PERCEPTION OF SAME-SEX MARRIAGE AMONG UNDERGRADUATES IN BENUE STATE: COUNSELLING IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract
The paper examined the perception of Same-Sex Marriage on Social, Religious and Medical variables among undergraduates in Benue state universities. The method used is the survey design and the study is conducted in Benue State. The population of the study is 35,962. Participants in the study consisted of 200 undergraduates selected from the three universities in Benue state, namely: The Federal University of Agriculture Makurdi, Benue State University and the University of Mkar using the Proportionate Stratified Random sampling technique. The instrument a questionnaire entitled Undergraduates Perception of Same-Sex Marriage, (UPSSM) was used to elicit responses from the participants. Mean scores and standard deviation was used to answer the research questions. Results indicate that social stigma, family abandonment and risk of death are the negative social perceptions. Rejection by the church and excommunication remain the religious perception. On medical issues, risk of cancers, barrenness and sexually transmitted diseases are outstanding medical factors perceived. The paper recommends preventable measures such as marriage seminars for young people by churches and religious organizations to educate them on proper Christian norms for marriage. Secondly Guidance Counsellors should organize group counseling for young people where pre-marital counselling and proper sexual behaviour will be taught. This paper will benefit teachers, students, policy makers and the general public.

Key words: Same-Sex, Marriage, Undergraduates and Perception.
Introduction
The history of marriage dates back to the time of creation when God created man and later through a deep sleep [anesthesia] carried out a surgical operation removed his rib and formed a woman [Genesis 3: 2]. The Bible tells us that when the woman was made, she was brought to the man and God gave them a charge to live together, multiply, and fill the earth. From the first time the charge was given, men have always obeyed God's instruction and today the world's population stands at seven billion.

To add color and humor to marriage, and since man is a creative being, he has adopted several ways of solemnizing marriage and presently in Nigeria, Kore (2005) identifies four types of marriages, which are:- The church marriage, Islamic marriage, court marriage and traditional marriage. The church or Christian marriage according to Nwobi [1997] is a religious sacrament which is carried out by Christians. In this form of marriage, the couple confess their commitment to live, love and care for one another as long as they live. This form of marriage also binds one man to one woman. However Ogebe (2004) reiterates that it is only marriage under the marriage act that has legal backing in terms of the practice of monogamy. Islamic marriage on the other hand according to Kore [2005] is polygamous and a woman who marries under this law sure knows that her husband will add not less than three women to her and she will have no right to stop him. There is also the legal court marriage which also comes under the marriage act. It binds one man to one woman legally in a monogamous union. This system of marriage legalizes the wife and her offspring to inherit property in the event of death [Igbetar 2008]. Finally there is the Traditional or Customary marriage which is conducted under native laws and customs of the people. This type of marriage could either be monogamous or polygamous. One notable aspect of this form of marriage is that, the woman is regarded as a chattel to be inherited as such in the event of death; she and her female children stand the chance of losing their husband/father's property. Only the male child is considered as heir.

It is worthy of note that the language of marriage is universal and cuts across all ethnic groups in Nigeria and beyond. Studies by Kiecolt and Newton [2001] reveal that married individuals are healthier than widows, divorced or never married. While Myer (2005) attests that marriage enhances happiness for at least two reasons. First married couples are more likely to enjoy an enduring, supportive, intimate relationship and are less likely to suffer loneliness. A good marriage gives each partner a dependable companion, a lover and a friend. However, as the society is fast changing due to technological advancement and the world seen as a global village thus the people's marital values which were based on traditional values and religious principles are fast decaying. Sexual norms which gave us our identity as Nigerians which were cherished are now treated with laxity. For example, premarital sex, out of wedlock births, family break ups are no longer news. Homosexuality, oral sex, anal sex and masturbation are now common. Social groups such as Lesbians, Gays, Bisexual, and Transgender Individuals (LGBTI) now parade themselves openly and agitate for rights. This trend is most popular with the young adults who seem to be in the Nigerian Universities or graduates who should be settling down to family life. If this is not checked it can metamorphosed into the highest state of moral decay which is the culmination of two people of the same sex into marriage [gay or same sex] as seen in other parts of the world.

In northern Nigeria, it is common to hear boys being addressed as Dan Daudu or Dan Hamsin in the local parlance which are names for gays. It should be noted that the Senate of the Federal Republic of Nigeria recently enacted a prohibition bill in 2011 which not only declares same sex marriage illegal, it also passed severe penalty on those found supporting it. This may affect the mental-health of those concerned. Although this bill was enacted, one cannot lose sight of the fact that a lot of people especially the youth are already trapped in this self destructive and weird behaviour. This practice is common and popular among the adolescents who desire to respond to concurrent heterosexual
and homosexual feelings. In non-coeducational schools, it begins with a romantic attraction of the same-sex to each other and gradually a habit is formed. Adults who are homosexuals today most likely started the practice in their youthful days, rather than outright castigation and discrimination over a behaviour they have no control over. More so this act would encourage individuals to go underground where they would discreetly practice this act in risky settings thereby exposing themselves to diseases associated with sex, prominent among which is HIV/AIDS and cancers. Closely related to this Medical hazard is Social stigma, prejudice and discrimination stemming from negative societal attitudes towards homosexuals which can likely lead to mental disorder and even risk of suicide among homosexuals and bisexuals compared to their heterosexual peers or counterparts (Gibson 1987). Religiously they stand a chance of excommunication from the church.

Several reasons are advanced for this sexual abnormality. For example, Evolutionary Theorist argue that we can best understand why people behave the way they do because certain genes are inherited which accounts for one's present behaviour (Mendel 1945). Mendel developed the laws of heredity which teaches us that character traits are transmitted from parents to offspring. Each normal human cell has 46 chromosomes which are arranged in 22 pairs, one chromosome in each pair comes from the father and one from the mother. The first 22 pairs of chromosomes program the development of the body and brain and the last pair, the sex chromosomes, determines sex. In females both chromosomes in the 23rd pair are called x chromosomes. In males the mother contributes an x but the father contributes a y chromosome. This one chromosome is responsible for the variance in biological sex. Abnormalities in the sex chromosomal pair can cause ambiguous sexual characteristics (Durand and Barlow 2000).

Bandura (1977) of the Social Learning Theory observes that animals learn new behaviours by observing what happens to someone else in a given situation. This he said can be achieved through modeling or observational learning. Young people learn and copy the behaviour of celebrities, including those who practice same sex. Aside from inheriting behavioral traits, they can also be learnt.

Today the act of homosexuality seems to increase among the young people in our Tertiary Institutions as they watch celebrities and same sex-married couples assert their rights. Whether this practice is accepted by Nigerians or not the youth will continue to practice homosexuality as a life-style. Counselling being a helping profession should rather educate the society, on the medical, social and religious effects this wired behavior would have on the Citizenry, this will enable them take meaningful decisions and refrain from such behavior. The application of the existentialist theory is applied to achieve this.

Statement of Problem
Every society has its own set of norms to determine what is right or wrong in their beliefs, customs, values and interest. In Nigeria, irrespective of religion or ethnicity, similarity is shared on moral issues of sexuality and marital values. What is considered normal in western countries may not necessarily be acceptable in Nigeria. For instance, while same-sex may be considered normal in western world being propagated through films, internet etc. Nigerians seem to disapprove of it because of the implications it has on individuals and the society. It is therefore necessary to empirically determine the Medical, Social and Religious perceptions this practice would have on the populace especially among the students in universities in Benue State, and this will further help them to make informed choices.

Purpose for the Study
The purpose of the study is to:
1. examine the Social perception of Same-Sex marriage among undergraduates in Benue State
2. to ascertain the Religious perceptions of Same-Sex marriage among undergraduates in Benue State.
3. to determine the Medical perceptions of Same-Sex marriage among undergraduates in Benue State.
Research Questions
The following Research questions would guide the study:
1. What are the Social perceptions of undergraduates on Same-Sex marriage in Benue State?
2. What are the religious perceptions of Undergraduates on Same-Sex marriage in Benue State?
3. What are the medical perceptions of undergraduates on Same-Sex marriage in Benue State?

Significance of the Study
The findings of this study would be of immense help to the teaming number of adolescents who are caught in their weird behaviour as the social, religious and medical consequences will be exposed to them for meaningful decisions rather than punishing them.

Results of the study would also be a ready tool in the hands of counselling professionals who will use it to assist their clients. Policy makers and implementers will use the findings to review policies and laws made against offenders. It will provide empirical data on undergraduates' perception of Same-Sex marriage.

Methodology
The design of the study is the survey. The population for is thirty five thousand nine hundred and sixty two undergraduates (35,962). At the moment there are three universities in the state. Information available from Benue State Education Management Information Technology (EMIS/ICT 2013) shows that Benue State University has a population of 22,316. University of Agriculture has 12,396 and University of Mkar 1,250. Participants in the study consisted of 200 undergraduates selected from the three universities in Benue state using the Proportionate Stratified Random Sampling technique. The instrument used is a questionnaire entitled Undergraduates perception of Same-Sex Marriage (UPSSM). UPSSM has three sections (1-3). Section A comprised 5 items and sought information on social perception. Section B had 4 items and measured the religious variable and Section C had six items and measured the medical perception respectively. The modified Liket scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) was used and scored 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The items were developed by the researchers to cover the variables raised in the research questions. Two experts in Educational psychology and one in Measurement and Evaluation validated the instrument to ensure face and content validity. Crombach-alfa method was adopted to determine the internal consistency of the items and a reliability coefficient of 0.82 was obtained. Mean scores and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions.

Research Question 1 What are the Social perceptions of undergraduates on Same-Sex marriage in Benue State?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>STD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Involving in same sex marriage will make me an object of scorn</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Involving in same sex marriage will put my life at risk</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Involving in same sex marriage will put my parents at risk</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Involving in same sex will lead to abandonment by my family</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>No serious assignment will be given to me in my community, if involved in same sex marriage</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results of Table one show that all the items on social perception of same sex marriage have mean scores of 3.13, 3.10, 2.93, 2.98 and 3.23 with standard deviation of 1.08, 1.06, 1.04, 1.02 and below 1 which indicates that undergraduates perceive that same sex marriage negatively. The standard deviation of below 1 is an indication of homogeneity of responses.

**Research Question Two:** What are the religious perceptions of undergraduates on Same-Sex Marriage in Benue State?

**Table 2: Mean and standard Deviation on Religious perceptions of Undergraduates on Same-Sex Marriage in Benue State**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>STD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Involving in same sex will lead to excommunication in the church</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Involving in same sex is punishable by external death</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Involving in same sex marriage will bring shame to my church</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>My church will not conduct any same sex marriage</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results of Table two show that all the items on religious perception of same-sex marriage have mean scores of 3.63, 3.32, 3.41 and 3.31 with standard deviation of 1 and below. This indicates that undergraduates perceive Same-Sex marriage negatively. Their standard deviation of below 1 shows the homogeneity of respondents.

**Research Question Three:** What are the medical perceptions of undergraduates on Same-Sex Marriage in Benue State?

**Table 3: Mean and standard Deviation on Medical Perception of Undergraduates on Same-Sex Marriage in Benue State.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>STD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Lesbians who have no children are at a high risk of breast cancer</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Sex toys can transmit sexually transmitted diseases</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Same sex will make me not have biological children</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Same sex puts you at risk of arthritis</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Oral genital sex puts one at risk of HIV/AIDS</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Same sex will make me not have biological children</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Result of Table three shows that all the items on medical perception of Same-Sex marriage on undergraduates have mean scores of 3.10, 3.01, 3.34, 3.20, 3.17 and 3.36 respectively. This indicates that undergraduates perceive same sex marriage negatively. The standard deviation of below 1 shows the homogeneity of the respondents.

**Discussion of Findings**

The result obtained from respondents on their social perception of same sex marriage, result shows that undergraduates perceive same-sex marriage negatively. The respondents attest that those who practice it are despised by members of the society. Furthermore they are ridiculed as they move around, Their parents are also mocked and finally no serious assignment would be given to them in their communities. These findings agree with Westlake and Westlake (1992) who attest that marriage is a career and every young person
looks forward to the time they would enter the marriage institution and start a family. In addition Kiecolt and Newton (2001) said that married couples are happier than those who are divorced or never married. This study has further confirmed the position of the Federal Government of Nigeria in banning this form of marriage for all her citizens.

Secondly in answering research question two which sought to address the perception of Undergraduate on the Religion variable of Same-Sex Marriage, most of the respondents agreed that their churches do not allow the practice of Same-Sex marriage. This result agrees with Nwobi (1997) who affirmed that marriage is a religious sacrament which is conducted between the man and the woman, both taking vows to live together till death. This is also supported by Islamic faith which authorizes a man to have as many as four wives, ruling out the possibility of gay. Those caught in this wired behavior will be shown the way out of the church.

Finally the third research question which is on medical perception, childlessness was identified as a major ill of Same-Sex Marriage. This finding agrees with Kore (2005) who advanced that the husband and wife and even clan members look to the family for children. Africans and Nigerians in particular attach a high premium on children. Children are seen as a continuity of the family lineage and marriage in particular is for the production of children. No matter how beautiful a marriage is, it suffers from full acceptance if there are no children.

Conclusion
The following conclusions are drawn:
Same-Sex Marriage is seen as a deviant behaviour in the Nigerian society and it requires counselling.

The only form of marriage accepted in Nigeria by law and evidence by this study is the heterosexual marriage which allows only people of opposite sex, male and female to be joined either traditionally, religiously and through the court registry. Same-Sex marriage has medical hazards such as barrenness, cancers etc. Same-Sex marriage brings about social discrimination and physical attack on perpetrators. Same-Sex Marriage can lead to excommunication from the church.

Implications for Counselling
Mental health includes our emotional, psychological and social well-being. It influences how we think, feel and act. It also determines how we handle stress, relate to others and how choices are made. Mental health is important at every stage of life from childhood, adolescents and adulthood.

Mental health problems are common but help is available through counselling. In this case the existentialist approach of psychotherapy is applied. The major concern of Existential Counselling is to assist the individual find meaning for his existence. It is assumed that the search for meaning in life is the central goal of human existence and that most forms of human psychological dysfunctions are due wholly or in part to man's inability to finds meaning to his existence. When he does, he would be able to bear the suffering, problems and difficulties. Finally the choices we make in life are very important and they form part of personality, therefore when choices are made wrongly people should consider making amends.

Recommendations
The following recommendations are made to serve as preventive measures;
1. Churches and religious organizations should organize marriage seminars for young people to educate them on proper Christian norms for marriage.
2. Guidance Counsellors should organize group counseling for youth where, premarital counselling and sexual behaviours will be taught.
3. Health workers and Non-Governmental Organizations should organize seminars where health hazards associated with Same-Sex relationships are taught for proper decision making.

References
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