PERCEPTION OF STUDENTS ON THE PRACTICES
HOMOSEXUALITY AMONG STUDENTS IN THE CAPE COAST
METROPOLIS

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the incidence of homosexuality practices in the senior high schools. Specifically, the study sort to find out whether homosexuality is practised in the senior high schools in the Cape Coast metropolis. The sample comprised 351 participants (203 males and 148 females) who were randomly selected from Form 3 and 4 students in three senior high schools in the Cape Coast Metropolis of the Central Region of Ghana. A questionnaire was used in data collection. Descriptive statistics were used in data analyses. The study revealed that homosexuality practices are going on in the senior high schools. The study recommends that counsellors and counselling centres should be resourced to handle homosexuality in Senior High Schools. Training workshops on sexual orientation should be intensified for teachers as well as schools administrators for them to be well informed with current trends such as homosexuality in schools.

Keywords: Students, Perception, Homosexuality and Senior High School.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Homosexuality is a romantic and erotic or sexual attraction or behaviour between members or people of the same sex or gender (McAnulty & Burnette, 2003). According to Kinsey’s six-point scale the term ‘homosexuality’ is viewed as one of the three main categories of sexual orientation with the heterosexual–homosexual continuum (Rice, 1999). It was coined in the late 19th century by a German psychologist, Karoly Maria Benkert (Pickett, 2011). Until the end of the 19th century, it was generally believed that people were either heterosexual or homosexual.

According to current scientific and professional understanding, the core attractions that form the basis for adult sexual orientation typically emerge between middle childhood and early adolescence (APAHelpCenter.org). A period of transition from childhood to adulthood during which an individual adjusts to the biological, emotional, sexual and social changes associated with the transition from childhood to adulthood (Berger, 2001). Adolescence is defined as a bridge between the asexual child and sexual adult (Feldman, 1999). It is a time of sexual exploration and experimentation with sexual fantasies and realities, of incorporating sexuality into one’s identity (Christopher, 2001). Adolescence is also a period where the individual thinks that conforming to group norms and peer pressure would make him accepted (Bischof, 1964).

Media reports further describe the senior high schools as major hubs for gay and lesbian activities. It is in those places that gays and lesbians are really made (The Chronicle, 2012). An article published by Mr Kwaku Adu-Gyamfi in Modern Ghana revealed that: "Homosexuality is not born, but made". He said 'I believe the brainwashing process begins in schools and colleges, where many people develop the desire to experiment the act of having sex with the same sex" (The Chronicle, 2012). Such reports makes homosexual practices in the senior high schools a sensitive topic to research to allow parents, government and private institutions and Ghanaians in general make informed decisions on the issue.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Under Ghanaian criminal law, same-sex sexual activity among males is illegal. It is uncertain whether same-sex sexual activity among females is illegal. Under the chapter 6 of the Criminal Code, 1960, as amended by The Criminal Code (Amendment) Act, 2003, homosexuality is punishable by law. More so Ghana is predominantly a religious state in which majority of the citizens’ frowns on the practice of same sex relationships. Again the Ghanaian culture believes sexual activity is basically between the opposite sexes and gradually socializes its young people towards heterosexual marriage which is exhibited in the rich Ghanaian marriage ceremonies. However, existence of the homosexuals is reported in
Ghana and given the complexity of homosexuality and the nature of the Ghanaian culture, it is difficult for homosexuals to live an open life and talk about it. Media reports suggest that homosexual activities are prevalent among students in the senior high schools in Ghana. Even though adolescent homosexual practices cannot be a justification of homosexual identity in adulthood, research indicates that most gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals first become aware of and experience their sexual thoughts and feelings during childhood and adolescence (Perin, 2002; Rosenberg, 2003). In September 2011, a suspected gay teacher was arrested by the Ghana police for sodomising some students in Adisdal College in the Cape Coast Metropolis (Nyarko, 2011). The Daily Graphic in June 2011 also published an article by Moses Dotsey Aklorbortu reporting that about 8000 homosexuals in the western and part of central regions of Ghana have been registered by a non-governmental organisation whose name was withheld. According to this report, these individuals are mostly students in junior and senior high schools, polytechnic students and some workers who are engaged in homosexual activities. However authorities denied such registration.

1.3 Research Questions

What are the perceptions of senior high school students on the practices of homosexuality in the senior high schools?

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study will be helpful in several ways. Since this study sought to find out whether homosexual practices are prevalent among senior high school students, the findings will confirm or disconfirm the assumptions in the public domain that homosexual practices can be found in the senior high schools. When the findings are revealed, then parents, school authorities, government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) will know how to handle the situation. It will further help them to mount up preventive and managerial measures in the senior high schools to help all students.

2.1 THEORETICAL REVIEW

2.1.1 Social Constructionist Theory

Social constructionist is perhaps the most common version of constructivism. Learning theories are called social constructivist when their main concern is with the knowledge construction through social interactions. Social constructivist theories derive primarily from the work of Vygostky (Vygostky 1978 as cited in Swan, 2005) a Russian contemporaries of Piaget whose work was suppressed by the Stalinists and rediscovered in the 1960s. Vygotsky’s theory asserts three major themes:

1. Social interaction plays a fundamental role in the process of cognitive development. Vygotsky felt social learning precedes development. He states: “Every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (inter-psychological) and then inside the child (intra-psychological).” (Vygotsky, 1978).

2. The More Knowledgeable Other (MKO). The MKO refers to anyone who has a better understanding or a higher ability level than the learner, with respect to a particular task, process, or concept. The MKO is normally thought of as being a teacher, coach, or older adult, but the MKO could also be peers, a younger person, or even computers.

3. The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZPD is the distance between a student’s ability to perform a task under adult guidance and/or with peer collaboration and the student’s ability solving the problem independently. According to Vygotsky, learning occurred in this zone.

Vygotsky focused on the connections between people and the sociocultural context in which they act and interact in shared experiences (Crawford, 1996). Vygotsky maintained that, while taking place in the individual minds, all learning results from social interaction and that meaning is socially constructed through communication, activity, and interaction with others. He believed that cognitive skills and patterns of thinking are not primarily determined by innate factors (as in genetic epistemology), but are the products of the activities practiced in the social institutions of the culture in which the individual lives. Consequently, the history of the society in which one is reared and one’s personal history are crucial determinants of the ways in which an individual will think. Even the solitary scholar alone in his room, Vygotsky argued, engages the artefacts and tools of his culture, and through them, their authors and the larger society, moreover, such scholar’s current activity is enabled by and so situated in a history of social and cultural interactions that have shaped his/her knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviours. According to Vygotsky, (1978) children acquire most of their culture’s cognitive skills and problem solving strategies through collaborative dialogue with more experienced members of their society. He saw cognitive development as more like
an apprenticeship than a journey of individual discovery (Weiten, 2007).

Vygotsky’s emphasis on the social origins of cognitive development is apparent in his theoretical concepts, such as zone of proximal development and scaffolding. The zone of proximal development is the gap between what a learner can accomplish alone and what he or she can achieve with guidance from more skilled partner. In other words it is the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978).

The zone of proximal development for a task is the area in which new cognitive growth is likely and the area that should be the focus of instructional effort. These efforts are more likely to be helpful when an instructor practices scaffolding. Scaffolding occurs when the assistance provided to a child is adjusted as learning progresses. Vygotsky claimed that all learning occurs in this zone, which bridge the gap between what is known and what can be known, through adult or instructor or peer collaboration.

The implication of the social constructionist theory to us in understanding homosexuality is that there is evidence that homosexuality, like drug use is “handed down” from older individuals. The first homosexual encounter is usually initiated by an older person. In isolated studies 60% (Bell & Weiberg, 1978), 64 % (Gebhard & Johnson, 1979) and 61% (Bieber, Dain, Dince, Drellich, Grand, Gunlach, Kremer, Rifkin, Wilber, & Bierber, 1962) of the participants claimed that their first partner was older person who introduced the sexual experience.

Social constructivism reminds us that learning is essentially a social activity, that meaning is constructed through communication, collaborative activity, and interaction with others. It highlight the role of social interactions in the meaning making, especially the support of more knowledgeable others in knowledge construction. Homosexuals overwhelmingly believed their feelings and behaviour were the result of social or environmental influences.

2.2 EMPIRICAL REVIEW

2.2.1 Richard Troiden Model

The last model to be considered is Richard Troiden model for the formation of homosexual identity propounded in 1989 (Troiden, 1989). Troiden uses an age specific four-stage model for developing a homosexual identity. He was an Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Miami University in Oxford, when he developed his theory of homosexual identity formation. Troiden is a gay sociologist. His model uses sociological theory, which represents a synthesis and elaboration on previous research. He called his model an ideal-typical model of gay identity acquisition. To obtain data for his theory, Troidan interviewed 150 gay men. Participants to be interviewed were gained by using a “snowball technique” (Troiden, 1989).

Stage one of his model is termed as ‘Sensitization stage’. This stage occurs before puberty, and is generally not seen in a sexual context. Rather, heterosexuality is accepted as the norm. So there is no homosexual or heterosexual labelling to one’s feelings or behaviours. What is noted is gender conformity or nonconformity to activities. Though there are generalized feelings of marginality and perceptions of being different from their same-sex peers. These perceptions are seen primarily in childhood social experiences. It is the subsequent meanings and labelling of childhood experiences, rather than the experiences themselves, which are significant in the sensitization stage.

The second stage of Troidan’s model is ‘Identity Confusion’. In this stage there is a confusion of identities. As specific things become personalized and sexualized during adolescence, an individual may begin reflecting on the idea that their feelings and behaviours could be regarded as homosexual. As a result, there is inner turmoil and uncertainty around their ambiguous sexual status. No longer is a heterosexual identity seen as a given, and as of yet there is no developed perceptions of having a homosexual identity. There are several factors responsible for this identity confusion. One is an altered perception of self. There is now along with gender experiences, genital and emotional experiences that set them apart from same-sex peers. Added confusion is seen when responding to both heterosexual and homosexual feelings and experiences. A third factor is the stigma surrounding homosexuality. An additional factor is ignorance and inaccurate knowledge about a social category for these behaviours and feelings. How does one become a member of this category?

The third stage is Identity Assumption. A homosexual identity becomes both a self-identity and a presented identity. Now that this homosexual/gay identity is tolerated, there is association with other homosexuals, exploration of a homosexual subculture, and sexual experimentation. Although a homosexual identity is assumed during this stage, it is first tolerated, and it is accepted later. Commitment stage is the fourth and the final stage. An individual at this
stage adopts homosexuality as a way of life. There is a self-acceptance and a comfort with a homosexual/gay identity. More emphasis is placed on this identity being a "way of life," "state of being," and an "essential" identity than a set of behaviours or sexual orientation.

Arthur, (1999) attempted to theorize a homosexual identity model is by combining three different models into a mega-model of five stages. The three models include Troiden’s model, Cass model and Colman model. Arthurs’s five stage model is;

1. Pre-Sexuality (Troiden 1) Preadolescent nonsexual feelings of difference and marginality.
2. Identity Questioning (Coleman 1; Cass 1, 2; Troiden 2) Ambiguous, repressed, sexualized same-gender feelings and/or activities. Avoidance of stigmatized label.
3. Coming Out (Coleman 2, 3, 4; Cass 3, 4; Troiden 3) Toleration then acceptance of identity through contact with gay or lesbian individuals and culture. The individual explore sexual possibilities and first erotic relationships. There is careful and selective self-disclosure outside gay /lesbian community.
4. Pride (Coleman 5; Cass 5; Troiden 4) the individual at this stage integrates sexuality into the self. He or she is capable for love relationships and can better manage stigma and wider self-disclosure.
5. Post-Sexuality (Cass 6) A diminishment of centrality of homosexuality in self-concept and social relations.

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

An exploratory design was used for the study. Exploratory research was used because it is a valuable means of finding out “what is happening; to seek questions and to assess phenomena in a new light” (Robson, 1993 as cited in Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 1997, p 78). It is a useful approach for gaining background information on a particular topic, it is flexible and can address research questions of all types (what, why, how).

3.2 POPULATION

The population for the study were students in senior high schools in the Cape Coast Metropolis. The target population were forms three and four students. Forms four and three students were chosen for this study because they were mature in age and had stayed in the senior high schools long enough to know whether or not homosexuality is practised by students in schools. In all, three schools were chosen out of eleven senior high schools in the Metropolis. The schools were selected such that it included a mixed school and two single sex school thus, male and female schools. The total target population was 5,456 students.

3.3 SAMPLE AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

Three Senior High Schools were purposively selected to include a male school, one female school and one mixed school. Purposive sampling technique was used for the selection of the schools because it allows the researcher to adhere to the objectives of the study by selecting the respondent who can answer the questions (Twumasi 2001). The researcher can select the populations that are judged to typify the views of the group. In many cases purposive sampling is used in order to access ‘knowledgeable people’, i.e. those who have in-depth knowledge about particular issues, maybe by virtue of their professional role, power, access to networks, expertise or experience (Ball as cited in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). Students were selected by the simple random technique, using table of random numbers.

In each school, the table of random numbers was employed to select the respondents from each of the form three and four classes. In all, a sample size of 357 students was obtained from a population of 5456. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007), a representative sample for a population of 5,000 ranges between 357 and 964 at 95% confidence level hence the sample size used.

3.4 INSTRUMENTATION

Questionnaire was used to gather data from the respondents. According to Wilson & McLean (1994) as cited by Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2007), questionnaire is a widely used and useful instrument for collecting survey information, providing structured, often numerical data, being able to be administered without the presence of the researcher, and often being comparatively straightforward to analyse.

The questionnaire consisted of five sections. The first section, section “A” considered personal data of respondents. The second section, section “B” focused on finding out homosexual practices in schools. The third section, section “C” dealt with causes of homosexuality. The section “D” which is the fourth section, addressed the attitudes of students towards
homosexuality and the fifth section considered the ways of managing homosexuality among the students. The types of questions and responses in the instruments (questionnaire) were likert scales and dichotomous type. The researcher decided on dichotomous and likert type because they are useful in generating frequencies of response amenable to statistical treatment and analysis. Such questions and responses also enabled comparisons to be made across groups in the sample (Osuala, 2001).

4.1 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Perception of senior high school student on the practices of homosexuality in their school

The first research question was to find out from the students whether homosexual practices really exist or go on in the senior high schools in the Cape Coast Metropolis. The result of the responses is presented in table 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homosexuality is practiced in my school</td>
<td>Yes 82.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a friend who is a homosexual</td>
<td>No 17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I practice one myself</td>
<td>Yes 1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No 98.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Homosexual practices in schools (in percentages)

Source: Field Data 2013

The result in table 5 shows that 82.6% of the participants believe that homosexuality is practiced in their schools as against 17.4% participants who think homosexuality is not practiced in their schools and 26.5% of the respondent also said they have a friend who is in the practice.

Again 1.4% of the respondent also said they are into the practice. This result indicates that homosexual practices really exist in the senior high schools in the Metropolis and confirms the general perception that homosexual practice is going on in the senior high schools. The result is line with that Kodero, Misigo, Owini & Mucherah (2011) that homosexual practices exist in the senior high school in Kenya.

It is not surprising that homosexual practices can be found among students at this level because according to Diamond (2003), most gays and lesbians recognize that they are gays or lesbians in mid adolescence. Stronski and Remafedi (1998) recognize that significant number of youth identify themselves as homosexuals. During puberty, many lesbians and gays begin to recognize that they may be homosexual (Cates, 1987; Mercier & Berger, 1989; Reiter, 1989). Sorenson (1973) surveyed a group of 16 to 19 year-olds and reported that 6% of females and 17% of males had at least one homosexual experience.

5.1 SUMMARY

The main emphasis of the study was to explore the existence of homosexuality practices among senior high school in the Cape Coast Metropolis. Specifically the study was to investigate whether homosexuality practices go on in the senior high schools in the Cape Coast Metropolis.

The exploratory research design was adopted for the study. A total of 357 students were sampled from a population of 5456 students from three senior high schools in the Cape Coast Metropolis. The simple random sampling method was used to sample the respondent for the study. A self-constructed likert scale and dichotomous type of questionnaire was used for the study.

Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages), were employed in the data analysis. The analysis revealed that homosexuality practices go on in the senior high schools in Cape Coast Metropolis.

5.2 CONCLUSIONS

The study concluded that homosexuality is practiced among the senior high schools in in the Cape Coast Metropolis.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the findings and the conclusions made for the study, some recommendations were suggested.

1. Counsellors and counselling centres in senior high schools should be resourced to be able to handle issues of student sexuality including homosexuality.
2. Training workshops on sexual orientation should be intensified for teachers as well as schools administrators for them to be well informed with current trends such as homosexuality in schools.
3. Student accessibility to appropriate and accurate information regarding students’ sexuality should be increased at early stages through library and Internet resources as well as workshops and forums.

6.1 REFERENCE

23 Rice, F. P. (1999). The adolescent development, relationships, and culture. Allyn and Bacon, USA.