

Grappling With the Issue of Homosexuality: Perceptions, Attitudes, and Beliefs among High School Students in Kenya

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Abstract

While the past decade has seen an improvement in attitudes toward homosexuality, negative attitudes are still prevalent in many parts of the world. In general, increased levels of education tend to be predictive of relatively positive attitudes toward homosexuality. However, in most sub-Saharan countries, it is still believed that people are born heterosexual and that nonheterosexuals are social deviants who should be prosecuted. One such country is Kenya, where homosexuality is illegal and attracts a fine or jail term. The purpose of this study was to examine high school students' perceptions of homosexuality in Kenya. The participants included 1,250 high school students who completed a questionnaire on perceptions of homosexuality. The results showed that 41% claimed homosexuality is practiced in schools and 61% believed homosexuality is practiced mostly in single-sex boarding schools. Consistently, 52% believed sexual starvation to be the main cause of homosexuality. Also, 95% believed homosexuality is abnormal, 60% believed students who engage in homosexuality will not change to heterosexuality after school, 64% believed prayers can stop homosexuality, and 86% believed counseling can change students' sexual orientation. The consequences for homosexuality included punishment (66%), suspension from school (61%), and expulsion from school (49%). Significant gender and grade differences were found. The implications of the study findings are discussed.

Keywords: Homosexuality, Attitudes, Beliefs, High School, Kenya

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