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Studying Gender Difference and Attitude towards Homosexuals among Young Adults

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A B S T R A C T

The research aimed at examining young adults' attitude towards homosexuals. It focused on studying the difference of attitude based on gender towards homosexuality. The study was an ex-post facto research design and used survey method for data collection. It employed Homosexuality Attitude Scale (HAS) by Mary E. Kite and Kay Deaux (1986). Convenient sampling technique was used with the sample size of 300 of which 150 were male and 150 were female. The study helped in understanding the discrepancies in acceptance of homosexuals by young adults. There was a significant difference between men and women in their attitude towards homosexuals. Also, educational qualification, religion, interpersonal contact showed significant relationship on attitude towards homosexuals, while personal choice had no effect on attitude towards homosexuals.

Introduction

Sexual orientation is defined as a pattern of emotional, romantic and/or sexual attractions to men, women or both sexes. It also refers to a person's sense of identity based on those attractions, related behaviours and membership in a community of others who share those attractions. Various researches over several decades have demonstrated that sexual orientation ranges from exclusive heterosexuality to exclusive homosexuality and also includes various forms of bisexuality. There is no general agreement among scientists about

the exact reasons that an individual develops a heterosexual, bisexual, gay or lesbian orientation. Though there is a lot of research done to examine the genetic, hormonal, developmental, social, cultural influences there is no particular evidence that helps the scientists to conclude that sexual orientation is determined by a particular factor or factors. Many think that nature and nurture both contribute to sexual orientation. Most people have little or no sense of their choice of sexual orientation. One of the categories of sexual orientation is Homosexuality. Homosexuality refers to the state of experiencing physical, emotional and sexual

attraction to the members of one's own gender. They are commonly known as Gay (applied to either male and female) or Lesbians (female only). Homosexuality has always been a part of human behaviour although the rate of acceptance increased and decreased throughout the course of civilization. At some point in their lives many people experience feelings of sexual attraction towards people of their own sex or the idea of engaging in homosexual acts. For example, a survey conducted in United States in 1992 concluded that nearly 8% of adults reported experiencing such attraction. Researches convey that homosexual orientation is essentially controlled by genetic and/or biological factors—put simply, that people are “born gay” or it develops primarily as a result of psychological and environmental influences and early experiences. Evidence points towards the existence of a complex interaction between genes and environment, which are responsible for the heritable nature of sexual orientation. A study presented at the American Society of Human Genetics (ASHG) in Baltimore, found that epigenetic effects, chemical modifications of the human genome that alter gene activity without changing the DNA sequence, may have a major influence on sexual orientation. Homosexuality is also influenced by environmental factors such as family, culture and history of sexual abuse. Researches have found that homosexuality can be caused as the result of having rejecting and less loving parents and family studies have revealed that having homosexual elder brothers increases the chances of the younger ones to become homosexuals. Similarly lesbian women have more lesbian sisters than heterosexual women. Education influences homosexuality in a way that higher levels of education are directly correlated with higher levels of homosexual behaviour. In considering the

factors influencing homosexuality, our research aims on studying gender difference in attitude towards homosexuals among young adults. The study focuses on studying the effect of variables like gender, educational qualification, religion, personal choice and interpersonal contact on homosexuality.

Need for the study

The misconception that homosexuals are basically voyeurs or they are sexually aggressive or suffer from a mental disorder is widespread. This study aims to understand attitudes towards homosexuality and the basis for those attitudes. Researches related to the behaviour of homosexuals are very less in number hence when there is lack of information, acceptance of the idea becomes difficult. In the Indian scenario, homosexuality is a tabooed topic. Same-sex relationship is a punitive offense under the legislature. Hence, homosexuals are said to be criminal offenders of the law even when it is a biological phenomenon. Hence, the aim is to study the attitudes and further provide insight into its nuances. The realization about sexuality starts, develops and becomes concrete during young adulthood. Therefore, this study will provide an understanding towards the attitude and development of the concept of sexuality among young adults.

Whitley (2012) used meta-analysis to examine the relationships between seven forms of religiosity and attitudes toward lesbians and gay men. All forms of religiosity except quest and extrinsic orientation had at least small negative relationships with these attitudes. Higher quest orientation was related to positive attitudes toward lesbians and gay men and extrinsic orientation had no relationship to these attitudes. In contrast, most forms of

religiosity had small relationships with positive racial/ethnic attitudes; the exceptions were fundamentalism and extrinsic orientation, which had small negative relationships with racial/ethnic attitudes. A number of moderator variables of the relationship between religiosity and attitudes toward lesbians and gay men were identified.

Herek (2010) discussed the basis for differences among heterosexuals in their reactions to gay people, with special emphasis on the issue of gender differences. Three studies conducted with students at six different universities revealed a consistent tendency for heterosexual males to express more hostile attitudes than heterosexual females, especially toward gay men. The same social psychological variables appear to underlie their attitudes toward both gay men and lesbians: religiosity, adherence to traditional ideologies of family and gender, perception of friends' agreement with one's own attitudes, and past interactions with lesbians and gay men.

Herek and Glunt (2010) studied the association between heterosexuals' attitudes toward gay men and their interpersonal contact experiences with a lesbian or gay person with data (n = 937) and found that interpersonal contact was more likely to be reported by respondents who were highly educated, politically liberal, young, and female.

The data indicated that interpersonal contact is strongly associated with positive attitudes toward gay men and that heterosexuals with characteristics commonly associated with positive attitudes are more likely than others to be the recipients of disclosure from gay friends and relatives.

Kite and Deaux (2010) conducted an experiment that predicts behaviour towards

an alleged homosexual. Results showed that tolerant and intolerant males react very differently when they believe they are interacting with a homosexual, as evidenced by their ratings of liking for that individual, the type of information they requested from him, the information they presented about themselves, and what they remembered about that person.

The influence of timing of information and expected interaction on these variables was also discussed.

Larsen *et al.*, (2010) developed a Likert-type scale measuring heterosexual attitudes toward homosexuality - (HATH) scale. Results showed significant effect of sex; females appear more tolerant than males. In addition, the HATH correlated significantly with peer attitudes, religiosity, and authoritarianism. The scale has satisfactory reliability and shows promising construct validity.

Steffens and Wagner (2010) assessed attitudes toward lesbians, gay men, bisexual women, and bisexual men with a national representative sample of 2,006 self-identified heterosexual women and men living in Germany. Replicating previous findings, younger people held more favorable attitudes than older people; women held more favorable attitudes than men; and men held more favorable attitudes toward female than male homosexuality, whereas women did not differentiate. However, women held more favorable attitudes toward homosexuals than toward bisexuals, whereas men did not differentiate. The findings supported the notion that attitudes toward lesbians, gay men, bisexual women, and bisexual men are related but distinct constructs.

Stotzer (2008) used convenience sample of 50 female and 18 male heterosexual students

with positive attitudes toward LGB people and found three key features in attitude formation: (1) early normalizing experiences in childhood, (2) meeting LGB peers in high school or college as important to the development of their attitudes, and (3) experiences of empathy based on an LGB peer's struggles and successes, or resistance to hatred expressed by those with negative attitudes.

Michelle Davies (2004) found that attitudes toward homosexual behaviour and homosexual persons comprised one factor: affective reactions toward gay men. Results showed that men were more negative on affective reactions than women were. No gender differences were revealed on attitudes toward civil rights. This study was a preliminary test of a scale that measured the subcomponents: hostile sexism, male toughness, and attitudes toward male sexuality. In addition, this study investigated the relationship between these subcomponents and other attitudinal measures.

Whitley (2001) conducted two studies that examined the relationships of gender-role variables to attitudes toward homosexuality. Study 1, a meta-analysis, found that endorsement of traditional gender-role beliefs, modern sexism, and hypermasculinity were related to attitudes, but that gender-role self-concept was not. Study 2 found that the best predictors of attitudes were participant gender, endorsement of male role norms, attitudes toward women, benevolent sexism, and modern sexism.

Also, the best predictors of antigay behavior were participant gender and hyper-gender-role orientation; attitudes toward women and modern sexism were also predictors for men but not for women.

Levina *et al.*, (2000) investigated the effects of visual media on attitudes toward gay men and lesbians by exposing 3 groups of participants to a brief video. Results showed participants attitudes were significantly different with attitudes with the pro-gay video group being most positive, and those in the anti-gay video group being most negative. Whitley and Ægisdóttir (2000) tested hypotheses drawn from three theoretical perspectives—gender belief system, authoritarianism, and social dominance—concerning heterosexuals' attitudes toward lesbians and gay men. Data from 122 male and 131 female heterosexual college students with mostly White, middle-class backgrounds showed gender differences in attitudes toward lesbians and gay men were mediated by social dominance orientation and gender-role beliefs, indicating that gender role beliefs may act as legitimizing myths to justify antigay attitudes. Authoritarianism had both a direct relationship to attitudes toward lesbians and gay men and an indirect relationship mediated by gender-role beliefs.

Kite and Whitley (1996) used meta-analytic techniques to compare men's and women's attitudes toward homosexual persons, homosexual behaviours and gay people's civil rights. They found that men were more negative than women toward homosexual persons and homosexual behavior, but the sexes viewed gay civil rights similarly.

Men's attitudes toward homosexual persons were particularly negative when the person being rated was a gay man or of unspecified sex. Women and men evaluated lesbians similarly. Ratings of homosexual persons and homosexual behavior were least likely to differ by subject sex for samples of nonprofessional adults. In addition, sex role attitude mediated sex differences in attitudes toward homosexuality.

Materials and Methods

Hypothesis

H₁: There will be a significant difference between men and women in their attitude towards homosexuals.

H₂: There will be a significant relationship between attitude towards homosexuals and educational qualification.

H₃: There will be a significant relationship between attitude towards homosexuals and religion.

H₄: There will be a significant relationship between attitude towards homosexuals and interpersonal contact.

H₅: There will be a significant relationship between attitude towards homosexuals and personal choice.

Research Methodology

The study was an Ex-post facto research design using convenient sampling method.

The sample size was 300 young adults of which 150 were male and 150 were female.

The data was collected using Homosexuality Attitude Scale (HAS) through online survey.

Variables

Independent variables

Religion, Interpersonal contact, Educational qualification, Gender difference and Personal choice.

Dependent variable

Attitude towards Homosexuality.

Tool

The Homosexuality Attitude Scale (HAS) is a Likert-type scale that assesses people's stereotypes, misconceptions and anxieties about homosexuals. The measure contains a unidimensional factor representing a favourable or unfavourable evaluation of homosexuals.

Reliability

The scale has excellent internal consistency (alphas >.92). The scale has a good test-retest reliability ($r = .71$). It is equally reliable for gay male and for lesbian targets. Attitude scores for "gay male", "lesbian", and "homosexual" targets do not differ significantly. However, researchers are best served by selection of a specific target and avoiding "homosexual" as an attitude object.

Validity

The scale correlates ($r_s = .50$) with the FEM Scale (Smith *et al.*, 1975) and the Attitude towards Women Scale (Spence and Helmreich, 1978). It is unrelated to the agency/communion scales of the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (Spence *et al.*, 1974) and is unrelated to the M and F Scale of the Bem Sex Role Inventory (Bem, 1974). It is also unrelated to the Self-monitoring Scale (Snyder, 1974), the Marlowe-Crown Social Desirability Scale (Crowne and Marlowe, 1960), and the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965).

Scoring

The respondents were scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from *strong agreement* (1) to *strong disagreement* (5) with *neither agreement nor disagreement - neutral* at (3).

Interpretation

Higher score indicated more positive attitudes towards homosexuality.

Statistical tools

To find the relationship between the demographic variables Pearson correlation was used and to understand the gender difference, Independent sample T-test was used.

The following demographic variables were statistically interpreted using Correlation.

Educational Qualification
Religion
Interpersonal Contact
Personal choice

Results and Discussion

From the above table, it is inferred that the relationship between attitude towards homosexuals and educational qualification is significant, $r = 0.117$, $p < 0.05$. Hence, the alternate hypothesis - "There will be a significant relationship between attitude towards homosexuals and educational qualification" is accepted.

This finding is supported by previous research studies that proved education fosters liberal attitudes, gives individuals the ability to think critically, the opportunity to interact with a diverse range of people and a greater awareness of the negative effects of prejudice (Lewis, 2003; Lewis and Rogers, 1999; Lottes and Kuriloff, 1994; Schellenberg *et al.*, 1999).

From the above table, it is inferred that the relationship between attitude towards homosexuals and religion is significant, $r = 0.136$, $p < 0.05$. Hence, the alternate

hypothesis - "There will be a significant relationship between attitude towards homosexuals and religion" is accepted.

This finding is supported by research studies that showed that religious persons are generally more prejudiced against homosexuals than non-religious persons (Crockett and Voas, 2003; Fisher *et al.*, 1994; Hayes, 1995; Schulte and Battle, 2004; Scott, 1998).

From the above table, it is inferred that the relationship between attitude towards homosexuals and interpersonal contact is significant, $r = -0.290$, $p < 0.01$.

Hence, the alternate hypothesis - "There will be a significant relationship between attitude towards homosexuals and interpersonal contact" is accepted.

This result is supported by previous research study done by Overby and Barth (2002) which showed that heterosexuals who report knowing someone who is gay generally express more positive attitudes towards homosexual people.

It is inferred, from the above table that there is no significant relationship between attitude towards homosexuals and personal choice, $r = -0.043$, $p > 0.05$. Hence, from this result, it is seen that the alternate hypothesis - "There will be no significant relationship between attitude towards homosexuals and personal choice" is rejected.

An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare the attitude towards homosexuals in men and women. It was seen that there was no significant difference in the scores between the two groups, $t(298) = -1.63$, $p > .05$, two tailed with females ($M = 77.92$, $SD = 17.54$) scoring higher than males ($M = 74.85$, $SD = 14.85$).

Table.1 Relationship between Attitude towards Homosexuals and Educational qualification

Variables	N	r
Attitude	300	.117*
Educational Qualification	300	

* p < 0.05 level

Table.2 Relationship between Attitude towards Homosexuals and Religion

Variables	N	r
Attitude	300	.136*
Religion	300	

* p < 0.05 level

Table.3 Relationship between Attitude towards Homosexuals and Interpersonal contact

Variables	N	R
Attitude	300	-0.290**
Interpersonal contact	300	

* p < 0.01 level

Table.4 Relationship between Attitude towards Homosexuals and Personal choice

Variables	N	r
Attitude	300	-0.043*
Personal choice	300	

* p > 0.05 level

Table.5 Gender difference in Attitude towards Homosexuals

	Gender	N	Mean	SD
Attitude	Male	150	74.85	14.855
	Female	150	77.92	17.544

Hence, from this result, it is seen that the alternate hypothesis - “There will be a significant difference between men and women in their attitude towards homosexuals” is rejected.

Limitations of the study

The sample size was too small.
The study relied on convenience sampling method, which included only the population

with the knowledge to read and understand English.

Since, self-report measures were used; there could be possibilities of socially desirable responses.

Stigma about homosexuality affected the participation of the target group.

Many instruments used to measure attitudes use the term 'homosexual' to study the attitude, failing to differentiate between attitudes towards gay men and attitudes towards lesbians.

Suggestions for future study

Future researchers should use a larger sample size that yields more statistical power.

Researchers can also use variables such as marital status, socio-economic status, influence of social media and age.

It would be more desirable to repeat the study on a more generalized basis, including the entire population without holding barriers with regard to the level of education or language.

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