

## **Gender Differences in Students' Adoption of Homosexuality in Selected Public Universities in Kenya**

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### **Abstract**

Homosexuality is a behavior involving sexual attraction between people of the same sex. Homosexuality is a problem in universities and complaints of its existence in universities have been raised and some university students have even declared publicly about their sexual orientation. The study aimed at determining gender differences in students' adoption of homosexuality in selected public universities in Kenya. The study was carried out among third year undergraduate students in selected public universities in Kenya. These universities were Egerton University, Moi University, University of Eldoret and University of Kabianga. Third year undergraduate students were chosen because they had been in the university for long and may have developed some perception towards the factors influencing adoption of homosexuality. The study adopted an *ex post facto* research design. The accessible population was 12,300 third year undergraduate students. Out of this population, a sample of 225 was selected through stratified random sampling and simple random sampling. The study also included a sample of 40 peer counselors and 4 university counselors from the four universities who were selected through purposive sampling. Data collection instruments were questionnaire, an interview schedule and a focus group discussion guide. The findings revealed that gender differences in students' adoption of homosexuality do not exist. The study recommends that measures on how best to handle homosexuality issues should be targeted at all students because homosexuality cuts across gender.

**Keywords: Gender Differences, Students' Adoption, Homosexuality, Selected Public Universities.**

## **1. Introduction**

Homosexuality refers to sexual attraction between members of the same sex (Cantor, 2012). Ahmed (2006) defines homosexuality as the sexual orientation and fantasies, with or without overt sexual behavior with same sex partner. The term homosexuality was first coined in the late 19th century by a German psychologist, Karoly Maria Benkert leading to labeling of homosexuals who were defined by their sexuality (Picket, 2011).

Many studies have been carried out on students' perception of homosexuality and the results have shown that they are against it. For instance, Mabvurira (2012) conducted a study at the University of Zimbabwe on attitudes, knowledge and perception of homosexuality and the results revealed that students expressed high levels of negative attitudes towards homosexuals. Mtemeri (2015) carried out a study on attitudes and perception of university students in Zimbabwe towards homosexuality and found out that students were hostile towards those who practice homosexuality. In spite of this unacceptability, the study also revealed that some students were accepting and tolerant towards homosexuality (Mtemeri, 2015). These studies reveal that university students were against homosexuality. Factors such as gender and religion were found to influence the students' perception of homosexuality.

In a survey of 880 heterosexual students on attitudes towards homosexuality at a university in Guateng in South Africa, the study revealed that heterosexual students have negative attitudes towards lesbians and gay men (Arndt & deBruin, 2006). The study also discovered that gender and religiosity has an influence on attitudes towards lesbians and gay men.

## **2. Literature Review**

Studies have shown that gender differences occur in views on homosexuality. For instance, Petersen and Hyde (2010) in their study observed that gender differences in attitudes towards homosexuality exist. Numerous studies examining gender of respondents' differences have shown that men generally have more negative attitudes towards homosexuality than women (Finlay & Walter, 2003). A study conducted by Oti-Boadi, Agbakpe and Dziwornu (2014) on Ghanaian students' attitudes towards homosexuality found that the students had high levels of negative attitudes towards homosexuality. They also found that gender did not have a significant

influence on attitudes towards homosexuality though female year 1 and 2 students expressed slightly higher negative differences in attitudes towards homosexuality than their male counterparts in year 3 and 4 students.

Besen and Zicklin (2007) while studying on attitudes to homosexuality in USA found that men are not less likely than women to approve of gay marriage. Gender differences in attitudes towards homosexuality exist with women generally being more tolerant than men ( Hicks & Lee, 2006). In yet another study carried out by Liebowitz, Guitierrez, Eisenman and Garcia (2011) on attitudes of heterosexual Hispanic college students in South Texas toward lesbians and gay men, it showed that Hispanic heterosexual males were more negative compared to Hispanic heterosexual females. Another study conducted by Cao, Wang and Gao (2010) among 500 Chinese university students revealed that no significant difference was found in perceptions and attitudes about homosexuality between male and female students. Further, the survey by Cao *et al* (2010) found that science students held more positive perceptions and attitudes towards homosexuality than those who majored in arts. The survey further revealed that gender and family factors like single parents and having siblings did not significantly influence students' perceptions and attitudes. The current study sought to determine gender differences in students' adoption of homosexuality.

A study conducted by Arndt and deBruin (2006) revealed in their study of a sample population of eight hundred and eighty university students of South Africa that male students display more negative attitudes towards lesbians and gays than their female counterparts. A study conducted by Raiz (2006) showed that female respondents were supportive of the homosexual community than males. The females believed that homosexuals should have the same rights in society as heterosexuals like the right to marry. The findings of Raiz (2006) were consistent with those of a survey conducted by Pew Resource Center (2013) that indicated that women are more tolerant to homosexual practices than males. However, other studies done by Lippincott, Wlazelek and Schumacher (2000) and Tan (2008) revealed that no gender differences exist in attitudes towards homosexuality.

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Another study by Seligson and Morales (2010) collected data from 23 countries in the Americas and found that there was greater tolerance of homosexuality among women, more educated respondents, younger people and urban residents. Davies (2004) asserts that men have often viewed women as their natural sexual partners and not men. This he says may contribute to their extreme negative attitudes towards homosexuality than females. The above researchers looked at gender differences in attitudes towards homosexuality but they did not look at gender differences in adoption homosexuality. Therefore, this study sought to determine gender differences in students' adoption of homosexuality.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Research Design

This study adopted an *ex post facto* research design. The researcher will not have direct control of independent variables because their manifestations have already occurred, hence the use of *ex post facto* design (Kerlinger, 2000; Kothari, 2009). In this study, the researcher did not have direct control of perception of the influencing factors of undergraduate students because their manifestations had already occurred among undergraduate students.

#### 3.2 Population of the Study

The research targeted all student peer counselors, University Counselors and undergraduate students in Moi University, University of Eldoret, University of Kabianga and Egerton University. The four universities have nineteen (19) university counselors, four hundred and eighty (480) peer counselors and fifty-three thousand undergraduate students.

#### 3.3 Sample Size and Sampling procedure

The sample size of two hundred and twenty-five undergraduate students (225) , forty (40) student peer counselors and four (4) university student counselors from the four universities were included in the sample. Therefore, the total population of the respondents for this study was two hundred and sixty-nine (269) as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Distribution of the Respondents in the Study**

Respondents	Male	Female	Total
University Counselors	2	2	4

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Undergraduate Students	121	104	225
Peer counselors	20	20	40
Total	143	126	269

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The researcher used stratified random sampling to ensure that all the universities were adequately represented. Stratified random sampling provides a more representative cross section of the population (Asthana & Bhushan, 2007). Simple random sampling was used to select the subjects at university level. Simple random sampling ensures that every element in the population is given an equal chance of being selected for the study (Oladipo, Ikamari, Kiplang'at & Barasa, 2015). The study used purposive sampling method to select four university counselors and forty peer counselors. Ten (10) peer counselors from each of the four universities were included in the Focus Group Discussion (FGD). Oladipo *et al* (2015) recommend that the number of respondents for a focus group should be eight (8) or ten (10). If the group is more than eight or ten, it will impede interaction and participation (Oladipo *et al*, 2015). The purpose of purposive sampling is to sample participants in a strategic way so that those sampled are relevant to the research questions that are being asked (Bryman, 2012).

### **3.4 Instrumentation**

Data was collected using a students' questionnaire, a university counselor's interview schedule and a focus group discussion (FGD) for peer counselors. The study thus adopted the triangulation technique of data collection. The technique involves collecting data from different sources and checking information collected from different sources for consistency of evidence (Mertens, 2005; Johnson & Christensen, 2008).

## **4. Results and Discussion**

### **4.1 Gender Differences in Students' Adoption of Homosexuality**

The study sought to establish whether gender differences exist in students' adoption of homosexuality. The findings are as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Gender Differences in Students' Adoption of Homosexuality**

Sexual orientation	Male n = 114		Female n = 99		Overall n = 213	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Homosexual	5	4.4	7	7.1	12	5.6
Heterosexual	100	87.7	92	92.9	192	90.1
Bisexual	9	7.9	-	-	9	4.2

As shown in Table 2, majority of the undergraduate students were heterosexual (90.1 %), 5.6 % were homosexual while a smaller number (4.2 %) were male bisexual. As revealed in Table 2, there were no female bisexuals. To establish the gender differences in adoption of homosexuality a Chi-square test was run. The results are summarized in Table 3.

**Table 3: Chi-Square test of Difference in Adoption of Homosexuality by Gender**

Gender	Frequency	Percentage	Df	$\chi^2$	p-value
Male	5	41.7	1	.333	.564
Female	7	58.3			

The results in Table 3 show that out of the twelve (12) university students who had adopted homosexuality, 5 were male and 7 were female. These frequencies were not significantly different,  $\chi^2 = .333$ ,  $p = .564$ . The results of the Chi-square computation ( $p > 0.05$ ) disclosed insignificant differences in frequencies indicating that gender differences do not exist in undergraduate students' adoption of homosexuality. For that reason, the results of the current study do support the hypothesis which stated that there was no statistically significant gender difference in students' adoption of homosexuality. This is an indication that gender does not affect adoption of homosexuality. There are other parameters that are significant determinant of adoption of homosexuality like parental upbringing, choice, one's lifestyle among others (Maina, Butto & Murigi, 2016). Thus, the hypothesis was accepted on the basis of these results. This is in agreement with a study conducted by Oti-Boadi, Agbakpe and Dziwornu (2014) on Ghanaian students' attitudes towards homosexuality that found out that gender did not have a significant influence on attitudes towards homosexuality. However, the findings are contrary to findings by Arndt and deBruin (2006); Liebowitz, Guitierrez, Eisenman and Garcia (2011) whose studies

showed that males have more negative attitudes toward homosexuality than females. The findings are also contrary to those of a previous study by Pew Resource Center (2013) that revealed that women are more tolerant to homosexual practices than males.

#### **4.2 Interview schedule and FGD data on Gender Differences in Adoption of Homosexuality**

The last section of the interview and FGD generated data that was used to examine whether gender differences exist in students' adoption of homosexuality. Majority of the university counselors were of the view that both males and females were involved in homosexuality. About half of the peer counselors were of the view that homosexuality is practiced by both males and females. About a quarter of the peer counselors were of the view that homosexuality was more prevalent among the males. They attributed this to the fear of approaching females and low self-esteem. There was also another quarter that was of the view that the vice is more prevalent among the females. This was consistent with the findings from undergraduate students that revealed that there was no gender difference in adoption of homosexuality as both males and females were involved in homosexuality.

#### **5. Conclusion and Recommendation**

The findings revealed that the respondents perceived that significant gender differences do not exist in adoption of homosexuality. There was no statistically significant gender difference in students' adoption of homosexuality. Thus, gender differences in students' adoption of homosexuality do not exist. This is an indication that homosexuality was practiced by both males and females in institutions of higher learning. The study recommended that measures on how best to handle homosexuality issues should be targeted at all students because homosexuality cuts across gender.

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