



Our Culture Our Heritage: Elders Save the Children from Homosexuality

Charity Chiromo
Faculty of Education
Midlands State University
Zimbabwe
chiromoc@staff.msu.ac.zw

Abstract: *This study was on causes of becoming homosexuals for most learners living in informal boarding facilities in Zimbabwe. Interpretivism was employed in this work as a research paradigm. A qualitative research approach was adopted. A phenomenology research design was used to explain how the respondents perceive the phenomena. The study took place in 3 purposively selected schools in Midlands Province. The participants were also purposively selected. The participants were 18 learners (9 girls and 9 boys), six from each school (3 boys, 3 girls), and 6 teachers (1 male, 1 female from each school). The researcher used structured in-depth interviews with open-ended questions to all participants to allow probing. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were used on the learner participants in their natural settings that is their respective schools. The researcher used a thematic approach to analyze the data and the presentation was purely qualitative with phrases from respondents quoted verbatim. The study found that sharing of blankets because of poverty, lack of adult supervision in IBFs, lack of information about sex from elders, and lack of the topic about homosexuality in the curriculum were the contributing factors to homosexual tendencies to learners in (IBFs) in Zimbabwe. The researcher recommends that Guidance and Counselling sessions be taken seriously in schools and more so for learners who stay in IBFs who constitute a more vulnerable group. Curriculum planners should include the topic of homosexuality in line with the African culture in the curriculum.*

Keywords: Homosexuality, Culture, Informal Boarding Facilities, Learners

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1. Introduction

The issue of becoming homosexuals may be another challenge faced by learners living in informal boarding facilities. Hall (2019) states that homosexual comes from the Greek word homo, which means “same.” Homosexual can be used as an adjective or noun that describes men or women who have special sexual attraction to people of the same sex with a significant period. Okanlawon, (2020) states that sociologically, a homosexual has a same-sex partner while homosexuality is an attitude, action, or behaviour toward homosexuality. According to Hall

(2019), homosexuality is a condition of someone who shows sexual behavior between people of the same sex. Okanlawon, (2020) also mentions that homosexuality can be defined as a strong tendency for someone’s erotic attraction to the same sex. Homosexuality therefore in simple terms can be referred to as a sexual relationship between people of the same sex. Schools are silent on the topic of homosexuality in the curriculum and library holdings. According to Harris et al., (2022), experts in the case of homosexuality believe that there is no single factor that causes homosexuality and the weight of each factor varies from one person to another. As a result, no one

knows the cause of a person to become a homosexual. This paper established the causes of learners in IBFs ending up being homosexuals.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

This paper is guided by Critical theory. The Critical theory as a framework in this paper enables the researcher to think critically about the variables under study. Aslan Tutak et al., (2011) argue that using Critical theory suggests a commitment to social justice. It informs the researcher's interest in unearthing and acknowledging the real conditions that the learners in informal boarding facilities experience but to which the social system is oblivious. According to Porter & O'Halloran, (2012), critical theories were developed as a response to oppression and to the hopes of liberation. As Critical Theory suggests, the voices of the voiceless should be heard by those in charge of the entire social system (Fleming, 2018). Such a lens underlines the emancipatory character of the Critical Theory (Fleming, 2018). It is the researcher's hope that by using Critical theory lenses, solutions to learners in Informal Boarding Facilities being forced to become homosexuals might be provided. Horkheimer, (1972) argues that the only way in which we might fix social problems in society, is by introducing Critical theory. Thus, in this paper, the researcher sought to investigate causes of becoming homosexual of learners living in Informal boarding facilities with the aim of liberating them.

The study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the causes of some learners living in informal boarding facilities in the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe of ending up being homosexuals?
2. How does our cultural values perceive homosexuality in informal boarding facilities in Midlands Province?
3. What strategies can be used to curb homosexuality in informal boarding facilities in Midlands Province

2. Literature Review

According to (De White et al., 2019) factors that cause sexual problems in adolescents is increased libido sexuality caused by adolescent hormonal change and lack of information about sex because of the close relationship between parents and children. (Lee, 2019) states that the number of homosexual men is estimated to be 3-4 times more than the number of homosexual women. Schools also are silent on the topic of homosexuality in the curriculum and library holdings. As the researcher see it, this could probably create a complete silence on the issue.

Specialists have observed that homosexual youth are at high gamble for self-destruction, substance misuse, savagery, and provocation from peers in secondary schools and in universities. In his study Kinyanjui (2022) highlighted that students of the above characters should not be in boarding facilities at school, because they bother their mates. He also argues that, if one is a homosexual in a boarding facility and hopping from one bed of student to another, he is depriving those students their rights. Kinyanjui (2022) says that he would not condone such characters in learning institutions.

Informal boarding facilities often have limited privacy and personal space, which can lead to a heightened awareness of one's own identity and personal feelings, including those related to sexuality (Hall,2019). This environment might also lead individuals to explore and understand their sexual orientation more deeply. In informal boarding facilities, students are often exposed to a range of social dynamics and peer interactions. These interactions can play a role in shaping their self-perception and understanding of sexuality. Supportive or challenging peer environments can impact how individuals express and come to terms with their sexual orientation. Boarding facilities might expose students to diverse viewpoints and experiences. This exposure can contribute to their understanding of different sexual orientations and may help them explore their own identities. Adolescence and young adulthood are key periods for identity development (Matsa,2020). For students in boarding facilities, the process of self-discovery and understanding one's sexual orientation can be influenced by the unique social and environmental conditions they encounter.

Informal boarding facilities often create close-knit communities where peer influence plays a significant role in shaping behaviour and identity. Peer interactions and the need for social acceptance can influence behaviour, including sexual orientation expression. Studies show that adolescents in group settings may experience shifts in sexual behaviour or identity due to peer pressure and social norms (Coleman et al,2022). The socialization process within informal boarding facilities can impact how individuals understand and express their sexual orientation. Environments with limited adult supervision may foster exploration and experimentation (Mubarak,2021)

Informal boarding facilities may lack structured supervision, which can lead to less regulated environments for personal development and behaviour. The relative lack of oversight in informal boarding settings can provide adolescents with morthe freedom to explore their sexuality. Such settings may expose individuals to a wider range of sexual identities and behaviours, potentially impacting their own sexual orientation and expression (Vanderlaan,2022). Adolescence is a critical period for identity formation, including sexual orientation. Informal

boarding facilities can provide a unique environment for self-discovery. Adolescents in informal boarding facilities may have increased opportunities for self-exploration and identity formation due to reduced parental oversight. The presence or absence of emotional support within these settings can impact the development of sexual identity. A supportive environment may facilitate more open exploration of sexual orientation the psychological stress experienced in informal boarding facilities can influence behaviour and identity, including sexual orientation. Adolescents may develop coping mechanisms in response to stress, which can include exploring and expressing different aspects of their identity (Perzov,2021). Psychological stress has been linked to increased risk-taking behaviours, including those related to sexual identity

The cultural and social norms within informal boarding facilities can impact how students perceive and express their sexuality. In some cases, these norms might be more conservative or less accepting, affecting how individuals come to understand their sexual orientation and whether they feel safe to express it. Cultural values are what define a community. It is based on spiritual beliefs and practices, norm guidelines, and material, emotional, and intellectual characteristics. This is how culture varies across the world as people develop their own beliefs, governments, and social norms. Culture plays a predominant role on every individual as it can influence people's perceptions and attitudes of people, events, or concepts. Culture is a major determining factor that can influence an individual's attitude toward homosexuality. Minkov et al. (2023) focused primarily on how cultural factors shape attitudes toward controversial topics. The researchers questioned people on what they felt was and was not justifiable. Fixating on negative attitudes toward homosexuality, results showed that national wealth, lower levels of geographic variables (such as the distribution, composition, and variation of the population), education, and conservatism were all associated with homonegativity (Minkov et al., 2023). Conservatism is therefore a by product of a tight culture, as members abide by stricter rules and tend to negate anything that goes against social norms or change.

Societal attitudes toward homosexuality vary greatly across different cultures and historical periods, as do attitudes toward sexual desire, activity and relationships in general. All cultures have their own values regarding appropriate and inappropriate sexuality; some sanction same-sex love and sexuality, while others may disapprove of such activities in part (Murray,2020) . As with heterosexual behaviour, different sets of prescriptions and proscriptions may be given to individuals according to their gender, age, social status or social class.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

A phenomenology research design was used in order to explain how the respondents perceive the phenomena (Crossman, 2018; McMillian & Schumacher, 2010).

3.2 Research Approach

Interpretivism was employed in this work as a research paradigm. The researcher adopted the qualitative research approach since it is the one that is in harmony with interpretivism. The qualitative research method is a naturalistic process that seeks an in-depth understanding of the social phenomena within a peoples' surrounding (Strauss and Corbin 2015).

3.3 Sample size

The participants were 18 learners (9 girls and 9 boys), six from each school (3 boys, 3 girl) and 6 teachers (1 male, 1 female from each school).

3.4 Sampling procedure

Data was collected over a period of a year that is January 2022 to December 2023. The research took place in 3 purposively selected schools in Midlands Province. The participants were purposively selected. Sampling was purposive to ensure a selection of participants with rich information, gender balance, age and experience.

3.5 Research instruments

The researcher used the structured in-depth interviews with open-ended questions to all participants to allow probing. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were used on learner participants only, in their natural settings that is their respective schools. A total of 3 FGDs were carried out. The interviews and FGDs were conducted in Shona and English depending on the language which the respondent was comfortable with.

3.6 Data Analysis

The researcher used thematic approach to analyse the data and presentation was purely qualitative with phrases from respondents quoted verbatim.

4. Results and Discussion

The issue of becoming homosexuals of most learners living in informal boarding facilities came up as one of the major challenges. The learner participants raised the following causes on this issue. Some teacher participants indicated that they came across the causes of learners

ending up being homosexuals during disciplinary hearings at school.

In a very shallow voice in an interview one participant had this to say:

The most boring one madam, but please do not say it to anyone. Most learners in these facilities are forced to become homosexuals. The fact that they share blankets might be the cause. I personally have refused to share my blankets with anyone, but do you know madam just hearing the sound of it when they start their business during the night is traumatizing. The other thing is these boys are ever threatening me because I refused to join them. I pray that they do not force me to become a homosexual. This disturbs my mind, even my education. (L18)

In another interview one participant had this to say:

We are forced to become homosexuals with the older boys since we share blankets because of poverty and since there is no adult supervision in our premises (L4)

Upon further probing the other participant had this to say:

They share blankets because most of us because of poverty brought one blanket each from home, so they 'sleep' together Maam it needs prayers. The situation is just too bad. Some boys we stay with has high libido and some of these boy's drink beer and some abuse drugs just believe us, the situation is bad. (L15)

Another participant expressed similar views

The other challenge that I faced in IBFs is that some big boys who stay with my younger brother forced my brother to become a homosexual, am so hate. I am sure it's lack of information about sex from home, because at home our parents rarely talk of these things. Even our curriculum here at school doesn't cover such topics like homosexuality (L7)

Similar views were raised during FGDs and one participant had this to say:

It's not me as such but some of us are becoming lesbians and some are gays (homosexuals) Maam because of sharing blankets, I think. (L16)

One teacher participant concurred with the above observation and expressed the concern that:

Hunhu/Ubuntu is being destroyed with the way they live in those unsupervised premises and sharing of blankets because most of them because of poverty bring one blanket from home. In those blankets a lot of experiments are happening. Homosexuality is starting from those experiments. (T3)

In an interview one teacher participant had this to say:

The worst indiscipline problem that we came across a few weeks ago is that of some learners in these IBFs practicing homosexuality. However, it's still under investigation. (T1)

The literature has it that, no-one knows the causes of a person to become a homosexual (Harris, 2022). From the above responses it is sad to note that some of the learners staying in IBFs were being forced to become homosexuals. The study revealed that because of poverty most of the learners bring with them one blanket from home. This means that they have to share the blankets at night both the young and the elder learners. However, the research findings revealed that, it is the beginning of a very sad and shocking experience of homosexuality. This study revealed that some learners in IBFs were practising homosexuality by being forced into it by the elder learners they stay with in informal boarding facilities. Most of the participants revealed that the other cause is the lack of adult supervision in informal boarding facilities. Some of learner participants described the elder learners that forced and sometimes threaten the young learners to this illegal act in Zimbabwe, as learners with increased libido. The study also revealed that lack of information about sex from parents at home was one of the contributing factors. The researcher was equally shocked when one of the teachers who was one of the participants revealed that the topic homosexuality was not included in the Zimbabwean curriculum.

One participant had this to say regarding how cultural values perceive homosexuality in the Midlands Province

Homosexuality is a taboo in our society. It is an unacceptable practice which is considered even by our forefathers as a barrier to rain and causes drought.

Another participant said that

Learners in informal boarding facilities are starting to practice homosexuality which is against our culture, this is very new especially in the Midlands province and chiefs need to perform cleansing ceremonies since this is a taboo in front of our ancestors

Another participant was very angry and had these harsh comments to say

Homosexuality is already punishable by law and those learners caught doing such shameful acts should be beaten up and brought before the law. We cannot let this practice spread to other children it needs to be stopped. This act is shameful to our cultural beliefs and values.

Depending on the cultural context and societal attitudes towards homosexuality, informal boarding facilities located in more liberal or accepting regions may attract students who feel more comfortable expressing non-heterosexual orientations. Society in Zimbabwe do not tolerate homosexuality and harsh measures are usually

taken against homosexuality. Some sects within some religions, especially those influenced by the Abrahamic tradition, have censured homosexual acts and relationships at various times, in some cases implementing severe punishments (Crompton,2003).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The sharing of blankets because of poverty, increased libido, lack of adult supervision in IBFs, lack of information about sex from parents and lack of the topic about homosexuality in the curriculum were the contributing factors to homosexual tendencies in learners in (IBFs) in Zimbabwe. Critical theory informs the researcher's interest in unearthing and acknowledging the real conditions that these vulnerable children in IBFs experience but which the social system is not aware of, thereby allowing their voice to be heard (Horkheimer, 1972; Henslin, 2010; Giddens & Sutton 2013; Haralambos & Holborn 2013). This means that the voice of learners in IBFs should be heard by those in charge.

Traumatising situations like these affect learners psychologically, leading to learners performing poorly in class. According to the Critical theory, this is exploitation, since these learners are being treated unfairly by being forced into homosexuality (Alvesson & Skolberg, 2000). Porter (2002) highlighted that critical theories were developed as a response to exploitation with the hope of emancipating the affected individuals. The aim of critical theory thus becomes the path to freedom through intervention and action (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000). These learners in IBFs who are being forced to become homosexuals need to be liberated because even those who have not yet joined the act are being threatened. The researcher was equally shocked when one of the teachers who was one of the participants revealed that, most of the learners in IBFs no longer observe humaneness. All these challenges affect negatively the teaching and learning of these called learners.

Kinyanjui (2022) is of the opinion that learners who practice homosexuality should not be in boarding facilities, because they bother their mates. He also argues that, if one is a homosexual in a boarding facility and hopping from one bed of a learner to another, he is depriving those learners of their rights. This is also supported by Ankut (2014) who observed that the rights of most children in IBFs are violated every day. Marcio and Chatiza (2013) argue that a nation that does not take good care of its young ones is a nation at risk tomorrow.

Culture plays a predominant role on every individual as it can influence people's perceptions and attitudes of people, events, or concepts. All cultures have their own values

regarding appropriate and inappropriate sexuality; some sanction same-sex love and sexuality, while others may disapprove of such activities in Zimbabwe. In Zimbabwe, homosexuality is viewed as a taboo and is a very unacceptable practice. Our culture believes that such acts leads to drought and in a particular area .therefore it is an uncultured unacceptable practice, Culture is a major determining factor that can influence an individual's attitude toward homosexuality however due to forced circumstances like poor living conditions which force learners to sleep in one blankets, lack of supervision from parents and increased libido this has forced learners living in informal boarding facilities to go against their culture

5.2 Recommendations

The research recommendations that:

1. The curriculum planners in African countries should include the topic of homosexuality in the curriculum and library holdings.
2. Guidance and Counselling sessions has to be taken seriously and more so for learners who stay in IBFs who constitute a more vulnerable group.
3. Make-shift buildings should be built inside the school yard so that teachers act in loco-parentis and supervise these vulnerable children
4. To eradicate poverty and empower the learners in IBFs an NGO to start income generating projects like gardening and rabbit keeping.

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