

Religious Orthodoxy and Attitude towards the Same Gender Relationships among University Students in Nairobi County, Kenya

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Abstract: Globally, studies have shown negative attitude towards the same gender relationships among the university students. However, there is lack of similar studies among University students in Kenya and therefore, the objective this study was to establish the relationship between religious orthodoxy and attitude towards the same gender relationships among University students in Nairobi County, Kenya. The study employed a correlational research design. Through simple random sampling the study utilized a sample size of 294 participants. The data was collected using the Religious Orthodoxy Scale and Attitude towards Homosexuality Scale. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and regression analysis. The study found out that religious Orthodoxy had insignificant predictive relationship with the general attitude towards homosexuality ($\beta=-.246, p\leq.05$).

I. INTRODUCTION

Globally, religious organizations continue to consider “homosexuality” as morally wrong and unacceptable in the society (Cadge, Olson, & Wildeman, 2008; Cohen, Aviv, & Kelman, 2009). Since gay men and lesbian relationships in perspective of Christianity are perceived sinful and unacceptable, they would not be allowed to participate in the Church activities (Whitehead, 2010). Homosexuality is extremely opposed among the religious fundamentalists because they strongly believe that they teach truth and that all other beliefs and interpretations are considered false. They strongly believe that their “truth” is given from the higher being and therefore, it cannot be questioned (Whitehead, 2010).

Earlier studies have reported religiosity to play a critical role in attitude towards gay men and lesbians though the intensity of it depends on the doctrine of a particular denomination (Finlay & Walther, 2003; Schulte & Battle, 2004; Whitley, 2009). According to Subhi et al. (2011), majority of Christian religious denominations such as Evangelical Christian faiths have doctrine and teachings that consider homosexuality to be morally wrong. Tension in social work profession has been experienced as result of conflict between the religious belief and social work values. Some Christian faiths would only tolerate LGBT person if they abstain from sexual behaviour (Hodge, 2005).

A study conducted by Jill et al. (2013) reported that people who score high in religiosity and spirituality had more

negative attitude towards the gay men and lesbians. The study found low negative attitude towards the LGBT persons where denominations taught accepting messages of the group. In addition, the study found that those who have LGBT friends are likely to have a positive attitude towards them. The intensity of attitude towards LGBT person is much influenced by their levels of religiosity. That means the students with high levels of religiosity are likely to have strong negative towards sexual minorities compared to their counterparts.

Some researchers have attributed inclusive attitude towards lesbians and gay men to secularization and declining of religious participation among the Christians (Twenge et al., 2015). According to Barnes and Mayer (2012) majority of religions in United States are unsupportive of homosexual behaviours. Many religious individuals are against the same sex behaviour and marriage (Sherkat et al., 2011; Twenge et al., 2015). Also, research has documented widely on denominational teaching and scriptural messages against the subject of homosexuality (Jaspal & Siraj, 2011; Wilkerson et al., 2012). Studies have found Muslims to have more negative attitude towards homosexuality compared to Catholics and Jews. However, the negative attitude towards homosexuality among the Muslims is not much different compared to Protestants, Hindus, Buddhists and orthodox Christians (Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009). A study by Pew Research (2015) reported that many religious institutions in United States including the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Jewish movement, Southern Baptist and other evangelical Protestants Churches have negative stand against the same sex marriages. However, some Churches such as Reform and Conservative Jewish movement and United Church of Christ have allowed the same sex marriage.

In Africa, homosexuality is one of the current behaviours that is considered “morally wrong” and against the African “taboos” (Sollar & Somda, 2011). A study conducted in Africa showed that many African countries strongly despise the practice of homosexuality (Sollar & Somda, 2011). African leaders such as Late Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe had compared those who practice homosexuality with prostitutes, pigs and dogs (Shoko, 2010). If taboos are broken the African people believe that there are consequences to follow. For example, the Ibibio people believe that if taboos were not

adhered to, the earth would not be able to bear crops and children. Similarly, if a woman engages in adultery, the ancestors would be offended and that could result in the death of the husband if he condoned her unfaithfulness or death of the woman during the child birth and therefore, the practice of homosexuality in African contexts is considered an evil (Shoko, 2010).

Africa as a continent seems to have a common stand against the practice of homosexuality. It seems to oppose the practice of homosexuality, claiming that it is against the plan of God, is completely evil and it does not emanate from Africa. In addition, Africans claim it is controlled by evil spirits (Obasola, 2013). This attitude is fully supported by Ernest who argued that “homosexuality is a curse and that God should punish those who engage in the act, just as God reacted to people of Sodom and Gomorrah” (BBC Live, 2012). Equally, James Hallowanger supports Ernest by asserting that “Africa has no right to respect gays according to African tradition and even condemned it in the Bible. In fact, the act of gays is immoral and should be condemned by all civilized nations of the world” (BBC Live, 2012). The majority of African people believe that by allowing the practice of homosexuality it would be throwing away its cultural principles (Kamor, 2009). This is supported by Obasola (2013) who perceived homosexuality as more dangerous to the moral wellbeing of the nation than a standing army and pointed out strongly that this global cancer should not be allowed to infect Nigeria.

One of the greatest contributing factors to a negative attitude toward homosexuality is the perception of African people that it interferes with procreation. Obasola (2013) argued that traditionally, Africans place high regard on procreation and that marriage is first and foremost expected to fulfil the divine mandate to replenish the earth. He went further to claim that homosexuality is a direct negation of this divine imperative; hence, homosexuals’ preference is considered unnatural and it is against sexual ethics. This is in contrast to scholars who argue that homosexuality is a result of genetics. Obasola (2013) claims that homosexuality is an adaptation, not an inborn trait. He further argues that it is a component of the body. In addition, he claimed it threatens the ultimate survival of the human race.

Uniquely, the author accepts that homosexuals deserve respect as human beings created in God’s image, their moral shortcoming notwithstanding. However, he emphasizes that to respect does not translate to condone the pseudo-dichotomy of the homosexual orientation and homosexual desires which are unarguably opposed to the creator’s original will (Obasola, 2013). To emphasize the importance of procreation to the African people, Uukoro (2009) strongly opposed the effects of Western culture on the African family values by saying:

The Western world has provided acknowledged leadership in science and technology, but the African marital culture is infinitely superior to theirs, and we must

not let them take its way from us. Rather they should be made to recognize and adopt our cherished family values and the beauty of our extended family symptoms which guarantees corporate and individual well-being. The giddy technological height attained by the so called developed world has resulted in the disintegration of their traditional society and the breakdown of the family life, as well as the collapse of the social and religious institutions which serve as ballast to the communal living (p.18).

Though studies have shown that religiosity influence the attitude towards homosexuality, there is scant of similar studies with University students in Kenya and therefore, the current study sought to fill this gap by establishing the relationship between religious orthodoxy and attitude towards the same gender relationships among the University students in Nairobi County, Kenya.

II. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed correlational research design. The design was suitable for this study because it sought to establish the relationship religious orthodoxy and attitude towards the same gender relationship among university students in Nairobi County, Kenya.

Population of the Study

The study target population was 1600 university students who were studying within Universities in Nairobi County, Kenya. The University students were drawn from the school of theology.

Sampling Method and Sample Size

The study employed simple random sampling. Through simple random sampling, a sample size of 310 university students was selected to participate in the study. The sampling was suitable because it gives the participants equal chance to participate in the study.

Instruments of Measure

The study employed a questionnaire in collecting data. The questionnaire had three parts. The first part of the questionnaire collected data on the demographic details of the participants which included: age, gender and level of education. The second part of the instrument collected data on religious orthodoxy using “Religious Orthodoxy Scale”, developed by Hunsberger (1989). It is a survey that includes a number of statements related to specific religious beliefs. The participants are assumed to agree with some of the statements and disagree with others to varying extents. The participants were expected to check their opinion in the boxes of each statement according to degree of their agreement or disagreement. The survey questionnaire contains 6 statements regarding religious specific beliefs. The questionnaire was in the form of 7-Likert type scale, with scores ranging from -3 (“strongly disagree”) to +3 (“strongly agree”). Participants

were to fill box with “0” if they would feel exactly and precisely neutral about an item. The scale was analyzed using the total score. Three items which were reversed required inverse scoring. The higher score meant the participant was conservative in regard to religious beliefs while a low score meant the participant was liberal in regard to religious beliefs. The responses are discarded if the participant fails to answer four or more items. This tool was considered suitable for the study because the religious beliefs have a lot influence on moral issues such as views on homosexuality.

The third part of the questionnaire was to collect data on attitude towards the same gender relationships. The study utilized “Homosexuality Attitude Scale”. The scale was developed by Herek (1997). It is a likert scale that assesses people’s stereotypes, misconceptions, and anxieties about homosexuals. The measure contains a uni-dimensional factor representing a favourable or unfavourable evaluation of homosexuals. The instrument contains 20 statements of which 10 of the items are meant to assess attitude toward lesbians while the other 10 items are meant to assess the attitude toward gay men. The tool was appropriate for the study because previous studies have found differences in the attitudes of male and female heterosexuals toward homosexuality in relation to the gender of the respondents. Similar studies have also shown differences in the attitudes of heterosexuals toward gay men and lesbians in relation to the gender of target (Herek, 1988). The questionnaire is in the form of a 5-point Likert Scale, with scores ranging from 1 (“Strongly Agree”) to 5 (“strongly disagree”). The score was analyzed using the total score. Seven items which are reversed required an inverse scoring. The higher scores meant that the participant had a more negative attitude toward homosexuality. The scale has excellent internal consistency ($\alpha > .92$). The scale has a good test-retest reliability ($r = .71$).

Data Analysis

Data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics and regression analysis with Software Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21. The results from descriptive statistics were presented with percentages and frequencies. Regression analysis was utilized to determine the relationship between religious orthodoxy and attitude towards the same gender relationships.

III. RESULTS

The study sought to establish the relationship between religious orthodoxy and attitude towards the same gender relationships among the university students in Nairobi County, Kenya. First, the study presented results on the demographic variables of the participants followed by results on the objective of the study.

Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

The demographic variables of age, gender, and educational level of participants were taken into account in this study. Table 1 shows the results of the age, gender and

education level distribution of the participants in the current study.

Table 1. Demographic variables of the participants

Variable		Frequency	Percent
Age	20-30 yrs.	139	47.3
	31-40 yrs.	103	35.0
	41-50 yrs.	40	13.6
	51-60 yrs.	7	2.4
	Above 61 yrs.	5	1.7
Gender	Male	170	57.8
	Female	124	42.2
Education level	Certificate	31	10.5
	Diploma	67	22.8
	Bachelors’ degree	164	55.8
	Masters’ degree	27	9.2
	PhD	5	1.7

Note²: N=294.

Out of 310 respondents, 294 filled the questionnaires. The majority (47.3%) of the participants who filled the questionnaires were between 20-30 years, 35.0% between 31-40 years, 13.1% between 41-50 years whereas 4.1% were 50 years as shown in Table 1. The sample consisted of more than 57.8% males and 42.2% females showing a high level gender disparity of university students. Table 1 also indicates that the majority of the participants, 55.8% of the respondents had Bachelor’s degrees, 33.3% had Diploma and Certificates education levels whereas 10.9% had Post-graduate degrees.

Religious Orthodoxy and Attitude towards the same Gender Relationships among University Students

To establish the relationship between religious orthodoxy and attitude towards the same gender relationships among University students in Kenya, regression analysis was conducted and the results are presented in table 2.

Table 2. Regression Analysis showing the relationship between religious orthodoxy and attitude towards homosexuality (Gay Men and Lesbians)

Dependent variable	Independent variable	Unstandardized Regression Coefficients	p-value
		B	
Attitude to homosexuality	(Constant)	79.204	
	Religious Orthodoxy	-0.246	0.106
Attitude to Lesbians	(Constant)	36.376	
	Religious Orthodoxy	-0.073	0.403
Attitude to Gay Men	(Constant)	42.828	
	Religious Orthodoxy	-0.173	0.044

Note⁵: N=294; Significance at $p < .05$. B-Unstandardized regression coefficient; p-value is the decision rule measure

The findings of the study revealed that Religious Orthodoxy had a negative and significant predictive relationship with attitude to gay men ($\beta = -.173$, $p < .05$) and insignificant negative relationship with attitude to lesbians ($\beta = -.073$, $p > .05$). This indicates that at 95% confidence level, it can be concluded that the more participants have stronger religious beliefs the more they are likely to develop negative attitude towards gay men. However, stronger religious beliefs are least likely to predict attitude towards lesbians. Hence overall, religious Orthodoxy has insignificant predictive relationship with the general attitude towards homosexuality ($\beta = -.246$, $p > .05$). The hypothesis that there is a positive significant relationship between religious Orthodoxy and attitude towards homosexuality among Catholic religious men and women university students is not supported at 95% confidence.

IV. DISCUSSION

The study was to establish the relationship between religious orthodoxy and attitude towards the same gender relationship among University students in Nairobi County, Kenya. The findings of the study revealed that Religious Orthodoxy had a negative and significant predictive relationship with attitude to gay men ($\beta = -.173$, $p < .05$) and insignificant negative relationship with attitude to lesbians ($\beta = -.073$, $p > .05$). The findings showed that the more participants have stronger religious beliefs the more they are likely to develop negative attitude towards gay men. However, stronger religious beliefs are least likely to predict attitude towards lesbians. Hence overall, religious Orthodoxy has insignificant predictive relationship with the general attitude towards homosexuality ($\beta = -.246$, $p > .05$).

The findings of this study showing that the more participants have strong religious beliefs, the more they are likely to develop negative attitude towards gay men than to lesbians may be attributed to gender. Earlier studies had shown significant difference between gender and attitude towards the same gender relationships. For instance, several researchers (Holland, Matthews, & Schott, 2013; Rutledge, Siebert, & Chonody, 2012; Woodford, Silverschanz, Swank, Scherrer, & Raiz, 2012) reported that male students had a negative attitude towards homosexuality compared to female students. In addition, findings of Weaver, Caswell and Burnaford (2011) had revealed that heterosexual men with feminine characteristics and weak in demonstrating their heterosexuality tended to have a negative attitude against gay compared to heterosexual men who were in a position to assert their sexuality and were accepted by others on regard to their heterosexuality. This shows that gender may be a moderating variable between religious orthodoxy and attitude towards the same gender relationship among University students.

The study anticipated a strong positive relationship between religious orthodoxy and attitude towards the same gender relationship among university students. The students who score on religious orthodoxy expected to have negative

attitude towards the same gender relationship compared to their counterparts. However, there was not significant relationship between the two variables of study among the university students. That means University students may have positive or negative attitude towards the same gender relationships despite of scoring high or low in religious orthodoxy. The findings of this study was in disagreement with findings of Jill et al. (2013) who reported that people who score high in religiosity and spirituality had more negative attitude towards the gay men and lesbians. The study found low negative attitude towards the LGBT persons where denominations taught accepting messages of the group. In addition, the study found that those who have LGBT friends are likely to have a positive attitude towards them. The intensity of attitude towards LGBT person is much influenced by their levels of religiosity. That means the students with high levels of religiosity are likely to have strong negative towards sexual minorities compared to their counterparts.

Moreover, the findings of this study contradicted earlier studies which reported religiosity to play a critical role in attitude towards gay men and lesbians depending on the doctrine of the particular denomination (Finlay & Walther, 2003; Schulte & Battle, 2004; Whitley, 2009). The participants of this study were expected to have negative attitude towards the same gender relationship since they were drawn from African population which considers homosexuality to be “morally” wrong and against the African “taboos” (Sollar & Somda, 2011). The study findings contradicted other studies conducted in Africa which have shown African leaders to have a strong negative attitude towards homosexuality. For instance, a study by Shoko (2010) revealed that African leaders such as Late Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe had compared those who practice homosexuality with prostitutes, pigs and dogs. The same attitude ideology was supported by Ernest who argued that “homosexuality is a curse and that God should punish those are engage in the act, just as God reacted to people of Sodom and Gomorrah” (BBC Live, 2002). Equally, James Hallowanger supports Ernest by asserting that “Africa has no right to respect gays according to African tradition and even condemned it in the Bible. In fact, the act of gays is immoral and should be condemned by all civilized nations of the world” (BBC Live, 2002). The majority of African people believe that by allowing the practice of homosexuality it would be throwing away its cultural principles (Kamor, 2009). This is supported by Obasola (2013) who perceived homosexuality as more dangerous to the moral wellbeing of the nation than a standing army and pointed out strongly that this global cancer should not be allowed to infect Nigeria.

The findings of this study showing insignificant relationship between religious orthodoxy and attitude towards the same gender relationships could be attributed to the education of the participants. Despite the religiosity of the participants, their level of education is likely to moderate the relationship between religious orthodoxy and attitude towards the same gender relationships. Earlier studies have shown that

those students with high levels of education have a positive attitude towards LGBT persons compared to the students with low levels of education (Van de Meerendonk & Scheepers, 2014; Van de Akker et al., 2013) In addition, findings of PEW Research Centre (2011) in United States showed that people who had attained college degree had a positive attitude towards homosexuality compared to people with lower education.

V. CONCLUSION

The study concluded that Religious Orthodoxy had a negative and significant predictive relationship with attitude to gay men and insignificant negative relationship with attitude to lesbian. It concluded that the more participants have stronger religious beliefs the more they are likely to develop negative attitude towards gay men. However, stronger religious beliefs are least likely to predict attitude towards lesbians. Hence overall, religious Orthodoxy had insignificant predictive relationship with the general attitude towards homosexuality. The hypothesis that there is a positive significant relationship between religious Orthodoxy and attitude towards the same gender relationship among university students was not supported at 95% confidence. There is a possibility that gender and educational level of participants influenced the findings of this study. The study recommends future studies on religious orthodoxy and attitude towards the same gender relationship to control the demographic details of the participants and especially gender and educational level.

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