University Students' Perception on the Influence of Mass Media on Homosexuality Adoption in Universities in Rift Valley Region, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed at establishing university students' perception on influence of mass media on homosexuality. Social Cognitive Theories guided the research. The study was carried out among the undergraduate students in some selected public universities in Rift Valley Region in Kenya. These are Egerton, Moi, Eldoret and Kabianga universities. Third year undergraduate students were chosen because they had been in the university for long and understood well the factors influencing students to adopt homosexuality. Third year students may have developed some perception towards the factors influencing adoption of homosexuality. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. A sample of 225 university students was selected through stratified random sampling, proportionate sampling and simple random sampling while a sample of forty (40) peer counselors and four (4) university counselors from the four universities were selected through purposive sampling. Data collection instruments were questionnaire, interview schedules and focus group discussions. The findings indicated that mass media positively influences students' perception on adoption of homosexuality. The study recommends that media owners and the government regulate programmes that might influence students' adoption of homosexuality.

Key Words: University Students' Perception, Mass Media, Homosexuality

INTRODUCTION

Homosexuality refers to sexual attraction between members of the same sex or gender (Cantor, 2012). The term homosexuality was first coined in the late 19th century by a German psychologist, Karoly Maria Benkert leading to labeling of homosexuals who were defined by their sexuality (Picket, 2011). Male homosexuality develops when the child fails to resolve the oedipal conflict and misdirects his libido toward members of the same gender. Thus, for a long time the mental health community unquestioningly adopted Freud's assessment of homosexuality as a perversion and a mental disorder (Kodero, Misigo, Owino & Wilfridah, 2011). However, many recent psychodynamics theorists have begun to integrate some of the newer findings about possible biological and social influences on sexual orientation (Kirk, 2002). Kelly also notes that samegender sexual orientation is now accepted as normal, mature, a developmental state rather than a pathological one requiring treatment. Such a belief can influence university students to think that homosexuality is normal and hence engage in it.

According to the Kenyan constitution, every adult has the right to marry a person of the opposite sex, based on the free consent of the parties (The Republic of Kenya, 2010). This implies that same-sex marriage is outlawed in Kenya. Although homosexuality is prohibited by law in Kenya, it exists in the country and some individuals involved in this practice have come out in the open and are demanding their rights. Barasa (2007) observes that in 2007 gay men and lesbians came out openly to demand their rights during the World Social Forum which was held in Nairobi. During this Forum, some Kenyan gay men and lesbians publicly declared that they were not ashamed of their sexual orientation. Judith Ngunjiri, a 20-year old University of Nairobi law student said that she realized she was lesbian at age 10 when she was in Standard 3. According to her one does not decide to be a lesbian but rather it is how you are born, either heterosexual or homosexual. In the same Forum, a young man, Emmanuel Kamau confessed that he was gay, and alleged that one in every five Kenyan men is a homosexual and that homosexuality is genetic in origin (Barasa, 2007).

It was against this background that an empirical study was conducted to address some questions that remain unanswered which motivated the researcher want to carry out the study. Are the university students in Rift Valley Region, Kenya aware of the factors that influence students to adopt homosexuality? What do the students perceive mass media as a factor that influences adoption of homosexuality? Is the perception of these students on factors influencing university students to adopt homosexuality different from those of other students in the world?

This study was carried out with the aim of trying to answer some of these questions. In addition, Wakhisi, (2013) observed that women in their late teens and twenties have turned to other females for companionship and sexual satisfaction due to exposure to television and peer pressure. Nabwire (2014) noted that media whether it is print, audio or television gives the gay community a lot of airtime to raise their issues and in the process help the public become aware of the prevalence of homosexual community and their lifestyle. However, this study aimed at establishing how students perceived mass media as a factor that influences adoption of homosexuality. Therefore, this study is designed to fill this gap.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Talbot (2007) notes that media has an important role in the modern world and cannot be ignored at all by the society. Talbot further asserts that some sections of the society like churches and trade unions have almost been replaced by the media as it is the primary source of understanding of the world and therefore serves as a vital function as a public forum. This is supported by Baran and Davis (2007) who observed that by using the media content one may learn or know things unintentionally that may impact the audience life either positively or negatively. Baran and Davis further note that the media plays a role of shaping people's mind and perception of the social world and also manipulate people's action in an effective way. Media not only gives the audience a chance to view happenings from different areas but also influences the perception of the audience and especially on controversial issues like homosexuality. For instance, media reporting about homosexuality as a normal behavior may influence students' perception on adoption of homosexuality.

According to Besen and Zicklin (2007), internet access makes people more likely to approve of gay adoption. This is because internet provides more exposure to such issues. Media representation of homosexuality has influenced the people's perceptions on homosexuality with many considering it as normal. Thus, the perception about homosexuality is changing due to the media reporting often

and portraying homosexuality as normal. Nabwire (2014) said that the media be it print, audio or television have given the gay community a lot of airtime to raise their issues, thereby helping the public become aware of the prevalence of homosexual community and their lifestyle. According to Stein (2007) the media shapes public perception about issues that are of concern to the audience. By persistently reporting on these subjects, the media may succeed in swaying people's perception towards homosexuality. This is because when the media continuously present something as normal sooner the public will consider it as normal even if it was not.

Media seems to play a major role in influencing peoples' perception of homosexuality. Calzo and Ward (2009) conducted a study with the presence of 1761 undergraduate level students. The results of the study indicated that men and women view homosexuality differently based on specific media consumption. The role the media plays and the influence it maintains over the public has shifted the perception of homosexuals from disturbed deviants to celebrated members of the society through popular broadcasting outlets. Thus the public continues to gain knowledge and understanding of homosexuals through media exposure and consequently influence their perception of homosexuality positively. The above researchers looked at media exposure and viewers' attitudes toward homosexuality but they did not look at university students' perception of mass media in influencing adoption of homosexuality. Therefore, this study was meant to fill the gap.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive survey research design, which is a method of collecting information by interviewing or administering a questionnaire to a sample of individuals (Orodho, 2003). The research targeted nineteen (19) university counselors, four hundred and eighty (480) peer counselor and fifty three thousands undergraduate students. The accessible population of the study involved all student peer counselors, University Counselors and third year undergraduate students.

The research used stratified random sampling to ensure universities were adequately represented. Stratified random sampling provides a more representative cross section of the population (Asthana, & Bhushan, 2007). Proportionate sampling was used to determine the numbers to be drawn from each university while simple random sampling was used to select the subjects at university level. The study adopted the triangulation technique of data collection. The technique involves collecting data from different sources and checking information collected from different sources for consistency of evidence (Mertens, 2005). The study employed an interview schedule to gather data from the university counselors. Interviews are recommended because they are more personal, allow more control in the order and flow of questions, have higher response rates and help in studying a phenomenon in depth (Kerlinger, 2000).

Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was used to capture data from the peer counselors (Chambliss & Schutt, 2010). The FGD targeted forty (40) university peer counselors, ten (10) from each of the four universities. The collected data was screened for errors and cleaned before conducting analysis. The researcher explained the nature and purpose of the study to the participants in order for them to make informed decision on whether to participate in the study or not. Best and Kahn (Best, & Kahn, 2006) recommend that a researcher should inform all the participants the purpose of the study. Descombe (2005) suggests that the research participants should be allowed to either participate or withdraw from the study. The respondents were informed that data was to be used for intended

research purpose only. Respondents were assured of confidentiality, utmost privacy and anonymity of the information provided.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Students' Perception of Mass Media and Homosexuality adoption Relationship

The study sought to determine students' perception on influence of mass media on adoption of homosexuality. Data on perceptions was gathered using a set of 11 closed ended items in the students' questionnaire. Additional data was captured using the university counselors interview guide and FGD for peer counselor and used to supplement the information provided by the students. The students' responses to the close-ended items are summarized in the table below;

Students' Responses to Statements on Perception on Influence of Mass Media on Adoption of Homosexuality

·	N	Percentage				
Statement		SA	A	N	D	SD
Media (print and electronic) is a good source of information on promotion and management of heterosexual						
relationships	220	41.4	45.9	5.9	4.1	2.7
Watching pornography on homosexuality influences						
students to adopt homosexuality	220	46.8	40.0	6.8	5.0	1.4
Exposure to the internet is a major factor responsible for						
the increase In number of homosexuality	219	45.7	42.0	5.0	5.5	1.8
Western influence through the media has greatly eroded the						
African culture by imposing homosexuality	219	55.7	39.7	2.3	1.4	0.9
Mass media has contributed to increase of homosexuality				11.		
in Kenya	220	33.2	47.7	4	2.7	5.0
Homosexuality has been given unnecessary publicity by				17.	10.	
the media		26.1	39.9	9	6	5.5
In my view electronic media is the main source of students'				21.		
knowledge on homosexuality	216	22.7	46.3	8	7.9	1.4
Print media is the main source of knowledge for				25.	26.	
homosexuality	215	7.4	35.8	6	0	5.1
Watching homosexuals declare their status on television				11.		
can contribute to adoption of homosexuality	218	26.6	52.8	5	6.9	2.3
Watching movies from the West on homosexuality can				10.		
contribute to adoption of homosexuality		33.8	49.5	2	4.2	2.3
Frequent reading newspaper/magazines on homosexuality				14.	12.	
can contribute to adoption of homosexuality	219	20.1	48.4	6	3	4.6

The results shown in the Table above reveal that the respondents agreed on all the items. However, slightly over a quarter (25.6 %) were neutral and a slightly higher number (31.1 %) disagreed with the item on; "Print media is the main source of knowledge for homosexuality". The results reveal that on "Print media is the main source of knowledge for homosexuality" slightly below half (43.2 %) agreed with it. The above results indicate that the students were of the view that mass media influence adoption of homosexuality. Those with high levels of exposure to mass media tend to be influenced to adopt homosexuality. The results of this study are supported by other studies that

postulated that students learn about homosexual activities through the television, pornography and internet, Mtemeri (2015) who found that specific types of media like prime television shows or magazines may have the strongest influence upon a person's perception of homosexuality. The results of this study are also in agreement with another study by Kubicek and colleagues (2011) as it revealed that homosexual's claim that internet access makes people more likely to approve of gay adoption.

Further analysis was done to determine whether the students' perceptions were affected by their gender or university. This was accomplished by developing the indices of the perceptions. The means of responses to items were computed and then transformed into perception on the influence of mass media on adoption of homosexuality index as depicted in Table below;

Students' Means on Influence of mass media on adoption of homosexuality perception index

Statement	N	Mean	SD
Media (print and electronic) is a good source of information on			
promotion and management of heterosexual relationships	220	4.19	0.92
Watching pornography on homosexuality influences students to adopt			
homosexuality	220	4.26	0.89
Exposure t the internet is a major factor responsible for the increase In			
number of homosexuality	219	4.24	0.91
Western influence through the media has greatly eroded the African			
culture by imposing homosexuality	219	4.48	0.70
Mass media has contributed to increase of homosexuality in Kenya	220	4.01	1.00
Homosexuality has been unnecessary publicity by the media	218	3.71	1.13
In my view electronic media is the main source of students'			
knowledge on homosexuality	216	3.81	0.92
Print media is the main source of knowledge for homosexuality	215	3.14	1.05
Watching homosexuals declare their status on television can			
contribute to adoption of homosexuality	218	3.94	0.93
Watching movies from the West on homosexuality can contribute to			
adoption of homosexuality	216	4.08	0.90
Frequent reading newspaper/magazines on homosexuality can			
contribute to adoption of homosexuality	219	3.67	1.07
Influence of mass media on adoption of homosexuality perception			
index	223	3.87	0.58

According to the above table, the means of the items ranged from 3.14 (SD = 1.05) to 4.48 (SD = 0.70). Only one item had a mean below 3.5 meaning that majority of the students agreed with the statement. The item with the lowest mean was "Print media is the main source of knowledge for homosexuality (M = 3.14, SD = 1.05)". This implies most of the students disagreed with it. An examination of the SD reveals that they were relatively high ranging from 0.70 to 1.13. This is an indication that there was reasonable variation in the students' responses to the items. The overall mean, index (M = 3.87, SD =0.58) was reasonably high. This suggests that they were of the view that mass media positively influences students' perception on adoption of homosexuality. Stein (2007) indicates that the media shapes public perception about issues that are of concern to the audience. He further asserts that by persistently reporting on these subjects, the media may succeed

in swaying people's perception towards homosexuality. Further, Elihu and Lazarsfeld (2006) observe that media reporting on homosexuality has been blamed for the spread of the vice with Christians accusing the media of giving homosexuality unnecessary reporting.

Further analysis was done to find if there are significant perception differences by respondents' characteristics. Differences on perception on influence of mass media on Adoption of homosexuality by gender were done. Levenes test of equality of variance F = 1.077, p = .300. The results are shown in the table below.

T-test Results comparing Perception on influence of Mass Media by Gender

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-value	p-value
Male	121	3.83	0.60	220	1.711	.089
Female	101	3.96	0.50			

The results in Table above show that the males had a mean score of 3.83 (SD = 0.60) while that of the females was 3.96 (SD = 0.50). The difference between the male and female mean scores was not statistically significant, t (220) = 1.711, p > .05. This is an indication that the perceptions of the two groups were similar. The findings are consistent with past studies done by Lippincott, Wlazelek and Schumacher (2001) and Tan (2008) that revealed that no gender differences exist in attitudes towards homosexuality. The perception means and the results of the ANOVA test are contained in the two Tables below respectively.

Means Scores and Standard Deviations on Perception on Influence of Mass Media

University	N	Mean	SD	
Moi	68	4.04	0.46	
Eldoret	62	3.75	0.70	
Egerton	73	3.77	0.54	
Kabianga	20	4.09	0.50	

An examination of the scores in Table above reveal that Kabianga (M = 4.09, SD = .50) had the highest mean while Eldoret (M = 3.75, SD = .70) had the lowest mean. It was not possible to establish by inspection whether the differences among the means were significantly different. This was established using the ANOVA test. The test results are summarized in Table below.

Comparison of Students Mean Scores on Perception on Influence of Mass Media by University

Scale	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F-ratio	p-value
Between Groups	4.535	3	1.512	4.744	.003*
Within Groups	69.782	219	.319		
Total	74.317	222			

The results in Table above reveal that the difference among the mean scores of the four universities were statistically significant, F(3, 219) = 4.744, p < .05. This means that the students' perception on influence of mass media on adoption of homosexuality among the universities was not similar. This could be explained by the fact that the locations of the four universities are not similar. The results however do not reveal where the difference are, given that 4 groups were involved in the

comparison. This was achieved by conducting further analysis using the Scheffe pairwise test. The results are posted in Table below.

Scheffe Multiple comparison on Perception on Influence of Mass Media on Adoption of Homosexuality Mean Scores by University

Pairs	Mean difference	SE	p-value	
Moi vs Eldoret	0.29	0.10	0.039*	
Moi vs Egerton	0.27	0.10	0.045*	
Moi vs Kabianga	-0.05	0.14	0.991	
Eldoret vs Egerton	-0.02	0.10	0.998	
Egerton vs Kabianga	-0.32	0.14	0.176	
Kabianga vs Eldoret	0.34	0.15	0.152	

The pairwise analysis indicates that the difference between the means of pair group Moi vs. Eldoret was statistically significant (p < .05) in favour of Moi. The results also reveal that the difference between the mean of Moi vs. Egerton was statistically significant, (p > .05) in favour of Egerton. The results in Table above further indicate that the difference between pair groups Kabianga vs. Eldoret (p > 0.05), Moi vs. Kabianga (p > 0.05), Eldoret vs. Egerton (p > 0.05), and Egerton vs. Kabianga (p > 0.05) were not statistically significant. This is an indication that location of an institution matters a lot.

After conducting the comparisons, the responses on perceptions were categorized as either negative or positive on the basis of the indices. Indices between 1.00 and 3.00 were considered as negative while any index above 3.0 was considered as a positive perception. The summary of the students' perception on influence of mass media on adoption of homosexuality is given in Table below;

Perception on Influence of Mass Media

Perception $n = 222$	Frequency	Percentage	
Negative perception	12	5.4	
Positive perception	210	94.6	

The results in Table above indicate that nearly all (94.6 %) the students were of the opinion that mass media positively influences their perception on adoption of homosexuality. This agreed with findings of a research done by Ian and colleagues (2011) who observed that media affected students' perception of homosexuality. Additionally, the above findings were congruent with past studies by Malamba who carried out a study on controversy of homosexuality and observed that the media and the television in particular was the major factor responsible for the increased number of homosexuals in Malawi. The results therefore do not support the second hypothesis which stated that there is no statistically significant relationship between students' perception on influence of mass media and adoption of homosexuality. The hypothesis was rejected on the basis of these results.

To get more information, qualitative data from open ended questions from students was used. As shown in Table below, the students gave the following reasons why mass media influences adoption of homosexuality.

Students' reasons why Mass Media has an Influence on Adoption of Homosexuality

Reason $n = 224$	Frequency	Percentage
Gives homosexuality publicity/makes people aware of it	8	3.6
Defends homosexuality (human right, unjust to condemn it)	3	1.3
Media promotes homosexuality (creates interest, makes people think media affects people's its right/normal, gives confidence)	68	30.4
Media affects people's beliefs, attitudes and behavior	56	25.0
Media discourages homosexuality	4	1.8
It has no effect since one's behavior depends on beliefs and values	10	4.5

The results in Table above reveal that slightly above a quarter of the students (30.4 %) were of the opinion that media promotes homosexuality as it creates interest, makes people think that homosexuality is right and also gives those practicing the vice confidence to continue with the practice. A quarter of the respondents (25.0 %) said that media affects people's beliefs, attitudes and behavior while 3.6 % of the respondents noted that media gives homosexuality publicity/makes people aware of it. The findings could be explained by past studies that affirm that reading and watching pornographic material may make one curious to try homosexuality (Ariithi et al., 2010). The findings are also in line with research by Elihu and Lazarsfeld (2006) who observed that media reporting on homosexuality has been blamed for the spread of the vice with Christians accusing the media of giving homosexuality unnecessary reporting. However, some respondents were of the opinion that mass media does not influence students to adopt homosexuality. 4.5 % of the respondents said that media has no effect since one's behavior depends on beliefs and values. A negligible number of students (1.8 %) believe that media discourages homosexuality while 1.3 % of the respondents seemed to defend homosexuality by saying that it is a human right and therefore unjust to condemn it. The findings could be explained by past studies that observed that due to the development of democracy, human rights and knowledge about gender and sexuality, some countries in Europe, North America and Asia seem to come to terms with homosexuality (Balcha, 2009).

Interviews and FGDs on Students' Perception on Mass Media and Homosexuality

Media plays a significant role in shaping people's mind, perception of the social world and manipulating people's action (Baral *et al.*, 2007). The study deemed it necessary to seek the views of university and peer counselors on students' perception on influence of mass media on adoption of homosexuality. University Counselors were of the view that students' perceive mass media to influence the spread of homosexuality, especially the internet as it is the easiest to access. The counselor from Kabianga University used Obama's stand on homosexuality that was given wide coverage by television stations, radio, print media and the internet as an example of the power of the media to influence students' perception on adoption of homosexuality. According to the Egerton University counselor, students are easily influenced by what they watch in televisions, movies and

internet. The findings are congruent with previous researches by Kubicek and colleagues (2011) and Mtemeri (2015) who argued that homosexuality is available through pornography and the internet.

In the discussions the peer counselors were also of the view that mass had a significant impact on students' adoption of homosexuality. Televisions, porno sites, radio and print media expose students to homosexuality thus making them aware of it. The findings are in agreement with Nabwire (2014) who says that the media be it print, audio or television have given the gay community a lot of airtime to raise their issues, thereby helping the public become aware of the prevalence of homosexual community and their lifestyle. The students look at the stars in the movies/videos they watch, some of whom are homosexuals as their role models. The students compare themselves to their movie idols/heroes and adopt their lifestyles. The observations of the peer counselors support those of the counselors that students are easily influenced by what they watch in televisions, movies and internet. They thus perceive mass media to influence adoption of homosexuality.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of the study show that media and especially print (newspapers/ magazines) and electronic is a good source of information on promotion and management of heterosexual relationships. The respondents perceived exposure to electronic media especially the internet to be a major factor responsible for the increased number of homosexuals in their universities. This is because it is easier to access homosexuality through the internet. Thus they perceived mass media as a factor influencing adoption of homosexuality. The respondents perceived Western influence through the media to have greatly eroded the African culture by imposing homosexuality.

Further, the respondents were of the view that homosexuality had been given unnecessary publicity by the media and therefore contributed to adoption of homosexuality. Mass media and especially the internet had a significant impact on students' adoption of homosexuality. The peer counselors were of the view that televisions, porno sites, radio and print media expose students to homosexuality thus making them aware of it. The students compare themselves to their movie heroes, some of whom are homosexuals as their role models and thereby adopt their lifestyles.

The findings revealed that students are easily influenced by what they watch in televisions, movies and internet. They thus perceive mass media to influence adoption of homosexuality. The study recommends media owners and the government to control programmes that might influence the adoption of homosexuality.

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