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The Consequences of Pre-Marital Sex among Youths in Imo State

Nkobiadede Fabian Chimezie

Imo State University Owerri, Nigeria

Abstract

This work sets out to explore the concept of Pre-marital sex and its high prevalence among our youths. It examines the causes of premarital sex, the consequences and proffers solutions to curbing the menace in our society. It has been observed that, pre-marital sex is an ugly trend, though to some, the normal thing, which goes with its many negative effects and consequences. To the average youths in Imo State, any relationship without sex is abnormal; it does not contain any love. To comprehensively explore this paper, the work in its methodology, adopted the descriptive method and secondary sources which majorly centers on the use of library and personal observations. The research findings obtained shows that, poverty, peer pressure, mass media, lack of good parental upbringing, financial constraints of some families constitute the major causes of premarital sex in our contemporary society with greater consequences of unwanted pregnancy, Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD's), HIV/AIDS, abortions which may eventually lead to death. It is recommended that, parents should provide for their children the needed facilities and support in their upbringing. Also, families in Imo state especially, need to teach their children whenever they are of age sex education; and it should be introduced in our schools too. They also need to watch and monitor the kind of friends their children keep. The government equally needs to regularly regulate the media especially the ones shown by broadcasting organizations; while the religious institutions like the church should continue teaching against fornication and adultery as ordered by God in the Bible.

Key Words: Pre-marital, Sex, Youth, Family, Imo State

Introduction

In recent times, to most or average number of youths in Imo State and beyond, sexual activity before marriage is very important for a healthy

relationship between a girl and a boy. "It helps to bond us together more in love," this was a statement by one of the youths/reporter during a phoning-in program, 'Battle of the Sexes' of

Hot FM Radio in Owerri in 2021. Pre-marital sex is sexual activity practiced by persons who are unmarried. Historically, it was considered a taboo by many cultures and considered a sin by numerous religions. It has become more commonly accepted in the last few decades. 'Until the 1950s, the term "pre-marital sex" referred to sexual relations between two people prior to marrying each other. During that period, Western societies expected that men and women marry by the age of 21 or 22; as such, there were no considerations that those who had sex before marriage would not marry each other' (Amaka, 19).

According to Geraldine in Amaka, the term was used instead of fornication, due to the negative connotations of the latter. The meaning has since shifted, referring to all sexual relations a person had prior to marriage; this therefore, removes the earlier emphasis on which the relations are with (19-20). The good people of Imo state are predominantly Christians and as such need to strictly adhere to their religious and moral values. Issues relating to sexual activities should be seriously monitored and great emphasis attached to the need to abstain from sexual activities outside marriage. Imo state like in most eastern states encourages its unmarried young people not to engage in any form of sexual activities before marriage. It has to be known that, great value is attached to virginity of both male and female in our society. Any girl married

as a virgin by her husband is highly respected by the community, and she is seen as a symbol of purity from birth to adulthood. This, no doubt, brought about some of the fattening seclusion by some communities in Imo State like *Iru-mgbede* by the Owerre Nchi-Ise, *Ikwu-ezi* by the people of Mgbidi, to mention but a few.

Alternative terms for pre-marital sex have been suggested, including non-marital sex, youthful sex, adolescent sex, and young-adult sex.

Sex

Many authors have tried to define sex according to their ideological background. Sex is designed by God from the beginning of creation to enable man procreate (Gen 1:28) "Be fruitful and multiply." It is designed by God for this purpose and should be between man and woman who are married. When sex is not treated as directed by God, He is always angry. God said in (1 Corinthians 6:18) "flee sexual immorality, every sin that a man does is outside his body; but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body".

Obi elucidates that, sex is an important terminology in biology and psychology. He maintains that, "the term refers to identity and activities; as identity, it refers to the anatomical structure of the sexual organism associated with certain psychological operations that make an individual to be identified as a male or female

(146-147).” According to a new study by Kinsey Institute, “people don’t agree on what the term sex means because people believe that, unless a man sleeps with a woman and have intercourse, then he has had sex while others believed that anal sex, oral sex and so on constitute sex as well” (3). The study says “Having “sex” means any consensual behaviour between two or more individual involving genital contact and bodily penetration that means that oral sex, anal sex and vaginal sex are all sex.

Brain defines sex as any consensual agreement and activity that happens in the presence of prophylactics (45).” Oxford Advanced Dictionary defines sex as physical activity between two people in which they touch each other’s sexual organs, and which may include sexual intercourse. For Taiwo, it is sometimes, hard to understand exactly the term “sex” in relation to how it differs from gender since they are closely related (15). He said that sex refers to the biological and physiological characteristics that define men and women while “gender” refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women. To put it in another way “male” and “female” are sex categories, while “masculine” and “feminine” are gender categories. He went further to state that aspects of sex will not vary substantially between different human societies while aspects of gender may vary greatly.

Ezeigbo (2009:5) defines sex as the state by which the three groups namely human beings, animals and plants produce their young ones. This means that for offspring of either men, animals and plants to emerge, there must be a method of procreation (5).

Overview of Premarital Sex

According to Adewele in Amaka, “premarital sex is what most youths engage in before marriage which is rather called fornication (57).” According to Freeman, “it is however a sexual instinct between two opposite sex partners who are not married (20).” He maintains that:

The social changes of the past few years have resulted in serious upheavals and transformation in many areas of life, including the domestic and religious, among these changes of attitudes concerning such things as premarital sex and sexual immorality and the traditional roles of men and women in the past quarter century. We have witnessed dramatic changes resulting in a much more liberal attitude towards premarital sex, pornography, abortion, masturbation, homosexuality and prostitution.

He further explains that, “most boys and girls today freely engage in premarital sexual relations and abortions by unwedded mothers are at a very high level today”.

According to the Holy Bible (Revised Standard Version) in Corinthians 6, sex before marriage (premarital sex) is a sin against the body. This further explains that, He God, created sex and said, 'it was good' but he gave rules with it. We have one basic rule from God with reference to sexual activity that is, "wait until marriage." Bower views premarital sex as, "a behaviour based on external influences and are controlled by non-genetic mechanism." In this regards, therefore, the family/parents should be careful of the impression they create in the minds of their children (19).

Afolabi in Amaka avers that, "wise parent's give their children sex education before someone else steps in and runs the child's mind with unwholesome misinformation. The parents who are wise enough to do this will have their children's confidence as long as they live (55)" He maintains that, "if parents are aware of their responsibilities, the problem of premarital sex and immorality burning like wood fire among youths today will be reduced to the barest minimum."

For Anderson, "premarital sex is any sexual activity with an opposite partner or with a same sex partner before he or she started a married life (12). He further avers that, though a human being gains the physical maturity of procreation at the beginning of puberty, but he/she is supposed to wait until after marriage.

Eze maintains that, "premarital sex may harm the marital stage of the youth and may at times lead to the misconceptions that sex is to be enjoyed in whatever way possible (5)." Therefore forced premarital love-making may lead to mental depression and dilemma. Anyanwu in Udembaozoh maintains that, during adolescent stage of life, all young, normal people suddenly change and become conscious of sex. How this peculiar problem is handled has great deal of implications now and in the future (75). For instance, it is believed that, bad company and lack of proper parental guidance may lead to a life of sorrow.

According to Kuka in Udembaozoh, "our young boys and girls could be caught unaware when parents do not start teaching them about sex education before they go into the world (71)." Then it becomes stiff to bend them with our elderly philosophies.

Nwagbuo says "since acts of premarital and sexual immorality are affecting children, efforts to curb the problem should start right from the formative years of our children because when you leave boys loose and they don't have good models, they tend to develop problem of discipline and problem of self-control of sexual urges (3). This is where the family plays great roles and responsibilities in ensuring adequate social and moral education to their children in their tender age.

Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) states that, "premarital sex (fornication) is totally condemned by God and can bring destruction to the nation" (47). It went further to admonish that, 'God wants us to be holy and avoid fornication because it is a sin against our body which is the temple of God. On the Biblical idea of becoming "One Flesh": The oneness of intimate fellowship between a man and a woman is expressed in Genesis 2:24 by the phrase "*one flesh*:" "Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and *they become one flesh*." The phrase "*one flesh*," refers to the total union of body, soul, and spirit between marital partners. This total union can be experienced especially through sexual intercourse when the act is the expression of genuine love, respect, and commitment.

One can rightly say that, the phrase *becoming one flesh* sheds considerable light on God's estimate of sex within a marital relationship. It tells us that, God sees sex as a means through which a husband and a wife can achieve a new unity. It is noteworthy that the "one flesh" imagery is never used to describe a child's relationship to his father and mother. A man must "leave" his father and mother to become "one flesh" with his wife. His relationship to his wife transcends the one to his parents because it consists of a new oneness consummated by the sexual union. This affirmation no longer holds among people especially the youths who

indulges in premarital sex with someone they do not intend to marry.

"Becoming one flesh" also as put by Bacchiocchi implies that, "the purpose of the sexual act is not only for *procreation*, that is, to produce children, but also *psychological*, that is, the emotional need to consummate a new oneness-relationship (4)." He further accentuates that, "Oneness implies the willingness to reveal one's most intimate physical, emotional and intellectual self to the other." As they come to know each other in the most intimate way, the couple experiences the meaning of becoming one flesh. Sexual intercourse does not automatically ensure this oneness intimacy. Rather it consummates the intimacy of perfect sharing which has already developed.

Youth Defined

"Youth" is generally perceived as the time of life between childhood and adulthood (Duruiezie, 2018, p.28). The age range that constitutes youth varies from one society to another because individual's actual maturity may not correspond to their chronological age. However, the United Nations defines youths as persons between the ages of 15 and 24 (UNESCO Reports in Duruiezie, p.28). The United Nations recognize the fact that, young people are heterogeneous group in constant evolution and that the experience of being young varies across regions and within countries. There are some

characteristics of youths that make them most vulnerable for development; the most important of which is their vigour and the spirit to achieve if an enabling environment is created for them. They are young, agile, and virile and are expected to be innovative.

Youths are the engine room of societies. They are the drivers of any developmental trend and activity in society and major determinants of the extent of growth and development in any given society. Youths are usually very energetic and are always willing to go the extra mile if need be to achieve what they believe in and hold on to.

As the engine room of societies, the youths need to be guided as they grow as premarital sex can damage their future; thereby, posing a problem to the development of the society.

Causes

Premarital sex is of high prevalence in Imo State in particular and Nigeria at large. Its high rate no doubt must have been brought about by some causative factors. In view of this, the following are some of the causes of premarital sex among youths in Imo State:

a) Poverty

Poverty is a scourge and big challenge in our society today, as it leads to many bad ends. Most girls have attributed parental poor background as a major cause of their indulgence in

premarital sex. As it is known, there are things they would need for their upkeep and when their parents cannot assist, they look for it from outside. Most men are not ready to assist without getting anything in return. They usually demand for sexual intercourse with them before granting them such assistance. This is why Askia asserts that, “this is a wrong mindset but because their parents could not attend to their needs, they are left with no other option.” This incidence is high in our campuses today (especially in schools like Imo State University, Alvan Ikoku Fed. College of Education, Federal University of Tech. Owerri, Federal Polytechnic, Nekede, amongst others) where most girls want to belong but do not have the means from their parents (110).

Poverty, as put by Opara in Udembaozoh “is high in our society today and also it makes some youths not to go to school because their parents could not afford to pay their fees (76).” These youths end up being frustrated and engage in vices like prostitution and raping as we see them today.

b. Peer Pressure Influence

Youths are easily influenced by peer group to do immoral acts, most of our institutions of learning have become places where sexual immorality pervade, innocent ones are being led into such vices by their peers. According to Udembaozoh, “boys and girls who boast openly of their sexual

escapade sometimes persuade others to try it.” It has to be stated that, some men do mount pressure physically on their partners while some ladies mount pressure on their own partners by dressing carelessly exposing their nakedness, to seduce men (75).” These youths would not want to be regarded as a novice or ‘not up-to-date’ by their friends. By this, they will now fall to the pressure of trying to indulge in premarital sex in order to tell their colleagues that they belong.

c. Media Effects

Teenagers are prone to premarital sex, and are especially influenced by the media’s casual attitude towards it. Teenagers of nowadays are bombarded with the image of premarital sex through advertising, movie/music, and video productions. Hardly can one watch cable television without seeing people kissing intimately, or even having sex.” Premarital sex is suggested everywhere in our contemporary media, as seen on billboards, in movies, and in magazines. The advent of smart phones and other internet-enabled devices are equally causes of the problem for the high prevalence of premarital sex. A teenager can now assess whatever he or she wants online; and this mostly is done in the absence of their parents. The social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Snapchat, amongst others have somewhat contributed to this

ugly trend. Teenagers now do online dating (even to the extent of traveling far to meet up with the so-called online friend, not taking into cognizance the dangers preeminent), naughty chats (nude contents inclusive), hook-ups and other immoral acts via these media handles. There is no better way for teenagers to protect themselves from all of the dangers surrounding all these sex-oriented media except to have them controlled, monitored and censored by their families.

d. Poor Child up-Bringing by the Family

The family is the smallest unit of the society which is the first place a child socializes. Most families have relatively failed in their designated role as child socializers and character molders. Children between 1-12 years who are not well trained are likely to fall into wrong hand. This in-between period is ideal time for laying a solid moral foundation in the child and the group of adults that are best suited for these jobs are the parents (who are being referred to as the first moral teachers and role models that young children have). Obi avers that, “At this early stage, parents have the opportunity of teaching respect to their children, these teachings usually occur as parents explain and reason with their children” (91-92).

According to Barrer “the home is the ideal place for telling the story of life. In many homes, parents provide good guidance in the aspect of sex education toward their children. Parents must be alert at all times to see to the sound upbringing of their children, “charity begins at home” parents should endeavor to carry the largest share of responsibility regarding sex education of their children (10). They may leave few for the school. It was on this that, Nwagbuo asserts, “Since acts of sexual immorality affects children, efforts to curb the problem should start right from the formative years of our children; and this can only be possible by their families. When you leave boys loose and they don’t have good models they tend to develop the problem of discipline and problem of control of sexual urges (5).

The Holy Bible in this regards admonishes us to “train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it” proverbs (22:6).

Premarital sex and immorality among youths in Imo State can be attributed to the non-challant attitudes of some families towards their children’s moral and social life. In that way, the children are exposed to negative societal values.

e. Low Socio-Economic Status of Parents in the Family

In a situation where both parents are not financially strong, it becomes a problem for them to pay the school fees of their children. In such a situation, the youths get themselves engaged in immoral practices in order to solve their problem. Children will hardly understand why only their own parent would not measure up financially.

In the words of Amolo and Stanley, “parents who are financially unable to meet up their parental obligation lack the moral standing to question their children and advise them properly since they cannot provide their needs (45).” Furthermore, Obi asserts, “most of those who become successful in their families come from homes where parental influences were favorable and mutual relationship existed between children and their parents (91)”. Moreover, in a family, the responsibility of molding and bringing up of children rests solely on the parents. Therefore, the moral discipline in the family depends much on the parents.

f. Environmental Factors

The environment has a lot of influence on child upbringing and development. This factor must have contributed negatively to the lifestyle of a child. A conducive environment is always expected of parents. As Obi rightly says, “part of conducive environment made available at home should be the provision of the right type of pictorial works, newspapers, good moral books,

to mention but a few, which would make the children keep abreast of the current moral life and topical issues in the society (74).” We live in a society and the influence from our environment affects our behaviour. The most total preoccupation with sex is by the media; this has greatly contributed in promoting the present moral decline and sexual promiscuity in our society today.

Consequences of Premarital Sex among Youths

Premarital sex is forbidden in any society; it is unethical in almost every culture, engaging in it has some consequences. This paper will look at the premarital sex and some of its consequences among the youths in the society, they include the following:

a. Death: The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). Here, the Bible makes it clear that premarital sex (fornication) is sinful and adultery also is sinful and the wages of indulging in such act is death. This death includes both physical and spiritual death. Again many youths contract Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD's) through sex which also results to death.

b. Abortion

Premarital sex leads to unwanted pregnancy and because it is a shameful act, the girl will want to abort it in order to continue with her education or career, in the process she visits quack doctors who may damage her womb. Most of these girls

find it difficult to give birth to a child when they get married. That could be the reason why most married women today can't even get pregnant not to talk of having babies because of the damage done to their wombs when they were involved in premarital sex which led them to unwanted pregnancies and the abortions that follow.

c. Wrong/Forced Marriage

Many women today ended up marrying the wrong person because they got pregnant and were forced by their parents to get married to the man to avoid disgrace and bringing shame to the family.

d. Prostitution

Since most girls are used to pre-marital-sex, some of them do not find it difficult to use it to make money and cater for themselves although some become addicted to it and just cannot avoid it. It pays no one any good but harms and shatters ones future.

The Role of the Family in instilling sound moral and good upbringing to their children as a measure of curbing Pre-marital Sex

The family here represents the biological family. Parenting is conceived as acts, not feelings or relationships. The key function fulfilled by parents is the moral and character formation of their children. In our contemporary society, the family socializes their children by impacting on

them those family values needed for their upbringing of which abstinence from pre-marital sex is one. It is pertinent to avert that, mothers are the first teacher of every child. They serve as foundation for their children's upbringing. They teach them the virtues of good living; how to be disciplined in life and eschew indiscipline. Mothers in every family provide conducive home for their children. Home is the first learning environment for the child; parents not only guide the child in his/her progressive path, but also teach the child the appropriate behaviour through their actions. It has to be stated that, socially, the roles of mothers in child's upbringing are of great significance and instrumental to the future of the child.

Parental attitude has strong influence not only on the children but also on their attitudes and behaviour. It has been observed that, most of those youths that become successful in life come from homes where parental influences were favorable and mutual relationship existed between children and their parents. Mothers are referred to as the first moral teachers and role models that young children have. Here, one can say that, at this early stage, mothers have the opportunity of inculcating values in the life of their children. These teachings usually occur as mothers explain and reason with their children. This is in line with Amolo and Stanley's (2014) assertion that, mothers provide the most constant and visible models of behaviours to

their children associated with character formation. What this means is that, mothers assist their children by exposure to examples of sound behaviours of positive values and virtues that will help them in life. The yielding to moral teaching as put by Amolo and Stanley is based primarily on "the process of the care given through the level of affection presented by the adult. This in turn brings the moral and social message to the child in a more concrete fashion (49)." The quality of the family-child bond and the degree of warmth in their relationship affect many facets of children's upbringing in the society. Indeed, one of the most consistent findings from investigation examining the family interactions that facilitate moral formation of their children in Imo state includes the affective components such as parental warmth, care and listening ear to their children. Therefore, a warm, supportive bond between parents and children may enhance the likelihood that children are motivated to listen to and respond to parental messages.

Mothers need to exemplify their status as Disciplinarian of first Order. Being a mother therefore, means that one needs to be reliable and dependable, with self-disciplined life, full of humility. Mothers mold not only the character of the home but also that of the nation, thus Clara M.A. Iwuoha avers, "Where there are no women, there are no good manners" and elsewhere she also reiterated, "Teach a woman

and you found a school.” In this direction, it is important to note that, children are the extension of the human race and as such they represent you as mothers. In this regard, parents need to monitor the activities of their children and know the kinds of friends they keep in order to save them from ruining their future. The family, of which a mother is part of, should not fail to correct their children when they err.

Recommendations

- (1) Parents have great role to play in their children’s upbringing and monitor their friends and who they go with. Also they should monitor the type of books and home videos their children watch. This will help in child monitoring and good moral up-bringing.
- (2) Our religious institutions should wake up in preaching against immorality and sin as against what we hear today. They should remind the people of the total consequences of sin of immorality and premarital sex.
- (3) Sex education should be introduced in our schools as this will help to educate the girl child on her reproductive organs and how to guide herself. We should not see sex education as spoiling the child. The earlier the children are educated about sex the more they become afraid of

the consequences of having sex which may lead to unwanted pregnancies, diseases and HIV/AIDs which may eventually lead to death.

- (4) The government has a role to play in terms of alleviating poverty. Poverty is one of the major reasons why people indulge in premarital sex. Some students cannot afford the exorbitant school fees paid in schools nowadays not to talk of feeding three times a day. This, is believed will leaves them with no option than to look for the rich men in other to get some money for their needs.
- (5) Awareness should be created by government agencies like National Action in Aids (NACA), Society for Family Health (SFH) and other sister agencies to sensitize the youths on the danger of premarital sex which could result to other health challenges. When these campaigns are carried out in schools, market places, it will help to create fear among the youths more especially on the issue of this dreaded disease called HIV/AIDs.
- (6) Indecent dressing should be banned in our schools and other public places. Indecent dressing is bait to current rape escapades we see in our society today.

The girls are the worst culprit.
Remember, "Give no room to the Devil".

Conclusion

It has to be noted that some parents are not aware of their responsibilities, and that is the reason the problem of sexual immorality is burning like wild fire among our youths today. If parents were responsible, sexual promiscuity would have been reduced to the barest minimum. In fact, if parents were able to discern on time, the dangers of premarital sex and immoral life of their children, they would stand as watch-dogs against their children going astray. Most families have failed to implant in their children the necessary guidance and information regarding sex education, not knowing that, the impacts of the adverse effect will be much felt by them (parents) at the end.

In these days of trying to meet up with the family needs, both parents are less concerned about their children's social life; the type of friends they keep and the kind of things they watch either on phone or television etc. The Holy Bible in this regards admonishes us to "train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it" proverbs (22:6).

Premarital sex and immorality among youths in Imo State can be attributed to the non-challant attitudes of some parents towards their

children's moral and social life. In that way, the children are exposed to negative societal values.

According to Obi (2014:91), he avers that, "in a family, the responsibility of molding and bringing up of children rests solely on the parents." Therefore, the moral discipline of the children depends much on the parents.

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