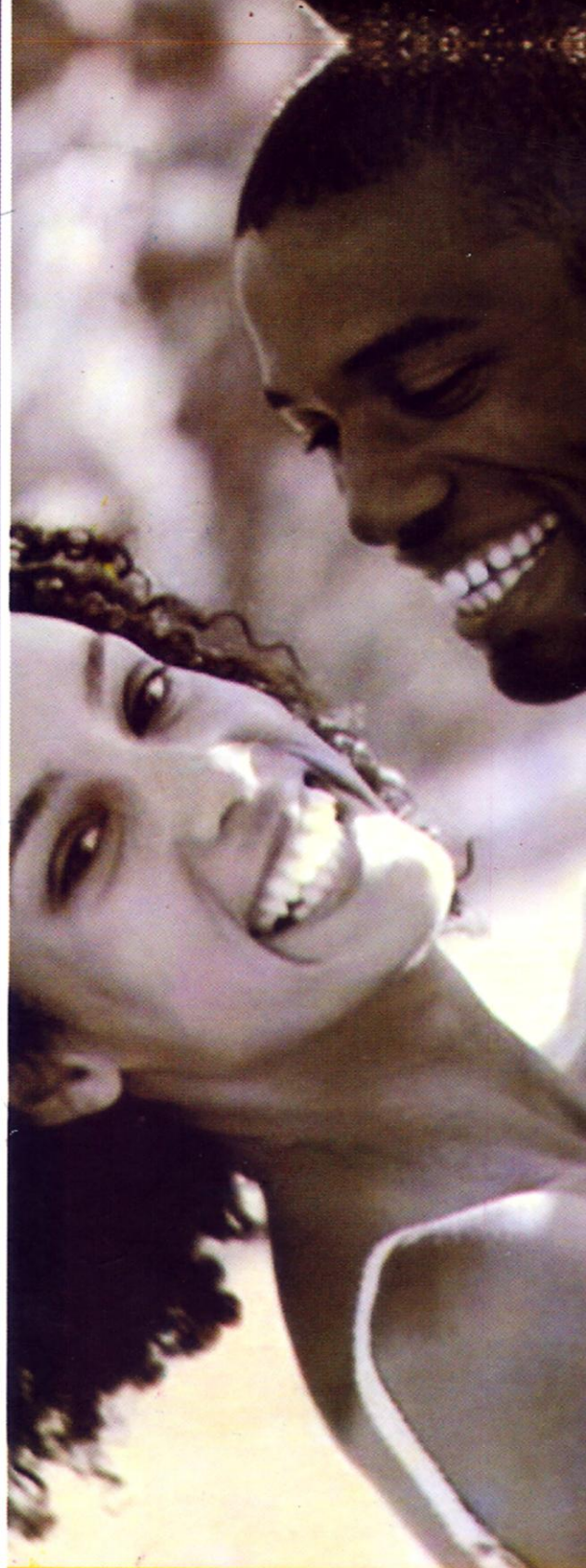


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Editorial

Here is another spectacular edition of our *Gender and Behaviour* Journal –Volume 14 Number 3 coming right after our Special edition on ‘Women in Africa’s Social Crises’ i.e Volume 14 Number 2. This edition presents numerous eye-opening topics for your reading pleasure. It comprises of various illuminating submissions which takes on deeper analysis into the various dimensions of gender and gender-related behaviour. Starting with the examination of the scourge of violence against women, particularly in their most vulnerable conditions, we begin to see that the discussion of gender-related issues has never been more pertinent. More revealing, are the studies into the predominant assumptions in African societies around gender roles and responsibilities, sex education, gender identity and sexuality to mention a few. This publication further lends its support to the modernization of discussions around gender as we present evidences of the evolving popularity of inquiries into the relationship between gender and the use of social media, cyber-crime and entrepreneurship. This in addition to the historical details on female representation in African society provides an incomparable juxtaposition of the progressive topic that gender is. As always, there is no shortage of educative research in this edition and we acknowledge all our erudite contributors for a job well done. Once again we express our gratitude for your formidable support and hope that we can continue to count on you.

Happy reading!

Yours Sincerely,

Professor Sola Olowu, (*PhD, FCIPM, FNPA, FIOE*)

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Homophobia and Perceptions about Homosexuality among Students of a Tertiary Institution in Nigeria

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Abstract

The term 'LGBT' is intended to emphasize a diversity of "sexuality and gender identity-based cultures". Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual (LGBT) adolescents face challenges growing up healthy in a culture that is often unaccepting. Both male and female same-sex sexual activity is illegal in Nigeria.² Discrimination by reason of sexual orientation, termed homophobia, embraces prejudices against LGBT individuals. The objective of the study was to determine the prevalence of homophobia, explore the perception about homosexuality and associations between sociodemographic factors and homophobia among undergraduate students of Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria. A descriptive cross sectional study was conducted among 500 students of OAU using a multistage sampling technique. They completed a semi structured Socio-demographic Data Schedule and a homophobic scale developed by Wright, Adams and Bernatto assess the cognitive, affective, and behavioral components of homophobia. Univariate analysis was used to determine the prevalence of homophobia and this was expressed in percentages. Association at bivariate level was assessed using chi-square and Pearson's correlation coefficient. About half of the respondents were between the ages of 21 and 25 years. There were slightly more females (56%) than males. most of the respondents (97.8%) were aware of homosexuality, fewer (64.3%) believed it was common while fewer still (36.8%) knew any gay or bisexual persons. Thirty-five (7.2%) respondents believed that homosexuality was acceptable. However, 359 (74.7%) believed that homosexuality was immoral, 326 (67.8%) would feel uncomfortable with a GLB roommate and 23 (4.9%) had actually damaged property belonging to GLB persons. Two hundred and forty-nine (54.5%) respondents had high overall levels of homophobia. Female respondents had significantly lower levels of total homophobia compared to male respondents. Respondents attracted exclusively to the opposite sex were more likely to demonstrate behavioural aggression compared to those attracted to same or both sexes. Although many are aware of same sex sexuality in

Nigeria, the restrictive confines of law and social norms make stigmatization and discrimination rife and these may impact negatively on the wellbeing of LGBT individuals.

Keywords: *LGBT, Homophobia, Homosexuality, Perception.*

Background

Homophobia was first used to refer to the heterosexual's dread of being in close quarters with homosexuals (Weinberg, 1973). It is broadly used to refer to a range of negative attitudes and feelings towards non-heterosexual individuals. It may manifest in hostile behaviour ranging from discrimination to outright violence (Herek, 2004). Gay, lesbian and bisexual (GLB) individuals face challenges growing up physically and mentally healthy in a culture that is often unaccepting (Remafedi, Resnick, Blum, & Harris, 1992; Rotheram-Borus, Hunter, & Rosario, 1994). Homophobia is experienced in many ways, disparaging jokes, physical, verbal and psychological attacks, discrimination and negative media representation.

Both male and female same-sex sexual activity is illegal in Nigeria. The maximum punishment in the twelve northern Nigerian states that have adopted Sharia law is death by stoning (Siraj, 2009; United States Department of State, 2008). This law applies to all Muslims and to states which have voluntarily consented to application of the Shari'a courts. In southern Nigeria and under the secular criminal laws of the other northern Nigerian states, the maximum punishment for same-sex sexual activity is 14 years' imprisonment (Federal Government Nigeria, 1990). Same-sex marriage has been further criminalized in the country (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014) further reinforcing negative attitudes towards homosexuality. The Pew Global Attitudes Project showed that 97% of Nigerian residents believe that homosexuality is a way of life that should not be accepted by the society, which was the highest rate of non-acceptance in the 39 countries surveyed (Kohut, 2013).

There are many factors that can cause a person to be homophobic. Research has shown that prejudice against gay people and homosexuality can be influenced by the person having strong religious beliefs that disapprove of sex and/or homosexuality, having little/no social contact with lesbian and gay people and reporting no homosexual experiences or feelings (Valentine & McDonald, 2004).

Homophobia destroys not just the people living openly as GLB but the whole fabric of the society. Living in a homophobic environment may force many GLB people to conceal their sexuality (Meyer, 2003; Sylva, Rieger, Linsenmeier, & Bailey, 2010) and those who have been socialized into negative beliefs about homosexuality may develop feelings of self-loathing, shame and low self-esteem if they realize sexual attraction for same-sex individuals (Shidlo, 1994; Williamson, 2000). This has been shown to have harmful mental health effects including depression and suicidal behavior (Igartua, Gill, & Montoro, 2009; Newcomb & Mustanski, 2010). Also, the decision about whether to inform others about their sexual orientation or not can cause significant personal distress (Bohan, 1996).

While heterosexuality is expected and encouraged, other forms of sexuality, such as men having sex with men and women having sex with women are generally perceived as deviant and alien to the social and cultural fabric of Africa. Perhaps as a reflection of this, there is paucity of published health literature on homosexuality in Africa (Dougan, Gilbert, Sinka, & Evans, 2005; Wade et al., 2005).

The current lack of information on the practice of same sex relationships in Nigeria is an important research gap that needs to be filled. Research is needed to document the prevalence and epidemiology of same-sex relationships in various regions of Nigeria. Research should also delineate the perception of the society and how this influences the quality of life of the homosexual individual. This becomes imperative if we are to appropriately tackle the mental health needs of this vulnerable group in our society with respect to adequate and specially tailored interventions to reduce the burden of disease among them and improve health-seeking behaviour. This study intends to fill the gap by providing relevant and essential information on the perception of students of a tertiary institution to homosexuality, the prevalence of homophobia and factors associated with this concept.

Objectives of the study

The aim of the present study is to determine the pattern of homophobia and perception of homosexuality among students of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.

The specific objectives include:

1. To determine the pattern of homophobia among the students of the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile – Ife.
2. To determine the perception of the study population towards homosexuality.

3. To determine the association between sociodemographic characteristics and homophobia in the study population.

Research design

The study used a descriptive cross sectional design.

Participants

The study sample was drawn from the undergraduate student population of Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife Osun state, situated in the South Western geographical zone of Nigeria. There are 10 halls of residence consisting of four male halls, four female halls and one postgraduate hall (all run by the university); and one female hall located within the university campus but managed by a private organization. A sample of the population was selected to be representative of the larger student population.

Sample size determination

The sample size that was used for this study was computed based on the formula by Araoye (Araoye, 2003). Since there was a dearth of studies on homophobia in Nigeria and there are great disparities in global figures depending on the region being investigated, the figure of 50% suggesting that the prevalence is largely unknown was employed. Thus, a minimum sample size of 384 was estimated which was increased to 500 to account for drop-out and incomplete data.

Sampling procedure

A multistage, stratified, systematic sampling technique was used in this study.

Stage 1: All the halls of residence were stratified into 2 based on gender. Of the 10 halls of residence within the university campus, two were excluded from this study on account of one (female hall) being a privately run residence which is more expensive than the other halls; while the other was a postgraduate hall. This was ensure uniformity of the sample studied.

Stage 2: The total number of students and total number of rooms in each of the selected halls were obtained from the hall supervisors of the halls. The 500 questionnaires were distributed among the 8 halls. The number to be interviewed in each hall was determined by proportional sampling method.

Stage 3: After determining the number to be interviewed in each hall, respondents were chosen by systematic random sampling. Odd-numbered rooms on odd-numbered floors were selected and then one student was

randomly selected from each odd-numbered room until the target study number for that hall was achieved.

Research instruments

The research instruments included a Sociodemographic Data Schedule and the homophobia Scale.

Socio-demographic Data Schedule

A semi structured Socio-demographic data schedule was designed purposely for this study to elicit information on variables such as age, gender, level of study, marital status of parents, ethnicity and religion. The following questions were also asked about perception about homosexuality: '*Are you aware of homosexuality?*' '*Do you believe homosexuality is common?*' and '*Do you know any gay/bisexual persons?*' The responses to the questions were Yes or No.

Homophobia Scale

The Homophobia Scale (HS) was developed by Wright, Adams and Bernat (Wright Jr, Adams, & Bernat, 1999) to assess negative cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses to homosexuality – homophobia; which has also been described as homonegativity (Hudson & Ricketts, 1980).

The Scale consists of 25 statements to which respondents answer on a 5-point Likert scale with responses ranging between 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*). The three factors were identified by principal component analysis, which collectively accounted for 68.69% of the scale's variance (Wright Jr et al., 1999). The first factor, Behavioral/Negative Affect (10 items), assesses primarily negative affect and avoidance behaviors and accounted for 40.88% of the scale's variance. The second factor - Affect/Behavioral Aggression measured negative behavioural responses to homosexuality. It was also accounted for by 10 items and accounted for 23.05% of the scale's variance; while the third factor - Cognitive Negativism consisted of 5 items and accounted for 4.77% of the scale's variance and assesses negative attitudes and cognitions. A reliability of 0.76 has been described (Rohner & Björklund, 2004). In this study, scores were considered high or low based on a median split (scores above and below the median) for both subscales and total homophobic scores.

Data analysis

Data analysis was carried out using the SPSS software version 23. To achieve the objectives of the study, the data collected was subjected to

appropriate descriptive and inferential statistics. Univariate analysis was used to demonstrate the pattern of homophobia and this was expressed in percentages. Association at bivariate level was assessed using Chi-square and Pearson's correlation coefficient, as was appropriate depending on the type of variable. A p-value of <0.05 was considered statistically significant in all cases.

Ethical consideration

The study protocol was presented for approval to the Research and Ethical Committee of the Institute of Public Health, Obafemi Awolowo University. The nature of the study, its aims and objectives were explained to the participants and written consent freely obtained. The participants were assured of confidentiality.

Results

Table 1 shows that half of the respondents were aged 21-25 years and 56% were female. Ninety-eight percent of the respondents were unmarried and 350 (82.4%) attended a place of worship regularly. Most were single (98%) and of Yoruba ethnicity (84.4%). Figure 1 shows that while most of the respondents (97.8%) were aware of homosexuality, fewer (64.3%) believed it was common while fewer still (36.8%) knew any gay or bisexual persons.

Thirty-five (7.2%) respondents believed that homosexuality was acceptable. However, 359 (74.7%) believed that homosexuality was immoral, 326 (67.8%) would feel uncomfortable with a GLB roommate, 200 (41.6%) avoided persons thought to be GLB and 23 (4.9%) had damaged property belonging to GLB persons (Table 2).

Two hundred and forty-nine (54.5%) respondents had high overall levels of homophobia as shown in Table 3. About three quarters of the respondents had high degrees of cognitive negativism, 43% had high levels of behavioural negativism and half of them had high levels of negative affect (Table 3).

Female respondents had significantly lower levels of negative affect, behavioural aggression and total homophobia compared to male respondents (Table 4) ($p=0.003$, 0.002 and 0.001 respectively). Respondents attracted exclusively to the opposite sex were more likely to demonstrate behavioural aggression compared to those attracted to same or both sexes ($p=0.05$); and respondents who self-identified as heterosexual were more likely to exhibit

cognitive negativism. There were no associations between homophobia and its domains and the awareness of homosexuality; however, the belief that homosexuality was common was associated with lower negative affect ($p=0.02$). Knowing persons who were gay/bisexual was associated with lower negative affect and lower total homophobia ($p=0.026$ and 0.01 respectively) (Table 4).

Discussion

In this study, we found high levels of homophobia similar to studies from other regions (Feng et al., 2012). Male respondents were more likely to be homophobic – similar to other findings. Feng et al. (2012) found that among respondents with a positive perspective to homosexuality, the percentages of males were lower than those of females. Also, the National survey of attitudes and perceptions of Jamaicans towards same-sex relationships (Boxhill, Martin, & Russel, 2011) showed that though both men and women exhibited strong negative views towards homosexuality, these negative views were stronger among males and this difference was statistically significant. The high homophobia among men may indicate a defense against a perceived threat to the masculine social status posed by the stereotype of gay men as being effeminate (due to mannerisms and the feminine sexual role of being ‘penetrated’). This may be particularly so in sub-Saharan Africa where gender roles are rigid and associated with male privilege (Shoola, 2014). By belittling femininity in men, homophobia may also represent a means for men to assert their dominant social masculine status (Bohan, 1996).

Consistent with previous research (Feng et al., 2012; Hou et al., 2006; Verweij et al., 2008), we found that exclusive sexual attraction to the opposite sex was associated with a higher likelihood of demonstrating behavioural aggression towards non-heterosexual individuals; which in turn may reflect the societal intolerance for homosexual behaviour.

As shown by other studies, we also found that knowing gay/bisexual persons appears to minimize the negative affect and total homophobia. Studies have demonstrated that having friends or relatives with homosexual orientation or having prior contact with homosexual people is positively related to positive attitudes toward homosexuality (Gelbal & Duyan, 2006; Rye & Meaney, 2009). Knowing and being in contact with homosexual individuals may provide an opportunity to challenge negative attitudes towards homosexual/bisexual persons.

Cognitive negativism was high among the sample population, and remained high despite knowing gay/bisexual persons. This may suggest that cognitive

factors such as beliefs, may be a major factor in determining whether individuals are homophobic.

In conclusion, while the awareness of same-sex sexuality in Nigeria is high, the attitude towards it is predominantly negative, reflecting the social norms and the law which may also facilitate stigmatization and actual violence towards LGBT individuals. While this will impact negatively on the wellbeing of LGBT individuals, more studies need to be carried out to investigate the determinants of homophobia in Nigeria.

The limitations of the study include the cross-sectional design, on account of inferences of causation cannot be drawn. Furthermore, the taboo nature of discussions regarding matters pertaining to sexuality and specifically sexual orientation; may mean that non-heterosexual behaviour is underreported. Finally, the study was carried out among students in a tertiary institution who may be more enlightened than the average Nigeria and represent a distinct subpopulation of Nigerians; thus caution should be exercised in generalizing these findings to the general population.

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Table 1: Socio-demographic (and other selected) variables of respondents

Variables	Frequency (n=481)	Percent
Age (456)		
≤20	130	28.5
21-25	229	50.2
26-30	52	11.4
>30	45	9.9
Sex (457)		
Male	201	44.0
Female	256	56.0
Marital status (451)		
Single	442	98.0
Married	9	2.0
Frequency of attendance at religious gatherings (425)		
Regularly	350	82.4
Occasionally	58	13.6
Rarely	17	4.0
Monthly allowance (456)		
<10000	294	64.5
10000-20000	117	25.7
>20000	45	9.9
Ethnicity (480)		
Yoruba	406	84.4
Igbo	35	7.3
Edo/Delta	23	4.8
Others	13	2.7
No response	3	0.6
Marital status (475)		
Single	465	97.9
Married	10	2.1
Religion (468)		
Christianity	409	87.4
Islam	58	12.4
Eckist	1	0.2
Sexual attraction (427)		
Opposite gender only	380	89.0

Same/both genders	47	11.0
Sexual orientation (432)		
Heterosexual	408	94.4
Gay/bisexual	24	5.6
Sexual behaviour (170)		
Opposite sex only	162	95.3
Same/both sexes	8	4.7

Figure 1: Perception about homosexuality among respondents

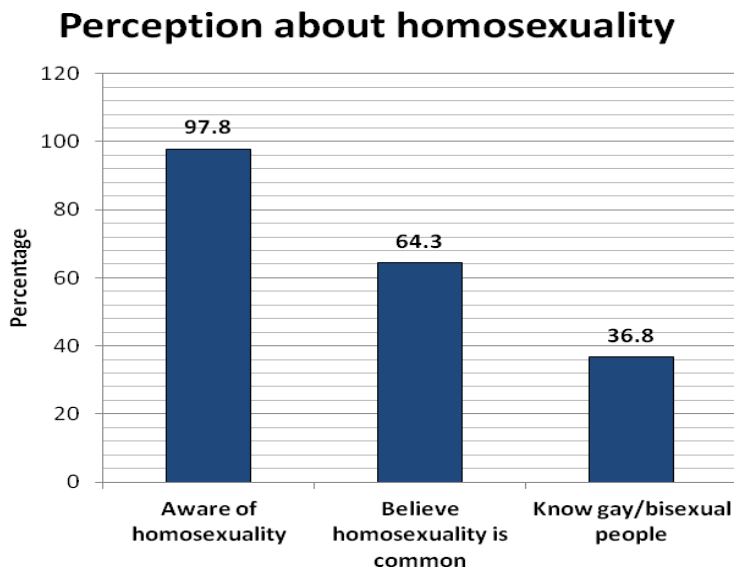


Table 2: Homophobia amongst respondents

Variable (N=481)	Agree	Indifferent	Disagree	No response
Gay people make me nervous	140 (31.2)	110 (22.9)	200 (41.6)	31 (6.3)
Gay people deserve what they get	149 (31.0)	149 (31.0)	147 (30.6)	6 (1.3)
Homosexuality acceptable to me	35 (7.2)	59 (12.3)	376 (78.2)	3 (0.6)
Will end friendship if friend is gay	167 (34.7)	107 (22.2)	199 (41.7)	8 (1.7)
Homosexuals should not work with children	286 (59.5)	66 (13.7)	122 (25.3)	7 (1.4)
I make derogatory remarks about gays	182 (37.8)	112 (23.3)	167 (34.7)	20 (4.2)
Enjoy company of gay people	38 (7.9)	87 (18.1)	243 (50.5)	118 (24.5)
Marriage between homosexuals acceptable	42 (8.7)	65 (13.5)	373 (67.5)	11 (2.3)
I make derogatory remarks about homosexuals	99 (20.5)	108 (22.5)	242 (50.3)	32 (6.5)
Indifferent to whether friend is straight or gay	92 (19.0)	78 (16.2)	300 (62.3)	11 (2.3)
Will be upset if my friend is a homosexual	310 (64.5)	60 (12.5)	101 (21.0)	10 (2.0)
Homosexuality is immoral	359 (74.7)	64 (13.3)	48 (10.0)	10 (2.0)
Tease and joke about gay people	119 (24.8)	135 (28.1)	208 (43.3)	19 (3.8)
Fear homosexuals will make advances at me	163 (33.9)	113 (23.5)	179 (37.3)	26 (5.4)
Organizations that support gay rights not necessary	313 (65.1)	74 (15.4)	84 (17.5)	10 (2.0)
Damaged gay peoples properties	23 (4.9)	88 (18.3)	346 (71.9)	24(4.9)
Will feel uncomfortable having a gay roommate	326 (67.8)	48 (10.0)	90 (19.2)	15 (3.0)
Would hit homosexual person for coming at me	218 (45.3)	107 (22.2)	144 (29.9)	12 (2.6)
Homosexual behavior not against law	63 (13.1)	88 (18.3)	306 (63.6)	20 (4.0)
I avoid gay individuals	200 (41.6)	141 (29.3)	106 (22.1)	34 (7.0)

Bothers me to see homosexuals together in public	267 (55.5)	108 (22.5)	85 (17.7)	21 (4.3)
When I see a gay I think what a waste	224 (46.5)	131 (27.2)	105 (21.9)	21 (4.3)
When I meet someone, I try to find out if he is gay	60 (12.5)	153 (31.8)	246 (51.2)	22 (4.5)
Have rocky relationship with people I suspect are gay	77 (16.0)	143 (29.7)	233 (49.4)	18 (3.9)

Table 3: Respondent scores on the Homophobia scale

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Negative affect		
Low	229	50.1
High	228	49.9
Behavioural aggression		
Low	259	56.7
High	198	43.3
Cognitive negativism		
Low	122	26.7
High	335	73.3
Total homophobia		
Low	208	45.5
High	249	54.5