INFLUENCE OF RELIGIOSITY, GENDER, AND AGE IN SEXUAL ATTITUDE OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

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Abstract

This study investigated the influence of religiosity, gender, and age in sexual attitude among undergraduate students. It was a cross-sectional design in which 160 participants, selected by random sampling across faculties and departments, were assessed with the Sexual Attitude Scale (SAS) and the Religiousness Measure (RM). The results showed that there were no significant differences in sexual attitude on account of gender and age. However, religiosity was a significant factor in determining sexual attitude. None of the interaction effects was found to be significant. Overall, the study supported employing good religious values’ approach for effective sex education at family levels, in schools and within communities. This will help in ensuring a morally acceptable sexual lifestyle which, in turn, will promote overall healthy sexuality and pave the way for a better society.

Keywords: Undergraduate students, sexual attitude, religiosity, gender, age.

Certain sexual attitudes, such as extra-marital and pre-marital sex (among others) are popular condemnable practices in the society, as handed down across generations. The evaluative aspect of how societies view sexual attitude may be related to one’s disposition towards sex. In this era of fluctuating human manners and morals as well as great changes in science and technology, sexual attitude has also greatly changed. People tend to have different attitudes towards sex and these attitudes serve different purposes respectively. Weber (1968) states that attitude is composed of affective, cognitive and behavioural components that correspond respectively to one’s evaluation of knowledge and predisposition to act toward the objects of the attitude. Researchers have offered a number of cogent insights about functions of attitude (e.g., Smith, Bruner & White, 1956; Katz, 1960). The first is that of value expression which an attitude proffers when it enables an individual to establish identity and portray the kind of person he is. The second is ego defense, in case of feeling insecure or threatened, where defense mechanism may be excessively used to hide under the problem and avoid facing the inner or outer reality (Smith et al., 1960).

Sexuality is viewed as a person’s capacity for sexual feelings. Different societies interpret sexuality differently, with corresponding differences in attitude towards it around the world. Some of the sexuality interpretation and attitude are described in terms of premarital sex, the age of sexual consent, homosexuality, masturbation and other behaviours that are not consistent with universal and or cultural norms (Katz, 1960; Egbochukwu, 2008). Behavioural theory of sexuality, based on Jessor’s (1987) problem-behaviour theory as extended by Donovan, Jessor and Costa (1991), has been hinged on the premise that all human behaviours are a result of the reward or punishment following past behaviours. Behaviours can be modified using reinforcements or punishments or reinforcements encourage an individual to continue exhibiting a particular behaviour by tying it to something pleasurable, for example, receiving pleasure during sexual interactions with a partner and as a consequence desiring to have frequent intimate interaction with that person. Conversely, punishments discourage an individual from repeating behaviour by associating the behaviour with something negative. The aim of this study is to examine the influence of religiosity, gender, and age in sexual attitude of undergraduate students.
Religion in the past has played a major role in controlling people’s behaviour and attitude. Religiosity is the quality of being religious or devoutness. Glock and Stark (1965), identified five dimensions of religiosity: experiential, ritualistic ideological, intellectual, and consequential. The experiential dimension focuses on personal faith experience, perhaps a transcendent encounter. The ritualistic domain involves the worship experience invoked as a community. The ideological dimension is constituted by expectations that the religious person will hold to certain beliefs (that is, professed doctrines). Intellectual dimension has to do with the expectation that the religious person will be informed and adequately knowledgeable about the basic tenets of his faith and sacred scriptures. The impacts, (that is, consequences), that religious behaviour has on a person’s life represents consequential dimension of religiosity. These consequences of religiosity (Glock, 1972) on an individual’s life include physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing as well as personal, marital and family happiness.

Allport and Ross (1967) further identified two basic dimensions of religiosity - extrinsic religiosity and intrinsic religiosity. Extrinsic religiosity is a self-serving and utilitarian outlook on religion that provides the believer with comfort in salvation. These individuals are disposed to use religion for their own ends, such as status sociability and self-justification and often selectively shape a creed to fit their own ends. A person with intrinsic religiosity is one who internalizes the total creed of his or her faith and moves beyond mere church attendance. These individuals find their master motive for life in religion. The extrinsically motivated person uses his religion, whereas the intrinsically motivated person lives his religion.

A negative relationship between religiosity and behaviours that implied sexual attitude was observed when Beckwith and Marrow (2005) examined six models of religiosity and personal sexual standards and attitudes. However, the non-significant relationship in the case of sexual experiences without intercourse suggested maintenance of technical virginity in accordance with religious precepts (Beckwith & Marrow, 2005). In a related development, Beckwith and Marrow (2005) suggested that core spirituality and spiritual existential factors are predictors of sexual attitude and association between measures of religiosity and sexuality which led to conclusion that religious behaviour is the strongest predictor of sexual behaviour.

Gender has been found as one of the significant moderators of the relationship between interpersonal religious commitment and appreciation of life (Ifeagwazi & Chukwuorji, 2014). While examining the role of gender in both implicit and explicit attitudes, Geer and Robertson (2005) showed that women had more implicit attitudes toward sexuality than men. Girls, compared to boys, perceived less positive benefits from sex which leave them with more shame and guilt (Juanita, Hallfors, & Waller, 2007). Another study, which examined the attitudes of Nigerian secondary school students toward sexual practice concluded that boys show more inclination towards sexual activity than girls (Egbochukwu, 2008). Petersen and Hyde (2011) upheld that there is significant gender difference in attitude towards casual sex which particularly reflected men as having more liberal attitudes toward casual sex than women. However, Babatunde (2010) found that there was no significant difference between male and female in terms of sexual attitude. In general, there is little research on gender differences in sexual attitude in the Nigerian setting.

Age is another variable which is of interest in this study. In an attempt to examine the influence of age and economic asymmetries on sexual behaviour, Luke (2005) found mean age difference between non-marital sexual partners. Relative differences in age with sexual partners was not associated with the likelihood to engage in unprotected intercourse (Garret, Jin, Bavinton, Scott, & Harley, 2013). However, Addis and van Den Eeden (2006) reported that more frequent sexual activity has been associated with younger age. These studies implied that age is critical in terms of sexual attitude among individuals.

Despite the proliferation of literature on sexual attitude, there seems to be little empirical findings based on how religiosity, gender, and age influence an individual’s sexual behaviour. In particular, there is dearth of literature on the influence of religiosity, gender and age on sexual attitude among university students in Nigeria. This gap made the researchers consider the need to investigate the influence of religiosity, gender and age on sexual attitude as a cogent problem.
Hypotheses
It is hypothesised as follows:
1. There will be gender differences in sexual attitude of undergraduates.
2. There will be age differences in sexual attitude of undergraduates.
3. There will be differences in sexual attitude of undergraduate students based on religiosity.

Method
Participants
Participants in this study were 160 students, selected from University of Jos students using stratified random sampling. Among the 160 participants, 83 (51.9%) were male while 77 (48.1%) were females. Participants who endorsed Christianity as their religion were 96 students while those who endorsed Islam were 64 students. By age groups, 8.5% participants were aged from 16-19 years (middle adolescents); 44.7% participants were 20-24 years (late adolescents); 37.3% participants were between 25-30 years (early adults); and 9.5% participants were 31 years and above (middle adults).

Instruments
The questionnaire for this study consisted of three sections, namely, section A, B and C. Section A consisted of demographic information (e.g., sex, age and religion). Section B consisted of Sexual Attitude Scale, while section C consisted of Religiousness Measure.

The Sexual Attitude Scale (SAS) was developed by Hudson and Murphy (1998). It consists of 25 items, which measure participants’ responses on sexual attitude. The SAS ask question such as “people should not masturbate” “the only proper way of sex is through intercourse” and so on. The SAS has excellent internal consistency, with an alpha in excess of .90. It also has very good content, construct, and factorial validity with validity (Hudson & Murphy, 1989). Items in the questionnaire are scored on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Higher scores indicate a positive attitude towards sex.

Religiousness Measure (RM) was developed by Seth and Seligman (1993). It consists of 17 items which measure the participants’ religious hope, religious involvement, and religious influence. The religiosity measure was designed to be responded on a 7-point scale. It has shown good reliability and validity, with measures of optimism, hope and daily influence (Seth & Seligman, 1993). Higher scores indicate higher religiosity.

Procedure
The instruments were administered to respondents with the help of three research assistants. The research assistants were fully informed and educated about the nature of the research and the importance of confidentiality as well as other ethical considerations in research with human participants. The participants were provided sufficient information about the study and their consent to participate was individually sought for. Study instruments were administered to consenting participants. There was no time limit in completing the instrument. Approximately 87% of student approached, participated in filling the questionnaire. Completion process took between six to nine minutes after the distribution.

Design/Statistics
This study used a cross-sectional design. A cross-sectional design was adopted for its clarity and ability to evaluate different variables across populations or within a target population that is made up of sub-populations. It sought to explore the influences of religiosity, gender, and age on sexual attitude. Thus, the dependent variable of interest was sexual attitude while the independent variables (study factors) were gender (male versus female), age (i.e. middle adolescents, late adolescents, early adults, middle adults), and religiosity (intrinsic versus extrinsic). Data was analysed using analysis of variance (ANOVA).
Results

Table 1: ANOVA results for influence of religiosity, gender, and age in sexual attitude

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Type III Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corrected Model</td>
<td>2119.38</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>151.38</td>
<td>1.214</td>
<td>.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>453021.91</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>453021.91</td>
<td>3633.96</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>117.34</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>39.11</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity</td>
<td>563.41</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>563.41</td>
<td>4.52</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender * Age</td>
<td>292.67</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>97.56</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender * Religiosity</td>
<td>151.84</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>151.84</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age * Religiosity</td>
<td>306.87</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>102.29</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender * Age * Religiosity</td>
<td>77.57</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>38.79</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>18076.22</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>124.66</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1090794.00</td>
<td>160</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrected Total</td>
<td>20195.60</td>
<td>159</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results showed that gender did not have significant influence on the sexual attitude of students, $F(1, 145) = .03, p = .868$; with sexual attitude mean scores of 80.26 and 82.33, for males and females respectively. Age did not have a significant influence on sexual attitude of students, $F(3, 145) = .31, p = .82$; with sexual attitude men scores of 79.97, 80.43, 82.15, and 82.56, for ages 15-19 years, 20-24 years, 25-29 years and 30 years and above respectively. This implies that age did not significantly affect the sexual attitude of students. Results indicated that there was a significant influence of religiosity on the sexual attitude of students, $F(1, 145) = 4.52, p = .04$; with sexual attitude mean scores of 78.80 and 84.29 for participants with intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity respectively. This implies that the extrinsic religiosity significantly influence the level of sexual attitude of students. Table 5 shows the mean summary.

Discussion

This study examined the influence of religiosity, gender, and age in sexual attitude among undergraduate students in University of Jos. From the results presented based on the investigation, the findings indicated that out of the three hypotheses formulated in the course of the study, one (There will be differences in sexual attitude of undergraduate students based on religiosity) was accepted while others were rejected.

The earlier hypotheses findings show that there will be a significant difference between men and women on sexual attitude was not supported. Literature across several decades revealed that there is significant gender difference on sexual attitude. From the meta-analysis by Petersen and Hyde (2011), researches reviewed indicated that many gender differences in sexuality are smaller than researchers once thought. According to them, most gender differences in sexual behaviours are less significant, indicating that a within-gender variation is more than a between-gender variation in reported sexual behaviour and attitude. Babatunde (2010)
found that there was no significant relationship between male and female in their sexual attitude.

Results indicated that there was no significant influence of age on sexual attitude. Thus the earlier hypothesis that there will be age differences in sexual attitude of undergraduates was not supported. This finding is consistent with Egbochukwu’s (2008) finding which indicated that there was no difference in terms of age on adolescent sexual practices. The significance of age on sexual attitude may be as a result of peer influence and getting unlimited access to more sexually explicit materials, websites and other resources.

Findings showed that there was a significant influence of religiosity on sexual attitude among undergraduate’s students. Barkin (2006) supports the view that religiosity reduces the number of sexual partners that individuals have, because of the moral disapproval of premarital sex. This finding seems inconsistent with Petersen and Hyde’s (2011) findings which indicated that a high level of religiosity was associated with more conservative attitude toward sex. However, a great deal of other researchers (e.g., Strong, DeVault, Sayad, & Yarber, 2005), reported that religiosity leads to the rejection or delay of sexual activities such as intercourse and not conservative views about it.

Contrary to this finding, Petersen and Hyde (2011) found that religiosity did not actually decrease sexual activities but rather promote conservative views about sex. Even though the mean of those that hold intrinsic (conservative attitude toward sex) was less than those with extrinsic (Liberal attitude toward sex), it could be because students who hold liberal attitude toward sex also know the appropriate cultural and accepted sexual norms or religious teaching concerning premarital sex. Probably as a result of this, they show conservative view toward sex.

The findings also showed that there was no interaction effect of gender and age on sexual attitude. This could be argued on the fact that gender according to the learning theory is a categorization by society and as such is only useful for role play. It does not affect states such as sexual attitude long enough to have a significant influence (Forsyth & Carey, Fugua, 1998; Rosenthal, 1993); therefore the lack of significant interaction with age of participants. There was no significant interaction effect of gender and religiosity on sexual attitude. Possible explanation for the lack of this main effect could be that participants’ sexual attitude might not be reflective when they are faced with a real life challenging situation of sexual risk-taking. Bandura (1997) recognizes that sometimes the difficulty of manoeuvring through a real life sexual situation can sometimes override the best informed judgment. As many researchers have noted, there tends to be a large inconsistency between what people say they can do and what they actually do in a challenging sexual situation, irrespective of the individual’s gender or religious affiliation (Forsyth, Carey, & Fugua, 1998; Rosenthal, 1991).

Results indicate that there was no significant interaction effect of age and religiosity on sexual attitude. This could be further explained on the fact that heterosexual university students in particular are a population with easy access to multiple sexual partners and a wide array of sexual opportunities, and faced with enormous peer influence, and pressures to live by their environmental and peer norms. That is to say the university environment itself often encourages and promotes a sense of social and sexual exploration among students (Strong, DeVault, Sayad, & Yarber, 2005). This could have rendered the interaction of age and religiosity non-significant.

The interaction effect of gender, age, and religiosity was not significant. This outcome could be attributed to the fact that sexual attitude is a state and not a trait, as such, the particular state of sexual attitude of an individual could be different at different times depending on prevailing factors that are influencing the individuals, such as significant others, environment and physiological factors could have further influenced the respective attitude in form of extraneous factors, as such, gender, age and religiosity not having effect on sexual attitude.
The main limitation of this study is that it was a survey research that did not have sufficient control to avoid possible extraneous variables and the design was cross-sectional. Considering most of the effects were not significant, there is need for further studies using a most robust approach to check the findings of present study. Future research should be conducted using longitudinal design.

Conclusion

It is hoped that sex education should be intensified at family settings, religious institutions and at all levels of education (primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions of learning). The parents are expected to create time for talking with their children, at home, about sexuality and other important issues while emphasizing the appropriate cultural norms regarding sex life. Our different religious groups should provide an avenue for sex education in their respective places of worship. Governments, at all levels, need to intensify public enlightenment campaigns to encourage the right or positive sexuality and good attitude towards sex.

References


