

ISRG Journal of Education, Humanities and Literature (ISRGJEHL)



ISRG PUBLISHERS

Abbreviated Key Title: ISRG J Edu Humanit Lit

ISSN: 2584-2544 (Online)

Journal homepage: <https://isrgpublishers.com/isrgjehl/>

Volume – II Issue -II (March – April) 2024

Frequency: Bimonthly



Attitudes Towards Homosexuality of Early Adulthood in Sri Lanka (Special reference on Colombo District)

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| Received: 07.04.2024 | Accepted: 10.04.2024 | Published: 30.04.2024

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Abstract

Homosexuality refers to the romantic or sexual attraction, emotional, and/or physical, between members of the same sex. Individuals who experience this attraction are known as homosexual, and they may identify as gay or lesbian depending on their gender. Sexual orientation is a complex interplay of biological, genetic, hormonal, and environmental factors. This research attempts to figure out the attitudes toward homosexuality in early adulthood in Sri Lanka considering the western province. A sample of 180 participants was randomly chosen through social media, but the analysis focused on 173 individuals who were originally identified as males at birth, as indicated by their birth certificates. Descriptive statistics were conducted to observe the distribution of the sample. Most of the respondents live with their parents (51.4%) and most of them are unmarried (64.2%). The majority of the study group are heterosexual (89%). Chi-square statistics were carried out to identify the association between the main variables and the status of attitudes toward homosexuality. Further, it highlighted the substantial influence of living area, occupation, ethnicity, and education level on attitudes toward homosexuality. Finally, the One-way ANOVA was carried out and the hypotheses were rejected based on the p-values below the significant level emphasizing the impact of living area, ethnicity, occupational levels, and education on early adult men's attitudes toward homosexuality, as indicated by the One-way ANOVA analysis. Respect for diversity, equality, and understanding can be cultivated through concerted efforts at various levels of society, from educational institutions to legislative bodies and community organizations.

Keywords: Attitudes, Homosexuality, Adulthood, One-way ANOVA

Introduction

Homosexuality is a widely discussed topic in psychology today. More people are openly identifying as homosexual compared to the past, breaking societal barriers. The way people think and perceive things has improved attitudes toward homosexuality, because of globalization, better education, societal progress, and evolving mindsets (Erich et al., 2009). These factors contribute to a more

positive view of homosexuality. However, negative attitudes still prevail in many countries.

Early adulthood, roughly between ages 18 and 29, is a critical phase characterized by significant psychological and developmental milestones. According to Arnett's theory of

emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000), this stage represents a distinct period of exploration and identity formation. It is a time when individuals delve into various life domains, such as education, career choices, and relationships, while gradually establishing autonomy and independence. Erikson's psychosocial theory emphasizes the central task of this period as the attainment of identity (Erikson, 1968). Santrock's life-span development theory further elucidates the complexities and transitions involved during early adulthood, emphasizing cognitive, emotional, and social growth (Horn, 2006). This stage marks a pivotal time for shaping one's future, making important life decisions, and adapting to adult responsibilities, laying the foundation for subsequent life stages.

Homosexuality refers to romantic or sexual attraction and behavior between individuals of the same gender (Erich et al., 2009). When seen as a sexual orientation, it denotes a consistent pattern of emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction toward people of the same sex, shaping an individual's identity based on these attractions and associated behaviors within their community. Besides heterosexuality, other major sexual orientations include homosexuality, bisexuality, pansexuality, and asexuality. Among these, homosexuality and bisexuality are the most prevalent in society alongside heterosexuality. While the exact factors determining sexual orientation remain unclear to scientists, they believe it arises from a complex interplay of genetic, hormonal, and environmental influences. Researchers generally view sexual orientation as not being a conscious choice, and they tend to lean towards biological theories or social factors to explain the origins of homosexuality.

The primary goal of this study is to explore the perspectives and opinions held by early adult men in Sri Lanka regarding homosexuality. Specifically, it aims to understand the attitudes of these men residing in the Colombo District, which operates within a patriarchal societal framework.

In 2011, the United Nations Human Rights Council recognized Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) rights for the first time. As a result, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights issued a report highlighting violations against LGBT people, including hate crimes, criminalization of same-sex relationships, and discrimination. Following this report, the United Nations urged countries that hadn't already done so to establish laws protecting basic rights for LGBT individuals.

Some studies suggest that many boys who had same-gender relationships during school may switch to opposite-gender relationships later on. However, some continue their same-gender relationships throughout life and identify as gay. This study aims to explore attitudes toward homosexuality in young men and whether they lean toward being homosexual.

In 2017, Sri Lanka's government rejected the opportunity to legalize homosexuality but agreed to update its human rights plan to prevent discrimination based on sexual orientation. Despite this step, the Sri Lankan LGBT community worries that existing laws labeling homosexuality as wrong won't stop abuse. Homosexual relationships remain practically illegal in Sri Lanka, with reports of invasive examinations of LGBT individuals by medical officers. The laws used against the LGBT community, sections 365 and 365A of the penal code, criminalize certain sexual acts not intended for reproduction, like anal or oral sex. Former Justice Minister Ali Sabry condemned the mistreatment of LGBT individuals by the police, emphasizing the right for all Sri Lankans

to live with dignity and without discrimination based on gender or sexual orientation.

In Sri Lankan society, various misconceptions about the gay community persist, leading to the need for dispelling these misunderstandings. By fostering a broader understanding and cultivating positive perceptions about homosexuality, it's possible to address these misconceptions. Unfortunately, many educated individuals within the gay community face unemployment due to discrimination in the workplace based on their sexual orientation. This exclusion can result in significant challenges such as personality issues, stress, frustration, substance abuse, and sometimes involvement in sex work.

The fear of societal rejection and potential harm leads many individuals to conceal their sexual orientation. Some even resort to marrying someone of the opposite sex to avoid isolation from family and friends, living with substantial stress and dissatisfaction. These ongoing challenges can culminate in severe mental health issues like depression and, in some tragic cases, suicide.

Sri Lanka, being a patriarchal society where the traditional role of a man is seen as marrying a woman and raising a family, creates uncertainty about the role of gay men in this context. Failure to conform to this societal expectation often leads to stigmatization and the violation of their basic human rights. This labeling as an unconventional and unwelcome group further exacerbates their challenges within society.

Review of Literature

In their research conducted in 2016, Twenge, Sherman and Wells delved into the perceptions and attitudes regarding homosexuality among university students in America. Their study encompassed a sample of 500 students drawn from three distinct universities across China. Through their investigation, they identified four key aspects and noted that variations in perceptions and attitudes were notably linked to the student's chosen fields of study. Notably, the study revealed a positive correlation between individuals' understanding of homosexuality and their corresponding attitudes. Specifically, a more comprehensive and accepting perception tended to align with more favorable attitudes. Additionally, the researchers observed a significant impact based on the timing of students' initial exposure to the term "homosexuality," which influenced both their perceptions and subsequent attitudes. In summary, the findings from the research done by Twenge, Sherman and Wells (2016) underscore the potential for increased knowledge and comprehension of homosexuality to foster greater acceptance and open-mindedness among Chinese university students toward the LGBTQ+ community.

In Clift's (1988) study, 80 first-year college students' attitudes toward homosexuality, gay men, lesbian women, and the intersection of 'homosexuality and education' were examined using specialized scales. The research also aimed to gauge the impact of a short module on 'homosexuality and education' on students' attitudes after completing an Educational Studies foundation course. The reliability of the measurement scales, evaluated over one week, demonstrated satisfactory consistency, with strong correlations observed between them. Clift's findings (1988) revealed noteworthy gender-based differences: men tended to exhibit less tolerance toward homosexuals and gay men while expressing greater resistance to discussing sexuality in educational contexts compared to women. Surprisingly, men showed more

positive attitudes on the scale measuring perceptions of lesbian women, especially on specific items related to lesbianism. Additionally, Lin and Lee (2024) highlighted the students who identified as something other than exclusively heterosexual and had acquaintances who were lesbian or gay, generally held more positive attitudes. However, concerning the 'homosexuality and education' scale, men's attitudes saw a significant positive shift after experiencing the module, although overall changes between the pre-test and post-test were modest (Lin & Lee, 2024).

Liyanage and Adikaram (2017) conducted a comprehensive exploration of workplace discrimination experienced by gay men within heteronormative contexts in Sri Lanka. Employing Erving Goffman's stigma theory as a framework, the researchers sought to investigate the multifaceted forms of harassment encountered by gay individuals in these specific workplace environments. Liyanage and Adikaram's (2017) qualitative approach involved in-depth interviews with 16 gay employees. The research findings illuminated a range of discriminatory behaviors prevalent in these heteronormative workplaces. These discriminatory practices encompassed ostracism, rejection, derogatory remarks about sexual orientation, sexual innuendos, frequent jokes, derogatory name-calling, instances of sexual assault, the spread of damaging rumors, leering, unwanted physical contact, and even coercion for sexual favors, collectively identified as manifestations of heterosexist harassment. The study done by Liyanage and Adikaram (2017), notably underscored that openly gay individuals and those expressing more feminine traits were disproportionately targeted for such forms of harassment. Conversely, gay individuals who concealed their sexual orientation and presented themselves with more masculine characteristics encountered less harassment, except when their sexual orientation was suspected or discerned through cues. Liyanage and Adikaram's (2017) research outcomes emphasized the direct linkage between these forms of harassment and individuals' sexual orientation. This underscores the pressing need for organizational intervention to effectively prevent and address these instances, thereby fostering a secure and inclusive work environment conducive to embracing diversity within modern organizational frameworks.

Horner's (2017) case study delves into the experiences of an individual named Dillion, a 40-year-old gay man living in London, who desires to return to Sri Lanka while remaining dedicated to his Sri Lankan cultural values. Employing an Interpersonal Phenomenological Approach, the study investigates the complex dynamics of gay sexuality within cultural contexts. It provides an avenue to explore why certain men, like Dillion, might opt to enter into heterosexual marriages to conform to societal expectations ingrained in the culture they were raised. The case study provides insight into Dillion's complex journey, highlighting the delicate balance he seeks to maintain between his inherent sexual orientation and the societal pressures entrenched in the cultural landscapes of Sri Lanka and London. His quest for acceptance and integration fuels an internal struggle as he endeavors to harmonize his genuine identity with the prevailing societal norms in both cultural milieus. Ultimately, this study unveils the intricate interplay between an individual's identity, the cultural values they embrace, and the pursuit of societal acceptance. It sheds light on how these factors intricately shape an individual's experiences within diverse cultural contexts.

Liyanage and Adikaram (2019) surveyed to understand how gay employees, as labeled deviants, cope with heterosexist harassment

at work in the Asian culture of hegemonic heterosexual masculinity, using the modified labeling theory. Using a qualitative research approach, in-depth interviews were carried out with 16 self-identified gay employees. Results revealed how the coping strategies of gay employees, in the face of harassment, are entwined with the labeling and stigma leading to diverse and complex coping strategies. Several broader coping strategies were thus identified by Liyanage and Adikaram (2019) based on whether the participants accepted the label of deviance and stigma and whether they were open about their sexuality. These broader coping strategies are supporting seeking, confrontation, inaction, quitting, and stigma and labeling avoidance strategies. Under these broader strategies, there were also sub-strategies such as seeking social support, organizational support, legal support, the support of the wise, as well as secrecy and social withdrawal (Liyanage & Adikaram, 2019).

Material and Methods

180 participants were randomly selected via social media. However, the analysis was based on 173 individuals identified as males at birth according to their birth certificates. The quantitative research plan used a structured questionnaire to evaluate attitudes, considering variables like residence, occupation, ethnicity, and education level. Before the main test, a pretest was conducted with 15 individuals to refine the questionnaire. To ensure accuracy, the main survey included only those identified as males on their birth certificates. Corrections were made, and additional questions were added to address issues. Data collection relied on the questionnaire method.

Results and Discussion

Distribution of Demographic Variables

Table 1 shows how early adult men live and some important facts about them. Most, about 51.4%, live with their parents. Remarkably, a good number, 27.7%, live with their wives. About 15% live alone, and a small group, 4.6%, live with male or female friends. In terms of marriage, 64.2% are not married, while 30.6% are married. Few mentioned being divorced (3.5%) or separated (1.7%).

When it comes to gender, almost all, around 97.69%, identified as male. A few, about 1.73%, identified as female, and a small percentage mentioned another gender. Looking at their sexual orientation, the majority, 89%, said they are heterosexual. A significant number, 7.5%, identified as homosexual. A few, only 2.9%, said they are bisexual. Out of 173 respondents, 16 mentioned having homosexual relationships, which makes up 9.2% of the group. The rest, around 90.8%, said they didn't have such relationships.

Table 1: Distribution of demographic variables

	Frequency	%
Living Status		
With Parents	89	51.4
On My Own	26	15.0
With Wife	48	27.7
With a Spouse (Male or Female)	2	1.2
With Friends (Male or Female)	8	4.6

Marital Status		
Unmarried	111	64.2
Married	53	30.6
Divorced	6	3.5
Separated	3	1.7
Current Gender Identity		
Male	169	97.69
Female	3	1.73
Other	1	.6
Sexual Interest		
Heterosexual	154	89.0
Homosexual	13	7.5
Bisexual	5	2.9
Other	1	.6
Homosexual Relationships		
Yes	16	9.2
No	157	90.8

Source: Survey Data, 2023

Association between Main Variables and Status of Attitudes towards Homosexuality

All Chi-square test statistics displayed in Table 2 indicate significance, with corresponding p-values below 5%. Therefore, with 95% confidence, it can be inferred that living area, occupation, ethnicity, and education level significantly influence attitudes towards homosexuality. Specifically, the percentage of positive attitudes toward homosexuality is notably higher in urban areas (28.32%) compared to semi-urban (20.23%) and rural areas (2.89%). Additionally, among different occupational categories, private executives exhibit a significantly higher rate of positive attitudes (21.39%) compared to small business professionals (14.45%) and other occupation categories. Regarding ethnicity, Sinhala Buddhists demonstrate a substantially higher percentage of positive attitudes (43.35%) compared to other ethnic groups. Moreover, individuals with A/L and Graduate education levels exhibit a significantly higher rate of positive attitudes towards homosexuality (20.81%) compared to other educational levels.

Table 2: Association between main variables and status of attitudes towards homosexuality

Main Variable	Category	% of Positive	Test statistics and p-value
Living Area	Rural	2.89	$\chi^2_a = 10.058$ P=0.021
	Semi-Urban	20.23	
	Urban	28.32	
Occupation	Government Executive	2.31	$\chi^2_b = 37.354$ P=0.011
	Government Labor	0.00	
	Private Executive	21.39	

	Private non-Executive	6.36	
	Private Labor	0.58	
	Small Business	14.45	
	Large Scale Business	3.47	
Ethnicity	Sinhala Buddhist	43.35	$\chi^2_c = 11.102$ P=0.044
	Sinhala catholic	5.20	
	Sinhala Christian	1.73	
	Tamil Hindu	0.58	
	Tamil catholic	0.00	
	Tamil Christian	0.00	
	Muslim	0.58	
Other	0.00		
Education Level	Less than O/L	0.00	$\chi^2_d = 0.796$ P=0.049
	O/L	2.31	
	A/L	20.81	
	Graduate	20.81	

Source: Survey Data, 2023

One-way ANOVA test for the attitudes toward homosexuality and Factors

Here considered total value of attitudes is the dependent variable. The total value consists of the summation of thirteen attitudes of each respondent in the sample. Living area, occupation, ethnicity, and education level are considered factors in the analysis.

Table 3: One-way ANOVA test for the attitudes of homosexuality and common factors

	Sum of Squares	df.	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Living Area					
Between Groups	47.924	2	23.962	1.989	0.040
Within Groups	2047.868	170	12.046		
Total	2095.792	172			
Occupational Level					
Between Groups	141.669	7	20.238	1.709	0.010
Within Groups	1954.123	165	11.843		
Total	2095.792	172			
Ethnicity					
Between Groups	29.971	5	5.994	1.685	0.007
Within Groups	2065.820	167	12.370		

Total	2095.792	172			
Education Level					
Between Groups	5.882	3	1.961	0.159	0.024
Within Groups	2089.910	169	12.366		
Total	2095.792	172			

Source: Survey Data, 2023

To test the One-way ANOVA built null hypotheses are as follows:

H_{0a}: There is no significant difference between the means of the different levels of the living area.

H_{0b}: There is no significant difference between the means of the different occupation levels.

H_{0c}: There is no significant difference between the means of the different levels of ethnicity.

H_{0d}: There is no significant difference between the means of the different levels of education level.

According to table 3, the F-value for the living area is 1.989, exhibiting significance with a p-value of 0.040 (< 0.05), leading to the rejection of H_{0a}. Thus, it is concluded with 95% confidence that there exists a statistically significant difference between the means across various living area levels. Similarly, the F-value for occupational levels stands at 1.709, with a p-value of 0.010 (< 0.05), resulting in the rejection of H_{0b}. Consequently, it can be concluded with 95% confidence that a statistically significant difference exists between the means of different occupational levels.

Furthermore, the F-value for ethnicity is calculated as 1.685, with a significant p-value of 0.007 (< 0.05), leading to the rejection of H_{0c}. Thus, it is inferred with 95% confidence that there is a statistically significant difference between the means across various ethnicity levels. Lastly, the F-value for education level is computed at 0.159, reaching significance with a p-value of 0.024 (< 0.05), resulting in the rejection of H_{0d}. Therefore, it can be concluded with 95% confidence that there exists a statistically significant difference between the means of different education levels.

Consequently, all hypotheses were rejected due to the p-values being lower than the significant value. Therefore, it is evident that the living area, ethnicity, occupational levels, and level of education among early adult men exhibit significant associations with their attitudes toward homosexuality.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Conclusion

In conclusion, the survey revealed significant aspects of the demographics and attitudes of early adult men in the study. Notably, 51.4% reside with their parents, while 27.7% live with their wives, and approximately 15% live independently or with male friends. Regarding marital status, 64.2% are unmarried, and 30.6% are married. Gender identification showed that nearly 97.69% identified as male. Concerning sexual orientation, 89% identified as heterosexual, 7.5% as homosexual, and 2.9% as

bisexual. Additionally, 9.2% of the respondents reported having had homosexual relationships among 173 participants.

The Chi-square analysis highlighted the substantial influence of living area, occupation, ethnicity, and education level on attitudes toward homosexuality. Significantly, these factors notably affected the percentage of positive attitudes toward homosexuality. The rejection of hypotheses based on the p-values below the significant level emphasizes the impact of living area, ethnicity, occupational levels, and education on early adult men's attitudes toward homosexuality, as indicated by the One-way ANOVA analysis.

Recommendation

Reducing positive attitudes towards homosexuality in factors such as living area, educational level, occupational level, and ethnicity can be a complex and multifaceted endeavor. Here are some general approaches that could potentially contribute to this goal:

Education and Awareness Campaigns: Implement educational programs to dispel myths, stereotypes, and misconceptions surrounding homosexuality. Promote understanding, empathy, and acceptance through workshops, seminars, and educational campaigns within communities, workplaces, and educational institutions.

Promotion of Diversity and Inclusion: Encourage diversity and inclusivity in all aspects of society. Foster environments that respect and embrace differences in sexual orientation, gender identity, and ethnicity. Encourage discussions and initiatives that promote tolerance and acceptance.

Legislation and Policy Changes: Advocate for policies and laws that protect the rights and dignity of individuals regardless of their sexual orientation, ethnicity, or gender identity. Ensure equality and non-discrimination in areas such as employment, housing, and public services.

Community Engagement: Engage communities in open dialogues and discussions about diversity, tolerance, and acceptance. Encourage community involvement in events, forums, and initiatives that promote understanding and respect for individuals with diverse backgrounds.

Training and Sensitization Programs: Provide training and sensitivity programs for various professionals, such as educators, healthcare providers, law enforcement, and workplace personnel, to foster an inclusive environment and address biases or discriminatory behaviors.

It's important to note that changing attitudes is a gradual process and requires a comprehensive, multi-pronged approach. Respect for diversity, equality, and understanding can be cultivated through concerted efforts at various levels of society, from educational institutions to legislative bodies and community organizations. Collaboration among stakeholders is crucial for creating a more inclusive and accepting society.

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