



Influence of Demographic Variables on Attitudes towards Homosexuality among Undergraduates of Public Universities in North-Central Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the influence of demographic variables of gender, age and socio-economic status on attitude towards homosexuality among undergraduates of public universities in North-central Nigeria. The study was guided by three specific objectives and three research questions. Also, three hypotheses were formulated and tested at the 0.05 level of significance. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design. The area of the study covered North-Central Region of Nigeria consisting of six States – Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, and Plateau, as well as the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The population of the study was 221,768 students, from which a sample of 399 students was drawn using Taro Yamane sample size determination formula. Simple random sample technique was used in selecting three universities that participated in the study, while purposive sampling was used in selecting the participating students. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled “Influence of Demographic Variables on Attitude towards Homosexuality Questionnaire (IDVAHQ). The instrument was validated by five experts and the reliability was established using Cronbach Alpha and it yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.87. Data for this study were collected through personal administration and retrieval of copies of the instrument to the respondents by the researcher and with the help of three research assistants. Data collected for this study were analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. Specifically, Mean (X) and Standard Deviation (SD) were used to answer the research questions while hypothesis one was tested using Independent T-test and hypotheses two and three were tested using ANOVA. The findings of this study revealed that gender, age and socio-economic status have no significant influence on attitudes towards homosexuality among undergraduates of public universities in North central, Nigeria. Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that demographic variables (gender, age, socio-economic status) have no influence on attitude towards homosexuality among undergraduates of public universities in North-central Nigeria. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are advanced: Universities should implement awareness programs that address sexuality, human rights, and diversity, fostering understanding and respect among students. Since gender does not significantly influence attitudes toward homosexuality, these programs can focus on promoting inclusivity for all students, regardless of their gender, to challenge negative societal perceptions.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

There are marked variations in attitudes towards homosexuality depending largely on the context or society. In most parts of Western societies such as Europe and America, homosexual practices, be it in form of gay – which involves sexual attraction between males, or lesbianism – involving sexual attraction among females have both societal and legal approval to the extent that same-sex romantic relationships and marriages are not seen as a problem. Conversely, in most societies of Africa, homosexuality is seriously frowned at, with high level of cultural, religious, and social disapproval, and recently legal sanctions have been placed on homosexual practices in Nigeria. Within such societies such as Nigeria, individuals engaged in such practices are sure to be faced with social adjustment and integration problems, and this pose implication for guidance and counselling services to such persons with the aim of helping them overcome or unlearn such practices and become well-adjusted within the societies they find themselves.

Generally, homosexuality implies sexual attraction between people of same gender. It involves a romantic attraction, sexual attraction or sexual behaviour between members of the same gender. As a sexual orientation, homosexuality is an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attractions to people of the same gender. 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.

In most countries of Africa, the situation is different, implying that homosexual relationships and practices are strongly frowned at, and prohibited. In Nigeria for instance, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) persons face legal and social challenges not experienced by heterosexuals or non-LGBT residents. The country does not allow or recognize [LGBT rights](#). There is no legal protection against discrimination in [Nigeria](#) - a country of more than 200 million people, split between a mainly Muslim from the north and a largely Christian from the south. Very few LGBT persons are open about their orientation, and violence against LGBT people is frequent (Alimi, 2015).

Moreover, both male and female same-sex sexual activity is illegal in Nigeria. The maximum punishment in the twelve Northern States that have [adopted Shari'a law](#) is [death by stoning](#). That law applies to all Muslims and to those who have voluntarily consented to application of the Shari'a courts. In southern Nigeria and under the secular criminal laws of northern Nigeria, the punishment for same-sex sexual activity is 14 years' imprisonment. The Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act criminalises all forms of same-sex unions and [same-sex marriage throughout the country](#).

Socially, homosexuals are more likely to experience intolerance, discrimination, harassment, and the threat of violence due to their sexual orientation, than those that identify themselves as heterosexuals. This is due to homophobia (the fear or hatred of homosexuality). Some of the factors that may reinforce homophobia on a larger scale are moral, religious, and political beliefs of a dominant group. This situation therefore poses implications for guidance and counselling services to this category of people to enable them overcome this problem, with a view to help them adjust and function within the confines of social and legal approval as far as the Nigerian context and space is concerned.

Furthermore, the study is also interested in the role of demographic variables on attitudes towards homosexuality. Demographic variables such as gender, age and socio-economic status, and other individual variable such as self-concept have been implicated in various forms of behaviours, and they can interplay in attitudes towards homosexuality among undergraduates in Nigerian Universities, thus forming the basis for this study to examine the influence or relationship of these variables among the population of this study.

Within this context, the problem can be situated around the fact that even in the face of stringent social disapproval, and existence of extant laws prohibiting homosexual practices or same-sex relationships and marriages, available evidence indicates that the practice is increasingly gaining more membership and capturing more grounds in Nigeria generally and in Universities across the country specifically. For instance, Okanlawon (2017), a Nigerian researcher released an article in an academic journal which includes interviews with 14 gay and lesbian Nigerian University students, as well as analyzed secondary data sources about the experiences of LGBT students in some Nigerian schools.

Demographic variables are individual characteristics, which may be naturally occurring such as gender, age, or acquired such as socio-economic status. Gender is seen as the range of characteristics pertaining to [femininity](#) and [masculinity](#) and differentiating between them. Depending on the context, this may include [gender-based social structures](#) (i.e. [gender roles](#)) and [gender identity](#). Most cultures use a [gender binary](#), in which gender is divided into two categories, and people are considered part of one or the other ([boys/men](#) and [girls/women](#)); those who are outside these groups may fall under the umbrella term [non-binary](#).

One of the bases for investigating gender differences in attitudes towards homosexuality may be situated in the fact that conventionally, culturally or traditionally, males and females have differed in their ways of doing things, reacting to situation generally and so on. From the outset, males are socialized to be less emotional, while the opposite is the expected case for females. These tendencies have to a large extent permeated the psyche, shaped and directed actions and reactions to events, objects, and situations between males and females over time. Recent developments are engendering a shift from the existing order along gender lines, but much is still left to be desired as far as these gender entrenched dichotomies are concerned.

In terms of age, Hornby (2010) defines age as the length of time that a person has lived or existed. There are many ways we can count a person's age. These include chronological age, biological age, psychological age, functional age, and social age. Chronological age refers to the actual age of an individual from birth regardless of development level. It encompasses a measure of the time a person has spent out of the womb interacting with the environment. It is inseparably associated with biological growth and experience. Since individual growth rates vary widely, individuals of the same chronological age show marked differences in strength, motor proficiency and the like (Maltoni, et al., 2022). Biological age is the age that the individuals' body resembles or functions at. Even though two people may both be thirty years old chronologically, one of them could have a biological profile that is closer to twenty-five, whereas the other might have a biological profile of thirty-five. Biological age can also be seen as a description of an individual's development based on biomarkers (a biomarker is a recordable molecular or cellular event) (Sternang, et al., 2019). Psychological age involves how old one feels, acts, and behaves, and is thus not necessarily equal to chronological age, which is age since birth. A person can therefore have a psychological age that exceeds their chronological age if they are mature or at least feel older than they really are (Symons, 2011). Functional age is an individual's age as determined by measures of functional capability indexed by age-normed standards. Functional age is distinct from chronological age and represents a combination of physiological, psychological, and social age. Social age refers to changes in a person's roles and relationships; both within their networks of relatives and friends and in formal organisations such as the workplace and houses of worship (Maltoni, et al., 2022). It further broadens the definition of Attention Age because the Social Age focuses on many forms of societal interactions including online relationships, collaboration and sharing. The various approaches to age have shown to have bearings or implications on the adjustment, perceptions, cognitions and general response patterns to situations and events in a person's life, hence this study examines age and attitudes towards homosexuality among undergraduates.

Statement of the Problem

Heterosexuality, which involves sexual or romantic attraction to people of the opposite sex, is more or less the norm in Nigeria. In this context, men are sexually or romantically attracted to women, and heterosexual women are sexually or romantically attracted to men. On the converse, homosexuality has been legally proscribed in Nigeria, however, evidence indicate that the practice is increasing in the country. Even before the passage of the law prohibiting homosexuality in Nigeria, public perception of people suspected to engage in such practices was anything but salutary. With passage of the law against homosexuality, comes more stringent legal measures and consequences ranging from 12 to 14 years of imprisonment for perpetrators of such acts, depending on the jurisdiction, as well as increased negative attitudes towards those perceived to be homosexuals in the society.

Furthermore, available evidence points to cases of arrest and detention of homosexuals in Nigeria, as well as increase homosexual activities in the country and on university campuses (Okanlawon, 2017). Moreover, there are research indicators of gender differences in various forms of behaviours and

reactions; links between age and maladaptive behaviour, socio-economic background and various forms of maladaptive and anti-social behaviours, as well as self-concept and maladaptive behaviours.

The problem is therefore situated in the fact that, even in the face of such stringent legal consequences and negative public attitudes towards homosexuality, evidence indicates that homosexuality is gaining more grounds in society generally, and on the university campuses specifically. Consequently, the existence of evidence indicating increases in cases of homosexuality in Nigeria generally, and university campuses specifically, as well as studies linking gender, age, socio-economic status, and self-concept to various forms of maladaptive behaviours among different populations notwithstanding, the influence of demographic variables (gender, age and socio-economic status) on attitudes towards homosexuality among undergraduates of public universities in North-central Nigeria seem to be underrepresented in research. Based on the foregoing, this study examined this phenomenon so as to provide guidance and counseling interventions to students that may require them, as well as contribute in bridging the existing void by examining demographic variables and homosexual tendencies among undergraduates of public universities in North-central Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to determine the influence of demographic variables on attitudes towards homosexuality among undergraduates of public universities in North-Central Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study sought to:

- (i) find out the influence of gender on attitudes towards homosexuality among undergraduates of public universities in North-central, Nigeria.
- (ii) determine the influence of age on attitudes towards homosexuality among undergraduates of public universities in North-central, Nigeria.
- (iii) determine the influence of socio-economic status on attitudes towards homosexuality among undergraduates of public universities in North-central, Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

- What is the influence of gender on attitudes towards homosexuality among undergraduates of public universities in Northcentral, Nigeria?
- What is the influence of age on attitudes towards homosexuality among undergraduates of public universities in North-central, Nigeria?
- What is the influence of socio-economic status on attitudes towards homosexuality among undergraduates of public universities in North-central, Nigeria?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide this study, and were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. Gender has no significant influence on attitudes towards homosexuality among undergraduates of public universities in North-central, Nigeria.
2. Age has no significant influence on attitudes towards homosexuality among undergraduates of public universities in North-central, Nigeria.
3. Socio-economic status has no significant influence on attitudes towards homosexuality among undergraduates of public universities in North-central, Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a cross-sectional survey design in eliciting responses from undergraduates of public universities in North Central, Nigeria. The study was carried out in North Central Region of Nigeria. North Central Nigeria consists of six States (Benue Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger and Plateau) and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja.

The population for this study include 221,768 undergraduates found across public universities in six States and Abuja that make up the area known as North-Central Nigeria (Combined Records: Benue State University Records; Kogi State University Records; University of Ilorin; Nasarawa State University; Federal University of Technology Minna; University of Jos; University of Abuja, 2020). The sample size for this study comprised 399 undergraduates randomly selected from the population of students in public universities across North-central, Nigeria. This sample size was derived from the population of 221,768 undergraduates using the Taro Yamane (1967) sample size determination formula. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled "Influence of Demographic Variables on Attitude towards Homosexuality Questionnaire (IDVAHQ)". The questionnaire was built into three sections namely; Section A, B and C. Section A contained demographic information like the gender and age of the respondents. Section B contained four items dwelling on socio-economic status. Section C contained 20 items on attitude towards homosexuality and was structured on a four point ratings with the continuum of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. The instrument for this study was subjected to face and content validation. Draft copies of the instrument were given to five subject-matter experts of which three were experts in Guidance and Counselling and two were experts in Test and Measurement. The instrument was trial tested to ascertain its reliability in terms of its internal consistency. An overall reliability coefficient of 0.87 was obtained for the instrument. Data collected for this study were analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential

statistics. Specifically, Mean (X) and Standard Deviation (SD) were used to answer the research questions while hypothesis one was tested using Independent T-test and hypotheses two and three were tested using ANOVA at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question One

What is the influence of gender on attitudes towards homosexuality among undergraduates of public universities in North central, Nigeria?

To answer this research question, the mean scores and standard deviations of male and female students' attitudes towards homosexuality were computed and presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of the Attitudes of Male and Female Students towards Homosexuality among Undergraduates in Public Universities in North Central, Nigeria

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Male	188	2.814	0.162	.0118
Female	211	2.806	0.163	.0112
Total	399			

The result of the data presented on Table 1 shows that the mean scores of the attitudes of male and female students towards homosexuality are 2.814 and 2.806 respectively. The mean scores of the attitudes of both the male and female students are above the mean bench mark of 2.50. This implies that both the male and female students have unfavourable (negative) attitudes towards homosexuality. The standard deviations of the male and female students are 0.162 and 0.163 respectively. From all indications, the standard deviations of both groups are quiet close to each other and this is an indication that the male and female students were homogenous in their responses on their attitude towards homosexuality. Since both the male and female students have unfavourable (negative) attitudes towards homosexuality, it is an indication that gender has no influence on attitudes towards homosexuality among undergraduates of public universities in North central, Nigeria

Research Question Two

What is the influence of age on attitudes towards homosexuality among undergraduates of public universities in North central, Nigeria?

To answer this research question, the mean scores and standard deviations of attitudes towards homosexuality of students within the age of 15-25 years, 26-35 years, 36 years and above were computed and presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of Attitudes towards Homosexuality of Students within the Age of 15-25 years, 26-35 years, 36 years and above.

Age	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
15-25 Years	267	2.81	0.17	0.010
26-35 Years	109	2.80	0.14	0.013
36 Years and Above	23	2.76	0.16	0.032
Total	399			

The result of the data presented on Table 2 shows that the mean scores of the attitudes towards homosexuality of students within the 15-25 years, 26-35 years, 36 years and above are 2.81, 2.80 and 2.76 respectively. The mean scores of the attitudes towards homosexuality of all the students within these age groups are above the mean bench mark of 2.50. This implies that all the students within these age groups have unfavourable (negative) attitudes towards homosexuality. The standard deviations of the students within these age groups are 0.17, 0.14 and 0.16 respectively. From all indications, the standard deviations of both groups are quiet close to each other and this is an indication that all the students within these age groups were homogenous in their responses on their attitude towards homosexuality. Since all the students within these age groups have unfavourable (negative) attitudes towards homosexuality, it is an indication that age has no influence on attitudes towards homosexuality among undergraduates of public universities in North central, Nigeria

Research Question Three

What is the influence of socio-economic status on attitudes towards homosexuality among undergraduates of public universities in North-central, Nigeria?

To answer this research question, the mean scores and standard deviations of attitudes towards homosexuality of students from high, middle and low socio-economic status were computed and presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of Attitudes towards Homosexuality of Students from High, Middle and Low Socio-Economic Status

Socio-Economic Status	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
High	89	2.79	0.16	0.02
Moderate	133	2.80	0.17	0.01
Low	177	2.81	0.17	0.01
Total	399			

The result of the data presented on Table 3 shows that the mean scores of attitudes towards homosexuality of students from high, middle and low socio-economic status are 2.80, 2.81 and 2.80 respectively. The mean scores of the attitudes towards homosexuality of all the students within this socio-economic status are above the mean bench mark of 2.50. This implies that all the students within this socio-economic status have unfavourable (negative) attitudes towards homosexuality. The standard deviations of the students within this socio-economic status are 0.16, 0.17 and 0.17 respectively. From all indications, the standard deviations of both groups are quiet close to each other and this is an indication that all the students within socio-economic status were homogenous in their responses on their attitude towards homosexuality. Since all the students within this socio-economic status have unfavourable (negative) attitudes towards homosexuality, it is an indication that socio-economic status has no influence on attitudes towards homosexuality among undergraduates of public universities in North central, Nigeria

Hypothesis One

Gender has no significant influence on attitudes towards homosexuality among undergraduates of public universities in North-central, Nigeria.

The hypothesis is tested using Independent samples t-test at 0.05 level of significance and the result is presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Summary of Independent Samples T-Test Showing Influence of Gender on Attitudes towards Homosexuality among Undergraduates of Public Universities in North-Central, Nigeria

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Df	t	Sig.	Alpha
Male	188	2.814	0.162				
				397	0.484	0.845	0.05
Female	211	2.806	0.162				

The result of Independent samples t-test in Table 4 shows that the Sig. value of 0.845 is greater than the Alpha value of 0.05 at 397 degree of freedom. This is an indication that the test is not significant. This implies that gender has no significant influence on attitudes towards homosexuality among undergraduates of public universities in North-central, Nigeria. Thus, the hypothesis is accepted.

Hypothesis Two

Age has no significant influence on attitudes towards homosexuality among undergraduates of public universities in North-central, Nigeria.

The hypothesis is tested using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) at 0.05 level of significance and the result is presented in Table 5

Table 5: Summary of ANOVA Test Showing the Influence of Age on Attitudes towards Homosexuality among Undergraduates of Public Universities in North-Central, Nigeria

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.056	2	.028	1.049	.351
Within Groups	10.484	396	.026		
Total	10.540	398			

The result of the ANOVA test in Table 5 shows that the Sig. value of 0.351 is greater than the set Alpha value of 0.05 at 398 degree of freedom. This is an indication that the test is not significant. This implies that age has no significant influence on attitudes towards homosexuality among undergraduates of public universities in North-central, Nigeria. Thus, the hypothesis is accepted.

Hypothesis Three

Socio-economic status has no significant influence on attitudes towards homosexuality among undergraduates of public universities in North-central, Nigeria.

The hypothesis is tested using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) at 0.05 level of significance and the result is presented in Table 6

Table 6: Summary of ANOVA Test Showing the Influence of Socio-Economic Status on Attitudes towards Homosexuality among Undergraduates of Public Universities in North-Central, Nigeria

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.029	2	.014	.514	.598
Within Groups	11.012	396	.028		
Total	11.041	398			

The result of the ANOVA test in Table 6 shows that the Sig. value of 0.598 is greater than the set Alpha value of 0.05 at 398 degree of freedom. This is an indication that the test is not significant. This implies that socio-economic status has no significant influence on attitudes towards homosexuality among undergraduates of public universities in North-central, Nigeria. Thus, the hypothesis is accepted.

Discussion of Findings

In this section, findings of the study are discussed. The discussion is tailored according to the findings of the research questions and hypotheses tested.

The findings of this study revealed that gender has no significant influence on attitudes towards homosexuality among undergraduates of public universities in North central, Nigeria. The findings showed that both the male and female students had unfavourable (negative) attitudes towards homosexuality. The findings of this study disagree with that of Gregory et al. (2010) who found significant gender difference among self-identified lesbians, gay and bisexual adults in a U.S probability sample. The findings of this study also do not conform to that Xinli and Skyler (2016) found a significant relationship between gender and homosexuality among university students in China. The lack of significant gender influence on attitudes towards homosexuality in the present study may be attributed to shared cultural and societal norms in North Central Nigeria, where both males and females are likely exposed to similar conservative beliefs about sexuality. Religious values, which strongly oppose homosexuality in many communities in the region, could also shape these attitudes uniformly across genders. Furthermore, educational environments in public universities may not provide enough exposure to diverse perspectives on sexuality, reinforcing negative attitudes in both male and female students. Peer group influence and social pressures may lead students to adopt negative views on homosexuality regardless of their gender. Lastly, limited representation or visibility of LGBTQ+ issues in the curriculum and social discourse in these institutions could hinder open-mindedness, making attitudes more homogenous.

The findings of this study revealed that age has no significant influence on attitudes towards homosexuality among undergraduates of public universities in North central, Nigeria. The study found that students within 15-25 years, 26-35 years, 36 years and above had unfavourable (negative) attitudes towards homosexuality. This finding is not consistent with that of Taquette and Rodriques (2015), who found that younger age was significantly related with homosexuality among adolescents seeking treatment in a primary health care facility. The finding also disagrees substantially with that of Gregory, et al. (2010), who also found that younger age is significantly implicated in homosexuality among lesbians, gay and bisexual adults in a U.S. probability sample. The findings of the present study that age has no significant influence on attitudes towards homosexuality among undergraduates in North Central Nigeria can be attributed to several factors such as; Peer pressure and societal expectations reinforce prevailing attitudes among students, regardless of their age; Access to LGBTQ+ advocacy or support systems may be scarce, leaving little room for attitudinal shifts over time; The lack of legal protection or recognition for homosexuals in Nigeria maintains a strong stigma across all demographics; The media representation of homosexuality in Nigeria is largely negative, influencing young and older students alike.

The study found that socio-economic status has no significant influence on attitudes towards homosexuality among undergraduates of public universities in North central, Nigeria. The findings further revealed that students from high, middle and low socio-economic status have unfavourable (negative) attitudes towards homosexuality. The findings agree with that of Xinli and Skyler (2016) who found that socio-economic status was not significantly related to homosexuality among university students in China. The finding is likely due to prevailing cultural and religious norms that transcend economic class. In Nigerian society, conservative beliefs regarding sexuality are deeply embedded in social structures, regardless of wealth or education levels. Public discourse on homosexuality is often shaped by religious teachings that are widely practiced and respected across different socio-economic groups. Consequently, even those from higher socio-economic backgrounds, who might be exposed to more liberal viewpoints, remain influenced by the societal pressures to conform to traditional values. The educational environment in these public universities may also reflect and reinforce existing societal attitudes, offering little variation across economic classes.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that demographic variables (gender, age, socio-economic status) and self-concept have no influence on attitude towards homosexuality among undergraduates of public universities in North-central Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are advanced:

1. Universities should implement awareness programs that address sexuality, human rights, and diversity, fostering understanding and respect among students. Since gender does not significantly influence attitudes toward homosexuality, these programs can focus on promoting inclusivity for all students, regardless of their gender, to challenge negative societal perceptions.
2. Curriculum developers should integrate topics on sexual orientation, gender identity, and human rights into the university curriculum to foster critical thinking and reduce prejudice among students.
3. School management should establish peer support networks within universities to provide safe spaces for students to share more experiences about homosexuality

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