

Assessment of the Sexual Orientation of Youth

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ABSTRACT

Sexual orientation is a controversial and sensitive issue, and very few individuals openly express their sexual preferences. The present study aims to understand the sexual orientation of youth. The study was conducted among 144 participants, including 71 males and 73 females. The Sexual Orientation Scale, developed by Sagayaraj and Gopal Ram (2020), was used to assess the sexual orientation of the participants. The sample was selected using a simple random sampling technique, and t-tests were conducted to analyze the results. The findings revealed significant gender differences in heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality, with males scoring higher in heterosexuality and females scoring higher in homosexual and bisexual orientations. No significant difference was observed in asexuality, indicating similar levels across males and females. These results suggest that gender influences sexual orientation in most dimensions, except for asexuality.

Keywords: *Sexual orientation, Homosexuality, Heterosexuality, Asexuality and Bisexuality*

Sexual development is an aspect of human development. Puberty begins for most people between the ages of nine and 12 and involves many changes: biophysical maturing of the body, self-consciousness about one's body, and the advent of sexual desires. Sexual activity is rare during this period—only 2% of adolescents have had sex by age 12 (Finer & Philbin, 2013). However, masturbation becomes more common during this time, and adolescents may engage in kissing or dating. Sexually playful behavior may also occur during childhood and early adolescence: this may involve showing one's genitals to a friend, looking at others' genitals, and even touching a friend's genitals. However, this is not necessarily related to sexual orientation and is typically driven by curiosity (de Graff & Rademakers, 2006). Sexuality often flourishes during the teenage years; interest and engagement in sexual activity advances during this time (Hall & Rounds, 2013). By age 19, over 70% of adolescents have had sex (Finer & Philbin, 2013). Strong sexual feelings are often accompanied by strong romantic feelings associated with initial romantic interests and relationships. Sexuality continues to play a strong role in people's personal lives and relationships through adulthood and into older adulthood.

Sexual orientation refers to an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attractions to men, women, or both sexes. Sexual orientation also refers to a person's sense of identity based on those attractions, related behaviors, and membership in a community of others who share those attractions. Research over several decades has demonstrated that

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sexual orientation ranges along a continuum, from exclusive attraction to the other sex to exclusive attraction to the same sex.

However, sexual orientation is usually discussed in terms of four categories:

- Heterosexual (having emotional, romantic, or sexual attractions to members of the other sex)
- Homosexual (having emotional, romantic, or sexual attractions to members of one's own sex)
- Bisexual (having emotional, romantic, or sexual attractions to both men and women)
- Asexual (not having emotional, romantic, or sexual attractions to men or women)

This range of behaviors and attractions has been described in various cultures and nations throughout the world. Many cultures use identity labels to describe people who express these attractions. In the United States, the most frequent labels are lesbians (women attracted to women), gay men (men attracted to men), and bisexual people (men or women attracted to both sexes). However, some people may use different labels or none at all (APA, 2008).

Asking questions about sexual orientation for the purposes of understanding clients or collecting data from research participants is a sensitive matter but should not be avoided. Questions about race/ethnicity, sex/gender, and age are routinely asked by service providers and researchers, yet inquiries about sexual orientation are often not made.

Research on sexual orientation has been an ongoing area of exploration. Numerous studies have been conducted to better understand sexual orientation. In past decades, it was considered a sensitive topic, and many individuals were hesitant to disclose their sexual orientation.

Studies on the sexual orientation of youth are very limited in India. The present study attempts to understand the sexual orientation of youth.

Objectives

- To find out whether there is a significant difference between males and females on the sexual orientation dimension of heterosexuality.
- To find out whether there is a significant difference between males and females on the sexual orientation dimension of homosexuality.
- To find out whether there is a significant difference between males and females on the sexual orientation dimension of asexuality.
- To find out whether there is a significant difference between males and females on the sexual orientation dimension of bisexuality.

Hypotheses

- There will be a significant difference between males and females on the sexual orientation dimension of heterosexuality.
- There will be a significant difference between males and females on the sexual orientation dimension of homosexuality.
- There will be a significant difference between males and females on the sexual orientation dimension of asexuality.
- There will be a significant difference between males and females on the sexual orientation dimension of bisexuality.

METHOD

Participants

The researcher randomly selected 144 participants for the study. Sample consisted of 144 participants among which 71 are males and 73 are females.

Measures

The Sexual Orientation Scale developed by Sagayaraj and Gopal Ram (2020) consists of 32 items designed to identify the sexual preferences of males and females. The test demonstrates high test-retest reliability ($r = 0.945$) and possesses strong face validity, construct validity, and divergent validity.

Procedure

The participants of the present study comprised young adults aged 18 to 30 years, including 71 males and 73 females. A simple random sampling technique was employed to select the participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and utmost confidentiality was maintained during the administration of the scale.

RESULTS

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of sexual orientation dimensions based on gender

Dimensions	Males N=71		Females N=73	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
HT	15.77	4.479	11.78	5.026
HO	1.80	3.174	3.92	4.527
BI	2.48	3.056	4.22	4.270
AS	7.80	3.289	7.23	3.821

Table 2: t values of sexual orientation for males and females

Dimension	t value	Sig
HT	5.029	.01*
HO	3.238	.01*
BI	2.806	.01*
AS	.958	.34

**significant at .01 level*

The purpose of the study was to determine the sexual orientations of youth. For the study, sexual orientation scale developed by Sagayaraj and Gopal Ram (2020) was employed to identify the sexual orientation of males and females. The sample consisted of 144 participants, including 71 males and 73 females. The dimensions of sexual orientation considered in this study were heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, and asexuality.

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of sexual orientation dimensions based on gender. Mean values of males for heterosexuality is 15.77 for males and 11.78 for females. Mean values of heterosexuality is higher in males when compared to females. This values indicate that males prefer to have heterosexual relationships than females.

Mean values of homosexuality for males is 1.80 whereas for females is 3.92. Mean values of homosexuality is higher in females than in males. These values indicate that females prefer homosexuality than males.

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With respect to bisexuality, mean value obtained for males is 2.48 and females is 4.22. Mean value of bisexuality is higher in females than in males. These values indicate that females prefer bisexual relationships than males.

While considering the asexuality dimension, mean value obtained for males is 7.80 and for females is 7.23. Mean value of asexuality is higher in males than in females. Result indicates that males prefer to be asexual than females.

The t-test was conducted to determine whether there were significant gender differences across the four dimensions of sexual orientation: heterosexuality (HT), homosexuality (HO), bisexuality (BI), and asexuality (AS). Table 2 indicates the t values of sexual orientation for males and females.

The results show that the t-value for heterosexuality ($t = 5.029$, $p < .01$) is statistically significant. Similarly, the t-values for homosexuality ($t = 3.238$, $p < .01$) and bisexuality ($t = 2.806$, $p < .01$) are also significant. In contrast, the t-value for asexuality ($t = 0.958$, $p = .34$) is not statistically significant.

DISCUSSION

The study aimed to explore the sexual orientation patterns among youth, focusing on four key dimensions: heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, and asexuality. The results reveal distinct gender-based differences in orientation preferences.

The findings show that males scored higher in heterosexuality than females, suggesting that male students are more inclined toward opposite-sex attraction and relationships. This may reflect the influence of traditional gender norms and societal expectations that often emphasize heterosexuality among men in Indian culture. Similar results are obtained in the study conducted by Sagayaraj and Gopal Ram (2020).

On the other hand, females scored higher in homosexuality and bisexuality, indicating a greater openness among female students to same-sex or dual-sex attraction. This trend may be linked to growing awareness, emotional expressiveness, and changing social perceptions that allow women to explore diverse forms of attraction more comfortably. This finding is supported by Sagayaraj and Gopal Ram (2020), whose results are consistent with the findings of the present study. Morocco et al (2013) found that lesbian or bisexual women are more likely to experience sexual assault by a stranger and a known person than a heterosexual person.

With respect to asexuality, males scored slightly higher than females, implying that some male students may show reduced interest in sexual relationships. This could be due to factors such as personal values, psychological factors, or hesitation shaped by social and cultural pressures.

The obtained t-value for heterosexual dimension indicates a highly significant difference between males and females in their level of heterosexual orientation. This suggests that males and females differ considerably in their heterosexual preferences, with one gender showing stronger heterosexual orientation than the other.

The t-value for homosexual orientation of youth also shows a significant difference between males and females in homosexual orientation. This implies that gender plays a notable role

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in homosexual tendencies, with males and females displaying different levels of homosexual orientation.

The t-value for bisexual dimension reveals a significant difference between males and females in bisexual orientation. This indicates that males and females vary in their degree of attraction toward both sexes.

The t-value obtained for asexuality is not significant, suggesting that there is no meaningful difference between males and females in asexual orientation. Both genders show similar levels of asexual preferences, indicating that asexuality is not influenced by gender differences in this sample.

Remafedi(1992) reported that 1.1% of teens identify themselves as gay or bisexual and 4.5% stated that their main attraction was to individuals of the same sex. Oswalt & Wyatt (2013) and Li et.al. (2022) found that females with bisexual orientation tend to have multiple sexual partners and risky sexual behaviours.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the findings suggest that gender differences exist in heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual orientations but not in asexual orientation. Males predominantly prefer heterosexual and asexual orientations, whereas females show relatively higher tendencies toward homosexual and bisexual orientations.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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