Church's Attitude towards Pre-Marital Sex: Its Repercussion and Counselling Implications for Christian Adolescent in Lagos State

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Abstract

Sexual escapades among teenagers are caused by lack of contentment, covetousness, the acute poverty and many more. Poverty has turned many adolescents to bread winner of their family. Thus, they are engaging in trading sex to have their needs and that of their family met. The main objective of this study is to appraise the Church's attitude towards pre-marital sex: its repercussion and counselling implications for Christian adolescent in Lagos State. The paper adopted a descriptive survey method. 1,020 copies of questionnaire were administered among the Christian adolescents. 826 copies of questionnaires were retrieved, representing a return rate of 80.98%. The analysis was done using frequency count and simple Percentages. Findings showed a permissive attitude of the adolescents in the Church to Premarital sex as the churches are becoming more tolerant to cohabitation as attested to by 671 respondents (82.9%). 737 respondents (89.1%) averred that parents are not doing their best, also 732 respondents (88.4%) affirmed the society and 696 respondents (76.7%) said the church; are failing in their responsibilities to train the adolescents which encourages premarital-sex. The research concludes that the menace of premarital sex among adolescents' must be combated in view of its grave consequences. Thus, the paper recommends that, the church, schools and parents should be united in the training of adolescents on ethical values of the Bible and to train them to avoid watching seductive materials on the print or electronic media which is capable of making them vulnerable to sexual promiscuity.

Key words - Premarital-sex, Adolescents, Christian-attitudes and Christian-ethics

Introduction

The advent of Christianity reinforced the restraining attitude towards premarital sexual expression. The missionaries built and managed schools putting in place very severe codes of conduct that were imposed on heterosexual activities which was regarded as an act of immorality and sin against God. But in the recent time, the situations have changed. Sexual activities among adolescents have been reported to be on increasing worldwide. Often this sexual encounter is with a person they will never marry (Donovan, 2000). Today sex is regarded by some as part of physical need, which must be satisfied without concern about the societal feelings and ethics; we are living in a period when sexual purity is been exhibited as a joke; high moral standards are being destroyed steadily by modern movies, novels, television, lewd stories, magazines and advertising techniques (Hostler, 1984). Premarital sex is seen by some adolescents as a modern way of testing a girl's fertility before marriage. This act is, however, regarded by some as a violation of the word of God and of his will.

Technological development orchestrated by globalization and civilization have attenuated and grossly affected our moral ethos. This has brought about a breakdown of the social structure on which society rests (Ehrman 1959; Amstrong, 1972 and Obasola, 2015). It is responsible for why many people, in recent time, are attaching little or no importance to religion, including its ethics, to the extent that they find it difficult to believe that there is anything called religious ethics. (Ayantayo, 2009) Sexual revolution according to Ehrman (1959) is the name of this new trend; it is one of the most striking features of Western socio-cultural milieu today. Also, as a result of this sexual revolution in the Western world, sex has become glorified and commercialized. All types of behaviour such as nudity, homosexuality, lesbianism, premarital sex and the likes are being experimented, and in some cases, legalized. Amao-Kehinde (2008) therefore, concluded that the phenomenon of premarital sex infiltrating our

social fabrics which is increasingly seen by the youths as a norm is foreign culture.

The influence of foreign culture on adolescents through video films, magazines, television programmes cannot be over emphasized. Permissive attitude towards sex come with attendants high sexual and reproductive health problems such as early commencement of sexual activities among adolescents which is equally associated with increase in the use of contraceptives, unwanted pregnancy with its complications and exposure to sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and AIDS. Also according to Ralph (2009), the rate at which sexually Transmitted Diseases such as Syphilis, Gonorrhea, Chlamydia, Venereal Warts, Cytomegalovirus, spread among the youth today call for sex education for the all youths.

Adepoju & Adunola (2005) affirmed that teens/ youth who are within the ages of 10-24 years constitute 36.7% of the Nigerian population and are found to be highly vulnerable to antisocial behaviours such as violence, crime, unsafe sexual activities, drug abuse among others. Demographic and health survey data published by the Population Bureau (1992) revealed that more than a quarter of Nigerian adolescent girls aged 15-19 years have had children, forty three percent of the pregnancies occur in never married adolescents, about twelve percent of the pregnancies are unintended. Consequently, adolescents account for a large percentage of all Nigerian births (NPC, 2004).

For example, the findings of the national survey by Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (2003); Oyefara (2009) put fertility rate for adolescents aged 15-19 years at 126 births per 1,000 women. He showed that there is high rate of single parenthood (never married) among adolescent mothers as against older mothers in Osun State, Nigeria.
Abe (1996); Bakare (1996) and Kelly (1989) advised that Lagos State governments need to include sexuality education as an integral part of

education programmes for elementary and high school students in order to reduce the incidence of premarital sexual permissiveness. Nonetheless, available evidence revealed that although informational methodologies like sexuality education successfully propagate knowledge, information alone is not motivating adolescents to reduce the rate of sexual networking (Belligham and Gillies, 1983; Kirby, Barth, Leland and Fetro, 1991). These Studies and a host of others constantly pointed to the fact that sexually active teenagers continue to engage in sexual intercourse even after they become knowledgeable about the content of sex education (Diclemente, Durbin, Siegel, Krasvosky, Lazans and Comacho, 1982). Conversely, Ross and Rosser (1989) review of the existing literatures showed that sexuality education alone is unrelated to behavioural change in the absence of modification of attitudes. It is the intention of this paper to fill this omission by advocating for Christian Sexual education in conjunction with other forms of sex education.

Christian sexual education in view of the power of the gospel to bring about behavioral change and modification of attitudes as testified by 2 Timothy 3:15-17 where the word of God was painted as a force capable for training, guiding and educating in righteousness (capable of empowering people to doing what is morally right). Akanni (2013) speaking on the scriptural passage above described the word of God as comprehensive instrument for changing people's lives and transforming their attitudes. In the light of the power of God to change people's lives and attitude, Ayantayo (2009) blamed the sexual permissiveness as shown in some of the societies in Nigeria, on the practice of removing from every sector of society the appearance or domination of religious tradition, ethics and symbols.

The objectives of this paper are to:

1. To highlight some of the attitudes of the church that emboldens premarital sex among Christian adolescents.

2. To investigate some of the attitudes of the church that discourages premarital sex among Christian adolescents.
3. To suggests how the church can help in educating and transforming adolescents' attitude to premarital sex.
4. Seek how the Church in Lagos State can help parents take responsibility of being their children first teacher on sexual matter.

This paper, therefore, provide answers to the following questions:

1. What are the negative attitudes of the Church to Premarital Sex?
2. What are the positive attitudes of the Church to Premarital Sex?
3. What can the church do to change adolescents' permissive attitudes to premarital sex?
4. How can the Church influence parents to mentor their children on sexual matter?

Methodology

Research Design: The research design was descriptive survey method of enquiry. The study was carried out among 400 students in two tertiary institutions in Lagos state and 620 church members in the Pentecostals, the Mainline, the Evangelicals and the African Independence Churches from the three Senatorial Districts of Lagos State, Nigeria: Lagos Central Senatorial Districts, Lagos East Senatorial Districts and Lagos West Senatorial Districts. Two local government areas from each of the three senatorial districts were randomly selected; making a total of six local government areas participated in this study. Churches were classified into four -groups and 620 copies of questionnaires were administered unequally among church members as follows:

The Pentecostal Churches (PC) - 160,
Evangelical Churches (EC) – 160
The Mainline Churches (MC) – 180 and

African Independent churches (AIC) 120. Two churches each from these four groups were purposively selected because they have many branches and because some others have very big congregations, making a total of eight churches under investigation. Also 400 copies of questionnaires were administered equally allocation among four student Christian fellowships on two campuses: University of Lagos and Lagos State Polytechnic Ikorodu Centre. 100 copies were administered to students in each of the four fellowships. A total of one thousand and twenty (1020) copies of questionnaire were administered in the course of this study.

Research Instrument: The research instruments were questionnaire and unstructured interview designed by the researcher. The questionnaire has seventeen (17) items describing the church's attitude to premarital sex. The instrument was prepared using 4-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). After the instruments has been certified okay by six experts who are educators and religious scholar in the university, college of education and Seminary. A total of thirty five questionnaires were administered among the population for the study to find out whether the questionnaire is simple enough for the respondents to understand. The result revealed that it was not ambiguous. This gave the researcher the confidence to go to the field to administer 1020 copies of the research instrument on his targeted audience.

Cronbach Alpha (α) method was used to determine the reliability coefficients of the instrument. Attitudes of the Church to Premarital Sex Revealed α =0.80 the scales is therefore reliable because it is very high having Cronbach Alpha > 0.7. The questionnaires were self-administered physically to the participants with the help of six trained research assistants. In addition to the use of structured questionnaire, the researcher also conducted unstructured interviews with four experienced ministers of God representing each of the denominational groups and two universities dons who are religious scholars. A total of 1020 copies of questionnaires were

administered in churches and two tertiary institutions in the selected Local Government areas. Eight hundred and twenty six (826) were retrieved and found usable having a return rate of 80.9%.

Data Analysis: The Data obtained for the study were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as Frequency count, percentages (%), Mean (X) and standard deviation (SD). The analysis was done based on each research questions raised. The statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the data

Research Question One: What are the attitudes of the Church to Premarital Sex?

ITEM	SA	A	D	SD	MEAN	SD
Wrong doctrines about sex had prevented the Church to speak boldly on God's will concerning sex.	388(46.9)	357(43.1)	49(5.9)	34(4.1)	3.33	0.758
The negligence of the church to direct the youth has given room for secular world to misdirect them	310(37.4)	441(53.3)	56(6.8)	21(2.6)	3.27	0.675
The church has a culture that is permissive towards cohabitation	345(41.7)	341(41.2)	99(12.0)	43(5.2)	3.21	0.836
Sex is a consecrated action reserved only for marriage	313(37.8)	358(43.2)	79(9.5)	78(9.4)	3.10	0.908
Premarital sex is a sin against God and a violation of his command	477(57.6)	247(29.8)	65(7.9)	39(4.7)	3.42	0.789
Sexual promiscuity can lead to physical and spiritual death	356(43.0)	420(50.7)	26(3.1)	26(3.1)	3.35	0.662
Godly mother can influence sexual (coital) delay in their children	370(44.7)	348(42.0)	76(9.2)	34(4.1)	3.30	0.757
Parental life of integrity and purity will influence the children more than their moral teachings	247(29.8)	415(50.1)	106(12.8)	60(7.3)	3.07	0.799
Discipline, strict and rigid self-denial are needed to abstain from premarital sex	346(41.8)	298(36.0)	105(12.7)	79(9.5)	3.13	0.932
Portrayal of sex generally as shameful and unspiritual acts	221(26.7)	389(47.0)	141(17.0)	77(9.3)	2.94	0.874
Female are simply male instruments for the relief of sexual tension	310(37.4)	346(41.8)	93(11.2)	79(9.5)	3.09	0.914
Sexual desire is an attempt to disregard God's will and to satisfy earthly desire	299(36.1)	409(49.4)	69(8.3)	51(6.2)	3.18	0.790
For reproduction to take place, there must be sexual act	426(51.4)	329(39.7)	43(5.2)	30(3.6)	3.42	0.709
Illicit sex twill produce illegitimate children	289(34.9)	433(52.3)	64(7.7)	42(5.0)	3.20	0.738
The church inhibition of sexuality was overly rigid	296(35.7)	368(44.4)	119(4.4)	45(5.4)	3.13	0.817
Refusal to wed people found to be guilty of premarital sex	308(37.2)	366(44.2)	82(9.9)	72(8.7)	3.12	0.875
Refusal to do naming ceremony of any child that is a product of premarital sex	357(43.1)	328(39.6)	67(8.1)	76(9.2)	3.19	0.900

- **Percentages in parenthesis**

Table 1 above showed the church's attitudes to premarital sex. Majority of the respondents are in agreement with the issues raised in the instrument on church's attitude to premarital sex. Those that admitted that each of the seventeen (17) items describing the church's attitude to premarital sex were 75%. The mean rating of each of the items is also above the 2.50 bench mark for the acceptance of a statement in each of the case. This is a confirmation

of the result found from the frequency and percentages analyses. Conversely, in the opinion of the respondents; they are in agreement with the entire seventeen items table 1 above.

Negative Attitudes of the Church to Premarital Sex (items 1, 2, 3, 10, 11, 12 and 15)

Some of what the respondents described as negative attitudes of the church to premarital sex are discussed as follows: Some of the past church leaders and fathers in their attempt to adopt a conservative attitude towards issue of sex and premarital sex has made some pronouncements that have been found over time to either be scientifically, biblically false or half true. The items are discussed sequentially as follows:

Item 1 stated that: Wrong doctrines about sex had prevented the church to speak boldly on God's will concerning sex-Seven hundred and forty five (745) of the total respondents representing 86. 8% were of the opinion that wrong doctrine about sex had prevented the Church to speak boldly on God's will concerning sex, while one hundred and nine (109) respondents representing thirteen point two six (13.26%) disagree with the assertion. The church is not speaking out on the issue of sex probably because of the nature of sex (its secretive nature). Sex is supposed to be a private thing between a male and a female. Also, the church assumed people should know about sex naturally. But the truth is that people will not have knowledge about several things naturally except they are taught. Adeniji in Ololade (2015) noted that Christian books on sexual intercourse are very scarce in the market probably because of people's attitude to sex matters and sex coaches. Many Christians believed that sex is so sacred an issue and it should not be mentioned, taught or discussed in the public. He averred that this should not be so, because God made man a sexual being that he may enjoy coital pleasure.

Item 2 stated that: The negligence of the church to direct the youths has given room for secular world to misdirect them. Seven hundred and fifty two (752) representing ninety points seven percent (90.7%) agreed with the assertion and seventy five (75) respondents representing nine point three percent (9.3%) disagreed with this conclusion. The scripture is filled with several injunctions where God commanded that children or people be taught. The Bible did not assume people should know things naturally. The unrestricted promotion of the use of condoms and any other form of contraceptives for the unmarried people one of the major way the secular have been misdirecting the unmarried adolescents.

Item 3 stated that: The church has a culture that is permissive towards cohabitation. We have six hundred and eighty six respondents (686) representing eighty two point nine percent (82.9%) who agreed to the fact that the church has a culture that is permissive towards cohabitation, while one hundred and forty two (142) respondents representing seventeen points two percent (17.2%) disagreed with the assertion. This is a total departure from what it used to be from time immemorial. People, who are converted to Christianity prior to this time, had a foundation of conservative and restrictive attitude towards premarital sex.

Upon reflections, the writer noted that there are many likely reasons why the church that was formerly noted for having a conservative and restrictive attitude towards premarital sex is now noted of recent to be having a culture of cohabitation. This recent permissive attitude to premarital sex may partly be explained by the recent uncontrolled proliferation of churches by men and women who may not necessarily be called by God but partly might have been called by their belly, which had no sense of decorum. The massive engagement of men and women who ought not to naturally involve in the apex running of the church life is not also unconnected with the high level of poverty and unemployment that is prevalent in the country.

Item 15 stated that: The church inhibition of sexuality was overtly rigid. Six hundred and sixty four (664) respondents representing eighty point one (80.1%) percent agreed that the church inhibition of sexuality was overtly rigid. One hundred and sixty four (164) respondents representing nineteen point nine (19.9%) percent disagreed with this assertion. Some people are of the opinion that there is no effort too much or caution too much to be taken by the church to prevent premarital sex from taking place. But when the deed has been done already, the church has got to be very careful otherwise some of the actions taken must not only be punitive in nature but must also be redemptive in nature. The whole exercises should be blended with love for the personality of the persons involved and hatred for the sins committed. We must not be overtly rigid in judging the sins committed at the expense of the personalities involved. We noted that, in God's judgment of sins he temper judgment with mercies. The same God in his hatred for sins have learnt to separate the personalities of the people who erred with that of the offence. Thus because his goal was to redeem and restore back the erring he directed his anger at the sins not at the persons.

Positive Attitudes of the Church to Premarital Sex (items 4, 5, 6, 8, 9)
Item 4 stated that: Sex is a consecrated action reserved only for marriage. Six hundred and eighty one (681) respondents representing eighty two point forty four percent (82.44%) agreed that sexual act is only legitimate when it is conducted between husband and wife who have made marital vow. The ground for legitimacy of sexual art is only if it is performed between husbands and wives is the truth.

Item 5 stated that: Premarital sex is a sin against God and a violation of his command. Seven hundred and twenty four (724) representing eighty seven point four (87.4%) percent of the respondents agreed with the assertion and one hundred and four (104) respondents representing twelve point six (12.6%) percent disagreed with this conclusion. Any form of sexual activities between the unmarried ones or between the married and any

unmarried one is therefore a sin to God and a violation of God's commandments, but saying that the purpose of sex is only for procreation is half-truth. Marriage was God's original plan of God to solve the problem of loneliness and that of unavailability of ready help for mankind. It is also for companionship and for the couples to mutually live together to fulfill God's purpose for their lives (Eccl. 4: 9-12).

For any sex to be correct according to scripture it must be within the married, the only thing that introduces shame to sex is when its original purposes are been abused. It is not supposed to be a sexual relationship between people that are not properly married, between people of same sex, between man and animal, a man or a woman with several others opposite sex partners and several other forms of abuses that we are witnessing in our days. Martin Luther kicked against Augustine's idea on the issue of sex, unlike many Roman Catholic members and priests are not revolting against the idea as Martin Luther did in his time. Katchandourian (1972) opined that, it is however, unfortunate that these early church fathers had allowed the moral degradation of their existential time to force them to propound a Christian theory which is not true about sex, which is God's gift to a man and woman in marriage. Sex as God's gift it is to be received with thanksgiving. The right use of sexual faculties is one of the most natural things by which God is glorified in the body.

Item 6 stated: that sexual promiscuity can lead to both spiritual and physical death. Seven hundred and seventy six (776) of the respondents representing ninety three points seven percent (93.7%) agreed that premarital sex can lead to physical and spiritual death, while fifty two respondents representing six point two percent (6.2%) of the respondents did not approve the assertion. Notable among several things mentioned that will disqualify a man from entering the Kingdom of God includes fornication (premarital sex) and adultery. To be disqualified from entering the Kingdom of God is to be banished from God's presence forever which

is spiritual death. If fornication and adultery can disqualify a man from making heaven, then that is the scriptural affirmation that sexual sin can lead to spiritual death.

Item 8 stated that Parental life of integrity and purity will influence the children more than their moral teachings. Six hundred and sixty two (662) of the respondents representing seventy seven point eight (77.8%) are in agreement with While one hundred and sixty six respondents representing twenty two point two (22.2%) percent disagreed. In consistence with the popular axioms that stated that action speak louder than voice. Recent studies have been attributed to the parental neglect and some of the parents' feelings of incompetence or lack of courage to come alive in their responsibility of being their children's first teacher on issue of sex and sexuality. Also young people are highly impressionable and are greatly influenced by parents and family members which they see. They are medium through which they learn about their society. Marcus, (2011) in Agboluaje, (2011) argued that the family is where moral values and other values such as Love, hard work, honesty are built and inculcated into the citizen. Parents who are themselves morally decent will not have problem passing moral lessons to their children because children learn more from parents and whatever they see their parents do they believe it is perfect and the right thing to be done. Eyo (1995) declared that "Value as a transmissible construct could be learned therefore, children and young ones learn to value the things their parents and elders value since their worlds' social, cultural and psychological are initially at least, defined by the worlds of their parents and elders".

Item 9 stated that: Discipline, strict and rigid self-denial are needed to abstain from premarital sex. Six hundred and forty four (644) of the respondents representing seventy seven point eight percent (77.8%) agreed to the assertion. While one hundred and eighty four (184) respondents representing twenty two points three percent (22.3%) disagreed with the

assertion. Godow (1982) also averred that there is no possibility for self-control which had been the ethics of the Greeks who had value, side by side, the thoughtful life and sexuality. To the writer, this can be on either side, he perceived self-control is needed to overcome sexual sin but sin in the opinion of this writer is not something anyone can overcome solely by his or her will power, he is of the opinion that sin is a force that is greater than any man, and thus it takes only a man whose will has been put under control of a greater force to wield the force of his God's controlled will to resist sins and sinful habits. Submitting one's will under the control of a greater force is what happens when a man gives his life to Christ. It is with salvation of a soul that brings about the release of the grace that empowers our will to resist or say no to sins and sinful habits.

Counselling Implications for Christians Adolescents

Alika (2012) noted in a similar study the need for personal-social counseling because his study showed that 54.4% of the respondents indicated that they had sex just for the fun of it while 73% of the respondents indicated that they willingly indulged in sexual activities and 72.4% indicated that they had sexual relations with peers. Behavioural counselling technique could adopted in counseling university undergraduates, since one of the assumptions of human personality is that each individual has the potentials to evaluate plan, and modify his/her behaviour. Counselors in higher institutions should be encouraged to identify at risk students and introduce behaviour modification therapy with a view to encouraging undergraduates to desist from risky sexual behaviours. Moreover, the female undergraduates should be counseled and well guided as regards the dangerous effects of abortion.

Conclusion and Recommendations

From the literature review and data analysis, the paper concludes that there is a permissive attitude of the adolescents in the Church to Premarital sex in Lagos State and that there is no better time than now to arise and combat

the menace of premarital sex among the young adults in view of the grave consequences of HIV/AIDS pandemics increase among them. This study is advocating for Christian sexual education by exposing the young adults to ethics and ethical values of the Bible. The study takes advantage of the power of the word of God not only to fill people with knowledge but also to impact behavioral change in people. Thus, this study will not make any attempt to advocate for the use of condom among the adolescents, but will radically advocate for inculcating of good conduct of sexual abstinence until marriage among adolescents'. Therefore, the study will offer recommendations to all the stakeholders on the issue of adolescence sex and sexuality such as parents, the school administrators, teachers, counselors, church ministers and the laymen alike. They will be helped in their fight against premarital sex. It thus puts the collective responsibility on these stakeholders to find solution to this social problem. The paper thus made the following additional recommendations:

1. That all single ladies and young men are to be thoroughly schooled in the ethics and ethical values of the Bible that inculcate values such as self-discipline and Godliness with contentment which will help them to be satisfied with whatever they have materially and financially.
2. The church must train the parents to be committed to teaching and exposing the adolescents to sound biblical position on pre-marital sex, thus enabling them to take responsible decision on sexual issues.
3. The church, schools and parents should be united in the training of adolescents to avoid watching seductive materials on the print or electronic media. This is capable of poisoning or polluting their minds thus making them vulnerable to sexual promiscuity.
4. The parents and the church must create an atmosphere that will enable the young ones to share their challenges without shame. This will generally correct and eradicate the general allusion among young adults that sex is synonymous to love.

5. The church should organize regular seminars, counseling, special programs like film show and talks on the evil of pre-marital sex and parents should encourage and cooperate with the church by encouraging their children to attend such programs.
6. The home, the church and the mission schools should be the proper place where young adults are to be shown true love and be taught the correct meaning of love.
7. There is need for corrective discipline at home and in the church for the young and unmarried girls who are carefree sexually. And reward for singles that are chaste.

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