

Research Article

# Attitude and Perception of Congolese and LGBT on Homosexuality and the Profession of Homosexuals: Cross-Sectional Study

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## Abstract

**Introduction:** Worldwide, 72 countries criminalize homosexuality. Only one country in Africa recognizes homosexuality. While 10 countries criminalize it, against only one that protects it. Exceptionally, the DRC does not have legislation against or for homosexuality. The aim of this study was to describe the attitudes and perceptions of Congolese and sexual minorities on homosexuality. **Methods:** This study was cross-sectional and analytical, conducted from February the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021 to March the 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022, in the homosexual, bisexual and transgender population of Kinshasa town. The selection was made in homosexual associations and the snowball method was used to constitute the sample. The statistical significance level is  $P < 0.05$ . **Results:** Almost half of the respondents (44.3%) were met with rejection by those around them. The majority (57.8%) have been victims of homophobic harassment. For Congolese population, homosexuality was perceived as a spiritual possession (90.5%). Homosexuality was not perceived as a handicap to undertake a profession (76.0%), although respondents with employment commitment represented just 15.3%. **Conclusion:** The Congolese population has a bad perception of homosexuality, with an attitude of rejection and harassment towards LGBT people; in the other hand, homosexuals have a good perception of their homosexuality.

## Keywords

Attitude, Perception, Homosexuals, Bisexuals, Transgender, Kinshasa, DRC

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## 1. Introduction

### Context

Homosexuality is remained a taboo for a longtime, and has been the subject of several superstitions: mental illness, chromosomal aberration, demonic possession, occultism, etc. But all those have not prevented this phenomenon from evolving, since immemorial time, in all its diversity (identity, situational and institutional homosexuality), and across centuries and nations by erecting solid columns to proclaim aloud its recognition, and destroy the taboo cap throughout the world [1].

Homosexuality tends to conquer the world, with unusual prevalence for a phenomenon long considered taboo; 15% of legal marriages in the world are homosexual. The prevalence in Africa, although South Africa is among countries that have legalized homosexuality, is not known. No value is recognized in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) [2].

In the world, 72 countries criminalize homosexuality and 85 protect it by their legislation. One country in Africa (South Africa) recognizes same-sex marriage out of the 47 countries currently allowing it. While 10 countries and states criminalize homosexuality (ranging from imprisonment to the death penalty), against only one country whose legislation protects homosexuality [3].

Exceptionally, the DRC remains the rare country not having legislation against or for homosexuality, although certain elected representatives of the people have tried in vain to propose bills against this scourge. Until today, the DRC, in addition to the recommendation it makes in Article 40 of the Constitution, which stipulates: "Every individual has the right to marry the person of his choice, of the opposite sex, and to found a family", it remains silent, however, to a clear declaration on homosexuality, while opening a highway to various interpretations of laws on good character, thus condemning or favoring homosexuality [2].

Despite the legislative arsenals established against homosexuality, this has not allowed the eradication of this phenomenon, which grows roots and reaches families till to form communities (LGBTQIA community) and homosexual organizations; who set themselves up as walls against the repression of this phenomenon; and promote its expansion in the world in such a way as to have prevalences of 3.4% and 8.1% in Western countries such as the United States of America (USA) and France [4, 5]; and also 4% of bisexuals in the USA [6]. Australia in Oceania counted 52% of lesbians out of a sample of 272 people [7]. Africa is poor in studies on the epidemiology of homosexuals, only South Africa counts 530,000 homosexuals [4-6].

The under-reporting of homosexuality, and even same-sex marriage, is one of the factors making difficult to obtain an accurate count of this community. The few sources available indicate that, self-identification or self-declaration as homosexual rarely occurs although the prevalence of homosexual behavior is higher, and also, given the tension of belonging

and or to declare their membership of this community; hence, in many countries of the world, the statistic remains approximate [8].

However, despite the perception or attitude towards homosexuality (good or bad) by homosexuals themselves and even the Congolese population, homosexuality is already gaining ground and tends to beat the world record in decades to come; because their representativeness in the societies of different nations of the world is increasing. But with regard to the world population, homosexuals constitute a small group, only large-scale surveys (very large), such as the population census, can make it possible to collect the true extent [9].

In addition, the under-declaration of homosexuality among the people questioned leads to underestimating its rate [9].

As far as the DRC is concerned, no scientific study on sexual minorities in general, and homosexuals, bisexuals and transgender people in particular, has not been carried out; leaving the country without socio-demographic data in this area; more serious still, these sexual minorities are a population at risk of sexually transmitted diseases, in this case Human Immunodeficiency/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS), and also at risk of pathologies such as Hepatitis.

The aim of this study was to describe the attitudes and perceptions of Congolese and homosexuals, bisexuals and transgenders on homosexuality; and to establish the connection between homosexuality and the profession.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Design and Implementation of the Study

This study was cross-sectional with an analytical aim, carried out among homosexuals, bisexuals and transgenders grouped together in associations in the City of Kinshasa, in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The study was carried out during the period from February the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021 to March the 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

### 2.2. Inclusion and Non-Inclusion Criteria

All persons between ages of 15 and 69 years old; who were among sexual minorities with a well-defined sexual orientation of homosexuality (gay, lesbian), bisexuality or transsexuality; and who had given their informed consent, were included in this study. People who did not respond to the questionnaires were excluded from the study.

### 2.3. Sampling and Sample Size

The selection was made in homosexual organizations and associations of the Kinshasa town, where we used non-probability sampling, with the snowball method to constitute the sample.

Our sample size was calculated using Fischer's formula:  $n \geq Z^2 \cdot P(1-P) / d^2$  (undefined population). With  $P=0.5$  (no known prevalence of homosexuality),  $Z=1.96$  and  $d=0.05$ . By carrying out the numerical operation, we have:  $n=(1.96)^2 \cdot 0.5 \cdot (1-0.5) / (0.05)^2 = 384$ . If we take into account the plane of sampling, we will multiply by incorporating 384 by 1.3 (assumed design effect) and obtain 499. Finally, we adjust with a non-response rate of 10%, we obtain 555.

## 2.4. Collection of Data

For data collection, the snowball technique was used to recruit homosexuals, bisexuals and transgenders. The data were collected using a 26-items questionnaire, developed on the basis of the objectives of this study, and which were used by investigators previously trained to properly conduct this study.

## 2.5. Variables of Interest

As variables of interest, it is the attitude of the population on homosexuality, the perception of the population on homosexuality, the profession of the respondents, and the perception of homosexuality by homosexuals, bisexuals and transgender people according to profession.

## 2.6. Statistical Analysis

Excel 2013 software and SPSS version 24 were have been used for data entry and analysis. The statistical test used to describe the variables are made of relative (%) and/or absolute (n) frequency (qualitative variables).

The value of  $p < 0.05$  is therefore the threshold of statistical significance.

## 2.7. Ethical Considerations

The study is conducted under the authorization and approval of the ethics and research committee of the Protestant University in Congo (UPC) under the number: CEUPC 0088. The participants and/or their legal guardians signed informed consent, after having had explanations of the objectives of the study. He was free to leave the study with out having to explain why. The questionnaire was anonymous and the data treated confidentially. All methods were carried out in accordance with current guidelines and regulations.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Public Attitude Towards Homosexuality

Table 1 lists the different elements of the attitude of third parties on homosexuality.

**Table 1.** Attitude of the surrounding population on homosexuality.

Variables	Whole group n=555	Born in Kinshasa n=207	Born outside Kinshasa n=348	P
Attitude of those around				0.003
The Majority rejected me	246(44.3)	86(41.5)	160(46.0)	
The majority supported me	171(30.8)	55(26.6)	116(33.3)	
Even my own family turne their back on me	73(13.2)	35(16.9)	38(10.9)	
Not recommended	49(8.8)	19(9.2)	30(8.6)	
Everyone ignores	16(2.9)	12(5.8)	4(1,1)	
Harassment				0.311
Yes	321(57.8)	123(59.4)	198(56.9)	
No	234(42.2)	84(40.6)	150(43.1)	

Nearly half of the respondents (44.3%) were stumped by an attitude of rejection on the part of those around them. The majority (57.8%) have been victims of homophobic harassment.

Comparing Kinshasa and non-Kinshasa natives, being rejected was significantly different in favor of non-Kinshasa natives.

### 3.2. Public and LGBT Perception of Homosexuality

Table 2 describes the different elements of the perception of third parties and sexual minorities on homosexuality.

**Table 2.** Perception of homosexuality by the population and sexual minorities.

Variables	Whole group n=555	Kinshasa n=207	Outside Kinshasa n=348	P
Perception of homosexuality by the Congolese population				
Like mental patients	50(9.0)	16(7.7)	34(9.8)	
Like spiritually possessed (demonic) sinners	502(90.5)	189(91.3)	313(89.9)	
3(0.5)	2(1.0)	1(0.3)		
Perception of homosexuality by sexual minorities according to profession				
Is a handicap to undertake a profession	133(24.0)	48(23.2)	85(24.4)	0.412
Is not a handicap to undertake a profession	422(76.0)	159(76.8)	263(75.6)	

The Congolese population perceived homosexuality as a spiritual (demonic) possession in 90.5% of cases.

As for the homosexuals, bisexuals and transgenders themselves, they did not perceive their sexual orientation as a handicap for undertaking a profession (76.0%).

### 3.3. Profession of Respondents

Table 3 gives the occupations of homosexuals, bisexuals and transgenders.

**Table 3.** Profession of homosexuals, bisexuals and transgenders.

Variables	Whole group n=555	Born in Kinshasa n=207	Born outside Kin- shasa n=348	p
Occupation				0.730
None	115(20.7)	46(22.2)	69(19.8)	
Sex workers	110(19.8)	39(18.8)	71(20.4)	
Liberal (hairdresser, small merchant): private	245(44.1)	94(45.4)	151(43.4)	
Committed	85(15.3)	28(13.5)	57(16.4)	

Slightly less than half of the respondents exercised a liberal profession (44.1%), compared to the unemployed and sex workers (40.5%).

## 4. Discussion

This cross-sectional study with an analytical aim on a population of homosexuals, bisexuals and transgenders, showed:

Nearly half of the respondents (44.3%) were stumped by an attitude of rejection on the part of those around them, and the majority (57.8%) were victims of homophobic harassment. This result is opposed to the results obtained by the association "Young gay, lesbians bi and trans (Mag)", in its study on the perception of homosexuality among students in colleges

and high schools in Île-de-France, where 77% of students who know a homosexual person say they are not bothered by meeting a homosexual person and say they just want to know if the person is nice [10].

This proves that 77% of students did not have an attitude of rejecting homosexual people, nor of subjecting them to homophobic harassment. This opposition between the two results is due to the fact that homosexuality is more or less accepted in France (Europe) than in the DRC (Africa); several associations fight against homophobia and always try to get heterosexuals and homosexuals to sit on the same table [10].

The homosexuals, bisexuals and transgenders in the present study did not perceive their sexual orientation as a handicap for taking up a profession (76.0%). This perception is acceptable only if we consider the liberal professions (in this study less than half of the respondents exercised a liberal

profession: 44.1%); This is similar to the study by Wade et al. (2005) in Senegal, they demonstrated that nearly half (45%) of its study population was made up of pupils or students, and not workers [11].

This is study, the respondents having a commitment in a job represented only 15.3%, this confirms the discrimination in the employment of homosexuals. Wilfried (2017), in his study, he specifies that with regard to homosexuals, in many countries, such as Belgium, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Sweden, no restrictions are foreseen in the legislative texts concerning the employment of homosexuals. But in practice homosexuals are excluded from employment, in Slovenia for example, if they recognize that they are homosexual. In some cases this goes as far as dismissal. A survey in the UK paints an alarming picture: 16% of respondents had experienced discrimination at least once at work [12].

All these data in the DRC, Senegal and the West, justifies that homosexuality, bisexuality and transsexuality is a handicap for an employee.

The Congolese population perceived homosexuality as a spiritual possession (demonic) in 90.5% of cases: homosexuality is very badly perceived in the DRC. Baptiste Coulmont in his study of 2003 just like in that of 2008 with Céline Béraud, have demonstrated a perception totally contrary to that of our respondents. For Baptiste, in Catholic Church, the emphasis is on welcoming and benevolence towards homosexual people while maintaining a prohibition and condemnation of sexual relations. Protestantism, in its great majority, leaves the believers alone judges of their faith and the way of applying it [13, 14]. Baptiste Coulmont does not demonstrate any connection between homosexuality and demonic possession.

#### *Strength of the study*

This study draws its data from a sample in the homosexual, bisexual and transgender population of the Kinshasa town, selected by the snowball method to constitute our sample. The results of this study, can to a large extent represent the attitude and perception of the Congolese population and the LGBTQIA (sexual minority) community of the Democratic Republic of Congo on homosexuality, thus constituting the strength of this study.

This study made available a missing database in the country, on the attitude and perception of Congolese population and the LGBTQIA community on homosexuality.

#### *Limit of the study*

Human work has never been perfect. This work had as limit, the fact that we did not consider and studied the attitude and perception of men who have sex with men (MSM), institutional and situational homosexuals on homosexuality.

## 5. Conclusion

The results of the research on the attitude and perception of Congolese population and the LGBT community on homo-

sexuality, brought the following conclusions:

Congolese population has a bad perception of homosexuality (considers it a demonic possession), with an attitude of rejection and harassment towards homosexuals, bisexuals and transgender people; on the other hand, homosexuals, bisexuals and transgenders themselves have a good perception of their homosexuality. They don't perceive their sexual orientation as an handicap for undertaking a profession, despite the fact that almost half of homosexuals, bisexuals and transgender people are unemployed or are sex workers.

## Abbreviations

DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
UPC	Protestant University in Congo
LGBTQIA	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex and Asexual
MSM	Men Who Have Sex with Men
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
USA	United States of America

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## Author Contributions

KKM researched and wrote this article; JP. FL co-supervised the research; PLN coordinated all of the research; ESK supervised the research.

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## Data Availability Statement

The data analyzed in this study are available from the author Kapitene Kamuanga Michael, upon reasonable request.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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