

Same-Sex Relationship Among Tertiary Institution Students in Ibadan

by

Ewere Nelson Atoi
atoiewere.nelson@yahoo.com
Department of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan, Nigeria

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Usman Adekunle Ojedokun
kunleusman84@ymail.com
Department of Sociology, University of Ibadan, Nigeria

Ewere Nelson Atoi is a Ph.D. candidate at the Department of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan, Nigeria. His research interests include Philosophy of Religion, Ethics, and Religion in Public Life. Usman Adekunle Ojedokun is a Ph.D. candidate at the Department of Sociology, University of Ibadan, Nigeria. He specializes in Sociology of Crime and Deviance.

Abstract:

The acceptability of same-sex relationship remains a contentious issue of debate in Nigeria despite the passage into law of the bill that proscribes it. While its antagonists oppose it because they believe it is a violation of their religious belief, the protagonists claim such law is an infringement on their fundamental human right and freedom. This paper, therefore, examines the disposition and attitude of students of four selected tertiary institutions -- University of Ibadan, The Polytechnic Ibadan, Oyo State School of Nursing and Immanuel College of Theology in Ibadan, Nigeria -- to the practice of same-sex relationship. Data was collected over a period of three months (October-December, 2011). A set of 300 semi-structured questionnaires was administered and eight focus group discussion sessions were held. Multi-stage sampling technique was adopted for respondents' selections. Findings revealed that respondents confirmed the practice of same-sex relationship among tertiary institution students in Nigeria; however, there was no clear cut consensus among them as to its prevalence. Also, the majority of the respondents (78%) expressed preference for heterosexual relationship over same-sex relationships.

Key Words: Same-sex relationship, Heterosexual relationship, Tertiary Institution Students, Disposition, Nigeria

Introduction

The practice of same-sex relationship has over time continued to generate serious debates in Nigeria. Although the furor relating to this sexual relationship has been tentatively laid to rest with the passage of the anti-homosexual bill into law by the Nigerian national assembly, the controversy it has thrown-up is far from over. On September 28th, 2011, Senator Domingo Obende sponsored a bill prohibiting same-sex marriage in Nigeria, saying “the practice cannot be allowed on moral and religious grounds”. Thereafter, the bill was unanimously endorsed by the legislators; subsequently, a fourteen year prison sentence was stipulated as the punishment for anyone who violates the law (Ajayi 2011; Ogala, 2011). However, while some groups of people view this law as a gross violation of their fundamental human right, others consider the practice of same-sex relationships an aberration and a blatant violation of the hallowed African traditional cultural values and the fundamental tenets of their religious belief.

Homosexuality, according to Anuradha (2007), is a sexual orientation characterized by sexual attraction or romantic love exclusively for people who are identified as being of the same-sex. People who are homosexual, particularly males, are known as ‘gay’, while gay females are known as ‘lesbians’. This practice has been widely viewed by different societies as abnormal, deviant and/or an abomination; thus, the development of a healthy homosexual identity is often challenged because of the existing social attitudes towards it (Berliner 1987; Cabaj, 1989; Loicano 1989). Laws criminalizing same-sex relationship, according to Baudh (2008), are differently worded as gross indecency, debauchery, buggrey, and carnal intercourse against the order of nature, but juridical measures are more commonly known as sodomy laws. Since the late 1990s and early 2000s, however, some countries like the Netherlands, Belgium, Canada, United Kingdom, South Africa, and others have recognized same-sex unions (Anuradha 2007).

In his discussion of issues that are considered to be of most serious social concerns in Nigeria, Raheemson (2006) observes that human security and the phenomenon of homosexuality and lesbianism in Nigeria are becoming a worrying phenomenon attracting the attention of the religious bodies, concerned individuals, and government organs in recent times. He further opines that the scourge of homosexuality if allowed to continue unchecked portends a dangerous threat to the Nigerian family-life structures.

In a similar vein, Pichardo (2006) opines that in Spain, the issue of same-sex relationship has become the symbolic focus of both the challenge to traditional hetero-normative values and structures, and the public emergence of new discourses of equality, full citizenship and human rights. Izugbara (2004) notes that same-sex sexual relations have currently been reported among young Nigerians, but the practice tends to be more prevalent among adults. Ikpe (2004) on his part submits that same-sex sexuality is more prevalent among the men-folk, but its practice by the womenfolk cannot be totally ruled out. Ikpe further alludes that same-sex sexual activities have been reported in the boarding houses among secondary school students.

Francour, Esiet and Esiet (2000), as cited by Izugbara (2004), observe that Nigerians tend to view homosexuals as sick, subnormal, and dangerous people. Hence, homosexuals dwell at the very margins of respectability in the larger Nigerian public imaginary. Francour et al. further claim that homosexuality is also frequently associated with witchcraft, magic, and the possession of diabolical powers. In a similar manner, Abogunrin (1989) opines that practices such as rape, homosexuality manifesting in gayism and lesbianism, and having sex with animals are not only taboos in Yoruba land and many African societies, but are also regarded as signs of mental illness.

Alexander (2000) contends that homosexuality is a pathology resulting from childhood trauma. Similarly, Cochrane (2004) asserts that the most basic tenet of the religious beliefs is that homosexual activity is always immoral, even sinful. According to him, the sources for this belief are threefold: scriptural and theological, psychological, and prudential. He further observes that through the Old and New Testament, God has revealed unequivocally that homosexuality is an abomination, interpreted either as a sin or a spiritual or mental sickness.

However, Gonsiorek (1982) in contrast, asserts that the sexual preferences of homosexuals and heterosexuals have nothing to do with a psychological disturbance and/or maladaptive behaviours. Cabaj (1989) similarly posits that homosexuals only differ from heterosexuals in that they are aroused and have their needs for affection, sexual fantasies and/or social needs met more often by a same-sex partner. Cabaj further asserts that homosexuality establishes a self-identity that is different from the majority, confront or manage the difficult challenges of heterosexism. Johnson (2011) maintains that the opponents of same-sex relationships often conceptualize marriage as a traditional institution founded upon the central principle of sex difference. In this sense, protecting marriage is not, it is argued, concerned with a denial of rights to non-heterosexuals, but with the continuation of a socially important and distinctive way of life.

Furthermore, Naphy (2004) submits that same-sex sexual behavior is usually not performed in public; and that affection between men is still kept discreet. However, Gaudio (1998) take a different position; he contends that in Nigeria, there are several Hausa gay men, known as “yan daudu”, who are openly gay and choose to only have sex with men. Gaudio also notes that the term “kamar mata” (meaning: “like women”) is used to particularly refer to such homosexuals. However, the Hausa homosexual men are not prostitutes because they view themselves as men; who prefer to adopt behavior and roles considered to be “feminine”.

Cameron and Kulick (2003) made an interesting point that sexual desire and intercourse have historically been viewed within a heterosexual understanding and expectations. Gopal (2008), however, argues that homophobia has served as a powerful tool to persuade people in Africa to conform to the heterosexual status quo as prescribed by colonialism. In a related manner, Ntuli (2010) contends that shame has played a large factor in the treatment of homosexuality in Africa and the world. In many traditional African societies shame can severely damage an individual's social standing and lead to isolation; even from one's own family.

Epprecht (2004) observes that homophobia is not only an external attack on homosexuals, but also finds its way into the internal landscape of many homosexuals. The social exclusion that homosexuals face in the societies, particularly in African societies, according to Epprecht, results in the creation of physical or geographical gay subcultures where they can feel at ease to express themselves and their sexuality without any fear. Epprecht equally posits that the existence of the term, *Hungochani*, the term for homosexuality in the indigenous Shona language of Zimbabwe and some other southern African languages, lend credence to the fact that homosexuality has for long been existing as a state of being, rather than an opportunistic lifestyle choice in Southern Africa. He demonstrates that the Southern African people have, from the earliest of times to the present, engaged in an active accommodation with all manner of sexual expressions.

In another dimension, Essien and Aderinto (2009) observe that during the 1990s, the subject of same-sex preference caught the attention of African leaders, as some African homosexuals demanded official recognition. These African leaders, according to them, resisted the reform of laws that criminalized same-sex relationships because of a combination of factors, which include but were not limited to the need to satisfy their conservative and largely heterosexual constituencies.

The controversy that the issue of same-sex relationship is currently generating in Nigeria and the conspicuously insufficient empirical research on this topic are the factors that stimulate a strong interest for this research. The major objective of this study is to examine the disposition and attitude of the Nigerian tertiary institution students to the practice of same-sex relationship.

Study Area

The study was conducted in the ancient city of Ibadan in Southwestern Nigeria. Ibadan is one of Nigeria's most important cities and was once acclaimed to be the largest city in the whole of the West African sub-region. The city is located approximately on longitude $3^{\circ}51'$ East of the Greenwich Meridian and latitude $7^{\circ}23'1''$ North of the Equator at a distance some 145 kilometers northeast of Lagos. Ibadan is directly connected to many towns in Nigeria. The population of the city rose to 1,829,300 in 1999 at a growth rate of 1.65% from 1963, and increased to 2,550,593 in 2006 at a growth rate of 3.4% (National Population Commission, 2007). Ibadan metropolis was selected for this study because the city houses different categories of tertiary institutions: universities, polytechnics and monotechnics.

Materials and Methods

This study is exploratory and cross-sectional in design. Primary data was collected over a period of three months (October-December, 2011). Survey questionnaire and focus group discussion methods were triangulated for the purpose of data collection. A set of 300 semi-structured questionnaires was administered, but 276, which was about 92% of them, were returned by the respondents. To guarantee absolute anonymity of respondents, there was no column provided in the questionnaire to indicate their identity in terms of name and/or identification numbers. Also, the administered questionnaires were only collected a few days after their administration from the class governors of the departments involved. Multi-stage sampling technique was adopted for the selection of 300 respondents from the four selected tertiary institutions. This was done by clustering tertiary institutions in Ibadan metropolis into universities, polytechnics, monotronics and seminaries.

University of Ibadan, The Polytechnic Ibadan, Oyo State School of Nursing, and Immanuel College of Theology were the institutions selected from the designed cluster. Two faculties each were randomly chosen at the University of Ibadan and at the Polytechnic Ibadan, while the only available faculty at the Immanuel College of Theology was purposively selected. Similarly, the only faculty at the Oyo State School of Nursing was selected purposively. At the faculty level, a stratified sampling technique was adopted to choose students from different departments and academic levels of study.

Eight focus group discussion sessions involving seven (7) students each, were held. Conscious effort was made in each of these discussion sessions to ensure the mixture of participants in alignment with the two sexes, different levels of study and religious faiths. These participants' dynamics have significant impacts on the outcome of the group discussions. At the analysis stage, data collected through the administered questionnaires were analyzed with the aid of *SPSS* version 17.0; descriptive statistics involving frequency distributions and cross tabulation analysis were done. Content analysis and ethnographic summaries involving the transcription, description, and interpretation were done for the qualitative data.

Results and Discussions

Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N=300)

The socio-demographic characteristic of respondents by institution/faculty, sex, religion and level of study

Institution/Faculty	Frequency	Percentage
University of Ibadan		
Arts	49	17.8
Social Sciences	48	17.3
The Polytechnic Ibadan		
Financial Management Studies	45	16.3
Business/Communication Studies	49	17.8
Oyo State School of Nursing		
Nursing Science	45	16.3
Immanuel College of Theology		
Theology	40	14.5
Sex		
Male	141	51
Female	135	49
Religion		
Christianity	167	61
Islam	109	39
Level of study		
100/N.D1	77	27.9
200/N.D2	101	36.6
300/HND1	48	17.4
400/HND2	50	18.1
Total	276	100.0

Source: Primary Data (October-December, 2011)

The demographic table shows faculties selected for the study to include: faculties of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Ibadan, faculties of Financial Management Science and Business and Communication Studies at the Polytechnic Ibadan, faculty of Nursing Science at the Oyo State School of Nursing, and faculty of Theology at the Immanuel College of Theology. The sex distribution of respondents indicates that 51% of the respondents were male as against 49% that were female. The religious affiliation of respondents showed that 52.7% were Christians and 39.5% were Muslims.

Same-sex Relationship Among Nigerian Tertiary Institution Students

With regard to the reality of same-sex relationships among students in the Nigerian tertiary institutions, analysis of responses showed that there was no clear-cut consensus among the respondents. While 52% of the students involved in the study believed the practice of same-sex relationship was not frequent among Nigerian tertiary institution students, 38% of the respondents, however, claimed that it was prevalent. About 10% of the students were undecided as to the frequency or level of occurrence of this sexual practice.

The category of respondents that indicated that same-sex relationships occur among tertiary institution students claimed that they knew people who were into the practice within their immediate environments. Some of them stated that some of their classmates and members of their halls of residence were involved in the act. This submission was accurately captured in one of the FGDs, where a lady declares:

“... I know them; they are everywhere on this campus - in my department, hostel, even in my chapel” (FGD, Female Student, University of Ibadan, November, 2011).

The above response of the respondent has confirmed that the involvement of some Nigerian tertiary institution students in the practice of same-sex relationship is not a mere speculation, but it is a reality. This indicates that there seems to be an alteration in the generally held belief that emphasizes heterosexual practices among the Nigerian populace. The practice of same-sex relationship among Nigerian tertiary institution students is posing a challenge to the hetero-normative practice that has over time been the dominant and the only accepted sexual practice among Nigerians.

Students' Preference Between Same-Sex and Heterosexual Relationship

The data also indicates that a substantial proportion (78.3%) of the respondents preferred heterosexual relationships, as against about 5% that indicated preference for same-sex relationships; 17% of the respondents were undecided as to the type of sexual relationship they prefer between same-sex and heterosexual relationships. Respondents who indicated preference for a heterosexual relationship claimed that a same-sex relationship is ungodly, a deviance, un-African and an evidence of a mental pathology. This is closely related to the submission of Francour, Esiet and Esiet (2000) that Nigerians tend to view homosexuals as sick, sub-normal and dangerous people, and Izugbara's (2004) assertion that the practice is associated with witchcraft, magic and the possession of demonic powers.

The reasons some of the respondents adduced for their sexual preference was captured in the FGDs. A majority of the discussants in the FGD believed that a same-sex relationship is un-African, because they claimed it negates the African traditional norms and values that encourage procreation.

A participant at one of the FGD sessions said this:

“... I prefer heterosexual relationship because marriage in African context is centered on child bearing; hence, involving in same-sex relationship in an African environment is a violation of African norms and values” (FGD, Female Student, University of Ibadan, November, 2011).

At another FGD session, a discussant puts it thus:

“... I came in to this world only because my father married my mother. If I get involved with Someone of my gender, how would I produce my own offspring?” (FGD, Male Student, The Polytechnic Ibadan, October, 2011).

However, it is pertinent to point out that the 17% of the respondents who claimed to be undecided may prefer same-sex relationships, but they decided to be silent about their sexual preference due to the fear of being stigmatized if detected as being homosexuals. This is a common reaction to the practice of same-sex relationships in Nigeria.

Respondents’ Response: Sex More Involved in Same-Sex Relationship

As regard respondents’ response on the sex that is more involved in same-sex relationship between the male and female students in Nigeria, the analysis below indicates that the two sexes believed females were more involved in the practice of same-sex relationship.

Table 2: Respondents' Response on sex involvement in same-sex relationship

Sex	Sex more involved in same-sex relationship			Total
	Male	Female	Undecided	
Male	34 24.5%	78 56.1%	27 19.4%	139 100.0%
Female	31 23.3%	80 60.2%	22 16.5%	133 100.0%
Total	65 23.9%	158 58.1%	49 18.0%	272 100.0%

Source: Primary Data (October-December, 2011)

This result is very interesting in the sense that there seems to be a clear consensus between the two sexes (respondents) that female students were more into same-sex relationship in Nigeria. The breakdown of the percentage indicates that a total of 56.1% of the male respondents agreed that females are more involved in same-sex relationship, as against only 25% who chose male.

Also, the same pattern was reflected in the responses of female respondents in which 60.2% were of the view that females are more involved in same-sex relationship compare to only 23.3% who chose male. This statistical analysis was further corroborated by the opinions of the students involved in the FGDs, where they claimed that females are more involved in same-sex relationship because they have the tendency to get easily emotionally attached.

A participant at the FGD has this to say:

“... Females are more involved in same-sex relationship because they do exhibit strong emotional attachment than their male counterparts, so they can easily develop strong emotional feelings for their female friend that they are very close-to” (FGD, Female Student, Oyo State School of Nursing, October, 2011).

It is important to note that these findings contradict the position of Ikpe (2004) who opines that men folk are more involved in the practice of same-sex relationship in Nigeria.

The response of the respondents that the Nigerian female students were more receptive to same-sex relationship when compared with their male counterparts may be as a result of some available media reports, photographs, as well as internet videos, showing certain Nigerian female students engaging in homosexual act as can be found on the following internet links (<http://www.date360.net>; www.naijapals.com; <http://www.naijarules.com>).

Influence of Religious Beliefs on Students' Preference Between Same-sex and Heterosexual Relationships

The analysis also indicates that a larger percentage of the respondents claimed that their religious beliefs influence their choice of sexual relationship. While 71% of the respondents were of the view that their religious beliefs influence their choice of sexual relationship, 15% of the respondents indicated that it had no influence on their choice. However, 14% of the respondents were undecided as to the influence of their religious beliefs on their choice of sexual relationship.

The above analysis was further buttressed by the outcome of the FGDs conducted. The FGDs, which comprised adherents of both Christian and Islamic religions, revealed that most of the discussants claimed that their religious beliefs played a pivotal role in their lifestyles. They were of the view that since their religious beliefs only encouraged the practice of heterosexual relationship, they cannot be involved in same-sex relationship. Aside from their religious beliefs, discussants identified some other factors that influence their choice of sexual relationship to include their cultural practices, ethical values and individual personality.

A participant in one of the FGDs categorically stated that:

“... Same-sex relationship is against the teaching of my Christian faith. I will never subscribe to it, because it contradicts the traditional view of marriage. The bible says that when God created man, he made them male and female, that is, Adam and Eve and not Adam and Steve or Eve and Rachael” (FGD, Male Student, Immanuel College of Theology, November, 2011).

One other discussant in another FGD session said:

“ ... I am a Muslim, I will say it anywhere and anytime that same-sex relationship violates the basic tenets of Islamic faith. Islam teaches that sex should be between a man and a woman, not otherwise” (FGD, Male Student, University of Ibadan, December, 2011).

Another person at the same forum had this to say:

“... Same-sex affair is against the plan of God for humanity because the Bible says; he who finds a wife finds a good thing, and not she who finds a wife”. (FGD, Female, University of Ibadan, December, 2011).

One of the discussants, however, expressed a very contrary opinion by stating that:

“...There is nothing wrong with same-sex relationship and government should allow people to practice whatever they like as long as it holds no negative effects on others, regardless of the stands of religion” (FGD, Female, University of Ibadan, December, 2011).

However, despite this unique opinion, the majority of the discussants claimed that their religious beliefs strongly influence their choice of sexual relationship. From the foregoing it can be deduced that religious beliefs play a prominent role in the daily lives of their adherents, especially in Nigeria. It therefore follows that students who might have been involved in the same-sex practice probably refrain from it because their religions forbid it.

Disposition Students to the Legislative Same-sex Relationships in Nigeria

The dispositions of the respondents to the legalization of the practice of same-sex relationship in Nigeria varied significantly. Thus about 72% of the respondents supported the law that criminalizes the practice of same-sex relationship in Nigeria, while 23% of the students involved in the study were of the view that the criminalization of the act is uncalled for.

However, 5% of the respondents were undecided on the criminalization or otherwise of same-sex relationship in Nigeria. While the anti-same-sex relationship students claimed that the act is ungodly and a deviant behavior that should not be condone in any form in Nigerian society, the students that opposed the criminalization of the practice claimed that since it violates nobody's right or poses no threat to heterosexual members of the society, everybody therefore should be allowed to exercise their human rights. This diverse opinion of the respondents is adequately captured in one of the focus group discussions held, where one of the discussants said:

“Thanks to the Federal Legislators for this laudable progress in their legislative duty. The act of same-sex relationship is an immoral act in the sight of God and it violates the traditional African value; it is a deviant behavior that should be criminalized in the society”. (FGD, Female Student, University of Ibadan, December, 2011).

Another discussant in the same FGD session, however, interjected the previous speaker this way: “Though I am not into same-sex relationship, but I think our legislators have no business criminalizing it. As it is, the act does not in any way affect the heterosexuals in the society; therefore, criminalizing it is a violation of people's fundamental human rights”. (FGD, Male Student, University of Ibadan, December, 2011).

The mixed responses of the respondents with regard to their disposition to the law that proscribes the practice of same-sex relationship in Nigeria is a reflection of the controversy the passage of the law is currently generating in Nigeria. However, the majority of the respondents in this study supported the law.

Summary and Conclusion

This paper has examined the disposition and attitude of some selected tertiary institutions students in Nigeria to the practice of same-sex relationships. Results confirmed the involvement of Nigerian tertiary institution students in the practice of same-sex relationship despite an existence of the law that proscribes it in the country. However, there was no general agreement as to the extent of the practice. A number of students expressed preference for same-sex relationships, but the majority preferred heterosexual relationships. Some of the respondents claimed that same-sex practice is a deviant behavior and that it is un-African. The majority of the respondents asserted that their religious beliefs played a very significant role in their sexual orientation - this clearly demonstrates that monotheistic (e.g., Christianity and Islam) religion is an integral part of peoples' culture. Conclusively, it can be deduced from the emerging issues in the study that the debate on the acceptability or the non-acceptability of same-sex relationship in Nigeria will continue to rage on for a very long time.

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Appendix

Questionnaire: A Survey on Same Sex Relationship and Changing Socio-Religious Lifestyles among Tertiary Institution Students in Ibadan, Nigeria

The questionnaire is designed to Survey Same Sex Relationship and Changing Socio-Religious Lifestyles among Tertiary Institution Students in Ibadan, Nigeria. Information supplied will be strictly used for academic purpose and will be held in strict confidence. I implore you to give honest and accurate answers.

Thank you very much.

Instruction: kindly answer the questions below. Mark [X] where appropriate in the given options, and where necessary, write your responses in the space provided.

Section A: Socio-demographic Characteristics

S/N	Question	Response	Code	Skip To
1.	Institution	University of Ibadan []	1	
		The polytechnic Ibadan []	2	
		Oyo State School of Nursing []	3	
		Immanuel College of Theology []	4	
2	Faculty	Arts	1	
		Social Sciences	2	
		Financial Management Studies	3	
		Business and Communication Studies	4	
		Nursing Science	5	
		Theology	6	
3	Sex	Male []	1	
		Female []	2	
4	Religion	Christianity []	1	
		Islam []	2	
		African Traditional Religion []	3	
5	Age	16-20	1	
		21-25	2	
		26-30	3	
		31and above	4	

Section B: Students' Attitude and Disposition to Same Sex Relationship

6	Are you aware of the practice of same sex relationship among tertiary institution students in Nigeria?	Yes [] No []	1 2	
7	Do you know of any person involved in it?	Yes [] No []	1 2	
8	How will you rate the practice of same sex relationship among Nigerian tertiary institution students?	Frequent [] Not Frequent [] Undecided []	1 2 3	
9	Are you currently in a relationship?	Yes [] No []	1 2	If no skip to 12
10	What type of relationship are you into?	Same sex relationship [] Heterosexual relationship []	1 2	
11	What influences your choice?	Culture [] Religion [] Personal conviction [] Others[specify]	1 2 3 4	
12	Which did you prefer between same sex and heterosexual?	Same sex relationship [] Heterosexual []	1 2	
13	Why?			
14	What do you think of same sex relationship?			
15	Why?			
16	In your own opinion which of the gender is more involved in the practice of same sex relationship?	Male [] Female [] Undecided []	1 2 3	
17	Why?			
18	What does your religion teach about sexual relationship?			

19	Does your religious belief influence your choice between same sex and heterosexual relationship?			
20	Do you support the law that criminalizes same sex relationship in Nigeria?	Yes [] No [] Undecided []	1 2 3	
21	Why?			