



Premarital Sex among JHS Students in Ashanti Region of Ghana: Some Lessons for Christian Advocacy

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ABSTRACT

Youth engagement in premarital sexual practice is reported to be increasing globally. This is not different in Ghana. In Ghana, the Ashanti Region is reported to have the highest rate of teenage pregnancy. This presupposes the prevalence of premarital sexual practice among the youth in the region. The study sought to assess the prevalence of premarital sexual practices among Junior High students in the Ashanti Region of Ghana and the factors accounting for that in order to suggest some lessons for Christian advocacy. The study used the Trede Adventist Junior High School as a case study. The descriptive-analytical method was used to discuss the data collected. The study uncovered that premarital sexual practice is prevalent among students of the Trede Adventist JHS. Peer pressure, poverty, poor parenting, dating, sexual urge, covetousness, media, lack of sex education and drug abuse were mentioned as the influencing factors. The study observed that there is a need for Christian advocacy in arresting this premarital sex menace, and this could be done through the provision of sex education and counselling services, education and awareness creation, job creation and provision of scholarships. This study provides insight into the construction of public theology for youth on similar issues.

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INTRODUCTION

Premarital sexual activities among adolescents have been reported to be increasing globally.¹ In Africa, studies has shown that youth start engaging in active sex from around 12-13 years of age.² This is not different in Ghana. In Ghana, youth between the ages of 15 and 24, who are not married, do engage in

¹ Ayodele O Adeoye, Omolayo Ola and Bose Aliu, "Prevalence of premarital sex and factors influencing it among students in a private tertiary institution in Nigeria," *International Journal of Psychology and Counselling* 4(1) (2012): 6.

² Ali Haruna and Alhaji Ahmadu Ibrahim, "Gender, Age Differentials: Implications in Premarital Sex among Adolescents and Young Adults," *Global Journal of Arts Humanities and Social Sciences* 2(2) (2014): 70.

premarital sex.³ In affirmation, Geugten, Meijel, Uyl and Vries have observed that youth in Ghana engage more in premarital sexual relationships as compared to the past.⁴

According to the Ghana Health Service District Health Information Management Health System, more than half a million teenagers in Ghana aged 10 to 19 years over the last five years (from 2016 and 2020) have gotten pregnant. Within these five years, 13,444 teenagers between the ages 10 and 14 got pregnant, while some 542,131 teenagers aged 15 to 19 years got pregnant. That is on average in Ghana, over 112,800 teenagers get pregnant annually.⁵

Statistics from the Ghana Education Service (GES) have it that the Ashanti Region has the highest teenage pregnancy rate in Ghana.⁶ According to the Ashanti Regional Girl Child Coordinator of GES, Hannah Amponsah, there were 1228 teenage pregnancy cases in the Ashanti Region of Ghana in the year 2019, of which 128 cases happened among upper primaries, with 783 in Junior High Schools and 310 cases in the Senior High Schools. This presents an indication of the prevalence of premarital sexual practice among students in the Ashanti Region of Ghana.

The study, therefore, seeks to assess the prevalence of premarital sexual practices among Junior High students in the Ashanti Region of Ghana and the factors accounting for that in order to suggest some lessons for Christian advocacy. The study uses the Trede Adventist Junior High School as a case study. As a mission school, students of Trede Adventist Junior High School enjoy weekly devotional sermons from the Scriptures, which normally admonish and entreat them to live a morally upright life. The study will also uncover whether such spiritual activity has a positive effect on the moral character of the students.

The study answers these questions: Do students in Trede Adventist Junior High School engage in premarital sex? What are the factors accounting for the students' engagement in premarital sex? What are some of the lessons for Christian advocacy on premarital sex? Whilst other issues affecting the students could be studied, this study would specifically focus on the students' engagement in premarital sex and its influencing factors.

The study is significant because it serves as an insight for parents, teachers, Christian bodies, educationists, policymakers and stakeholders of education. Again, it adds to the existing documents on premarital sexual practices among students in Ghana, and the strategies to arrest this menace.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Youth/Adolescent

In Ghana, Junior High students are usually youth or of adolescent age, there is, therefore, a need to provide a working definition of these terms for this study. There exists a diverse understanding of the term "youth."⁷

The term youth is mostly interchanged with adolescent, teenager, kid, childhood, early adulthood, puberty, tender age, juvenescence, minority, teenage, or young person.⁸ Basically, youth is defined as "the quality or condition of being young, immature, or inexperienced."⁹ It is seen as the

³ Charlotte Ofori and Francis N.A. Dodoo, "Young People's Perceptions about Premarital Sex, Perceived Parent Values about Sex and Premarital Sexual Behaviour in Ghana," accessed 12 October 2018, <https://paa.confex.com/paa/2016/mediafile/ExtendedAbstract/Paper8002/PAA%202016-Ofori%20and%20Dodoo.pdf>

⁴ Jolien van der Geugten, Berno van Meijel, Marion H.G. den Uyl and Nanne K. de Vries, "Virginity, Sex, Money and Desire: Premarital Sexual Behaviour of Youths in Bolgatanga Municipality, Ghana," *African Journal of Reproductive Health* December 17(3) (2013): 93.

⁵ Nii Larte Lartey, "Teenage Pregnancies in Ghana hit 555,575 in five years," *CNR*(blog), June, 2021, accessed April 11, 2022, <https://citinewsroom.com/2021/06/teenage-pregnancies-in-ghana-hit-555575-in-five-years/amp/>.

⁶ Evans Annang, "Ashanti Region has the highest teenage pregnancy rate in Ghana-GES," *the Pulse* (blog), April 21, 2021, <https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.pulse.com.gh/news/local/ashanti-region-has-the-highest-teenage-pregnancy-rate-in-ghana-ges/6jmh2kn.amp>.

⁷ Dean Borgman, *A Practical Theology for Youth Ministry* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 10.

⁸ Webster's New World Thesaurus, Funk and Wagnalls ed., 1993, s.v. "Youth."

⁹ Collins Dictionary, 7th ed., 2008, s.v. "Youth."

period in-between childhood and adulthood. When a person is considered a youth, he or she is neither a child nor an adult.¹⁰

For the United Nations, youth are “those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years.”¹¹ According to the World Health Organization (WHO), adolescents are between the ages of 10 and 19 whilst youth is between the ages of 15 and 24. And young people are those aged between 10 and 24.¹² In this study, the considered age group for youth or adolescents is between 10-18 years, which is usually the age range for Junior High School students in Ghana.

Premarital sex

As the name itself suggests, premarital sex is engaging in sexual activities before marriage. For Ajiboye, Aina, Oyebanji and Awoniyi, “premarital sex is the involvement in sexual intercourse by persons who have not engaged in a marital vow or culturally recognized as having been enrolled in the marriage institution.”¹³ For Davidson, premarital sex is the “intromission of the penis by a never-married male into the vaginal tract of a never-married female. The absence of orgasm on the part of the male and/or female does not preclude the use of this definition.”¹⁴ For Abdissa, Addisie and Seifu, “Pre-marital sex is any sexual activity with an opposite-sex partner or with a same-sex partner before he/she has started a marriage life.”¹⁵ Premarital sexual behavior also involves the intentional stimulation of the genital areas before marriage which includes kissing or touching private parts, hugging and holding hands as well as vaginal intercourse.¹⁶ For Mashault, premarital sex is “generally used in reference to young people who are presumed to be of marriageable age, or will one day be married, but who are engaging in sexual practices prior to their being sanctioned within a marriage.”¹⁷ Actually, this is the definition employed for the use of premarital sex in this study.

For Abdullahi and Umar, “Pre-marital sex is an act of deviation. A deviant act is used here to refer to departure from societal norms that attract social disapproval which is likely to elicit negative sanctions.”¹⁸ In Africa, many cultures frown upon sex before marriage. For example, “Hausa culture values the institution of the family with prescriptive norms that prohibit premarital sex.”¹⁹ The traditional society discourages premarital sex and puts high charges on any man who impregnated a woman before marriage. This practice is still relevant among the *Nfantas* of Ghana, as they can make a man lie with his female sexual partner (who has died) if the marriage rite was not consummated. Also, the major religions in Ghana, Islam, Christianity and African Traditional Religion (ATR), frown

¹⁰ “Youth,” Youth Dictionary, accessed 15 May 2017, <http://www.yourdictionary.com/youth>.

¹¹ “Definition of Youth,” United Nations, accessed 15 May 2017, <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/factsheets/youth-definition.pdf>.

¹² Bekana Fekecha Hurissa, Bosen Tebeje and Hirut Megersa, “Prevalence of Pre-marital Sexual Practices and Associated Factors among Jimma Teacher Training College Students in Jimma Town, South West Shoa Zone, Oromiya Region, Ethiopia-2013,” *Journal of Women's Health Care* 4(1) (2014): 1.

¹³ Samuel Kolawole Ajiboye, Josephine Shola Aina, Temitope Oyeyemi Oyebanji and Samuel Adebayo Awoniyi, “Possible Causes of Premarital Sex Among Youths as Perceived by Lecturers of University of Ilorin, Nigeria,” *European Journal of Educational Sciences* 4(1) (2014): 2.

¹⁴ John Kenneth Davidson, “Premarital Sexual Intercourse: A Modified Approach to Axiomatic Theory Construction, (PhD Dissertation: University of Florida, 1974), 10.

¹⁵ Bayisa Abdissa, Mesfin Addisie and Wubareg Seifu, “Premarital Sexual Practices, Consequences and Associated Factors among Regular Undergraduate Female Students in Ambo University, Oromia Regional State, Central Ethiopia, 2015” *Health Science Journal* 11 (1:482) (2017): 1.

¹⁶ Badaki Olusegun Lasisi, “Knowledge of Premarital Sex and its influence on Sexual Behaviour of Adolescents in Federal Government Senior Secondary Schools in Nigeria,” *IOSR Journal of Sports and Physical Education (IOSR-JSPE)* 1(6) (2014): 39.

¹⁷ Thinandavha D. Mashau, “Cohabitation and premarital sex amongst Christian youth in South Africa today: A missional reflection,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 67(2), (2011): 1-7 (2).

¹⁸ Musa Abdullahi and Abdullah Umar, “Consequences of Pre-Marital Sex among the Youth a Study of University of Maiduguri,” *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)* 10(1) (2013): 10.

¹⁹ Abdullahi and Umar, “Consequences of Pre-Marital Sex among the Youth a Study of University of Maiduguri.”

upon premarital sex. These religions see the practice of sex before marriage as abominable and strongly teach against it.²⁰

Christian Advocacy

Advocacy has to do with pleading the cause of another. It is also about “giving private or public support to a person, an idea, an institution, a course of action or a belief.”²¹ It is giving support to a person or people who are disadvantaged. Advocacy aims to influence public policy and resource allocation decisions in relation to political, economic, and social systems, and it may include many activities.²² Advocacy is achieved by able men or women through public education, dialogue and consultation with the right institutions. Through advocacy, God’s love, care, sovereignty, power and justice are demonstrated to all of His creation. Advocacy is geared toward changing the course of history.²³

Christian advocacy, for that matter, is the church’s response to issues of public interest. It has to do with the voice of the church in putting sanctity and order in the socio-economic system. It is the church becoming the voice of the voiceless and the hope of the hopeless in the society. Christian advocacy seeks to bring justice to those facing violence, poverty, and discrimination, and to help God’s children experience life in its fullness. It is an effort by the church to influence public policy either by dialoguing with the public officials or by educating church members on public issues. Thus, Christian advocacy answers God’s call for justice.

THE BIBLE AND PREMARITAL SEX

When an article of faith becomes a subject of debate, it has to be scrutinized primarily from a Scriptural perspective without depending heavily on any person’s interpretation.²⁴ This section of the paper seeks to add the voice of the Bible to the topic under study. It answers the question, what does the Bible teach about sex and premarital sex?

Man as a product of God’s creation was made in the image of God (Gen 1:27). However, one distinguishing characteristic of man is that he was made a sexual being. For that matter, every man (male and female), has the natural urge for sex. Thus, it can be established that the feeling for or the desire to have sex is not a sin in itself, but simply a response to nature. Sex becomes a sin when it is enjoyed before or outside marriage. The reason is that “it is only after Adam and Eve were joined together in marriage and the Lord had blessed them that he gave them the go-ahead to have sex and multiply.”²⁵ For Keller, sex is sacred and it is “very good (Gen. 1:31). God would not create and command something to be done in marriage (1 Cor. 7:3–5) that was not good.”²⁶

Biblically, God designed a “heterosexual monogamous relationship, wherein sex is to be enjoyed within the marriage context.”²⁷ God’s design for sex was for it to be expressed by and between a man and a woman, who are joined together as couples because of love. “Those who exchange their vows, ‘until death do us part’, are also given the license to share a blanket together.”²⁸ Any sexual intercourse outside the marital bond is unbiblical and against God’s plan.

Marriage is the only place where the beauty of sex can be experienced as an expression of love between husband and wife. The Song of Solomon is an allegory of such an expression; it is full of tender,

²⁰ Ajiboye, Aina, Oyebanji and Awoniyi, “Possible Causes of Premarital Sex among Youths as Perceived by Lecturers of University of Ilorin, Nigeria,” 2.

²¹ Kwabena Opuni-Frimpong, *Christian Ministry of Advocacy* (Accra, Ghana: SonLife Press, 2015), 10.

²² Opuni-Frimpong, *Christian Ministry of Advocacy*.

²³ Opuni-Frimpong, *Christian Ministry of Advocacy*, 12.

²⁴ Franz Pieper, *Christliche Dogmatic* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1924), 426.

²⁵ Mashau, “Cohabitation and premarital sex amongst Christian youth in South Africa today,” 5.

²⁶ Timothy Keller, “The Gospel and Sex,” accessed November 15, 2018, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/53189f41e4b0ee73efed7b5a/t/53405ed7e4b02233d743c913/1396727511326/The_Gospel_and_Sex.pdf.

²⁷ Mashau, “Cohabitation and premarital sex amongst Christian youth in South Africa today,” 5.

²⁸ Mashau, “Cohabitation and premarital sex amongst Christian youth in South Africa today,” 5.

passionate love that is not dirty or embarrassing to the author. Husband and wife should commit themselves to this expression of love, hence the biblical injunction that, ‘The husband should not deprive his wife of sexual intimacy, which is her right as a married woman, nor should the wife deprive her husband’ (1 Cor. 7:3).²⁹

Human sexual nature encourages marriage when one has the gift to do so. But not against staying single if gifted as such. For Paul, singleness is a God-given gift and must be celebrated, however, if one cannot endure, he or she should get married (1Cor. 7:7) to maintain purity before his Maker. Married couples are instructed to enjoy their sexuality and make the most of it. Whenever people engage in sex outside marriage, they tarnish the image and character of God within them and within their partners.³⁰

The Bible calls all men to honour God in all that they do (1Cor. 10:31), and sexual choices are not an exception. “The Bible condemns fornication (premarital sex), adultery, homosexuality (Lev. 18:22) and the defilement of one’s marriage vows by engaging in any or all of the above.”³¹ The Bible calls man to flee from all forms of sexual sin. The human body belongs to God. He owns mankind and desires to tabernacle with him. Sexual sin hinders this privilege. In Hebrews 14:4, Paul wrote “Marriage should be honored by all and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all sexual immoral. Give honour to marriage and remain faithful to one another in marriage. God will surely judge people who are immoral and those who commit adultery.”

To sum up, sex is a wonderful gift from God that should be enjoyed within the boundaries of marriage (Gen. 2:18–25). Premarital sex is biblically unjustifiable. The Bible says no to sex before marriage (Lev. 18, 20; Matt. 15:19; 1 Cor. 6:9–10, 18). Every Christian is faced with only two options: to either control one’s sexual drive or to get married (1 Cor. 7:36–37).³² If the Christian Bible condemns premarital sex, then it can be asserted that Christianity strongly opposes such a deviant act.³³ The Christian Bible, Heb. 13:4, describes premarital sex as immoral and is punishable by God. The church punishing culprits is an indication that it frowns upon the practice of sex before marriage.

METHODOLOGY

The mixed research method was used in approaching the study. The quantitative data was collected from structured questionnaires and qualitative data from the interviews. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected from March 23 to March 30, 2022, to assess the prevalence of premarital sexual practices among Junior High students in Trede Adventist Junior high School and the factors accounting for that.

Trede is one of the fastest-growing towns in the Atwima Kwawoma District, which is one of the forty-three districts in the Ashanti region of Ghana. Trede Adventist Junior School started in 1999 as a private school owned by the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church. In 2014, the SDA Church handed the school over to the government. Trede Adventist Junior School is a community day school with nine teachers. At the time of the study, the school had a population of 175 students; Form one class had 35 students with 18 boys and 17 girls, Form two class had 69 students with 42 boys and 27 girls, and Form three class had 69 students with 24 boys and 45 girls. The school had a total of 82 boys and 93 girls during the period of the study. Their ages ranged between the ages of 10 and 18 years.

The sample size was calculated using the Sample Size Calculator³⁴ at a 95% confidence level, a 5% confidence interval and with a 175 population size, the sample size was calculated to be 120. Both the simple random and stratified sampling methods were used to get the required sample size. The stratified sampling technique was used to group the sampled size into levels (Form 1, 2 and 3). This was to ensure that all the levels in the school are represented in the study. Using simple random

²⁹ Mashau, “Cohabitation and premarital sex amongst Christian youth in South Africa today,” 5.

³⁰ Mashau, “Cohabitation and premarital sex amongst Christian youth in South Africa today,” 5.

³¹ Mashau, “Cohabitation and premarital sex amongst Christian youth in South Africa today,” 5.

³² Mashau, “Cohabitation and premarital sex amongst Christian youth in South Africa today,” 5- 6.

³³ Ajiboye, Oyebanji and Awoniyi, “Sex among Youths as Perceived by Lecturers of University of Ilorin, Nigeria,” 2.

³⁴ Easy calculation.com, accessed July 7, 2022. <https://www.geopoll.com/blog/sample-size-research/>.

sampling, the structured questionnaires were randomly issued to the students to ascertain the reality of premarital sex among the students and its motivating factors.

A total of 120 questionnaires, of which all were retrieved, were personally distributed to the students and collected by the researcher on the school premises in order not to distort the responses. The responses to the questionnaires are analyzed and discussed in this study. The descriptive-analytical method was used to discuss the data collected. Secondary sources pertinent to the study were also consulted to support the findings.

Before the investigation, written permission was sent to the Headmistress of the Trede Adventist Junior High School, to obtain official permission to conduct the study. Lastly, four of the teachers and the Assistant Headmaster were randomly selected for structured interviews, to ascertain the prevalence of premarital sex and its influencing factors among the students.

FINDINGS

This section of the study presents the result of the data collected from the respondents of the questionnaires. In all, 120 questionnaires were randomly issued out to the students of the Trede Adventist Junior High School, which was the focus of the study was limited, and all were carefully retrieved. This section is grouped under three sub-sections: demographical information, the prevalence of premarital sex among the students, and factors influencing the students' engagement in premarital sex.

Demographic Information

All 120 respondents responded to the questionnaires, of which the males were 48, representing 40% and the females are 72, constituting 60% of the total respondents. This indicates that though the females have the largest representation, ideas of both genders are fairly represented in the responses. Again, the respondents were between ages 10 and 18, which constitutes the age bracket constituting the youth group per this paper. Also, with regards to their levels, 34 of the respondents were Form 1 students, 34 in Form 2 and 52 were in Form 3, constituting 28.3%, 28.3% and 43.4% of the total respondents respectively. Though Form 3 has the highest representation, ideas of each level are represented in the study.

Moreover, all the 120 respondents who responded to the questionnaires were singles. This paints the picture that the respondents were persons who were not supposed to engage in premarital sex since they are not in any marital relationship. Sex is a God-given gift to those who are engaged in a marital relationship. Lastly, with regards to religion, 118 of the respondents were Christians constituting 98.3% of the total respondents with 2 as Muslims constituting 1.6% of the respondents. Thus, the majority of the respondents are Christians while a few of them are Muslims. There is a clear picture that the respondents are persons who espouse faith in the Bible and Islam, which condemn premarital sexual practices.

All five teachers interviewed, were between the ages of 35 and 45. Three were males and the other remaining two were females. They had all taught for more than five years in the school and were all Christians.

Prevalence of and Factors Influencing the Students' Involvement in Premarital Sex in Trede Adventist JHS

This section of the paper exposes the various factors that influence students in Trede Adventist Junior High School to engage in premarital sex. It answers the question: what influenced you or other students to engage in premarital sex? All the respondents to the questionnaire and those who were interviewed confessed to the prevalence of premarital sexual practice among the students of the Trede Adventist Junior High School. The responses are tabulated below.

Table 1: What influenced you or other students to engage in premarital sex?

Factors	Frequency	Percentage /	Position
Poverty	100	83.3%	2 nd
Dating	96	80%	3 rd
Media	72	60%	7 th
Peer Pressure	108	90%	1 st
Poor Parenting	96	80%	3 rd
Covetousness	76	63.3%	6 th
Drug abuse	48	40%	8 th
Lack of sex education	82	68.3%	4 th
Sexual urge	80	66.7%	5 th

Table 1 above shows the respondents' views on the various factors influencing premarital sex practice among the students. In all peer pressure, poverty, poor parenting, dating and sexual urge were mentioned as the five leading influencing factors for students' engagement in premarital sex. Thus, the prevalence of premarital sex among students of Trede Adventist JHS has causative factors.

DISCUSSION

This study also assessed the prevalence of premarital sex among students of Trede Adventist Junior High School and its influencing factors. The data gathered from the survey depicts the prevalence of premarital sex among the students of Trede Adventist JHS. All the respondents admitted that they know a student in the school who has engaged in premarital sex. This was also confirmed by all the teachers who were interviewed during the survey. Philip Yeboah, the Chaplain of the school, mentioned that the weekly morning devotion organized by the school authorities seems not to be influencing the moral character of the students, though they are constantly challenged to live a morally upright life as espoused in the Bible.³⁵

The prevalence of premarital sex among the students of Trede Adventist JHS has been attributed to many factors from the interviews conducted and the questionnaires that were administered. Upon critical personal observation, the authors realized that some of the youth do not wish to get involved in premarital sex, but they are helpless and naïve. Some of the respondents posited that student engagement in premarital sex is a fulfillment of God's word that in the last days (this period), immorality would be on the increase (2Tim. 3:1-13) and this does not exclude the youth. The following sections discuss in detail the various factors mentioned by the respondents as being responsible for the increase in sexual promiscuity among students.

Peer Pressure

From the survey, peer pressure is mentioned as the leading influencing factor for the prevalence of premarital sexual practice among the students in Trede Adventist JHS. 108 out of the 120 respondents mentioned peer pressure, constituting 90% of the total respondent. Peer pressure refers to influences from one's age group. Oftentimes, one's peers such as study mates, roommates, classmates, club associates and other members of one's social group members can influence one to become deviant.³⁶ Research has brought forth that youth engagement in premarital sex is also as "a result of the influences of their mates."³⁷ To feel belonged and accepted among their peers, some youth do submit to pressure

³⁵ Interview with Philip Kwame Yeboah, Chaplain of the Trede Adventist JHS, March 23, 2022.

³⁶ Ekpenyong Nkereuwem Stephen and Ekpenyong Alfred Stephen, "Perceived Factors Influencing Premarital Sexual Practice Among University Students in Niger Delta University, Bayelsa State, Nigeria," *Canadian Social Science* 12(11) (2016): 81.

³⁷ Ekpenyong and Ekpenyong, "Perceived Factors Influencing Premarital Sexual Practice ...," 81.

from their friends to engage in premarital sexual practice.³⁸ Also, some youth engage in premarital sex to raise their status among their peer mates.³⁹

Poverty

Poverty is mentioned as the second leading factor for the prevalence of premarital sexual practice among students of Trede JHS. 100 of the respondents, constituting 83.3% of the total respondents mentioned poverty. This was supported by five of the teachers who were interviewed. Poverty, though a broad concept, in this study, has to do with the state where an individual's survival is threatened.⁴⁰ It is a state where there is a lack of access to the basic needs of life. In an interview with Madam Salia, a teacher of the school, she declared that some of the students engage in hawking as means to raise funds to provide for their basic needs.⁴¹ She continued that the inability of some parents to provide for the basic needs of their ward causes them to engage in premarital sex.⁴² A report from Nigeria indicates that school girls who hawk engage in sex as a means of funds to supplement their basic needs.⁴³ Economic hardships have made many youths prey to rich adults, who mostly demand sex before giving a helping hand.⁴⁴

Poor Parenting

Out of the 120 respondents, 96 of them, representing 80% of the total respondents cited poor parenting as an influencing factor for the students' engagement in premarital sex. Priscilla Otu Acheampong, a teacher at the school, in an interview, echoed that broken homes and single parenting are rampant in the Trede community, and the result is irresponsible parenting. She continued that this affects the behaviour of some students, resulting in premarital sexual practices.⁴⁵ The family is the first socializing agent every child comes in touch with and it goes a long way to define what a child will do or not. Parents and family members are the most powerful sources of social influence.⁴⁶ Family factors such as the relationship between parents and the youth in aspects such as care and protection, parent-child communication, single parents, monogamy and polygamy and the parenting style can affect youth engagement in premarital sex.⁴⁷ The data confirms the results of another study carried out in Lagos, where out-of-school female adolescents reported that more than 60% of those who resided with relatives or friends were sexually active compared to those who lived with both or either parents (38%).⁴⁸ Single parenthood oftentimes leads to a distorted family relationship and family dysfunction. There is poor supervision of children and communication which makes the home environment less positive. And these become grounds for the youth to engage in premarital sex.⁴⁹

Dating

Dating was also mentioned by 96 respondents as an influencing factor for the prevalence of premarital sex among the students, constituting 80%. Youth by nature do extend and receive love from the opposite sex. However, many young people abuse their natural response to love and engage in sex as

³⁸ Interview with Philip Kwame Yeboah, March 23, 2022.

³⁹ Ekpenyong and Ekpenyong, "Perceived Factors Influencing Premarital Sexual Practice ...," 81.

⁴⁰ Jacob Beyers, "The effect of religion on poverty," *HTS Teologiese/Theological Studies* 70(1) (2014): 2.1-8.

⁴¹ Interview with Christiana Salia, March 23, 2022.

⁴² Interview with Christiana Salia, March 23, 2022.

⁴³ Ekpenyong and Ekpenyong, "Perceived Factors Influencing Premarital Sexual Practice ...," 81.

⁴⁴ Ekpenyong and Ekpenyong, "Perceived Factors Influencing Premarital Sexual Practice ...," 81.

⁴⁵ Interview with Priscilla Otu Acheampong, March 23, 2022.

⁴⁶ Ekpenyong and Ekpenyong, "Perceived Factors Influencing Premarital Sexual Practice ...," 81.

⁴⁷ Ekpenyong and Ekpenyong, "Perceived Factors Influencing Premarital Sexual Practice ...," 81.

⁴⁸ Ifeoma Bridget Udigwe, Prosper Obunikem Adogu, Nwabueze, Achunam Simeon Echendu Dolly Adinma, Chika Florence Ubajaka, Chika Onwasigwe, "Factors Influencing Sexual Behavior among Female Adolescents in Onitsha, Nigeria," *Open Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology* 4 (2014): 988.

⁴⁹ Anna Bocar, "Factors that Induce Premarital Sexual Intercourse among Adolescents: Reasons that Lead to Teenage Pregnancy," accessed 17 October 2018, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/309193874>.

an expression of or consummation of their love for each other. Some young ladies have the notion that *if I don't give in to his sexual demands; he will leave me*. This unjustifiable assumption has led many youths to engage in premarital sex. In a study conducted by Taye and Asmare, they described a love affair, as “the most prominent factor that precipitated the first sexual intercourse among the youth.”⁵⁰ Sex has become an important aspect of boyfriend-girlfriend relationships today.⁵¹ The reason is the youths are of the standpoint that “without sex, there is no love in a relationship.”⁵²

Sexual Urge

Out of the 120 respondents, 80 mentioned sexual urge as contributing to students' engagement in premarital sex, constituting 66.7%. Youths generally have a natural desire for sex. The inability of some of the youth to control their cravings for sex becomes a factor in their engagement in premarital sex.⁵³ The data is similar to the results of a study conducted in North-Western Ethiopia, where sexual desire was discovered as a reason for premarital sexual practices among the youth.⁵⁴

Covetousness

63.3% of the total respondents, which is 76 out of the 120 respondents, cited covetousness among the youth as a factor for premarital sexual practice. The desire for abundant material things has made many youths become victims of premarital sex, especially young ladies. Insatiable lust for money has caused many young ladies to engage in premarital sex without considering the long-term effects of their actions. In a study conducted in Ghana, it was reported that some young ladies had sex in exchange for money “in order to be able to pay for or buy food, shelter, clothing, school fees, school uniforms, mobile phones, trendy dresses and jewelry.”⁵⁵ The situation is the same at Trede SHS. The notion that money is everything has caused many young people to do whatever possible, including engaging in sex, to get money in order to satisfy their many insatiable needs. In the quest for expensive phones, laptops, clothes, shoes, cars, television sets, and sound sets, young people engage in this immoral act, premarital sex.

Media

With the media as an influencing factor, 72 of the 120 respondents, constituting 60% took such a stand. The media is saturated with sex and sex-related videos and images, which the youth have access to. Recent musical videos and video films commonly feature sexy and half-naked ladies and this serves as a temptation to the youth as it arouses their sexual urge in the course of watching these videos and thus desire to experience. Also, easy access to the internet has led many youths to have easy access to pornographic sites and videos. In a study conducted by Taye and Asmare, it was observed that “the exposure of school adolescents to sex films is significantly associated with adolescents' involvement in sexual activity.”⁵⁶

Lack of sex education

⁵⁰ Taye and Asmare, Prevalence of Premarital Sexual Practice and Associated Factors among Adolescents of Jimma Preparatory School Oromia Region, South West Ethiopia, 6.

⁵¹ Jolien van der Geugten, Berno van Meijel, Marion H.G. den Uyl and Nanne K. de Vries, “Virginity, Sex, Money and Desire: Premarital Sexual Behaviour of Youths in Bolgatanga Municipality, Ghana,” *African Journal of Reproductive Health* 17(3) (2013): 99.

⁵² Geugten, et all, “Virginity, Sex, Money and Desire: Premarital Sexual Behaviour of Youths in Bolgatanga Municipality, Ghana.”

⁵³ Interview with Agyemang Prempeh Patrick, March 23, 2022.

⁵⁴ W.L Arega, T. A. Zewale, and K. A. Bogale, “Premarital sexual practice and associated factor among high school youths in Debreabor town, South Gondar zone, North West Ethiopia, 2017,” *BMC Res Notes* 12 (314) (2019): 1.

⁵⁵ Geugten, et all, “Virginity, Sex, Money and Desire: Premarital Sexual Behaviour of Youths in Bolgatanga Municipality, Ghana,” 97.

⁵⁶ Taye and Asmare, Prevalence of Premarital Sexual Practice and Associated Factors among Adolescents of Jimma Preparatory School Oromia Region, South West Ethiopia,6.

Lack of sex education was also cited by 82 of the 120 respondents, constituting 68.3% of the total respondents, as an influencing factor for the students' engagement in premarital sex. This was mentioned by all the teachers who were interviewed. According to the Assistant Headmaster, Mr. Yaw Owusu it is a taboo among the *Akans* for a parent to discuss sex with their children and this makes the youth ignorant and vulnerable.⁵⁷ In African homes, "parents are not fully equipped to answer questions on sexual matters adequately; even those who attempt to do so pass on faulty information to their children."⁵⁸ Thus, inadequate sex education at home makes the youth confused, which leads to a personal search and in that quest, they become prey to adults who often take advantage of them and defile innocent mostly young ladies.⁵⁹ A study conducted by Abdissa, Addisie and Seifu, concluded that "poor communication with parents on sexual and reproductive health issues"⁶⁰ is one of the causes of premarital sex among the youth. Also, the report had it that lack of sex education has caused many Ghanaian youths to engage in premarital sex.⁶¹

Drug Abuse

From the survey, drug abuse was revealed as an influencing factor for the prevalence of premarital sexual practice among the students in Trede Adventist JHS. 48 of the 120 respondents cited drug abuse, constituting 40% of the total respondent. Drug abuse is "an intense and often willful misuse of drugs."⁶² In Malaysia, for instance, it has been reported that drug use (alcohol misuse, cigarette smoking, and drug use) is a significant factor in the practice of premarital sex among the youth.⁶³ Sex-inducing drugs and alcohol have been identified as factors that may encourage premarital sexual practice.⁶⁴

In the above discussion on the prevalence of premarital sex among students of Trede Adventist JHS and its influencing factors, it was a clear indication that a problem exists. Though the Bible condemns premarital sexual practices, it prevails even among contemporary Christian youth. There is, therefore, the need for Christian advocacy to address this canker.

SOME LESSONS FOR CHRISTIAN ADVOCACY ON PREMARITAL SEX

This study is purported to provide some lessons that can be considered for Christian advocacy on premarital sex. These lessons include; the provision of sex education and counselling, education and awareness creation, job creation and provision of scholarships.

Provision of Sex Education and Counselling Services

The survey conducted revealed some of the influencing factors for the students' involvement in premarital sex as peer pressure, dating, sexual urge, media, and lack of sex education. For Christian advocacy on premarital sex, sex education and counselling could be provided by the church. The youth age is a stage of curiosity. The youth like to explore and experiment. Sex experimentation is not an

⁵⁷ Interview with Yaw Owusu, March 23, 2022.

⁵⁸ Adeoye, Ola and Aliu, "Prevalence of premarital sex and factors influencing it among students in a private tertiary institution in Nigeria," 2.

⁵⁹ Adeoye, Ola and Aliu, "Prevalence of premarital sex and factors influencing it among students in a private tertiary institution in Nigeria."

⁶⁰ Abdissa, Addisie and Seifu, "Premarital Sexual Practices, Consequences and Associated Factors among Regular Undergraduate Female Students in Ambo University, Oromia Regional State, Central Ethiopia, 2015" 5.

⁶¹ Geugten, et al, "Virginity, Sex, Money and Desire: Premarital Sexual Behaviour of Youths in Bolgatanga Municipality, Ghana," 94.

⁶² Muhammad Zaman, Sobia Razzaq, Rabia Hassan1, Junaid Qureshi3, Hira Ijaz, Muhammad Hanif, Fazal Rahman Chughtai, "Drug Abuse among the Students," *Pakistan Journal of Pharmaceutical Research* 1(1) (2015): 41.

⁶³ Abdissa, Addisie and Seifu, "Premarital Sexual Practices, Consequences and Associated Factors among Regular Undergraduate Female Students in Ambo University, Oromia Regional State, Central Ethiopia, 2015", 2.

⁶⁴ Ekpenyong and Ekpenyong, "Perceived Factors Influencing Premarital Sexual Practice ...," 79.

exemption. For that matter, the youth need direction and guidance, most especially education on sex. The church can organize seminars for the students to provide education on sex and human sexuality, self-identity, Christian dating and how to handle peer pressure. During such times counselling services could be provided to the students. This will help train and educate the students on sex, and help them understand their sexuality. Again, it will help the students to come to know themselves in order to live a purpose-driven life.

Education and Awareness Creation

The Christian advocacy of the church towards premarital sex could be through education and awareness creation. The students usually lack knowledge of the effects and consequences of engaging in premarital sex. Proper knowledge and awareness creation on the immediate and long-term effects of premarital sex could deter the students from its engagement. This could help them become satisfied and content with what they own and have, and many would avoid this canker of engaging in premarital sex. Again, parents should be made aware of the prevalence of premarital among the youth and be educated on how to save their children through effective parenting. This will help parents to make a conscious effort to deal with the issue.

Job Creation

From the survey, poverty was discovered as the second influencing factor for the students' engagement in premarital sex. All the teachers that were interviewed mentioned the lack of jobs among the parents as the basis for the poverty. It is either the parents don't have a job or their jobs are not well paying. As a result, providing for the basic needs of the family is threatened. For Christian advocacy on premarital sex, the church can engage in job creation ventures. Needy parents can be supported financially to start small-scale businesses. Also, the church can liaise with Non-Profit Organizations (NGOs) to provide jobs for the people in the community. This will put money in the pockets of the parents, thus making them responsible. The long-term effect will be that the basic needs of the youth could be catered for thus limiting their vulnerability to engage in premarital sex.

Provision of Scholarships

From the survey, it was revealed that some students engage in premarital sex as a means to provide for their basic needs which include paying school fees and buying textbooks and food. This is a result of their parents' inability to provide for them due to poverty. For Christian advocacy on premarital sex, scholarships could be provided by the church. Thus, the church can establish a scholarship fund with the sole purpose of sponsoring the educational expenses of needy students. Again, the church can liaise with NGOs to achieve this purpose. The church providing financial sponsorship for needy students could deter them from engaging in premarital sex. This is because it will make them less vulnerable to rich adults who usually take advantage of them in the quest to provide financial assistance.

CONCLUSION

Youth engagement in premarital sexual practice is reported to be increasing globally. This is not different in Ghana. In Ghana, the Ashanti Region is reported to have a high rate of teenage pregnancy. This presupposes the prevalence of premarital sexual practice among the youth in the region. The study sought to assess the prevalence of premarital sexual practices among Junior High students in the Ashanti region of Ghana and the factors accounting for that in order to suggest some lessons for Christian advocacy. The study used Trede Adventist Junior High School as a case study.

The study uncovered that there is a prevalence of premarital sexual practice among students of Trede Adventist JHS. Peer pressure, poverty, poor parenting, dating, sexual urge, covetousness, media,

lack of sex education and drug abuse were mentioned as the influencing factors. The study concludes that there is a need for Christian advocacy in arresting this premarital sex menace, and this could be done through the provision of sex education and counselling services, education and awareness creation, job creation and provision of scholarships. This should be done by parents and other caregivers, teachers and the Church. Some work has been done by the stakeholders but with the recent spate of events, it is clear that more work needs to be done.

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