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*Youth, Church and
Sexuality in Kenya.*

Lucy KANGARA

SLD Fellow, 2004

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This report is part of the post SLDF activities to be carried out by the fellow after the course and the views expressed in this project are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the ARSRC or any organization providing support

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Abstract

Purpose; To examine what Christian churches are doing to create a conducive environment for young people to discuss sexuality issues openly without fear or guilt. Kenya is a country where 80 percent of the population is Christian and sexuality issues have not been given spaces for discussion within churches on “moral” ground. This study aims to qualitatively seek young Christian’s views and how their different churches are dealing with sexuality issues.

The Method used; In-depth literature review on various Kenyan newspapers, then focus group discussion where two focus group were identified. The discussion was recorded and thereafter transcribed and analysed.

Findings; The churches, even in the advent of HIV/AIDS, are not very comfortable in discussing sexuality issues or creating a favourable space for the young adults within the church to explore their sexuality.

Conclusion; Sexuality information is lacking among young Christian especially who are living in the rural area of Mukinduri village. The churches are still hiding behind the veil of morality.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Human beings are sexual beings throughout their entire lives. Freud; Maslow et al (1992) states that “We are sexual from birth, and sexual expression is a basic human need throughout our lives. Sexual expression is an essential component of healthy human development for individuals of all ages”. At certain points in life, sexuality may manifest itself in different ways. Each life stage brings with it pressures for change and sexual development milestones to be achieved if sexual health is to be attained or maintained. The stages of sexual development are a human developmental process involving biological and behavioral components.

Sexuality and Adolescent in the Early Churches.

In the early Christian church, few restrictions were placed on adolescent boys. Kiel (1967) cites a passage from St Augustine’s writings that mirror descriptions of adolescent boys today, including mention of sexual curiosity and body changes. It was around sixth century when the church “peritentials” were dispersed to govern the sexual conduct of clergy (Gies & Gies 1989). The peritentials specified sex only at a certain times of the year and were exclusive to heterosexual marriages. Penalties for other activities, ranging from kissing to oral sex, were severe.

During the middle ages various changes occurred in church and state doctrines governing adolescent sexuality. The church sought great social control over parishioners. This led to restrictive measures governing adolescent sexuality which included bans on premarital sex, homosexuality, masturbation, abortion and contraceptives (Boswell, 1980). There are other evidence to show that church exerted sexual norms for example the first systematic persecution of sexual nonconformists and banning of parishioners from direct access to the bible (Boswell, 1980).

During late 18th century and early 19th century sexuality study was placed under the direct purview of religion and not science. The Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) of

the late 1870s and 1880s attacked all forms of public indecency, including adolescent vices (Kett, 1977). The Young Men Christian Association complemented the WCTU's activities from the 1870s onward and even published scores of pamphlets designed to terrorize adolescents about the evils of sexuality (Kett, 1977). Some religious groups established homes for unwed pregnant adolescents and these girls were kept in groups homes long after births of their offspring (who were adopted by others) so as to keep them away from additional exposure to worldly vices, In a report by Lancaster (1987) and Starbuck (1899), show religious leaders and psychologists asserted that the only way to keep adolescents away from sexual activities was religious conversion.

Church and Sexuality: an important element in Kenya's struggle against AIDS

Despite the social changes that have occurred in the lives of Kenyans, religious institutions continue to celebrate an era of chastity and sexual conservatism. In an era of sexual freedom, religious institutions still hamper dispensation of sex education that can guide and assist its members towards surviving in the global sex culture. In a world that is characterised by technological advanced and increased connectivity, people are confronted with sexuality issues on a daily basis - through television, radio, music, newspapers, magazines, adverts, dressing, etc., making it impossible to escape the invasion. Without adequate information about sex, people face a risk of being swallowed up by a culture that does not rhyme with the doctrine they receive in religious institutions. While churches need to preserve the sanctity of marriage (as seen in their discouragement of condoms and insistence of abstinence), such an objective can only be attained if people possess adequate knowledge of their sexuality and how to express it in a changing society.

Research Question

What are the Christian churches doing to create a conducive environment for young people to discuss sexuality issues openly without fear or guilt?

Research Objectives

This study attempts to investigate the barriers to sexuality information in Kenyan religious institutions, and how these affect the young. The study examines the role played by Kenyan churches in dispensing sexuality information, sex education, and also how the churches' doctrine about sexuality influences the sexuality of Kenyan youths. This study will sought to determine whether young people in Kenyan churches receive factual and positive information about sexuality and, it will also examine factors that promote or hinder the transmission of sexuality information within Kenyan churches. Overall, the study will sought to find out whether Kenyan Christian churches are creating conducive environment for young people to discuss sexuality openly, and without fear or guilt.

Importance of the Study

The study has both theoretical and applied utility. Within the theoretical arena the findings are aimed to add knowledge within the area of sexuality and especially to shed more light on the relationship between sexuality and religion. This is because despite the many studies on sexuality pertaining to young adults or adolescents the relationship between religion and sexuality has not been fully explored my study will try to fill in this gap. At the applied level it is hoped that this research will contribute towards knowledge base for effective sexuality policies, planning and implementation within the churches and at government level. It is also hoped programmes that address youth sexuality will be instituted within the churches.

Definition of young people

The term "Youth" "adolescence" and "young people" are defined variously. The US Centre of Disease Control defines adolescence as ages between 13 and 19 years and 20 to 24 for young adults. Paediatrics and the Society for Adolescent Medicine define it as 13 and 31 years Kunins (1993) WHO refers to people between the ages of 10 to19 as adolescents and the larger age group 10 to 24 as young people (WHO 1986). In this research I will adopt the age group between 13 to 24.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

This section reviews relevant literature pertaining to sexuality within churches in Kenya and it will also look at the various theories that have been used to explain sexuality.

Various theories have been used to explain sexuality ranging from biological, essentialism but my study will focus on script theory which is a product of interactionism and constructionist theories.

Parker, Gagnon (1995) explains sexuality using script theories whereby sexual conduct rests on quite different assumptions about the ways in which specific sexual patterns are acquired and expressed. First scriptists assume that patterns of sexual conduct in a culture are locally derived (that is, that what is sexual and what sex means differs in different cultures). Second, they assume that there is no innate sexual instinct or drive and that infants do not possess any information about sex or specific sexual aims when they are born. Infants may vary biologically in activity level and temperament, but there are no direct links between this variation and what they will do sexually as adults. Third, they assume that individuals acquire, through a process of acculturation that lasts from birth to death, patterns of sexual conduct that are appropriate to that culture (including those patterns that are thought to deviate from the norms of the culture). Fourth, they assume that people are not simply mirrors of the sexual scenarios provided by their culture and that as they get older they make individual adaptations to what is originally provided by the culture. In complex and contradictory cultures such individual adaptations will be very diverse.

Given these assumptions, people acquire scripts for sexual conduct (who they should have sex with, when they should have sex with, where they should have sex with them, what they should do sexually and why they should do sexual things). These scripts embody what the inter-subjective culture treats as sexuality (cultural scenarios) and what the individuals believe to be the domain of sexuality. Individuals improvise around the cultural scenarios and in the process of social action create a changed sexual culture for the society. Individual sexual actors as well as those who create representations of sexual life (eg. the mass media, religious leaders, educators, researchers) are reproducing and transforming sexual life in a

society. For example, introducing condoms in sexual activity s part of an AIDS education and prevention program requires changing scripts for sexual conduct on the part of individuals. If large numbers of individuals use condoms, they will change the health situation around sexuality by reducing AIDS, other sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies and abortions. This particular theory will be adopted for my study because it is what the church interprets sexuality to be will be passed to the members of the church.

Relevance of Adopted Theory

This draws a lot from Interactionism , framework that sees society as a product of everyday interaction (Macionis and Plummer, (1997) . Through everyday interaction whether in the family or religious circles people form scripts of what is sexually acceptable and what is not acceptable.

The Church and its Influence in Kenya

The church holds an important place in the socio-economic and political life of Kenya. Out of a total population of 30 million¹, over 50% are Christians. A study conducted by Daystar University revealed that Nairobi records the highest number of church goers and the highest frequency of church attendance. In Nairobi alone, over 70% claim to be Christians. These Christians are distributed across five main churches, which include: the Roman Catholic, African, and Protestant (Presbyterian and Pentecostals), Indigenous and Orthodox Churches². The presence of cults today in Kenya provides a false idea about Kenyans' insatiable thirst for religion. Cults such as the Jehovah Witnesses, the Seventh Day Adventists, the Mormous and many others are battling with the traditional Christian churches over Christians. Increasingly, non-believers and Christians of traditional churches are staying away from their congregations following fears to fall into cults. While Christian affiliation does not necessarily translate into the practice of Christianity or the upholding of Christian values, it however entails that a large proportion of Kenya's population is, to some extent, inclined to the doctrine of Christianity. According to Rau, "the Kenyan people are very religious, and moral arguments from their church leaders and religious organisations are extremely

¹ 1999 Census

² Daystar University, Nairobi Church Survey, Summary Report

influential. There are few other institutions in Kenyan society with such ability to change hearts and minds about this epidemic.”³

Catholic and Protestant churches are very conservative theologically and morally, the former because of dependence upon expatriate (Irish/Italian) missionaries, and the latter due to a mass evangelical movement that has dominated Protestantism for several generations. Kenya is a center for the independent church movement, with over five hundred groups ranging from African denominations to prophetic cults. Many allow polygamy and permit women prophetic figures, but are intolerant of abortion, contraception, sex education etc, (Brockman, Kariuki, undated). Infact it is not uncommon for people to try to censor sexual expressions or sexual material because of religious taboos against them. But by and large sexuality approaches differs greatly by religion and by the culture in which that belief system is found.

It is estimated that between 70-80 percent Kenyans are Christians .Whether this proportion of the population practices the teachings of the church remains a puzzle. As some have remarked, “the church in Kenya is one mile wide and one inch deep. It is so widely spread but has no depth⁴.” This entails that despite the fact that the majority of Kenyans identify with Christianity, the Christian doctrine, or the message spread through these churcheds have not successfully penetrated the hearts of its disciples. Kihiko (undated) posits that the impact of the many churches in Kenya on the everyday social lives of Kenyans has not been felt. While this failure to practice Christian principles results from individual recalcitrance or refusal to abide by Christian teachings, political conflicts have also penetrated the Kenyan church. Consequently, many worshipers perceive the church as a political institution, or a tool used by politicians to pass on their messages. It is such perceptions that push Christians out of the church. Yet, while the Kenyan church seems to be losing its grip on the individual, its impact on the Kenyan family form and structure continues to be strong. Kihiko (undated) maintains that while western culture is increasingly changing the values of, especially, underdeveloped societies, the family is still a respected unit in Kenya and functioning as ideal. He argues that “Kenya has not gone to the excesses of the West where the institution of

³ Family Health International: Kenyan Religious Leaders Become Partners in Prevention

⁴ Kihiko, M.K. (undated) The State of the Church in Kenya

the family has really been taunted. We do not see couples living in communes as groups of marriage couples, swapping partners at will⁵.” This is a success story for the Kenyan church, however, the rising HIV/AIDS prevalence amongst adults and youths indicate that, while the form of the Kenyan family seems to remain the same, the values upheld by the individuals who constitute the traditional family seem to have been influenced by Western lifestyles. It is unclear whether Kenya’s traditional family owes credit to customs and traditional beliefs or to Christian influence. If it’s the former, then we should expect to have a society in which sexuality is policed by the doctrines of Christianity, with believers upholding the churches doctrine of abstinence and fidelity/faithfulness in marriage. However, the trading of sex and an increase in fornication (amongst Christians and non-Christians) indicates that the church is, to some extent, losing its grip and anointing in Kenya. That is why this study examines the impact of Christianity on the sexuality of young Kenyans, especially in the face of HIV/AIDS.

Church, Sexuality and HIV/AIDS in Kenya

In the face of the AIDS crisis in Kenya, the church is increasingly being looked upon to play an important role towards fighting the pandemic, which is fast ravaging Kenya’s youthful population. Kenya occupies 5th position on the UNAIDS’ world HIV prevalence rankings. By 2005 it is estimated that over 2.7 million Kenyans would have died from the AIDS pandemic, with life expectancy reduced from 47 to 42 years. Currently, over 16% of the adult population is infected with the pandemic, with 80% of those infected falling within the 15-49 years age bracket.

Church and Approach to Sex/AIDS in Kenya

Throughout the early 1990s, most religious groups in Kenya either ignored AIDS or explained it as the result of aberrant or immoral behaviour. In fact, at one extreme were

⁵ Kihiko, M.K. (undated) The State of the Church in Kenya

religious leaders who led anti-condom crusades and rallies where HIV/AIDS brochures were burnt⁶, in the belief that teaching about prevention measures encourages promiscuity.⁷

A 1994/1995 KAP survey of over 311 Kenyan pastors and church leaders in Kenya made startling revelations about HIV/AIDS and sexuality within the Kenyan church⁸. In the survey carried out by MAP International, over 60% of respondents had received no counselling or information on AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases. Nearly one half of respondents reported that their churches rarely or never discussed AIDS, despite the fact that nearly three quarters of the pastors and church leaders surveyed said they knew congregation or community members infected with HIV/AIDS. The reason(s) for such coolness lean upon the training of the clergy and also the conservatism of Christian dogma. Fear of association with “sinners” was pointed out as the reason why pastors felt the churches failed to respond to the AIDS epidemic. Forty-four percent of interviews saw AIDS as a curse from God, while 13.8% insisted that AIDS was not a problem to be addressed by the churches. It is evident that Christians have been socialised in such a manner as to make them even more resistant to sex education. Remarks from pastors such as:

“we do sex; we do not talk about it. If you want me to drive people out of my church, I’ll preach about it.”

“AIDS affects sexuality and causes death, two things that the church and Africans in general don’t like to talk about.”

These show how uncommitted the church is towards integrating sex and AIDS education into their activities. Without the church, AIDS and sexuality awareness campaigns would be fruitless, considering that the church touches on all issues of human life.

Church and Homosexuality in Kenya

One of the “demons” that have influenced the modern church is homosexuality. Recently, gay relationships have divided, especially, the Anglican Church both within and between continents. While some African countries have opened and cooled down discussions about

⁶ InterPress News Service (IPS), September 5, 1996, :Kenya-Population: Church Burns Condoms and AIDS Materials”

⁷ Family Health International: Kenyan Religious Leaders Become Partners in Prevention

⁸ Curled from the MAP HIV/AIDS Pastoral Counseling Training in Africa Project web portal

homosexuality in – particularly – the Anglican Church, the Kenyan Anglican church continues to herald a conservative stance about the issue. Though some Kenyan Christians are slowly bowing to demands for gay rights in Kenya, Kenyan Christians are also very hostile to homosexuality – it is still very much frowned upon and regarded as a sin⁹.

In some communities in Kenya same-sex activity were tolerated in tribal tradition, but only as childish behaviors unworthy of an initiate. In tribes where initiation involves long periods of separation from female contact along with powerful emphasis on male group bonding (Maasai), situational homosexuality is not uncommon. When limited to mutual self-pleasuring, it is regarded as merely unmanly. Oral or anal intercourse can, however, result in expulsion from the age set, severe beatings, and disgrace. One finds some nonpenetrative homosexual behaviour among Maasai *askaris* (guards) who have migrated to Nairobi or the coast but this is perceived to be a sin within the Christian teachings.

In August 16, 2003, the Saturday Nation reported about Kenyan church leaders' request for Kenyans to ignore Nobel Peace Prize winner – Desmond Tutu's positive views on homosexuality. A joint declaration by the Federation of Churches in Kenya – an umbrella independent church organisation – describe Tutu's remarks that “sexual orientation should not be an issue in a leader, and that a homosexual leader should remain celibate,” as shocking and unfortunate. This conservative stance was further reflected in the church leaders' request to delegates in the Kenyan National Constitutional conference, asking them to block a section of the draft constitution, considered by religious clerics to “leave an open window for the official sanctioning and recognition of same sex marriages”¹⁰.

Church and the Policing of Sex in Kenya

The conservatism of the church in Kenya is not only Anglican. Within the Roman Catholic church, religious doctrine sent shock waves to educationists as Roman Catholic Christians protested against the inclusion of three novels – ¹¹A Man of the People (Chinua Achebe), Kiu (S.A. Mohamed) and Kimeingia Mchanga (S.A. Mohammed) – considered by parents and

⁹ Sunday Nation, July 26th, 1998

¹⁰ Saturday Nation, August 16th, 2003, “Clergymen disagree with Tutu”

¹¹ Daily Nation, Wednesday September 3, 2003, “Church wages war on ‘A man of the people’.

clerics alike to be pornographic and sexually explicit. Organised under the theme – Help Kick Pornography out of the Classroom, the Roman Catholics carried their protests across Nairobi and Kiambu, the which reached a crescendo when during mass at the Holy Family Basilica in Nairobi, President Mwai Kibaki and Education Minister George Saitoti (in attendance) were requested to yield to their demands¹².

This protest marked a turning point in the history of church and sexuality in Kenya. Literary critics were quick to point out that the protest was sheer religious extremism and the continuous attempt of the Kenyan church to direct and control the lives of Kenyans, especially in an era where the individual is increasingly gaining rights and freedom from social institutions such as the church. Fr. Emmanuel Ngugi's remarks that the church must stand up to be counted as it is the conscience of society suggests that despite the liberation of "the individual", the church still looks upon itself as the most powerful socialisation and moral correcting institution in society. Consequently, even though sexuality has undergone a remarkable revolution (cf. Fuh, 2004), the church still intends to blindfold its Christians to the new challenges that occur in the sexuality of contemporary Kenyan society.

Demanding that three novels be scrapped off the education system "lest they corrupt the youth¹³" is cowardice and an escapist strategy to avoid equipping the youth with the necessary skills to choose between right and wrong in the domain of sexuality – that is, how to survive with or how to remain a good Christian in the face of a sexual revolution. While the Holy Family Basilica's clergy claim "there is nothing morally redeeming¹⁴" about the portrayal of sexuality in the three novels, social critics insist that the novels "only mirror society and that the themes do not aim to corrupt but to correct social mores," especially considering that, evil does not, in the end triumph over good in these novels. Rather, the three books should be perceived as elements of moral education than corruption. It is such resistance to and failure to offer sex education to its Christians that is responsible for the corrosion of sexual mores, than three books in the syllabus. It should be noted that two of the

¹² ChickenBones: A Journal for Literary & Artistic African-American Themes, "Banning Chinua Achebe in Kenya" – A Man of the People – Pornographic?

¹³ Saturday Nation, August 16th, 2003

¹⁴ Saturday Nation, August 16th, 2003

books requested to be banned by Roman Catholic clerics were taught in the 1970s and 1980s in Kenyan secondary schools without protest, “and the students were none the worse for it.”

The effects of such sexual conservatism are devastating, especially considering that the church constitutes one of the most powerful agents of socialisation. Having both parents (family) and church protest against sex education, gives the youth very little hope or opportunity to come to terms with sexuality. Consequently, television, magazines and peers remain the only other option for learning about sex – an option that has contributed immensely to the corruption of youth morality. Prof. Henry Indangsi, lecturer at the University of Nairobi maintains that such moral posturing by the church should be condemned. In his critique of the Kenyan Catholic church’s 2003 request for the elimination of “pornographic books from the syllabus,”¹⁵ he argues that the Kenyan church is deliberately refusing to accept the sexual realities of Kenyan society. He maintains that Kenyan society is flout with men and women with sexual mores that are deviant from that preached by the church. Kenyan society is, for example, flout with men who are disgusting and irresponsible; and those who treat women as sexual objects and later gloat about its existence in society. According to Indangsi (2003) the sexual conservatism of the Kenyan church fails to equip girls and boys with the necessary knowledge and skills to fight sexual temptation.

Such practices can only be “viewed as religious conservatism and perpetuation of a theology that is removed from reality.¹⁶” Yielding to Christian activism against sexuality is “tantamount to taking [Kenya] back to the dark ages.”¹⁷ However, such sexual conservatism can be linked to the reign of terror that existed in Kenya during the KANU (Moi) era. Even with a change of government, the ideals that were implemented or imposed upon society – especially about policed and secret-sacred sex, still abound today.

¹⁵ Daily Nation, Wednesday September 3, 2003, “Church wages war on ‘A man of the people’.

¹⁶ Indangsi, H. (2003)

¹⁷ Daily Nation, Wednesday April 2, 2003, “Clergymen hypocritical of AIDS”

Positive Church Action towards HIV/AIDS and Sexuality

The Kenyan church is gradually participating in efforts to fight the pandemic. Currently, a number of congregations refuse to marry couples unless they have undergone an HIV test and have both emerged negative. This according to the Rev. Simon Onyango is to also reduce the work of the clergy. He maintains that the church cannot preside over short-lived marriages only to be called upon to perform burial rites when the couples die after a few years in the union¹⁸. In the era of AIDS, the Rev. Onyango contends that the three functions of marriage – procreation, sex and companionship – are jeopardised

The United Church has also developed programmes aimed at educating Kenyan youth about sexual issues. Working in collaboration with the Kenyan Alliance for the Advancement of Children's Rights (KAACR), children have been encouraged and supported to form rights clubs – facilitated by teachers. Through such clubs, the United church and its partners have been able to organise discussions with youths about puberty, sexually transmitted diseases, and HIV/AIDS¹⁹. Through drama and other informal education techniques, youths have been assisted to understand sexual maturation and its implications. Despite the hope created by this project, other organisations have tried to inform young people in Kenya about sexual issues with less effectiveness.

In 2000, the African Inland Church in Kenya (AIC) also endorsed the introduction of HIV/AIDS lessons in all Kenyan primary and secondary schools. Catherine Anyona, the AIC's HIV/AIDS project coordinator maintains that it is imperative for all religious institutions to help the youth towards eradicating the scourge. She contends that church involvement in AIDS and sexuality education constitutes a necessary step towards equipping the youth with the necessary ammunition to fight the disease. This view is also held by the Kenyan Christian Students Fellowship, who posits that the introduction of classes on HIV/AIDS in Kenyan learning institutions would save many Kenyan youths by encouraging them to avoid careless sexual behaviour.²⁰

¹⁸ Daily Nation, Friday July 30th, 1999, "Clergyman's stand on AIDS and marriage stirs debate"

¹⁹ Daily Nation on the Web, "Kenya: Fighting AIDS with Education"

²⁰ Daily Nation, August 31st, 2000, "AIC backs AIDS lessons for schools"

So far, very little has been done in Kenya to equip clergy men and women in Kenya with the necessary tools for addressing sexual issues in their daily chores. This lacuna in the training of the clergy impacts immensely on the overall attitude of the various churches towards sexuality, considering that the clergy are authoritative figures – trained to promote the conservation or policing of sex within society. Currently, only MAP International (Medical Assistance Programme) has developed a programme targeting the clergy (in Kenya and Ivory Coast). In collaboration with USAID (United States Agency for International Development) and FHI (Family Health International), MAP initiated the project – Integrated Action Against AIDS in Kenyan Churches²¹ – to address the training needs of Kenyan church leaders, so as to better equip them to support the church community as they face various aspects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. On setting up the programme in 1994/1995, training workshops were expected to be offered in four main districts in Kenya – Kakamega (Nyanza District); Nyeri and Nairobi (Central District); Kitui (Eastern District) and Kilifi (Coast District).²²

²¹ Curled from the MAP HIV/AIDS Pastoral Counseling Training in Africa Project web portal

²² Curled from the MAP HIV/AIDS Pastoral Counseling Training in Africa Project web portal

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

In research there are two methodologies used for data collection and analysis. These are qualitative and quantitative approaches. Hein deVries et al, (1992), have documented that the two methodologies used differ in four aspects, namely the research object, the research design, data collection and data analysis. The discussion of the relative strength of the two approaches also brings into central focus the issues of validity and reliability. Qualitative research method is an inquiry approach in which the researcher seeks to get the complete understanding of a social phenomenon by being totally involved in the situation. The approach is useful for exploring the phenomenon. In this approach, the inquirer asks questions, collects the detailed views of the participants in the form of words while quantitative research method is an approach, which is used in describing trends and explaining relationships among variables. To conduct this kind of inquiry, the researcher / investigator asks questions, and then analyses the responses from the instruments in a scientific way (using statistics).

The qualitative and quantitative research methods have different characteristics which helps us to identify which one can be suitable for different study situations. Classifying an approach as qualitative or quantitative however does not mean that if one approach has been chosen, a researcher may not touch some aspects of another method. There are times when qualitative researchers may draw on quantitative techniques, and vice versa.

My research will employ qualitative method. Its main focus is in describing the way respondents define, experience, and constitute their world (Hein de Vries et al 1992). Since human interaction provides the basis for data collection, this method has been hailed as providing rich, thick and in-depth knowledge about beliefs, attitudes, values and norms related to people's behaviour.

Study Design

The study targets population in adolescents who are in and out of school at Mukindui village in Kirinyaga district, Kenya. The study area represents adolescents in rural areas. The village is located approximately 150kms from the capital city Nairobi. The nearest town is Kerugoya which is the district headquarters approximately 2kms away.

The village is predominantly agricultural and most residents are small scale farmers. The agricultural industry has undergone through massive transformation, in the early 1970s and mid 80s most farmers relied on cash crops such as coffee. But from early 90s coffee farming became so unpopular and most farmers uprooted coffee trees and replaced them with bananas, tomatoes, etc. Poverty has been on the increase since income from coffee decreased tremendously. Most residents in the village rarely go beyond standard 8 (which is the final grade in primary education). I was actually lucky to get 8 participants who have gone through secondary education or are still studying.

Sampling and interviewing

The study began with informal interviews amongst the adolescents in the village and some church leaders about their interpretations of sexuality, factors influencing choice of partners, determinants of multi-partner relationship and decision making in sexual intimate relationships. Asking these questions becomes important because the symbols and icons that line the world of sexuality and in themselves living cultural products and processes that shape our understanding of what sex is in Africa (Ssewakiryanga, 2001: 1). The study sample consisted of 2 focus groups of 8 participants; each group had 4 girls and 4 boys. While in the first focus Discussion group most failed to turn up the second session all turned up. The study used focus in-depth interview with the adolescents and some pastors. To obtain information on topics such as sexuality and religion it is important to engage with respondents lived experiences and perspectives as well as the feeling and perspectives of other persons (Ssewakiryanga, 2001). Two in-depth interviews were conducted among the young people and 3 individual interviews with the pastor/priest/church elders were conducted.

Selection of place of discussion

A recreation spot within the village was selected. This is a place which is in the middle of the village, easily accessible to the participants. It is located outside their regular homes and secluded from occasional disturbances from the general public. As other studies that have used FGD on sensitive issues have revealed, “focus group participants sometimes identify the focus group as a special occasion and take the opportunity to discuss issues that are unconsciously censored or simply awkward to raise in more routine settings.” (Kitzinger & Fairguhar,). Hence and choice of secluded area gave the participants an opportunity to make revelations and exchange new and sensitive information about their own personal experiences and that of their peers.

Ethical Consideration

Participants were assured of strict confidentiality and anonymity. Informed consent was sought prior to commencing discussions. They gave nick names during interviews. No addresses were sought. The Pastors declined to be on tape for fear of being victimized by their superiors. This was accepted.

Demographic background of the respondents

Respondents	Age	Denomination	Sex	Level of Education	Residence
1	17	Catholic	F	Form IV	Rural
2	20	Anglican	M	Form Iv	Rural
3	16	Catholic	M	Form 3	Rural
4	16	Catholic	M	Form 3	Rural
5	18	Pentecostal	F	Form IV leaver	Rural
6	18	Pentecostal	M	Form IV leaver	Rural
7	21	Anglican	F	Form IV	Rural
8	17	Catholic	F	Form 2	Rural

Data Analysis

Fields notes were taken during interviews and one focus group was recorded on tape. The field notes and recorded interviews were later transcribed for analysis. The data was analyzed qualitatively, seeking general trends, and patterns. In reporting and discussing the findings several qualitative techniques have been used. Interview excerpts have been inserted in the discussion to give life and reality to the analysis. In discussing the findings reference has been to theoretical frameworks adopted in the study and comparison made with other findings from other studies.

Limitations of the study

Sexuality is a topic that many people would rather not discuss. It is riced with taboos. Getting my respondents to comfortably discuss the topic was huge obstacle.

Trying to translate the term sexuality using our local language was a big problem as some of my respondents wanted to understand what sexuality in our own mother tongue is.

The respondents at times consented their participation but they failed to turn up for the discussion. My highest turn up failure was with the pastors. The first interview I had arranged with four of them none turned up for the meeting. I had to devise a way of paying them visits and having informal discussions in their own settings about sexuality, even then, they were not forthcoming with information.

Another limitation was the time limit. There was very little time to undertake this particular study. Sexuality issues are quite sensitive and a researcher needs time to build confidence among the respondents.

Lack of a mentor in this field of sexuality. As an upcoming scholar in this field, I needed guidance from somebody with experience but there was none. So I spent a lot of time looking for people in the field of sexuality for guidance.

Lack of literature pertaining to sexuality among rural adolescents in Kenya. Infact there are few studies one would come across solely done among rural adolescents.

The funds were so limited to enable me to at least hire few extra research assistants who could have enabled me to have a larger and wider representation.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Sexuality issues in Kenya are highly sensitive more so in the rural areas. My findings from focus group discussion showed that young people are still very conservative in talking about sexual issues. Being Christians the topic was like no go area. But as Debbie Dortzbach, the first director of the MAP Kenya HIV/AIDS project puts it "Churches in Kenya are right where the people are in the community," "There's a good structure for a multiplier effect when church leaders talk to their congregations." The churches have now to create spaces for young people to be in a position to discuss sexuality and sexual issues openly. As mentioned earlier Kenyan Christians over decades have been very conservative for example Bill Rau, AIDSCAP's associate director for policy asserted that throughout the early 1990s, most religious groups in Kenya either ignored AIDS or explained it as the result of aberrant or immoral behavior (FHI 2004). And at one extreme religious leaders who led anti-condom crusades and rallies where HIV/AIDS brochures were burned, in the belief that teaching people about prevention measures encourages promiscuity. Research studies investigating the impact of sexual health education on adolescent behaviour consistently find that providing contraceptive/condom education does not lead to earlier or more frequent sexual activity (Frost & Darroch Forrest, 1995; Grunseit & Kippax, 1993; Grunseit et al., 1997; Jemmott, Jemmott & Fong, 1998; Ku, Sonnenstein & Pleck, 1992; Wellings et al., 1995). A meta-analysis of published teenage pregnancy prevention program evaluations shows that these programs do not increase sexual activity but do significantly increase contraceptive use among sexually active teens, and that those programs which include the distribution of contraceptives are the most effective (Franklin, Grant, Corcoran, O'Dell Miller & Bultman, 1997).

SECTION 1

Understanding sexuality

The focus group discussion started by having packed snacks which I had carried. This was meant to create a relaxed environment. We also talked about other issues affecting our village before I commenced the discussion. When we turned to the topic and I mentioned the word sexuality, all participants became silent. I informed them of my intention to have the interview on tape and assured them of utmost confidentiality. I also informed them that I intended to take photos but one male and one female both from Pentecostal Church declined while another boy decided to cover his face completely.

As I started asking the first question, there was a feeling of uneasiness as Hodzic (2002) maintains that talking about sex (whether in mixed groups or within a relationship) triggers negative feelings of uneasiness, fear and doubt.

The respondents at first when I asked about what they thought sexuality gave various responses. Two of them said “It is the relationship between male and female. Another said it was about sexual intercourse. From the responses above it is quite clear that sexuality issues were defined within the parameters of sexual relationship. This particular perception of sexuality being seen in terms of sexual relations is widespread as Friedman (1993); Aggleton and River (1999) indicated that young people often have less access to information services and resources than those who are older and they further say that one of the most important reasons why young people are denied adequate access to information, sexual health services and protective resources such as condoms, derives from the stereotypical and often contradictory ways in which they are viewed. Many adults have difficulty acknowledging adolescents as sexual beings and therefore adolescents must be controlled and restrained (Hoffman & Futterman, 1996).

When we explored on who knew about sexuality and who did not know the response was that illiterate people don't know. This response shows that these young people did not see

sexuality as part and parcel of a human being but as a separate component that is studied in school and when we tried to find out who knew more about sexuality, one male respondent was quick to point out “boys”. Here the issue of male dominance in sex issues was evidently portrayed and the girls were just keeping quiet. Parker, Gagnon (1995) found that men in many cultures wage daily battles to prove to themselves and others that they qualify for inclusion in the esteemed category “Male”. To be “not male” is to be reduced to the status of women, or worse, to be “queer”. Since gender is socially constructed, it must be actualized through action and sensation by doing things that repeatedly affirm that one is really male or really female while avoiding things that leave room for doubt.

Source of sexuality information

The widely acknowledged source of sexuality information was the magazine, television and teachers. None of the respondents mentioned church leaders or their parents. This is in line with other findings. This finding is similar to a study survey in Ontario that found that 89% of adolescents felt that it was important for them to receive sexual health education (McKay & Holowaty, 1997) and from a list of six possible sources, the adolescents rated the school as their most preferred source of sexual health information, followed by family and friends.

SECTION TWO

Exploring church, youth and sexuality

From the focus group all my respondents were Christian and trying to merge the topic of sexuality and their Christian beliefs was quite difficult. We started by exploring the programmes churches have for the youth and the Catholic participants at least they belonged to two youth programmes each while the others belonged to one programme each. On the programmes that churches offer youth, Catholic respondents indicated that the church organizes cinema where the leader comes with a tape and they are shown. This can be done yearly. The programmes range from Jesus film and also topics on HIV/AIDS. This actually indicates that despite the fact that church leaders are finding it difficult to talk about issues of sexuality and sex health, they are starting slowly to acknowledge that there is a problem and young people need to know about it. The churches leaders arrange programmes for young

without consulting them. This still goes on to show that the churches do not trust young people to make responsible decision. To all the respondents issues of sexuality has never been discussed in church.

Love relationships within churches

Relationships between boys and girls are highly censored. As one respondent indicated that they are only encouraged to have friends who can help with school work and if a church administrator sees or knows that you are spending a lot of time together you are labelled as 'immoral'. Things like touching and going for walks are highly discouraged. According to the latest release from NCLS Research which draws from the 1998 Australian Community Survey (ACS) of reasons why people do not go to church one of the major reason people gave was the fact that many feel that the moral values which the churches are seen to affirm, particularly in areas such as sexuality or abortion, are not values with which they agree. (<http://www.cra.org.au/pages/00000242.cgi>). In another study on adolescent sexuality Pemberton (1992) found that religiosity was demonstrated to have a significant negative relationship with sexually intimate behavior. A major conclusion of this study was that religiosity is a multi-dimensional construct which influences male adolescent sexual behavior to the extent to which its values have been internalized. In another similar study Altopp (1981) found that While degree of religiosity demonstrated a significant relationship to sexual attitudes, there was no relationship found between degree of religiosity and sexual behavior. For the subjects in this sample, there appears to be some discrepancy between what the subjects say they believe about the items on the sexual attitudes scale and what their actual sexual behaviors.

Boy-Girl relationships

In this particular question we sought to explore what each sex looks for when they are looking for a boyfriend or girlfriend. The girls were united in stating good behaviour as the most important characteristic, personal grooming, how the boy interacts with others and also the church he goes. The boys indicate that they would be more concerned with a woman who is very patient and one who can be helping may it be in school work or otherwise.

On issues of girls having a boyfriend they indicated that most of the time when you are spending time with a boy he only thinks about sex and boys felt that the girls are not patient, they want to be married very fast even before they finish school. Stoltenberg, (1989) indicated that people born with a penis between their legs grow up aspiring to feel and act unambiguously male, longing to belong to the sex that is male and daring not to belong to the sex that is not, and feeling this urgency for a visceral and constant verification of their male sexual identity – for a fleshy connection to manhood – as the driving force of their life. The drive does not originate in the anatomy. The sensations derive from the idea. The idea gives the feelings social meaning; the idea determines which sensation shall be sought . In both sexes Religion affiliation was the last to be mentioned and as one study done in Austria indicates.

Church, sexuality and general protection

This part we explored the issues whether pastors actually talk about contraceptives in the church or in young peoples meeting. One respondent female, Catholic said she has never heard; another one male catholic said he has heard about his priest talking about condoms. The priest was passing a message on the unsafeness of the condom, actually the message was they are not good. Another respondent also a catholic male said that the priest indicated that condoms are only 70% safe, and this shows a kind of a shift because initially condoms were seen as evil. Respondents both from Pentecost church who were quiet almost throughout the discussion commented that some forms of contraceptives cause cancer, condoms are best used by couples with HIV/AIDS, contraceptives should only be used by married couples for family planning. These beliefs were so strong within these two Pentecost believers and as Birch (1991) asserted that teenage belief systems regarding sex and pregnancy is very

important . It is only by understanding the belief systems of the adolescent and his or her peer group that the health professional can effectively interact with the teenager in a way that has relevance and meaning. Counseling, contraceptive, antenatal or any other service will fail if adolescents do not believe that they need them. Parental, cultural, and religious beliefs, as well as myths, form a basis on which the adolescent belief system is built. Many teenagers do not believe that they will become pregnant because of magical beliefs that they are protected, beliefs that they are too young to get pregnant, or an external locus of control (the belief that they have no control over their bodies or actions).

These findings show that these young people have a lot of misconception about contraceptives and the church also is not helping as it is not creating that conducive environment for young people to discuss these issues.

Perceptions of young people who use condoms/contraceptives

Some respondents felt that this was against Gods commands, the girls felt that boys will have no respect for girls who use condom (male supremacy). Girls will be seen as cheap. For boys they felt that girls who use contraceptive are really cheap and they must be sleeping around. Strangely even the girl respondents concentrated on other girls who use contraceptives and they did not talk about boys who use contraceptives and the boys also did not talk about themselves but they talked about girls. Gilmore, (1990) argues that “manhood” represents an “achieved status” different from parallel notions of womanhood. “As a social icon,” he writes, “femininity usually involves questions of body ornament or sexual allure, or other essentially cosmetic behaviours that enhance, rather than create, an inherent quality of character. An authentic femininity rarely involves tests or proofs of action....”

Churches and Introduction of sexuality programmes

The respondents felt that these programmes should be incorporate in the church because they will help them to learn how to relate with each. These programmes according to the respondents they should deal with pregnancy, HIV/AIDS and other STDs, relationship, between boys and girls, contraceptives.

Young Christians and Homosexuality

They all agreed that homosexuality is like a disease because God created people to be attracted by opposite sex. They also indicated that men who are homosexuals may not have a sexual relationship with their wives. Another respondent even quoted statistics saying that 80% of homosexuals are HIV positive because when they use anus for sex it keep on tearing and it becomes susceptible for HIV infection.

HIV/AIDS knowledge among young people

In this section I sought to find out whether these young people have adequate knowledge about HIV/AIDS. On how HIV/AIDS is transmitted they all knew that it was through unprotected sexual intercourse, blood transfusion, mother to child, needles and one said deep kissing. Their knowledge was also riced with lots of misconception for example one respondent said that one get AIDS even when you use a condom because condoms are not meant for HIV/AIDS virus.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

This study set to interrogate the relationship between youth, church and sexuality. From the findings from both the extensive review of literature, newspapers and from exploratory study and analysis of the focus group discussion, there is indication that sexuality within churches is still an uncomfortable topic and it is only mentioned in passing. Most adolescents who were interviewed indicated that they have many programmes within their churches, for example, youth choir, clubs and they do attend Sunday afternoon activities but in all these forums, they have never attended a sexuality discussion forum. They also indicated that most of what they know for example, teenage pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, STDs is mostly from school and the media.

Christian churches have done very little to create space for young people to discuss their sexuality freely. Sexuality information has been censored and we are having rural young Christians making wrong decisions about their sexuality because the institutions such as churches have not taken up the responsibility to offer direction.

Another important conclusion that can be drawn from this study is all the adolescent I had discussions with came from homes which are Christian oriented and only 2 girls said their parents have mentioned about issues of sex before marriage and the emphasise was on how to protect themselves from teenage pregnancy.

The 3 pastors whom I managed to speak to perceived issues of sexuality among young people as very uncomfortable to discuss and one even mentioned to me that such topics will make people to leave the church.

Recommendations and further research

1. In no uncertain terms a lot of work is needed in this area of sexuality especially among young people in rural areas where even the media which most young people mentioned as the source of sexuality information is lacking.
2. The Government of Kenya and other stakeholders like NGOs should put funds aside to finance a more broader study encompassing two or more provinces on sexuality.
3. The church should highly be sensitized about issues of sexuality as one Mr Opondo said, “Church leaders are preaching from the pulpit about sexual morality and then burying the dead (Williams, 1997). This is a clear sign that churches need to do more in coming out in the open to give their followers a forum to discuss sexuality.
4. Pastors/priests should be well trained and equipped on sexuality issues as they have to deal with this very sensitive topic. It is even more paramount to pastors/priests who are working in rural areas.
5. With the help of the Government, NGOs and other stake holders a youth centre should be provided in Mukinduri shopping centre where young people can walk in freely for counselling , learning about issues of sexuality and other issues that affect them. Educating and training of young people should be offered by NGOs and volunteers who have expertise in these areas. Many NGOs only concentrate their efforts and resources in urban area and now it is the time they should start to decentralise.

6. A comparative research between Christian young people who live in rural areas and the ones who live in urban areas to find out if they hold different views or the same concerning sexuality issues.
7. Many institutions of higher learning in Kenya and Africa as a whole should play a more proactive role in conducting research on sexuality so that sexuality can be understood and interpreted using African terms and expressions.
8. Upcoming Scholars in this field of sexuality should be encouraged to do more research as this will create a database of literature that can be used by others .

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Focus Group Discussion, Question guide for the Youth.

Demographic information of each participant

Sex

Age

Residence

Church

Level of education

Knowledge of Sexuality

1. Generally what do you think is sexuality?
2. Do you think there are some people who do not know about sexuality?
3. What kind of people do not know about sexuality?
4. Do you think there are some people who know about sexuality?
5. What kind of people know about sexuality?
6. What kinds of things should young men and women know about sexuality?

Exploring Church and sexuality

1. Which church denomination do you attend?
2. What youth programmes do your church offer?
3. Who is usually in charge of formulating youth programmes in your church?
4. Do these programmes include discussions on sexuality?
5. What does your church say about having a boyfriend or girlfriend?
6. Are there girls or boys with boyfriends and girlfriends in your church?
7. What do people in your church say about them?
8. When looking for a girlfriend /boyfriend, what do you take into account? E.g your pastor's attitude, his/her age, family background, religion etc.
9. Why do you think some girls or boys in your church stay without boyfriends or girlfriends?
10. Is it possible to have a girlfriend/boyfriend without having sex with her/him.

Church, Sexuality and General Protection

1. Does your pastor/priests ever talk about condoms?
2. If yes what does he say?
3. What do you think about condoms/contraceptives?
4. What kind of girl or a boy would want to use a condom?
5. What do people say about such girls or boys?
6. Do you think your church should have programmes about sexuality?

7. What type of programmes about sexuality would you want the church to have?
8. Would you want your church to invite experts on sexuality to give a seminar or a talk on sexuality?
9. Does your church give you a forum to discuss anything about sexuality?
10. If yes, what do you discuss?