT individuals	33	54.1
Do not want to tell	10	16.4
Do not think it is important	4	6.6
Total	57	77.1

In this evaluation, 73.8% of the participants (n = 45) reported that they did not read any articles related to LGBT individuals. However, 59% of the participants indicated that it was necessary for them to obtain knowledge related to the health requirements of these individuals.

While identifying the topics that were most required, the theme of

**Table 3**  
Distribution of homophobia levels in the nurse educators according to certain socio-demographic characteristics.

	Low homophobia level Number	High homophobia level Number	(X <sup>2</sup> ) p
Gender			
Female	29	26	X <sup>2</sup> = 0.83 <sup>a</sup> p = 0.36
Male	2	4	
Age			
23–30	13	10	X <sup>2</sup> = 1.46 p = 0.48
31–38	7	11	
> 39	11	9	
Marital status			
Married	18	22	X <sup>2</sup> = 1.58 p = 0.21
Single	13	8	
Job experience (year)			
1–5	15	10	X <sup>2</sup> = 4.37 p = 0.23
6–11	3	9	
12–16	11	10	
> 16	2	1	
Title			
Research assist.	13	11	X <sup>2</sup> = 0.19 p = 0.23
Assistant professor	12	13	
Associate professor	6	6	
Total	31	30	

barriers to accessing health services encountered by the LGBT individuals ranked first [with a rate of 47.2% (n = 17), followed by sexual matters [with a rate of 27.8%]. In response to the question regarding incorporating the topics related to LGBT individuals into the curriculum, 52.5% of the participants responded that it is important to incorporate such issues into the content of education, while 34.4% of the participants responded that it is not important. Moreover, 77% (n = 47) of the participants did not include these topics in the process of course preparation, while 23% of them included such topics. The most frequently mentioned topics related to LGBT individuals in the course content were HIV-AIDS (11.9%), homophobia (4.9%), sexuality (3.3%), and violence (3.3%). Participants who responded that they did not include the topics related to LGBT individuals in their course content provided the following reasons for this: lack of knowledge (54.1%), their unwillingness to lecture on these topics (16.4%), and that they did not consider these topics important (6.6%).

#### 4. Discussion

LGBT individuals constitute a population that is neglected in several aspects of life with unique cultural structures and psychosocial characteristics. Issues related to the health of LGBT individuals and the challenges they encounter in healthcare have unfortunately been disregarded in nursing education as well, and it has been reported that nurses are less adequate in comparison to the other health professionals in addressing the issues related to the LGBT individuals (Eliason et al., 2010). In this context, it has been stated that the integration of the issues related to the attitudes toward LGBT individuals and the healthcare issues encountered by these individuals into the curriculum delivered by nurse educators could be the first step toward achieving cultural competence and preventing social stigma (Lim and Bernstein, 2012).

In the present study, 59% of the nurse educators stated that they required knowledge related to the healthcare requirements of the LGBT individuals. A study conducted by Lim et al. (2015) in America reported that 47% of the participants of the study had limited knowledge regarding LGBT individuals, and 20% of the participants did not read any LGBT-health-related articles (Lim et al., 2015). In the present study, it was revealed that 73.8% of the participants did not read any articles on the care of LGBT individuals. This result is important as it indicates the requirement of knowledge of the great majority of nurse educators in

Turkey.

The Institute of Medicine (IOM) has emphasized the importance of person-centered care in nursing education. In order to achieve this, IOM has been putting efforts to draw attention to the requirement for nurses to be culturally competent in addition to being qualified in their area of practice (Nelson, 2002). Despite the growing emphasis on person-focused care, it has been observed that LGBT healthcare is not adequately addressed in the nursing curriculum (Lim et al., 2014). For example, Carabez et al. (2015) reported that in their interviews with nurses, 80% of the nurses admitted not receiving any training on the subject, and therefore, did not feel qualified to provide the LGBT individuals with culturally sensitive care (Carabez et al., 2015). In the present study, 52.5% of the nurse educators reported that it is important to include the subjects related to LGBT individuals in the content of education, while 34.4% of the participants considered that such an inclusion is not important. Similarly, in the study conducted by Sirota (2013), it was observed that a large majority of the nurse educators (79%) felt that teaching the students about the sexual minorities was important (Sirota, 2013). In the present study, it was revealed that only 23% of the nurse educators included the topics related to LGBT individuals in their courses, while most of them did not include such topics while delivering the education. In a study conducted by Lim et al. (2015), 75% of the nurse educators reported that the topics related to LGBT healthcare were not available or had limited inclusion in the course content, while homophobia, violence, and HIV-AIDS were indicated as the most frequently taught topics (Lim et al., 2015). In the present study as well, HIV-AIDS, homophobia, violence, and sexuality issues were identified as the most frequently taught topics.

It has been reported that the inclusion of topics related to LGBT health in the issues such as social justice, security concerns, or cultural competence serves as a facilitator in integrating the LGBT health-related topics into the nursing curriculum, while the factors such as limited guidance and resources, and social pressures serve as barriers to this integration (Lim et al., 2015). In the study conducted by Sirota (2013), the vast majority of nurse educators considered that topics related to homosexuality should be included in the education, although they also expressed that they viewed 'not feeling well equipped and competent' in this area as the major obstacle in achieving this inclusion. It is noteworthy that a large majority of nurse educators, in the present study, cited their inadequate knowledge of the topic as the reason for not including the content related to LGBT individuals in the education they delivered.

Being homophobic does not require being a conscious or deliberate process; however, the individuals with high levels of homophobia may regard the health problems of the LGBT group marginal or less important. It has been reported that this situation may result in homophobic individuals influencing, directly or indirectly, the practices toward LGBT individuals (Irwin, 2007). In this context, in order to effectively identify the health requirements of LGBT individuals, it is important that the nurse educators are able to evaluate themselves in terms of homophobia as well as in being knowledgeable in this subject. In the present study, high levels of homophobia have been identified among approximately half of the nurse educators that were surveyed. In other words, although the vast majority of nurse educators indicated that they wished to include the topics related LGBT individuals in the content of education they delivered, having a homophobic attitude may serve as a potential obstacle in overcoming the prejudices against these individuals. Previous studies conducted at the global level have demonstrated that the homophobic approach in nurse educators has declined over the years, although it has not reached the desired levels yet. Dinkel et al. (2007) and Sirota (2013) have both reported in their studies that the levels of homophobia among nurse educators have declined over the years (Dinkel et al., 2007; Sirota, 2013). However, it has also been underlined that this decline in homophobia does not mean that there is a reduced requirement in nursing care for knowledge regarding the LGBT individuals (Dorsen, 2012). In the present study, no

significant difference was observed between the degree of homophobia and certain demographic characteristics of the nurse educators. Sirota (2013), however, indicated in a previous study that advancing age and increase in experience was associated with a greater positive approach toward the LGBT individuals.

## 5. Conclusion

The present study has identified that the nurse educators in Turkey require knowledge related to LGBT individuals, although little efforts are put to obtain this knowledge. Moreover, it was observed that nurse educators did not integrate topics related to LGBT individuals sufficiently into the content of the course, even though they were willing to include these topics in the course content. This situation demonstrates that knowledge related to LGBT individuals among nurse educators is insufficient, and homophobic approaches are the major obstacles in achieving the solution to this issue. The high levels of homophobia which were reported among half of the nurse educators in the results of the present study indicated the necessity of reviewing the content of nursing education in a country like Turkey, where there is a huge requirement of demonstrating sensitivity to the marginal groups. The outcomes of the present study demonstrated that the nurse educators who grew up in the same social structure in Turkey exhibited no significant differences with the demographic variables such as age-related levels of homophobia. Although the levels of homophobia in the whole world are declining, they have not reached the desirable levels yet. Turkey has a secular structure and also includes Islamic values of the majority of the population. In this context, it has been observed in the present study that Islam and its values are an important factor in influencing the views and norms of the individuals. In the light of these results, it is important that the nurse educators who teach the health-care providers develop awareness on their own levels of homophobia, and are willing to acquire knowledge related to the LGBT individuals.

### 5.1. Limitations

Despite the use of online questionnaires in the present study, through which participants were able to participate in the survey and respond to the questions independently and without any pressure, it was observed that the desired number of participants could not be reached, which could have happened due to the reasons such as the existing traditional approaches and the people who do not value the importance of this subject.

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