

A Description of Intimate Partnerships in The Bahamas and Their Association with Adult Aggression and Other Experiences

William J. Fielding 0000-0001-5433-9673
University of The Bahamas

Theresa E. Moxey-Adderley 0000-0003-1211-4120
Bahamas Baptist University College

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Abstract

This article builds off of data collected in a previous study of 5,351 Bahamian adults, examining respondents' experiences of intimate relationships. About 10% of both male and female respondents in sexual relationships reported engaging in non-heterosexual sex. Notably, these relationships were associated with higher levels of aggression and domestic violence than heterosexual relationships. Also of note, divorce was most commonly reported in the 40-plus age group. Finally, separation and divorce were associated with higher levels of aggression, domestic violence and experiences of unwanted sexual intercourse than those in married or unmarried relationships.

Gays should understand that most Bahamians regard marriage as a sacred institution with certain well-defined moral commitments. Furthermore, many consider the union to be incomplete if without one or two children ... and perhaps an occasional sweetheart (Knowles, 2016).

Introduction

The topic of relationships has received renewed interest in recent years due to attempts to criminalise rape within marriage, the protection of women from violence in general and whether or not so-called gay marriage should be permitted (Benjamin & LeGrand, 2012). These issues have resulted in an ongoing discussion on relationships in the Bahamian media (Rolle, 2019; Strachan, 2022).

A brief review of the social landscape in which heterosexual intimate partnerships exist in The Bahamas is provided by Moxey-

Adderley and Walker (2023), and for gay relationships by Gaskins (2013), and reports in the media ("Readers react", 2014). The veiled hostility that gays face is alluded to in a letter to the editor of a newspaper quoted in full at the start of this paper (Knowles, 2016) and has apparently been more openly manifested by alleged attacks on persons in the LGBT community (Bahamas Weekly, 2016). Infidelity in sexual relationships, typically called *sweethearting* in the Bahamas, has received renewed interest in recent years (Fielding et al., 2026). Sweethearting can result in marriage ending in divorce (Brennen, 2024); therefore, its role in relationships cannot be ignored. Violence

in heterosexual relationships is also an ongoing concern in the Bahamas (Fielding & Ballance, 2022), and reports of violence between ex-partners, are sometimes highlighted in Bahamian media (Bailey, 2024a). Further, the books *Gender Inequality in The Bahamas: Violence, Media, and Law* (Storr, 2023), *Sexual Violence in The Bahamas* (Fielding & Ballance, 2022), *Violence in The Bahamas* (Fielding et al., 2016) and *Rooting Out Violence* (Bahamas Ministry of Health & Wellness, 2024) provide a wide-ranging background to violence in homes and in relationships in The Bahamas. The 2023 human rights report of the U. S. Department of State included concerns about some attitudes within Bahamian society and stated that “significant human rights issues included extensive gender-based violence” (U. S. Department of State, 2024). An Inter-American Development Bank report (2024) reiterated that violence against women is a concern and indicated that “LGBTQ+ persons ... face a high risk of discrimination and violence in The Bahamas” (p. 26). Further, some have viewed sweethearting as a form of transactional sex, which would suggest there is also a risk of violence and stigma with this activity (Kempadoo, 2009).

In The Bahamas there is still a stigma attached to those who are divorced (Darville, 2024); this is despite the fact that divorce is relatively common (Amato, 2017) and has become more common in The Bahamas (Brennen, 2024). Negative attitudes towards divorce may dissuade those in dangerous relationships to seek legal protection via the courts. Such discouragement is increased by statements by leaders in society who talk about frivolous reasons for divorce (Dames, 2022). Therefore, when a marriage fails, or a relationship is not heterosexual, there are difficulties that partners can encounter which arise from societal norms.

Study Data

The data presented in this study arose from an internet study described by Moxey-Adderley and Fielding (2024) which investigated childhood experiences of corporal punishment and adult aggression reported by 5,351 participants. However, their data also permit us to investigate some aspects of intimate partner experiences. In the Bahamian context, this would indicate a gender identification outside of what is commonly understood as male and female and a presumed sexual orientation towards the opposite sex. While *Other* was used in the study by Moxey-Adderley and Fielding (2024) to accommodate those participants who did not feel that their sexual identification was male or female, their precise sexual identification was not investigated. Despite that limitation, given the context of the study, which included questions on sexual activity, those with what some might describe as non-normative sexual choices (Rothmann & Simmonds, 2015) or non-heterosexual relationships, the data allow us to make some tentative statements about this *Other* group in relation to the male and female groups. We are also able to compare groups of respondents by the choice of sexual partner, males who have sex with males (MSM), males who have sex with females (MSF), females who have sex with females (FSF) and females who have sex with males (FSM). We distinguish between MSF (male respondent with a female partner) and FSM (female respondent with a male partner), because the data are indexed by sex of respondent, male or female, and by the sex of their partner, but we only have experiences of the respondent, not their partner. While such classifications allow us to examine aspects related to sexual behaviour, they do not allow us to say anything about sexual orientation (U. S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022), but MSM and FSF groups are regarded as being part of the wider

LGBTQ+ group (Waugh et al., 2021).

The data also allow us to examine self-reported aggression and other experiences of respondents by marital status. Aggression of respondents was measured by the Aggression Questionnaire of Buss and Perry (1992) and experiences of being a victim of domestic violence by the HITS index of Sherin et al. (1998). Consequently, we are able to add to our appreciation of experiences of those in intimate partner relationships in the first quarter of the 21st century Bahamas.

This report focuses on adult sexual preferences and selected experiences related to these choices. This focus on the experiences of the 18 and over age group arises because when people experience sexual relations before the age of 18, these experiences may not have reflected the free choice of the respondent and may have been illegal, as indicated by Bethel and Fielding (2020).

Results and Discussion

Choice of adult sexual partner

Table 1 indicates that about 10% of male and female participants who had had a sexual partner had engaged in non-heterosexual sex. This figure is close to that of 9% reported in an international study by IPSOS in 2023. Those who considered their sex as Other showed a less definite choice of sex of intimate partner(s) than males or females and

so it may be simplistic to label the Other group as homosexuals. Table 1 provides an estimate of the percentage of the adult population who may face discrimination associated with the sex of their choice of sexual partner(s), and this suggests that discrimination based upon choice of sexual partner(s) would affect similar percentages of males and females. Despite the fact that Other sex was not defined in the survey, Table 1 suggests that this group consists of respondents with a less consistent choice of partner (sometimes male, sometimes female), than the male and female respondents.

When classified by sex, respondents typically had had differing numbers of intimate partners when an adult (Table 2). While females had a median of three partners, the median number of partners for males and those of other sex, was over six. This finding for males and females is consistent with the results from the 2019 Bahamian Ministry of Health STEPS study. This result has implications for sexual and reproductive health, which may raise concerns including both sexually transmitted diseases (Gibson, 2009) and unwanted pregnancies. This finding aligns with the concerns associated with increased paternity rates when males have more than one partner (Fielding, 2017). Table 2 demonstrates that females were less likely than males or those of Other sex to have over six partners in their lifetime.

Table 1
Choice of Adult Sexual Partner by Sex

Sex of intimate partner(s)	Sex of respondent		
	Male	Female	Other
Male	5.5%	91.4%	17.9%
Female	89.7%	4.6%	17.9%
Sometimes male, sometimes female	4.7%	4%	64.3%
N	979	2,810	29

Table 2
Number of Adult Intimate Partners by Sex of Respondent

Number of intimate partners, when an adult	Sex of respondent		
	Male	Female	Other
1	11.7%	18.7%	
2	7.6%	15.9%	7.1%
3	8.6%	17.1%	7.1%
4	7.7%	11.2%	14.3%
5	6.6%	9.1%	3.6%
6	3.7%	5.4%	
More than 6	54.1%	22.6%	67.9%
<i>N</i>	909	2,582	28

Note: Males V females only, $\chi^2 = 320$, $df = 6$, $N = 3,491$, $p < .001$

Table 3 confirms that males have higher aggression scores than females. It also shows that study participants of Other sex were even more aggressive. It may be conjectured that this aggression is associated with the negative ways society can respond to those who it considers as not normal and the associated stigma of being homosexual (Martin-Mack, 2012). Given the small number of data points available in this group the driver(s) of this elevated aggression, within and/or outside the relationship, could benefit from being investigated further to determine if, or in what ways, public policy needs to be changed to reduce or to offer anger management in this segment of the population.

Table 3
Aggression Score of Respondents by Sex

Sex of respondent	M	SE
Male	74.1	0.6
Female	71.4	0.35
Other	82.5	3.44

Note: Analysis of covariance, $F = 2, 3,863 = 12.3$, $p < .001$, covariate age group

Table 4
Aggression of Respondents by Sex of Their Intimate Partner(s)

Sex of intimate partner(s)	M	SE
Male	71	.49
Female	74.7	.99
Varies, sometimes male, sometimes female	81.8	1.47

Note: Analysis of covariance, $F = 2, 3,319 = 26.5$, $p < .001$, covariate, sex and age.

Table 4 gives the mean aggression scores by sex of the respondents' intimate partner(s). The pattern of aggression scores reflects that seen in Table 3. This confirms the suggestion that respondents in non-sex specific sexual relationships are more aggressive than those in other relationships.

Table 5 indicates that adult aggression reported by respondents is linked to their number of sexual partners. Those respondents with just one partner reported lower aggression scores and those with six or more partners had the highest mean aggression score. This suggests that those respondents who engage in philandering and are more aggressive may put themselves at risk of being victims of domestic violence. This in turn may cause the relationship to fail

(Spencer et al., 2019). This finding may be of concern when there is a power imbalance in the relationship such as an older man having

relations with a younger woman (Dunn, 2002).

Table 5
Aggression Score and Number of Sexual Partners

Number of intimate partners	M	SE
1	67.2	.83
2	70.4	.93
3	69.3	.87
4	71.9	1.03
5	73.1	1.15
6	72	1.51
More than 6	78.1	.6

Note: Analysis of covariance, $F = 6, 3,070 = 23.7, p < .001$, covariates, age, sex.

The elevated chance of experiencing domestic violence is associated with victims having had more partners, analysis of covariance, $F = 2, 3,442 = 9.08, p < .001$, covariates age and sex. This overall pattern is seen irrespective of the sex of the respondent, Table 6. Again, we see that people of Other sex are at greater risk than males or females

of being victims of domestic violence, and men are at lower risk than women. The limited data on those of Other sex, suggest an even higher level of domestic violence in their relationships irrespective of the number of partners, however the data on the Other group need to be interpreted with caution due to the limited number of observations.

Table 6
Percentage of Respondents Suffering From Domestic Violence By Sex and Number of Partners

Number of intimate partners, when an adult	Sex of respondent		
	Male	Female	Other
1	5.9%	8.6%	
N	101	476	
2	10.4%	13.7%	0%
N	67	402	2
3	15.6%	20.2%	50%
N	77	434	2
4	17.1%	17.4%	100%
N	70	287	4
5	26.3%	16.7%	100%
N	57	233	1
6	18.2%	23.4%	
N	33	137	
More than 6	23.8%	27.2%	61.1%
N	487	574	18

Note: N = number of respondents in each classification

Experiences of violence within adult relationships

The adult experience of unwanted sexual intercourse is more common for females than males. While the number of respondents in the Other sex is relatively small, the data suggest that unwanted sexual intercourse is highest in this group, Table 7.

Overall, higher mean aggression scores were associated with respondents experiencing unwanted sexual intercourse, Table 8.

The adult experience of unwanted sexual intercourse, a component of domestic

violence, is associated with elevated scores across all the dimensions of the aggression score as well as in the overall aggression score, excluding the verbal abuse dimension, Table 9.

Respondents who were not in exclusively heterosexual relationships had higher domestic violence scores than respondents in other types of relationships as shown in Table 10. This reflects the pattern of aggression scores seen in Table 8 and results from other studies (Kar et al., 2023).

Table 7
Experience of Adult Unwanted Sexual Intercourse by Sex of Respondent

Experienced unwanted sexual intercourse	Sex of respondent		
	Male	Female	Other
Yes	7.7%	17%	32.1%
Not sure, maybe yes	11.8%	14%	39.3%
No	80.5%	69.1%	28.6%
N	964	2,776	28

Note: $X^2 = 82.3$, $df = 4$, $N = 3,769$, $p < .001$

Table 8
Mean Aggression Scores by Adult Experience of Unwanted Sexual Intercourse

Experienced sexual unwanted intercourse	Mean	SE
Yes	78.5	.85
Not sure, maybe yes	76	.88
No	70.6	.38

Note: Analysis of covariance, $F_{2, 3,284} = 45.6$, $p < .001$, covariates: age and sex.

Table 9
Aggression and Its Component Scores, by Experience of Adult Sexual Abuse

A victim of sexual abuse/ unwanted sexual intercourse	Aggression score	Physical aggression	Verbal aggression	Anger	Hostility
Yes	78.5	23.2	14.2	18	22.5
Not sure, maybe yes	76	22.5	14	17.7	21.7
No	70.6	21	13.9	16.2	19.3
p	<.001	<.001	.16	<.001	<.001

Note: Analysis of covariance, Covariates, age and sex

Table 10
Mean Domestic Violence Scores by Sex of Intimate Partner

	Mean Domestic violence score (HITS)			
	Sex of respondent's partner(s)			
	Male	Female	Varies	Overall
Male	7.59	7.54	10.19	8.44
Female	7.17	8.7	8.49	8.12
Other	11	10.83	13.16	11.7
Overall	8.59	9.92	10.6	

Note: Analysis of covariance, interaction, $F_{4, 3,733} = 5.33$, $p < .001$, covariate, age.

While the main effects of sex of respondent and the sex of their partner were not statistically different with respect to aggression scores ($p = .14$ and $p = .64$, respectively), this is to be expected due the small numbers in the *Other* and *Varies* groups. Although the interaction between these effects was significant ($p = .038$), this

should be treated with caution in the absence of significant main effects. However, this pattern of elevated aggression in non-heterosexual relationships reflects the findings in Table 11. Aggression in homosexual relationships have been reported in the press (Rolle, 2024) and such violence can result in death (Clarke, 2020).

Table 11
Mean Aggression Scores by Sex of Respondent and Sex of Intimate Partner

Respondent's sex	Sex of respondent's partner(s)			
	Male	Female	Varies	Overall
Male	73.7	74	83	76.9
Female	71	76	82.1	76.4
Other	95.2	83	77.7	85.3
Overall	80	77.7	80.9	

Note: Analysis of covariance, interaction, $F_{4, 3,311} = 2.54$, $p = .038$, covariate, age.

MSM and FSF

While few respondents identified as *Other* sex beyond male and female, data were collected from 55 persons in the MSM group and 129 persons in the FSF group. Before looking at the current relational experiences of these groups, note that the MSM group was more likely than the MSF group to have suffered violence of some sort, as shown in Table 12. Differences in the experiences of the FSF and FSM were minimal. These experiences can be a cause for concern as indicated by Moxey-Adderley and Fielding (2024). However, note also that the MSM group in particular, continued to report being victimised as adults (bullied in the

workplace). Due to the small sample size in the MSM group, we were only able to detect large differences between the MSM and MSF groups; however it is noteworthy that for the experiences in Table 12, the percentages for the MSM group, were almost always higher than for the MSF group. These findings suggest that further research on the MSM group in The Bahamas is warranted.

The MSM and MSF groups had a similar number of intimate partners ($p = .84$) and the FSM group had more intimate partners than the FSF group ($p = .004$, non-parametric analysis of covariance, with age as covariate). Likewise, the MSM and MSF had similar domestic violence scores ($p = .902$)

and the FSF group had a higher domestic violence score than the FSM ($p < .001$, analysis of covariance, with age as covariate). However, only the FSF group (76, $SE = 1.76$) reported higher aggression scores than the other groups, (for example: FSM group (71, $SE = .39$). Experiences of adult

unwanted sexual intercourse were more common in the MSM and FSF groups, (MSM, 20.4%, compared to MSF, 5.7%, $X^2 = 22.9$, $N = 915$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$, and FSF, 19%, compared to FSM, 16.4%, $X^2 = 6.96$, $N = 2656$, $df = 2$ $p = .031$).

Table 12

Respondents Who Agreed to Being Victims of Experiences Which Had a Negative Impact on Them

Experience	MSM	MSF	p	FSF	FSM	p
Physically punished by parent/guardian at home	34.1%	23.2%	.104	34.9%	29.2%	.235
Physically punished by teachers at school	31.8%	17.8%	.027	24.3%	20.1%	.322
Shouted at by parent/guardian at home	32%	33%	> .99	52.9%	47.2%	.258
Shouted at by teachers at school	27.7%	19.7%	.191	36.9%	27.7%	.04
A victim of bullying at school	51.2%	34.9%	.047	54.3%	44.4%	.07
A victim of bullying in the workplace	43.9%	23.2%	.005	38.5%	36.4%	.737
A gang member at school	23.1%	18.5%	.604	9%	5.4%	.263
A gang member after you left school	25%	14.9%	.239	9.4%	5.2%	.157
A victim of property crime	47.4%	36.3%	.225	29.9%	37.9%	.14
A victim of a physical attack	45.9%	37.3%	.3	40.4%	42.9%	.741
A victim of sexual abuse/unwanted sexual intercourse	68.8%	26.2%	< .001	52.7%	54.1%	.829
Detained at Fox Hill Prison or the Detention Centre	30%	21.6%	.406	11.3%	8.5%	.478

Note: p from Fisher's exact test, for MSM v MSF and FSF v FSM. Those who responded "Not applicable" were omitted.

Marital Status of Males and Females

In The Bahamas, only those in heterosexual relationships can marry (Bahamas Registrar General Department, 2016). The letter to the editor of *The Tribune* newspaper quoted at the beginning of this study might be considered a pithy summary of what relationships in The Bahamas look like, and it summarises the tension associated with relationships in The Bahamas, as it appears to find fault with all relationships.

By the age 30-39, about half of the respondents were single and almost one in three were married. By age 40-49, about one in five respondents were either divorced or separated, indicating that their formal relationship had broken down, Table 13.

Data from the 2022 census indicate a similar pattern for divorce by age group, with a marked increase in the percentage of

divorced persons aged 40 and over (Bahamas National Statistical Institute, 2024). The higher percentages for separated persons reported in Table 13 suggest that for some respondents' their relationships may have resulted in a separation without the legal protection which can occur with a legal separation. Why this might be, and the implications of separation without legal protection from a former partner would be areas for future research in the Bahamian context.

Newspaper reports show that women who try to leave against the partner's will can face extreme violence due to the lack of safe houses (Bowleg, 2021), indicating the risk women face when they leave relationships. The alleged slow legal process of divorce may also be a matter that contributes to the situation of separation outside of the legal system (Turnquest, 2014).

Table 13
Respondent's Marital Status Within Age and Sex

Age group	Sex	Never married	Currently married	Common law relationship	Separated	Divorced	Widowed	N
18-19	Male	90.7%	4.7%	4.7%	0%	0%	0%	43
	Female	68.8%	1.1%	26.9%	3.2%	0%	0%	93
20-29	Male	78.4%	6.6%	12%	2.3%	1%	0%	391
	Female	78.4%	7.6%	11.7%	1.9%	.4%	0%	1,023
30-39	Male	52.9%	27.7%	7.1%	6.7%	5%	.4%	238
	Female	50.3%	31.3%	7.5%	4.6%	4.2%	2.1%	716
40-49	Male	27.3%	47.9%	3.3%	7.4%	13.2%	.8%	121
	Female	28.5%	44.7%	5.8%	5.6%	13.4%	2.1%	432
50-59	Male	13.6%	56.8%	4.2%	8.5%	16.9%	0%	118
	Female	21.8%	44.8%	3.5%	5.3%	15.9%	8.6%	395
60 or over	Male	6.9%	59.7%	5.6%	6.9%	15.3%	5.6%	72
	Female	17.8%	38.5%	3.4%	6.3%	16.1%	17.8%	174

Respondents who were currently married reported lower levels of aggression than those who were separated or divorced, Table 14. Table 14 shows that the pattern of aggression is dissimilar for males and females. For example, it would appear that separation and widowhood are associated with a greater impact, as measured by aggression for males than females. Alternatively, it may be that females are more

likely to leave a relationship when their partner was aggressive; reports from newspapers support this interpretation (Bailey, 2024b). Further study would be required to assess the temporal aspect of the aggression and the change in the participant's marital status; does the elevated aggression result from or is it a cause of divorce or separation in the Bahamian context?

Table 14
Mean Aggression Scores by Marital Status

Marital status of respondent	Sex of respondent		Overall
	Male	Female	
Separated	80.2	78.3	79.2
Common law relationship	80.3	74.6	77.4
Never married	73.5	72.9	73.2
Divorced	81	71	76
Widowed	82	68.9	75.5
Currently married	71.6	67.7	69.7
Overall	78.1	72.2	

Note: Analysis of covariance, interaction, $F = 5, 3,302 = 2.83$, $p = .015$, covariate, age.

Respondents who were separated or divorced reported higher domestic violence scores than respondents in other relationships.

Married respondents reported the lowest mean domestic violence scores, Table 15. This may provide a rationale as to why

established relationships might fail. The fact that aggression scores and domestic violence scores are correlated, $r = 0.33$ 95% [CI 0.3, 0.36] suggests that aggression may also play a part in contributing to a failed relationship. Of the 107 women who were separated, 46% were victims of domestic violence and in the case of 182 divorced women, 34%. However, these data cannot identify any temporal association; that is, which came first.

However, only 11% of 723 currently married women were victims of domestic violence. A study from Great Britain indicated that 16% of women indicated that domestic violence was the reason for their divorce and in addition, arguments were reported by 30% of women (Gravningen et al., 2017). In The Bahamas, domestic disputes can escalate to murder, in both homosexual and heterosexual relationships (Hanna, 2017).

Table 15
Mean Domestic Violence Scores by Marital Status of Respondent

Marital status	Male	Female	Overall
Separated	9.7	10.2	9.9
Divorced	9.3	8.9	9.1
Widowed	7.2	7.4	7.3
Common law relationship	8.4	7.2	7.8
Never married	7.2	7.2	7.2
Currently married	7.6	6.6	7.1
Overall	8.2	7.9	

Note: Analysis of covariance, interaction, $F_{5, 3,706} = 2.95$, $p = .012$, covariate, age

Table 16 gives the percentage of male and female respondents by current marital status who had sexual intercourse against their will when an adult (this does not include those who were unsure, and so gives a minimum figure.) For most marital status groups, women were more likely than men, to have had sex against their will. Table 16 also shows that for women, the higher rates of having sex against their will were associated

with the separated and divorced groups. Notwithstanding the limitations in the data about temporal aspects, these findings are consistent with the conjecture that forced sexual intercourse may contribute to separation or divorce of married couples. Such an interpretation would be consistent with a well-publicised divorce in 2021 (AA v. BB, 2021), among other cases.

Table 16
Percentage of Respondents Having Sex Against Their Will (when an adult) by Current Marital Status

Marital status	Male	Female	X^2 p
Separated	12.8%	33.6%	.024
Divorced	9.5%	23.6%	.053
Never married	6.1%	17.6%	< .001
Common law relationship	13.2%	14.2%	.624
Currently married	7.7%	13%	.071
Widowed	16.7%	12.6%	.589
X^2	.033	< .001	

Implications of the findings

The data from Moxey-Adderley and Fielding (2024) provide incidental information on some less often researched aspects of intimate relationships between adults in The Bahamas. It should be noted that the data arose from a snowball sample seeded by university students, and so can be expected to result in a biased sample of respondents in the 18 and over aged group. However, where the data can be triangulated with other sources, the overall patterns in the data are similar to those in this study.

The data confirm that about 10% of the adult study population may be engaged in non-heterosexual relationships. This figure is close to the percentages reported elsewhere, despite national differences (IPSOS, 2023), and is in line with a study of college students reported by Bethel & Fielding (2020). The clustering of these estimates confirms the hypothesis that the non-heterosexual population may be close to the world figure. This means that policies, or other societal norms or attitudes, that adversely affect non-heterosexuals may be detrimental to a not insignificant percentage of society. As such, confronting policy changes would appear to be necessary, if uncomfortable (Wallace, 2022). Newspaper reports illustrate the negative attitudes towards gay persons in The Bahamas (Bowleg, 2022) and the quotation at the beginning of this paper (Knowles, 2016) expresses the tensions associated with these relationships which are evident in this paper, while also pointing to the otherness associated with homosexuality (Martin-Mack, 2012).

The experiences of respondents in the homosexual relationships confirm different experiences to those in heterosexual relationships. The limited data in this study indicate that non-heterosexual relationships are more violent than heterosexual relationships. This finding contrasts with

research in the United States which found similar levels of violence between same sex and opposite sex relationships (Blosnich & Bossarte, 2009); the causes for the higher aggression scores found in the non-opposite sex relationship group of respondents requires further investigation within the Bahamian context. The questions which may need to be considered go beyond any one type of relationship (MSF, MSM or FSF) and gender identification, and might include the extent to which pressures in the Bahamian context contribute to violence in relationships.

The choice of males to engage in sexual intercourse with multiple females has public health, as well as social, issues. These actions appear to conflict with the common perception that Bahamian society represents a Christian nation, and so it might presumably be expected to follow Christian expectations of relationships. Unpublished data from Fielding and Ballance (2023) indicated respondents did not have a strong leaning towards keeping the Biblical commandment concerning adultery or coveting a neighbour's wife, which demonstrates the tension between what might be considered as expected and actual behaviours in society.

The choice to engage in sweethearting continues to occur even though it is regarded as being detrimental to family life (Fielding & Ballance, 2023). The divorce of Williams and Williams (Williams v. Williams, 2024) illustrated potential negative effects of sweethearting on a marriage. Elsewhere, marital infidelity was reported as the reason for divorce by 24% of women in a study in Great Britain (Gravningen et al., 2017) and marital infidelity is also as a leading course of divorce in the United States together with domestic violence (Scott et al., 2013). Similar findings have been reported in The Bahamas (Brennen, 2024). Men having multiple

partners contribute to the number of single mothers, and the number of children being born outside of married relationships (Brennen, 2024). In the case of Bahamian teenage mothers, the life-long negative economic consequences for such women are of concern, as has been described by Fielding (2018). Given that 48% of married and unmarried females in sweetheating relationships received money to live on from their sweetheart, demonstrates that financial benefits can accrue from such relationships. This then raises the question as to whether or not the money is necessary to improve the economic condition of the household. In contrast, a monetary benefit was less likely for men, being 20% for never married, and 9% for married male respondents (Fielding et al., 2026). These findings suggest that further research could examine the financial, or transactional, aspects of sweetheating.

Married relationships show a marked increased risk of being terminated in the 40-plus age group; this may be associated with the so-called graying of divorce (Brown & Lin, 2022). Aggression and the elevated occurrence of domestic violence and unwanted sexual intercourse were all elevated in respondents whose relationship had resulted in separation or divorce. This is consistent with cruelty being a common reason why divorce is granted in The Bahamas (Brennen, 2024). While marriages can be dissolved for reasons of cruelty, there is presently no move to outlaw the action of rape within marriage (Rolle, 2025). People who find themselves in relationships with an aggressive partner, and who are victims of domestic violence and/or unwanted sexual intercourse, appear to have good reason to leave their relationship, although they may face pressure to remain in their failing relationship from some church-based groups (Cadet, 2018). The finding that women who were divorced or separated had reported higher domestic violence scores suggests that

domestic violence contributes to the ending of relationships, either legally or otherwise. In America, it has been noted that black couples are at greater risk of separating and not divorcing than other racial groups (Hurt, 2013), so the observation noted in Table 12 is not unexpected. This points to the importance of having protection mechanisms in place for victims of violence and sexual abuse, no matter the status of their intimate relationship. The need to protect women who are escaping abusive relationships has been alluded to in media reports (Bailey, 2025) and supports the need for a shelter of abused women (Editorial: Shelter for abused women needs action, 2024). For those who are separated, further research is required to determine why this separation is not formalised through the courts. For example, it would be useful to ascertain if this status is a result of the choice or one or both (ex)partners or the inaccessibility (perceived or otherwise) of the legal system. Results from The Bahamas household expenditure survey report (Bahamas Department of Statistics, 2013) showed that the largest percentage (10.2%) of divorce/separated people, 10.2%, live in the in the highest quintile expenditure group, compared to 4.5% being divorced/separated in the lowest quintile group. (This larger percentage of divorced persons in the higher quintile group persists even taking into account the number of married persons in the quintile groups.) This might suggest that the cost of engaging the courts to obtain a divorce/legal separation may be a factor in people in lower expenditure households not obtaining legal protection from potentially abusive ex-partners. Therefore, given that household economics is related to the prevalence of domestic violence (Fielding et al., 2016), it would be useful to examine household income in the wider frame of Bahamian intimate partnerships.

A limitation of the study is with respect to gender identity in the so-called *Other* group. Interpreting the results from this group should be made with caution due to the small sample size and lack of knowledge regarding the sexual orientation of those in this group. The information in Table 1 invites further and more detailed research concerning the choice of sexual partner and sexual orientation of sexual partners. Consequently, this study highlights various aspects of intimate relationships which would benefit from in-depth research. In addition to more research on the non-heterosexual community, further research could usefully establish details as to why married people in The Bahamas choose to leave their partner (beyond the classifications accepted by the law courts [Brennen, 2024]) and what prevents failed

partnerships being legally dissolved. Such information would enable policy makers to ensure that all vulnerable members of society receive the protection and assistance they require to participate in society without fear or discrimination or violence.

Survey-based studies can only identify associations between variables, and so care should be taken not to infer causality from associations. Although the data arose from a large sample of observations, the sampling method was not random and so care should be taken in extrapolating the results to the wider Bahamian population (Moxey-Adderley & Fielding, 2024).

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