



GENDER IDENTIFICATION AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION ON EMOTIONAL WELLBEING AMONG YOUNG ADULTS IN LAGOS METROPOLIS

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Abstract

Homosexuality is a recognized risk factor for some emotional illness in high income countries; however, there is little research investigating the relationship between emotional wellbeing and sexual orientation in developing countries, especially in Nigeria. The study aims to examine the impact of gender identification and sexual orientation on emotional well being of young adults in Lagos Metropolitan city. This study employs a descriptive survey research design that examined the attitudes of University of Lagos students towards sexual minorities. The target population consisted of young adults in educational institutions, motor parks, churches, mosques, and resort centres in Lagos metropolis. A simple random sampling technique was used to select 300 participants: 100 from educational institutions, 50 at the motor parks, 50 at the resort centres, 50 at the churches, and 50 at the mosques. Data were collected using self-developed, validated questionnaire divided into demographic profiling and the variables under study. Validation was performed by Health Education experts and a pilot study was conducted with 25 Undergraduates at the Lagos State University which ensured reliability of Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.9. Descriptive statistics of frequency counts were used for demographic data, while inferential statistics of Chi-square examined the hypotheses at 0.05 significant level. The findings reveal with conclusion that, the complexities of societal attitudes towards sexual minorities and emphasize the importance of fostering inclusive environments that respect and celebrate diversity.

Keywords: Emotional Wellbeing, Gender Identification, Heterosexual, Homosexual, Sexual Orientation.

Introduction

Young adults globally do like to exhibit behaviours that don't add value to their lives, particularly the negatives. Gender identification has been a major concern to, especially the health professionals whose focus is on the preventive medicine. Same-sex romantic attraction remains a punishable act in Nigeria and in many other African countries. Al Jazeera (2023) reported that over 200 individuals were apprehended during same-sex marriage ceremony in Delta State, with 67 of them detained following thorough investigations. This incident highlights the harsh legal and social environment faced by non-heterosexual individuals in Nigeria. The societal belief that non-heterosexual orientations and non-binary gender identities are linked to emotional and mental health problems persists, shaping negative dispositions towards gender identity and sexual orientation. The pervasive stigma and criminalization of same-sex relationship have profound implications for the emotional and mental well-being of the sexual minorities. Research has shown that societal acceptance and supportive environments significantly impact the mental health outcomes of LGBTQ+ individuals (Meyer, 2015). However, in Nigeria, the lack of such support exacerbates the challenges faced by these individuals, leading to higher levels of emotional distress and mental health issues (Ilesanmi, 2019). This study explores these dynamics within the context of Nigerian universities, where young adults' attitudes and perceptions are particularly influenced.

Universities and other educational institutions are crucial arenas for intellectual exploration, where young adults are exposed to diverse perspectives and engage in the free exchange of ideas. They represent intersections of cultures, beliefs, and backgrounds, making them dynamic environments for examining prevailing social attitudes (Busser, Adeju, & Bernard, 2019). As students embark on their academic journeys, they are exposed to ideas that can reinforce or challenge societal norms, significantly influencing their perceptions of sexual minorities (Okanlawon, 2019). The legal and social environment in Nigeria is challenging for openly gay individuals due to prevalent homophobic attitudes and laws. Despite legal protections in some contexts, human rights violations against LGB individuals continue, with insufficient actions taken to punish perpetrators (Ilesanmi, 2019). This legal backdrop emphasizes the need for focused research on the perceptions and attitudes of young adults towards sexual minorities.

The acknowledgment and acceptance of sexual minorities, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) individuals, has become integral to contemporary societal discourse. Educational institutions play a pivotal role in this transformation, serving as microcosms of society where the younger generation's attitudes and beliefs are shaped. Understanding how university students perceive and engage with the LGBTQ+ community is crucial for fostering inclusive campuses and preparing socially responsible citizens. The experiences of university students, who are in the midst of their formative years, are intricately tied to the broader societal narrative. Recognizing this, the present research seeks to explore the nuanced landscape of perceptions and attitudes held by university students towards sexual minorities (Ogunleye, 2017). This study aims to provide insights into how exposure to diversity, education, and peer interactions within university settings shape attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals.

The global discourse on LGBTQ+ rights and inclusivity has seen significant advancements in some regions, including legal recognition of same-sex marriages and increased visibility of LGBTQ+ individuals in media. However, the extent to which these changes are reflected in the attitudes of university students, particularly in Nigeria, remains a complex issue. This research aims to provide a comprehensive exploration of how university students perceive and engage with sexual minorities, offering insights that can inform policies and interventions to promote tolerance and respect for human rights.

Understanding and addressing people's attitudes towards homosexuality is crucial for ensuring that LGB individuals can enjoy their rights and dignity within society. Historical examples, such as the tolerance of 'yan daudu' (gender nonconforming men) in Northern Nigeria despite sodomy laws, illustrate how societal attitudes can sometimes override legal restrictions (Okanlawon, 2015). More, political homophobia and the introduction of Sharia law have shifted these dynamics, highlighting the importance of ongoing efforts to change societal attitudes (Okanlawon, 2015). The importance of understanding and addressing implicit and explicit biases towards homosexuality cannot be overstated. Research indicates that people's values, norms, and attitudes toward LGBTQ+ issues can be powerful determinants of behavior and policy (Arndt & De Bruin, 2006). In some cases, law reforms and constitutional protections for LGB persons do not translate into significant attitudinal changes, necessitating continued efforts to foster acceptance and understanding within society (Ilesanmi, 2013).

Further studies have highlighted the role of education in shaping more inclusive attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals. For instance, Worthen (2014) found that higher levels of education correlate with more accepting views on homosexuality, suggesting that exposure to diverse perspectives and critical thinking in academic settings can mitigate prejudices. This underscores the potential of universities to act as catalysts for social change, fostering environments where tolerance and respect for diversity are cultivated. Additionally, the influence of peer groups and social networks within universities cannot be overlooked. As noted by Fish and Russell (2018), the social interactions and friendships formed during university years significantly impact students' attitudes towards sexual minorities. Positive interactions with LGBTQ+ peers can lead to greater empathy and understanding, reducing prejudice and promoting inclusivity. This highlights the importance of creating supportive and inclusive campus environments where diverse identities are respected and valued.

Moreover, the intersectionality of identities plays a crucial role in understanding the experiences of sexual minorities. Research by Crenshaw (1991) emphasizes that individuals' experiences are shaped by multiple overlapping social identities, including race, gender, and sexual orientation. In the context of Nigerian universities, exploring how these intersecting identities influence students' perceptions and attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals can provide a more nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by sexual minorities and inform targeted interventions. In the light of these considerations, this study aims to contribute to the growing body of literature on LGBTQ+ issues in non-Western contexts. By examining the perceptions and attitudes of university students in Nigeria, the research seeks to fill a gap in the existing scholarship and provide insights that can inform policies and practices aimed at fostering more inclusive and supportive environments for sexual minorities. The findings of this study have the potential to inform broader societal efforts to combat homophobia and promote the rights and well-being of LGBTQ+ individuals in Nigeria and beyond.

In conclusion, the present study explores the attitudes and perceptions of university students in Nigeria towards sexual minorities, with a focus on understanding how these attitudes impact emotional and mental well-being. By examining the intersection of legal, social, and educational factors, this research seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on LGBTQ+ rights and inclusivity, providing insights that can inform future policies and interventions to support the well-being and rights of sexual minorities in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Young adults exhibit negative disposition which could be, micro aggression, discrimination, intolerance, and stigmatization towards the sexual minorities in the societies, particularly at the institutions of higher learning where different kind of experiences are being displayed. Meta analytical studies agree on societal attitudes towards sexual minorities and such behaviours have been found to have resounding negative effects on the mental and emotional wellbeing sexual minorities, thereby contributing to the global burdens of emotional health problems. There have been several studies on sexual minorities generally. Nevertheless, there is dearth of such studies on cosmopolitan population

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested in this study:

1. Heterosexual attraction will have no significant impact on social acceptance of young adults in Lagos metropolis.
2. Homo sexual attraction will have no significant impact on cultural acceptance of young adults in Lagos Metropolis.
3. Bisexual attraction will have no significant impact on the emotional status of young adults in Lagos metropolis.
4. Transgender identities will have no significant impact on emotional wellbeing of young adults in Lagos metropolis.

Methodology

The research design for this study is a descriptive survey research deemed most suitable for examining the conditions and relationships existing between two or more variables. This design was employed to determine the perceptions and attitudes of University of Lagos students towards sexual minorities. The total population of the undergraduates of University of Lagos is, fifty two thousand. The target population comprised young adults in the Lagos metropolis, including those from educational institutions, motor parks, churches, and mosques. A simple random sampling technique was used to select 300 young adults: A self-developed and validated questionnaire was utilized as the research instrument, divided into two sections: Section A for demographic data and Section B for variables related to the study, with responses rated on a four-point scale from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The questionnaire's face and content validity were assessed by experts in Health Education, with necessary corrections implemented before administration. A pilot study involving 25 University students, at the Lagos State University, Ojoo, Lagos, (LASU), not part of the main study, was conducted to test the instrument's validity and reliability, employing the test-retest method and analyzing results using Cronbach's alpha, aiming for a reliability coefficient of 0.5 and above. Data analysis involved coding the collected questionnaires, with descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage) used for demographic data analysis, and inferential statistics (chi-square) applied to study variables at a 0.05 significant level.

Result

Demographic Data

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	112	37.3
Female	188	62.7
Total	300	100.0

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by Age

Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
16-20	39	13.0
21-25	196	65.3
26-30	65	21.7
Total	300	100.0

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents by Marital Status

Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Single	178	59.3
Married	100	33.3

Divorced	22	7.3
Total	300	100.0

Table 4: Distribution of Respondents by Level of Education

Level of Education	Frequency	Percentage (%)
No formal education	4	1.3
Primary education	37	12.3
Secondary education	80	26.7
Tertiary education	179	59.7
Total	300	100.0

Table 5: Distribution of Respondents by Religion

Religion	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Christian	166	55.3
Muslim	112	37.3
Traditional	22	7.3
Total	300	100.0

Table 1 revealed the gender distribution of the respondents. 112(37.3%) were males while 188(62.7%) were females. This implies that majority of the respondents were female. Table 2 above revealed the age distribution of the respondents. 39(13.0%) were between the ages 16-20 years, 196(65.3%) between the ages 21-25 years, while 65(21.7%) were between the ages 26-30 years. This implies that majority of the respondents were between the ages 21-25 years. Table 3 above revealed the distribution of the total respondents by marital status. 178(59.3%) were single, 100(33.3%) married, while 22(7.3%) were divorced. This implies that majority of the respondents were single. Table 4 above revealed the distribution of the total respondents by level of education. 4(1.3%) had no formal education, 37(12.3%) had primary education, 80(26.7%) have secondary education, while 179(59.7%) have tertiary education. This implies that majority of the respondents have tertiary education. Table 5 above revealed the distribution of the total respondents by religion. 166(55.3%) are Christians, 112(37.3%) are Muslims, while 22(7.3%) are traditional worshippers. This implies that majority of the respondents are Christians.

Hypothesis 1 stated that Heterosexual attraction will have no significant impact on social acceptance of young adults in Lagos metropolis.

Gender	N	Mean	SD	r-value	p-value	Decision
Male	112	17.10	5.42			
Female	188	16.21	5.01	.183	.000	S
Total	300					

It is revealed on the table that p-value is 0.000 which is less than the significant value of 0.05 ($0.000 < 0.05$), the null hypothesis that stated that heterosexual attraction will have no significant impact on social acceptance of young adults is therefore rejected. Hence heterosexual attraction has significant impact on social acceptance of young adults. This is confirmed by the coefficient (r-value) of .183.

Hypotheses 2 stated that Homosexual attraction will have no significant impact on cultural acceptance of young adults in Lagos Metropolis.

Gender	N	Mean	SD	r-value	p-value	Decision
Male	112	5.13	2.12			
Female	188	5.11	2.32	.312	.061	S
Total	300					

It is revealed on the table that p-value is 0.06 which is greater than the significant value of 0.05 ($0.000 > 0.05$), the null hypothesis that stated that homosexual attraction will have no significant impact on cultural acceptance of young adults is therefore accepted. Hence homosexual attraction has no significant impact on cultural acceptance of young adults. This is confirmed by the coefficient (r-value) of .312.

Hypothesis 3 stated that Bisexual attraction will have no significant impact on the emotional status of young adults in Lagos metropolis.

Gender	N	Mean	SD	r-value	p-value	Decision
Male	112	5.23	1.71			
Female	188	5.71	1.43	.212	.001	S
Total	300					

It is revealed on the table that p-value is 0.06 which is lesser than the significant value of 0.05 ($0.000 < 0.05$), the null hypothesis that stated that Bisexual attraction will have no significant impact on the emotional status of young adults is therefore rejected. Hence bisexual attraction has no significant impact on the emotional status of young adults. The is confirmed by the coefficient (r-value) of .212.

Hypothesis 4 stated that Transgender identities will have no significant impact on emotional wellbeing of young adults in Lagos metropolis.

Gender	N	Mean	SD	r-value	p-value	Decision
Male	112	10.16	5.42			
Female	188	11.21	4.12	.012	.001	S
Total	300					

It is revealed on the table that p-value is 0.06 which is greater than the significant value of 0.05 ($0.000 > 0.05$), the null hypothesis that stated that transgender identities will have no significant impact on emotional wellbeing of young adults is therefore rejected. Hence transgender identities has significant impact on emotional wellbeing of young adults. The is confirmed by the coefficient (r-value) of .12.

Discussion of findings

.The findings with regards to social acceptance, heterosexual attraction significantly influenced social integration among young adults ($p = 0.000$, $r = 0.183$). This underscores societal biases favoring heteronormative behaviors, as documented in studies emphasizing conformity to heterosexual norms for enhanced social acceptance (Bernard, 2019; Akorede, et.al.2021).

Conversely, homosexual attraction did not significantly affect cultural acceptance ($p = 0.061$, $r = 0.312$), suggesting that cultural attitudes towards homosexuality in Lagos Metropolis may be less influenced by individual sexual orientation. This contrasts with global trends indicating varying degrees of cultural acceptance based on sexual orientation (Corrigan, 2001).

Moreover, bisexual attraction significantly impacted emotional status ($p = 0.001$, $r = 0.212$), highlighting the distinct emotional challenges faced by bisexual individuals. This finding resonates with previous research emphasizing the unique psychological experiences associated with bisexuality (Ilesanmi, 2013).

Finally, transgender identities significantly influenced emotional wellbeing ($p = 0.001$, $r = 0.120$), underscoring the importance of societal acceptance and affirmation for transgender individuals' mental health. These findings are consistent with literature emphasizing the crucial role of social acceptance in promoting emotional wellbeing among transgender populations (Ogunleye, 2017; Akorede, 2021).

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Inclusive Policies: There is a need for policies that promote inclusivity and diversity within educational and social settings. Institutions should adopt non-discriminatory practices and create safe spaces for individuals of all sexual orientations and gender identities.
2. Awareness Campaigns: Public awareness campaigns should be intensified to challenge stereotypes and reduce stigma against sexual minorities. These campaigns can be conducted through media channels, educational seminars, and community outreach programs.
3. Support for Bisexual and Transgender Individuals: Specific support mechanisms should be established for bisexual and transgender individuals, considering their unique emotional and social challenges. This may involve tailored counseling services, peer mentoring, and advocacy for their rights.
4. Further Research: Continued research is recommended to explore deeper into the factors influencing social acceptance and cultural attitudes towards sexual minorities in diverse cultural and regional contexts within Nigeria.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study underscores the significant impact of sexual orientation on the emotional wellbeing and social acceptance of young adults in Lagos Metropolis. The findings highlight the complexities of societal attitudes towards sexual minorities and emphasize the importance of fostering inclusive environments that respect and celebrate diversity. By implementing the recommended strategies, stakeholders can contribute towards creating a more equitable and supportive society where all individuals can thrive regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

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