

Children's Attitudes Towards Homosexuality in China

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ABSTRACT

The extant research has shown that high school students and universities students hold neutral attitudes toward homosexual. However, how children's attitudes toward homosexual individuals and homosexual family are scarcely known by public. The aim of the study is to make up the gaps by surveying children's attitudes to these two attitudinal subcomponents. I investigated 9- to 12- year-old children (N total=138; 76 females and 62 males) from Chengdu, Nanchang, Beijing, Jinan, Dezhou, Yantai, Foshan, Lanzhou, Jinhua, Yanchen, Yongkang, Xian, Deyang, Yibin. In this work, results revealed, there were high correlations between children's attitudes toward homosexual individuals and homosexual family. An obvious gender differences also revealed on the result, males were more negative towards all two attitudes than females. Children who have heard homosexuality and acquainted a homosexual individual showed more positive attitudes than those who have not. With the ages growing, children tend to accept more about homosexual individual and homosexual family.

Keywords: Children, attitudes, homosexual individual, homosexual family, male, female

1. INTRODUCTION

China has a large homosexual group, around 39million to 50million of people in China are homosexuals, over 8.3million of them are children (age 0-12). Research has shown that neutral attitudes toward homosexuals are generally held in China. In different research among adolescents and adults, half of people tend to accept homosexuals. However, In a survey conducted by WEI chong-zhen & LIU wen-li (2015), because of their sexual orientation and gender identity, 306(40.7%) students got nicknames, 261(34.8%) students were verbally threatened, 168(22.4%) students were isolated by their peers, and 45(6.0%) students were physically threatened; LGBT with bully experience had more frequent suicide thoughts, lower sense of well-being and higher prevalence of being depressed than LGBT without bully experience; school bullying had a significant positive correlation with depressed emotion and suicide thoughts, and a significant negative correlation with self-esteem and social support. Conclusion: School bullying has a negative impact on academic performance, interpersonal relationships and mental health of LGBT students [1]. Despite the study on the students' age over 16 years old, few studies about the investigations of children's attitudes toward homosexuals and homosexual family, especially no

studies from homosexual children are found.

Children barely have the access to know more about homosexuals due to the social and cultural restrictions, many children just hear the concept of homosexuality. So, it is unclear that how children evaluate this group, homosexual children's social environment is unpredictable. However, children's attitudes toward homosexuality decides how well homosexual children will be accepted. According to Erikson's theory, between the ages of approximately six and eleven, a significant role will be played by school and social interaction on a child's life. As children enter school and create considerable social relationships with peers, therefore a child's social world extends. This could occur double-edged influences on children. Of whom gain positive feedback more will develop a sense of confidence in their accomplishments and abilities; Those who receive more of negative reactions from social interactions will disdain themselves and even be left with trauma in their mental health. Thus, the children's attitudes toward homosexuals are vital for homosexual's mental development environment.

Little is known about homosexual marriage too. In China, homosexual marriage is not legal, besides homosexual couples are not allowed to adopt children, children will not have the legal identity in China. However, if homosexuals can show the paternity test,

children of them will be able to get the legal identity in China. Thus, the ways to have children for lesbian couples are basically through anonymous self-insemination, named donor self-insemination or heterosexual intercourse. Opportunities for gay couple to become parents are relatively constrained, including surrogacy, being a named donor for lesbian couples and participating in the child's life as a parent with lesbian couples [2]. Children from homosexual family didn't come easy, their families are in a controversial state with stigma, and they face heavy mental pressure of being secrecy of their "special" families. Children's attitudes literally decide how much social pressure those children will bear, and therefore affect their mental development [3].

Given that the importance of children's attitudes, there were few previous research among all the countries, and all of them centered in attitudes toward homosexual individual about adolescents and adults: Most of research were classified into three parts, "Kite and Whitley (1996) [4]: attitudes toward homosexual individuals, homosexual behavior, and gay people's civil rights. Attitudes toward homosexual persons was conceptualized by Kite and Whitley (1996)[4] as "homosexuality as a threat to the respondent, to people close to the respondent, and to strangers, and the management of homosexuality by means of social restrictions"(p. 337). In contrast, they conceptualized attitudes toward homosexual behavior as "the moral reprehensibility of homosexuality as a deviant sexual act and lifestyle" (p. 339)." Thus, the present study will be focused on the attitudes toward homosexual individuals and homosexual family. Besides, "Civil rights" are not included in the study, because most children don't have the awareness of it.

In this work, my research targets on Chinese children from 14 cities, ages range from 9 to 12. The survey is to investigate children's attitudes toward homosexual individuals and homosexual family.

1.1 Present Work

The conduction of current study aimed for an investigation of children's attitudes toward homosexual persons and homosexual family. As neutral attitudes toward homosexual individuals are quite common among late adolescents to above [5], the current study applied the previous survey who were aged between 15 and 29 years old and rearranged to make children easier to comprehend. The study also extends the focus on children's attitudes toward homosexual family in China, which is contemporarily rare.

In the United States or other European countries, the studies on attitudes toward homosexuals, sexual minorities have been contributed to fill in the gap of the unknown area [5]. However, empirical of research is

currently lacking in this area in Asian countries, the tendency of Chinese children's attitudes toward homosexuals is little known. This study is the first in China to investigate empirically children's attitudes toward homosexual individuals. On the assumption that the attitudes toward homosexuals and homosexual family are correlated. Girls tend to have higher acceptance toward homosexuality than boys [6]. Children in older ages have more possibilities to accept homosexuality [6]. Being acquainted with a homosexual individual would positively influence attitudes toward homosexual individual [7].

1.2 Participants

I recruited 139 children (76 females and 63 males). All children were from Chengdu, Nanchang, Dezhou, Jinan, Yantai, Foshan, Lanzhou, Jinhua, Yanchen, Yongkang, Xian, Deyang, Yibin. 128 were from Chengdu (122 of them were from one private school in Chengdu), 11 were averagely from all the other cities. All participants completed questionnaires voluntarily. The age ranged from 9 to 12 years. 50 (35.97%) were 12 years old, 33 (23.94%) were 11 years old, 28 (20.14%) were 9 years old, 28 (20.14%) were 10 years old.

Participants filled the questionnaire by two means. 11 (7.91%) children completed the questionnaire through the internet, 128 (92.09%) children completed the paper questionnaire. Each child was told to keep the privacy of their answers and not to share their answers with others. Overall, 109 (78.42%) participants have heard about homosexuality, 22 (15.82%) have known homosexuals around.

1.3 Experimental design.

I designed the questionnaire for this study. Participants provided only two details: gender, age. Standardized guidances are given on completing the questionnaire [3].

As no present scale for children's attitudes toward homosexuality and homosexual family can be found, I developed the scale for the study based on a 5-point Likert scale from "1 (highly disagree) to 5 (highly agree), with a mid-point (neither agree nor disagree)" was used to measure the result of questionnaires [5]. The complete questionnaires were firstly translated to Chinese and then back to English.

The attitudes toward homosexuality contained 10 items, items 20 and 21 were taken and rewritten from "Herek's [8] Attitudes Toward Gay Men Scale". Items 19 was modified from Hudson and Ricket's [9] Index of Homophobia. Items 12 and 14 were modified from Kite and Deaux's [10] Homosexuality Attitude Scale. I developed items 8 and 9 to know children's basic understanding and assesses of homosexuality. Questions

13 and 16 were descriptive questions in order to know children's descriptive reasons whether they can accept homosexuality. Question 16 was designed to know children's real reactions toward homosexual children. Items 17 and 18 were questions about homosexual family. Item 17 was designed to investigate the proportions of homosexual family within the questionnaire fillers. Item 18 was to know how well children could accept children who were from homosexual family.

1.4 Procedures

Participants participated in the survey mainly through two ways, one of which is from a private primary school in Chengdu, the other way is by the internet. 17 (13.18%) children completed the questionnaire through internet, 122 (86.82%) children completed the paper questionnaire in the classroom. Children were told that this study was about attitudes to homosexual individuals and homosexual family. The questionnaire was separated to each of them to complete individually and anonymously. Process was willing and unpaid.

2. RESULTS

2.1 The Attitudes of Participants toward Homosexuals

In the result of 139 questionnaires, scores ranged from 6 to 30, the mean is 19.094 and a median is 19. Children's attitudes toward homosexuality are a U-shape relationship. Scores of 9 years old (Mean=19.75) and 12 years old (Mean=19.9) were at the peak; Scores of 10 years old (Mean=17.036) were at the bottom; Scores of 11 years old (Mean=19.061) were in the middle.

In terms of gender differences, significant differences were revealed on both attitudes. Girls were more likely to endorse homosexuality (Mean=19.79) and homosexual family (Mean=2.84) than boys. Children who have heard homosexuality (109), Mean=19.28; Among 101 valid responses to the question "Do you know any homosexual individual around?", 22 children confirmed yes with higher scores of attitudes towards homosexuality (Mean=23.18), it suggests children who have heard homosexuality and homosexual acquaintances endorse homosexuality more ; In multiple-choice question "What have you done to people who are regarded as homosexual?", 61 valid responses were received. 49 children (80.33%) chose "I haven't done anything to them." 15 children (24.59%) chose "I stood up for them." Only 6 children (9.84%) chose "I made jokes on them."; Children were asked to respond to the open questions ("Why would accept or not accept homosexual individuals?") In total, 48 responses were received. Of the 31(64.58%) positive responses, 10 children (20.83%) suggested everyone has freedom to

choose who they love if they are happy; 4 children (8.3%) claimed themselves as homosexuals, they supported homosexuality. 17 students showed negative reasons to homosexuality. 10 responses were "abnormal"; 6 children responded "disgusting"; 1 child responded "Homosexuality might transfer AIDS".

2.2 The Attitudes of Participants toward Homosexual Family

Of the 139 participants, the range of scores is from 1 to 5, the mean is 2.659. It indicated children held neutral attitudes toward homosexual family. I found that 12-year-old children (N=3.18) accepted homosexual family the most, followed by 10-year-old (N=2.607), 9-year-old children (N=2.393), 11-year-old children (N=2.125). Children who heard homosexuality and had homosexual acquaintances had higher scores than those who didn't.

3. DISCUSSION

Principal components analysis of children's attitudes toward homosexuality and homosexual family revealed children held neutral attitudes toward homosexuality and homosexual family. However, the results were lower than the adolescences. Girls tend to be more open toward these two components than boys. Children who are 12 years old had higher scores than the rest of children toward these two attitudes. Children who heard homosexuality and had homosexual acquaintances had higher scores than those who didn't.

The first prediction of research is that children would have neutral attitudes [11] As predicted, children held neutral attitudes toward homosexuality and homosexual family, however, 12-year-old children have the highest scores of these two attitudes, which fell in the level of "neutral". The scores were still lower than the previous research on adolescences in Beijing [11]. It indicated that people tend to be more open toward homosexuality and homosexual family with the ages growing.

As predicted, and connected with the earlier research, girls are more likely to hold positive attitudes to homosexuality and homosexual family than boys. According to the previous research in difference countries about different ages of girls, this reflects that female in different ages would be more open to homosexuality [5].

The third prediction is Children who heard homosexuality and had homosexual acquaintances had higher scores than those who didn't. Inspired by Costa & Davies, being acquainted with a homosexual individual leads to more open attitudes toward homosexuality and homosexual family. Due to 22 children's results, it suggested that homosexual acquaintances would help children to know more about homosexuality, thus, they can endorse homosexuality and homosexual family more.

4. CONCLUSION

The research was the first to investigate children's attitudes toward homosexual individuals and homosexual family in China. The findings indicate Children showed relatively neutral attitudes toward homosexuals and homosexual family. Children who are 12 years old and 9 years old showed more positive attitudes toward homosexuals and homosexual family. Girls are more open to these groups than boys. Children who have heard homosexuality had much higher scores than those who haven't. Children who acquainted with a homosexual held more open attitudes than those who didn't.

To different extent, homosexual children are suffering the discriminations and experiencing mental health problems [1]. Recent study has shown the great champion to homosexual children who are bothered by the problems above. Therefore, it is indispensable to understand children's attitudes toward homosexual children. I sincerely look forward to research more on homosexual children's exact mental health situations and homosexual families' current conditions. The present studies show more information about children's attitudes toward homosexuality and homosexual family, there are still several limitations. First, most of participants are from Chengdu, which is a relatively open and liberal city to homosexuality in China. So, it is hard to define how much it can represent the large population in China. Second, the questionnaire about homosexual family is only one question. It is not designed thorough enough to know children's attitudes toward homosexual family. Thus, it is not certain that the similar finding will be received if I complete the questionnaire.

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