

Full Length Research Paper

Manifestation of human sexuality and its relevance to secondary schools in Nigeria

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Accepted 21 April, 2015

The alarms against the menace of premarital sexual activities reached a crescendo but the behaviour of young people remained at variance with the alarms. This contradiction contributed to the growth of sexually transmitted diseases including human immune virus (HIV) and acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS). Thus, this study examined manifestation of human sexuality and its relevance to secondary schools in Nigeria using information derived from content analysis of secondary data. Results principally showed that human sexuality extended beyond procreation as it captured all the nuances of the socio-cultural contexts of a society. Different sexualities such as child sexuality, adolescent sexuality, adult sexuality and sexuality of the elderly produced specific implications for the entire society. Conclusively, understanding of the interdependent layers of human sexuality would promote the management of sexually transmitted diseases including HIV and AIDS. Therefore, it was recommended that sexuality education should be emphasized in the socialization from infancy till death. Nobody would be too young or old for learning human sexuality. Critical steps should be taken to empower students towards scanning their sexual histories and acquiring the right skills to manage any detected or potential sexual problem.

Key words: Schools, sexuality, STIs, youth.

INTRODUCTION

Human sexuality remains largely misrepresented despite impressive attentions devoted to it since the enlightenment era. Archaeological evidence showed that it was fluid in pre-agricultural societies and its restriction accompanied the emergence of farming. Gradually, human sexuality and sexual orientation became means of social control (Alastair et al., 2008; Kauth, 2006). In the 18th century, classical demographers including Malthusians and neo-Malthusians recognized the power of human sexuality in explaining population and development. Their concentration on the issues of fertility, mortality, migration and marriage was so enormous that other vital aspects of human sexuality were neglected especially as the world became polarized into pro-natal and anti-natal divides.

Subsequently, human sexuality was largely confined to reproduction and protected with a culture of silence (Foucault, 1978). Obviously, most aspects of human sexuality will not promote reproduction because they transcend vaginal penetration and manifest in divergent ways (Alastair et al., 2008). Expectedly, the unexpected confinement and protection opened spaces for introduction of distortions into the knowledge

of human sexuality. What is the popular perception of sexuality and how can secondary schools intervene in mitigating sexual challenges? These questions constitute the central focus of this study given their relevance in managing the scourge of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV and AIDS.

As mentioned above, human sexuality has been widely discussed but several people still misunderstand it. This misunderstanding introduces flaws and distortions, which affect preventive knowledge of STIs including HIV and AIDS. The key flaws in the understanding of human sexuality include misconception of sex, intimacy, pleasure and negligence of the vital layers of sexualities.

Misconceiving and neglecting human sexuality can portend danger for the society. For Foucault (1990), the manifestation of human sexuality would determine the fortune and future of the society. In light of the foregoing, this study is an attempt to demystify the mysteries of sex through a discourse of manifestation of human sexuality and its relevance to the Nigerian secondary schools.

Issues discussed in the next sections include human sexuality and its manifestation, popular perception of sex-

uality and mitigation of sexual challenges. Conclusion and recommendations follow the discourse.

HUMAN SEXUALITY AND ITS MANIFESTATION

Human sexuality is a life-long and multi-dimensional process involving all aspects of behaviour. Its layers are biological, cultural, economic, physical, political, psychological, sociological and spiritual. The biological layer of sexuality entails the natural classification of organisms based on their sex which refers to observable characteristics that defined them as male or female. Sex is rooted in biology of nature. Fundamentally, both biological and non-biological factors influence understanding of sex and sexual drives of males and females. This assumption echoes the interdependence of nature and nurture as well as their influence on the manifestation of human sexuality. For instance, aging affects human sexuality within dynamics of transition from infancy to childhood, childhood to adolescence, adolescence to adulthood, and adulthood to grave. Within and between these transitions, several manifestations occur, namely: puberty, menopause, and menopause. Understanding of the problems and prospects of each of these manifestations is important for people including students in secondary schools.

The cultural layer of sexuality can be described as the total ways of life of people in a society. People's life ways may include arts, beliefs, customs, knowledge, morals, and other cultural traits such as dress, drinks, food, marriage and music. A very high significant relationship can be found between culture and human sexuality. This hypothesis exposes the danger of solely relying on the Western culture for the understanding of human sexuality in Nigeria, a highly heterogeneous African society. A perspective of human sexuality cannot fit all settings of the Nigerian social structure. The peculiarities and differences in sexuality of each of the Nigerian ethnic groups can be understood in different cultural contexts such as attires, beauty, ceremonies, dialects, greeting, history, naming, poetry, and proverbs.

In Southern Nigeria, cultural practices such as fattening ceremony among the Okrika as well as popular music and dance among the Tiv have contributed to the development of cultural layer of sexuality. Similarly, in Northern Nigeria, a considerable proportions of Hausa and Fulani are known for the use of traditional medicines, "Burantasi" and Kayamata" in the treatment of sexual weakness in men and women. These medicines can aid sexual satisfaction at different stages of sexual expressions: desire, arousal, plateau, orgasm and resolution. Also, nuptial songs, popular traditional sexual expressions among the Yoruba of the Western Nigeria, serve as avenue for sharing cultural knowledge of sexuality.

The economic layer of sexuality deals with livelihood activities including human interaction with the environment to ensure survival. A discourse of gender discrimination in economic activities is relevant here. Sexuality

influences access to capital, health care, employment, education, social justice in terms of inheritance, property rights, and use of communal land (Fawole, 2008). This level of manifestation of sexuality put women at a disadvantage especially with regard to discriminatory practices at various establishments. Nigeria remains a largely patriarchal society though the last Nigerian population census revealed that women outnumbered men. Unexpectedly, men dominate women in many organisations in Nigeria despite the fact that the Nigerian governments ratified several policies on gender main-streaming.

The physical layer of sexuality refers to observable elements of human development. These elements include growth, appearance, body posture, eyes contacts, facial expressions, hugging, kissing, touching and sexual intercourse which can cause adolescent pregnancy. Growth reflects in all parts of human body and each part plays specific roles in the manifestation of human sexuality.

In this light, it is important to stress the functions of hair, eyes, ear, nose, mouth, tongue, teeth, hands, breast, buttocks, vagina, penis, anus, legs, nails, skin and complexion in the study of human sexuality because they represent sense organs which assist in the transmission and interpretation of sexual signals. Human sexuality can be managed through understanding of the power of sense organs and how to control it. However, the handicapped and the able-bodied persons require different skills and orientations in the management of their sexuality due to differences in their physical appearance.

Recent studies showed that sexual relationships that could lead to procreation were judged not acceptable for people with learning disabilities even if their child could be nurtured by a non-handicapped parent (Esterle et al., 2008). Sexual relationships among people with disabilities were, however, judged moderately acceptable in the cases when the person is autonomous, the partner is of the same age and is also handicapped, and the relationship is protected (Esterle et al., 2008). The main concerns here centered on the consequences of sexual relationships and not the relationships per se.

The political layer of sexuality indicates interpretations of identities and segregation of members of the society into different categories. Gender is a major component of this layer because it influences understanding of sexuality in terms of homosexuality, heterosexuality and bi-sexuality. The Nigerian societies are largely heterosexual because they discourage marriage or sexual relationships between persons of the same sex. With the adoption of western culture of Christianity, heterosexual monogamy became largely popular in Nigeria, whereas heterosexual polygygy remained unabated in some parts of the country with strong Islamic tradition or indigenous values. Basically, the Nigerian societies promote marriage and family to regulate human sexuality. Alternatively, people engage in premarital and extra-marital sexual relationships for different purposes. Such relationships were defined as plastic sexuality indicating sexual relationship that is not gear-

ed towards marriage or reproduction (Giddens, 1992) .

Psychologically, the evidence of human sexuality can be demonstrated through conception and interpretation of desires. All forms of sexual expressions closely associate with psychological layer of human sexuality. A principal component of this layer is sexual script, which implies series of stages and procedures followed in securing the attention of the prospective beloved. Sexual script exists in dating and courtship. It is an integral part of family life cycle covering different human experiences from marriage to death. Communication and intimacy are essential elements of this layer as they affect outcomes of human sexual relationships. A psychologist (Sigmund Freud) confessed his childhood sexual experience while narrating the Greek story of Oedipus Rex who fell in love with his mother and wished to kill his father. This story has been analysed within the spiritual layer of human sexuality.

The sociological layer of sexuality covers many borders of human behaviour and all aspects of interaction including relationships, friendship, courtship and marriage. Intimacy, love, romance and sexual intercourse can be examined in this context and their implications vary but are essential for the understanding and management of STIs including HIV and AIDS. In their recent study of 690 boys and girls selected from kindergarten through high school, scholars concluded that youth who initiate sexual intercourse in early adolescence (age 11 - 14) experience multiple risks including concurrent adjustment problems and unsafe sexual practices (Schofield et al., 2008). This shows the danger of sexual intercourse at certain age and time can be understood in this context.

The spiritual layer of sexuality refers to understanding of the sacredness of human body. Spirituality is governed by truth and righteousness (Yehuda, 2008). Issues such as sexual taboos and incest are part of the spiritual layer of sexuality. Reflecting spirituality of sexuality, the Greek story began before the birth of Oedipus Rex and its representation in Sophocles' play featured after the death of Oedipus' father (Bernstein, 2001). In the story, an oracle told Laius (the king of Thebes) that his unborn child would murder him and marry Jocasta (the queen of Thebes). Laius ordered his shepherd to kill his new born son to avert the foretold danger but the shepherd secretly took the child to the palace of Polybus (the king of Corinth). Oedipus grew up as a prince and was ignorant of his true origin. An oracle told him the same story that made his father ordered his death and he ran away from Polybus and Merope thinking they were his parents. On his way, he met and killed Laius during a quarrel.

Subsequently, his ability to solve a riddle led to the death of the monster that used to kill people at Thebes and to show their gratitude, Thebans made him their king and Jocasta became his queen and they had two sons and daughters. As earlier predicted by an oracle Oedipus life ended in tragedy following the discovery of his predicaments.

Societies regulate all layers of sexuality through socialisation agents including the family, schools, religious organisations, pressure groups, mass media, and the state. Conflicts of interests among these agents usually produce barriers and contradictory messages on human sexuality. For instance, peer pressures and unwholesome exhibitions in the mass media can affect conformity with sexual values acquired through the family, schools and religious organisations. Each of these agents differently contributes to modifications of lifestyles of members of the society who are usually expected to perform specific roles that fit their sexualities.

Role expectations depend on different factors such as age, gender, time, location and circumstances. Generally, sexuality affects all segments of the society including children, adolescents, adults, and the elderly. These categories of people have various sexual needs, which produce different sexualities such as child sexuality, adolescent sexuality, adult sexuality, men sexuality, women sexuality and sexuality of the elderly. A study of sexual orientation among 14,059 persons across 48 countries showed sex differences in human mating strategies within diverse range of cultures (Schmitt, 2005). The study found that sex differences were significantly larger when reproductive environments were demanding but were reduced to more moderate levels in cultures with more political and economic gender equality. In his earlier study, Schmitt (2003) collected data from 17,804 men and women in 62 countries to investigate gender differences in romantic attachment. He demonstrated that the influence of gender on romantic attachment was weak. His study combined men and women across different age categories. Schmitt's study on mating strategies in four major world regions covered views of men and women across three sexual orientations: heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual. His findings showed that across all four world regions and regardless of sexual orientation, men more than women were sexually unrestricted and relatively open to multiple mating opportunities. He found that across world regions, gay and bisexual men reported engaging in more unrestricted sexual behaviors than heterosexual men. Contrary to expectations, however, bisexual women reported engaging in more unrestricted sexual behavior than either heterosexual women or lesbians. This trend can be understood in light of the fact that same-sex sexual behaviors cannot lead to reproduction.

POPULAR PERCEPTION OF SEXUALITY

Basically, most studies on human sexuality focused on adolescents thereby neglecting other segments of the society. This situation affects popular perception of sexuality and sexual challenges that could have been prevented from infancy or childhood. People generally attribute sexuality to sex, sexual intercourse and sexual activities. Accumulated knowledge confirms the growth of

adolescents' sexual intercourse (Ghuman, 2005; Nwafor and Madu, 2002).

Comparably, the prevalence of premarital sexual intercourse among adolescents was higher in developed countries, Africa and the Caribbean than in Latin America, Asia and Middle East. Studies in the United States revealed that sex was the most frequently searched topic on the internet (Dixon-Muller, 1996).

In the late 1970s in the United States, France and England, 40 - 50 per cent of girls had sexual intercourse before reaching age 17; while in Sweden about 80 per cent of girls had sexual intercourse before reaching age 17. Similarly, over 90 per cent of American adolescents aged 16 years had sexual intercourse and 72 per cent of the boys and 57 per cent of the girls aged 16 - 19 had it (Haralambos et al., 2004). Sexual intercourse is different from sexual activities but several studies seem to ignore this fact. Studies on adolescent sexual behavior in several parts of Nigeria showed that premarital sexual intercourse were popular (Araoye and Adegoke, 1996). The popularity of premarital sex is not necessarily an indication of high level of awareness of human sexuality. Adequate understanding of human sexuality can contribute towards management of premarital sexual intercourse.

Asuzu (1994) reported that in Ibadan, 49% of 16 years old boys reported premarital intercourse compared to 28% of 16 years old girls. Adebayo et al. (2006) described the Nigerian young people's sexual attitudes as risky. They reported that Nigerian adolescents were largely characterised by early initiation into sexual activities, multiple sexual partners and poor attitude towards protective sex. Similarly, a recent study of perception of sexuality in a Nigerian secondary school showed that students were concerned about abortion, premarital sex, pregnancy, teacher-student relationships and lesbianism (Kafewo, 2008). It was mentioned that sexuality-related problems especially premarital pregnancy forced some students to drop out from the school. This situation has implications for parity and women development. Researchers have shown that female education negatively affected fertility (Osili and Long, 2008).

On this note, governments advocated the need to educate women for reducing population growth and fostering sustainable socio-economic development. The students that dropped out from schools may, however, constitute threat to the realisation of developmental goals of the society and they themselves may be principal victims of underdevelopment.

Another study (Fawole, 2008) shed light on gender based violence and its consequences on human health and development. Conclusively, perception of sexuality is largely misleading as several studies demonstrated. Unfortunately, positive lessons in various aspects of the neglected aspects of human sexuality have not been explored. This gap calls for additional information for effective management of sexual challenges.

MITIGATION OF SEXUAL CHALLENGES

The prevalence of adolescents' sexual activities in the

Nigerian educational systems has produced several challenges such as premarital pregnancies, abortion, untimely death, dropping out of schools and vulnerability to STIs including HIV and AIDS. The ravaging influence of these challenges shows that successive efforts towards sexuality education remain inadequate. Obviously, many adolescents are sexually active with poor knowledge of human sexuality. Popular manifestations of poor knowledge of human sexuality are low level of contraceptives' use and the growth of STIs including HIV and AIDS (Juarez and LeGrand, 2005; Okekearu, 2004).

Over 50% of the global cases of HIV and AIDS were recorded for persons aged 15 - 24 and over 60% of the cases occurred in sub-Saharan Africa, which constitutes 10% of the world population (UNAIDS, 2004; WHO, 1998). The high magnitude of HIV and AIDS prevalence among young people associate with misconceptions about sex and lack of curriculum for sexuality education in schools. The German philanthropic movement was an example of necessary approach that can be utilized to mitigate sexually oriented challenges. A German school tested the efficacy of sexuality education by inviting dignitaries and asking students questions on the mysteries of sex, birth and procreation. Students were made to comment on pictures of pregnant women and couples and they responded without signs of shame or embarrassment (Foucault, 1978). Drawing from the German model of sexuality education for students, availability of institutional devices and deployment of appropriate discursive strategies can improve knowledge of human sexuality and reduce the incidence of STIs in secondary schools.

Conclusion

This study examined manifestation of human sexuality and its relevance to secondary schools in Nigeria. Principally, the importance of complete understanding of human sexuality and schools' intervention in the mitigation of sexual challenges in Nigeria were discussed. This study has reinforced the notion that the perspectives of human sexuality are diverse: historical, theological, anthropological, psychological and sociological (Geer and O'Donohue, 1987). Each perspective presents unique opportunities and challenges suggesting that no single perspective can provide adequate knowledge of human sexuality. Therefore all the perspectives must be connected. As shown in this study, all layers of human sexuality essentially interweave and affect knowledge of managing STIs including HIV and AIDS.

This notion impregnates the fact that human sexuality extends beyond procreation to capture the nuances of the socio-cultural contexts of the society. A popular expression of sexuality can be found in nuptial songs composed to amuse, entertain and prepare people for different responsibilities. Thus, any genuine interest in the study of human sexuality will consider the relevance of understanding its interdependent layers. Different sex-

ualities such as child sexuality, adolescent sexuality, adult sexuality and sexuality of the elderly produce serious implications for each segment of the society. The growth of premarital sexual activities in Nigeria can be attributed to adoption of western culture of sexuality and relegation of traditional idioms of sexuality in the country. Different relevant aspects of sexualities earlier mentioned in this study seem to have been neglected as information on them remains scanty. In this light, sexuality education can start from conception and continues till death. Nobody can be too young or old for learning human sexuality.

Therefore, secondary schools in Nigeria should establish sexual laboratories and make sexuality education a daily extra curricular activity to demystify the myths or misconceptions associated with it. Essentially, the neglected aspects of sexualities must be brought forward and cross-linked to promote robust knowledge of human sexuality. Scanning sexual history of individuals should be the starting point in attempts to prevent STIs including HIV and AIDS. This step is necessary for detecting the strengths and weaknesses of different persons in the determination of counseling needs and recommendation of therapies for them.

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