

THE INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY AND MODERNITY ON YOUTH SEXUALITY IN KISII CENTRAL SUB-COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract: Before the advent of Christianity in Africa, the Abagusii community had systems of teaching youth responsible sexual behaviour. This prepared them for adolescent and adult experiences. However, the introduction of Christianity and modernity in Kisii Central Sub-County over a century ago created a new culture which has interfered with traditional systems. This paper investigated the social and moral issues arising from youth sexuality in SDA and Catholic churches in Kisii Central Sub-County, Kisii County. Qualitative method of research and simple statistical tools were used to enrich this paper. Information was gathered using questionnaires, observations and interviews. Selected youth, youth leaders, pastors, priests and catechists from selected SDA and Catholic Churches formed the sample of 108 respondents. The paper established that Christianity and modernity have negatively influenced youth sexuality education in Kisii Central Sub-County. They have weakened morals because the community hardly provides informal education for socialization of youth as before. Besides, though churches teach youth sexuality, they are influenced to pre-marital sex and its attendant challenges. The objective of this paper is to share with the readers the moral and social issues arising from youth sexuality as a result of modernity and Christianity in Kisii Central Sub-County.

Keywords: Influence, Christianity, Modernity, Youth sexuality, Church, Morality.

1. INTRODUCTION

Social changes are products of political and industrial revolutions, and urbanization since the 18th Century. The inflow of technology, new trends and modern products from developed nations is swift. Inability to address these changes affects youth's choices and requires unparallel capacity in guidance and counselling.

The communal African Traditional Society (ATS) system of child-rearing was achieved through up-bringing and "initiation and puberty rites" (Mbiti, 1989:118). Parents and responsible adults educated children on overall life (Ibid). Among the Abagusii, boys moved to huts (*chisaiga*) meant for young unmarried men or special compounds away from homes (*gesarate*) at the age of ten. Here, male clan elders and young men guarded, tended and lived with livestock. Boys were educated on animal husbandry, acquisition of wealth (for bride price), and responsible leadership of future families (Ochieng', 1974). The Kisii initiates to-be spent a month in the *gesarate* learning "...endurance...bravery...and intellect" (Bosire and Machogu, 2013:1422). The girls went to the grandmother's house at age eight to await initiation and eventually marriage (Ibid). They were taught cookery, responsible behaviour towards men, how to care for children and husbands, and other domestic issues. Their teachers were mothers, aunties, grandmothers and older women who spent most of their time with them (Mbiti, 1989).

Later, youth were introduced to adult-life through initiation/puberty rites. They were educated on sexuality and sex, marital life and family responsibilities (Sharkey and Welch, 1979; Mbiti, 1989). In ATS education, mentorship was employed; the young and inexperienced learnt from adults who had superior knowledge, experience and insight (Mbiti, 1977; Kinai, 2006). Although the syllabus was unwritten, it had definite aims (Sharkey and Welch, 1979; Mbiti, 1990).

This prepared youth physically, mentally, morally and emotionally for adolescent and adulthood experiences. However, currently, many parents assume that it is the responsibility of schools to “develop the character, moral values and religious understanding” of youth alongside teaching them “all knowledge and skills” for life (Sharkey and Welch, 1979: 67).

Nevertheless, the family remains the only institution with the greatest impact on youth’s basic values and choices. Parents, being the closest people to their children, have the strongest influence on character formation because they spend early years together.

Although missionaries brought Western education and a new civilization, this perpetuated a new form of morality that was initially Christian-oriented but which turned out to be materialistic, and is cultivated by mass media (Bennaars, 1993). Christianity and modernity encourage free interaction of youth of opposite sexes in Church, schools, colleges and other forums. Today’s society provides limited guidance and counselling to youth. Kinship links have grown weak and relativism thrives (Maynard, 1970), escalating broken families and loose morals. Christianity, Western education and modernity might be blamed for this paradigm shift.

Purpose:

The purpose of this paper is to share with readers the findings of a recent investigation on social and moral issues arising from youth sexuality in SDA and Catholic churches in Kisii Central Sub-County, Kisii County. These churches, being dominant in the area, have youth sexuality programmes. However, despite the provision of sexuality education, youth are still affected by pre marital sex and its attendant challenges due to modernity and Christianity as depicted from the findings.

Justification:

The influence of Christianity and modernity on youth sexuality based in the sub-county is unclear. The researcher encountered youth affected by pre-marital sex and its related consequences, including psychological trauma, guilt, pre-marital pregnancy, abortion and STIs. This paper established that youth are affected by pre-marital sex and its related challenges including pre-marital pregnancy, abortion and STIs, products of early sexual experimentation, regardless of Church teachings on sexuality. The findings cite a high rate of children born out of wedlock and abortions. Besides, stakeholders ought to appreciate the challenges youth encounter in order to work out intervention measures, including assessing their youth sexuality programmes and family life policies and sharpening their skills in guidance and counselling.

2. THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

Theoretical Framework:

This study was based on dysfunctionality theory proposed by Merton (1968) It postulates that not all structures contribute positively to society. A structure could produce negative results for another while at the same time maintaining other parts of the social system. Merton introduced human functions and divided them into *manifest* (intentional and obvious) and *latent* (unintentional and not obvious) functions. He related them to anticipated consequences (functional) that make positive contributions and unanticipated consequences (not necessarily obvious and dysfunctional) to society because they make negative contributions. This paper concludes that although Christianity and modernity exist in Kisii Central Sub-County, they have negative influences on youth sexuality, hence early sexual debut.

Conceptual Frameworks:

Youth sexuality education and its components formed independent variables while the desired expectation of moral uprightness among youth served as the dependent variable for study. The extraneous variables (non-study variables) are factors that may directly or indirectly affect delivery of sexuality education and influence youths against the sexuality education they receive.

3. METHODOLOGY

The findings of this paper are results of a field study involving one hundred and eight respondents from SDA and Catholic churches sampled using purposive, snowball and stratified random sampling methods. The respondents’ church membership, age, sex, academic achievements and leadership roles were considered. Data was collected using questionnaires, observations and interview schedules. Document analysis from Kisii Teaching and Referral Hospital was

conducted to corroborate the data collected. The major limitation was lack of previous studies on the moral and social issues arising from youth sexuality in SDA and Catholic churches. However, materials related to the topic were used to validate the findings.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

Havighurst and Taba (1949) argue that most youth who rebel are eager to embrace moral values. Their rebellion/conduct is based on causes rather than rejection of moral values. Most people who reject Christian traditions are children of religious parents, displacing their rebellion against their families on religion (Adorno *et al.*, 1950). These studies are relevant to this paper although they do not assess the influence of Christianity and modernity on youth sexuality, which the current study addresses.

Ausubel (1954) analyses the challenges of adolescents as they develop; a process of synthesis called “inherent sacredness of moral standards”. He asserts that it starts to break down when parents begin to lose value. This occurs when children become aware of other authorities, experience moral alternatives, and a variety of truths. As youth join older peers with clearly differentiated roles and participate in formulation of rules, a functional rather than “sacred” concept of moral law emerges. This explains the cause of pre-marital sex among youth in Kisii Central Sub-County. However, social and moral issues resulting from youth sexuality, which the current paper tackles, has not been included.

Patterns and growth in personality are explored by Allport (1961) who confirms that youth may not necessarily be against parents’ values, but they want their own. Therefore, youth leaders should help them in identity crises, overcoming identity diffusion, affirming them during best moments and serve as adult guarantors to their children (Yates, 1969). Rogers (1969) notes that youth are greatly disturbed by adults’ conduct including hypocrisy, injustices, sex and drugs. This perspective is general on youth sexuality without considering Christianity and modernity, which the current paper covers.

Combs, Arila, and Purkey (1971) acknowledge that pre-marital pregnancy gets youth off-guard. Their behaviour seems a product of sound judgement, but regrettable when pregnancy occurs. When youth have sex, they never think of pregnancy. The study’s focus is, however, on helping relationships rather than youth sexuality.

Richards (1972) proposes that values are embodied in culture and are a product of interpersonal relationships. Therefore, behaviour is the true indicator of values. Consequently, youth ministry should guide youth in learning how to evaluate values through choices and how they express feelings. Though this assessment has valuable information for this paper, it does not explore youth sexuality.

Glasser (1972) asserts that people cannot relate when one person hurts another. Abortion is punitive than corrective pre-marital pregnancy. Although sins like pregnancy out of wedlock causes lifelong consequences, parents/guardians should not “protect” youth through abortion. This evaluation is general on challenges of youth sexuality. The social and moral issues arising from youth sexuality which this paper seeks to address are not explored.

Mbiti (1977) examines causes and effects of pre-marital sex and opposes sex out of wedlock, maintaining that expectant girls should keep their pregnancies. Mbiti mentions better teachings on sexuality and family life education to youth and adults respectively as remedies to pre-marital sex.

Sharkey and Welch (1979) agree that victims of pre-marital pregnancy should be compassionately handled by families to encourage frank discussions, paving way for guidance. Youth should know that the ultimate responsibility for their lives is upon them. Nevertheless, the evaluation briefly mentions pre-marital sex and youth sexuality education. Social and moral issues related to youth sexuality are not part of their investigation.

Bahemuka (1982) ascertains that “...missionaries...preached against everything African” (p.30). African culture was termed uncivilized and harmful to development. She supports initiation rites in socialization of youth and virginity as treasured by most African communities, unlike modern times dominated by early sexual experimentation as noted in this paper’s findings. However, social and moral issues resulting from youth sexuality in relation to Christianity and modernity is not covered in the work.

Muthoni (1987) confirms that life originates from God. The analysis briefly addresses the challenges youth experience today, including teenage pregnancy and abortion. It lists the consequences of teenage pregnancy and abortion as: uterine perforation, infections, bladder damage due to “unsupervised labour”, tender age-related complications like caesarean delivery and psychological effects. However, the social and moral issues related to sexuality are not in scope.

Mbiti (1990) supports initiation as a bridge from childhood to adulthood that prepares youth for marriage. The investigation touches on marriage, choice of partners and marriage customs. Moral and social issues among youth are hardly discussed.

Suggestions that the Church can help youth through championing behavioural change through messages of abstinence and fidelity to the unmarried and married respectively to lower the HIV risk, and indirectly delay the age at first sex have been advanced (Green, 2003; Parsitau 2009). Youth sexuality in relation to Christianity and modernity is not covered in the work.

Many people perceive sex as a private issue (Tabifor and Mulyanga, 2003). Africans believe in public, “the less said about it the better” (Maranga *et al.*, 2008). This prejudice contributes to ignorance among youth, prompting them to unreliable sources (peers, mass media and social networks). These studies affirm that today’s society exposes youth to so much sex literature, influencing many to pre-marital sex due to lack of mentorship. Besides, the 21st Century is experiencing early sexual debut among teenagers below 15 years because of that (Ibid). They propose that friendship for both sexes is healthy for youth although this paper established that the influence of unrestrained passion has made these interactions degenerate into sexual perversion. KESSP (2009) opines that youth need preparation to develop and apply life skills and critical judgment to enable them socialize effectively. The evaluations are relevant and validate the findings of this paper although they do not discuss social and moral issues related to youth sexuality.

Mayor (2004) ascertains that pregnancy and childbirth-related complications are key causes of deaths among teenage mothers (15-19 years) in developing countries. Although relevant to this paper, it does not address the influence of Christianity and modernity on youth sexuality.

The potential for sexual activity among youth is greatest and its consequences, including pregnancy, cause challenges to girls (Gunyali *et al.*, 2005). The psychological and social effects mentioned are:

Frustration and stress due to feelings of guilt, shame and pity.

Even when the man responsible for the pregnancy can feel the same, the girl feels it more. Rejection of the pregnant girl by parents, relatives and friends also occurs. This leads to dropping out of school..... Some mothers abandon...babies... after delivery.

Others kill the children...below five years (infanticide). Others...opt for an abortion (p.42).

This work lacks depth on sexuality despite having vital facts for this paper.

Trinitapoli (2006) avers that youth need time together without sexual involvement and proposes that proper association benefits them. However, this paper established that majority of today’s youth view these relationships as sexual. Trinitapoli supposes that delaying of first sex, even shortly, can have valuable effects on HIV infection rates, because it lowers the time spent in the most dangerous period of infection among youth. Nevertheless, the assessment does not encompass youth sexuality.

Were (2007) mentions proxies that can assist youth to access sex education including church forums that teach adolescents on sex and family life as avenues that can minimise teenage pregnancy. The work lists peer pressure, inappropriate leisure activities, absence of guidance and counselling from parents, inaccessibility to formal education and endemic poverty as factors that perpetuate teenage pregnancy. Although relevant to the findings of this paper, it does not mention the influence of Christianity and modernity on youth sexuality.

The National Co-ordinating Agency for Population and Development (2010) contends that teenagers constitute a large part of the Kenyan population (Of the 39 million people, one in every four Kenyans aged between 10-19 years is an adolescent), necessitating government promotion of healthy behaviour and prevention of diseases among them. It affirms that some sexually active youth (15-19 years) had their first sexual encounter at 12 years. Besides, 50% of Kenyan women get married by the age of 20 and by then, they are already mothers. Majority engage in risky sexual behaviours including early sexual activity, multiple sexual partners, sexual encounters with men older than them and temporary sexual relationships. These practices have grave consequences including early marriages, still practised in North Eastern, Nyanza and Coast provinces. NCAPD focus on adolescents because of their vulnerability to illnesses and deaths caused by early pregnancy, abortion and STIs. This work lacks depth on sexuality despite having key facts that are vital to this paper.

Several scholars have studied the SDA Church in Kisii. Onyancha (1989) investigated African spiritual response to Western Christianity with reference to Abagusii and the SDA Church in Ogembo Division. The role of the Church in rural development in the SDA Church in South Nyanza was studied by Ayiamba (1992) while the place and role of women in the SDA Church in Kenya was analysed by Okemwa (1993). Nyaundi (1993) studied religion and social change in the SDA Church in Kenya. However, the influence of Christianity and modernity on youth sexuality in Kisii has not been studied. This paper intends to fill this knowledge gap by highlighting pre-marital sex and its related challenges in the area.

Muganda and Omondi (2008) suggest that teenage pregnancy is one of the major factors that lead to school dropout of Kenyan women. They concluded this after assessing wastage among teenage women due to school dropouts. Their analysis concentrates on the effects of teenage pregnancy on the academics of female teenagers. Although related to this paper, it does not consider social and moral issues related to youth sexuality.

Teenage pregnancy and abortion were investigated by Kenyan Human Rights Commission (KHRC), in conjunction with Reproductive Health Rights and Alliance (RHRA), based on Korogocho slums in Nairobi (2010). They confirm that adolescents are sexually active, risking unwanted pregnancy and STIs. Youth who find themselves 'trapped' in pregnancy resort to abortion due to pressure caused by stigmatisation and economic challenges. This makes pregnancy and abortion common among school-going youth. The analysis focuses on consequences of unsafe abortion and argues that since young women procure abortions regardless of knowledge of its effects, it should be made safer by legalising it. This position is, however, controversial because abortion is illegal in Kenya (Sexual Offence Act, 2006). Nevertheless, the study does not include the influence of Christianity and modernity on youth sexuality.

5. FINDINGS

Findings were discussed based on the purpose and objective of this paper. The objective was to evaluate the moral and social issues arising from youth sexuality in Kisii Central Sub-County in view of Christianity and modernity. This paper confirmed that a significant number of youth engaged in pre-marital sex despite receiving sexuality education. Majority were between 16-18 years although some were below 15 years. Evidence from document analysis at Kisii Teaching and Referral Hospital confirms the high rate of teenage pregnancy in Kisii Central Sub-County as summarised on Table 1 below:

Table 1: Deliveries of mothers below 20 years at Kisii Teaching and Referral Hospital between 2012 and August 2015

Year	Total no. of deliveries	Below 14 years	15-19 years	Total no. of youth	Percentage (%)
2012	5883	49	1283	1332	22.6
2013	7244	41	1515	1556	21.5
2014	8688	64	1073	1137	13.1
2015 upto August	6191	17	579	596	9.6

Source: Field Data (2015)

However, these figures exclude teenage mothers who delivered in other health facilities in the region and at home. Those who indulged and never conceived are also excluded.

From Table 1 above, in 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015 upto August, there were 1283, 1515, 1073 and 579 cases of teenage mothers between 15-19 years respectively. This age bracket registered the highest number of teenage mothers throughout because as teenagers grow, pressure to indulge in sex increases (Were, 2007).

Nevertheless, some youth delivered before their 15th birthday as Table 1 above indicates. This supports Maranga *et al.* (2008) that the 21st century is witnessing early sexual debut among teenagers below 15 years.

One contributing factor to sexual perversion among youth in Kisii Central Sub-County is the Abagusii culture. It forbids parents to share information on sex and sexuality with their children. This was the grandparents' responsibility (Reverend Obanyi, OI). The hurdle remains because most parents have abdicated their duty as immediate teachers of sexuality education (Pastor Maangi, OI). Youth fill the gap with unreliable sources (peers, social networks and mass media) facilitated by modern technology.

This paper ascertained that victims of crisis pregnancy were treated with understanding. Some teenage mothers questionably claimed to be married on admission to the Hospital despite their young age; some were not first time mothers (Margaret, OI). Most youth who conceive become victims on their first attempt (Pastor Makori, OI). Combs, Arila, and Purkey (1971) confirm that pregnancy out of wedlock gets youth off-guard. They engage in sex never intending to conceive; some never even think of pregnancy (Ibid).

Although compassionate treatment paves way for guidance, adults should be cautious of compromising morality. They should not protect youth from natural consequences of their conduct because some rich learning experiences are products of individuals' actions (Dudley, 1978). Wise discipline which builds relationships and respect for adults and godly values should be cultivated. However, unreasonably harsh discipline that breaks youth's spirit should be avoided.

This paper established that sexually active youth hardly used contraceptives. However, some females used morning after/emergency pills (RU486), injections and nor-plant although they are buffeted by STIs (Pastor Mainye, OI) from strangers who they meet through friends (Pastor Makori, OI).

However, use of contraceptives among married couples is controversial. According to Catholic Straight Answers.htm (2015), Christianity (Orthodox, Catholics and Protestants) had a common stand on contraceptives before the 20th Century. They condemned contraceptives in support of Natural Family Planning (sympto-thermal method). Ever since, the debate continues but positions vary among various denominations from time to time. Protestants and Anglicans support contraceptives but Catholics are divided. While some support it, others believe it interferes with the procreative aspect of marriage as designed by God and erodes Biblical morals. Some Catholics blame contraceptives for removal of conjugal love from marriage, making it a sex act and depersonalizing and exploiting sexuality. If family planning is encouraged among youth, the Bible and moral decency will be inconsequential.

This paper could not ascertain the prevalence of STIs though some cases of syphilis and gonorrhoea were reported. This is because majority of victims handle STIs privately (especially boys); those who open up share with peers (Pastor Mainye, OI). However, Trinitapoli (2006) confirms that one of the consequences of casual sex among youth is transmission of STIs, to which they are vulnerable.

Besides, some youth procured abortions but people around them thought the youth's actions were justified. Results of document analysis from Kisii Teaching and Referral Hospital on Table 2 below are evidence that abortion is a challenge among youth in Kisii Central Sub-County.

Table 2: Abortion cases among youth below 20 years from Kisii Teaching and Referral Hospital

Year	Below 14 years	15-19 years	20-25 years	Total of cases
2011	3	96	216	315
2012	1	83	185	269
2013	1	48	220	269
2014	0	65	285	350
2015 upto August	0	45	98	143

Source: Field Data (2015)

Table 2 indicates that abortion cases increased among older teenagers and were highest between 20-25 years across the years. This is ironical because older youth should understand the consequences more.

This paper established that several abortions were facilitated by parents/guardians. Some victims consented though others did not. Nevertheless, most respondents did not approve of the abortions although a few thought they were justified.

The abortion debate consists of the pro-life (argue that human life is sacred and no one has a right to take it) and the pro-choice (support women's rights). Though the pro-choice and pro-life categories have existed for long, both sides have variations (Catholic Straight Answers.htm, 2015). Some proponents of prochoice believe that abortion should be a last resort when either the mother or the unborn baby or both are endangered. Others advocate for unrestricted access regardless of circumstances. On the contrary, the pro-life proponents vary from opposition of abortion despite of circumstances to acceptance under situations of incest, rape or when the mother's life is at stake.

Pastor Makori (OI) proposes that parents/guardians are a major challenge. Though Christians, some tolerate promiscuity among their youth while others avail contraceptives. Besides, some assist youth to procure abortions. Joy (OI) confirms this; she kept her pregnancy against pressure from friends and relatives to terminate it. Reasons given for abortions from respondents include proceeding with education, influence by peers and maintaining the status quo.

In 2003, 16% of young women below 20 years were among over 20,000 abortion-related complications treated yearly in Kenyan public hospitals (KHRC, 2010). This is evidence that pre-marital pregnancy and abortion are prevalent among school girls in Kenya. Pastor Oirere (OI) ascertained that one of the major challenges that churches face is divergence between theory and practice of God's word.

This paper established that churches have role models. Few youth who thought otherwise might have been disappointed by adults whom they respected. Youth can tell when adults are sincere Christians. They see some adults conform to certain religious standards but violate more fundamental principles (Pastor Atemba, OI). Besides, for religious knowledge to influence youth's behaviour, it should be incorporated into concrete models (Dudley, 1978) that they can identify with. This underscores mentorship. However, respondents indicated that youth seek sexuality information from peers, social networks and mass media respectively. Modern technology enhances this.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions were made by this paper based on the objective which was to evaluate the moral and social issues arising from youth sexuality in Kisii Central Sub-County:

There is a high rate of teenage pregnancy, a precursor to school dropout and early marriages, despite Church sexuality education offered to youth. Besides, as youth grow, pressure to indulge seems to increase. However, some youth are not sexually active, implying that sexuality programmes are not in vain.

Youth hardly use contraceptives, predisposing them to STIs and pregnancy. This paper could not establish the prevalence of STIs because health issues are generally private. Nevertheless, few youth had suffered from gonorrhoea and syphilis.

Abortion is prevalent despite religious teachings and legal constraints. Therefore, it remains a polarising moral issue. The Church can no longer ignore it.

Youth have challenges finding role models because of double standards by some adults. This makes parents to lose moral authority.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the objective and findings of this paper, the following recommendations are made to facilitate effective sexuality education:

Churches should establish feedback mechanisms to assess the impact of sexuality education on recipients.

The Church should emphasize Abstinence and Behaviour Change to minimize pre-marital sex and its related challenges.

Use of contraceptives among youth should be discouraged.

Parents/guardians should be role models to their children by consistently living practical Christianity.

Youth and family life programmes at church ought to include enlightenment on the benefits and challenges of modern technology.

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