



The influence of Christian and Traditional cultural moral values on Adolescent Sexuality in the Mfanteman Municipality

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the interplay between traditional Ghanaian culture, Christianity, and youth sexual behavior, with a specific emphasis on teenage pregnancy within the Mfanteman Municipality of Ghana's Central Region. Although Christianity and African traditional culture are widely considered strong moral frameworks, particularly for sexual conduct, adolescent pregnancy remains prevalent in the region. This paradox raises significant questions regarding the efficacy of religious and cultural ethical systems in shaping adolescent sexual behavior. The study applied Immanuel Kant's deontological ethical theory, which emphasizes ethical responsibilities and compliance with moral standards irrespective of consequences. Methodologically, the research employed an interpretivist framework and a case study approach to investigate the personal experiences and ethical perspectives of adolescents and community leaders. Primary data was gathered using semi-structured interviews and surveys administered to adolescents, pregnant teenagers, teenage mothers, parents, traditional leaders, spiritual leaders, and Pastors in the municipality. The findings indicate that Christian and African traditional ethical norms strongly condemn premarital sex and adolescent pregnancy. These norms reinforce each other through common principles, such as chastity, collective accountability and religious penalties. However, the research reveals that the effectiveness of these moral frameworks is reduced by ineffective communication, parental supervision, insufficient sexual health education, economic and social pressures, and conflicting sexual information from peer groups and media. Young people often develop conflicting moral perspectives, where personal convictions coexist with hidden sexual behaviors. The research suggests that preventing teenage pregnancy and risky sexual activity requires not only moral and cultural guidance but also mentorship, comprehensive sex education, and socio-economic support.

Keywords: Sexuality, Moral Values, Teenage Pregnancy, Sexual Health Education.

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INTRODUCTION

Adolescent sexuality and health are significant concerns in Ghanaian society. The failure of society to control and influence the sexual life of young people could have negative repercussions on the morality and socioeconomic development of the country. Therefore, early sexual activity by young people is a significant public health issue worldwide, placing adolescents at increased risk for negative psychosocial and sexual health consequences. In Ghana, the ongoing discussion surrounding when early adolescents reach sexual maturity and first engage in sexual activity remains a central topic of national conversation, often viewed from contrasting perspectives. Adolescents between the ages of 12 and 18 in Ghana demonstrate significant levels of risky sexual behavior, with more than half having had sexual intercourse before their 19th birthday.¹ According to research by Awusabo-Asare *et al.*, 9% of adolescent boys and 12% of adolescent girls in Ghana reported their first sexual experience before the age of 15. In particular, early sexual introduction among adolescent girls is highest in the Bono and Ahafo regions (21%), followed by the Northern (8%) and Greater Accra (5%) regions, despite existing social stigma. Previous research conducted in Ghana indicates that the majority (73.3%) of sexually active young individuals begin having sex after the age of 15. These include having multiple sexual partners, engaging in unprotected sex, experiencing unplanned pregnancies, contracting sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and facing challenges such as depression and low self-esteem. Furthermore, early sexual introduction can be associated with undesirable sexual experiences, such as unwanted orgasm and sexual arousal.

Among the 354,927 individuals living with HIV in Ghana in 2022, 16,629 were young people aged 15-24. This age group also experienced a considerable burden of new HIV infections, representing 14% (5,613 cases) of the total new infections in that year.² In terms of teenage pregnancy, a report compiled by the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection in 2014 suggested that the problem of teenage pregnancy was predominant in Ghana.³ According to the 2022 Ghana Demographic and Health Survey (GDHS), approximately 15% of adolescent women aged 15-19 have ever been pregnant, with 11% having given birth. The highest rates of teenage pregnancy are reported in regions such as Savannah (26%) and Northern (24%) compared to Greater Accra, which has the lowest rate of 6%.⁴ The Central Region was ranked as the region with the second-highest rate of teenage pregnancy in 2013, 2014 and 2015.⁵ The Ghana Health Service reported that more than 13,000 teenage girls became pregnant in the Central Region in 2015 alone, with a notable prevalence rate of approximately 25% among adolescents from 2012 to 2016.⁶ According to the Ghana 2022 Demographic and Health Survey, the Central Region recorded 13% of teenage pregnancy among adolescents.⁷ The data indicates the intensity of teenage pregnancy and its consequences in the region.

Surprisingly, the data shows a contradictory relationship with the dominance of Christianity and the practice of indigenous Akan culture in the region. Christianity and African culture are known to inculcate good morals in their adherents and are considered the main sources of morality. The differing relationship between culture, Christianity, and good morals calls for an investigation into their impact on shaping the sexual and moral life of teenagers in the region. It further calls for an examination of the role of the culture of the indigenes and Christianity in curtailing the health problem of teenage pregnancy. Therefore, the study examines Ghanaian culture, Christianity, and their impact on the sexual life of adolescents with a case study of teenage pregnancy among the people of Mfantseman municipality in the Central Region of Ghana.

¹ Ernest Kenu *et al.*, "Sexual Experiences of Adolescents and Young Adults Living with HIV Attending a Specialized Clinic in Accra, Ghana," *Ghana Medical Journal* 54, no. 2 (August 31, 2020): 91–97, <https://doi.org/10.4314/gmj.v54i2s.14>.

² UNAIDS, "Global HIV & AIDS Statistics — Fact Sheet," October 14, 2022, <https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/fact-sheet>.

³ *Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection* (Programme Based Budget Estimates, 2023).

⁴ Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) and ICF, *Ghana Demographic and Health Survey 2022: Summary Report* (Accra, Ghana, and Rockville, Maryland, USA: GSS and ICF, 2023).

⁵ Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) and ICF, *Ghana Demographic and Health Survey 2022: Summary Report*.

⁶ Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) and ICF, *Ghana Demographic and Health Survey 2022: Summary Report*.

⁷ Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) and ICF, *Ghana Demographic and Health Survey 2022: Summary Report*.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Perspectives of Adolescent Sexuality and Teenage Pregnancy

Teenage pregnancy and motherhood are phenomena often associated with significant psychological distress. Erikson proposed an eight-stage model of psychosocial development, where each stage presents a unique crisis defined by two opposing tendencies. Successful navigation of this crisis, driven by both biological maturation and societal expectations, leads to a positive outcome, while failure may result in a negative one. For instance, the first stage, Infancy (Basic Trust vs. Mistrust), requires resolving the trust versus mistrust conflict to progress.⁸ According to Erikson, childhood also encompasses stages such as autonomy vs. shame and doubt, initiative vs. guilt, and industry vs. inferiority.⁹ According to Erik Erikson's influential theory of psychosocial development, adolescence represents the fifth critical stage, characterized by the central conflict of Ego Identity versus Role Confusion.¹⁰ He contended that this stage is associated with the period spanning roughly from the ages of 12 or 13 to approximately 20 and marks a significant transition as individuals navigate the complex terrain between childhood and adulthood.¹¹ Schwartz, *et al* explained that during this pivotal developmental period, adolescents are confronted with a multitude of evolving social expectations and shifting roles. These demands necessitate a fundamental re-evaluation of their sense of self and their place within the broader social context, ultimately preparing them to effectively meet the multifaceted challenges inherent in adulthood.¹²

Erikson further disclosed that a successful resolution of the ego identity versus role confusion crisis is paramount for healthy psychological development. Achieving a coherent sense of ego identity involves integrating various self-perceptions, values, and aspirations into a unified and stable sense of who one is. This sense of self provides a foundation for future social interactions and commitments.¹³ Conversely, failure to resolve this crisis can lead to role confusion, a state characterized by uncertainty about one's identity, values, and future direction.¹⁴

Expanding on this, Schachter highlighted the potential for significant psychological distress during this stage. They suggest that many adolescents grappling with this age-specific conflict may experience profound feelings of futility (a sense of pointlessness), personal disorganization (a lack of inner coherence), and aimlessness (a lack of clear goals or direction). These adolescents may feel inadequate (lacking competence), depersonalised (detached from themselves), and alienated (isolated from others). In some instances, this struggle can even manifest in the adoption of a negative identity, a rejection of the values and expectations prescribed by significant figures such as parents and peers, leading them to embrace opposing identities.¹⁵ Building upon this understanding of adolescent development, Schachter strongly argued that adolescent engagement in sex and teenage pregnancy is highly likely to precipitate a significant developmental crisis. Rather than fostering the development of a positive and coherent self-identity, early parenthood can severely disrupt the typical processes of exploration and identity formation. The immediate and demanding responsibilities associated with pregnancy and raising a child can overwhelm the adolescent's capacity to navigate the already complex challenges of this stage.¹⁶ This premature assumption of adult roles can lead to increased confusion as the adolescent struggles to reconcile their developmental needs with the demands of parenthood.¹⁷

⁸ E. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York, NY: Norton, 1950).

⁹ Erikson, *Childhood and society*, 15-45.

¹⁰ Erikson, *Childhood and society*, 15-45.

¹¹ Erikson, *Childhood and society*, 15-45.

¹² Seth J. Schwartz et al., "Measuring Identity From an Eriksonian Perspective: Two Sides of the Same Coin?," *Journal of Personality Assessment* 91, no. 2 (February 17, 2009): 143–54, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00223890802634266>.

¹³ Erikson, *Childhood and society*, 15-45.

¹⁴ Schwartz, *et al*. "Measuring identity from an Eriksonian perspective," 143 – 154.

¹⁵ Elli P. Schachter, "Erikson Meets the Postmodern: Can Classic Identity Theory Rise to the Challenge?," *Identity* 5, no. 2 (April 2005): 137–60, https://doi.org/10.1207/s1532706xid0502_4.

¹⁶ Schachter, "Erikson meets the postmodern," 137 – 160.

¹⁷ Schachter, "Erikson meets the postmodern," 137 – 160.

Supporting this view, Busch and Hofer found in their research on adolescent parents that the crucial processes of identity formation (developing a stable sense of self) and role experimentation (exploring different social roles and possibilities) may be significantly inhibited by the intense focus on maternal identification and role definition.¹⁸ The demands of motherhood can prematurely solidify a single role, limiting the exploration of other potential identities and hindering the development of a well-integrated sense of self.¹⁹

Following adolescence, Erikson proposed that individuals progress through three further stages of adulthood: intimacy versus self-absorption (forming close relationships), generativity versus stagnation (contributing to society), and finally, integrity versus despair (reflecting on one's life).²⁰ A fundamental tenet of Erikson's theory is that each of these eight stages presents a developmental crisis. This signifies that each stage offers both the opportunity for significant psychological growth through successful resolution of the central conflict and the potential for negative outcomes if the challenges are not adequately addressed. Consequently, each stage is inherently associated with its own unique form of emotional stress.

The Influence of Religion and Culture on Adolescent Sexual Behaviour

Religion, as a pervasive social institution, often exerts a significant influence on this process, shaping adolescents' understanding of sexuality through doctrines, norms, and community practices. A substantial body of research highlights the role of religion in promoting more conservative attitudes towards premarital sex, contraception, abortion, and same-sex relationships. Many religious traditions emphasize chastity before marriage and procreation within marriage as the primary legitimate context for sexual expression. These teachings often translate into stricter parental monitoring, delayed sexual initiation, and lower rates of sexual activity among adolescents with religious involvement.

Regnerus also argued that the mechanism through which religion exerts this influence is multifaceted. Religious institutions provide explicit moral frameworks and guidelines regarding sexual behavior, often reinforced through sermons, religious education, and community discussions. Social control within religious communities can also play a significant role, with adherence to religious norms influencing social standing and acceptance.²¹ Moreover, parents' religiosity often mediates the relationship, with more religious parents more likely to transmit conservative sexual values and implement stricter rules on dating and sexual behavior.²² However, Wright argued that the influence of religion on adolescent sexuality is not uniformly restrictive. Some religious traditions and communities may offer more nuanced perspectives on sexuality, emphasizing love, intimacy, and responsible decision-making within a broader spiritual context. Furthermore, religious involvement can provide adolescents with strong social support networks, which can be protective against risky sexual behaviors and promote overall well-being. For some adolescents, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds, religious communities can offer a sense of belonging and identity, potentially mitigating the negative impacts of societal stigma.

The specific doctrines, interpretations, and levels of adherence vary considerably, leading to diverse experiences and outcomes for adolescents. Denominational differences, the level of individual religiosity, and the specific social context of the religious community all contribute to the complexity of this relationship.

Recent research by Tshelane and Tshelane extends these findings to cultural contexts, highlighting that in predominantly Christian countries, regular church attendance and prayer are strongly related to postponement of sexual initiation, independent of permissive sexual attitudes.

In these contexts, religious salience (the personal importance of religion) appears to exert its influence primarily through shaping attitudes toward sexual permissiveness, which in turn mediates actual sexual

¹⁸ Holger Busch and Jan Hofer, "Self-Regulation and Milestones of Adult Development: Intimacy and Generativity.," *Developmental Psychology* 48, no. 1 (2012): 282–93, <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0025521>.

¹⁹ Busch and Hofer, "Self-Regulation and Milestones of Adult Development: Intimacy and Generativity."

²⁰ Erikson, *Childhood and society*, 15-45.

²¹ Mark D. Regnerus, "Talking About Sex: Religion and Patterns of Parent–Child Communication about Sex and Contraception," *The Sociological Quarterly* 46, no. 1 (February 1, 2005): 79–105, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1533-8525.2005.00005.x>.

²² Regnerus, "Talking About Sex: Religion and Patterns of Parent–Child Communication about Sex and Contraception," 79 – 105.

behavior.²³ Tshelane and Tshelane support the Path analysis model in which both direct and indirect effects of religiosity operate, with church attendance and prayer maintaining direct associations with delayed sexual initiation. At the same time, religious salience acts mainly through attitudinal mediation.²⁴

Longest et al. also argued that religion can potentially influence when adolescents initiate sexual activity by acting as a form of social control. Social control theorists argue that social bonds restrain everyone's inherent tendency towards deviance. Therefore, adolescents strongly connected to religious organizations with conservative views on sex may be more likely to delay sexual behavior. Religion functions in part as a social control mechanism by establishing consequences for violating its norms, including feelings of guilt and shame, social stigma, and the fear of divine retribution. The awareness of these potential repercussions encourages adherence to religious teachings. However, when religious individuals act against these norms, they may experience psychological distress in the form of cognitive dissonance, a conflict between their beliefs and actions. For instance, religious teenagers who engage in premarital sex, a proscribed behavior in many faiths, might feel "unworthy". To alleviate this discomfort, individuals typically adjust either their behavior or their beliefs. Consequently, a sexually active religious teen could stop engaging in premarital sex or modify his or her religious views or practices to reduce the conflict. In essence, combining social control theories of religion with cognitive dissonance theory helps explain the potential reciprocal relationship between sexual behavior and religiosity.²⁵ The findings align with existing research, demonstrating a significant connection between religiosity and adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviors.

Odimegwu also argued that the level of religious commitment appears to exert a more significant influence on adolescents' attitudes and behaviors than mere religious affiliation.²⁶ This underscores the importance of understanding not only the religious identity of adolescents, but also the depth of their religious involvement. Despite these insights, the relationship between religiosity and adolescent sexuality remains complex and warrants further investigation. In particular, longitudinal studies are needed to unravel causal pathways and temporal dynamics, providing a clearer picture of how religious beliefs and practices shape sexual decision-making over time.²⁷

Longest advocates that, given that religion plays a substantial role in influencing adolescents' sexual lifestyles, religious leaders and institutions are uniquely positioned to contribute meaningfully to public health initiatives. By actively mobilizing their congregations and communities, they can promote awareness, foster healthy attitudes, and support HIV/AIDS prevention efforts. Harnessing the influence of religious networks could be a powerful strategy in reducing risky behaviors and improving health outcomes among young people.²⁸

Amy raised a major concern by contending that the prevalent view in research on religiosity and adolescent sexual behavior assumes a one-way influence, where religious beliefs and practices shape sexual choices. However, this unidirectional model may oversimplify the relationship, potentially exaggerating the impact of religiosity on the initiation of sexual activity. A crucial oversight is the lack of investigation into the possibility that becoming sexually active might, in turn, influence the subsequent religiosity of an individual, suggesting a reciprocal relationship.²⁹

²³ Emma Tshelane and Molaodi Tshelane, "Cultural and Religious Influences on Adolescent Sexual Behaviour and the Use of Participatory Visual Methodology by Basotho Learners in South Africa," *African Journal of Religion Philosophy and Culture* 2, no. 1 (June 1, 2021): 39–56, <https://doi.org/10.31920/2634-7644/2020/v2n1a3>.

²⁴ Tshelane and Tshelane, "Cultural and Religious Influences on Adolescent Sexual Behaviour and the Use of Participatory Visual Methodology by Basotho Learners in South Africa."

²⁵ Kyle C. Longest and Jeremy E. Uecker, "Moral Communities and Sex: The Religious Influence on Young Adult Sexual Behavior and Regret," *Sociological Perspectives* 61, no. 3 (June 8, 2018): 361–82, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0731121417730015>.

²⁶ Clifford Odimegwu, "Influence of Religion on Adolescent Sexual Attitudes and Behaviour among Nigerian University Students: Affiliation or Commitment?," *African Journal of Reproductive Health* 9, no. 2 (August 1, 2005): 125, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3583469>.

²⁷ Odimegwu, "Influence of Religion on Adolescent Sexual Attitudes and Behaviour among Nigerian University Students: Affiliation or Commitment?"

²⁸ Longest and Uecker, "Moral Communities and Sex: The Religious Influence on Young Adult Sexual Behavior and Regret."

²⁹ Amy Adamczyk, "The Effects of Religious Contextual Norms, Structural Constraints, and Personal Religiosity on Abortion Decisions," *Social Science Research* 37, no. 2 (June 2008): 657–72, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2007.09.003>.

Cross-sectional research provides mixed support for the idea that sexual behavior and religiosity mutually influence each other. A study by Steven found that religiosity predicted sexual attitudes and behaviors, and sexual permissiveness predicted religious attendance.³⁰ In contrast, Amy and Terrence's study showed that sexual intercourse negatively predicted religiosity but not the other way around. Due to the cross-sectional design of both studies, which only assess relationships at one time point and do not track changes, the direction of any causal links remains speculative.³¹

Using longitudinal data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health, Meier investigated the bidirectional associations between initial religiosity and the transition to first sexual intercourse among a sample of 15–18-year-old virgin adolescents over 1 year. The results indicated a statistically significant negative relationship between baseline religiosity and the likelihood of initiating sexual activity for female participants (controlling for sexual attitudes), but not for male participants. In contrast, no significant association was observed between the initiation of sexual intercourse and subsequent changes in religiosity for male or female adolescents.³² Consequently, the study provides partial support for the unidirectional influence of religiosity on sexual behavior among female adolescents, but does not demonstrate a reciprocal effect of initial sexual experience on religiosity.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study adopts the deontology theory proposed by Immanuel Kant. The theory is relevant for the present study as the issue of sexuality and teenage pregnancy is guided by ethical principles within indigenous Ghanaian culture and Christianity.

Deontology is an ethical theory that emphasizes that inherent morality is based on adherence to rules or duties, rather than the consequences of those actions. It is a normative ethical theory grounded in rules that highlights the moral aspects of human actions, particularly those related to obligations and responsibilities.³³ Deontological ethics judges the morality of actions based on whether they adhere to rules or duties, not on their outcomes. Deontologists view punishment as a proactive measure against unlawful behavior, and their ethical theories are characterized as non-consequentialist. This means that deontologists focus on the individual's choices or decisions, which are guided by their principles, beliefs, or ideals, rather than being primarily concerned with the outcomes of those choices or decisions.³⁴ This perspective relies on the appropriateness of ideals to guide one's behavior in specific circumstances. The ethics of duties and the ethics of rights and justice represent two fundamental theories that explore non-consequentialist ideas. These non-consequentialist concepts are rooted in principles concerning universal rights and wrongs, as well as responsibilities. Immanuel Kant, recognized as the founder of deontological ethics, famously stated, “the only proof in the consciousness of a man is that he has character.”³⁵ Voegelin posits that character is the bedrock of individual existence. He argues that failing to build this foundation is a moral transgression, while surpassing its inherent limitations is an impossible endeavor.³⁶ This means that these ethical obligations should be universally applicable to all individuals, regardless of location, and they are non-negotiable. Kaptein and Wempe argue that while the outcomes of an action do not determine its moral nature, this does not imply that deontologists ignore consequences. An action that violates a moral duty is certainly considered immoral.³⁷ While adhering to established moral codes is crucial, it does not automatically guarantee that

³⁰ Steven E. Barkan, “Religiosity and Premarital Sex in Adulthood,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 45, no. 3 (September 11, 2006): 407–17, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5906.2006.00315.x>.

³¹ A. M. Burdette and T. D. Hill, “Religious Involvement and Transitions into Adolescent Sexual Activities,” *Sociology of Religion* 70, no. 1 (March 1, 2009): 28–48, <https://doi.org/10.1093/socrel/srp011>.

³² A. M. Meier, “Adolescents’ Transition to First Intercourse, Religiosity, and Attitudes about Sex,” *Social Forces* 81, no. 3 (March 1, 2003): 1031–52, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sof.2003.0039>.

³³ Schalk W. Vorster, “Fighting Corruption – a Philosophical Approach,” *In Die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi* 47, no. 1 (November 29, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v47i1.651>.

³⁴ Thorian R. Harris, “Moral Perfection as the Counterfeit of Virtue,” *Dao* 22, no. 1 (March 5, 2023): 43–61, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11712-022-09866-4>.

³⁵ Eric Voegelin, *Anamnesis*, trans. Gerhardt Niemeyer (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978).

³⁶ Voegelin, *Anamnesis*, 96.

³⁷ M. Kaptein and J. Wempe, *The Balanced Company: A Corporate Integrity Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 24.

those actions are inherently morally correct. Kaptein and Wempe contend that the outcomes of an individual's actions should be considered an integral part of the behavior itself. Moreover, they argue that the true moral value of an action lies in its alignment with specific ethical principles.³⁸ For example, refraining from fornication is a moral imperative, not simply a means to avoid negative consequences.

Kant's philosophy is grounded in two fundamental assertions: first, that the only source of moral goodness is the will, and second, that goodwill operates based on universal reasoning. He posits that individuals have sole control over their will, enabling them to select the principles they adopt mentally. Additionally, it is crucial to recognize that the will, which serves as the foundation for goodness, is validated by reason.³⁹ This relationship illustrates the uniqueness of individuals and indicates that reason is essential to guide them toward adhering to moral ideals and maxims.

Kant posits that individuals should depend on their own reasoning abilities to discern their duties, rather than relying on religious guidance. John R. Silber expresses this perspective while reflecting on Kant's view by stating that human beings possess a sacred will; if they were purely rational entities, they would naturally adhere to the moral law without succumbing to temptation. They would not experience obligations or require incentives to follow this moral law, as it would inherently govern their behavior. However, human beings are not purely rational; their will encompasses not only practical reason but also the capacity for desire. Consequently, the moral law applicable to pure rational beings transforms into the categorical imperative for humans, who, being both rational and sensitive creatures, need tangible incentives to meet the demands of reason.⁴⁰ Silber, therefore, argues that reason should not only have the authority to establish laws for the human will but must also generate a meaningful motivation within the will to adhere to those laws.⁴¹

Kant's ethical framework centers around what he calls categorical imperatives. His principle asserts that individuals should be regarded as ends in themselves, rather than merely as means to achieve other goals.⁴² This suggests that individuals deserve to be treated with dignity, as each person is autonomous and rational. Consequently, treating someone merely as a means to an end means using them as a tool to achieve another goal. For instance, when consumers buy products made by workers who receive unacceptably low wages, ensuring that these goods are sold at low prices effectively treats the workers as a means to an end, neglecting the responsibilities owed to them. In contrast, purchasing certified 'fair trade' products acknowledge the obligation to ensure that the workers involved are compensated fairly for their labor.

Kant acknowledged certain limitations in his theoretical framework, particularly the understanding that individuals cannot be 'programmed' through sociological or educational methods. Consequently, there is no mechanism to ensure that individuals become morally good or deserving of happiness.⁴³ Kant argued that individuals must undergo education to cultivate goodness. However, educators themselves are often still grappling with their own instincts and require the very guidance they are meant to provide. This creates a paradox: The moral education essential for individuals is reliant on the existence of virtuous educators, who must themselves have received proper moral training. Since no one is entirely free from sexual sin—whether inherent or learned—the challenge of achieving moral education for humanity remains fundamentally unresolved, both theoretically and practically.⁴⁴

Deontology's strength lies in its tendency to articulate moral obligations as clear and direct prescriptions readily comprehensible to individuals, in contrast to the often burdensome and uncertain calculations inherent in consequentialist approaches. Blackburn aptly describes it as the ethics of the police and the law courts, emphasizing its intrinsic clarity and certainty. Despite this advantage, the application of

³⁸ Kaptein and Wempe, *The Balanced Company: A Corporate Integrity Approach*.

³⁹ I. Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1981), 41.

⁴⁰ John R. Silber, "Kant and the Mythic Roots of Reason," *Dialectica* 35, no. 1/2 (1981): 167–94, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1746-8361.1981.tb01501.x>.

⁴¹ Silber, "Kant and the Mythic Roots of Reason," 23.

⁴² Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, 72.

⁴³ Silber, "Kant and the Mythic Roots of Reason," 26–27.

⁴⁴ Silber, "Kant and the Mythic Roots of Reason," 26–27.

fixed rules can sometimes yield crude justice, resulting in undesirable or unworkable outcomes, particularly in contexts that extend beyond their initial scope.

In the context of this study, deontology serves as a foundation for understanding the expected behavior of adolescents, who must follow rules of ethical living that are influenced not only by their indigenous culture and Christian beliefs but also by their personal judgments.

METHODOLOGY

The research used an interpretivist framework and a case study approach to investigate the personal experiences and ethical perspectives of adolescents and community leaders. The Case study research design allows for a detailed examination of a particular population or phenomenon. It is especially useful for exploring the underlying causes, contexts, and processes associated with a particular issue. The purposive sampling approach was used for the study, as it allows the researcher to focus on a particular demographic context, most suited to providing the necessary information. By selecting participants from various subgroups, such as pregnant adolescents, chiefs, elders, and family members, the researcher can gain a more comprehensive understanding of teenage pregnancy in Mfanteman and its related issues. The population of this study comprise pregnant teenagers (six), teenage mothers (five) and adolescents (50), parents, traditional leaders of Nkusukum and Mankessim traditional areas, leaders and ministers of Churches in selected communities (Presbyterian Church, Ghana, Assemblies of God Church, Ghana, and Musama Disco Christo Church) in Mfanteman municipality who know the topic under study. The study used both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data was gathered using semi-structured interviews and surveys administered to adolescents, pregnant teenagers, teenage mothers, parents, traditional leaders, spiritual leaders, and Pastors in the municipality. Secondary data were gathered from books, published and unpublished articles, the internet and other electronic sources of data related to the subject under study.

Braun and Clarke's thematic approach was used for the analysis of data. Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis approach comprises six steps.⁴⁵ In the first step, the researcher must become acquainted with the data through multiple readings, note-taking and an active engagement with the material. In the second step, the initial codes - the initial thoughts and ideas which arose when viewing the data were identified.⁴⁶ The third step involved reviewing the codes and organising them into potential themes. The fourth step required the definition and naming of the themes, articulating their meaning. The fifth step required the researcher to revisit the data to ensure that the themes accurately reflect them. The sixth and final step required the reporting of the findings, which involves clearly articulating the themes and their meanings.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section provides an in-depth examination of Christian and African traditional moral norms and values regarding sexuality and how these shape the sexual attitudes and behaviours of adolescents in the Mfanteman Municipality of Ghana's Central Region. Guided by an interpretivist paradigm and a phenomenological approach, the chapter investigates the complex interaction between Ghanaian cultural beliefs, Christian influences, socio-economic conditions, and possible interventions that inform adolescent sexuality in the country.

Christian and Traditional Cultural Moral Norms and Values and How They Shape the Sex and Sexuality of Adolescents in Mfanteman Municipality

The study showed that both Christian and indigenous religious moral principles significantly influence young people's perceptions of sex and sexuality in Mfanteman. These adolescents predominantly absorb sexual ethics through religious teachings, expressed through concepts such as sin, divine command, spiritual purity, taboo practices, and community norms. Christian doctrine emphasizes premarital abstinence as an act of

⁴⁵ Lorelli S Nowell et al., "Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 16, no. 1 (2017): 1609406917733847.

⁴⁶ Norman K Denzin and Yvonna S Lincoln, "Introduction: The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research.," 2008.

adherence to divine will and an obligation for believers to uphold their bodies as sacred. While Fante traditional customs view sexual relations before marriage as a transgression against ancestral laws, which leads to spiritual and social repercussions. A significant finding from the study is that ethical principles primarily influence an individual's personal sense of what is right and wrong. Adolescents experience considerable fear, guilt, and unease about sexual activities before marriage, suggesting that they have systematically absorbed the moral norms and values of the community. Therefore, their sexual behavior is shaped not by a lack of moral understanding or a rejection of values, but by a conflict between deeply held moral beliefs and the realities of their lives. Many adolescents engage in sexual activity privately, not because they deny moral guidelines, but because those guidelines are perceived as rigid, harsh, and uncompromising. This secretive conduct indicates an acceptance of moral principles in thought, yet a practical deviation from them in action.

This clearly reflects Kant's argument that moral actions should arise from duty (willpower) influenced by reasoning, rather than inclination (desire).⁴⁷ According to Sigmund Freud's theory of Psychosexual Development, adolescents progress into the Genital stage, during which their sexual feelings intensify.⁴⁸ In the context of Mfanteman, however, these inherent desires (the Id) are in conflict with rigorous moral codes imposed by a particularly severe Superego (sexual norms and values of Christianity and Traditional culture). This rigorous Superego develops as young individuals internalize moral teachings. The practices of community shaming, family criticism, and spiritual repercussions of premarital sex, along with Christian teachings about spiritual defilement and sins against one's own body, create a strong moral structure. According to Sigmund Freud's theory of Psychosexual Development, this situation creates significant psychological pressure for teenagers. They accept the perspectives of authority figures such as Queenmothers, elders, and pastors until these influences become integrated into their personal conscience.⁴⁹ Consequently, their Ego is perpetually influenced by feelings of guilt and fear. When young people view premarital sex as a serious wrongdoing that leads to physical or spiritual consequences, it illustrates the deep influence of these strict Christian and traditional norms on the moral framework and thoughts of adolescents in the municipality.

According to Problem Behavior Theory, possessing strong moral intentions alone cannot impact actions if there is a lack of external supports like mentorship, ethical education, and adult supervision. In such situations, the Perceived Environment System—which encompasses peer pressure and media influence—gains greater significance in predicting behaviors, including secretive premarital sexual activities.⁵⁰ From the data, the reality is that adolescents engage in sexual activities secretly to evade public shame underscores this breakdown. This behavior highlights how, when conventional controls are ineffective, young individuals attempt to mitigate the immediate risks of social punishment, thereby fostering environments where Problem Behavior can develop without parental and institutional supervision. The exploration of teenage sexuality in Mfanteman reveals a notable difference between deep-seated moral values and adolescent sexual behaviours.

How Christian and African Traditional Religious Moral Norms and Values Reinforce Each Other in Matters of Adolescent Sex and Sexuality

The research indicates a significant mutual reinforcement between Christian and traditional religious ethical frameworks concerning adolescent sexual behavior. Instead of being divergent, these two systems support and bolster each other. Christian sexual principles are frequently interpreted using traditional concepts such as shame, ancestral honor, and spiritual defilement, while traditional customs increasingly employ Christian terminology such as sin, atonement, and divine retribution. This merging of systems results in a unified moral framework where engaging in premarital sex is characterized as simultaneously a transgression against God,

⁴⁷ Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*.

⁴⁸ Avinash De Sousa, "Freudian Theory and Consciousness: A Conceptual AnalysisFNx08," *Mens Sana Monographs* 9, no. 1 (2011): 210, <https://doi.org/10.4103/0973-1229.77437>.

⁴⁹ De Sousa, "Freudian Theory and Consciousness: A Conceptual AnalysisFNx08," 210-217.

⁵⁰ R Jessor and S L Jessor, *Problem Behavior and Psychosocial Development: A Longitudinal Study of Youth* (Academic Press, 1977), 65.

an affront to ancestors, and a menace to the destruction of family reputation. Clergy, traditional community leaders, and parents often draw on both sets of principles interchangeably when guiding young people.

However, the study indicates that strong institutional reinforcement mechanisms do not match the application of moral values and norms. Traditional sexual education rituals have largely diminished, while Christian moral instruction is frequently inconsistent and delivered as sermons rather than through relational dialogue. This creates a disconnect between moral expectations and practical moral life, thereby weakening the effectiveness of behavioral regulation despite the strong moral conviction of adolescents.

From the findings, it can be asserted that Christian teachings and African Traditional Religions in Ghana advocate for distinct moral responsibilities concerning adolescent sexuality, particularly emphasizing abstinence, parental respect, and community accountability. These responsibilities are closely in line with deontological ethics due to their rigid moral framework and focus on duty. However, to be entirely consistent with Kantian ethics, these norms need to be universal, freely chosen, and grounded in rational thought.⁵¹ Traditions that excessively depend on authority, shame, or discriminatory practices do not meet this standard. The strength of these common ethical principles is rooted in their deep respect for human dignity and societal harmony. However, a deontological perspective emphasizes that genuine morality necessitates freedom, justice, and rational thought and not merely compliance.⁵² Although cultural standards can help with moral growth, they must also adapt to meet the requirements of justice and the inherent value of all individuals.

The Cultural and Religious Factors Contributing to or Curtailing the Prevalence of Teenage Pregnancy in Mfanteman Municipality in the Central Region of Ghana

The research indicates that religious and traditional cultural values serve primarily as stronger deterrents against adolescent pregnancies than as a contributing factor. Participants consistently stated that without these ethical frameworks, youth sexual activity and pregnancy rates would be significantly higher. The apprehension of divine retribution, ancestral disapproval, social disgrace, and family dishonor acts as a caution against explicit sexual engagement. Nonetheless, the study identifies several cultural and faith-based elements that indirectly play a role in teenage pregnancies and adolescents' engagement in illicit sex. These include a lack of open discussion about matters related to sex, strict moral codes that discourage openness, and the social stigma associated with sexual mistakes. Adolescents who become sexually active frequently avoid seeking birth control information or reproductive health care for fear of moral condemnation by religious leaders. The sole emphasis on abstinence, unaccompanied by a comprehensive sexual health education, increases the risks when sexual activity occurs.

The Effectiveness of Christian and Traditional Cultural Interventions on Controlling Adolescents' Sexuality in Mfanteman Municipality

The study concludes that religious and traditional ethical principles in Mfanteman are very effective at influencing moral awareness but less successful at influencing behavior. This is attributed to weakened institutional transmission, insufficient guidance, and an ethical environment driven by apprehension rather than by supported moral development. Teenage pregnancy and adolescent premarital sex emerge not from a breakdown of morality but from systemic deficiencies within robust ethical structures. According to some respondents:

*Christianity continues to have a significant influence on our young people. Even when they go astray, they are aware that it is inappropriate due to the church's teachings. Without these lessons, the incidence of teenage pregnancies in this area would likely have increased dramatically. What currently restrains the youth is their fear of God and the belief that premarital sex is sinful. If we as ministers cease to promote sexual purity, I can confidently say that moral decline will prevail entirely. However, I still believe we could do more to bring total moral sanity to the community.*⁵³

⁵¹ Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, 40.

⁵² Silber, "Kant and the Mythic Roots of Reason," 23.

⁵³ Personal Interview with Rev. Ike Ewusi Morgan (Pastor, Progressive Life Assemblies of God (A/G), Saltpond) at the Church Premise on 16th March, 2025.

Another minister echoed the same response when asked about the effectiveness of Christian and traditional sexual norms and values in the municipality:

*Certainly, they are effective. Although they may not deter every young person, most refrain from certain actions because they fear disobeying God. Even those who succumb to temptation acknowledge feelings of guilt and understand that God is unhappy with their choices. This consciousness alone serves as a powerful deterrent. Without it, young people would engage in any behavior without apprehension. Our sermons on the body being holy and the importance of self-control continue to influence many young people. Some approach us and admit that if it were not for the fear of sin and the embarrassment of letting down the church, they would have engaged in sexual activities much earlier. Therefore, Christianity has a significant impact. It helps prevent complete moral decay.*⁵⁴

According to one of the traditional leaders,

*They continue to be effective. Although Bragoro is on the decline, the underlying principles—honor for womanhood, virginity, and family dignity—remain strong within the community. It is the fear of disgrace that encourages many girls to maintain discipline. If these customs were to vanish entirely, the outcome would be chaos. Our traditions still help prevent many children from misbehaving. Without the societal stigma attached to Kyiribra (premarital pregnancy), the rate of teenage pregnancies would be significantly higher than what we currently observe.*⁵⁵

One adolescent expressed this by stating,

They do. Even when I erred, I recognized it as wrong because I was raised to believe that having sex before marriage is a serious sin that leads to spiritual repercussions. If I hadn't been exposed to these teachings, I might have engaged in more harmful behavior at an earlier age. These teachings keep us safe, even if we occasionally stumble. Absolutely. They strongly advise against it. The influence of peers is significant, but the teachings of the church hold a greater place in our hearts. Without these teachings, we would likely follow our friends into any situation. (TEENMO 3)

The impact of Christian and traditional cultural moral norms in Mfanteman is rooted in a moral logic similar to Divine Command. Both frameworks express sexual ethics as directives from a higher authority, be it God or the ancestors and thus are not subject to questions. This establishes fixed moral restrictions, nurtures self-imposed moral discipline, and offers young people a moral structure that goes beyond individual urges or social pressure. In a nutshell, respondents acknowledge the massive effectiveness of Christian and traditional moral norms and values in the municipality.

The Syntax Between Christian and Fante Traditional Sexual Norms and Values and Adolescent Morality in Mfantseman Municipality

From the study, it is deduced that in the Mfanteman Municipality, the ethical development of adolescents is influenced by a complex interaction between Christian morals and traditional Fante values regarding sexuality. This interaction is characterized as a moral syntax, a cohesive framework that integrates norms, restrictions, and expectations from both belief systems to shape adolescent views on right and wrong. The teachings of Christianity, grounded in divine command, alongside Fante's traditional values, based on ancestral norms and community identity, establish a dual moral framework that significantly affects how young individuals perceive sexual conduct, purity, and accountability. Although each system operates according to its own principles, the findings indicate that they frequently support each other, forming a defined moral context, although contradictions within beliefs diminish their overall impact.

However, the relationship between Christianity and Fante culture is predominantly harmonious in terms of their syntactic elements. Both belief systems generate a duty-based moral framework similar to

⁵⁴ Personal Interview with Rev. Kwadwo Atua Ateko (District Minister), The Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG) at his residence on 15th March, 2025.

⁵⁵ Personal Interview with Omankyeame Kofi Hagan (Omankyeame of Mankessim traditional council) at his residence on 21st February, 2025.

Kant's deontological ethics, where premarital sex is not viewed as a personal choice but as a breach of a fundamental moral obligation. This links to the Categorical Imperative: both Christian and traditional values emphasize that sexual conduct should be based on responsibility, respect for oneself and others, and commitment within the confines of marriage. Breaches of these responsibilities are sin in Christian contexts or shame in traditional contexts and represent failures to adhere to universal moral standards.

Further, both Christian and Fante cultural principles continue to have a significant influence on adolescent sexuality. Participants highlighted that, in the absence of these moral frameworks, sexual activities among teens would likely be worse, resulting in increased instances of teenage pregnancy. Both pastors and parents noted that Christianity serves as a "strong deterrent," where feelings of guilt, fear of sin, and the wish to avoid disappointing God act as practical moral boundaries. Traditional cultural norms also remain powerful regulators, particularly through the fear of *kyiribra* and the shame linked to tarnishing the family image. Adolescents themselves acknowledged that these values offer guidance, discipline, and moral awareness, even if they sometimes struggle to adhere to them.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study proposes the following recommendations:

- A. This study advocates for a deliberate shift in both religious and traditional ethical education, moving from merely listing prohibitions to fostering comprehensive moral formation. Although ideals such as abstinence, chastity, and sexual self-control remain vital ethical guidelines, they must be accompanied by ethical reasoning suitable for their age, emotional intelligence, and practical life capabilities. Young people should learn not only what is disallowed, but also the rationale behind these rules and how to conduct themselves ethically when faced with real-world social pressures. Without this integrated approach, moral principles remain theoretical, leading to fear rather than the development of personal moral responsibility.
- B. Families should be recognized as the primary setting for moral education concerning sexuality. Parents and guardians should be encouraged through community discussions, religious institutions, and local leadership groups to overcome societal hesitations surrounding sexual topics. When parents do not engage in sexual education, adolescents gain moral awareness but lack practical direction. Structured programmes for parent training should be developed to help families convey ethical principles with clarity, empathy, and consistency.
- C. Traditional norms surrounding sexuality and ceremonies marking the transition to adulthood should be re-evaluated and adjusted, rather than entirely discarded. Although certain specific practices might need ethical modification due to contemporary human rights considerations, the foundational moral principles they embody, such as collective well-being, the virtue of patience, and sexual self-restraint, continue to hold significant worth. Modern rituals and community-supported mentorship can offer young people moral direction that is culturally appropriate and aligns effectively with Christian instruction.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the study, a prominent analytical pattern is the ongoing presence of moral awareness among adolescents who breach sexual norms. Whether manifested as feelings of guilt, anxiety over divine retribution, fear of family disgrace, or adherence to cultural traditions, young individuals do not dismiss the fundamental values. Rather, their conflicts highlight the disparity between ingrained responsibilities and real-world circumstances. This disparity indicates the deterioration of the institutional framework that previously upheld those responsibilities, including traditional ceremonies such as *Bragoro*, parental control, community guidance, and steady religious teachings. As these systems weaken, adolescents find themselves with moral obligations that, while absolute in theory, lack support in practice, resulting in a conflict between their beliefs and actions. This contradiction is heightened by socio-economic challenges that directly hinder adolescents' ability to act in line with the moral principles they uphold. Poverty, lack of resources, restricted educational access, and the acceptance of transactional sexual interactions create coercive environments in which ethical

decision-making is compromised. Kantian deontology posits that moral obligations are pursued under conditions of autonomy; however, the material circumstances described by participants reveal situations where choices are influenced by necessity rather than by free, rational thought. In summary, the evidence suggests that a fundamental change is necessary. Morality cannot rely solely on fear, shame, or divine commands; likewise, traditional practices cannot thrive without cultural validation and institutional sustainability. To foster effective moral development for young people in Mfanteman, it is essential to establish ongoing intergenerational dialogue, culturally relevant mentorship, economic support networks that lessen vulnerability, and sexual education that complements rather than replaces existing moral perspectives. By re-establishing the connection between beliefs, teachings and real-life experiences, the community can improve young people's ability to make morally informed choices that respect the ethical values of Christians and Fante while addressing modern challenges.

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