

Gender and Locale Influences on Sexual Attitudes: The Role of Parenting Styles, Religiosity, And Self-Esteem in Hnahthial District, Mizoram

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Abstract

The study examines the influence of gender and locale on sexual attitudes, in Hnahthial District, Mizoram. It investigates the impact of parenting styles, religiosity and self-esteem on sexual attitudes of male and female youth in rural and urban areas. Data were collected from 77 respondents using structured questionnaires. The results indicate that gender had a significant effect on attitudes towards homosexuality ($p = 0.002$) with females having more positive attitudes than males. The locale was also significant for sexual attitudes with urban residents having more progressive attitudes than rural respondents ($p = 0.016$) on religiosity. Significant gender differences were identified in attitudes towards homosexuality ($r = .347$, $p = .002$) with females indicating more positive attitudes towards homosexuality. Authoritative parenting is positively associated with premarital sex ($r = .285$, $p = .012$), pornography ($r = .224$, $p = .050$) and attitudes towards homosexuality ($r = .407$, $p = .000$) suggesting respondents raised with authoritative parenting had more accepting sexual attitudes. The findings revealed the importance of gender, parenting style, and religiosity on sexual attitudes and how sociocultural factors have considerable influences on sexual attitudes with gender differences playing an important role in shaping attitudes.

Keywords: Gender, Locale, Parenting Styles, Religiosity, Self-Esteem, Sexual Attitudes

INTRODUCTION

A complex interaction of psychological, familial, cultural, and environmental factors shapes sexual attitudes, which are defined as people's beliefs, feelings, and predispositions towards sexual behaviours and identities (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1987). It is crucial to comprehend these attitudes in youth because they have an impact on social relationships, health outcomes, and sexual decision-making. Traditional values, religious beliefs, and family structures have a significant impact on how young people in Mizoram, a predominantly Christian state in Northeast India, view sexuality.

Community cohesion, moral behaviour, and adherence to Christian religious norms are highly valued in Mizo culture. With an emphasis on heterosexuality, premarital chastity, and the sanctity of marriage, the community has historically held conservative views on sexual behaviour (Lalrinawmi, 2017). Young people negotiate their sexual attitudes against the backdrop of these cultural and religious expectations. However, these attitudes may be changing as a result of fast social change, urbanisation, and greater exposure to international media, which are bringing in a wider range of perspectives, especially among

urban youth.

One significant familial factor affecting young people's development, including their sexual attitudes, is parenting style. The three parenting styles identified by Baumrind (1971)—permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative—offer a framework for comprehending how parental warmth, control, and communication affect youth behaviour. Healthy sexual attitudes and open communication about sexuality are associated with authoritative parenting, which is defined by high responsiveness and reasonable control (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). On the other hand, adolescents may develop excessively liberal or restrictive sexual attitudes as a result of permissive parenting, which is characterised by loose control, and authoritarian parenting, which is characterised by rigid rules and little warmth (Lamborn et al., 1991). Christian values, which place a strong emphasis on moral instruction and discipline, may have a unique connection to Mizoram's parenting practices.

Sexual attitudes are also significantly influenced by religiosity, or the level of religious involvement and commitment. It includes convictions, customs, and the significance of religion in day-to-day existence (Hill & Pargament, 2003). Christianity has a strong hold on Mizo social life, influencing standards of moral behaviour, gender roles, and sexuality. More conservative sexual views that discourage premarital sex, homosexuality, and pornography have been repeatedly linked to higher levels of religiosity (Regnerus, 2007; Rostosky et al., 2003). In Mizoram, where religious teachings and church institutions play a major role in community life, this influence is especially noticeable.

Youth's perceptions and interactions with their sexuality are influenced by self-esteem, or an individual's overall sense of self-worth (Rosenberg, 1965). While low self-esteem may leave young people more vulnerable to peer pressure or internal conflict over sexual norms, high self-esteem can promote greater autonomy and confidence in sexual decision-making (Goodson et al., 2006). Adherence to social norms and community approval can also influence self-esteem in collectivist cultures like Mizoram.

In light of this, the current study investigates how youth sexual attitudes in Hnahthial District, Mizoram, are influenced by gender, location, parenting styles, religiosity, and self-esteem.

Objectives

1. To examine the influence of gender on sexual attitudes among youth in Hnahthial District.
2. To assess the impact of locale (urban vs. rural) on sexual attitudes and religiosity.
3. To investigate the relationship between parenting styles and sexual attitudes.
4. To analyse the role of religiosity in shaping sexual attitudes.
5. To identify gender differences in the relationship between parenting style and sexual attitudes.

Hypotheses

1. There will be significant differences in sexual attitudes based on gender, with females showing more positive sexual attitudes than males.
2. There will be a significant difference in sexual attitudes based on locale, with urban youth displaying more progressive attitudes than rural youth.
3. Authoritative parenting style will be positively correlated with permissive sexual attitudes.
4. Religiosity will be significantly associated with sexual attitudes, with higher religiosity corresponding to less permissive sexual attitudes.

Methodology

The study employed a quantitative research design to investigate how gender, locale, parenting styles, religiosity, and self-esteem influence sexual attitudes among youth in Hnahthial District, Mizoram. 77 youth participants were taken from two urban areas and three rural areas from the district of Hnahthial. The study also employed a factorial design, considering gender (male and female) and location (rural and urban) as independent variables. The data collection was conducted through house-to-house approach.

Tools used:

Sexual Attitude Scale (SAS, Amit Abraham, 1997): This instrument is a 70-item scale designed to measure five dimensions of sexuality. The subscales are designed on a five-point scale. Chronbach alphas' reliability test ranging from .93 to .83.

The Perceived Parenting Style Scale developed by Divya and Manikandan (2013). It consists of 30 items in which responses were elicited in a five point Likert scale. Alpha coefficient being 0.79, 0.81 and 0.86. Self Esteem Scale SES-DSDU was developed by Dr. Santosh Dhar and Dr. Upinder Dhar (2015). A 23-item scale measures global self-worth by measuring both high and low feelings about the self. All items are answered using a 5-point Likert scale with 0.87 reliability.

The Santa Clara Strength of Religious Faith Questionnaire (SCSRFQ, Plante. T, 2010) is a validated and reliable questionnaire that assess the strength of religious faith. It possesses 10 items, scored at a 4-point Likert type scoring scale. It was found to have coefficient alphas between .94 and .95.

Statistical Treatment of Data:

Parametric tests and procedures, including independent sample t-tests, analysis of variance (ANOVA), and Pearson Correlation were employed as the data acquired have acceptable normality as indicated by the skewness and kurtosis values.

Result and Interpretation

An independent samples t-test revealed a statistically significant gender difference in attitudes toward homosexuality, with females expressing significantly more positive attitudes than males, $t = -3.205$, $p = .002$. No significant gender differences were found in attitudes toward premarital sex, pornography, lesbianism, self-esteem, religiosity, or parenting style dimensions.

Table 1: Results of the Independent t-test examining the effect of Gender

t-test for Equality of Means						
		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Authoritative	Equal variances	0.336	75	0.738	0.22727	0.67713
	Equal variances	0.339	71.273	0.736	0.22727	0.67088
Authoritarian	Equal variances	0.409	75	0.684	0.50758	1.24219
	Equal variances	0.411	70.449	0.682	0.50758	1.23526
Permissive	Equal variances	0.372	75	0.711	0.52273	1.40648
	Equal variances	0.379	73.347	0.706	0.52273	1.37805

Religiosity	Equal variances	0.74	75	0.462	0.82576	1.11645
	Equal variances	0.729	65.257	0.468	0.82576	1.13207
Self Esteem	Equal variances	0.57	75	0.57	1.53788	2.69733
	Equal variances	0.578	72.093	0.565	1.53788	2.66182
Premarital sex	Equal variances	0.732	75	0.467	0.89394	1.2217
	Equal variances	0.742	72.3	0.46	0.89394	1.20432
Pornography	Equal variances	-1.847	75	0.069	-1.59848	0.86564
	Equal variances	-1.773	57.103	0.082	-1.59848	0.90156
Lesbianism	Equal variances	-0.226	75	0.822	-0.20455	0.9039
	Equal variances	-0.223	65.364	0.824	-0.20455	0.9162
Homosexuality	Equal variances	-3.205	75	0.002	-2.09848	0.65485
	Equal variances	-3.131	62.464	0.003	-2.09848	0.67025

Table 2: Results of Independent t-test examining the effect of locale

t-test for Equality of Means						
		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Authoritative	Equal variances	1.276	75	0.206	0.8473	0.66403
	Equal variances	1.28	74.998	0.205	0.8473	0.66209
Authoritarian	Equal variances	0.991	75	0.325	1.21216	1.22378
	Equal variances	0.995	74.946	0.323	1.21216	1.21869
Permissive	Equal variances	1.162	75	0.249	1.60541	1.38201
	Equal variances	1.163	74.735	0.249	1.60541	1.38095
Religiosity	Equal variances	-2.457	75	0.016	-2.62365	1.06772
	Equal variances	-2.486	71.438	0.015	-2.62365	1.05519
Self Esteem	Equal variances	1.31	75	0.194	3.46689	2.64738
	Equal variances	1.307	73.733	0.195	3.46689	2.65285
Premarital sex	Equal variances	0.544	75	0.588	0.65946	1.21201

	Equal variances	0.542	72.178	0.59	0.65946	1.21773
Pornography	Equal variances	-0.295	75	0.769	-0.25811	0.87618
	Equal variances	-0.293	72.365	0.77	-0.25811	0.88007
Lesbianism	Equal variances	-0.325	75	0.746	-0.29054	0.89499
	Equal variances	-0.323	72.279	0.748	-0.29054	0.89908
Homosexuality	Equal variances	0.899	75	0.372	0.61824	0.68792
	Equal variances	0.904	74.482	0.369	0.61824	0.68354

The independent samples t-test results indicated no significant differences between urban and rural youth regarding perceived parenting styles, self-esteem, and sexual attitudes. Specifically, authoritative parenting showed no significant difference, $t = 1.276$, $p = .206$; authoritarian parenting, $t = 0.991$, $p = .325$; and permissive parenting, $t = 1.162$, $p = .249$. Similarly, self-esteem scores did not differ significantly between locales, $t = 1.310$, $p = .194$. Sexual attitudes towards premarital sex, pornography, lesbianism, and homosexuality were also comparable across urban and rural youth, with all p-values exceeding .05.

However, religiosity was significantly higher among rural youth compared to urban youth, $t = -2.457$, $p = .016$, with a mean difference of -2.62 (95% CI: -4.75 to -0.50), suggesting stronger religious involvement in rural areas. This may reflect the more traditional and community-centred lifestyle prevalent in rural settings. Overall, except for religiosity, locale does not appear to influence parenting style perceptions, self-esteem, or sexual attitudes in this sample.

Table 3: ANOVA by Gender

ANOVA						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Authoritative	Between Groups	0.974	1	0.974	0.113	0.738
	Within Groups	648.455	75	8.646		
Authoritarian	Between Groups	4.858	1	4.858	0.167	0.684
	Within Groups	2182.311	75	29.097		
Permissive	Between Groups	5.153	1	5.153	0.138	0.711
	Within Groups	2797.705	75	37.303		
Religiosity	Between Groups	12.858	1	12.858	0.547	0.462
	Within Groups	1762.856	75	23.505		
Self Esteem	Between Groups	44.598	1	44.598	0.325	0.57
	Within Groups	10289.765	75	137.197		

Premarital sex	Between Groups	15.069	1	15.069	0.535	0.467
	Within Groups	2110.879	75	28.145		
Pornography	Between Groups	48.183	1	48.183	3.41	0.069
	Within Groups	1059.765	75	14.13		
Lesbianism	Between Groups	0.789	1	0.789	0.051	0.822
	Within Groups	1155.523	75	15.407		
Homosexuality	Between Groups	83.04	1	83.04	10.269	0.002
	Within Groups	606.492	75	8.087		

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine whether there were statistically significant differences between male and female participants on parenting styles, religiosity, self-esteem, and attitudes toward sexuality. The results indicated no significant gender differences in perceived parenting styles—authoritative ($F(1, 75) = 0.113, p = .738$), authoritarian ($F(1, 75) = 0.167, p = .684$), and permissive parenting ($F(1, 75) = 0.138, p = .711$). Similarly, religiosity ($F(1, 75) = 0.547, p = .462$), self-esteem ($F(1, 75) = 0.325, p = .570$), and attitudes toward premarital sex ($F(1, 75) = 0.535, p = .467$) did not differ significantly between genders.

However, a marginal gender difference was observed in attitudes toward pornography, with males tending to have a more favourable attitude, although the result approached but did not reach statistical significance ($F(1, 75) = 3.410, p = .069$).

A statistically significant gender difference was found in attitudes toward homosexuality, $F(1, 75) = 10.269, p = .002$. This suggests that females held significantly more positive attitudes toward homosexuality compared to males. No significant gender difference was found in attitudes toward lesbianism ($F(1, 75) = 0.051, p = .822$).

Table 4: ANOVA by Locale

ANOVA						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Authoritative	Between Groups	13.799	1	13.799	1.628	0.206
	Within Groups	635.63	75	8.475		
Authoritarian	Between Groups	28.242	1	28.242	0.981	0.325
	Within Groups	2158.927	75	28.786		
Permissive	Between Groups	49.538	1	49.538	1.349	0.249
	Within Groups	2753.319	75	36.711		
Religiosity	Between Groups	132.307	1	132.307	6.038	0.016

	Within Groups	1643.407	75	21.912		
Self Esteem	Between Groups	231.021	1	231.021	1.715	0.194
	Within Groups	10103.343	75	134.711		
Premarital sex	Between Groups	8.359	1	8.359	0.296	0.588
	Within Groups	2117.589	75	28.235		
Pornography	Between Groups	1.28	1	1.28	0.087	0.769
	Within Groups	1106.668	75	14.756		
Lesbianism	Between Groups	1.622	1	1.622	0.105	0.746
	Within Groups	1154.689	75	15.396		
Homosexuality	Between Groups	7.347	1	7.347	0.808	0.372
	Within Groups	682.186	75	9.096		

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to examine whether there were significant differences between groups (e.g., male and female) in parenting styles, religiosity, self-esteem, and attitudes toward sexuality.

The analysis revealed no statistically significant differences in perceptions of authoritative ($F(1, 75) = 1.628, p = .206$), authoritarian ($F(1, 75) = 0.981, p = .325$), and permissive parenting styles ($F(1, 75) = 1.349, p = .249$) across groups.

A significant group difference was found in religiosity, $F(1, 75) = 6.038, p = .016$, suggesting that levels of religiosity significantly varied between the two groups (e.g., males and females). Specifically, this result indicates that one group (likely females, based on prior trends) reported higher religiosity.

No significant group differences were observed for self-esteem ($F(1, 75) = 1.715, p = .194$), attitudes toward premarital sex ($F(1, 75) = 0.296, p = .588$), pornography ($F(1, 75) = 0.087, p = .769$), lesbianism ($F(1, 75) = 0.105, p = .746$), or homosexuality ($F(1, 75) = 0.808, p = .372$).

Table 5: Correlation

	Gender	Locale	Authoritative	Permissive	Religiosity	Premarital sex	Pornography	Lesbianism	Homosexuality
Gender	x								.347**
Locale		x			.273*				
Authoritative			x			.285*	.224*		.407**
Permissive				x			-.270*		
Religiosity		.273*			x			-.351**	
Premarital sex			.285*			x		.430**	.232*
Pornography			.224*	-.270*			x	.286*	.332**
Lesbianism					-.351**	.430**	.286*	x	.256*
Homosexuality	.347*		.407**			.232*	.332**	.256*	x

The correlation analysis revealed several significant relationships among the variables. Gender (SEX) was

found to be positively correlated with attitudes toward homosexuality ($r = .347, p = .002$), suggesting that female participants were more likely to hold positive attitudes toward homosexuality. No other correlations involving gender reached statistical significance.

Authoritative parenting demonstrated significant positive correlations with three sexual attitude variables: premarital sex ($r = .285, p = .012$), pornography ($r = .224, p = .050$), and homosexuality ($r = .407, p < .001$). These findings indicate that participants who perceived their parents as more authoritative tended to have more permissive or accepting attitudes toward these aspects of sexuality. The correlation with homosexuality was particularly strong, suggesting a notable influence of authoritative parenting on open-minded sexual attitudes.

Permissive parenting showed a significant negative correlation with pornography ($r = -.270, p = .018$), indicating that individuals who perceived their parents as permissive were less likely to endorse pornography positively. No other significant associations emerged for this parenting style, though it was positively correlated with Authoritarian parenting (not discussed here) due to overlapping parenting perceptions.

Religiosity was significantly negatively correlated with lesbianism ($r = -.351, p = .002$), indicating that more religious individuals held less accepting attitudes toward same-sex female relationships. Religiosity also showed a positive correlation with address ($r = .273, p = .016$), which may reflect geographic or cultural differences in religious involvement — for example, those from more rural or specific regions may report higher religiosity. Other correlations between religiosity and sexual attitudes were not statistically significant, though the negative associations with premarital sex ($r = -.215, p = .060$) and pornography ($r = -.180, p = .117$) approached significance. Self-esteem was not significantly correlated with any other variables in the matrix. This suggests that in this sample, self-esteem did not play a notable role in shaping attitudes toward parenting styles, religiosity, or sexual behaviours.

Regarding attitudes toward sexuality, several significant inter-correlations were observed. Premarital sex was positively correlated with lesbianism ($r = .430, p < .001$) and homosexuality ($r = .232, p = .042$), indicating that individuals more accepting of premarital sex also tended to hold positive attitudes toward same-sex relationships. Pornography was significantly positively correlated with lesbianism ($r = .286, p = .012$) and homosexuality ($r = .332, p = .003$), suggesting a shared pattern of permissive sexual attitudes. Lesbianism and homosexuality were themselves positively correlated ($r = .256, p = .025$), showing coherence in acceptance across different forms of same-sex.

Discussion

The present study examined the influence of gender, locale, parenting styles, religiosity, and self-esteem on sexual attitudes among youth in Hnahthial District, Mizoram. Several key findings emerged, pointing out both similarities and differences with earlier studies.

The study revealed notable gender differences in attitudes towards homosexuality, with women reporting more positive attitudes than men, which is consistent with Hypothesis 1. This is consistent with earlier studies that found women are generally more understanding and accepting of sexual minorities (Herek, 2002; Whitley, 2001). One explanation could be that women are more receptive to sexual orientation diversity because they are raised to be more compassionate and sensitive to others. Contrary to some previous findings that suggested men are generally more permissive regarding sexual behaviour, it is interesting to note that no significant gender differences were found in attitudes towards premarital sex, pornography, or lesbianism (Oliver & Hyde, 1993). This could be a reflection of changing gender norms

in Mizoram, where gender-based differences in some sexual domains may have decreased as a result of increased education and exposure to international viewpoints.

Contrary to Hypothesis 2, there were no significant differences in the sexual attitudes or self-esteem of young people living in urban and rural areas. But when compared to their urban counterparts, young people in rural areas were noticeably more religious. This result supports the idea that traditional values and greater adherence to religious practices are frequently emphasised in rural communities (Regnerus, 2007). The fact that there are no regional differences in sexuality attitudes is significant because it shows that cultural conservatism and Christianity may have an impact in Mizoram that cuts across geographic borders. It also suggests that media exposure and globalisation may be bridging the gap between urban and rural areas in influencing the sexual perspectives of young people.

Permissive sexual attitudes, especially with regard to premarital sex, pornography, and homosexuality, were positively connected with authoritative parenting, which is consistent with Hypothesis 3. This research backs up the claims made by Baumrind (1971) and Darling and Steinberg (1993) that open communication and warmth encourage healthier sexual exploration and more tolerant perspectives. In particular, supportive parenting may encourage young people to embrace more accepting views of stigmatised identities, as evidenced by the strong association found between authoritative parenting and acceptance of homosexuality. On the other hand, attitudes towards pornography were negatively correlated with permissive parenting, suggesting that lax parental supervision may not always promote liberal viewpoints in all areas of sexuality. This complex pattern emphasises how context and cultural expectations mediate the relationship between parenting and sexuality.

Religiosity was negatively linked to acceptance of lesbianism, which supports Hypothesis 4. This is because Christian teachings traditionally condemn same-sex relationships (Rostosky et al., 2003). While the correlations between religiosity and premarital sex or pornography did not attain statistical significance, the negative trends identified align with previous studies indicating that greater religious commitment correlates with more conservative sexual attitudes (Regnerus, 2007). This underscores the church's function as a significant socialising force in Mizoram, influencing youth attitudes towards sexuality in accordance with moral teachings.

Unexpectedly, self-esteem did not exhibit a significant correlation with any sexual attitudes or associated variables. This finding contrasts with research suggesting that elevated self-esteem fosters increased autonomy in sexual decision-making (Goodson et al., 2006). One possible explanation is that in collectivist cultures like Mizoram, sexual attitudes are more significantly shaped by communal and religious norms rather than by individual self-concept. Consequently, self-esteem may not be as pivotal in influencing sexual attitudes as it is in more individualistic cultures.

The fact that premarital sex, pornography, lesbianism, and homosexuality are all linked in a positive way suggests that people are generally open to different types of sexuality. This grouping of attitudes is similar to what Hendrick and Hendrick (1987) found, which said that sexual attitudes are a basic idea of sexual liberalism or conservatism. In the Mizo context, this means that even though there is a lot of religious conservatism, some young people are developing consistent, liberal views on many aspects of sexuality. This could be a sign of larger social changes and exposure to diverse sexual discourses.

Limitations and Implications

Like any other research this study is also not devoid of any flaws. It contains limitations which are as follows

1. The representative sample size was not feasible for the whole population of Mizo youth. One cannot conclude that the results obtained are representative of the Mizon youth and thus generalisation of the present finding is limited.
2. The nature of data is quantitative and may not be enough to explain the participants attitude towards sexuality in depth. Results are limited as it provided numerical descriptions rather than detailed narrative and unable to provide elaborate account of the participants perceptions
3. Most participants belonged to Christian religion: the inclusion of a mixed religion will be able to provide better results.

Despite these limitations, the study underscores the role of gender, parenting, and religiosity in shaping sexual attitudes among youth. The strong association between authoritative parenting and liberal attitudes toward sexuality points to the potential of family-based interventions that promote supportive and open communication. Similarly, the gender gap in attitudes toward homosexuality calls for targeted education and sensitization efforts, particularly among male youth.

Conclusion

This study found that gender and religiosity play central roles in shaping sexual attitudes among Mizo youth, with females showing more positive attitudes toward homosexuality and rural youth reporting higher religiosity. While religiosity was linked to more conservative attitudes, especially regarding same-sex relationships, authoritative parenting was linked to more accepting views on sexuality. Self-esteem had no discernible impact, indicating that social and religious norms might have a greater influence than personal characteristics. Overall, even though traditional values are still very much in place, Mizoram's culture is gradually changing, as evidenced by the openness shown by the youth, particularly those who are female and have supportive parents.

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