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*The Social Construction
of Sexuality Among
Students at The
University of Nairobi.*

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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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CHAPTER ONE

1.0 BACKGROUND

Sexuality is a complex, multifaceted, and central area of people's lives. It is the total expression of who we are as male and female and embodies our beliefs, values, attitudes, emotions, spiritual, physical and psychological, social and cultural aspects of relating to each other as male and female (WHO 2002). This, therefore, implies that all human beings are sexual. Sexuality is an essential part of everyone no matter their age, gender, health social status, ethnicity or physical ability. It begins at birth and ends with death.

Sexuality is an emerging discourse in Africa. Until recently, knowledge and understanding of human sexual behaviour and influences of sexual behavior has been rudimentary. The HIV/AIDS pandemic has not only changed societal perceptions of sexuality but may also have precipitated changes in perceptions of sexuality. For example, the association of sexuality with love, intimacy and pleasure may be lost due to a new found association of sexuality with fear of HIV/AIDS. HIV/AIDS has helped to change our understanding of sexuality by breaking taboo against the study of human sexuality. It has, therefore, provided a socially acceptable rationale for the continued study of human sexuality.

1.1 Problem Statement

The field of sexuality is relatively new in Africa and Kenya in particular. In many parts of the continent, mention of the word sexuality has immediate connotations of sexual intercourse which is traditionally sacred and taboo and hence not spoken about in public. Sex and sexuality are basic components of human nature yet they are shrouded in mystery and misunderstanding. This is because the words have many connotations depending on one's religion, culture, family, environment, and personal values among others. Due to these factors, sexuality in indigenous Africa was looked upon as something mysterious and was hardly verbalized. Because the generation of life was a matter of

concern to the whole community, there were strong sanctions against people who indulged in sex for 'selfish' reasons. In most parts of Africa, sexual acts that did not fulfill the condition of marriage and child bearing were condemned and severely punished (Benezeri *et al* 1997). The African notions of sexuality resonate with Christian/religious teaching on sex in marriage as a means to perpetuate God's creation. Due to the long period of colonial rule in most of Africa, the Christian/religious dogma has taken root as one of the key factors influencing local notions and experiences of sexuality.

As a consequence of this culture of silence surrounding sexuality, there has been very little research on sexuality due to social taboos and religious conservatism that restrict open discussion of sexuality issues. In predominantly Christian regions, many people equate sexuality with sex and its consequences such as AIDS and sexually transmitted infections including the ways it is transmitted. Adolescents and young people, who are sexually curious, adventurous and risk takers, are poorly informed about sexuality issues because there is no formal curriculum for sexuality education in schools yet they are continually confronted with images of sex and sexuality through media and internet. This places them in very vulnerable situations due to misinformation about sexuality. In a culture that is slowly/reluctantly embracing sexual freedom, there is confusion for young people about what is acceptable and what is taboo. There are restrictions on their behaviour to protect them from the risk of HIV infection, disease, unwanted pregnancy and abuse yet they are not adequately informed on how to protect themselves from these risks. In such an environment, it is extremely difficult for them to enjoy their sexuality because they are not well informed and cannot, hence, make informed decisions.

Universities constitute of young people who in most cases may engage in risky sexual bahaviuor such as multiple partners and unprotected sex. This has led to serious sexual and reproductive health consequences that include;

unintended/unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS, and unsafe abortions (because abortion is illegal in Kenya). Many University students also use sex as an economic survival mechanism due to the fact that financial support to the students by the government is no longer available. Students have to apply for government loan without guarantee that they will get the loan. One of the consequences of this action has been engagement in sex for economic survival by female students. This has dire implications for their reproductive health.

Therefore, in order to develop a better understanding of sexual behavior among the students and other young people and how knowledge of sexuality influences their behaviour and the way they deal with risks of HIV/STIs infection, there is need to investigate their knowledge of and attitudes towards sexuality. This study, therefore, aimed to investigate the understanding, knowledge and attitudes towards sexuality by young university students. This information could constitute important ingredients into effective HIV/AIDS intervention campaigns and education in sexuality issues among young people.

1.2 Objectives

The main/overall goal of the study was to document knowledge and attitudes relating to sexuality among students at the University of Nairobi. Specifically, the study sought to:

- ❖ Document definitions of sexuality among the students
- ❖ Describe the students' attitudes and perceptions towards sexuality and sexual expression
- ❖ Establish whether the university enhances understanding of sexuality
- ❖ Make policy recommendations that can aid in planning for effective sexual and reproductive health intervention anchored on local notions of sexuality among young people

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do students define sexuality?
2. At what ages do young people become aware of their sexuality?
3. What factors made them aware of their sexuality and how have these factors continued to influence their current notions of sexuality?
4. What are the students' attitudes and perceptions of sexuality and sexual expression?
5. How do their attitudes towards sexuality influence their sexual behaviour?
6. What messages about sexuality do they receive as university students?
7. How do the messages shape their sexuality?
8. How has the institution of the university influenced their understanding and practicing their own sexuality?

1.3 Study Justification

- ❖ There is limited documentation of how young people define and experience their own sexuality. Most of the studies in existence have primarily looked at sexuality in relation to HIV/AIDS, sexual behavior, abortion, female genital mutilation among others. This study, consequently, looks at how young people define or understand and experience sexuality including their attitudes and sexuality.
- ❖ Sexuality is an emerging phenomena and a field that is under-researched in Africa and Kenya in particular where sexuality is taboo. This study, therefore, adds to the few that are breaking new ground in studies around sexuality among young people and adds stock to the limited knowledge in sexuality studies in the country and region.
- ❖ In order to effectively plan for Programmes that relate to young peoples' sexuality, it is critical to understand their own definitions and meanings attached to sexuality, what they know about it and their attitudes towards sexuality. Knowledge and attitude studies help policy makers and those in intervention to adequately and effectively plan for interventions.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Defining Sexuality

The most difficult aspect of the study of human sexuality is defining the subject matter (Tiefer, 1991). While sexuality is widely used in research, a precise definition is not available because it has many diverse meanings. In general, sexuality refers to the feminine/masculine dimension marking the entire personality of every individual from birth to death. This means that it is a life long process that involves all aspects of one's personality and behaviours that reflect and are affected by being male or female. It also refers to the totality of who you are, what you feel and how you respond (AHI, 2003).

According to Rathus et *al* (1998), human sexuality is defined as the ways in which we experience and express ourselves as sexual beings. This in essence means that it encompasses feelings, attitudes and behaviours that contribute to a person's own sense of womanhood or manhood. The World Health Organization (WHO) gives a working definition of sexuality as:

Sexuality is a central aspect of being human through out life and encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy, and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviour, practices, roles and relationships. It is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, ethical, legal, historical and religious and spiritual factors. (WHO, 2002)

Therefore, all human relationships are inevitably sexual. Any situation involving both man and woman is experienced partly as a function of their respective

sexual identity and in terms of the distinct role that each is called upon to perform.

Various factors influence our sexuality as noted in the WHO definition. For example, biologically, sexuality is influenced by our gender differentiation and identity, sexual drive and our physical appearance. Women's prescribed role in sexual relations is often to be passive. Women are not encouraged to make decisions regarding choice of sexual partners, negotiate timing and nature of sexual activity, protect themselves from unintended pregnancy and disease and lest of all to acknowledge their own sexual desire. On the other hand, men are encouraged to think primarily of sexual performance. For men, sexual conquest is almost universally prescribed as a way of proving one's manhood (Zeidenstein, 1996). Culturally, the way we think and talk about sex and sexuality is dependent upon the culture we come from and/or society we live in. we speak, dress and act in certain ways that may or may not conform with societies' expectations. Morally, expression of sexuality is determined by an individual's values and beliefs about which sexual practices are acceptable. Physically, sexuality may include, sexual intercourse, hugging, petting, and sexual talk while the psychological component of sexuality involves all other aspects and determines how one interprets his/her sexuality and how one chooses to express it. Thus, human sexuality is highly regulated by society, through factors such as custom, religion, legislation, economics, and politics among others.

Most oftenly, sexuality has been equated with sex which refers to the characteristics associated with being male or female or sexual intercourse. Sexuality is much more than sex, sex is just but an aspect of sexuality. Sexuality involves the whole experience of self including relationships with others, feelings about self and the functioning of the body. The equation of sexuality with sex is the reason why sexuality is still taboo in many cultures.

Sexuality has become a growing area of focus in the fields of gender and development, HIV/AIDS, human rights, reproductive health, education, violence prevention, legal issues, women's rights and the media. Within all these areas, the understanding of sexuality varies and has been approached from different perspectives, (Common Ground Sexuality, 2001).

Key elements of sexuality as outlined in the book; Common Ground Sexuality: Principles for Working on Sexuality, 2001, which was a result of a collaborative and consultative process among agencies that work on sexuality and related areas are that:

- All people are sexual, whether or not they engage in sexual acts or behaviour.
- People express their sexuality through both positive and negative attitudes and behaviours.
- Sexuality expressed positively, through consensual, mutually respectful and protected relationships, enhances well-being, health, and the quality of life.
- Sexuality expressed negatively, through violence, exploitation, or abuse, diminishes people's dignity and self-worth, and may cause long-term harm.
- Being sexual is not only about sexual acts and behaviours, it also includes thoughts, attitudes, and feelings.
- Society exerts strong controls on sexuality, especially women's sexuality, through social norms, values, and laws.
- The understanding of sexuality has considered only men's experiences and needs and has ignored, negated and devalues those of women.
- Many people are initiated in negative ways through experiences of abuse, coercion, or violence.

2.2 Sexual Behaviour among young people in Kenya

The sexual behavior and reproductive health of young people in developing countries have attracted a lot of attention in the last 15 years mainly due to the HIV pandemic. Young people make up over half of the population in the developing countries and are more seriously affected by HIV/AIDS. Worldwide, more than 10 Million young people aged 15-24 have HIV/AIDS. Sub-Saharan Africa has just over 10% of the world's population but is home to more than 60% of all people living with HIV/AIDS, 76% of who are females aged 15-24 years (UNAIDS, 2004). It is projected that, by the year 2015, 15 million people in Kenya would either have died of the virus or would be living with it. Unfortunately, the most affected population is the youthful, productive and future leadership within the age group of 15-16 years. This realization has led to many studies being conducted on the sexual behaviour of young people, especially within this reproductive age group to come up with viable solutions on how to protect them from HIV/AIDS.

Adolescence is a developmental period marked by discovery and experimentation that comes with numerous emotional changes. Sexual behaviour and/or drug abuse are often part of this exploration. During this time of growth and change, the youth get mixed messages about sexuality. On the one hand society urges and expects them to observe abstinence while on the other, they are confronted by sexuality and drug message and images both in the electronic and print media. This makes them eager to explore and try out what they learn from the media and in the process risk sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS. Peer pressure is also an important factor in the sexual behaviour of the youth. Also, cultural, social, and economic pressure often put young people, especially women, at excess risk for HIV infection.

Existing literature shows that young adolescents and youth engage in premarital sex with insufficient knowledge of reproduction and family planning,

and that only small proportions use contraceptives, especially condoms (Ajayi et al 1991). Most young people often lack knowledge, access to accurate sexual health information and services. Limited resources also make contraceptive use lower among young people. In particular, unmarried youth have great difficulty getting needed sexual health services mainly due to negative attitudes by some service providers who hold the view that such services should only be provided to married people and that unmarried persons seeking sexual health or family planning services are promiscuous.

However, given that the burden of new HIV infections in developing countries is concentrated among the young and females, there is emerging awareness that even with knowledge of how to protect oneself from infection, such information may not always be usable in daily situations of economic and social disadvantage that characterizes the live of many young people, especially females, in poor countries (UNAIDS 2004). Relative economic disadvantage is found to significantly increase the likelihood of a variety of unsafe sexual behaviours and experiences. Low socio-economic status not only increases the pressure to exchange sex with money or goods, it also raises female chances of experiencing coerced sex and male and female likelihood of having multiple sexual partners. Low socio-economic status has more consistent negative effects on female than on male sexual behaviours. It also raises female risks of early pregnancy, Hallman (2004).

Shifting cultural values, poor economic prospects and high prevalence of HIV/AIDS along with low expectations of tangible changes in the near future may bring social disillusionment and encourage some young people, particularly those who are already socially or economically marginalized to engage in unsafe sexual and health practices (Collins and Rau, 2000). HIV is still largely considered a medical and public health problem with most interventions emphasizing individual responsibility to prevent infection. Without sufficient recognition of the social and economic conditions in which individuals live-

conditions that can make them more or less vulnerable to infection, such an approach risks sacrificing effectiveness of the global response at best and blaming vulnerable groups for their infections at worst Hallman (2004).

Young University students are some of the youth faced with economic problems. A lot of students in the public Universities come from poor economic backgrounds. Given the fact that government support in form of loans given to students is not guaranteed for everyone of them, it is plausible that female students engage in sex with older men who can in turn pay for their upkeep at the University. Many times, they have multiple sexual partners. Also, the university, unlike secondary schools gives the young people a lot of freedom because there are no rules of conduct. Thus, when students leave secondary schools and join the university, they get the feel of freedom which includes sexual exploration and experimentation. There have also been reported cases, though not documented of students having sexual relationships with their lecturers in exchange for good grades and other favours. All these factors increase the risk of sexual infections. It is, therefore, important to look at how students define their sexuality, their knowledge and attitudes towards sexuality and how this influences their sexual behaviour. This way, viable programmes can be put in place to educate the young people on how to deal with their sexuality and the sexual images and situations that confront them.

Notable is the fact that there are no courses at the university level on human sexuality. Courses such as counseling, psychology and psychiatry do include aspects of sexuality but are not entirely devoted to sexuality.

2.3 The Status of Sexuality education in Kenya

Sexuality education is a lifelong process of acquiring information and forming attitudes, beliefs, and values about identity, relationships and intimacy. It encompasses sexual development, reproductive health, interpersonal

relationships, affection, intimacy, body image and gender roles (Public Health 2005).

In many Kenyan societies, rites of passage provided sexuality education to both girls and boys during the initiation period but began much earlier in the extended family. As boys were growing up into manhood, their uncles and other elderly people took the role of educating them on what it meant to be man, husband and father. Similarly, girls stayed with their aunts and other older women receiving education on how to be a woman, wife and mother. However, with westernization/ modernization and the proliferation of the nuclear family, this informal sex education for girls and boys has diminished. Today, parents, peers, teachers, religion, media are all sources of sex education and they influence the way people learn about sexuality.

With the advent of HIV/AIDS pandemic and with statistics indicating that the worst hit by the scourge are the youth, the government and other non-governmental organizations realized the importance of sex education especially to teenagers and youth. The government first attempted to use television for sex education in the late 1980's. They developed a soap opera in Swahili language which was then stopped by the then president after several episodes. He instead endorsed sex education by elders in the different ethnic tribes. However, this did not bear fruit because few youth undergo traditional initiation and moreover many more youth were living in towns where there were no elders to conduct sex education (Brockman 2004).

Due to the increasing rates of HIV infection, many NGO's involved media in sex education programs on protection from HIV infection. They also realized a need for comprehensive sex education to be introduced in schools. This would give the youth an opportunity to learn about sexuality wholistically. Comprehensive sex education, according to AHI (2003) is a planned process of education that fosters the acquisition of factual information, the formation of

positive attitudes, beliefs and values, as well as the development of skills to cope with the biological, psychological, socio-cultural and spiritual aspects of human sexuality. The main goal of sexuality education is the promotion of sexual health by providing learners with opportunities to:

- Develop a positive and factual view of sexuality
- Acquire the information and skills they need to take care of their sexual health including preventing HIV/AIDS
- Respect and value themselves and others
- Acquire the skills needed to make healthy decisions about their sexual health and behaviour

Efforts to introduce a comprehensive sex education curriculum for schools in Kenya has been persistently opposed by the Catholic church and others with a conservative view of sexuality despite the declarations of international bodies like the UNAIDS conference that sex education is key to fighting HIV/AIDS. So when Kenya did develop a comprehensive sex education curriculum, it was shelved due to vocal opposition from the Catholic Church. However, all is not lost, units of family life education are integrated into various curricula. These units were designed by NGOs and especially the National Christian Council of Kenya, Kenya Family Planning Association, Young Men's' Christian Association, the Kenya Catholic Secretariat and the Maendeleo ya Wanawake (Brockman 2004). All these organizations also provide training programs for sex education for teachers. Various other NGOs such as Programme for Appropriate Technology (PATH), Population Council of Kenya, Family Care International, Planned Parenthood Federation of America-International (PPFA), Pathfinder and others in the reproductive health sector are vigorously involved in peer education for both in and out of school youth. Comprehensive sexuality education curriculum has been successfully introduced in countries such as Nigeria, Uganda and South Africa. Nonetheless, it is important that those opposed to the introduction of sex education recognize that comprehensive education about sexuality and HIV/AIDS can save lives, promote sexual health and avert the

devastating social and economic costs to people. Sexuality education has been found to delay onset of sexual activity, reducing number of sexual partners and increasing contraceptive use especially condoms.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

2.4.1 Social Constructionism

Social constructionism is a school of thought introduced into Sociology by Peter L Berger and Thomas Luckmann with their 1966 book, *The Social Construction of Reality*. The focus of social constructionism is to uncover the ways in which individuals and groups participate in the creation of their perceived reality. What we perceive as reality has been shaped through a system of socio-cultural and interpersonal process. In social constructionism, the idea of an objectively knowable truth does not exist. Knowledge is constructed through social interpretations and the intersubjective influences of language, family and culture (Hoffman, 1999).

Socially constructed reality is seen as an ongoing, dynamic process; reality is reproduced by people acting on interpretation and their knowledge of it. Assumptions of the theory as outlined by Gergen (1985) are that:

1. The way we go about studying the world is determined by available concepts, categories and methods. Our concepts often incline us toward or even dictate certain lines of inquiry while precluding other, making our results the products of our own language than of empirical discovery.
2. The concepts and categories we use vary considerably in their meanings and connotations over time and across cultures. Concepts are assumed to relate to permanent human experiences and cultures.
3. The popularity or persistence of a particular concept, category or method depends more on its usefulness (political usefulness particularly) than its validity.

4. Descriptions of the world are themselves forms of social action and have consequences.

Therefore this theory places an emphasis on the individuals' active role in constructing reality being guided by his/her culture. Persons are constructors of knowledge in their lives assisted by the prevalent discourses in their societies and cultures (Martino 1997).

Historical and cross cultural differences in sexual practices suggest that there is no predetermined pattern of sexuality. What is seen as normal and natural varies from society to another, and in the same society overtime. This is the starting point for the idea that sexuality is socially constructed. How sexuality is expressed and organized varies between societies, social classes, gender, and ethnicities. Thus, through social constructionism, we can look for diverse meanings of sexuality within and between social groups (Thompson 1992). Social construction theorists argue that physically identical sexual acts may have different personal and social meanings depending on how they are defined in their different cultures and historical contexts (Vance, 1991). Sexuality is influenced by social norms, culture, and personal experience. All these, therefore, affect the way individuals define, feel and perceive their sexuality. Thus diverse sexualities may exist in the same environment.

This theory, thus, forms the basis for which this study is conducted. The study seeks to find out how University students construct or define sexuality, their attitudes towards sexuality and how these influence their behaviour.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Location of Study and Target Population

The study was conducted at the University of Nairobi in Kenya and focused on students from the first to the fourth academic years.

3.2 Sampling Design/Selection Criteria

This was an exploratory study that sought to understand students' knowledge of and attitudes towards sexuality.

Purposive sampling, a non-probability (or qualitative) sampling technique was used to select the respondents in the study. Selection was based on availability of and willingness by the students to participate in the study.

3.3 Methods of Data Collection

Since this was an exploratory study, the methods of data collection were qualitative.

3.3.1 Literature Review

Literature was obtained through reviewing written reports related to the study. Sources of information included; books, scholarly journals, theses and dissertations, and Internet search.

3.3.2 Primary Data

Primary data formed the core database of this research. Two methods, Focus Group Discussions and In-depth interviews, were used to assemble rich qualitative data. The data was collected in two phases.

Phase I Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

The researcher drew participants in FGDs from students in all the four academic years of study. Most of the participants were from the social science departments. From each year, two FGDs-one comprising female and the other male students were carried out thus making a total of eight FGDs. A total of 69 students participated in the FGDs while 7 were selected for the in-depth interviews. The 7 were either class representatives or official from student Associations in the different departments. The reason for selecting students from the different academic years was to establish variation in responses in their understanding of sexuality.

The Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) focused on issues such as definitions of sexuality, sexuality messages received when they were children or teenagers, messages received now as university students, how these messages help them to define and understand sexuality, influences on sexuality, attitudes towards sexuality and sexual expression, role of the University in enhancing the understanding of sexuality. The tool of data collection used was the FGD guide. Notebooks and tape recorders were also used to record the discussions.

Phase II In-depth interviews

In-depth interviews took the form of unstructured interviews using an interview guide. The interviews were carried out with student leaders of various organizations/committees in each academic year. About two leaders from each academic year were selected. The reason for conducting in-depth interviews with student leaders was to reinforce and supplement data gathered from the students during the FGDs. These, therefore, shed light on the issues that were not discussed with the students hence permitting a deeper understanding of the objectives under investigation.

This technique was used to gather data on issues such as definitions of sexuality, meanings attached to these definitions, attitudes and perceptions of sexuality and influences on sexuality.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data from the tape-recorded Focus Group Discussions was transcribed. The field notes from the in depth interviews were typed. All responses from both the in-depth interviews and FGDs were then categorised in terms of the questions and the themes that emerged. Excerpts or chunks of verbatim texts from the data were placed in their specific themes. Relevant notes written were also incorporated in the analysis.

Pertinent observations made were incorporated in the analysis. Relevant sexuality perspectives and concepts were used to make sense of the responses from the data gathered. The meanings of those responses were then analyzed.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

This chapter presents findings of the study. The study utilized qualitative research methods namely, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews. Therefore, the findings of the study are analyzed qualitatively. Participants in the FGDs were drawn from first to the fourth year of study. The aim was to find out if the different years of study influenced the level of knowledge of sexuality issues among the students. However, the findings indicate that the year of study had no impact on what the students knew because there are no sexuality courses taught at the University. Hence, the data presented does not include analysis of levels of knowledge.

4.1 Students' own Definitions of Sexuality

Generally, sexuality is defined as the ways in which we experience and express ourselves as sexual beings. The expert group of the World Health Organization (WHO) defines sexuality as:

Sexuality is a central aspect of being human through out life and encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy, and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviour, practices, roles and relationships. It is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, ethical, legal, historical and religious and spiritual factors, (WHO, 2002).

During the focus group discussions and in-depth interviews, varying definitions of sexuality came up but commonly, most students defined sexuality in the following ways:

- a) An individual's feelings, values, perceptions and beliefs relating to sex
- b) The ways in which one expresses/acts on their sexual preferences
- c) Encompasses one's sexual orientation (who they prefer to have sexual relationship with) and how one expresses that. Sexuality is learnt through socialization
- d) One's sexual orientation and the manifestation of that orientation
- e) The understanding and acceptance of your desires and urges as a sexual being

Definitions of sexuality by the students revolved around sex, sexual orientation and preferences. This was not surprising since many people think that sexuality is about sex and sexual relationships (sexual intercourse particularly). Discussing sexuality has generally been considered taboo in Africa and only opened up with the advent of HIV/AIDS. In many Kenyan communities, discussion on sexuality is still a very sensitive issue and local languages do not have a word for it. There was, however, mention of factors that influence sexuality such as social and cultural factors as included in WHO's (2002) definition of sexuality. The definitions, therefore, indicate very limited knowledge of components of sexuality important in understanding sexuality in totality.

The students were also asked to define sexual expression. Some students felt that this referred to the way sexual feelings are outwardly manifested, or the choice to act or ignore sexual urges and desires. Other students noted that sexuality determines one's sexual expression. One's personality, feelings and attitudes towards sex influences how they express their sexuality.

4.2 Definition of components of sexuality

As spelt out in the WHO's working definition of sexuality, Sexuality encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. After giving students participating in the study the definition of sexuality by WHO during the group discussions, the researcher then asked them to define each of these components.

4.2.1 Sex

In the main, sex refers to the sum of biological and physiological characteristics that define human beings as either female or male. The female sex is distinguished from the male sex by their external sex organs (differences in genitalia), internal sex organs and secondary sexual development especially at the puberty age (for example, body physique- the female develop breasts and begin to menstruate while the male start to develop deep voices and a beard). It also refers to the activities associated with sexual intercourse.

Students in both the focus group discussion and key informants defined sex as follows:

- a. The vaginal, oral or anal intercourse between two individuals.
- b. The physical act of potential conception.
- c. Physical act between two people for the purpose of conception or enjoyment.
- d. A physical act that leads to procreation.
- e. Biological determination, xx, xy chromosome and not a choice.
- f. Physical intimacy including penetration (vaginal, anal or oral) between two or more people.

From the definitions above, it is clear that a lot of emphasis was laid on meanings associated with sexual intercourse. This is perhaps, because of the subject under investigation (sexuality) and their earlier definitions of sexuality

and sexual expression in terms of sex. There was little mention of sex referring to either being male or female.

4.2.2 Gender identities and roles

Gender, in contrast with sex, refers to the sum of cultural values, attitudes, roles, practices and characteristics based on sex (AHI, 2003). It is the socially constructed behaviour or roles of men and women that a society considers appropriate for them.

Gender identity is a person's internal self-awareness of being male or female, masculine or feminine, or both in rare cases. Gender identity is closely related to gender role which refers to the outward expression of personality that reflect the gender identity or the activities that society determines to be appropriate for individuals on the basis of their biological sex. The outward expressions referred to here include, among others, behaviour, attitude, values and beliefs (Bland 1998). This implies that, for example, if a person thinks of herself as female (gender identity) her gender role is only female if she exhibits behaviour that society prescribes as female.

Students defined gender identity and roles in different ways. An in-depth interview with a female student leader yielded the following definition:

Gender identities are the sex with which a person identifies (whether or not they are biologically that sex or not). Gender roles are the behaviours a person is socialized to have based on their gender.

Definitions from the focus group discussions without distinguishing gender identity and role included:

- a. How we identify with our gender as well as the stereotypes that go along with that gender.

- b. How one aligns oneself (as being male or female) and acts within a given society.
- c. How an individual of a particular gender should behave based on their socialization in their society and culture.
- d. The place in society which males and females hold.
- e. Socialized learned roles of what boys and girls do.

All the above definitions by students, though in different words, concur with the gender role description; the adherence to cultural norms of feminine and masculine behaviour. The discussions went further to include how gender identities and roles are socially determined and have nothing to do with the sex of an individual. Society imposes upon people behaviour that they are supposed to conform to depending on their biological sex.

4.2.3 Sexual orientation

Sexual orientation refers to preference for sexual activity with people of the opposite sex, the same sex, or both. The terms sexual preference or sexual inclination are also used in place of sexual orientation.

The American Psychological Association (APA, 1999) gives a research definition of sexual orientation as:

“An enduring emotional, romantic, sexual, or affectional attraction toward others. It is easily distinguished from other components of sexuality including biological sex, gender identity and the social gender role.

Sexual orientation exists along a continuum that ranges from exclusive heterosexuality to exclusive homosexuality and includes various forms of bisexuality. Persons with a homosexual orientation are sometimes referred to as gay (both men and women) or as lesbian (women only).

Sexual orientation is different from sexual behavior because it refers to feelings and self-concept. Individuals may or may not express their sexual orientation in their behaviors" (APA, 1999).

Students variously gave meanings of sexual orientation as:

- a. A form of socialization, how a person of a gender feels they should be attracted to a person of the opposite sex. However, it is also based on genes; some people are sexually attracted to the same sex. So sexual orientation is both innate and taught.
- b. Whom one is sexually attracted to, male female or both.
- c. Sexual preference: homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual.
- d. The sex with which a person chooses to make their sexual partner.

There was interesting discussion on whether homosexuality is innate or learned through socialization. Some students felt that it is acquired while others argued that one cannot rule out biological characteristics when accounting for homosexuality. Those who argued against homosexuality being socially learned sexual behaviour noted that such behaviour did not exist in traditional African culture and is not recognized in the Bible so it could not have been passed on through socialization. However, they did not support the innate theory either. To them those engaging in this 'abnormal' sexual behavior were deviants aping the Western culture where such behaviour may be normal. Those who supported the argument that attraction towards members of the same sex is innate noted that many people feel attracted to the same sex but they can not express this attraction because it was socially sanctioned and continues to be in Kenya and many other cultures. While it is not the concern of this study to find out whether homosexuality is innate, inherited or learned, it is nevertheless, important to observe that there is no support in scientific research to argue that homosexuality is biologically determined. Though some people argue that it is likely that homosexual attractions, like many other

attractions, include both biological and environmental influences, no single gene has been found to make people gay (Byrd and Robinson, 2001). Some students noted that homosexual behaviour is also found in one-sex boarding schools and one student gave an example of her former high school where some girls were sent home on suspicion of engaging in lesbianism. Also, a while ago a Kenyan prisoner who was interviewed on television said that there are cases of homosexuality in the prisons though he was quick to add that he would never engage in such behaviour himself. This might prove that environmental factors do influence homosexuality. However, homosexuality is an issue of ethics and morality, whether or not people agree with the choice to practice homosexuality is not as important as respecting their right to make that choice. But in a religious and conservative society such as Kenya, the acceptance and tolerance of such diversity in sexual orientation will take sometime. There are very many homosexuals, who have even appeared on Kenyan television interviews with their faces hidden, but they can not openly declare their orientation fearing social stigma. In Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya, people even talk of designated places and hotels where homosexuals are known to meet.

4.2.4 Intimacy

The first image that comes to peoples' minds at the mention of intimacy is two people engaged in hot and passionate sex. However, this is not entirely true, there is a strong argument that intimacy is much less physical and has more to do with the mind, heart, and soul of those who enjoy sharing it together. In actual fact, the beautiful experience of physical connection between two people is the culmination of all that is intimate between them, (<http://www.romanceopedia.com/I-IntimacyDefined.html>). Intimacy is an attitude that defines the quality of how two people relate to each other during the "in between" times as well as during actual lovemaking. It's caressing each other's heart and touching one another's soul long before their bodies ever come together (ibid...).

The students' definitions of intimacy were as follows:-

- a. Sexual or non-sexual closeness between individuals, sex can be intimate but not always and non-sexual relationships can both be intimate or not.
- b. The level of sexual closeness. Emotional intimacy pertains to the sharing of personal thoughts.
- c. A feeling of closeness to another person who you may or may not be involved with sexually.
- d. Sharing of personal feelings and desires with another.
- e. Physical, spiritual, emotional connection that can be reached/experienced through anything for example, conversation, quietness, sex etc.

On the other hand, one of the students defined intimacy as "contact between two people involving the penis and/or vagina", thus, reducing the meaning of intimacy sexual intercourse. Nonetheless, additional discussions showed that intimacy does not have to include intercourse.

4.2.5 Eroticism

Eroticism is described as sexual excitement or the aesthetic focused on sexual desire, especially the feelings of anticipation of sexual activity.

Different students in the various group discussions and in-depth interviews defined eroticism as:

- a. Pertaining to sexual desires and actions
- b. Forms of sexual behaviour not openly accepted within a society
- c. Extreme forms of sexual behaviour
- d. How a person feels about what brings them sexual pleasure.
- e. Intense physical pleasure or the fulfillment of fetish

This seemed to be a difficult word to define. Many students defined it negatively as extreme forms of sexual behaviour that are not openly discussed in society and they seemed very reluctant to talk about it.

4.2.6 Pleasure

According to Webster's Dictionary, pleasure is "enjoyment or satisfaction derived from what is to one's liking; gratification or delight." Pleasure is experienced differently by different persons and may be derived from activities such as, certain types of foods, sex, entertainment, and spending time with friends and family. Pleasure in the context of this study refers to sexual pleasure or the feeling of being gratified from sexual activity. During the group discussions and in-depth interviews, the following definitions of pleasure came up:

- a. Feeling good, this word usually has a sexual connotation physically or emotionally.
- b. Physical or emotional euphoria.
- c. Physical and emotional feelings a person derives from engaging in sexual acts.
- d. The sensation, provoked by sex and other forms of social, physical and mental relation.
- e. Physical actions that may or may not end with an orgasm. Can encompass emotional enjoyment.
- f. Excitement arising out of physical or emotional arousal.

All the definitions above, though in different words indicate that pleasure is the feeling of gratification, emotionally and physically from sexual activity. And like eroticism, students showed reluctance in furthering discussion on pleasure.

4.2.7 Reproduction

Reproduction is a fundamental feature of life. According to the free web encyclopaedia, Wikipedia, it refers to the biological process by which new individual organisms are produced. Sexual reproduction refers to the process by which organisms create descendants through the combination of genetic material. This involves two different sexes, the male and the female www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/reproduction.

The students' definitions of reproduction were as follows:

- a. A possible outcome of vaginal intercourse between a male and a female. One purpose of vaginal intercourse but not the only purpose
- b. The act of creating offspring
- c. The outcome of sexual intercourse-the fertilization of egg and sperm
- d. Making babies
- e. The process where the sperm fertilizes the egg and then a baby begins to form. Can involve sexual intercourse or invitro fertilization.

Reproduction in comparison with pleasure, intimacy and eroticism was easily defined.

4.3 Factors and Age at which students became aware of their Sexuality

The age at which one becomes aware of their sexuality may be a determining factor for sexual debut or the choice to remain chaste. Research documents that most adolescents start exploring sex in their teen ages which exposes them to reproductive health risks such as pregnancy and sexually transmitted illnesses and HIV/AIDs at a very early age. On the other hand, it is now evident, as shown in countries that have done it, for example, Nigeria, South Africa and other developed countries, that sexuality education in schools is important in making sure that children become aware of sexual risks and, therefore, take precaution and make informed sexuality choices early in life. In Kenya, there are opposing views on the introduction of sexuality education in schools. The

Catholic Church, in particular, is strongly opposed to it as it is opposed to family planning methods even among married people. Those opposed argue that sexuality education will enlighten children more on sexuality issues and hence make them want to explore more on sexual activities thus increasing risks of infections and pregnancy. So the less the children know about sexuality, the better as they will not be engaged in something that they do not know about.

Among students interviewed, the age at which they became sexually aware of their sexuality, ranged from 9-17 years. Majority were between 13 and 16 years of age. In Kenya, generally those who fall between these ages are in primary school standard seven or eight and secondary school form two or three¹.

The students observed that factors that made them aware of their sexuality include:

- a. Having a first boyfriend and I found myself curious about things I had never thought of before.
- b. Being physically drawn to the opposite sex, not strictly relying on socialization but biology.
- c. Media and friends at school.
- d. Older friends talking about sexuality and the attraction to girls.
- e. May be after puberty- social teachings, experimentation, and gossip with friends.
- f. My realization of my interest in men and my desire to have a male companion.

It seems that most students became aware of their sexuality when they started to get attracted to members of the opposite sex. Even though sexuality is a life long process that begins at conception, it is likely that people do not know this as the definition of the word is reduced to sexual and sexual behaviour and relationships. This may be the reason why students reported that they became

¹ This is based on the 8-4-4 education system in Kenya, 8 years of primary school, 4 years of high school and 4 years of University education.

aware of their sexuality in school and when they felt attracted to the opposite sex. They experienced sexuality since childhood but due to lack of sexuality knowledge that would enable them understand that sexuality begins with birth and ends with death, they now think that sexuality begins when they start to feel attracted to the opposite sex. This necessitates the importance of sexuality education in primary schools.

4.4 Sexuality messages received as children/teenagers and sources of the messages

One of the components of the research was to establish sexuality messages that the students received as children or teenagers and the sources of these messages. There were interesting discussions on different types of sexuality messages received. Messages either came from parents, school, church, media, or friends.

Almost all students observed that they did not learn anything regarding sexuality from their parents. Parents avoided subjects that touch on sex. It is, however, understandable that sexual discourse was and still remains largely taboo in African communities and if parents did not discuss the subject with their children, then it is most likely that they will feel embarrassed or uncomfortable discussing sexuality messages with their own children.

But with a changing world where sexuality images and messages are the order of the day and the HIV/AIDS pandemic, it is imperative that parents sit and talk with their children. Sexuality education should begin at home, it is a lifelong process. From the moment of birth, children learn about love, touch and relationships. Infants and toddlers learn about sexuality when their parents talk to them, dress them, show affection, play with them and teach them the names of the parts of their bodies. As children grow into adolescence, they continue to receive messages about sexual behaviour, attitudes, and values from their families and within their social environment. From the parents' role modeling, children learn how to behave and interact with people.

Although children and teenagers hear about sexuality all the time from the television programmes, music, movies and other people, they do not often have serious discussion about the topic. Many parents think that talking about sexuality with their children means talking and encouraging them to talk about sexual relationships and/or intercourse, even for those who have a broader definition of sexuality.

The messages given to children are often unspoken. For example, a television show with a kissing scene might be switched to a different channel, children asked to go to bed or leave the room or parents may suddenly turn their attention to other things. Children will eventually conclude that these are topics that are bad because parents can not talk about them. The children will, therefore, exclude their parents as sources of information and will seek information elsewhere, most often friends or peers who are likely to misinform them, <http://www.canadianparents.ca/CPO/Experts/SexualHealth.html>. Thus, talking and role-modeling are key factors that allow parents to effectively communicate their own values, provide accurate information, nurture self-esteem and influence healthy, responsible decision-making around sexuality.

Students noted that discussion in homes relates to sexuality issues that do not touch on sexual behaviour. At home, girls were taught how to be girls and boys how to be boys following the traditionally prescribed gender roles. As such, the girls would be sent to wash dishes, help in cooking, sweeping, and taking care of younger children (to be homemakers) while boys would be with their fathers looking after cattle, fixing things (cars, broken carts, chairs, tables etc) in the house. It was and still is very uncommon to find a boy in the kitchen! Thus, girls were taught to be nurturing and homemakers while boys had to learn to be breadwinners by following what their fathers did. However, during teenage, most female students noted that they were frequently warned to keep off boys and were scolded or beaten if they had a boyfriend or, worse still, brought a

boyfriend home. Many were not told why they should not have boy/girl relationships by the parents while some were told that they could become pregnant which would curtail their education. They learnt from their peers that having a relationship was bad because one could contract sexually transmitted illnesses or become pregnant in addition to affecting their education.

Most students noted that they received sexuality messages from the media such as, TV, magazines, music and books. Teenagers especially are bombarded with media messages which mainly serve to reinforce common stereotypes that create a culture based on inflexible gender roles. The mass media has become an extremely important institution in present day world. Today, many children are exposed to massive and explicit sexual messages everyday of their lives, probably even before they have the knowledge to accurately deal with such complex content. Sex in the media is becoming increasingly frequent and explicit as many advertisers come to the realization that sex sells. Thus, viewers can observe several aspects of sexuality such as gender roles, affection and intimacy, erotic behaviour, family life and many others on television and magazines. In Kenya today, there is an upsurge of magazines detailing sexuality issues. These include, True Love, Eve, Drum, Insyder, The Parents and Cosmopolitan Kenya. True Love and Eve target Kenyan women while the Drum is aimed at young men, the Insyder is for the youth. The magazines give readers a wide range to choose from depending on their taste. This has made the oldest magazine, The Parents to re-modify its content by covering more sexuality issues to suit the readers' demands. The two leading Newspapers in Kenya have pull out magazines such as Lifestyle, Living, Saturday Magazine and Moments, among others, that carry a lot of sexuality information. The TV, by and large, remains the most important source of sexuality messages.

The media can be a double edged sword by delivering both entertainment and harmful messages. The images on television can be harmfully limited, stereotypical and one -dimensional, depicting sex as an activity that is only

acceptable for the young, single and beautiful. Also, sex encounters may be continuously and erroneously presented as spontaneous, romantic and risk-free. The use of contraception and contraction of sexually transmitted illnesses on TV are rare. On the other hand, the pervasive, accessible and popular nature of TV makes it an excellent instructor, offering an opportune way to learn about sex and sexuality without embarrassment. The media can help break down the cultural taboos associated with sensitive sexual topics and bridge the gaps in our sexual and sexuality knowledge (www.soc.ucsb.edu/sexinfo). TV viewing may help shape viewers attitudes and expectations about sexual relationships which are some of the strongest predictors of their behaviour.

All students noted that the media glorifies sex too much, and this affects how teenagers and young people view sex. One student, however, noted that her parents also taught her their more conservative views on sex, either through spoken or 'unspoken' word and she was able to find a balance between the two.

Study findings show that the church and school do not seem to have played any significant role in sexuality education. Teachers in school avoided sexuality issues and were even uncomfortable teaching girls about the very important monthly periods. Biology lessons concentrated on the body anatomy and there was little mention of sexual behaviour and relationships in a positive manner. Girls were strongly advised against relationships because it would hinder their education. The stereotypical gender roles of women being homemakers and men breadwinners in the family were also reinforced in school. In church, sexuality issues are dealt with in light of the churches' moral teachings of chastity, fidelity in marriage and abstinence until marriage.

The lack of explicitness in sexual matters is hardly surprising in the context of African culture where young people were expected to learn by observation (Balmer, 1994). Many cultures in the region do not have the language to describe sexual terms. Traditionally, sexuality and adult responsibility were

dealt with specifically during the rites of passage. This traditional system broke down and the modern system does not provide an alternative and, therefore, a gap exists, (Balmer, 1994). Some of the problems that emerge are that the media, school and secular based programmes are not viewed as legitimate sources of information on sexuality while those that are thought to be legitimate for example, parents and religious based programs are found to be reluctant to offer other behavioural choices other than abstinence.

4.5 Sexuality messages received now as University students

With the parents, school and church having played a minimal role in sexuality education, the media continues to be the most important source of sexuality information for these young university students. Other sources include, friends and fellow students. The academic program at the University does not include sexuality education. Even the students in the medical and biological sciences courses, like in the high school courses, concentrate on the body anatomy and reproduction. Some courses like sociology (and may be Anthropology) have courses such as socialization process, culture, sociology of the family, and adolescence. These may encompass aspects of sexuality such as gender identities and roles, and reproduction but leave out the most important aspects which relate to sexual behaviour of the youth and young people. Others in other departments do not have this advantage. At the Masters level (although not focus of this study), courses that relate to sexuality in the department are sexuality, gender and health, gender and society and Sociology of adolescence. While these, especially the sexuality course are important, the course is taught at Masters Level and only to people who choose that particular course since it is not compulsory. As such, it can be said that there are no courses at the University that are specially geared to educate all students on sexuality issues.

The university gives students a lot of freedom because they are no longer under the watchful eye of parents or teachers at school. Many students, hence, want to experience life in a different and more carefree way because they were not

able to do this before joining the university. Some of the messages that the students receive now as university students include:

- Messages about sexual behaviour of young people especially because of HIV/AIDS. There are many TV adverts on how to stay safe from contracting the disease by using condoms which has become a very common advertisement on TV, radio and billboards.
- That sex is something acceptable at this age and that many men will expect it. It is up to the girls and women to make a decision on whether they want to engage in sex and bear the consequences or to 'chill' (the now common word for abstinence among youth in Kenya)
- Even with campaigns for abstinence and safe sex, there is still more than ever before, a glorification of sex in the media, especially western programmes. Also many students are falling into the pressure for sex through peer influence.
- Many felt that media messages towards women and sex are derogatory. The advertisements portray women as weak or are used as sexual objects in advertisements where their bodies are sexualized in order to grab the viewers' attention to the product being advertised. Many magazines also give the general idea that women should concern themselves with looking beautiful to attract men or to sexually satisfy them.

Asked if the University has influenced understanding and expression of sexuality, almost all noted that the University has not influenced their sexuality in any way since there are no courses on sexuality. Most of the messages on sexuality are received outside of the University context. Some, nevertheless, noted that being at the University has given them the freedom to express their sexuality outside of school or home and, therefore, made sexuality to them a more open idea. Others felt being at the University has exposed them to sex and sexual behaviour content on a regular basis which is very different from the high school environment.

4.6 How the messages help to define and understand sexuality

The students were also asked how the messages received from different sources helped them to define and understand sexuality. From the group discussions and in-depth interviews, the following were reported by different students:

- ◆ The messages have been both good and bad but “I now feel more open to exploring my sexuality because it is not a taboo” but at the same time there is pressure on those who do not want to explore.
- ◆ Sexuality is important and biologically endorsed and no one should be ashamed of discussing sexual sexuality issues
- ◆ “I do not really understand sexuality and all the messages that I have heard do not help me to define in its entirety”. It is different for each person and difficult to define
- ◆ You need to sift through everything you are told by media, peer group and base your decision on your own values and what is positive and healthy for you as an individual
- ◆ I define my own understanding of sexuality through experiences
- ◆ There is now a lot of information on sexual behaviour due to HIV/AIDS. The voluntary and counselling centers also offer free information on behaviour and counselling for those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. I take time to read all of this information for fear of contracting the virus and in order that I may make informed choices on sexual relationships.
- ◆ Before the government declared HIV/AIDS a national disaster on November 25 in 1999, people did not take it seriously. Now I have more knowledge on sexuality and I act based on informed choices.
- ◆ As a woman, I now understand that women are more at risk of harmful consequences of sexual behaviour and I am, therefore, more careful about sexual relationships or any relationship that might my sexuality in danger.

- ◆ I feel that having a sexual relationship is appropriate at my age. Understanding sexuality makes me validate my actions even though the old mentality of no sex before marriage continues to prevail in society.
- ◆ Many sexuality messages from the media teach children and young adults that engaging in sex is okay without telling them the dangers of unsafe sex. These messages may not be 'healthy' and, therefore, negatively affect children and young people who engage in risky sexual behaviour.
- ◆ I think I am affected by the messages but it makes me want to do the opposite because I understand that I am being affected by them.
- ◆ I feel comfortable with experiencing sexual pleasure with my partner because I understand myself.

4.7 Perception of sexuality and sexual expression

The students interviewed perceived sexuality and sexual expression in different ways. They noted that perceptions were influenced by individual sexual experiences, upbringing and childhood experiences and their circle of friends.

During one of the group discussions with male students in the fourth year, one of the students observed that:

"Sexuality and sexual expression are a very personal matter and vary greatly from individual to individual. The male are socialized to dominate over women while the female are taught to be submissive and this affects each one of them sexually. Therefore, men tend to be more aggressive when it comes to sex and expressing sexual desires. However, women also can be aggressive but they don't usually talk about it".

A student from a discussion group composed of female students in first year, while agreeing with the above also added that:

“Sexuality is freedom to experience sex in whatever way ones wants to. I think however one feels about sexuality and sexual expression as long as it is without violence or discrimination should be accepted”.

Some students noted that sexual behaviour is a personal choice. There are students who engage in sex for money, others out of pressure from their boy-friends and yet others for enjoyment if they feel they are doing it with the right person.

With regard to sexual expression, there was a lot of discussion on dressing. Some students (both male and female) felt that dressing was part of sexual expression and spoke volumes about that person. Scanty dressing (that exposes certain parts of the body) was viewed as a way of trying to attract men. This was, nonetheless, disputed by others who felt that dressing was an individual's preference and one had a right to dress in anyway that made them feel comfortable. The male students, however, appreciated female students wearing short-skirts (mini-skirts that expose thighs) as long as the girls had nice legs! All in all, it was agreed that dressing depicts a lot about a person's sexuality.

There was also debate on whether it is acceptable for girls and women to seduce boys/men. Traditionally, men initiated sexual relationships by asking girls out for dates or hand in marriage. But with the changing times, girls are now asking men out. Some male students felt girls who asked men out were bold and had defied tradition while others reported that they would find that odd and unacceptable and would be very wary of such girls because that is not a genuine relationship. They noted that girls who ask men out have ulterior motives.

Attitudes and perceptions on sexuality and sexual expression do have a bearing on the sexual behaviour of young people. The students interviewed had different views on how these perceptions have shaped their behaviour. During an in-depth interview with a fourth year female class representative, she observed that:

“Sexuality for me means that I am able to express and acknowledge my sexual desires (in a safe manner) without feeling that I am being cheap or dirty” .

In other group discussions, some students noted the following:

“Awareness about sexuality implies a rebellion against traditional norms especially those that are harmful and persistent male domination. It means seeking self-awareness.” .

‘I think I now accept how other people view sex as long as it does not result to violence or pornography but I know that in turn, I can accept that I do not need to do the same things others do” .

One of the students also observed that she now tries to approach sex as spiritual experience instead of just for pleasure. Others were of the view that their perceptions on sexuality had made them accept other peoples’ perceptions and ways of expressing themselves. Other female students felt that they tended to be afraid of sex or being used by men for sex as is common at the University and society at large. They claimed that many male fourth year students take advantage of first year female students and have sexual relationships with them while still having other girlfriends in or outside the University. They end these relationships when they graduate. The male students, while not quite refuting this allegation, thought that once they graduate, it becomes difficult to maintain relationships with the students because they find employment in different parts of the country,

further their education elsewhere or are simply in situations which make it hard to continue with these relationships. Nevertheless, many female students still do have relationships with male students in senior years.

4.8 Factors influencing students' sexual behaviour

A multiplicity of factors are involved in influencing the sexual behavior of young people. During the group discussions, the following were noted to be among the key factors that influence the students' sexual behaviour.

4.8.1 Attitudes about sexuality

Personal values and attitudes about sexuality and self esteem (believe whether sex is wrong or right) contribute directly to sexual expression. For example, those who believe sex is right may have initiated sex early and sex initiation is a predictor of sexual frequency. Those who believe that sex is wrong at their age or before they marry are less likely to engage in sex. There are also perceptions towards protection. There are students who felt that people who engage in risky sexual behaviour may negatively view condoms or other methods of protection while those who practice safe sex have positive attitudes towards use of condoms.

4.8.2 Religiosity

The level of involvement in religion also greatly influences sexual behaviour. It was noted that students who are deeply religious may avoid sex. This is in line with the Christian teachings of abstinence before marriage/pre-marital chastity. They may also avoid any romantic relationships that may disrupt their education. On the other hand, those not deeply involved in religion or non-believers may have more freedom of sexual exploration because religion does not judge their sexual conduct.

4.8.3 Family/Parental influence

Parents play a major role in influencing their children's sexuality especially teenagers. Research shows that involved and warm parenting both directly and indirectly (through less deviant peer affiliations) delays sexual intercourse. Parents who talk to their children about sex have teenagers who are less likely to engage in risky sexual behaviour. However, this influence is later replaced by stronger peer influence on sexual attitudes and behaviour, (Whitaker and Miller, 2000). The moral teachings of parents in the formative years of adolescents bear a lot on how they perceive sexuality and sexual behaviour. Parents are charged with the responsibility of teaching their children religious, cultural and societal norms which sanction sexual behaviour. According to the students interviewed in this study, there is very little parental influence on the students' sexual behaviour. This is because students live on their own at the University; therefore, parents have no knowledge on the students' sexual relationships or conduct. Nonetheless, those students who still discuss sexuality issues with parents and adhere to moral teachings of parents are less likely to give into pressure for sex.

4.8.4 Peer Influence

Peers are an important factor in influencing sexual behaviour. The male are more likely to give into peer influence than the female as they are constantly challenged by friends in their group to prove their 'manhood' by having multiple partners and sex. However, it was observed that influence by peers can be negative or positive. If one is in a group of friends who believe in having multiple sexual partners or who believe that for a relationship to last it must be consummated through sex, then one may feel pressure to engage in sex. On the other hand, if one has friends who believe that relationships can be intimate and last without having to engage in sexual intercourse, or if necessary practice safe sex, then they are more likely to be careful about their sexual behaviour.

4.8.5 Exposure to sexual content

As discussed previously, the media is a powerful and important source of sexuality information for young people. Correlational studies indicate that exposure to sexually suggestive material is associated with pre-marital sex, although whether sexually active youth seek out sexual content or whether sexual content increases sexual activity remains uncertain (Brown and Newcomer, 1991 and Donnerstein and Smith, 2001). Other researchers have found sexual content in the media to have a minimal, if any, impact on sexual activity of adolescents. The differences in the way media influences their sexuality is dependent on individual personality and other individual differences, perceived reality of the content viewed, media portrayal of consequences (or lack of) associated with the sexual behaviour and the influence of their role models (Malamuth and Impetti, 2001).

This notwithstanding, students felt that the media may positively or negatively influence sexual behaviour. The glorification of sex in the media can make young people want to experience what they see in the media. On the other hand, there is a lot of information on harmful consequences of unsafe sex which makes some people take precaution when engaging in sex. To them, what is in the media is solely for entertainment and does not affect them. Therefore, the media has messages that are both harmful and useful to young people.

4.9 Role of University in enhancing understanding of sexuality

Generally, students felt that the University has not played any major role in enhancing the understanding of sexuality among students. They note that the University just brings students together and it is upon them to learn about sexuality issues on their own. Notable here is the fact that, the only people who may have the opportunity to learn some of the sexuality issues are those in the medical classes but their learning is limited to the body anatomy. The

students, therefore, underscored the need to have structures in place to increase learning of sexuality issues at the University.

The University as a higher learning institution ought to play a significant role in ensuring that students understand sexuality issues either through teaching or research. The following were recommendations given by students on how the University could enhance sexuality learning at the University level:

- Promote discussion groups and bring in lecturers and guest speakers to talk about sexuality issues and encourage acceptance of different sexual orientations.
- Have a sexuality class or seminar that all students, regardless of their areas of study, are required to attend.
- Teach safe sex and have free condoms available in a common location like a health centre or nurse office.
- Create more gender awareness.
- Offer information and free STD checks and encourage students to use them.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The findings of the study show that students define sexuality mainly with regard to sex and sexual behaviour and did not seem to relate sexuality with gender roles and identity. With regard to WHO's experts working definition of sexuality, the students have a very shallow definition and this was linked to lack of sexuality courses or lectures at the University that would enable them to understand sexuality and the fact that there is no sexuality education in schools in Kenya. Students were also very reluctant to discuss components of sexuality such as pleasure, eroticism and intimacy depicting further that sexuality discourse is still a very sensitive issue and people shy away from the topic especially if it touches on sex.

They further noted that they became aware of sexuality while either in primary or secondary school. This is because at home, parents did not discuss sexuality issues with them. Factors that influenced this awareness were, among others, feeling attracted to the opposite sex, media, and friends. Sexuality messages came from parents, school, church, media and friends. Notable here is the fact that parents, church and school play a very minimal role in sexuality education. They insist on chastity/ abstinence without explaining to young people how to experience and express their sexuality in a positive way. To the students, important messages that have educated them about sexuality come from the media though the media glorifies sex and rarely exposes the dangers of risky sexual behaviour. Peers and friends also provide useful information and advice on sexual relationships.

Factors that continue to influence their sexuality are the media, peers, level of religious involvement, exposure to sexual content, personal beliefs and attitudes, and parents. However, parents play a very minor role in influencing the students' sexuality because they spend most of their time in school and parents now treat them as mature people able determine their own destiny. Nonetheless, the messages received have been of great help in deciding on relationships and realizing self-awareness.

Students felt that the University has not influenced their sexuality because of lack of structures that enhance learning of sexuality issues. They, therefore, noted that the University needs to put in place such structures and educate the students and other young people.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the research findings, the study recommends the following:

1. That the University seeks ways of disseminating sexuality information to students. This could be done through guest lectures and introduction of a common course on sexuality that is mandatory for all students despite their areas of specialization.
2. Involve students in discussion on sexuality and awareness through debates and seminars. This will encourage students to speak up on sexuality issues and share experiences with other students.
3. Create a sexuality information desk well equipped with trained personnel on sexuality issues. What exist today are students' counselor and peer counselors who may not adequately handle all sexuality issues. The office could also be a resource center for sexuality information.
4. This study focused on a small group of students due to limited funds and time. Hence, further research on sexuality and sexual behaviour of students even in other Universities needs to be carried out to determine levels of awareness of sexuality issues in order to put in place appropriate interventions.

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