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## EDITORIAL

# Sexual prejudices of students of the health sciences



Discrimination is to make a distinction in treatment based on arbitrary reasons like race, sex, socioeconomic level, political or religious differences, etc. It has been present throughout the history of mankind. Sexual discrimination is manifested in conducts of intolerance and disregard, often without being aware of them, toward those who have different sexual preferences from heterosexuality.<sup>1</sup>

In this context, homosexuality has been historically rejected and misunderstood. For a long time the term utilized to describe this has been homophobia. The term was coined by American psychologist George Weinberg in 1971. During an interview in 2002 he commented on the meaning: *Homophobia is simply that, a phobia, an irrational fear which provokes an escaping behavior or the desire to destroy all phobia stimuli or anything related.*

The Royal Spanish Academy included it for the first time in the 22nd edition of their dictionary, defining it as 'obsessive aversion toward homosexuals'.

This term has been criticized for its psychological connotation because it erroneously makes allusion to a type of phobia (irrational fear). Nowadays, the preferred term is sexual prejudice, as aptly specified in this issue's main article "Variables Related to Sexual Prejudice among Mexican Health Science Students". This article analyzes the stigma and discrimination toward non-heterosexuals in health institutions and among students in this field. It makes a thorough analysis of different variables, like socio-demographic data, social and sex life, type of university and major. Within this population the level of open rejection toward non-heterosexuals was low; however, some predictive variables were found, like having non-heterosexual friends and the acceptance of their own homosexual desires or fantasies.

This study was conducted with a population of university students with a mean age of 19.13 years. The results are as expected in a group with this level of education and age, so, exposed to global information and thus having better judgment.

In appearance, homosexuality is nowadays more accepted than ever before. It is a part of media like movies, press and television. It is a part of our everyday life. There have also been great legislative advances in favor

of homosexual rights. It seems like just a matter of time before we achieve equality in other areas.<sup>2</sup>

However, if we watch our society carefully we are still able to find many attitudes of sexual prejudice in different environments like religion and work, among others.

The origin of this prejudice is found in heterosexism, which tends to make heterosexuality the only legitimate and accepted sexual experience, hence many people do not see homosexuality as an acceptable alternative.<sup>3</sup>

For them, the sole existence of homosexuals, who do not threaten them in any way, subjectively constitutes a threat for the lifestyle which they have built around that exclusion, thus explaining the fear and hatred manifested, which in some cases reaches extreme violence.

For the homophobic these behaviors serve certain functions, giving it sense and allowing it to remain through time as proposed by Katz in his work:

- (a) A function of adaptation in the subject who seeks to belong to a group in society.
- (b) An ego-defense function through which the subject expresses his/her values.
- (c) A value-expressive function where the subject expresses the type of person he/she wants to be.
- (d) A knowledge function which helps the subject to obtain a simplified representation of the reality which surrounds him/her.<sup>4</sup>

Nowadays, sociocultural changes have led the way to the presence of strong normative pressure in favor of equality and tolerance, making the prejudice not disappear but adjust, transforming into something more subtle.

In conclusion, researches like the one presented are a valuable contribution to reduce behaviors of sexual prejudice. It is our expectation that there are similar studies in populations in different age groups and at education levels, which will allow us to compare results.

I'll end this with the words of the actor Morgan Freeman: *"I hate the word "Homophobia". It is not a phobia, you are not afraid; you are an asshole"*

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## Conflict of interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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