

Attitude Toward Homosexuals Among College Students

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Abstract

Accepting homosexuality is increasing in Nepali society, yet negative attitude toward homosexuals persists. In educational setting, homosexual students face direct or indirect discrimination.

This article reports on the study aimed to assess the attitude of college students toward homosexuals in relation to various factors affecting it. A descriptive study was done on 160 students of Padmakanya Multiple Campus and Shanker Dev Campus using homophobia scale, a self-administered questionnaire that measured the affective, cognitive and behavioral aspects of homophobia. It was hypothesized that there would be difference in attitude toward homosexuals with regards to the independent variables used under the study. Exactly how these factors play role to form a college students' overall attitude toward homosexuals is not fully understood, though associations between sex, religion and contact experience have been recognized. The study results show that male students and those who have no or negative contact experience with homosexuals hold more negative attitude than female students and those having homosexual friends. The implication of the study include taking gender into account when working with issues surrounding homosexuality and emphasizing on more positive contact environments between heterosexual and homosexual students.

Keywords: College students, gay, heterosexuality, homosexuality, lesbian,

Introduction

Inequality, social exclusion and discrimination impact negatively on the health, well-being and achievement of mankind. The experience of homophobic discrimination can have detrimental effect on their lives and career. Homosexuality

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is defined as sexual desire or behavior directed toward a person or persons of one's own sex (Webster, 2001). Until 1973, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) regarded homosexuality as a psychopathology. Although homosexuality has ceased to be regarded as mental illness, heterosexuality continues to be referred to as the norm and homosexuality is still often inadvertently discussed within the context of pathology (Morin, 1997, Rudolph, 1988). Attitude is determined as "the predisposition or a tendency to respond positively or negatively to a certain idea, object, person or situation. Negative attitude towards homosexuality exist on a continuum from homophobia to heterosexism. Homophobia is traditionally defined as "fear, disgust, anger, discomfort and aversion that individuals experience in dealing with homosexual people (Hudson and Ricketts, 1980) or as a dread of being in close quarters with homosexuals" (Weinberg, 1972). The term has come to be more broadly defined as "any belief system which supports negative myths and stereotypes about homosexual people" (Morin and Garfinke, 1978) and any of the varieties of negative attitudes which arise from fear or dislike of homosexuality" (Martin, 1982). Whereas heterosexism is "a belief system that values heterosexuality as superior to as and/or more natural than homosexuality" (Martin, 1982).

Daisuke Ito (2007), "College students' prejudiced attitude towards homosexuals- a comparative analysis in Japan and the United States". Involving 166 Japanese students, his thesis result suggested that the result showed that Japanese heterosexual men expressed more prejudiced attitude toward heterosexual Japanese women and the Japanese people are more generous regarding various sexual practices than American people.

In an article by Stephanie Pappas (2015) wrote People with "fearful-avoidant" attachment styles, who tend to feel uncomfortable in close relationships with others, were significantly more homophobic than those who were secure with close relationships. High levels of hostility and anger, measured as psychoticism, were also linked to homophobia, the researchers found. Phil Zuckerman (2017), in his article wrote "Religion, Secularism and Homophobia" wrote "Research shows that there is a strong correlation between being religious and being homophobic. On, average, the more religious you are in terms of strength of faith and church attendance, the more likely you are to be anti-gay rights, anti-gay marriage, etc. And conversely, the more secular you are, the more likely you are to be open and accepting of homosexuals, and supportive of there equal rights. It is thus no accident that in those nations where religion is strong- especially in Islamic-majority nations- the lives of homosexuals are plagued by inequality, disrespect, harassment and dangerous oppression. But in those highly secularized nations where religion is the weakest, the lives of homosexuals are much safer.

Finn and Mc Neil (1982) reported that gay and lesbian individuals are susceptible to more hatecrimes than any other minority group. For all young people, overcoming homophobia is particularly urgent for society as a whole; homophobia contributes to the perpetuation of traditional masculine and feminine stereotypes and gender roles thereby circumscribing male and female areas of interest, emotional expressions and the attainment of full intimate relationships. The profound and diverse consequences of homophobia have been recognized by various education authorities that have developed curriculum materials, which aim to provide understanding of homosexuality and reduce homophobic attitudes and behaviors.

Nepal's Education Board has implemented sexual and gender diversity in grades 6-9 syllabus, making Nepal the second Asian country after Mongolia to implement this. However many LGBT children also face extreme discrimination and are unable to complete their education due to threats, bullying and neglect from fellow students and teachers as well. Hence the study is important for the present scenario in Nepalese context.

The situation has definitely changed since the 1970s. Much of the world has become more accepting of homosexuality. Many countries have seen a rise in campaigns for LGBT rights, awareness, and discussions around it. According to a survey done by the Pew Research Center conducted in 39 countries among 37,653 respondents in 2013, there seems to be a global divide on attitudes toward homosexuality. Although there is broad acceptance of homosexuality in North America, the European Union, and much of Latin America, there is an equally widespread rejection in predominantly Muslim nations and in Africa, as well as in parts of Asia and in Russia. In another survey, Smith, Son, and Kim (2014) reported a notable global increase in the acceptance of homosexuality over the past 20 years. Up until few years ago, Nepal's gays, lesbians and transgenders faced widespread harassment. But, since then the country's high court has declared that the gays and lesbians have equal rights and that discrimination would not be tolerated. There are lots of ignorant homophobes in our society who are unaware about the concept of varieties of sexuality because 'sex' is still a taboo in Nepal. Thus, this study aimed to assess the attitude toward homosexuals and level of homophobia among the college students.

Method

Descriptive research design was adopted for the study, which used quantitative approach to assess the attitude toward homosexuals among college students. The study was conducted at two different colleges of Kathmandu. A Sample size of 160 college students, 75 males and 85 females aged 20-30 years from the above mentioned colleges studying in bachelor and master level were included as participants for

the study. The data from only heterosexual students were taken for data analysis. Cochran's formula was used to determine the sample size with 5% confidence level and 8% margin of error. Non-probability purposive sampling technique was used in the study. The students who were willing to participate were involved and excluded the responses of the students other than heterosexuals.

The study used standard tool, the Homophobia scale developed by Lester W. Wright Jr. Henry

E. Adams and Jeffrey Bernat in 1999. The Homophobia Scale was designed to measure cognitive, behavioral and affective aspects of homophobia. It consists of 25 statements to which participants' answer on a 5-point Likert scale of 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). The range of scores would be between 0 and 100 with a score of 0 being the least homophobic and 100 being the most homophobic. The scale yielded an overall reliability co-efficient of $r = .94$, $p < 0.01$ and a 1-week test-retest reliability co-efficient of $r = .96$ $p < 0.01$. Concurrent validity was established using the Index of Homophobia (IHP, Hudson and Ricketts, 1980). The result yielded a significant correlation, $r = .66$, $p < 0.01$.

The raw data was statistically analyzed through Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 23.0. The analysis variables were subjected to include frequencies, cross-tabulations, independent T-test, chi-square test and ANOVA to meet the objectives of the study. The significant differences were tested through t-test and One Way ANOVA. The significance level was determined at 95% confidence interval and the significance value was used as p-value and compared with $\alpha = 0.05$ test significance. The associations were tested through chi-square test. For this test, the homophobia scale scores were changed into the qualitative/ordinal data by categorizing into very low, low, moderate, high and very high.

Likewise, the correlation was tested through Pearson's correlation coefficient.

Result

Table 1: Independent T-test for Homophobia Scale Score and sex

Homophobia score

Sex

	N	Mean	SD	df	Mean	t value	P value
difference							
Male	75	42.95	12.376	158	6.394	3.205	0.002
Female	85	36.55	12.779				

The difference in attitude toward homosexuals by sex is statistically significant as $p < .05$ [t

(158) 3.205, $p = .002$]. From the above result, female students are less homophobic than male students.

Table 2: Independent T-test for Homophobia Scale Score and Religion

Homophobia score

Religion

	N	Mean	SD	df	Mean	t value	p value
difference							
Hindu	126	38.96	12.62	158	-3.157	1.266	0.208
Non-Hindu	34	42.12	13.94				

The mean scores of Hindus and non-Hindus came out to be 38.86 and 42.12 with standard deviations of 12.65 and 13.94 respectively. There is statistically no significant difference in the t-test for homophobia scale score and religion as $p > 0.05$ [t (158) = 1.266, $p = .208$]. The above data shows that the Hindu students are less homophobic than the students of religions other than Hindu.

Table 3: Multiple comparisons of responses and response scores on having homosexual friend

Responses for “have a homophobic friend”

F-test

	N	Mean	S.D.	I	J	Mean difference	p-value
Yes	31	31.10	13.94	Yes	No	-11.27	.000
					Unsure	-1.348	.953
No	120	42.38	11.87	No	Yes	-11.278	.000
					Unsure	-9.931	.049
Unsure	9	32.44	6.76	Unsure	Yes	-1.348	.953
					No	-9.931	.049

There is a statistically significant difference between groups as determined by one-way ANOVA as $p < .05$ [$F = 12.391$ and $p = .000$]. A Tukey post hoc test revealed that there is statistically significant difference between ‘yes’ and ‘no’ response ($p =$

000, $p < .05$) and 'no' and 'unsure' response ($p = .049$, $p < .05$). Whereas, there is statistically no significant difference between 'yes' and 'unsure' response ($p = .953$, $p > .05$).

Discussion

The study intended to investigate on the significant differences according to sex and religion. The result showed that there is significant difference in attitude toward homosexuals according to sex revealing males to be more homophobic than females revealing the mean difference of 6.40 in the total scores. Slaby (1994) contended that anxiety about homosexuality typically does not occur in individuals who are same-sex oriented, but it usually involves individuals who are ostensibly heterosexual and have difficulty integrating their homosexual feelings or activity. Males in our society are regarded as having more powerful or dominant role.

The study results also revealed that there is significant difference in attitude toward homosexuals by religion. Hayes (1885) found that participants who identified as being religious were generally more prejudice towards homosexuals than participants who identified as being non-religious. The researcher did not focus on how religious people are, to be more or less homophobic but showed that Non-Hindus being more homophobic than those who had Hinduism as their religious affiliation. The reason behind this may be that many Hindu epics have portrayed homosexual experience as natural and joyful, which has been distinguished as sin in other religions like Christianity. Same-sex relations and gender variances have been represented within Hinduism from Vedic times through the present day.

The test revealed that there is a statistically significant difference between homophobia and having homosexual friend as determined by one-way ANOVA [$F(160) = 12.391$ and $p = 0.000$]. A Tukey post hoc test revealed that there is statistically significant difference between 'yes' and 'no' response and 'no' and 'unsure' response. There is no statistically significant difference between the 'yes; and 'unsure' response and the hypothesis was accepted.

The three subscales or components of homophobia i.e. negative affect, behavioral aggression and cognitive negativism presented different levels of significance with regards to sex. The result showed that the difference in negative affect and behavioral aggression toward homosexuals by sex is statistically significant as the p-values for negative affect is 0.002 and for behavioral aggression is 0.009. Whereas, the difference in cognitive negativism toward homosexuals by sex is statistically not significant as the $p = 0.075$ and $p > 0.05$. The homosexuality is getting gradually

accepted in our context too which is proved by the laws in favor of LGBT rights and same-sex marriage. For the attitude toward homosexuals, there is discrepancy in what we show in behavior is not exactly what cognition we hold. Though showing discriminatory attitude is not that significant, the prejudiced view within our cognition is yet prevalent. The other hypothesis of significant difference in subscale scores of homophobia scale by sex seems to be partially supported by the study.

Conclusion

The obtained results point to the average to moderate level of homophobia among the respondents which is below the median. At the same time, they indicate that negative attitudes are still present in the population. Gaining better knowledge on this issue enables better understanding and acceptance of various sorts of sexual orientation and builds healthy social

relations that have effect on enriching mental health and develop better educational environment for the sexual minorities as well. The results point to the necessity of conducting similar studies in the future, as they can contribute to widening public consciousness and reducing ignorance, prejudice and stereotypes regarding homosexuality.

Implication

The results of the study represent a small segment of investigations conducted on the research question. In spite of including a small number of participants, the study contributes to enlarging the database on the attitudes of college students toward homosexual individuals.

The result should be taken into account when working with issues surrounding homosexuality such as planning strategies around education and in dealing with problematic attitudes such as homophobia. It is recommended that the students be provided with additional education regarding various sexual orientations and to increase sensitivity toward homosexuality.

An unbiased personal social contact with homosexuals may somehow reduce negative treatment on grounds thus, a positive contact environment between heterosexuals and homosexuals is the must in educational settings and workplaces. Implications for future research include qualitative interviews and focusing on emphasizing social contacts with homosexuals in the development of more positive attitude toward homosexuals. Strategies could look at providing more opportunities.

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