

SEXUALITY IN MARRIAGE AND AFRICAN CULTURE: A SOCIO- ETHICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This paper geared towards examining the sexuality in marriage in the Africa Cultural context. The contemporary research work has shown that there has been a progressive trends towards an increase in premarital coitus. At least eighty-five percent of adolescents have had sexual intercourse at one time or the other. It has also been confirmed that many Nigerian adolescents have premarital sexual intercourse (Oguntola 2006). However, sex is said to be a sacred affair in traditional African society and ordained within marriage. The entire range of past and present human societies, marriage can be described as a legal union of man and woman based on mutual agreement. However, a great significance is attached to a virgin bride (Virgo-vitacta) and this is the social bond for both the high and the low in Yoruba socio-cultural setting. The moral-instincts (values) are scarcely found and maintained in the modern African society. This paper highly concerned about the deplorable, condition of the recent society where premarital sex is the vogue and virginity has no virtue. Also the objective of this work is to delve into biblical and traditional rote from the socio-ethical point of view and historical methods to elicit our findings.

Keywords: *Marriage, Sexuality, African, Culture and Socio-ethical*

Introduction

It is obvious that every society possesses some elements of culture irrespective of the socio-economic development of the society. Culture is therefore universal but may differ from one society to another. It is simply a complete societal heritage. Etuk (2002) asserts that people's culture is their entire way of life as a social group.

Amoponsah (1974) reveals that it is a taboo for sexual intercourse to take place before puberty stage in some West African societies. In some societies in which the Large or extended family remains the basic unit, marriage are usually arranged by the family. The assumption is that the love between the partners comes after marriage. Some tribes allow their unmarried boys and girls to mate in temporary unions. But there are other tribes, particularly the Yoruba, where virginity of the unmarried is regarded as a virtue, especially in girls, and any deviation from it is severely censured or even punished. Premarital sex or extramarital matings are often overlooked or pardoned in men, although they are not encouraged. A virgin is one who has never had sexual intercourse; a sexually clean person, without blemish, fresh, unused or untouched. Virginity is a cultural value and is highly regarded in the Yoruba society. It is also a spiritual attitude that constitutes a state of well-being as a single person.

Situations in various other societies other than Yoruba with regard to sex are briefly observed. Among the Samoans of Polynesia, young men and women are expected to engage in a number of mating before marriage, none of which necessarily results in marriage. Premarital sex on a casual basis is encouraged among the Ila-speaking people of Zambia. Girls are given houses of their own at harvest time when they may play at being wives with the boys of their choice. It is reported that among these people, virginity does not exist beyond the age of ten. On the other hand premarital sex is strictly forbidden among the Tepoztlan Indians of Mexico. From the time of a girl's first menstruation, her life becomes confined. She would not speak to or attract any man to violate the customary law in whatever manner. In some societies, a man might be punished for seducing a woman but concern is focused mainly on female marital fidelity. However, in the Yoruba society, particularly in the olden days, virginity was highly cherished, honourable, rewardable and highly celebrated. Unfortunately, it is no longer so in the contemporary society.

Sexuality and Culture: A conceptualization

Sexuality

The Word "Sex" refers to the sum of biological characteristics that defines the spectrum of humans as females and males. It encompasses all the characteristics that distinguish us on the basis of reproductive function-anatomy and physiology. Sex is frequently confused with gender. Gender refers to the social interpretation of Gender is the condition of being masculine or feminine in behavior. One is born male and female biologically but one learns how to be masculine or feminies. Gender is a socially determined definition of what it means to be female or male. The word "sex" is also sometimes used to describe various sexual behaviours, like sexual intercourse. While sexuality is a broad term that refers to a core dimension of being human which includes sex, gender, sexual and gender identity, sexual orientation, emotional attachment/love, and reproduction. It is much more than sexual feelings or sexual intercourse, Rather, it includes all the feelings, sexual thoughts attitudes, experiences, learning, ideas, value, imaginings and behaviours of a person, whether female or male. It also refers to the totality of who you are, what you believe, what you feel and how you respond (Bullough, 1994)

It is a life long process that begins when a person is born and ends when he/she dies. It involves all aspects of one's personality and behaviours that reflect and are affected by one being male or female.

All children, teenagers, adults and older people are sexual being who are interested in everything about their world (environment), including sexuality. They seek to touch and be touched and to show affection. They may want to be loved, given love and understand their own physical development. As they grow, children begin to imitate adult social and sexual behaviours like holding hands or kissing. They may look at other children's genitals and show theirs when they play "Doctor" or any other form of sex play. Self-esteem, body image, love and friendship are part of our sexuality (carrera, 1981).

Culture

Generally, culture refers to the level of sophistication of the individual(s), who can be "cultured" and be uncultured, For deeper understanding of culture, it can be viewed from anthropological and sociological perspectives. Culture in a sense refers to all the things which human beings do, hut which have no biological basis, i.e. all non-biological actions and behaviours of man are products of his culture. Culture, Therefore, refers to the total way of life

of a given people (Amadi 1982). Thus it includes any piece or pattern of behaviour, the attitudes, norms, values, objects, skill, belief systems and world outlook which human beings learn and adopt as members of a given group or society. In other sense, Tylor (1971) defines culture as [hat complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, moral, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. This indicates that culture is all-embracing of human social life; it is learned or acquired. Culture, therefore, marks the dividing line between man and animals. While the behaviours of animals are determined by instinct and are typical, those of man are influenced by the culture of his society.

Also, Adedokun (1990) summarises culture as a total way of a people:

The way they live from day-to-day, what they do, believe, cherish. Desire and how they go about these things. The culture of every society is unique. It contains a combination of their norms and values which are different from those of other peoples.

Every culture has three aspects to it, material culture (objects physical traits and tools). Non-material culture is sub-divided into cognitive (knowledge and beliefs) and normative (moral, law, custom, rules). Therefore, the African culture spells out those aspects of life which are uniquely African, that are products of African hand and mind, while Ogunmodede (1992) explains the essential point of African culture as:

African traditional culture held a human-face. There was dignity and respect for human life which was regarded sacred and to have come from God. Also, cohesion and well-being of the individual was ensured and enhanced through appreciated virtues like spontaneous greetings, friendships and hospitality, cooperation and brotherhood. Justice was accorded its rightful place as a moral imperative and life was peaceful.

Sexuality and Religion

Religion is a specific system of worship or belief built around God, or gods. There are many religions in the world. The major religions and their places of worship in Nigeria are:

- Christianity - Churches
- Islam - Mosques
- Traditional religion - Shrines, Groves.

In most cultures and societies, religion is a primary influence, or at least among the most powerful forces in establishing and maintaining sexual attitudes and regulating sexual behaviours. Religions draw their strength from a belief system that includes the authority of a divine spiritual being (or beings) who is believed to have created this world, to govern it and to control its destiny. This spiritual authority controls the individual destinies of all humans in this life and rewards or punishes them in some kind of life hereafter. Religions usually deal with some sort of revelation, contained in a sacred text or passed on through a chosen representative. Such revelations and sacred texts often contain regulations for sexual behaviours, establishing the norms of who can have sex, with whom, under what circumstances, when, how, and for what reasons. These sexual regulations, along with other regulations unrelated to sexual behaviour, are interpreted by male priests, rabbis, imams, shamans, or other individuals who claim either direct contact with the divine being or delegation by the supreme being as his representative and interpreter (Parrinder, 1980).

Historically, religions have had much to say about sexuality, sexual values, and sexual behaviours and relationships of adults. Religious views that have been applied to children and adolescents have been derived from doctrines articulated for adults. Also, it can be said that all the "great religions of the world," Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, have an

essential patriarchal bias that puts women in a secondary position and role. Even (though in Eastern religions, gods and goddesses are seen in ritual sexual intercourse and women are often presented as the sexual experts and initiators, the social role of women is very much inferior to that of the male. Much the same holds of the Islamic tradition, which is still expressed mainly in male-dominated tribal cultures where women are subservient. Judaism, Protestantism and Christianity have different contradictions, in these religions, Jesus told his disciples that in his kingdom there would be no distinction between male and female, but the patriarchal views of the disciples often overpowered this effort toward gender equality. Equality, Early Christianity established sexual abstinence as the hallmark of the spiritual life. Because the mother and father of Jesus were portrayed as virgins, married couples were urged to have sexual intercourse only for procreation within otherwise celebrate marriages. Protestants rejected this view of sexual intercourse in marriage and have in recent years affirmed the equality of men and women by ordaining women to the ministry (Parrinder, 1980).

Religions provide guidelines for the way people live their lives. The following represent some of those guidelines, though each may be interpreted differently within the scriptures of the various religions:

- good behavior
- good neighbourliness
- love for each other
- do what is right
- be peaceful
- be law abiding
- be useful
- respect for other people
- avoid sex before marriage (and outside of a marriage commitment)
- promote life
- be responsible
- Value sex within marriage

Sexual Behaviour

Some religions and cultures do not encourage some sexual behaviours, the behaviour vary depending on the tradition or the culture. For example: in many Islamic communities, boys and girls are segregated in schools, dating is forbidden and for some, courtship does not actually happen until the couple is married and the wife has moved to her new domicile. Loss of chastity has very serious consequences for those involved and their families. Among Muslims, a great emphasis is placed on female chastity, purity, and modesty and even complete seclusion and veiling. A matter of constant concern to Muslim men is the conduct of women. The focus is on the female and not the male because it is widely believed that she is primarily responsible for any relationship with the male. Men are only chastised for extramarital activities, although women are treated more strictly (Struass, 1992).

In Judaism sex, both for procreation and for pleasure, is a blessing and a gift, it is to be practiced wisely, and not used for control or, humiliation, prohibited behaviours are sexual relations that are “considered unnatural, as between a human being and sheep or cattle” Adultery is prohibited, as is intercourse during menstruation. Homosexual behavior (men having sexual intercourse with men, women having sexual intercourse with women) is looked at differently

depending on whether one is Reform or Orthodox. Orthodoxy sees it as a moral failure where Reform and Liberal are much more accepting.

Cultural Norms on Sexuality

A norm is a standing that is set by the culture. It is a principle of correct action, binding on certain members of a group and serving to guide, control, and relate proper and acceptable sexual behavior. Norms suggest that there is an acceptable behavior for the group, and therefore unacceptable behavior. In Nigeria, where there are many ethnic groups, each with their own culture, there may be many different norms. For example, it may be acceptable in one culture to kiss on a date, but it would not be acceptable in another culture. A woman may be covered completely when she leaves the house in one culture, and in another she may wear very little (Wilson, 1991).

A taboo is something that is forbidden or highly disapproved of in a culture. Taboos may differ in ethnic groups/culture in the large country of Nigeria. Examples of some of these taboos in Nigeria are listed below:

- Sexual relationship with your brother/sister
- Sexual relationship with your parents
- Sexual relationship with animals
- Sexual relationship during menstruation
- Obscenities
- Discussing sexual issues openly
- Explicit sexual references during public discussions
- Pre-marital sexual activity

Each culture also determines what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior, with regard to sexuality in Nigeria, the following are generally acceptable (though there will be variations between cultures on what is appropriate):

- Dressing in an appropriate manner
- Being nude only when necessary
- Chastity for girls and boys
- Ensuring privacy of parents' sexual relationship
- Censoring all films being watched at home
- Disallowing pornography at home
- Parental consent/family approval before forming a long-term relationship

Unacceptable Behaviour

- Soliciting sexual abuse as incest, rape or sexual harassment
- Alcoholism
- Drug abuse
- Indecent exposure
- Nudity

Sexuality and Mythology

Conflicts in societal messages may arise in a situation whereby the same society directly or indirectly encourages and at the same time discourages a particular idea, practice or behavior or when these have no general acceptability. The following are common MYTHS:

1. Eating eggs increases libido
2. Beating a boy with a broom can cause impotence
3. Pregnant women should not go out in the afternoon and night, to prevent encountering evil spirits
4. Eating too much beef encourages infertility.
5. Having sexual intercourse with a virgin purifies a man's blood
6. Women should not add salt to their food during their menses
7. It is harmful for young girls or women who are menstruating, and women who have recently had sexual intercourse to touch a baby
8. Eating groundnuts is an effective way to abort an unwanted pregnancy
9. Women who are menstruating should not go to the stream
10. You can get STIs (Sexually Transmitted infections) from sharing a drinking cup with someone who has
11. Female circumcision is done to ease child birth.
12. Female circumcision is part of the culture and cannot be changed

The following are some guidelines that can promote the sexual and reproductive health of individuals:

1. Keep responsible company
2. Wear culturally appropriate clothing
3. Choose your friends wisely
4. Responsible/respectful manner of speech
5. Respect constituted authority when no harmful practices are involved
6. Culturally appropriate media exposure (e.g Films, Magazines, radio etc)
7. Reconcile your intended action with your values and spirituality

Virginity and Yoruba Cultural Values

Among the Yoruba, premarital matings are not approved of. It is affirmed that the gratification of sexual desire, except in a state of wedlock, is against the mores of the Yoruba. That is, the bride is expected to keep her Virginity till the day she is loyally married to her husband, because great importance is attached to virginity. The Yoruba idolize virginity in brides, for it symbolizes purity not only of the body but also of moral life. A virgin bride is regarded as the greatest glory and crown of her parents, husband and relatives. Traditionally, girls and unmarried men are supposed to be sexually innocent and completely ignorant until the wedding night when the groom's mother would be at hand to teach them how to do it. But if she fails, the father-in-law will go in and directly teach the groom. It is revealed that when the bride cries out, the groom's mother standing by, would start jubilating.

The evidence of virginity is usually a blood-stained bedsheet which is sent to the bride's parents in a calabash bowl early the next morning after the wedding. It is usually accompanied by a sum of money and a hen to be sacrificed for the bride's head. This is just to thank her god, for making the son's bride a *virgo intact*, that is, no man ever had any carnal knowledge of the lady before marriage. The bride would, according to custom, spend this day in her own parent's home, amidst merriment and feasting, while the same event would take place in her husband's house, even on a large scale.

Fadipe (1970) asserts that, at marriage, two female members of the bride's extended family were to remain with the bride until after the chief event of the bridal night. These two

women usually slept outside the door of the bridal couple's room on the occasion of the expected defloration. They would be straining their ears to catch any exclamation of pain coming from the bride. If the bride had not been found a virgin, they seized the earliest opportunity of taking flight, even if it should be very late in the night, together with the bride's associates who had to look after their own safety for the reaction of the disappointed husband could be violent. However, this does not result in the wife being totally rejected. She would be made to confess and reveal the name of the man or men who robbed her of her virginity, and such people could be sued according to custom. The unfaithful bride thus suffers a considerable loss of face, and the many gifts that are usually showered on brides are all denied her. She would live in shame for a considerable length of time. Fadipe (1970) adds that a symbolical message would be sent to her parents the following morning. The father usually sent words of consolation to the bridegroom and sometimes asked for the bride to be sent to him. Upon arrival in her father's house, she would be tied up and flogged until she mentioned the man that deflowered her. In most cases, it is generally unnecessary to send such a bride to her father's house for the purpose of getting the fact about the incident. The husband could handle the case by giving her a very rough treatment until the confession is made. When the confession had been obtained, the husband could proceed to sue for damages in the customary fashion, the man or men who had deflowered his bride. The bride would be respected by the co-wives of her husband and other members of his kindred. On occasions when tempers were roused, they could taunt her as a result of her unfaithfulness.

A bride found to be a virgin at marriage is highly respected. She makes her husband happy and congratulatory messages are sent to her parents and relatives. The white sheet smeared with blood is sent in a covered calabash to her parents with a sum of money and a hen for sacrifice. Early in the same morning, the husband, together with friends, would come around to thank the parents of the bride. He repeats his visit later in the day, accompanied by drummers and by a whole host of his associates. The whole day is given to merriment in both the bridegroom's and the bride's father's compounds. Fabarebo (2004) stresses that the cultural morality on sex is regarded as a communal responsibility, especially binding the kindred and parents to see to it that, as far as it lay in their power, none of their children violates the customary laws of the land with regard to sex. It is unfortunate that such responsibilities have been neglected and not been taken care of in the contemporary society.

The Biblical Concept of Virginity

The root meaning of Virginity is derived from the Hebrew word *betula*, meaning "to separate" and is the common word for a woman who has never had sexual intercourse. It has similar meaning with the Greek word *parthenos*. Baab (1962) reveals that the word *parthenos* signifies the arrival of an individual at the age when he or she is capable of sex relations but has not yet had the experience.

Virginity of brides was highly prized, and adjudication of disputes over virginity is carefully spelt out in the biblical. In the Bible, the betrothed woman was sometimes called "wife" and was under the same obligation of faithfulness (Genesis 29:21; Deuteronomy 22:23-24; Matthew 1:18, 20); and the betrothed man was called "husband" (Matthew 1:19). The testing of the bride by a publicly exhibited token of defloration, which forms part of certain marriage ceremonies and which expressed the value of virginity, is carried out more or less thoroughly and naturally fends itself to deception and circumvention,

In Israel, the law discloses the esteem which Israelites placed upon virginity in the bride. Fiancee's virginity was very important to them before marriage (Leviticus 21:13; Deuteronomy

22; 13-21). Therefore, proof of virginity could be demanded by the groom before the consummation of marriage. If the bridegroom becomes suspicious, he may require the bride's parents to exhibit suitable evidence that she is in fact a virgin (Deuteronomy 22:13-21). The bride's parents would then have to exhibit evidence of her virginity, probably one of her garments stained with menstrual blood to prove she was not pregnant. A blood-stained cloth or chemise was exhibited as a proof of the bride's virginity (Deuteronomy 22:13-21). Her crime would have been sexual relations with a third party when she was already betrothed but still living with her parents. A man who falsely accused his bride of not being a virgin could be fined a hundred shekels, whipped, and compelled to take her as his wife (Deuteronomy 22:13-19). But if his accusation proved true, the woman was to be stoned to death (Deuteronomy 22:20ff). A man who raped a virgin who was already betrothed, particularly in open country where she could not summon help, was liable to the death penalty (Deuteronomy 22:25ff). But in the case of a woman who was not betrothed, the man was to take her as his wife and pay the girl's father the sum of fifty shekels (Deuteronomy 22; 28f. cf Exodus 22:15), for he has damaged her value in the matrimonial market. McKenzie (1976) further states that if the charge of unchastity against a virgin was false, after the slanderous husband had been flogged and fined, he was strictly forbidden to divorce the wife whom he has slandered; but if there was no evidence of virginity, the guilty woman was automatically stoned to death at the door of her father's house (Deuteronomy 22:19-21).

The term 'betrothed' used in the Pentateuch (Exodus 22:16, Deuteronomy 20:7; 22:23-24) was said to be a legally binding contract between the parents of the bride and the groom. It had the legal status of marriage (Deuteronomy 28: 30, 2 Sam, 3:14), yet virginity had to be maintained (Deuteronomy 22:23-24). It was assumed that the prospective groom had taken the possession and established control over his bride by the gift of the bride price to her father.

Certain prohibitions were attached, particularly, to the priesthood. The high priest was permitted to marry only a virgin selected from his own people (Leviticus 21:13f.). Ryrie (1994) agrees with this and further stresses that the failure of the high priest to marry a virgin Israelite would render his children unfit for priestly service (Leviticus 21:13-15). This simply reflects the divine will that purity is a necessity in marriage and that defilement should be strictly avoided. Baab (1962) sees virginity as a means of justifying righteousness on the basis of the ideals by which one has lived. While examining the story of Esther in the Bible, he argued that a virgin was also a likely candidate for royal honour. Therefore, it was the duty of the family, particularly, the parents, to protect the virginity of their daughter.

Perkin (1984) stresses that the betrothal used to last for a year, and that it was a distinct part of a permanent relationship (Matthew 1:18; Luke 1:27; 2:5). He clearly stated that, although Mary was considered to be Joseph's wife at the time of their betrothal, there was no sexual intercourse between them until after the birth of Jesus.

McKenzie (1976) claims that the issue of virginity is explicitly proposed in the New Testament by Apostle Paul. His own verdict seems to be that there should be no sexual intercourse between them at all, that is, the unmarried partners (1 Corinthians 7:1,2). Sex before marriage is defilement, and no man or woman should be defiled before getting married. 1 Thessalonians 4:3-7 reveals that everyone should abstain from fornication. Hebrews 13:4 warns that marriage should be honourable and the marriage bed undefiled. That is, marriage tends to be perfect and pure in all ramifications. Jesus in his preaching on the Mount emphasized that looking lustfully on a woman could be regarded as adultery as the case may be (Matthew. 5:27,28). Hence, premarital sex is apparently forbidden in the New Testament.

Virginity in the Contemporary Yoruba Society

It is a fact that attitudes concerning sex relations and marriage are changing and an increasing number of women are involved in premarital and extramarital relations. This is very common in the contemporary Yoruba society. A research has shown that in the United State of America and parts of Europe, there has been, within the last century, a progressive trend towards an increase in premarital coitus. Currently, in the United States of America, at least three-quarters of the males and over half of the females have experienced premarital coitus.

Otite and Ogionwo (2006) observe that a girl and a boy, nowadays, may decide to marry in the name of “modernization” and “civilization” without the knowledge of their parents. Nowadays, the issue of virginity is no longer a focus in some marriages observed in the Yoruba society. The focus now is the issue of pregnancy. Before the parents of the bridegroom approve the wedding ceremony of their son his fiancée must have shown the evidence of pregnancy. Instead of virginity, pregnancy is now the issue. Virginity is no longer recognized and cherished, except in a few cases. There was a case of newly married woman who gave birth to a baby the next day after the wedding ceremony. Therefore, the joy and approval of some marriages today is found in pregnancy before wedding. This has created an avenue for young ladies and boys to get deeply involved in premarital sex. Youths of today often perceive sex as expressions of love and emotion to the opposite sex.

it is very unfortunate today that some ministers of God allow couples to come to the altar with pregnancy. A particular case of a Christian brother and a sister was reported by Leigh (1990) that they delivered a baby six months after wedding. It has been revealed that the absence of a code of conduct and a presumptuous, relaxed attitude among Christian youths have given rise to some premarital and extramarital cases in some Christian communities. Some youths are fond of indulging in sex during courtship. The way Christian youths of today conduct their courtship seems not to be quite different from that of the unbelievers. That is, courtship proceeds without any moral and spiritual restrictions. Some youths not only hold hands and sit together in public places but also engage in physical contacts like kissing and hugging that exposed them to more temptations. Hence, premarital sex has been on the increase in our society.

Sexual Morality and Yoruba Culture

The institution of marriage is virtually universal in human societies. Otite and Qgionwo (2006) emphasized the involvement of spouses' families in marriage as customary in most indigenous societies. The parents of the boy or the girl usually have an overriding say in deciding whom their son or daughter marries. As the parents decide the marriage of their children, the relatives also have a social duty to ensure that eligible persons enter into approved marriage. In most cases, courtship is defined largely through the interaction of two sets of parents, who arrange spouses for their children. Schaefer (2004) typically reveals that a young woman will be socialized to eagerly anticipate her marriage to a man whom she has met only once, when he is presented to her family at the time of the final inspection, of her dowry.

Before the formal betrothal, enquiries are made by the relatives of the young man into the history of the intended bride's family. When they are satisfied that the union is desirable, they approach the parents of the girl who also conduct their own enquiries and then refer to the Ifa oracle for a decision. If the outcome is favourable, the expression used is Ifa fore, that is, Ifa has spoken well. The formal betrothal then takes place.

In the past, during courtship, the young woman was not permitted to meet her fiancé or any of his relatives, particularly when the marriage proposal had been confirmed end legalized.

She had to avoid them at all cost. If it was not possible to avoid an encounter with them, the girl had to cover her face; for, according to custom, her face was not to be seen until nine days after her arrival in her husband's house. Only then could she be seen, after a customary fee had been paid by either her mother-in-law or a sister-in-law, even though this practice is no longer observed today. There is usually feasting on the wedding (marriage) day, and if the bride is found to be a virgin, there would be more celebrations and feasting. If the bride is not found to be a virgin, the festivities are quietly brought to an end. Oguntola - Laguda (2006) declares that, among the Yoruba, a lady must not engage in sexual cohabitation before marriage. Whoever violates this would be sanctioned by the society. She would be publicly disgraced and her father blamed for her moral laxity.

Suggestions and Recommendations

To restore the lost dignity of virginity in the contemporary Yoruba society, some steps are urgently needed to be taken. Orodiji (2002) outlines some important things to be considered in order to discontinue sexual immorality, particularly, premarital sex, in our society. They are basically biblical and full of practical experiences. They include:

- Persistent prayer of faith (Mark 11:22 - 24);
- Regular study of the word of God (Psalm 119:9 -11);
- Youths should flee from every appearance of evil (I Thessalonians 5:22);
- Youths should avoid reading immoral books, magazines and pornographic junks;
- Ungodly television programmes and video should not be watched;
- Lustful looking at the opposite sex, body make-up and sexy underwears should be avoided (Matthew 5:27 - 28);
- Youths should endeavour to avoid wrong relationship and friendship (1 Corinthians 6:15-18);
- It is dangerous for youths to stay idle;
- Youths should avoid undefined visitation and staying together behind closed doors with the opposite sex;
- It is important to make a determined covenant with God on sex.

It is obvious that no society leaves marriage unregulated. As a result of this, Johnson (1960) asserts that it is so important that children be cared for and properly trained that there are always norms concerning what persons, under what conditions and in what manner, may establish a marriage relationship. Parents should endeavour to give their children sex education instead of leaving this role to the higher institutions of learning alone.

All citadels of learning should include punitive measures on sexual harassment- indecent dressing and rape in the students' handbooks. Counselling services could be organized for students on sex education. Higher institutions of learning can organize seminars/conferences and workshops to give talks on matters bordering on sex.

The mass media also can play a vital role in informing and educating young boys and girls as regards the implication of sexual immorality. Pornographic film shows and seductive music should also be discouraged; instead, educative and religious programmes should be entertained.

Religious institutions also should endeavour to train both men and women, particularly the young ones, on how to exercise self- control. Every youth needs to learn how to control emotions and sexual urges. Shishima (2005) points to Joseph in the Bible, how he exercised self-control when faced with the temptation of sexual harassment from his master's wife.

Leigh (1990) opines that if Jesus were to be born into the world today, many of our single ladies would not be eligible to be His mother because of the way they have been sexually defiled before marriage. It is a sign of dishonour and disrespect for any young man to demand for sex from his betrothed. However, it is suggested that ladies should make up their mind that they will not give themselves to any kind of sex, no matter how much pressure their partners, parents or the society exert, until after marriage, Unmarried men are also advised to be responsible, self-controlled, culturally oriented, and endeavour to restore the dignity of virginity in the Yoruba society. Any move or gesture that will lead to sex should be refused, resisted and rejected.

Conclusion

This paper has been able to examine the concept of virginity in the Yoruba society; its cultural value, the biblical stand and the deplorable condition in the contemporary society. The main causes of premarital sex that is so rampant nowadays were critically outlined and suggestions raised to curb its proliferation. If the suggestions are properly utilized, sexual immorality among youths will definitely diminish.

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