

Kohlberg Six Stages of Moral Reasoning and Attitude towards the Same Gender Relationships among University Students in Nairobi County, Kenya

Wambua Pius Muasa (PhD)

*Institute of Youth Studies, School of Arts and Social Sciences
Tangaza University College, Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Kenya*

Abstract: The objective this study was to investigate the relationship between Kohlberg six stages of moral reasoning and attitude towards the same gender relationships among University students in Nairobi County, Kenya. The study employed a correlational research design using a simple random sampling technique. The study adopted a sample size of 294 number of participants. The data was collected using Moral Judgment Test (MJT) and Attitude towards Homosexuality Scale. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and regression analysis. Result showed out that instrumental attitude towards homosexuality is positively and significantly influenced by instrumental relativism moral reasoning ($\beta=0.514$, $p<.05$). This type of moral reasoning also impacted positive attitudes towards lesbians ($\beta=0.301$, $p<.05$). Engaging law and order reasoning impacts significantly negative attitudes towards homosexuality ($\beta=-0.253$, $p<.05$). The study concluded that there was insignificant relationship between the Kohlberg six stages of moral reasoning and attitude towards the same gender relationships. The study recommends more studies with different populations on the relationship between Kohlberg six stages of moral reasoning and attitude towards the same gender relationships.

people. For instance, Gibbs (2013) argued that men are likely to achieve moral maturity compared to the female counterparts. According to Freisdorf et al. (2015) women are considered not to attain moral maturity because they operate in the morality of care compared to their male counterparts. Studies have shown that when faced with moral dilemmas, women are likely to make decisions that will not harm other despite of the offense committed (Armstrong et al., 2019). Unlike men, most of the women values are based on the welfare of others and that has a lot influence in their moral judgement when faced by moral dilemmas (Longest et al., 2013). Due to the morality of care, women are likely to treat LGBT persons with understanding compared to their male counterparts. Religion is considered to have a role in moral judgement because it can lead people to have conservative moral attitudes. For instance, religion can play a big role in moral reasoning when faced with moral dilemmas related to abortion and homosexuality (Stark, 2001). People scoring high in religiosity are likely to have conservative moral reasoning and therefore, it might determine their attitude towards the LGBT persons.

I. INTRODUCTION

The researchers have been interested in scientific study of morality and this have contributed in understanding the origin of morality and what informs people in making moral judgement (Graham et al. 2016). Also, researchers have made an attempt to understand how morality is influenced by socialization and cultural groups (Graham et al. 2016; Knobe et al. 2012; Tomasello 2016; Tomasello & Vaish 2013). For instance, in Africa, homosexuality is one of the current behaviours that is considered “morally wrong” and against the African culture (Sollar & Somda, 2011). Therefore, the culture has influence on moral judgement to people with homosexual orientation. Studies have shown that institutional setting plays a big role in morality because it is where beliefs, values and attitudes are developed. It is through institutional settings that people are likely to experience injustices or inequalities (Morris, 2016; Tyler, 2013). The LGBT persons are likely to experience discrimination, violence in the institutional setting and especially when they are looking for employment.

Research has found that gender, religion and religiosity to have a great influence on moral attitude of

According to Kohlberg (1984), the concept of moral judgment is a cognitive process that allows an individual to reflect on his or her values and order them in a logical hierarchy. The failure to develop high moral reasoning has been correlated to lack of cognitive structure operating at the formal level (Kohlberg & Gilligan, 1971). Kohlberg formulated this theory from the understanding of Piaget’s concept of morality. Normally the Kohlberg theory of morality has three levels (pre-conventional, conventional and post-conventional) and six stages each level having two stages. According to him each individual person progresses from one stage to another in a sequential manner (Kohlberg, 1981; 1984).

For Kohlberg to formulate the theory of moral judgment, he analyzed the free responses of children, adolescents, and adults on moral dilemmas such as the story of Heinz and asked the respondents questions to elicit their reasoning in arriving at a solution. It is through the answers that were given by the participants of different ages that led him to develop the distinct stages of moral judgment. Kohlberg (1976) described the six stages of moral

development as follows: level 1-preconventional morality which is divided into stage 1-heteronomous morality and stage 2-individualistic morality; level ii-conventional morality which is divided into stage 3-morality of interpersonal conformity and stage 4-morality of social systems and conscience; and level iii- post-conventional morality which is divided into stage 5-morality of social contract, utility and individual rights and stage 6-morality of ethical principles.

Kohlberg (1984) went further to suggest that each level can be divided into sub stages. He divided these sub stages into types As and Bs. According to him the individuals who fall under type As are mostly in stage 1, 3, and 5 and tend toward a moral reasoning orientation that is governed by rules and authorities. On the other hand type Bs fall under stages 2, 4 and 6 and tend toward moral concept of fairness, equality and reciprocity. He argued that both types As and Bs have similar moral principles when justifying their responses to moral dilemmas, however types Bs are more likely to lean toward the moral action. The current study anticipated that those scoring high on stage 1(punishment and obedience), stage 3 (interpersonal concordance), and stage 5 (social contract) were likely to have negative attitude towards the same gender relationships. In stage 1 moral reasoning is dependent on rewards and punishment which is determined by authority as right or wrong. People scoring high in stage one are likely to follow the society authority and since in African context homosexuality is perceived as morally wrong, there are likely to have negative attitude towards the LGBT persons.

Moreover, in stage 3, moral reasoning is determined by peers and social group expectations. A person is expected to adhere to the expectation of the society. Since the African society is against homosexuality, the individuals scoring high in stage 3 are likely to have a negative attitude towards the same gender relationships. In stage 5 society values, rules and expectations must be supported regardless of majority opinion. Since people are expected to conform with the expectations of the society, those who score high in stage 5 are likely to have a negative attitude towards the same gender relationships.

On the other hand, the participants who score high in stage 2 (instrumental relativism), stage 4 (law and order), and stage 6 (universal ethical principle) are likely to have tolerance attitude towards the same gender relationships. In stage 2 moral reasoning is based on one's wants and needs which may also satisfy the needs of others. As long as there is mutual exchange, there is likelihood of treating the LGBT persons with respect and dignity. Stage 6 of moral reasoning is based on ethical principles rather than rules and laws. Individuals operating in this stage are convinced that all humanity should protect the rights of individuals and there is a sense of personal commitment in following the ethical principles. The persons scoring high in universal ethical principle are likely to treat LGBT persons with respect accepting the choices they have made. However, there are few people who reach at the universal ethical stage of moral

reasoning and given the participants of this study are young adults; it was expected that few may have reached at this stage.

When exploring moral reasoning stages 1, 3 and 5 can be looked as levels of development of rules and thinking while stage 2, 4, and 6 can be looked as levels of consciousness about rules and practices (Onuf, 1987). Kohlberg (1971) went further to argue that there is a cognitive conflict that occurs when an individual holds two beliefs that may be contradictory in a specific situation or when one of an individual's beliefs conflicts with external information. He claimed that cognitive conflict leads to the intention of moral principles and beliefs that reflect a solution about the problem (Green, 1986). Higgins (1995) argued that role taking ability is required to assess multiple points of view when making moral judgment. He claimed that those individuals who have role-taking ability have a higher potential for moral development. Most of the studies on Kohlberg stages on moral reasoning have focused on the factors that influence moral reasoning including socialization, culture, religion and level of education. However, there is lack of studies on relationship between Kohlberg stages of moral reasoning and attitude towards the same gender relationships among university students in Kenya and therefore, the current study seeks to fill this gap.

II. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

According to Orodho (2003) a research design is defined as the scheme, outline or plan that is used to generate answers to research problems. The study employed a correlational research design. The design is suitable for this study because it sought to investigate the relationship between Kohlberg six stages of moral reasoning and attitude towards the same gender relationship among University students in Nairobi County, Kenya.

Population and Sampling

The term population means the total number or aggregate of individuals, objects, or any other subject of concern which by virtue of common characteristics is of interest to the researcher and may lead to obtaining relevant information regarding the phenomenon under study (McLeod, 2019). 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.

Orodho and Kombo (2002) define sampling as the process of selecting a number of individuals or objects from a population such that the selected group contains elements representative of the characteristics found in the entire group. The study employed simple random sampling. The sampling was suitable because it gives the participants equal chance to participate in the study. Through simple random sampling, a sample size of 310 university students was selected to participate in the study.

Instrumentation

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 collected data on six stages of moral reasoning and the third part collected data on attitude towards the same gender relationships. Moral reasoning was measured using "Moral Judgment Test" (MJT), a tool developed to assess simultaneously moral attitudes and moral judgment competence for use in evaluations and cross-cultural studies (Lind, 2006). In addition, the MJT is well suited to domestic as well as cross-cultural research into moral development and education. The hypothetical employed in this study takes the form of vignettes, concerning employment discrimination against a gay man. The instrument has two parts each containing six statements. The six statements in each part represent Kohlberg six stages of moral reasoning in their order (Stage 1: Punishment and obedience; Stage 2: Instrumental hedonism and concrete reciprocity; Stage 3: Interpersonal relation of mutuality; Stage 4: Maintenance of social order, respect for law and authority; Stage 5: Social contract; and Stage 6: Universal ethical principles). In the first part, participants after reading this vignette, were asked to indicate in a 7-point likert-type scale the extent to which they agree with manager's (Mr. Webster's) actions. The scores ranged from 7 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). In the second part, participants were to indicate how acceptable they found the arguments in favour of the manager's actions in 9-likert scale. The scores ranged from 9 ("I strongly accept") to 1 ("I strongly reject"). The higher score in a particular statement would mean a participant is operating under that stage of moral reasoning.

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 means, standard deviation and frequencies. Regression analysis was utilized to determine the relationship between Kohlberg six stages of moral reasoning and attitude towards the same gender relationships among University students.

III. RESULTS

The study sought to establish the relationship between Kohlberg six stages of moral reasoning and attitude towards the same gender relationships among the University students in Nairobi County, Kenya. First, the study presented results on descriptive age of the participants, followed by the demographic variables of the participants and results on the objective of the study.

Descriptive Statistics of Age

To obtain the mean age of the participants, they were asked to indicate the range of their age. The age range was 20-30 years; 31-40 years; 41-50 years; 51-60 years; and 61 years and above. Using descriptive statistics, the results are presented in table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics on Age of Participants

		M	SD
Age	20-30 yrs.	73.8	10.1
	31-40 yrs.	71.0	12.9
	41-50 yrs.	74.7	11.5
	51-60 yrs.	70.3	11.1
	Above 61 yrs.	70.8	15.8

Note⁵: N=294; M-Mean, SD-Standard Deviation.

The table 1 shows that participants between the age of 41-50 years had the highest mean (mean=74.7, SD=11.5) followed by the participants with age of 20-30 years (mean=73.8, SD=10.1). The participants with age of 51-60 years had the least mean (mean=70.3, SD=11.1).

Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

The demographic variables of age, gender, and educational level of participants were taken into account in this study. Table 2 shows the results of the age, gender and education level distribution of the participants in the current study.

Table 2. 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 2. The sample consisted of more than 57.8% males and 42.2% females showing a high level gender disparity of university students. Table 2 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.

Kohlberg Six Stages of Moral Reasoning and the Attitude the Same Gender Relationships among University Students

To establish the relationship between the Kohlberg six stages of moral reasoning and attitude towards the same gender relationships among University students in Kenya, a regression analysis was conducted and the results are presented in table 3.

Table 3. Regression Analysis Testing for the Relationship between Kohlberg Six Stages of Moral Reasoning and the Attitude towards the Same Gender Relationships

Independent variables	Attitudes towards homosexuality		Attitudes towards lesbians		Attitudes towards gay men	
	B	p-value	B	p-value	B	p-value
(Constant)	75.264		34.645		40.62	
Punishment and Obedience	-0.124	0.531	0.009	0.939	-0.133	0.238
Instrumental Relativism	0.514	0.011*	0.301	0.010*	0.213	0.064
Interpersonal Concordance	-0.274	0.205	-0.149	0.228	-0.125	0.309
Law and Order	-0.297	0.161	-0.253	0.037*	-0.043	0.717
Social Contract	0.113	0.611	0.142	0.267	-0.029	0.82
Universal Ethnic Principle	-0.318	0.131	-0.13	0.28	-0.187	0.117
R ²	0.047		0.051		0.034	
Adjusted R ²	0.027		0.031		0.014	
VIF	1.19		1.19		1.19	
D-W statistic	1.587		1.718		1.72	

Note⁷: N=294; Significance at p<.05; B- Unstandardized regression coefficient.

Results in table 3 showed that instrumental attitude towards homosexuality was positively and significantly influenced by instrumental relativism moral reasoning ($\beta=0.514$, $p<.05$). This type of moral reasoning also impacted positive attitudes towards lesbians ($\beta=0.301$, $p<.05$). Engaging law and order reasoning impacts significantly negative attitudes towards homosexuality ($\beta=-0.253$, $p<.05$). Furthermore, the results in table 3 indicates that all the 5 stages (punishment & obedience, interpersonal concordance, law & order, social contract and universal ethnic principle) had insignificantly negative attitudes towards gay men, $p>0.05$. The six stages of reasoning only accounted for about 3% of the variations in the attitude towards homosexuality, Adjusted R²=0.027. The hypothesis that there was positive

significant correlation between Kohlberg six stages of moral reasoning and attitude towards the same gender relationships among university students was partially supported at 95% confidence.

IV. DISCUSSION

The study was to establish the relationship between Kohlberg six stages of moral reasoning and attitude towards the same gender relationships among university students in Nairobi County Kenya. The result showed that instrumental attitude towards homosexuality was positively and significantly influenced by instrumental relativism moral reasoning ($\beta=0.514$, $p<.05$). This type of moral reasoning also impacted positive attitudes towards lesbians ($\beta=0.301$,

$p < .05$). These findings are in agreement with Kohlberg (1984) who argued that people who follow under stages 2, 4 and 6 and tend toward moral concept of fairness, equality and reciprocity and therefore, are likely to have a positive attitude towards homosexuality. Engaging law and order reasoning impacts significantly negative attitudes towards homosexuality ($\beta = -0.253$, $p < .05$). These findings failed to support prior studies of Kohlberg (1984) which argued that those individuals who follow under stage 4 (Law and Order) are likely to have a positive attitude towards homosexuality because they tend to have a moral concept of fairness, equality and reciprocity.

Furthermore, the results in all the 5 stages (punishment & obedience, interpersonal concordance, law & order, social contract and universal ethical principle) had insignificantly negative attitudes towards gay men, $p > 0.05$. The findings were contrary to what was expected. The study anticipated that those scoring high on stage 1 (punishment and obedience), stage 3 (interpersonal concordance), and stage 5 (social contract) were likely to have negative attitude towards the same gender relationships. This is because in stage 1, moral reasoning is dependent on rewards and punishment which is determined by authority as right or wrong. Since homosexuality is perceived as morally wrong in the African society, the study expected those who score high in stage 1 of moral reasoning would have a negative attitude towards the same gender relationship. However, the relationship was insignificant.

Moreover, the study anticipated those scoring high in stage 3 of moral reasoning to have a strong negative attitude towards the same gender relationships. This is because those who operate in stage 3 are motivated in adhering to the expectations of the society. Since the African society is against homosexuality, the individuals scoring high in stage 3 were expected to have a negative attitude towards the same gender relationships. However, the negative attitude towards homosexuality was insignificant. Likewise, the findings were contrary to the expected results that those scoring high in stage 5 were to have a negative attitude towards the same gender relationships because the society values, rules and expectations of the society are to be supported regardless of the majority opinion.

Surprisingly, the findings showed that those who were operating in universal ethical principle had insignificant negative attitude towards the same gender relationships which was contrary to what was expected of the results. Those operating in universal ethical principle were expected to have a positive attitude towards the same gender relationships because those who operate at this stage are committed to justice even when it contradicts the rules and laws. The findings might have been influenced by the demographic details of the participants and especially the religion and educational level of the participants. Earlier studies have reported the religion, culture and level of education to have a big role moral reasoning of individuals.

V. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that there was insignificant relationship between the Kohlberg six stages of moral reasoning and attitude towards the same gender relationships. The results could have been influenced by the demographic variables of culture, religion and educational level. The study recommends the future studies to control the demographic variables of religion, culture and level of education when examining the relationship between Kohlberg six stages of moral reasoning and attitude towards the same gender relationships. Since there is lack of studies on relationship between Kohlberg stages of moral reasoning and attitude towards the same gender relationships, the study recommends similar studies with different populations in order to generate more knowledge on the subject of study.

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