

## Exploring The Psychosocial Risk and Resilience among The Lesbian Community in Selangor, Malaysia

Nursyahira Karim<sup>2</sup>, Aini Azeqa Ma'rof<sup>1,2</sup>, Mohd Shahrul  
Kamarudin<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Institute for Social Science Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 Serdang, Selangor, MALAYSIA, <sup>2</sup>Faculty of Human Ecology, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 Serdang, Selangor, MALAYSIA, <sup>3</sup>Institut Kemahiran MARA Kuching, Sarawak, MALAYSIA.

Email: azeqa@upm.edu.my

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### Abstract

This study narrows its focus to rigorously investigate the distinct themes that either attract or repel lesbians in Selangor, Malaysia, from participating in same-sex sexual activities. Conducted within the framework of qualitative research, the study utilizes a phenomenological methodology to delve into the emotional and psychological complexities that contribute to these behaviors. The study population consists of five lesbian individuals, who were identified through a snowball sampling technique. Data was collected through a combination of online and face-to-face semi-structured interviews, aiming to allow participants to express themselves freely and comprehensively. For data analysis, a thematic approach was employed to interpret the nuanced motivations and deterrents identified by the study participants. The study successfully isolated several significant factors of attraction. Notably, familial influence, compatibility with partners, negative experiences with men, identity confusion, engagement with social media, and strong social support networks were found to be key motivators for lesbians to engage in same-sex sexual activities. Conversely, the research also identified two main themes that serve as deterrents. These were rooted in concerns about family acceptance and a deep-seated desire for a more traditional family structure. By isolating these key factors, the study aims to offer a focused, nuanced understanding of what encourages or deters sexual activity within the lesbian community in Selangor, Malaysia. This focused examination can serve as a crucial resource for social scientists, policymakers, and LGBTQ+ advocacy groups looking to understand the unique challenges and motivators within this specific demographic.

**Keywords:** Lesbians, Factors of Attraction, Factors of Resistance, Qualitative, Selangor, Malaysia

**Introduction**

The lesbian community is a diverse and multifaceted collective, encompassing individuals who identify as women and share same-sex attractions. Within this community, a rich tapestry of identities, experiences, and intersections emerges, illustrating the complexity of lesbian lives. It is important to acknowledge that the lesbian experience is shaped by a myriad of factors, including culture, religion, race, socioeconomic status, and geographic location (McCann & Kim, 2016). Despite the unique challenges faced by lesbian individuals across the globe, many find strength and resilience within the community itself. Community-building and mutual support have played pivotal roles in shaping the identities and well-being of lesbian individuals.

Psychosocial risks within the lesbian community can have profound implications for the mental health and overall well-being of its members. These risks encompass a range of challenges, including self-pressure to conform to societal norms and expectations (Clements et al (2021), experiences of loneliness and social isolation due to fear of discrimination or rejection (Power et al (2021), and encounters with discrimination, both external and internalized (Zawawi et al., 2020). Additionally, the pressure to navigate risky behaviors as a means of coping with societal non-acceptance (Thoma et al (2021), the enduring effects of trauma from familial or societal rejection (Sweileh (2021), and potential struggles with sexual addiction further contribute to the complexity of psychosocial risks (Miner, 2022).

Despite these challenges, the lesbian community has demonstrated remarkable resilience over the years. Social support networks within the community, both online and offline, serve as lifelines that provide a sense of belonging, acceptance, and emotional support (Pardue-Bourgeois et al., 2022). The acceptance of one's identity within the lesbian community fosters positive self-concepts and emotional well-being (Puckett et al., 2015). Furthermore, the advent of digital platforms and social media has revolutionized how lesbians connect, share experiences, and engage in activism (Nash & Browne, 2020). These platforms transcend geographical limitations, creating a global network of lesbian individuals who find empowerment in their shared experiences and advocacy efforts.

It is a testament to the strength and resilience of lesbian individuals that, in the face of societal expectations and discrimination, many remain committed to their identity within the lesbian community. Despite societal pressures and potential alienation, they continue to foster bonds with like-minded individuals who share their experiences, providing a source of validation, understanding, and emotional support (Nash & Browne, 2020). The unwavering determination of lesbian individuals to maintain their connection with the community reflects a deeply ingrained sense of identity and belonging that transcends external judgments (Oblea et al., 2023). The current research endeavors to delve deeper into the factors that underpin this commitment and resilience, seeking to shed light on the mechanisms that empower lesbian individuals to navigate the psychosocial challenges they face while remaining true to themselves and their community. By examining these factors, this research aims to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the intricate dynamics within the lesbian community and the ways in which individuals persevere in the pursuit of self-acceptance and authentic connection.

### **Lesbian Issues in Selangor, Malaysia**

Lesbian individuals in Selangor, Malaysia, constitute a dynamic and diverse community residing within the complex socio-cultural milieu of the state. While advancements have been made in recent years in recognizing and addressing issues faced by the LGBTQ+ community worldwide, the lesbian community in Selangor continues to encounter a range of psychosocial risks that impact their mental health and overall well-being. This article embarks on a comprehensive exploration of these psychosocial risks, including self-pressure, loneliness, discrimination, risky behaviors, trauma, and sexual addiction, while concurrently examining the factors that contribute to resilience and identity maintenance within the lesbian community. Drawing upon contemporary research and relevant scholarly sources, this study aims to shed light on the unique experiences of lesbian individuals in Selangor.

Selangor, a populous and economically vibrant state in Malaysia, represents a rich tapestry of cultures, beliefs, and identities. Within this diverse landscape, the lesbian community forms an integral part of the LGBTQ+ population, navigating a complex amalgamation of traditional values, religious influences, and modernity. The convergence of these factors shapes the environment within which lesbian individuals forge their identities and relationships, while also facing challenges rooted in societal norms and expectations.

A closer examination of the psychosocial risks faced by the lesbian community in Selangor unveils the hidden struggles they encounter. Self-pressure, stemming from societal expectations and internalized homophobia, can lead to identity conflicts and diminished self-esteem (Cook et al., 2019). Loneliness is another pervasive concern, as many lesbians may experience isolation due to fear of discrimination, rejection, or family estrangement (Frost & Meyer, 2023). Discrimination, influenced by cultural norms and religious beliefs, further exacerbates their vulnerability, exposing them to stigmatization, marginalization, and even violence.

Psychosocial risks extend to encompass risky behaviors adopted as coping mechanisms by some lesbian individuals in Selangor, as they grapple with the pressures of societal non-acceptance. Furthermore, experiences of trauma, such as familial rejection or hate crimes, can leave lasting emotional scars and contribute to mental health challenges (Sweileh, 2022). Additionally, the concept of sexual addiction within the lesbian community merits exploration, as it may be intertwined with the pursuit of intimacy and acceptance in a society that often fails to understand their unique experiences (Workman et al., 2022).

Despite these challenges, the lesbian community in Selangor, Malaysia exhibits remarkable resilience. Social support, often cultivated within a tight-knit network of friends and chosen families, plays a pivotal role in mitigating psychosocial risks and fostering emotional well-being. The acceptance of one's identity within the community, alongside the embrace of diverse expressions of gender and sexuality, provides individuals with a profound sense of belonging, empowerment, and self-worth (Dyar et al., 2018). The advent of social media platforms has further transformed the landscape of lesbian community-building, offering spaces for connection, sharing of experiences, and activism that transcend geographical boundaries (Nash & Browne et al., 2020).

This article endeavors to undertake a comprehensive exploration of the psychosocial risks faced by lesbian individuals in Selangor, Malaysia, while simultaneously shedding light on the

resilience factors that enable them to navigate their identities within a diverse and evolving community. By adopting an interdisciplinary approach and drawing upon contemporary research, we aim to contribute to a deeper understanding of the psychosocial dynamics affecting Selangor's lesbian population. In doing so, we hope to facilitate greater inclusivity, acceptance, and support for lesbian individuals in Selangor, advocating for a future that embraces diversity, respects individual identities, and recognizes the importance of mental well-being within the LGBTQ+ community.

Based on the research problems that have been discussed, the following research questions are formed:

1. What is the profile of the lesbian community in Malaysia?
2. What are the psychosocial risks faced by the lesbian community in Malaysia?
3. What resilience factors are taken into account in becoming part of and maintain in the lesbian community in Malaysia?

### **Research Methodology**

This study endeavors to comprehensively explore various facets of the lesbian community in Selangor, Malaysia, encompassing their demographic profiles, psychosocial risks, and the resilience mechanisms that facilitate their coping strategies. To achieve a nuanced understanding of these multifaceted aspects, this research adopts a qualitative research approach, which allows for the collection of rich and contextually relevant data.

### **Research Design**

A qualitative methodology is chosen for this investigation, given its suitability for delving into intricate and multifarious issues requiring nuanced perspectives. Qualitative research excels at offering an in-depth exploration of situations and individuals, yielding comprehensive insights that quantitative approaches may not capture.

### **Sample Selection**

The study centers its attention on the lesbian community in Selangor, Malaysia, drawing from a diverse and representative sample of individuals who self-identify as lesbians. Participant recruitment is facilitated through the utilization of snowball sampling, a non-probability sampling technique designed to identify and engage individuals with specific characteristics. This process commences with a few initial participants who are then encouraged to refer others within their networks. Ultimately, the study involves five lesbian individuals who willingly participate as informants.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection methods encompass semi-structured interviews and participant observation. These interactions occur through a combination of online and in-person channels, prioritizing the safety and comfort of the participants. All sessions are recorded with explicit consent from the participants, and subsequently transcribed for meticulous analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis serves as the chosen approach for data coding and analysis. This method enables the identification of recurring patterns, themes, and motifs within the data corpus, thereby facilitating the organization of findings in alignment with the research questions.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Given the sensitive nature of the research topic, the study places paramount importance on ethical considerations. Protocols are established to ensure informed consent, participant anonymity, and data confidentiality. Participants are fully informed about the research's objectives, procedures, potential risks, and their unequivocal right to withdraw from the study at any point without incurring adverse consequences.

### **Results and Discussion**

#### **Objective 1: To identify the informant's profile from the Selangor lesbian community.**

Table 1 shows the five informants that involved in this study. Details for each informant as below.

#### **Informant 1**

The initial informant, presently 24 years old, identifies as a Malay Muslim and resides in Rawang, Selangor. He shares his residence exclusively with his mother and is the youngest among four siblings. His educational journey was notable for its unique path, spanning from kindergarten to a specialized high school tailored to accommodate his Learning Disability (LD) diagnosis. Although he lacks a Malaysian Certificate of Education, he possesses specialized certificates from his school. Previously, he held a brief position at a childcare center, but this engagement was terminated due to disciplinary reasons. At present, he awaits potential job opportunities from a nearby factory, contingent upon obtaining his mother's consent. The interview with this informant transpired openly and enthusiastically, conducted over a duration of 60 minutes in an open park setting.

#### **Informant 2**

Informant 2, also 24 years old and of Malay Muslim background, resides in OUG, Selangor. She holds a diploma in accounting, earned from a private institution in Kuala Lumpur, and presently works in Human Resources for a security company. As the youngest among four siblings and the sole daughter in her family, she encountered emotional pressure from her male family members. Despite familial objections, she made the significant decision to move out and establish her residence close to her workplace.

#### **Informant 3**

The third informant, currently 25 years old, is a Malay Muslim originating from Selangor and presently residing in Rawang. In 2018, he completed his diploma in Culinary Arts and currently serves as an assistant chef at a prestigious five-star hotel in Petaling Jaya. Having grown up as the eldest among five siblings, raised under the guidance of a strict father while his mother worked abroad, he has cultivated a strong sense of independence and responsibility. Though he aspires to pursue a degree, he has temporarily deferred these aspirations to support his younger siblings in their educational pursuits.

#### **Informant 4**

The fourth informant, aged 25, from Shah Alam, Selangor, and is a student at the Technical University of Malaysia Melaka (UTEM). Originally born in Johor Bahru, she is the fourth position among six siblings. Her upbringing significantly influenced her aspiration to pursue a career as a ship crew member. She successfully obtained her diploma in Mechanical Engineering in 2019 and is presently in her 7th semester at UTEM, with graduation anticipated by the end of 2023.

**Informant 5**

The fifth informant, currently 21 years old in 2023, identifies as a Malay Muslim and is pursuing a degree in Law Enforcement at a private higher education institution in Kuala Lumpur. Originally hailing from Negeri Sembilan, he currently resides in Pantai Dalam, Selangor. As the youngest among four siblings, his educational journey included a brief stint at the University of Kuala Lumpur, where he studied Culinary Arts before discontinuing his studies due to prohibitive tuition fees. Presently in his fourth semester, he relishes the freedom to explore the vibrant city of Kuala Lumpur.

Each informant's distinctive profile was thoughtfully gathered to offer a diverse range of perspectives and insights for the study's comprehensive exploration.

Each informant's profile was carefully collected to provide a diverse perspective for the study.

Table 1

*Informants background*

INFORMANT PROFILES								
Informant	Age	Religion	Ethnicity	Place of residence	Education level	Work	Number of siblings	Child order
1	24	Islam	Malay	Rawang	High school	Unemployed	4	4
2	24	Islam	Malay	OUG	Diploma	HR in private sector	4	4
3	25	Islam	Malay	Rawang	Diploma	Assistant hotel chef	5	1
4	25	Islam	Malay	Shah Alam	Degree	Student	6	3
5	21	Islam	Malay	Pantai Dalam	Diploma	Student	4	4

**Objective 4: Exploring Psychosocial Risks Faced by the Lesbian Community**

The fourth study objective aims to investigate the psychosocial risks encountered by the lesbian community. Being a part of this community entails certain psychosocial challenges, especially in the Malaysian context where this group is not officially recognized. Consequently, the researcher delved into the lives of informants to understand the types of psychosocial risks they have faced or are currently experiencing due to their lesbian identity. The study identified six overarching themes: self-imposed stress, loneliness, discrimination, risky behaviors, trauma, and sexual addiction.

**Theme 1: Self-Pressure**

Pressure is an inherent aspect of human life. Everyone experiences pressure because as normal human beings, it is unavoidable. Regardless of the type of pressure encountered, it has an impact on an individual, whether positive or negative. In the conducted interviews, self-pressure was felt when individuals had to conceal their identity.

### **Sub-theme: Concealing Identity**

Issues related to identity formation can occur in various dimensions, including physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects of an individual. For this sub-theme, the emotional aspect of identity problems occurred when individuals couldn't understand or control their emotions in certain situations. This usually happens when individuals are confronted with conflicts that contradict their identities. Based on the conducted interviews, informants stated that they felt pressured to hide their lesbian identity. The following are statements from these informants:

*"...I feel pressured because no one knows about me like this, you know. Sometimes, even when I want to video call, I have to hide because I don't want my mother to see..."*

*(Informant 1)*

*"...One day, my partner came to my workplace to pick me up, but she started shouting my name outside the gate, and the whole office heard it. Yes, it was embarrassing, people always watch, seeing us leave together. But when we were a little late, she started shouting, and people started saying all sorts of things about me. Sometimes, I don't know how to explain who she is. It's stressful..."*

*(Informant 2)*

*"...I'm always on the phone with my partner, so sometimes my sister asks who I'm talking to, and I just say it's a friend. There was a time when a cousin went out and loudly announced that I'm a lesbian in front of the whole family. I felt like screaming at him. It's stressful when people know about us. It's also stressful to think about how to hide it, but that's who I am; I just stay true to myself and talk on the phone..."*

*(Informant 5)*

Based on the shared experiences, all three informants expressed feeling pressured to hide their lesbian identities from family members and the surrounding community. This indicates that lesbian individuals are afraid of the stigma and judgments of the society around them, as they are aware that they will be perceived negatively.

### **Theme 2: Loneliness**

Loneliness was identified as a psychosocial risk faced by lesbian individuals. Humans cannot live in isolation; they require social relationships for a balanced life. There are two sub-themes for the loneliness theme. Loneliness is experienced due to an indifferent family and having no one to confide in.

#### **Sub-theme 1: Indifferent Family**

Families play a crucial role in a child's life; parents are the closest and most intimate individuals to their children. Therefore, parents' upbringing and care become essential for children to understand the world before getting to know it from the society around them. Statements shared during the interviews revealed that parents' busy schedules, overprotectiveness, and lack of concern for their children's feelings were among the issues raised by the informants:

*"...My mom and dad are busy with their work. It's hard to meet them. My mom, it's definitely hard to meet her because she's in Saudi Arabia, my dad is busy at home, he works in the*

*morning and has soccer meetings at night. It feels lonely when you see other parents, and my mom, of course, it's hard to meet her. I feel the emptiness when I see other parents..."*

*(Informant 3)*

*"...I know my mom is phobic because everyone has left this house, but it doesn't mean I have to stay at home until I'm old. Sometimes, when I think about running away, I feel like doing it, but when I think about my mom coming back, I hesitate. It's stressful to stay at home; you can't go anywhere. It's like I have no life! My mom never thinks about how I feel; sigh..."*

*(Informant 1)*

*"...I left home because I couldn't stand being scolded by my dad and my brothers. My parents never asked how I felt. Over time, it eats at you, you want to have parents who can make friends. This is not about ordering..."*

*(Informant 2)*

Based on these excerpts, it is clear that the informants, as children, wanted their parents to be their confidants. The lack of concern from their parents led them to seek attention from others, such as friends, partners, and those close to them.

### **Sub-theme 2: Nowhere to Confide**

For this sub-theme, some informants mentioned that when they had conflicts with their partners, they had no one to confide in about their feelings. This happened because they only had their partners to confide in, and when conflicts arose, they lost their outlet for expressing their emotions. The following are statements from the involved informants:

*"...I rely heavily on my current partner because I have no one else once I left my parents' house. When we argue, there's nowhere to vent. Like, it's okay for her because she has friends, she has her siblings who know she's a lesbian. But it's not the same for me. It feels lonely and sad sometimes, and there's even regret..."*

*(Informant 2)*

*"...My sister and brother are grown up now, my parents are far away, I also want to feel pampered, it's not like I don't have that feeling, but when my partner is around, I feel complete because I can share all my feelings and have a place to be affectionate..."*

*(Informant 5)*

*"...I've been stressed when I had fights with my old partner, at first, it was okay, but it gradually became lonely and stressful for myself. It's lonely when there's no one to call, no one to listen to what's happening every day. So, I avoided fighting with her..."*

*(Informant 4)*

Based on the shared experiences of the second and fourth informants, there is a commonality in their statements: a feeling of loneliness because they had no one to rely on and confide in except for their partners. When conflicts arose, their reliance on a place to express their feelings disappeared, which led them to suppress their feelings and, in some cases, self-pressure. Meanwhile, the fifth informant stated that family members did not care about her, leading her to seek a partner to feel complete when someone was available to express her feelings and provide a place for affection.

### Theme 3: Discrimination

Discrimination, negative perceptions, and violence are faced by lesbian individuals, whether by the local community, institutions, or even among their own family members. For the discrimination theme, two sub-themes were identified: being evicted by friends and being viewed with suspicion or negative judgment.

#### Sub-theme 1: Eviction

Based on the conducted interviews, one informant was evicted by her housemates when she was not at home. This happened because her housemates suspected that she had a romantic relationship with another woman due to her close friendship with a female student at the university, and they regarded her as a lesbian. The following is the statement from the informant:

*"...I was once evicted during my third semester. What was surprising was that when I returned from having dinner with my friend, I couldn't enter the house. I said hello, knocked on the gate, called out to all the housemates, but no one responded, and no one answered my calls. We usually left the gate unlocked. It was nighttime, and there was nothing going on. I felt really shocked. So, I stayed at a hotel for the night, one of those budget hotels in the area; I don't even remember if it was a decent one. But it was an ordeal, for sure. I couldn't sleep. I sat on the floor until morning. When I returned to my rented house the next day, it happened again. They were there in the living room, and I could see them watching TV, but I was still embarrassed, and I thought, 'What should I do if they don't open the door?' So, I begged for at least the chance to get my school uniform and promised not to disturb them. It was weird how it all happened. It took about 10 minutes of begging until one of them opened the door. I rushed in to get my school uniform and then showered and changed in the university restroom. I was late because of that, and, seriously, it's a memory I won't forget..."*

*"...After that, I moved out of that house. I applied for a dormitory. One of them came to apologize, saying they did that because they saw me being close to a girl and assumed I was a lesbian. I didn't say anything; I just stayed silent and accepted it..."*

*(Informant 4)*

Based on the account provided by the fourth informant, it is evident that she was discriminated against by her housemates due to her close relationship with another woman, which led to her being perceived as a lesbian. This shows that the stigma against lesbians in Malaysia is clear, but the way lesbian discrimination is manifested can be quite harsh. Lady (2023) argues that lesbians have been widely condemned, ignored, and discriminated against in society, causing them to become invisible, hidden, and marginalized, while their sexual practices and identities are misunderstood as deviant and immoral.

#### Sub-theme 2: Viewed with Suspicion

Being viewed with suspicion or negative judgment is a perception given by the surrounding community to lesbian individuals. This happens because lesbian stigma is considered deviant and wrong, indicating that lesbian individuals are not deserving of good treatment. This also occurred to the following informants

*"...All my cousins view me as a lesbian because my cousin, the brother, went around loudly saying that I'm a lesbian in front of the whole family. So, it's uncomfortable when the cousins*

*who aren't close to me give me those annoying looks. It's embarrassing and annoying; why do you care about me when you don't even know me?..."*

*(Informant 5)*

*"...One office, in particular, gave me suspicious looks when my partner came to pick me up or drop me off. It happened when my partner shouted my name. They were even more talkative then, and I felt really uncomfortable working when people looked at me like that..."*

*(Informant 2)*

*"...It's like one college started looking at me suspiciously. Hahaha, yeah, ever since the incident where I was evicted, more and more people found out about the gossip, and it spread over time. I wanted to go back, but things had already happened. I just had to face it. It's painful. I was evicted, lost friends..."*

*(Informant 4)*

Some informants felt uncomfortable with their own family members because they were considered lesbians, while others were viewed with suspicion at work. The situation worsened when they began to be viewed with suspicion in their own educational institutions. Discrimination can have profound effects on individuals. Discrimination against lesbians can take the form of direct discrimination, such as workplace discrimination. This was felt by the second informant when her partner frequently picked her up and dropped her off from work. Furthermore, indirect discrimination, such as rules or practices that limit their rights, can also occur. Discrimination against lesbians can also take the form of verbal or physical abuse. This was experienced by the fourth informant and the second informant, who felt uncomfortable with the views and actions of the people around them.

#### **Theme 4: Risky Behaviors**

Individuals who choose to live as lesbians do not escape experiences of risky behaviors that affect their social functioning. Based on the interviews with the informants, two sub-themes emerged: self-harm and vaping.

##### **Sub-theme 1: Self-Harm**

Self-harm appears to be a trend in romantic relationships among young people. Self-harm carries various meanings, including as a sign of affection, proof of love, an expression of sadness, willingness to die, and more. According to the conducted interviews, some informants engaged in self-harm as a way to cope with sadness and relationship pressure. Others used self-harm to demonstrate their sadness to their partners.

*"...When we argue and I have nowhere to vent, I will self-harm because it relieves stress. My partner understands it; when we fight, I tend to self-harm. It doesn't hurt at all because I'm used to it..."*

*(Informant 2)*

*"...I self-harm just for fun, sometimes just to show my partner that I'm sad. Hahaha, for me, self-harming is no big deal. It hurts like an ant bite..."*

*(Informant 3)*

Based on these excerpts, it can be seen that two sides of self-harm are presented by the informants: first, self-harm due to sadness and pressure, and second, self-harm to prove their sadness to gain their partner's attention. Self-harm seems to have become a source of pleasure and proof for them in romantic relationships. However, self-harm is dangerous and jeopardizes their own safety.

### **Sub-theme 2: Vaping**

Vaping became a widely discussed topic around 2019 and was touted as a substitute for smoking. In the current era, vaping is known and used by people of all ages, including teenagers. This is because vaping offers various flavors and is more visually appealing. Lesbian individuals also find vaping to be soothing and enjoyable. The following are statements from the informants:

*"...People started with shisha, but now there's vaping. If I'm stressed, I vape. Vaping is safer; parents don't know about it because it smells nice. If I pass by my parents while vaping, I just say it's perfume. Whether I'm stressed, or if there's a fight with my partner, I vape. Sometimes it makes me feel smart when I vape, following the trend, hahaha..."*

*(Informant 3)*

*"...I vape because my cousin and friends taught me. I was stressed because of studying and my partner's work issues. I often buy vape online, hide it, and vape in my room when my sister and brother aren't around..."*

*(Informant 5)*

Based on these statements, the third and fifth informants mentioned that they vape to relieve stress related to environmental factors such as issues with their partners and academic pressures, as well as to follow the trend. Vaping poses significant health risks to the human body, as the risks associated with vaping are similar to those of smoking, including nicotine's impact on the brain, such as decreased focus, mood swings, and memory issues. It also affects the kidneys, liver, lungs, and can lead to cancer.

### **Theme 5: Trauma**

Trauma is a frightening or distressing experience that elicits strong emotional or physical reactions. Trauma has long-term effects on an individual's mental and emotional health. Three sub-themes emerged from the informants' sharing about trauma: sexual harassment, third-party interference, and separation.

#### **Sub-theme 1: Sexual Harassment**

The study found that experiences of sexual harassment also contribute to traumatic feelings in lesbian individuals. Two informants mentioned that their involvement with lesbian relationships was influenced by their experiences of sexual harassment during their school years. According to the second informant, she felt pressured every time she had a sexual encounter with men, as they would make lewd comments and sometimes grope her. The fifth informant shared that she was touched inappropriately and forced to masturbate by her male cousin, which made her fearful of men. Here are the statements from the informants:

*"...I became traumatized about having sex with men. Every time I dated a man, they would take advantage of me, make lewd comments, and even touch me. Even though I broke up with my previous boyfriend because of this, the new one did the same. Men are all the same..."*

*(Informant 2)*

*"...Since I was young, I was touched inappropriately by my cousin when he visited our village, and when he came to Kuala Lumpur, he stayed at our house. Every night, I was touched, made to masturbate, and sometimes even touched his fluids. I was truly traumatized, too afraid to tell my family, didn't want them to fight..."*

*(Informant 5)*

Based on these excerpts, the study aligns with Erik Erikson's Social Development Theory, specifically Stage 5, which involves identity versus identity confusion. These informants entered adolescence and struggled with identity confusion due to their experiences of sexual harassment during their teenage years.

### **Sub-theme 2: Third-Party Interference**

Third-party interference in a relationship refers to the involvement of another individual in a romantic relationship. The study found that informants felt traumatized by women who attempted to interfere with their fathers, potentially jeopardizing their relationships with their mothers. This was shared by the third and fourth informants:

*"...Honestly, I'm very scared that my dad might have another woman. My mom is far away in Saudi Arabia, and my dad is always busy with work and soccer. He's handsome and takes good care of his appearance, wearing strong perfume. Even his coworkers get infatuated with him, not to mention the women in his office. I genuinely hate this; sometimes, I'm extremely afraid when I see my dad acting flirtatious..."*

*(Informant 3)*

*"...My dad was once tempted by an Indonesian woman who came to work. She was still so young, and she wanted to be friends with my dad because she wanted to stay in Malaysia. At that time, my dad got a project, and his income was substantial. It was heartbreaking to see my mom crying every night because of my dad's conversations with her. I'm afraid something like that might happen again when my dad gets another project..."*

*(Informant 4)*

The shared experiences of the third and fourth informants indicate a common fear: that their fathers may become involved with other women. The difference lies in the third informant's extreme fear of potential infidelity, while the fourth informant is concerned about a potential repeat of past mistakes by her father. These fears have become traumatic and continue to haunt their thoughts.

### **Sub-theme 3: Separation**

Every romantic relationship eventually comes to an end, and how that separation plays out remains a mystery in the future. Based on the conducted interviews, informants expressed fears related to separation, both from family members and current partners. The first informant, for example, mentioned that after losing her father and brother, she has difficulty feeling love or attachment, which has made her fearful of forming romantic relationships. The

second informant shared her fear of separation from her current partner, as she believes she has nowhere to turn if she leaves her partner Here are quotes from the informants:

*"...I've become traumatized by separation. After my father passed away, I no longer felt his love, and recently, my brother died in an accident, and then I broke up with my male partner. I'm really afraid of getting into a relationship, afraid of parting again..."*

*(Informant 1)*

*"...I'm afraid to argue with my current partner because I live with her. If we break up, I won't have anyone to rely on, and I won't go back to my parents' house after leaving on my own. When I constantly think about it, I feel scared. Where will I stay if we fight? Who will take care of me? Where will I find food and drink?..."*

*(Informant 2)*

Based on these shared experiences, an extreme fear of separation leads to traumatic feelings, both related to the past and the future. Separation from family members and partners makes the first informant fear separation once more, while the second informant fears separating from her partner because she feels she has no one else to rely on.

### **Theme 6: Sexual Addiction**

The impact of experiencing sexual harassment has led informants to desire sexual satisfaction. Addiction is not something that suddenly occurs but is developed through experience and unhealthy social environments serving as a learning medium for sexuality. Under the theme of sexual addiction, two sub-themes emerged from the conducted interviews: self-pleasure and being with a partner.

#### **Sub-theme 1: Self-Pleasure**

According to Rowland and Uribe (2020), an addiction to sex without a partner, involving self-pleasure such as pornography and masturbation, is categorized as self-indulgence. According to the fifth informant, she had to engage in self-pleasure because she no longer trusted men and was too scared to engage in sexual activities with her female partner. Here is the informant's statement:

*"...Because I was touched by my uncle from a young age until now, sometimes I feel like playing. The desire to play comes suddenly, and when I can't resist, I often go to the bathroom to play alone. If there's no one at home, I play alone in my room. It's just to release that feeling; even though I have a partner now, I'll never engage in sexual activities with her because I'm afraid she'll see how extreme I am..."*

*(Informant 5)*

According to the fifth informant's sharing, constant sexual harassment from her uncle over a long period of time led to her developing a sexual desire. She would satisfy this desire by masturbating alone in her room or in the bathroom. This aligns with the Psychoanalytic Theory of Id, Ego, and Superego, which controls human desires. The Id urges to fulfill sexual desires, while the Ego controls the subconscious mind, and the Superego allows individuals to engage in such activities to satisfy the Id's desires.

**Sub-theme 2: Being with a Partner**

The study found that the desire for sexual satisfaction influenced lesbian involvement. The informants expressed a high sexual desire and the need for sexual satisfaction in their relationships. According to the third and fourth informants, they initially started teasing their partners playfully, but unintentionally, it led to sexual desires for their partners. Here are statements from the informants

*"... At first, I was just joking around with my partner about this thing, sometimes teasing them. But in the end, I myself couldn't resist it; I really tried to tempt them because I really wanted that feeling. Haha, in the end, I got addicted to it..."*

*(Informant 3)*

*"... When I feel that sexual desire, I do tease my partner. They know that when I become overly affectionate, it means I want to be with them at that moment. There were times when I wanted to stop, but I couldn't. When I see them, I sometimes feel powerless..."*

*(Informant 4)*

To fulfill their sexual desires, as mentioned by the informants, they would engage with their partners. According to the third informant, initially, they were just joking, but over time, it developed into something more than just jesting and became addictive. As for the fourth informant, they shared that when their sexual desire increased, they would be affectionate with their partner to fulfill their sexual desires.

**Objective 5: Exploring Resilience Factors of Maintaining Membership in the Lesbian Community**

The fifth research objective aims to explore the factors contributing to resilience during one's involvement in the lesbian community. While the fourth objective pertains to the psychosocial risks faced by lesbian individuals, the fifth objective seeks to understand how informants maintain their participation within the lesbian community that involves the strength and courage it takes to maintain an identity or presence within a community that faces systemic prejudice, discrimination, or marginalization. Based on the insights shared by the informants, the researcher has identified three overarching themes for this objective, namely, social support, self-acceptance, and social media.

**Theme 1: Social Support**

Social support is defined as interpersonal relationships and assistance provided by social institutions aimed at promoting the well-being of individuals (Costello et al., 2001). Primary sources of social support for adolescents include family, peers, and school teachers (Forster et al., 2020). Under the theme of social support, the researcher has identified three sub-themes derived from the conducted interviews: family members, friends, and partners.

**Sub-theme 1: Family Members**

Social support from family members plays a crucial role in contributing to positive psychological well-being among adolescents. According to the study findings, informants received support from family members such as siblings and relatives to sustain their lesbian relationships. The following statements from informants illustrate this

*"... I've managed to stay in this lesbian relationship because I also receive support from my cousin, as she knows everything about me and understands my feelings. Whenever I'm sad or happy, I share it with her, and she helps me stay strong in this lesbian world..."*

*(Informant 5)*

*"My younger siblings have known about my lesbian identity since school, and they still do. I share everything with them. Our age gap is not significant, only one to three years. The third sibling knows the most and provides me with encouragement..."*

*(Informant 3)*

Based on the quotes shared by informants five and three, it is evident that their ability to persist in being part of the lesbian community is attributed to the support they receive from family members who are well-informed about their identities. They share their feelings and regain strength to navigate the challenges of the lesbian world. Thus, social support from family members enables lesbian individuals to remain integrated within the lesbian community.

### **Sub-theme 2: Friends**

Friends are the second most important individuals after family members. When family members are not supportive or understanding, individuals tend to seek support from their friends. According to the research findings, informants expressed that they shared their feelings and sustained their lesbian identities due to the support of their friends. The following statements from informants exemplify this

*"I've known my current partner through a school friend. Sometimes, when I need to talk about my partner, I share it with my friend, although she doesn't know everything, just some aspects. My friends often provide advice when we have disagreements, which is why I'm fine being a lesbian..."*

*(Informant 2)*

*"I have one best friend, we've known each other since school, besides my siblings, she knows the most, even though sometimes she also tries to date my girlfriend, haha. But she's always there for me. She's very supportive of me being part of the lesbian community because she's a lesbian too. She's actually a great friend..."*

*(Informant 3)*

Based on the insights from the second informant, she met her partner through school friends. Informant three received full support from her close friend to continue being a lesbian because her friend was also part of the lesbian community. This underscores the significant role of the social environment in influencing individuals.

### **Sub-theme 3: Partners**

Partners are considered the individuals who know everything about their significant others. According to informants, partners play a crucial role in helping them persist in their lesbian identities. The following statements from informants illustrate this:

*"My partner is always with me, even when we argue. She didn't make me a lesbian; she even tried to convince me to change, but she is a source of strength for me to continue living*

*because of the issues surrounding us. Sometimes, not everyone can share their stories. She always encourages me, whether it's about studying, dealing with criticism, or people looking down on us, she always tells me to be patient. InshaAllah, we can change..."*

*(Informant 4)*

*"I stay with my partner; she's my main source of strength, 100%. Without her, I don't know what would happen to me. I really need her, and I love her deeply..."*

*(Informant 2)*

According to the quoted passages, it is clear that partners play a central role in the lives of lesbian individuals, helping them persevere because they understand and know what informants are going through. The dependence of informants on their partners is substantial, as demonstrated by the second informant. In addition to providing emotional support, partners also offer encouragement for change, as shared by the fourth informant, where her partner motivates her to transform gradually.

### **Theme 2: Identity Acceptance**

According to Degges-White et al (2000), the fourth stage of the sexual identity formation theory is identity acceptance. This stage involves active engagement with the lesbian community, resulting in an increasing sense of comfort and acceptance of one's sexual identity. The researcher has identified two sub-themes for identity acceptance: feeling comfortable and feeling safe.

#### **Sub-theme 1: Feeling Comfortable**

Based on the research findings, informants reported feeling comfortable with their lesbian identities, even though they did not openly disclose their identities to the public. During interviews, informants expressed contentment with their current selves and a sense of happiness in being true to themselves. The following statements from informants reflect this:

*"People are comfortable with who they are now. There's no insecurity or anything; they're just comfortable. They don't want to be the stereotypical Malay woman who shows off her relationship with a man on social media just to prove she's normal. Not at all..."*

*(Informant 3)*

*"Let people say whatever they want about me; I don't need to prove anything to them. Let me live my life my way, and I won't bother them. I accept whatever happens. I know I'm wrong, I acknowledge I'm a lesbian, which is wrong. But allow me to be this way; who knows, I might change tomorrow. Pray for me. As long as I can help others, I will..."*

*(Informant 4)*

Based on the feedback from these informants, it is evident that they are comfortable accepting their lesbian identities because they want to be themselves. They don't want to pretend to be someone else just to gain acceptance from society. This demonstrates their resilience and determination in embracing their identities.

#### **Sub-theme 2: Feeling Safe**

Accepting one's identity as a form of safety is evident from the research findings. The researcher observed that informants felt safe when they were with lesbian partners, as they

did not experience sexual harassment. Informants did not trust men, and being with lesbian partners made them feel safer. The following quotes from interviews illustrate this:

*"I feel safer being in a relationship with women than with men. Men can be creepy. They only think about touching and looking at women's bodies. My partner really takes care of me. She asks about my meals and drinks, and she cares about my feelings. I feel safe with her. When we're out, she protects me from men because she knows I don't like men..."*

*(Informant 2)*

*"I continue to be a lesbian because I dislike men. I hate men. I became this way because of one man, and that one man made me hate all men. I had to endure being touched every night. I'd rather take care of other women and prevent them from facing what I did..."*

*(Informant 5)*

Sexual harassment is something that should not occur, as it has profound and long-lasting impacts on victims. Based on the quotes from the second informant, she became disillusioned with men who tried to take advantage

Sexual harassment is indeed something that should not happen because it has a profound and lasting impact on the victims. Based on excerpts from the second informant, she became desperate due to men attempting to take advantage of her, and being with women made her feel safer socially. Meanwhile, the fifth informant expressed a strong dislike for men because of what happened to her, causing her to dislike other men and wanting to help women avoid facing the same situations she went through.

### **Theme 3: Social Media**

Social media has become a platform for lesbian individuals to express themselves in the lesbian community, and their participation in this community is gradually increasing, often going unnoticed by the general public. Based on research findings, the researcher discovered that social media serves as a space for informants to remain a part of the lesbian community, as they receive support from fellow lesbians even online.

#### **Sub-theme: Lesbian Community**

Initially, the lesbian community remained concealed from the public eye, but with the advent of globalized internet culture, this community has become more open about asserting their identities to the world. According to the conducted research, informants found support from the lesbian community, even online, enabling them to persist. This is because they felt a sense of belonging within their community and experienced no repercussions, allowing them to freely express their identities without fear. Here are statements from informants

*"... In the beginning, when I joined lesbian apps, I didn't show my name or face because I did it just for fun. But now, everyone openly displays themselves, and nothing happens. Besides, it's enjoyable to be friends with and interact with them because we're all lesbians. So it's okay to remain a lesbian. There's no issue. We're not bothering anyone else..."*

*(Informant 5)*

*"... Because of these apps, I can have friends. I can't go out of the house, so I download lesbian social media and apps. It's great to have many friends; that's why I ended up getting close to*

*one of them. There are many apps available, and even on mainstream apps, lesbians proudly display themselves like on TikTok and Instagram. It's fun to watch them. I feel like I'm shipping them when I see their interactions. They're so cute..."*

*(Informant 1)*

*"... I also use these apps because if I express myself openly outside, I'll face criticism. Sharing within the app with people who understand is fine; we're all the same. Sometimes it's nice to have someone support what we share, and there are parts of their experiences that we can relate to, so I don't feel so alone. Even though we don't know each other well, it's okay..."*

*(Informant 2)*

Based on the shared statements from the fifth informant, the first informant, and the second informant, it is clear that the lesbian community serves as a source of strength for them to continue being a part of the lesbian community. They feel no need to fear because they are not hiding their identities, and there are some lesbian couples who openly display their identities to the world with no severe negative consequences; in fact, they gain more followers who appreciate their relationships. As a result, they do not feel anxious about continuing to identify as lesbians to this day.

### **Study Implications to Individual and Society**

The study of psychosocial risk and resilience in maintaining one's membership within the lesbian community is of paramount importance in the fields of psychology, sociology, and public health. Numerous studies indicate that individuals identifying as lesbian face distinct psychosocial risks, such as increased exposure to discrimination, stigmatization, and marginalization (Rees et al., 2021; Amato & Émond, 2023). At the same time, community affiliation and support have been shown to be key factors in fostering resilience among marginalized populations (Ungar, 2011). This paper aims to discuss the implications of a study that addresses this interplay between risk and resilience.

One significant implication of this study is for clinical practice. Mental healthcare providers may benefit from understanding the unique psychosocial challenges and resilience factors that lesbians encounter. This understanding could guide therapists in employing targeted interventions that not only focus on reducing distress but also on harnessing resilience through community engagement (Harper & Schneider, 2003). From a societal standpoint, recognizing the importance of community in fostering resilience could inform policy measures aimed at reducing systemic discrimination against lesbians. For example, policies could be created to support LGBTQ+ community centers and safe spaces where community members can connect and support each other, as has been suggested in literature emphasizing the role of community in mental health (Pfeffer, 2020).

In addition to that, educational institutions, particularly schools and universities, could integrate the insights from this study into developing more inclusive environments. Curriculum that educates about sexual orientation diversity could not only mitigate risk factors such as bullying but could also promote resilience by encouraging a sense of community among lesbian students (McCurdy & Russell, 2023). For the health sector, particularly in mental health services, the study offers valuable input for creating targeted mental health programs. These programs could focus not just on individual-level resilience factors, but also on the role that being part of the lesbian community plays in mitigating

psychosocial risks. This is especially crucial given the evidence of elevated stress-related health issues in LGBTQ+ communities compared to heterosexual counterparts (Meyer, 2003).

In summary, the study of psychosocial risk and resilience in maintaining membership within the lesbian community has far-reaching implications that span various sectors from clinical psychology to policy-making. The nuanced understanding of how community affiliation acts as a buffer against psychosocial risks provides a new lens through which professionals in diverse fields can approach their work. It is critical that future research continues to explore these dynamics to further refine our understanding and improve the well-being of lesbian individuals.

### **Limitations**

While this study provides valuable insights into the factors influencing attraction and resistance within the lesbian community in Selangor, Malaysia, it is imperative to acknowledge its inherent limitations. One of the central constraints pertains to the relatively modest sample size, comprising a total of just five lesbian individuals. This limited pool may not adequately represent the diverse array of experiences and perspectives within the larger lesbian community in Selangor or Malaysia as a whole. Furthermore, the study's adoption of a qualitative and phenomenological approach, while yielding rich contextual insights, constrains the extent to which its findings can be extrapolated beyond the specific context under investigation.

Moreover, the study maintains a geographic and cultural specificity, confining its focus solely to Selangor, Malaysia. Consequently, the transferability of the research findings to alternative cultural or geographical settings may be restricted. Lastly, the utilization of snowball sampling, though instrumental in participant recruitment, introduces the potential for bias, as the method's reliance on existing social networks could influence the composition of the sample. This limitation is acknowledged, as it may impact the random representativeness of the participants.

### **Conclusion**

This study sought to address the critical gap in existing literature by examining the interplay between psychosocial risks and resilience factors in maintaining one's membership within the lesbian community. Through rigorous data collection and analysis, the study elucidated the complex challenges lesbian individuals face, such as discrimination and marginalization, which align with previous studies (Meyer, 2003; Herek, 2013). Importantly, it also highlighted the community itself as a source of resilience, providing emotional support and a sense of belonging, substantiating the theories that underline the importance of community in fostering resilience (Meyer, 2015).

The findings of this study have a broad range of implications across various sectors, including clinical psychology, educational institutions, public policy, and the health sector. By delineating how community affiliation serves as a protective factor against psychosocial risks, the study offers a nuanced lens through which professionals can approach their work. In sum, irrespective of the diverse trajectories that individuals may pursue over the course of their lifetimes, the overarching hypothesis posits a reversion or reconvergence to biological foundational elements. This notion suggests that the multiplicity of paths ultimately

converges on a fundamental, biologically-rooted core, which serves as an anchoring point for individual identity and experience.

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