

CONNECTION BETWEEN RELIGIOSITY AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS SEXUALITY IN MONTENEGRO

Mitar Saveljić, Damira Murić, Milena Raspopović & Damir Peličić

Clinical Center of Montenegro, Podgorica, Montenegro

SUMMARY

The aim of the study was to examine the relationship between religiosity and liberal versus conservative attitudes about sex. The study involved 1287 residents of Montenegro over the age of 18, of which 848 women and 439 men. They completed the scale for examining the liberality of attitudes about sex, which the authors of the article compiled for the purposes of this research. Respondents declared their religiosity as believers, agnostics or atheists, so there were 957 believers, 171 atheists and 159 agnostics in the sample. We found that agnostics are the most liberal in terms of attitudes about sex, then atheists and then believers. In addition to religiosity, we examined the connection of attitudes about sex with gender, age, and education level. More educated respondents proved to be more liberal than less educated ones. The women in our sample proved to be more conservative than the men. We did not confirm the assumption that younger respondents would be more liberal than older ones, which can be partly explained by the numerical inequality of age groups. The knowledge we have gained in this study can be of great use primarily as guidelines for further research work, and can also be implemented in various educational programs.

Key words: religion – sex – education – psychology - sexuality

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INTRODUCTION

The traditional value system in Montenegro indisputably changed at the end of the 20th and at the beginning of the 21st century, which was further influenced by technological development, primarily the development of modern means of communication. It is evident that attitudes towards sexuality, but also sexual behavior are significantly more liberal in recent decades than before. On the other hand, after the replacement of socialism by capitalism, an increase in religiosity is obvious. Most monotheistic religions contain a solid value system that includes, among other things, attitudes towards sexuality and permissible sexual behavior. The aim of this study was to examine the relationship between religiosity and liberalism versus conservative attitudes towards sex among adults in Montenegro.

Earlier results indicate a negative correlation between religiosity and sexual permissiveness (Lastoria 1982). The results show significantly lower sexual permissiveness in individuals with a stronger identification with religion (Cochran & Beeghley 1991). It is interesting that intrinsic religiosity affects conservative attitudes about sex more than the religious group to which respondents belong (Ahrold et al. 2010). Research conducted in a neighboring state showed that religious respondents are not a homogeneous group, but that an indicator of religious engagement (in the form of regular attendance of religious services) was a stable predictor of more traditional attitudes towards sexuality (Marinović Jerolimov & Ančić 2014). In the same study, it was found that younger respondents, more educated and male respondents as well as respondents from urban areas showed a higher degree of permissiveness in the surveyed

attitudes about sex. The findings show that respondents with a more flexible approach to religion also show a more flexible approach to sexuality (McMillen et al. 2011). Research in a sample of adolescent girls shows that religiosity in girls is significantly related to their sexual behavior and experience, whereby most religious girls have less sexual experience and less motivation to have sex (Rajhvajn Bulat 2016). In line with all the above, the finding is that students who are more religious, especially those who attended religious ceremonies and had strong religious feelings, were less involved in various sexual behaviors (Penhollow et al. 2005). The same research raises the question of whether, since we know that religiosity affects attitudes about sex, on the other hand, extramarital sexual activity affects the degree of religiosity.

Based on all the above results, we assume that religious respondents will show less liberal views on sexuality than atheists and agnostics. Then, we assume that younger respondents will have more liberal attitudes about sex than older ones. We also assume that men will be more liberal in their attitudes about sex than women. Finally, we assume that more educated respondents will show a higher degree of liberality than less educated ones.

SUBJECTS AND METHODS

The sample consisted of 1287 inhabitants of Montenegro older than 18 years. During 2019, we collected data online, using the snowball method. To examine the liberality of attitudes, we used a 5-point Likert scale with 17 items, which we constructed ourselves for the purposes of this research. The items are given in Table 1,

Table 1. Scale items to examine the liberality of attitudes towards sexuality

Item	M	SD
Casual sex from time to time is good.	2.93	1.40
Premarital sex is useful for getting to know your partner better.	4.35	1.00
While I am in a relationship with one person, sex outside of it is unacceptable to me.	1.90	1.20
Prostitution should be legalized.	2.94	1.57
Marriage is the best form of partnership.	2.63	1.29
I would have sex with a person I meet online.	2.11	1.24
Homosexual marriages are acceptable to me.	2.46	1.53
Extramarital union means the same to me as marriage.	3.77	1.32
When an adult lives alone, only then can he/she enjoy full freedom.	3.48	1.34
Sex is primarily physical relaxation and enjoyment.	3.26	1.37
Sexual pleasure of two sincerely close people is the foundation of a lasting human relationship.	3.75	1.16
A good sex life increases a person's self-confidence.	4.18	0.99
Sex is the solution to many partner problems.	3.03	1.27
The basic function of sex is reproduction.	3.94	1.22
It is the woman's exclusive right to decide whether to give birth or have an abortion.	3.36	1.50
I justify abortion when pregnancy is unwanted.	3.67	1.40
Abortion is unacceptable to me as a way to prevent the birth of girls.	4.47	1.29

along with the average values and deviations for each of them. The Cronbach's reliability coefficient alpha (α) obtained in our sample is 0.66, which is certainly not satisfactory and which we will have in mind when interpreting the results.

Religiosity is represented by one categorical variable with the categories religious, agnostic (one who doubts the existence of God), atheist (one who does not believe in the existence of God). Other variables included in this study were gender (with categories of female and male), age (with 6 age levels, from 18 to over 65 years), and level of education (with levels of completed primary school, secondary school, and higher education). The data were processed in the SPSS software (*Statistical Package for Social Sciences*).

RESULTS

Sample structure

Research included 848 women (65.9%) and 439 men (34.1%). Regarding the age structure of the sample, 13.4% of respondents are aged 18 to 25 years, 38.7% are aged 26 to 35 years, 34.1% are aged 36 to 45 years, 11% of respondents is from 46 to 55 years old, 2.3% of respondents are aged 56 to 65 years and 0.5% of respondents are over 65 years old. Therefore, as many as 72% of the sample is between 26 and 45 years old. When we look at the educational level of our respondents, we see that 76.6% of respondents in our sample are highly educated, 22.2% have secondary education, and only 0.2% of respondents in our sample have completed only primary education. When asked about religiosity, 74.4% of our cause or 957 respondents declared themselves as believers, 13.3% or 171 respondents declared themselves as atheists and 12.4% or 159 respondents declared themselves as agnostics.

Analysis results

Religiosity and attitudes towards sexuality

When we compared agnostics, atheists, and believers in terms of liberal attitudes toward sex, we found significant differences. Thus, the value of F statistic is 74.12, and the statistical significance of Sig = 0.00, which means that the difference is significant at the level of 0.01. When we look at Table 2, we see that the average values of these 3 groups on the scale of liberal attitudes are such that they indicate that agnostics are the most liberal, then atheists and then believers. The greatest dispersion among believers is in terms of liberal attitudes about sex, although this is to be expected if we keep in mind that they are significantly more represented in the sample than the other two categories. As we assumed with our first hypothesis, believers have proven to be the most conservative in terms of attitudes about sex, while atheists and agnostics are significantly more liberal.

Age and attitudes towards sexuality

Significant differences were found between different age groups in terms of liberal attitudes about sex. Namely, the obtained F statistic 3.14 is significant at the level of 0.01 (Sig = 0.008). Table 3 provides the arithmetic means and standard deviations of the liberality of attitudes for each of the 6 age categories. The surprising result is that the lowest average score on the liberality scale is in the category of young people aged 18 to 25. After that, the slightly higher average score on the liberality scale is in the age category from 46 to 55, then in the age category from 26 to 35, then in the respondents over 65 years of age. The most liberal attitudes are expressed by respondents from the age categories from 36 to 45 and from 56 to 65 years of age.

Table 2. Religiosity and attitudes towards sexuality

Religiosity	M	SD
Agnostic	61.60	7.35
Atheist	60.52	7.57
Believer	54.59	8.61

Table 3. Age and attitudes towards sexuality

Age	M	SD
From 18 to 25	54.02	9.46
From 26 to 35	56.35	8.57
From 36 to 45	57.06	8.76
From 46 to 55	55.85	8.54
From 56 to 65	57.24	7.01
Over 65	56.50	14.60

Gender and attitudes towards sexuality

When we compared liberal attitudes towards sexuality between women and men in our sample, we obtained statistically significant differences. Namely, the t statistic of -2.94 is statistically significant at the level of 0.01 (Sig = 0.003), while the average value of liberal attitudes in women is 55.73, and in men 57.24. This indicates that the men in our sample have statistically significantly more liberal attitudes towards sexuality than the women in our sample, which was to be expected.

Education and attitudes towards sexuality

F statistic of 4.55 and the statistical significance Sig = 0.011 (statistically significant at the level of 0.05) indicate that there are significant differences between respondents of different educational levels in terms of liberal attitudes about sex. Table 4 provides the arithmetic means and standard deviations of the attitudes liberality for each of the 6 age categories. As expected, people with a higher level of education are proving to be more liberal in their attitudes towards sex than people with a lower level of education.

Table 4. Education level and attitudes towards sexuality

Education	M	SD
Primary school	46.50	4.95
Secondary school	55.12	8.97
Higher school	56.61	8.71

DISCUSSION

With our first hypothesis, we assumed that religious respondents would show less liberal attitudes regarding sexuality than atheists and agnostics, which we confirmed. This is in line with all the earlier principles we stated. Interesting is the finding that agnostics from our sample proved to be more liberal in terms of attitudes about sex than atheists. This can be explained by the cultural patterns of our country. Namely, during most of the 20th century atheism was in our country the "official religion" and it was atheism that included a rather strict

moral pattern of behavior, so it is possible that these patterns were passed on to next generations in the family. On the other hand, agnosticism as a concept of spiritual search in our culture does not include certain rules of behavior, but rather a manifestation of individuality in the philosophy of life, and therefore it is quite logical and greater liberalism in attitudes.

We did not confirm our assumption that younger respondents would have more liberal attitudes about sex than older ones. Here, on the contrary, the youngest age category showed the most conservative attitudes towards sexuality, and the most liberal attitudes towards sexuality were shown by respondents in the age group of 56 to 65 years. In any further interpretations, it should be borne in mind that the age groups were extremely numerically unequal and that the number of respondents in the category from 56 to 65 years is only 29, and in the category over 65 years only 6, while in other categories it was a three-digit number of respondents.

We confirmed the hypothesis that men will be more liberal in their attitudes about sex than women. In our sample and in our culture, this can be explained by inconsistent rules of conduct that apply to the male and female populations, where female sexuality is far more taboo than male, so it is very likely that women are reluctant to express their own attitudes about sex.

With the last hypothesis, we assumed that more educated respondents would show a higher degree of liberality than those less educated, and we confirmed that. This result is expected because it is assumed that people who are more educated generally have greater flexibility of opinion, and thus greater flexibility in attitudes related to sexuality.

It should be noted that the scale of liberal attitudes about sex did not show satisfactory reliability, more precisely internal consistency, which may affect the validity of the results obtained.

CONCLUSION

We see the solution to the methodological problems of our research in the construction of a new scale whose validity and reliability would be ensured by pilot research, which would precede the further use of the scale. Despite the methodological disadvantages of the research, the findings we have gained can be of great use primarily as guidelines for further work. We fulfilled the main goal of this research and examined whether there is a connection between religiosity and liberalism/conservatism of attitudes about sex in a sample from the population of Montenegro. We obtained the expected result that more religious respondents are also more conservative in terms of attitudes about sex. We gave the idea of distinguishing between atheists and agnostics in attitudes, which can be further verified through future research. This knowledge can

be implemented in sex education programs, where the participants' assumed value system and harmonizing the program content with it would be taken into account, thus consequently reducing the antagonism between religion and human sexuality.

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Contribution of individual authors:

Mitar Saveljić: data collection, study design, approval of the final version;

Damira Murić: study design;

Milena Raspopović & Damir Peličić: study design, statistical analysis.

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Correspondence:

Mitar Saveljić, MD

Clinical Center of Montenegro

Ljubljanska bb, 81 000 Podgorica, Montenegro

E-mail: mitarcg81@yahoo.com