

DOI: 10.58490/ctjump.2026i11TA.4099

PERCEPTIONS OF HOMOSEXUALITY AND ASSOCIATED FACTORS IN VIETNAM: A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY USING THE 2020 WORLD VALUES SURVEY

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Received: 15/7/2025

Reviewed: 23/7/2025

Accepted: 25/6/2026

ABSTRACT

Background: Attitudes toward homosexuality are influenced by cultural, social, and religious norms, and play a critical role in shaping public acceptance and social equity. Understanding these perceptions is essential for informing inclusive policies and promoting equal rights. The World Values Survey 2020 was a global research project that explores people's values and beliefs across countries, including the justifiability of homosexuality in Vietnam. **Objectives:** 1. To describe the perceptions of Vietnamese people regarding homosexuality; 2. To identify factors associated with these perceptions; 3. To identify the factors related to the justifiability of homosexuality. **Materials and methods:** A cross-sectional analysis was conducted using data from 1,200 Vietnamese respondents in the World Values Survey Wave 7 (2017-2020). Bivariate analyses and multivariable logistic regression models were applied to examine factors associated with justifying homosexuality. **Results:** Overall, 56.7% of respondents considered justifiability of homosexuality. In bivariate analyses, justification of homosexuality was significantly associated with belief that homosexual couples can be good parents ($p < 0.001$), importance of God in life ($p = 0.001$), religious affiliation ($p = 0.025$), and acceptance of homosexual neighbors ($p = 0.002$). In multivariable analysis, factors independently associated with justifying homosexuality included age 41-50 years (OR = 0.674; 95% CI: 0.461-0.987), perceived importance of God (OR = 1.498; 95% CI: 1.162-1.930), acceptance of homosexual neighbors (OR = 0.699; 95% CI: 0.526-0.928), and belief that homosexual couples can be good parents (OR = 0.563; 95% CI: 0.438-0.723). Marital status other than married, Buddhist affiliation, and other religions were also significantly associated with justification of homosexuality. **Conclusions:** More than half of Vietnamese respondents considered justifiability of homosexuality. Agreement that homosexual couples can be good parents, the perceived importance of God, religious denomination, and acceptance of homosexual neighbors were associated with greater acceptance. These findings suggest that public education programs, community-based interventions, and culturally sensitive dialogue within religious and social institutions may help promote more inclusive attitudes toward sexual minorities in Vietnam.

Keywords: Homosexuality, associated factors, Vietnam, World Values Survey Wave.

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, perceptions of homosexuality remain a particularly important topic due to their profound implications on social inclusion, and mental health [1]. Globally, over 85% of respondents in countries like Sweden, the Netherlands, and Canada believe homosexuality should be accepted by society, while support remains below 15% in nations such as Nigeria, Pakistan, and Indonesia. Acceptance is also relatively low across many

Asian countries, including Malaysia (14%), China (21%), and the Philippines (73%), reflecting a wide regional disparity [2]. Although Vietnam has taken steps toward acknowledging sexual minorities, the reality remains that negative public attitudes persist.

Despite the gradual progression toward tolerance, social stigma and discrimination against homosexual individuals continue to manifest in various aspects of Vietnamese life, including family, school, workplace, and healthcare settings. International literature has consistently shown that homophobia and negative perceptions are often influenced by sociodemographic characteristics, including age, religion, education, political ideology, and occupation.

In Vietnam, limited research has been conducted to systematically quantify public attitudes toward homosexuality or to identify which factors are associated with more or less acceptance. In light of these realities, it is essential to empirically investigate the factors associated with Vietnamese perceptions of homosexuality. This includes determining to what extent people view homosexuality as justifiable, and identifying what demographic or social characteristics correlate with acceptance or rejection.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Study population

Study population: 1,200 survey respondents in Vietnam in World Values Survey Wave 7 (2017-2020). All respondents were included in the analysis, as the study aimed to capture a comprehensive national perspective without applying exclusion criteria.

2.2. Research methods

- **Study Design:** This was an analytical cross-sectional study.
- **Samples:** The probabilistic sample consisted of 1,200 survey respondents in Vietnam from the World Values Survey Wave 7 (2017-2020).
- **Sampling method:** The WVS used stratified multistage probability sampling to obtain a nationally representative sample based on region, urban/rural residence, and gender.
- **Study content:** Justifiability of homosexuality was defined as respondents who rated it 6 to 10 on question Q182 of the WVS. Sociodemographic variables including age, gender, education, marital status, religion, health, happiness, income, having homosexual neighbors, and belief in homosexual couples as good parents were compared between the justifiable and unjustifiable groups using univariate analysis. Two binary logistic regression models were subsequently conducted.
- **Statistical Analysis:** Data were expressed as absolute frequencies and percentages. Differences between two proportions were assessed using the Chi-square test or Fisher's Exact Test. Statistical significance was defined as $p < 0.05$. A binary logistic regression model was used to evaluate the association between predictor variables and the outcome. All statistical analyses were performed using SPSS version 22.0 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA).
- **Ethical Approval:** This study uses public-use dataset from the World Values Survey (WVS) Wave 7. All datasets have been fully anonymized. As the study uses secondary anonymized data, it is exempt from formal ethical review according to most institutional guidelines. Nonetheless, the analysis adheres to ethical principles for human subject research.

III. RESULTS

3.1. Proportion of respondents who consider homosexuality justifiable

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of opinions toward homosexuality. Overall, 56.7% (680 of 1,200) of participants considered homosexuality justifiable, while 43.3% did not.

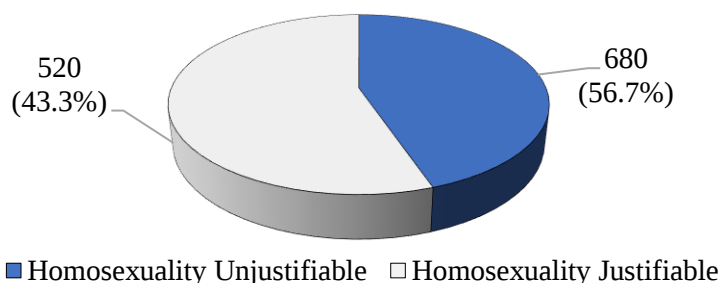


Figure 1. Proportion of respondents who consider homosexuality justifiable

3.2. Comparison of Selected Characteristics Between Respondents Who Consider Homosexuality Justifiable and Unjustifiable

Table 1. Bivariate analysis of the justifiability of homosexuality according to sociodemographic characteristics

Characteristics	Homosexuality Unjustifiable n (%)	Homosexuality Justifiable n (%)	χ^2 / Fisher's, p
Age < 30	174 (33.5)	231 (34.0)	$\chi^2=1.407$; p=0.704
Female	277 (53.3)	378 (55.6)	$\chi^2=0.693$; p=0.424
Education: ISCED2 and lower	179 (34.4)	221 (32.5)	$\chi^2=0.604$; p=0.739
Family is important	507 (97.5)	655 (96.3)	$\chi^2=1.330$; p=0.249
Work is important	362 (69.6)	477 (70.1)	$\chi^2=0.040$; p=0.842
Married	373 (71.7)	496 (72.9)	$\chi^2=1.548$; p=0.461
Agree Homosexual couples are as good parents	308 (59.2)	493 (72.5)	$\chi^2=23.377$; p<0.001
Happy	502 (96.5)	666 (97.9)	$\chi^2=2.234$; p=0.135
Health: good and very good	344 (66.2)	421 (61.9)	$\chi^2=2.295$; p=0.13
God is very important in their life	316 (60.8)	348 (51.2)	$\chi^2=10.971$; p=0.001
Full-time or part-time employment	200 (38.5)	258 (37.9)	$\chi^2= 4.018$; p=0.134
Do not belong to a denomination	363 (39.8)	502 (73.8)	$\chi^2=7.364$; p=0.025
Buddhist	118 (22.7)	151 (22.2)	
Other religion	39 (7.5)	27 (4.0)	
Ethnic group: Kinh	501 (96.3)	657 (96.6)	$\chi^2=0.064$; p=0.8
Household income group: Fourth step and lower	141 (27.1)	194 (28.5)	$\chi^2=3.837$; p=0.147
Accepting homosexual neighbors	418 (80.4)	495 (72.8)	$\chi^2=9.330$; p=0.002

Bivariate analysis of the justifiability of homosexuality shows the relationship between the sociodemographic variables and homophobic attitude. Significant statistical

differences were found for: belief that homosexual couples can be good parents ($p < 0.001$), importance of God in life ($p = 0.001$), religious affiliation ($p = 0.025$), and accepting homosexual neighbors ($p = 0.002$). Other variables including age, gender, education, marital status, income, health, and happiness were unrelated ($p > 0.05$)

3.3. Multivariable logistic regression analysis on the association between homosexuality justifiable and characteristics

Table 2. Multivariable logistic regression analysis of sociodemographic and attitudinal factors associated with justifiability of homosexuality

Variables	Regression Coefficient	SE†	Odds Ratio	95% CI‡
Age (31-40 /<30 years)	-0.313	0.221	0.731	0.474-1.128
Age (41-50 /<30 years)	-0.394	0.194	0.674*	0.461-0.987
Age (>51 /<30 years)	-0.234	0.202	0.792	0.533-1.176
Sex (Male/Female)	-0.134	0.125	0.874	0.685-1.116
Ethnicity (Other/ Kinh)	0.017	0.331	1.017	0.532-1.945
God is important (Yes/No)	0.404	0.129	1.498**	1.162-1.930
Marital Status (Single/ Married)	0.501	0.273	1.650	0.966-2.818
Marital Status (Other/ Married)	0.530	0.325	1.698	0.898-3.211
Education (ISCED3/ ISCED2↓)	-0.056	0.178	0.946	0.667-1.341
Education (ISCED4+/ ISCED2↓)	0.037	0.151	1.037	0.771-1.396
Religion (Buddhist/No)	0.429	0.275	1.536	0.896-2.634
Neighbors are Homosexuals (Yes/No)	-0.358	0.145	0.699*	0.526-0.928
Homosexual couples are good parents (Yes/No)	-0.575	0.128	0.563***	0.438-0.723

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

In the multivariable analysis, justifiability of homosexuality was significantly associated with age 41-50 and age <30 years (OR=0.674; CI 95%: 0.461-0.987), perceived importance of God (OR=1.498; CI 95%: 1.162-1.930), having homosexual neighbors (OR=0.699; CI 95%: 0.526-0.928), and belief that homosexual couples can be good parents (OR=0.563; CI 95%: 0.438-0.723).

Table 3. Multivariable logistic regression analysis of the association between religion, education, and justifiability of homosexuality

Variables	Regression Coefficient	SE†	Odds Ratio	95% CI‡
Age (31-40 /<30 years)	-0.251	0.219	0.778	0.506-1.195
Age (41-50 /<30 years)	-0.363	0.193	0.696	0.477-1.016
Age (>51 /<30 years)	-0.203	0.201	0.816	0.551-1.210
Sex (Male/Female)	-0.194	0.123	0.823	0.647-1.047
God is important (Yes/No)	0.244	0.218	1.277	0.834-1.956
Marital Status (Single/ Married)	-0.054	0.180	0.948	0.666-1.348
Marital Status (Other/ Married)	-0.901	0.401	0.406*	0.185-0.892
Education (ISCED3/ ISCED2↓)	0.254	0.282	1.290	0.742-2.242
Education (ISCED4+/ ISCED2↓)	0.113	0.311	1.120	0.609-2.058
Religion (Buddhist/No)	0.547	0.271	1.728*	1.016-2.938
Religion (Other/No)	0.586	0.283	1.797*	1.032-3.130

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

In the multivariable analysis, marital status other than married (OR: 0.406; CI 95%:0.185-0.892), Buddhist religion (OR=1.728; CI 95%:1.016-2.938), and other religions (OR=1.797; CI 95%: 1.032-3.130) were significantly associated with justifying homosexuality, while other demographic and educational variables showed no significant effects.

IV. DISCUSSION

4.1. Proportion of respondents who consider homosexuality justifiable

This study found that 56.7% of the 1,200 individuals interviewed that they accepted homosexuality. In contrast, 43.3% (520 out of 1,200) stated that they judged homosexuality. Therefore, the proportion of those who judged homosexuality was lower than that of those who accepted it. This was a positive sign, suggesting that social perceptions had shifted toward greater acceptance. This level of acceptance was relatively high when compared to regional data reported in the Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Survey (2013) [2]. According to that report, the acceptance rate of homosexuality in Vietnam's neighboring countries. Even in China, acceptance stood at only 21%, and in India, 15%, reflecting the deeply rooted cultural and religious conservatism across much of Asia [2].

This rate was lower than that found in a 2012 study by Chaohua Lou in Taipei, which showed that the acceptance of homosexuality was 55.8% among males and 77.4% among females [3]. The rate of acceptance or stigma toward homosexuality largely depends on the cultural and societal norms of the countries in which the studies are conducted [4]. Although part of East Asian culture, Taiwan's openness to diversity has fostered greater acceptance of homosexuality [5]. In Vietnam, a 2012 study by Chaohua Lou and colleagues conducted in Hanoi reported a lower rate of acceptance of homosexuality compared to our study, with acceptance rates of 32.9% among males and 32.1% among females [3]. Compared to our study, this research was conducted five years earlier, and it is likely that over time, public attitudes have shifted among certain segments of the population.

4.2. Comparison of selected characteristics between respondents who consider homosexuality justifiable and unjustifiable

This study found no statistically significant differences in attitudes toward homosexuality across most predisposing variables, including age, gender, education level, marital status, and ethnicity. While previous studies in Chile and Europe suggested that older individuals and men are more likely to express homophobic attitudes, such trends were not observed in this Vietnamese sample, possibly due to a younger age distribution and overall cultural conformity [6], [7]. Similarly, unlike many international findings, education level did not significantly influence attitudes, which may reflect the relatively high level of acceptance across both high- and low-educated groups in Vietnam [8], [9].

Marital status likewise had no significant effect, aligning with findings from Chile but differing from studies linking marital status with greater homophobia [6]. The similar patterns of acceptance across gender and ethnic groups may point to cultural norms that discourage open dissent on sensitive social issues.

Belief-related variables played a more significant role. Those who viewed homosexuality as justifiable were more likely to agree that homosexuals can be good parents and less likely to rate religion as very important or report religious affiliation. Interestingly, a higher proportion of respondents who judged homosexuality as unjustifiable reported

having homosexual neighbors, contradicting the widely supported contact hypothesis [10]. However, broader literature confirms that meaningful, close relationships with LGBTQ+ individuals are more strongly associated with acceptance than mere proximity.

Finally, enabling and psychological variables such as happiness, health, income, and employment status did not show significant associations with attitudes. This diverges from findings in high-income countries and suggests that in Vietnam, attitudes toward homosexuality are shaped more by cultural and ideological norms than by material well-being [11]. These results underscore the importance of targeting cultural beliefs and moral narratives, rather than solely improving socio-economic conditions, to promote greater acceptance of sexual minorities.

4.3. Multivariable logistic regression analysis on the association between homosexuality justifiable and characteristics

The findings provide valuable insights into the sociodemographic and attitudinal factors influencing public justification of homosexuality. Age emerged as a significant predictor, with individuals aged 41-50 being less supportive of homosexuality compared to younger respondents. This reflects a generational divide, where older individuals socialized during less accepting eras [12]. Religiosity also remained a strong determinant. Respondents who viewed God as “not important” were significantly more likely to justify homosexuality, aligning with previous cross-national studies that found higher religiosity correlated with homonegative attitudes [13]. Interestingly, the effect of religion was not uniform. Among Buddhists and individuals of other religious backgrounds, higher education appeared to moderate religious influence, suggesting that tolerance may arise not only through secularization but also through doctrinal reinterpretation or flexibility within certain religious traditions. In addition, two attitudinal variables were support for homosexual parenting and acceptance of homosexual neighbors were positively associated with justification of homosexuality. These findings support the contact hypothesis, which argues that increased personal contact with marginalized groups can reduce prejudice [6]. Such results underscore the importance of both interpersonal exposure and broader sociocultural openness in shaping public perceptions. Collectively, the study highlights that age, religiosity, and interpersonal contact significantly shape societal attitudes toward homosexuality. These factors suggest that interventions aiming to reduce homonegativity should prioritize educational strategies and promote meaningful social engagement, particularly targeting older and religious populations.

The interaction between religiosity and educational attainment offers a more nuanced understanding of public attitudes toward homosexuality. In this study, a significant positive interaction effect was observed among Buddhists compared to those without religious affiliation. This finding challenges the conventional view that religiosity uniformly correlates with homonegativity, suggesting instead that the relationship may be moderated by educational background [14]. This moderating role of education is consistent with findings by Ying Xie *et al.* (2018), who noted that higher education levels were associated with more favorable homosexual attitudes across college campuses [15]. Education not only enhances critical thinking but also broadens social exposure, enabling individuals to engage more thoughtfully with diversity. In our sample, over 65% of respondents had completed ISCED3 or higher, which may have contributed to reduced stigma despite religious affiliation. These results underscore the importance of educational

interventions in religious contexts. In Vietnam, where Confucian values and traditional family expectations continue to shape social conservatism, integrating sexual diversity education within religious communities presents a culturally sensitive avenue for fostering acceptance and reducing prejudice.

This study has several limitations. First, the cross-sectional design of the World Values Survey does not allow for causal inference between associated factors and attitudes toward homosexuality. Second, all variables were self-reported and may be subject to social desirability bias, particularly given the sensitive nature of homosexuality in the Vietnamese cultural context. Finally, the use of secondary data limited the ability to explore additional relevant factors such as personal experiences with sexual minorities, exposure to sexual diversity education, or depth of religious practice. These limitations should be considered when interpreting the results.

V. CONCLUSION

This study found that 56.7% of Vietnamese respondents accepted homosexuality. Univariate analysis revealed that while most variables such as age, gender, educational level, marital status, and income were not significantly associated with attitudes toward homosexuality, factors related to religion, parental beliefs, and social proximity played a role in influencing acceptance. Educational strategies and social engagement should be prioritized to reduce homonegativity, especially among older and religious groups. In Vietnam, incorporating sexual diversity education into religious communities offers a culturally appropriate approach to promoting acceptance and reducing stigma.

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