

## **An analysis of postgraduate theses on LGBTI individuals: A case of nursing departments in Turkey**

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**A**- Conception and study design; **B** - Collection of data; **C** - Data analysis; **D** - Writing the paper; **E**- Review article; **F** - Approval of the final version of the article

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### **ABSTRACT**

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**Purpose:** This study aimed to analyze postgraduate theses conducted on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, and intersex Individuals in the field of nursing in Turkey.

**Materials and methods:** Within the scope of the study, all the theses conducted in the field of nursing in Turkey until December 31st, 2018 were reviewed and the theses aiming at LGBTI individuals were assessed.

**Results:** As a result of the scanning, 9 theses were reached and 88.8% of the theses were postgraduate thesis. It was seen that the theses were mainly

conducted as postgraduate theses and although the total number of theses conducted in this field had increased over time, it was not at the desired level.

**Conclusions:** As a result of the study, it was found that the theses were conducted in titles determining attitudes toward LGBTI individuals, questioning health problems of LGBTI individuals, and investigating LGBTI individuals' barriers to health access.

**Keywords:** Bisexuality, homosexuality, nursing, postgraduate nursing education, transsexualism

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, and intersex (LGBTI) individuals are among disadvantaged groups in most countries and get exposed to health inequalities [1-3]. The abbreviation of LGBTI is used as an umbrella term for this group. However, each one of these letters represents a separate population with specific health concerns [4]. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and intersex individuals have health needs same as other individuals [4,5]. However, they also have to bear different health burdens due to presence of negative attitudes toward them in the society and lack of necessary legal regulations. These burdens include stigmatization, exposure to prejudice, exclusion, rejection, and verbal and physical violence. The burdens also bring along some health issues such as depression, stress, unhappiness, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, smoking, alcohol use, and substance abuse [6,7]. LGBTI individuals not only have these health issues, but also encounter barriers in finding a solution to them.

The fact that institutions providing service within the healthcare system do not include LGBTI individuals and/or they ignore special needs of this group restricts these individuals' access to healthcare services [8]. In a study conducted in the United States of America, it was determined that LGBTI individuals faced negative attitudes during medical care, experienced delays in accessing to healthcare services and got low quality care when utilizing healthcare services [9]. Thus, the presence of studies on LGBTI individuals is important.

It is seen that the number of studies on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, and intersex individuals in different countries has increased since the 1990s [10,11]. When these individuals and their problems began to make an impression in politics, media and popular culture, an increasing interest was observed in their health in the nursing literature as well [10]. Additionally, it is indicated that the studies drawing attention to healthcare needs of LGBTI individuals is inadequately involved especially in the nursing literature [10, 12]. Eliason et al., (2010) reviewed the nursing literature and examined articles on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transsexual individuals from top 10 nursing journals with a 5-year impact factor from 2005 to 2009. They found that only 0.16% of the articles (8 out of nearly 5000 articles) focused on the health of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transsexual individuals [10]. As a continuation of this study, Jackman et al., (2019) reviewed studies on sexual minorities in nursing journals with the highest 5-year impact factor. In the study, it was determined that the topic in question occupied a place of 0.19% among all articles published between 2009-2017 [12]. It is seen that nurses in the world have a

slightly increasing interest in studies on LGBTI individuals.

In Turkey, on the other hand, studies on LGBTI individuals have become widespread since the 2000s [11]. It is seen that these studies have been conducted mainly in the fields of psychology, medicine and sociology. As the issue of sexual orientations and gender identity remains a taboo in Turkey, studies conducted by nurse researchers are conducted at a low rate [13]. In a study conducted with nursing academics in Turkey, they admitted little knowledge about the health of LGBTI individuals [14].

Lack of adequate studies on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, and intersex individuals leads to the failure of developing care and policies regarding these people (Jackman et al., 2019). Lack of relevant studies especially in countries where the issue of sexual orientations and sexual identity remains a taboo, may make LGBTI individuals even more disadvantageous [15]. Nurses have ethical liabilities in providing a culturally appropriate, quality service to LGBTI individuals [16]. Thus, nurses' recognition of problems faced by this group and awareness of this group will be effective to protecting and promoting these people's health [17].

Therefore, in this study, it was aimed to analyze subjects discussed in relation to LGBTI individuals in the postgraduate theses conducted in the field of nursing in Turkey until 2019. Accordingly, the postgraduate theses were reviewed according to their subjects, methods of researches, years, universities and regions of field studies. The study is expected to form a basis for future studies to be conducted about LGBTI individuals in the field of nursing in Turkey.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **Study Type**

This study is a retrospective theses review. Within the scope of the study, all the theses conducted in the field of nursing in Turkey until December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2018 were reviewed and the theses aiming at LGBTI individuals were assessed.

### **The Population and Sample of the Study**

The sample of the study consisted of 9 theses. In order to determine the population, the Council of Higher Education National Thesis Center Database (<https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi/giris.jsp>) was used. The Council of Higher Education National Thesis Center Database is an archive system recording all postgraduate theses conducted in Turkey and all their services are provided via internet. In this system, the theses that are permitted to be archived and can be accessed

fully via internet, are presented to open access by their authors. In addition, abstracts of all the theses in the Council of Higher Education National Thesis Center Database can be accessed. The keyword “nursing” was typed in the search engine on the web page and 7197 master’s and doctoral theses conducted until 2019 were listed. 362 theses conducted by different disciplines were omitted from the study population. It was determined that the first thesis in the field of nursing was conducted in 1984. A scanning was made using the keywords “sexual orientation”, “intersex”, “homosexual”, “gay”, “nursing”, “LGBT”, “LGBTI”, “lesbian”, “trans” and “transsexual”, both separately and in combination based on the theses conducted in the field of nursing. In line with the search criteria determined, we reached 7 theses with access permission and 2 theses without access permission but with abstract information. The theses to be included in the study were determined according to the following criteria; being conducted in the field of nursing, being related to LGBTI individuals, and having available abstract information.

#### Data Collection /Data Collection Tools

Prepared by the researchers in line with the literature; the “Data Assessment Form” was used as a data collection tool [18-20]. The data were analyzed in categories of master’s and doctoral thesis, year of publishing, university, department,

purpose and method (study type, population, sample, data collection tools).

#### Data Assessment

The theses were assessed in chronological order. Characteristics of the data acquired from the theses were summarized by calculating numbers and percentages.

#### Ethical Principles

Before conducting the study, ethical approval numbered B.30.2.ODM.0.20.08/692-802 was obtained from Clinical Trials Ethics Committee.

## RESULTS

Within the scope of the study, the master’s and doctoral theses conducted on LGBTI individuals in the field of nursing were reviewed. Total number of theses conducted in the field of nursing was found to be 6835. Reviewing the postgraduate theses conducted on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and intersex individuals in the field of nursing; we reached 9 theses on the issue (8 master’s theses and 1 doctoral thesis). It was found that this number corresponded to 0.13% of all the theses conducted in the field of nursing (Figure 1).

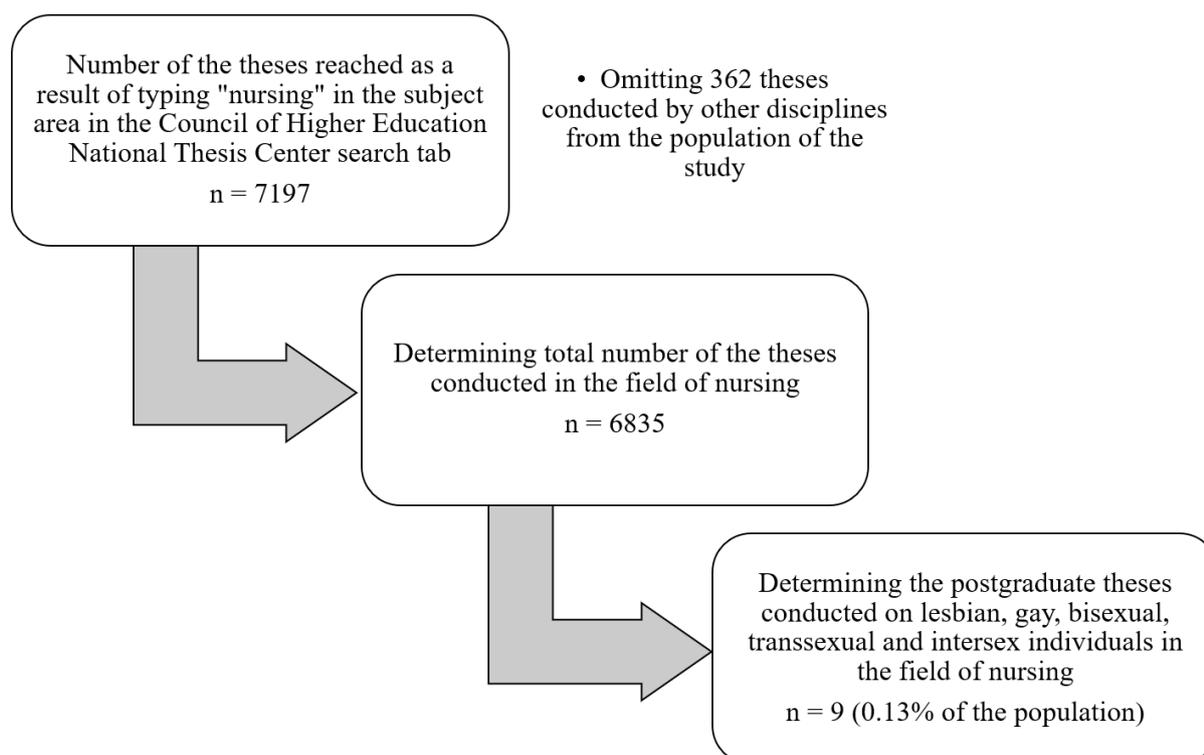


Figure 1. The Study Process

According to the Table 1, it was seen that the theses were conducted in categories of determining attitudes toward LGBTI individuals, assessing health problems and needs of LGBTI individuals and investigating LGBTI individuals' barriers to health access. When examining dates when the postgraduate theses were conducted, it was determined that they were mainly conducted in 2017 (50%). When examining regions of the postgraduate theses, it was observed that the Marmara Region was the leading one with 75%. It

was found that one thesis was conducted in each of the Black Sea and Mediterranean Regions. A doctoral thesis was conducted in the Marmara Region. When examining departments conducting postgraduate theses, it was observed that the Department of Nursing had the highest rate (50%). A doctoral thesis was conducted by Marmara University in the Department of Psychiatric Nursing in 2011 (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Distribution of Master's and Doctoral Theses in Terms of Some Characteristics

Descriptive Characteristics	Master's Theses		Doctoral Theses	
	n	%	n	%
<b>Year of Thesis</b>				
2011	-	-	1	100.0
2015	1	12.5	-	-
2017	4	50	-	-
2018	3	37.5	-	-
<b>Region of University</b>				
Marmara Region	6	75.0	1	100.0
Mediterranean Region	1	12.5	-	-
Black Sea Region	1	12.5	-	-
<b>Field of Thesis</b>				
Department of Nursing	4	50.0	-	-
Department of Psychiatric Nursing	2	25.0	-	-
Department of Public Health Nursing	1	12.5	-	-
Department of Nursing Management	1	12.5	1	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 2** Distribution of Information Regarding the Methods of Master's and Doctoral Theses

Descriptive Characteristics	Master's Theses		Doctoral Theses	
	n	%	n	%
<b>Study Type</b>				
Qualitative Research/Phenomenological Method	2	25	-	-
Cross-Sectional Descriptive	2	25	-	-
Descriptive	3	37.5	-	-
Descriptive and Correlational	1	12.5	1	100
<b>Purpose of the Study</b>				
Attitudes towards LGBT Individuals	4	50	1	100
Health Problems of LGBT Individuals	2	25	-	-
LGBT Individuals' Barriers to Health Access	2	25	-	-

<b>Sample Group</b>				
Lesbians	1	12.5	-	-
Nurses	2	25	-	-
Nursing Students	1	12.5	-	-
Nursing Lecturers	1	12.5	-	-
LGBT Individuals	2	25	-	-
LGBT Individuals and Healthcare Professionals	-	-	1	100
Trans Men and Trans Women	1	12.5	-	-
<b>Total</b>	8	100	1	100

When examining data in method sections of the master’s and doctoral theses, it was observed that 37.5% of the master’s theses were mainly conducted in the ‘quantitative descriptive’ type. When examining purposes of the master’s theses, it was determined that 50% of the master’s theses mainly investigated attitudes toward LGBTI individuals. When sample groups of the theses were analyzed, it was observed that sample groups in the master’s theses consisted mainly of LGBT individuals (50%), nurses (25%), nursing students (12.5%) and nursing lecturers (12.5%).

It was determined that a doctoral thesis was conducted in the ‘descriptive and correlational type’ for the purpose of investigating attitudes toward LGBT individuals. Its sample group consisted of ‘LGBT Individuals and Healthcare Professionals’.

## **DISCUSSION**

Studies to be conducted on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and intersex individuals should be important in terms of protecting and promoting the health of these people [21]. The Institute of Medicine underlines inadequacy of the base of scientific knowledge and studies on the health of LGBTI individuals [4]. In this study, it was found that there were only 9 theses conducted on LGBTI individuals in the field of nursing in Turkey.

Assessing the theses reviewed within the scope of the study according to their purposes, it was observed that researchers conducted studies on LGBTI individuals in 3 different categories (Table 1). They were attitudes of nurses/nursing students/nurse academics toward LGBTI individuals, health problems and needs of LGBTI individuals and LGBTI individuals’ barriers to health issues. It was seen that in these categories, there were many theses investigating attitudes of nurses/nursing students/nurse academics toward LGBTI individuals.

It was seen that the postgraduate theses reviewed increased in the course of time and they

were conducted mainly in 2017 (Figure 1). Jackman et al., (2019) reviewed studies on sexual minorities, which were published in nursing journals with the highest 5-year impact factor [12]. They found that nurses’ studies on the issue increased between 2009-2017 and the studies were conducted mainly in 2017. In parallel with the world, nurses in Turkey are also interested in studies on LGBTI individuals, which might be associated with the increase of the effectiveness and visibility of LGBTI movements worldwide. In addition, the profession of nursing, like many other professions, is affected by social dynamics. Also this may be associated with limited inclusion of subjects related to LGBTI individuals in the nursing curriculum, unpreparedness of nursing trainers to teach LGBTI health, and realization of nursing practices in the heterosexist system [22]. In a study conducted with nursing academics in Turkey, it was found that most of academics (59%) need knowledge about the health of LGBTI individuals [14].

The majority of the theses were conducted in the Marmara Region in Turkey. The Marmara Region is an important region in terms of urbanization in Turkey. Istanbul, one of the largest metropolitans of Turkey, is located in this region. The reason behind why majority of the theses were conducted in the Marmara Region might be because researchers felt less concerned about conducting studies on LGBTI individuals in this region. This is because issues related to LGBTI individuals remain a taboo in Turkey [13].

When reviewing the postgraduate theses on LGBTI individuals in the study, it was determined that the researchers chose descriptive, cross-sectional and qualitative methods, whereas they never used experimental methods (Table 2). In addition, it was found that only one out of the nine theses was the doctoral thesis (Table 1). In the study by Eliason et al., (2010), it was stated that nurse researchers usually used qualitative methods [10]. In the study conducted by Jackman et al., with sexual minority groups, they found that the nurses used mostly qualitative and cross-sectional studies [12].

In the theses reviewed, it was found that sample group consisted mainly of LGBT individuals and nurses and the theses were usually conducted for the purpose of determining attitudes toward LGBTI individuals. Additionally, it was determined in the present study that the theses usually used survey forms and scales as data collection tools. As this issue has begun to be studied in Turkey only recently, it was seen that researchers investigated mostly attitudes. In the articles reviewed by Eliason et al., (2010) in their study, it was indicated that nurse researchers chose mostly LGBTI individuals for their sample group between 2005-2009 [10]. Also, in their study, Jackman et al., found that nurse researchers included LGBTI individuals mostly in their sample group in their studies on sexual minorities between 2009-2017 [12]. The fact that nurse researchers studying the issue in Turkey chose nurses for their sample group might be due to the fact that it is harder to contact LGBTI individuals in Turkey. LGBTI individuals in Turkey have to hide their sexual identity due to fear of being exposed to stigma, exclusion, and being exposed to discrimination, which makes it difficult to conduct a study with this group [23].

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

As a result of the study, it was seen that the theses were mainly conducted as postgraduate theses and although the total number of theses conducted in this field had increased in the course of time.

It was found that the theses were conducted as descriptive studies rather than experimental studies, a great majority of the theses were conducted to examine attitudes toward LGBTI individuals; and they were conducted mainly in the Marmara Region.

In addition, it was determined that sample group of majority of the theses consisted of groups other than LGBTI individuals. For postgraduate theses to be conducted for LGBTI individuals in the field of nursing, it can be suggested to plan interventional and analytical studies that may reveal and effectively solve the problems of these groups in particular and to conduct studies directly contacting LGBTI individuals, for the sake of future studies.

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