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Religiosity and attitude towards homosexuality: A comparative study on religious and non-religious young adults

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Abstract

Religion is a multifaceted notion that connects people or groups with their imagined sense of a higher power, spiritual force, by accommodating a range of beliefs, rituals, and organizational structures. In the modern era, attitudes toward homosexuality have undergone a significant shift, especially in light of scientific advancements and the global LGBTQ+ rights movement. Decriminalizing same-sex relationships and recognizing the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals have gained momentum globally, challenging long-standing prejudices and legal restrictions. Religion has a significant influence on how society perceives homosexuality. On the other hand, LGBTQ+ people tend to be more accepted in secular or religiously mixed communities, however persistent prejudices from culture and religion may still have an effect. The findings from this research reveal a significant moderate positive correlation between religiosity and negative attitudes, highlighting that individuals with higher religiosity levels tend to hold less accepting views of homosexuality. Gender differences emerged, with females exhibiting higher religiosity than males. These results align with existing literature, illustrating the complex influences of religious beliefs and gendered socialization on social attitudes.

Keywords: Religion; Homosexuality; Religiosity; Attitudes

1. Introduction

Religion is a multifaceted notion that connects people or groups with their imagined sense of a higher power, spiritual force, by accommodating a range of beliefs, rituals, and organizational structures. Any religion's core principles and beliefs establish its conception of the divine, existence, and humanity's role in the cosmos (Smart, 2000). These beliefs frequently involve stories concerning the beginnings of life, the presence of a higher power or powers, and the soul's fate. The rituals one follows and how they worship are also crucial elements including prayer, meditation, scriptures and communal worship which express religious devotion and foster a sense of connection with the divine (Davie, 2013). Furthermore, a lot of religions include moral and ethical principles that govern social relationships, personal behaviour, and how one should treat other people. These rules can be interpreted as coming from above or as a means of reaching enlightenment (King, 2002).

Religion has a detrimental impact on people's lives, identities, and perspectives. India is one of the most diverse countries religiously and culturally in the world. It is home to numerous indigenous and traditions as well as major world religions like Buddhism, Sikhism, Christianity, Islam, and Jainism. They have all made significant contributions to India's history, philosophy, art, and social structures, weaving together a complex web of practices and beliefs that occasionally clash and coexist (Smith, 2013). For approximately 80% of the population, Hinduism, the predominant religion in India, is a way of life that informs daily customs, holidays, rituals, and values.

The diversity of Hinduism is reflected through the fact that there is no one creator. The Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, and Ramayana are the holy texts referred to by the Hindus (Flood, 2003). Islam is the second most practiced

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religion in India, followed by Buddhism, with about 14% of the population practicing it. Islam as a religion was introduced by Islamic dynasties such as the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire through trade, invasions, and later their rule. Muslims in India place a strong emphasis on the Five Pillars of Islam, monotheism, and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. They are followers of the Islamic schools of Sunni and Shia. Islam has had a considerable cultural impact on India, affecting music, art, language, architecture, and other professions (Eaton, 2019).

Despite these legal developments, the acceptance of homosexuality by Indian society is still a complex issue. While LGBTQ+ rights are becoming more widely acknowledged in urban regions and among younger generations, many LGBTQ+ people—especially those living in rural areas continue to face intense discrimination, social shame, and pressure from their families. Homophobic attitudes still exist, often motivated by social norms and traditional religious beliefs. Issues like forced marriages, conversion therapy, and social exclusion—all of which are still prevalent—highlight the distinction between legal rights and social acceptance (Bhan & Bose, 2020). The landscape of LGBTQ+ rights in India is shifting as more individuals become aware of these concerns and push for legislative improvements, including rights to same-sex marriage, adoption benefits, and anti-discrimination laws.

Many Christian denominations have historically maintained that homosexuality contradicts what the Bible states. Scriptures from both the Old and New Testaments, such as Leviticus 18:22 and Romans 1:26-27, have been read as opposing same-sex unions. Because of this, many conservative Christian organizations have continued to hold views that view homosexuality as sinful. Still, a growing movement inside Christianity is advocating for equality and inclusion, reading the Bible more inclusively, and defending the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals (Gagnon, 2001; Schaefer, 2022). In the meanwhile, the Islamic faith condemns same-sex unions, and conventional Islamic law interprets the Quran and Hadith to describe them as immoral. The story of Lot in the Quran is frequently invoked to disprove homosexuality. Nonetheless, a rising corpus of work within some Muslim communities (El-Rouayheb, 2009; Al-Hariri, 2018) argues for a more inclusive reading of Islam, challenging traditional views, and endorsing LGBTQ+ rights. The Jewish perspectives on homosexuality are diverse. While Orthodox Judaism mostly upholds the historic, Torah-based bans against same-sex relationships, Conservative Judaism has changed toward more inclusive perspectives, particularly in recent decades. LGBTQ+ rights, including same-sex marriage and rabbinical ordination for LGBTQ+ individuals, are supported by the majority of Reform and Reconstructionist schools of Judaism (Klein, 2015).

Religion has a significant influence on how society perceives homosexuality. In countries like the Middle East and some parts of Asia where religious traditions are deeply ingrained, religious beliefs often shape social standards and legal structures. As a result, homosexual behaviour is illegal and stigmatized widely. On the other hand, LGBTQ+ people tend to be more accepted in secular or religiously mixed communities, however persistent prejudices from culture and religion may still have an effect. LGBTQ+ individuals who grew up in fervently religious homes may experience a significant deal of internal conflict between their religious beliefs and sexual orientation. This strain may result in mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and identity issues. While conventional religious views often conflict with LGBTQ+ rights, there is a growing movement that encourages acceptance and inclusivity across a wide range of religious traditions. Understanding this relationship in its entirety requires considering a range of historical and contemporary settings in addition to the different ways that individuals and cultures navigate the relationship between sexuality and religion.

2. Literature Review

Research done on physicians' attitudes toward homosexuality in India by B. Hafi et al reveals complex relationships between religious affiliations, knowledge, and attitudes. A cross-sectional study was done which found that physicians generally had positive attitudes toward homosexuality, with those not affiliated with any religion showing the most positive attitudes, followed by Hindus, while those belonging to Abrahamic religions, particularly Muslims, had more negative attitudes (B. Hafi et al., 2023). This study examined how religious affiliations influenced Indian physicians' attitudes toward homosexuality, highlighting the potential conflict between personal beliefs and professional responsibilities. Through a cross-sectional survey of physicians from various religious backgrounds, the study found that those with strong religious affiliations were more likely to hold negative views on homosexuality compared to their less religious or non-religious counterparts. Notable differences were observed among different religious groups, with some displaying more conservative attitudes. Despite these biases, many physicians recognized the importance of maintaining professionalism and unbiased patient care, although this was not consistent across the board. The findings underscore the need for targeted educational interventions and sensitivity training to address biases and promote a more inclusive healthcare environment, ensuring that personal beliefs do not interfere with the ethical duty to provide equitable care to all patients.

Another study highlighted inadequate knowledge about homosexuality among medical students and interns, despite neutral attitudes (Girish H. Banwari et al., 2015). Knowledge emerged as a significant predictor of attitudes, with higher knowledge associated with more positive attitudes (Girish H. Banwari et al., 2015). Cross-cultural comparisons revealed that physicians' attitudes toward spirituality, religiosity, and health varied significantly across countries, emphasizing the influence of ethnicity and culture on approaching spirituality in medical practice (G. Lucchetti et al., 2016). These findings emphasize the need for educational interventions and anti-stigma campaigns targeting physicians to improve knowledge and reduce negative attitudes toward homosexuality (B. Hafi et al., 2023).

Prabhu and Sinha (2023), investigated the interplay between attitudes toward homosexuality, gender role beliefs, and religiosity among mental health professionals in India. The study revealed that mental health professionals with higher levels of religiosity tend to hold more conservative views on homosexuality and traditional gender roles. Conversely, those with lower religiosity levels are more likely to exhibit accepting attitudes towards homosexuality and more progressive gender role beliefs. The findings underscore the significant influence of personal religious beliefs on professional attitudes within the mental health field, highlighting the need for enhanced training and awareness programs to promote unbiased and inclusive practices. This study advocates for a balanced approach where mental health professionals can separate personal beliefs from professional responsibilities, ensuring equitable and non-discriminatory care for all individuals, including those from the LGBTQ+ community.

Thattil and Stephen (2024), aimed to examine the relationship and impact of religious values, attitudes towards lesbians and gay men, and gender role beliefs among young adults. A quantitative approach was employed in this study, utilizing self-report inventories to gather data from 300 participants aged 18-25 years in Indian cities. The results indicated that there was a positive correlation between religious values and attitudes towards lesbians and gay men, a negative correlation between religious values and gender role beliefs, and between attitudes towards the lesbian and the gay men and the gender role beliefs.

3. Material and methods

3.1. Research Design

The study utilizes a correlational research design to examine the relationship between religiosity and attitudes towards homosexuality among young adults. This design is appropriate for investigating associations between variables without manipulating them, making it suitable for understanding naturally occurring relationships in a sample. Additionally, the study includes a comparative component to assess differences in religiosity levels and attitudes towards homosexuality across gender groups.

3.1.1. Statement of the Problem

The problem to be addressed through this study is whether the level of religiosity determines the attitude one holds towards homosexuality

3.1.2. Objective of the study

To compare and analyse the views on homosexuality among religious and non-religious young adults, exploring the factors that influence these views and the potential impact of these perspectives on social attitudes and policies.

3.1.3. Research Questions

- Do social, cultural, and familial influences shape the views on homosexuality among young adults from religious and non-religious backgrounds?
- Do demographic factors (e.g., age, gender, education level) influence views on homosexuality among young adults from both religious and non-religious communities?

3.2. Hypotheses

- **H1:** Higher the level of religiosity, the greater would be the negative attitudes held by them towards homosexuality.
- **H2:** There is a significant difference in the religiosity level across males and females

3.3. Operational Definitions of Key Terms

- **Religiosity** - Religiosity refers to the degree to which individuals endorse and engage in religious beliefs, practices, and values. Measured using a religiosity scale, participants' religiosity scores are based on their responses to questions about their religious beliefs, practices (e.g., frequency of prayer, attendance at religious services), and importance of religion in their lives. Higher scores on the scale indicate stronger religiosity, while lower scores indicate weaker religiosity.
- **Attitude towards Homosexuality** - Attitude towards homosexuality reflects an individual's beliefs, feelings, and predispositions toward homosexuality, which can range from acceptance to disapproval. Attitudes are measured using an Attitude towards Homosexuality Scale Inventory (AHSI), which includes items assessing participants' level of acceptance, approval, or disapproval of homosexuality. Higher AHSI scores indicate more negative or conservative attitudes, whereas lower scores suggest more positive or accepting attitudes toward homosexuality.
- **Gender** - Gender in this study is the demographic categorization of participants as male, female, or other through self-report and is coded numerically (1 = Male, 2 = Female, 3 = Other). For statistical analysis, it is treated as a categorical variable, and participants identifying as "Other" were excluded based on study criteria to minimize bias.

3.3.1. Inclusion Criteria

- **Age:** Participants who were young adults aged between 18 to 25 years, were part of the study ensuring the sample aligns with the study's focus on young adults.
- **Education:** Participants had to be either currently enrolled in undergraduate or postgraduate education or be recent graduates. This criterion targeted individuals who were more subjected to varying social and cultural views, including those related to religiosity and homosexuality.
- **Residence:** Participants were classified on the basis of rural, urban and suburban areas to capture attitudes shaped by potentially similar socio-cultural environments.

3.3.2. Exclusion Criteria

- **Gender Representation:** Participants identifying as non-binary or part of the LGBTQIA+ community were excluded to minimize bias, as their personal identities might influence attitudes toward homosexuality beyond religious beliefs alone.
- **Age Outliers:** Any participants outside the age range of 18 to 25 years were excluded to ensure uniformity in the age demographic and relevance to young adult perspectives.

3.4. Description of tools

- **The Attitudes Toward Homosexuality Scale for Indians (AHSI)** - Attitudes Towards Homosexuality Scale for Indians (AHSI) scale by Kanika Ahuja is a 5-point Likert scale consisting of 20 items. The AHSI has been used in studies to investigate the relationship between attitudes toward homosexuality and other factors. A Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) was used. The higher the score, the more positive is the attitude of the subject towards homosexuals. Items 1, 2, 3, 6, 9, 10, 11, 13, 16, and 17 are reverse scored. The scale had a reliability of 0.91.
- **Indic Religiosity Scale** - Indic Religiosity Scale by Jayakumar & Verma (2020) is a 15-item construct with five factors which is a valid and reliable measure of religiosity. It measures the general intensities of five theoretical defined core dimensions of religiosity. The five factors include: Way of Life; Belief in Rebirth, Karma and Destiny; Existence of Supreme Power; Importance of Prayer and Purposeful Life with a 5-point likert scale. The Cronbach's Alpha was found to be 0.96 and validity was found to be above 0.70 for all constructs.

4. Results

4.1. Overview

The aim of the study was to determine whether the level of religiosity determines the attitude one holds towards homosexuality. The study was conducted to find if there was any correlation between religiosity and the attitude young adults hold against homosexuality. The study was taken forward by doing data collection followed by scoring, analysis and the results obtained were tabulated. In this current chapter, the results are tabulated, described, analysed and interpreted. The data was imported to find out the descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation of the variables Religiosity and Attitude towards Homosexuality was done to check for any significance relationship.

4.2. Sociodemographic variables

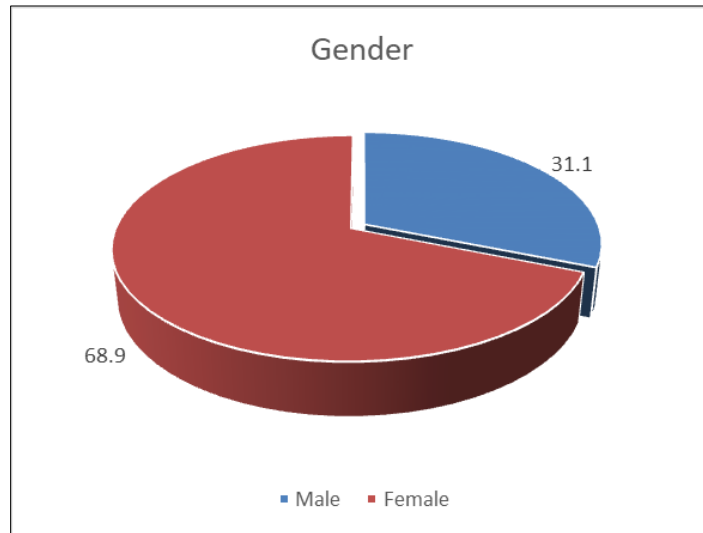


Figure 1 The number of males and females in the population

The total sample size (N = 255) consisted of 79 males and 175 females with a mean age of 21.4 years, indicating that the population skews towards younger adults. The standard deviation of 1.87 suggests a moderate spread of ages around the mean, with ages ranging from 18 to 25. With a mean of 1.76 and a standard deviation of 0.745, gender coding (typically 1 = Male, 2 = Female, 3 = Other) implies that the sample has more females than other genders. During the data collection, 3 individuals from 'other' gender were also present which were excluded based on the exclusion criteria of the study since the representation of the LGBT community would bring about bias in the study. The median value of 2 suggests a significant number of females are present in the sample. The mean score of 2.67 with a standard deviation of 0.562 might suggest that respondents have mostly reached higher levels of education (e.g., undergraduate or graduate). Coding was based on 1 = Undergraduate, 2 = Postgraduate and 3 = Working. The mean of 2.67 and median of 3 could indicate that the majority of participants live in urban or suburban areas based on the coding 1 = Rural, 2 = Suburban, 3 = Urban.

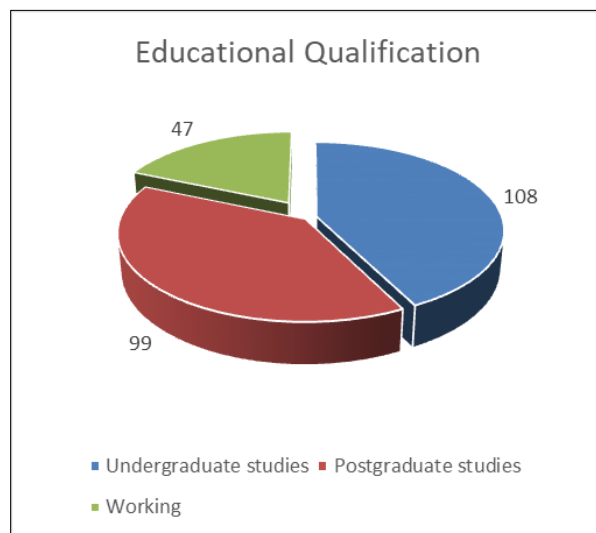


Figure 2 The educational qualification in the population

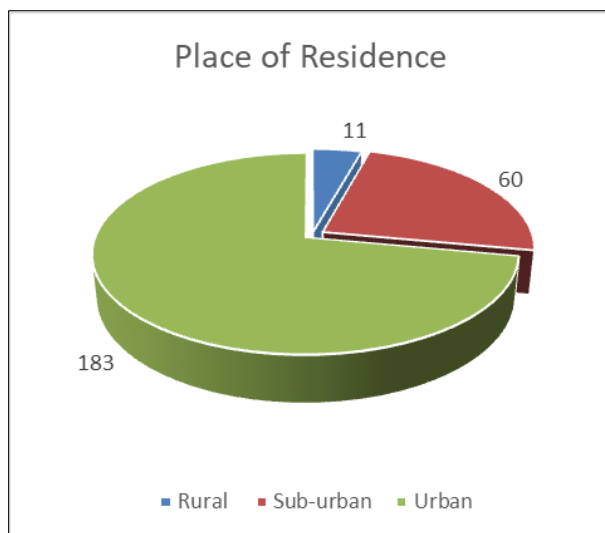


Figure 3 The place of residence of the population

- **Hypothesis 1** - Higher the level of religiosity, the greater would be the negative attitudes held by them towards homosexuality.

Table 1 shows the correlation between the variables Attitude towards Homosexuality and Religiosity. Pearson's correlation was done between the variables Attitude towards Homosexuality and Religiosity. The correlation analysis indicates a moderate positive relationship ($r = 0.319$). This suggests that, as scores on one of these variables increase, scores on the other also tend to increase. In other words, the more religious a person would be, according to the religiosity scale, the more negative would be the views held against homosexuality. However, the strength of this relationship is not very strong, but it's meaningful.

Table 1 The correlation between Attitude towards homosexuality and Religiosity

Correlation Matrix			
		AHSI Total	Religiosity Total
AHSI Total	Pearson's r	—	
	df	—	
	p-value	—	
Religiosity Total	Pearson's r	0.273	—
	df	254	—
	p-value	<.001	—

If AHSI refers to something like an attitude, belief, or behaviour scale (Attitude toward Homosexuality Scale Inventory), and if Religiosity refers to a measure of how religious a person is, the positive correlation might suggest that individuals with stronger religious beliefs tend to have a much biased or strong stance against homosexuality reflected in the AHSI score. This is in line with the research done by Prabhu and Sinha (2023), which investigated the interplay between attitudes toward homosexuality, gender role beliefs, and religiosity among mental health professionals in India.

5. Discussion

The current study also shows similar results in which individuals with high religiosity were seen to have less accepting views towards homosexuality. This is also in line with another study done by Thattil and Stephen (2024), which was aimed to examine the relationship and impact of religious values, attitudes towards lesbians and gay men, and gender role beliefs among young adults. The results indicated that there was a positive correlation between religious values

and attitudes towards lesbians and gay men, a negative correlation between religious values and gender role beliefs, and between attitudes towards the lesbian and the gay men and the gender role beliefs.

- **Hypothesis 2** - There is a significant difference in the religiosity level across males and females

Table 2 ANOVA - AHSI Total

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Gender	14269	2	7135	26.0	<0.001
Residuals	69061	252	274		

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine the effect of gender on AHSI (presumably an Attitude or Health-related Score Index) Total scores across three gender categories. Results indicate that gender has a statistically significant impact on AHSI Total scores, as evidenced by an $F(2, 252) = 26.0, p < 0.001$. The Sum of Squares for gender is 14,269, representing the portion of total variance in AHSI scores attributable to gender differences.

Table 3 ANOVA - Religiosity Total

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Gender	2379	2	1189	11.7	<0.001
Residuals	25530	252	101		

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to explore the influence of gender on Religiosity Total scores among three gender categories. The results reveal a statistically significant effect of gender on Religiosity Total scores, with $F(2, 252) = 11.7, p < 0.001$. The Sum of Squares for gender is 2,379, accounting for the variation in Religiosity Total scores attributed to gender differences within the sample. The gender degrees of freedom (df) of 2 suggests the analysis includes three gender categories (e.g., male, female, and other or non-binary), and the Mean Square for gender is 1,189, obtained by dividing the Sum of Squares for gender by its degrees of freedom. This Mean Square value represents the average variance in Religiosity Total scores between gender groups.

5.1. Summary and Conclusion

This chapter provides a comprehensive analysis of the study's findings concerning the relationship between religiosity and attitudes toward homosexuality, alongside the exploration of gender differences in these dimensions. Utilizing a young adult sample, this study aimed to address two primary hypotheses: (1) that higher religiosity would correlate with more negative attitudes toward homosexuality, and (2) that religiosity levels would differ significantly across gender groups. The findings of this study offer meaningful insights into the intersection of religious beliefs, social attitudes, and gender among young adults, echoing similar trends observed in previous research by Prabhu and Sinha (2023) and Thattil and Stephen (2024). This chapter also interprets these findings in relation to existing literature, discusses limitations, and suggests directions for future research.

The sample size for this study comprised 255 young adults with a mean age of 21.4 years ($SD = 1.87$), reflecting a relatively young population with ages ranging from 18 to 25. The sample was predominantly female, with 79 males (31%) and 175 females (69%). Although three individuals identifying as "other" gender participated in the survey, they were excluded based on the study's exclusion criteria, as the limited representation could potentially skew the results. This decision aligns with the goal to avoid bias, particularly regarding the views of the LGBT community, which might introduce unique variables not addressed in the current study framework.

The first hypothesis posited a positive correlation between religiosity and negative attitudes toward homosexuality, suggesting that higher levels of religiosity would be associated with less accepting views toward homosexuality. As shown in Table 1, the results support this hypothesis, revealing a moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.319, p < 0.001$) between Religiosity Total scores and the Attitude toward Homosexuality Scale Inventory (AHSI) Total scores. This correlation indicates that as religiosity scores increase, attitudes toward homosexuality tend to become more negative. This finding is in line with previous studies, particularly Prabhu and Sinha's (2023) research among mental health professionals in India, which identified that individuals with stronger religious convictions tend to hold conservative

views on social issues such as homosexuality and gender roles. Similarly, Thattil and Stephen (2024) found a positive correlation between religious beliefs and attitudes toward homosexual individuals, reinforcing the notion that religiosity and traditional perspectives on gender and sexuality are closely linked.

The second hypothesis proposed that religiosity levels would differ significantly across gender groups. To test this hypothesis, two separate ANOVAs were conducted: one examining the effect of gender on religiosity scores and the other on AHSI Total scores, which measured attitudes toward homosexuality. The ANOVA results for Religiosity Total scores indicated a statistically significant effect of gender ($F(2, 252) = 11.7, p < 0.001$), suggesting that religiosity varies by gender.

5.2. Implications and Future Directions

The findings of this study carry significant implications for understanding the complex interplay between religiosity, gender, and attitudes toward homosexuality. As religiosity is shown to correlate positively with negative attitudes toward homosexuality, interventions aimed at reducing prejudice may benefit from approaches that consider religious beliefs and values. Education programs that promote inclusivity and respect for diversity, while simultaneously acknowledging individuals' religious backgrounds, may help bridge the gap between religious and progressive social values.

Moreover, the observed gender differences in both religiosity and attitudes underscore the importance of addressing gender-specific socialization processes that influence religious observance and attitudes toward sexuality. Future research could delve deeper into the mechanisms by which religiosity and gender interact to shape social attitudes, potentially incorporating qualitative methods to capture the nuanced experiences of individuals across diverse religious and cultural backgrounds.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The exclusion of participants identifying as "other" gender may limit the generalizability of the findings to non-binary and gender-diverse individuals, whose attitudes and experiences may differ from those of cisgender males and females. Additionally, the study's reliance on self-reported measures introduces potential biases, such as social desirability bias, which could influence participants' responses on sensitive topics such as religiosity and attitudes toward homosexuality. Lastly, while the sample size was sufficient for statistical analysis, a more diverse sample in terms of religious affiliation, geographic region, and age could enhance the generalizability of the findings.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights into the role of religiosity and gender in shaping attitudes toward homosexuality among young adults. The significant positive correlation between religiosity and negative attitudes toward homosexuality, coupled with gender differences in both religiosity and social attitudes, highlights the complex and multifaceted nature of these constructs. The findings align with existing literature, affirming that individuals with higher religiosity levels tend to hold less accepting views of homosexuality, with females generally exhibiting higher religiosity than males. This study contributes to the broader understanding of how religious beliefs and gendered socialization influence social attitudes and underscores the need for future research that embraces the diversity of gender identities and religious perspectives.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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