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A Socio-demographic Study of Homosexuality in an Egyptian Sample

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Abstract

Although homosexuality has been dropped from the recent system of psychiatric classification, yet a corresponding shift in medical and public attitudes towards the problem has not occurred with much debate about its "nosological" status. This study aimed at highlighting the problem of homosexuality in an Egyptian sample from the socio-demographic point of view. The results showed that the prevalence of homosexuality is not very far from that in Western cultures. A difference has been found in the socio-demographic profile between male and female homosexuals. The age of starting homosexuality tended to be younger in males, with lower marriage rate and less religiosity than females. Furthermore, the homosexual relation was found more "indigenous" among females than males.

Dealing with the problem rather than denying is finally recommended.

Introduction Homosexuality is not, at all, a specific phenomenon of the modern world. It can be traced back in history to as early as the laws of "Hammurabi" in Babylon and the Ancient Egyptian papyri, in which it is referred to as an ancient custom of the "Gods".

Prior to 1970s, homosexuality, if considered at all, was seen as a "disorder". However, in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III-R) of the American Psychiatric Association, homosexuality has been deleted from the diagnostic categories. In spite of this, it is clear from the behaviour of therapists and other care giving workers that a corresponding shift in professional attitudes did not take place. Homosexuality affects both men and women, but female homosexuality (lesbianism) is less obvious and often neglected, compared to male homosexuality. No certainty is present regarding the exact aetiology of homosexuality. Although there is a claimed evidence of a genetic link in some and low levels of testosterone in others, other causative factors have been implicated as family patterning, experience, arrested psychosexual development... etc... A difference in attitudes and social customs related to homosexual, is

thought to exist between Western and non-Western societies.

Homosexual men of the modern "gay liberation" groups, claim passionately that their preference is a variant, if not an improvement, to normal being. Homosexuals - a "high risk" group for HIV infection - started to face some objections and increased fear challenging the alleged "rights" of homosexuals

For several reasons (including religious and cultural aspects), the problem of homosexuality has been understudied in Eastern societies like Egypt, which made concepts about the real magnitude, not certainly clear.

Aim of the Work The aim of the present study is to highlight the problem of homosexuality in an Egyptian sample from the socio-demographic point of view, in order to have a broader and a more precise view of the problem, its management and prevention.

Material and Methods The study included a heterogenous group (different ages, sexes, educational level etc) of 270 individuals

selected randomly. Each individual was given a structured questionnaire covering different items about the sexual orientation and behaviour, in addition to socio-demographic data and a scale for religiosity. The results were statistically analysed using the critical ratio, the corresponding values to the levels of significance were as follows:

Critical ratio	Level of significance
2.58 > >1.96	p < 0.05
3.29 > >2.58	p < 0.01
>3.29	p < 0.001
1.96 >	non significant (p > 0.05)

Results The study included 155 males and 115 females. For the male groups, 15 individuals admitted having homosexual experiences (9.67%), while 8 females reported having such experience (6.95%). The other non-homosexuals were taken as the control group.

The findings for the two groups compared to control and to each other were as follows:

(a) The age of starting homosexual practice

Age of onset	Male		Female		CR.
	n	%	n	%	
< 10	1	6.7	0	0	0.75
10-15	8	53.3	5	62.5	0.42
16-20	6	40	1	12.5	1.37
20-30	0	0	2	25	2.03*
Total	15	100	8	100	-

(b) The age of the other partner on first experience

Age of the other partner	Male		Female		CR.
	n	%	n	%	
< 15	5	33.3	2	25	41
16-30	6	40	2	25	72
31-50	3	20	4	50	1.49
- over 50	1	6.7	0	0	0.75
Total	15	100	8	100	-

No significant difference was found between male and female

(c) Marital status

Marital status	Male				Female				CR	CR	CR
	Controls		Homo.		Controls		Homo.				
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%			
Single	67	47.9	13	86.7	47	43.9	1	12.5	2.86*	1.74	3.47*
Married	65	46.4	2	13.3	48	44.9	5	62.5	2.46*	0.97	2.44*
Others	8	5.7	0	0	12	11.2	2	25	0.95	1.15	2.03*
Total	140	100	15	100	97	100	8	100	-	-	-

* = significant

Homosexual males are less likely to be married than homosexual females.

(d) Educational level

Educational level	Male				Female				CR	CR	CR	
	Controls		Homo.		Controls		Homo.					
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%				
Illiterate	6	4.3	0	0	5	4.5	0	0	0.82	0.61	0	4.9
Read only	16	11.4	1	6.7	15	13.4	0	0	0.56	1.11	0.75	14.7
Read & Write	1	0.71	0	0	10	8.9	3	37.5	0.33	1.31	2.54	9.8
Primary School	22	15.7	3	20	20	17.9	0	0	0.43	0.55	1.36	19.6
Prep School	22	15.7	5	33.3	23	20.5	1	12.5	1.71	0.86	1.08	22.5
Secondary Sch.	32	22.9	2	13.3	39	34.8	4	50	0.85	-	1.91	28.4
Above sec.	12	8.6	1	6.7	0	0	0	0	0.25	-	0.75	0
Univ.	25	17.9	3	20	0	0	0	0	0.21	-	1.36	0
Post graduate	4	2.9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.66	-	0	0
	140	100	15	100	112	100	8	100	-	-	-	-

(e) Religiosity

Religiosity	Male				Female				CR	CR	CR
	Controls ¹		Homo. ²		Controls ³		Homo. ⁴				
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%			
Not reported	0	0	0	0	9	9.3	0	0	0	0.9	0
religious and practice	20	14.3	5	33.3	1	1.0	2	25	1.91	3.91*	0.41
religious and irregular in practice	11	7.9	1	6.7	15	15.5	1	12.5	0.16	0.22	0.47
religious but no practice	109	77.9	9	60	82	84.5	5	62.5	1.54	1.59	0.12
Total	140	100	15	100	97	100	8	100	-	-	-

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as male homosexuality. Several aspects could be considered in interpreting these results. The first is a biological one reflecting the difference in sexual activity between men and women, in the sense that a female can have successful sexual intercourse without a desire, unlike the case in males, where desire is an important prerequisite for development of erection which is a necessary step in successful intercourse. The second factor is related to social expectance and gender role behaviour, where a female is expected to be dependent and non-assertive, hence, not accepted as being unmarried. The third factor is of economic origin, where females may accept to be married against their will, just for financial support. Thus, women having a "female lover" may accept her marriage, for social and financial reasons, without interfering with her true sexual orientation.

As regards the educational level, there was no significant difference from the control group in male homosexuals, but there was more prevalence of "uneducation" among females. It seems that uneducated women have less chances for mixing with it the other sex, and thus, homosexual activity may be an overreaction to this.

For religiosity, scores were significantly higher in homosexual females than in males, which may be explained by the fact that there is not much mentioning of lesbianism in religious books, thus, it has a less negative religious attitude than male homosexuality.

The parental attitude, socialization and housing conditions were found not significantly different in homosexuals (men and women) from those in the control groups. It seems that housing may have its effect in incestuous relations and other sexual perversions, rather than true sexual orientation. It appears also that homosexuality has no relation to whether parents were restrictive or permissive. It might be that parental attitude and cross gender behaviour affect "gender identity" rather than "sexual orientation", unlike what has been found by other studies.

Concerning the pattern of relationships with the other partner, variations do exist, especially for homosexual men i.e. some are monogamous (having one partner only) and others have open non-monogamous homosexual relations.

Homosexual women are more likely to have monogamous relation. It is to be mentioned here that even in heterosexual relations, women, more likely than men, tend to link sexual activity with emotional intimacy.

Nearly one third of male homosexuals in the study reported feeling guilty and bothered with themselves, after the first homosexual experience, and nearly half of them reported that they want to stop but are unable to do so. This means that even the homosexuals, themselves, accept the public view of homosexuality as being sinful and shameful, which may explain the higher suicide rates among homosexuals, found by other studies. However, this idea is now being challenged by the modern views declared by the Western homosexuals, who consider themselves even a superior race to heterosexuals, to the extent that there are now several hundreds of the so called "gay liberation groups" all over the Western world.

The final overall impression shown by the present study is that homosexuality does represent a problem in Egypt and it is better to be studied and dealt with, rather than to be ignored and neglected.

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دراسة إجتماعية ديموغرافية للجنسية المثلية لدى عينة مصرية

رغم أن فئة الجنسية المثلية Homosexuality قد أسقطت من نظم تصنيف الطب النفسى الحديثة، إلا أنه لم يحدث تغير فى إتجاهات الأوساط الطبية والرأى العام نحو المشكلة بل ويزداد الجدل حول "أسبابها".

وتهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى إلقاء الضوء على المشكلة فى عينة مصرية من زواياة إجتماعية وديموغرافية. وقد بينت النتائج أن شيوع الجنسية المثليه فى تلك العينة لايبعد كثيرا عما هو موجود فى المجتمعات الغربية. كما ظهرت فروق فى البروفيل الإجتماعى الديموغرافى بين النساء والرجال الممارسين للجنسية المثلية. وكان سن الذكور أقل من سن الإناث عند بداية الممارسة. كما كانت نسبة إقبالهم (أى الذكور) على الزواج والتدين أقل مما هى عليه لدى الإناث. فضلا عن ذلك وجد أن العلاقة الجنسية المثلية بين الإناث أكثر "تأصلا" منها لدى الرجال.

وتقترح الدراسة فى النهاية معالجة المشكلة بدلا من إنكار وجودها.