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Youth Conception of the Transition to Adulthood in South Africa: Barriers and Opportunity

Linda Richter and Saadhna Panday

Intergenerational Conflict and Adolescents as Counter-Hegemonic Agents in Namibia

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On the Proposed Bill to Ban Same-Sex Marriages in Nigeria

Leo Igwe

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1

Feature

Youth Conceptions of the Transition to Adulthood in South Africa: Barriers and Opportunities

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Introduction

The demographic bulge of young people in Africa, where youth make up 40 percent or more of the population, presents a unique opportunity to renew and grow the continent's social and economic capital. As part of the life course, the youthful years establish the building blocks necessary for productive adulthood. Historically, research has focused on the timing of externally identified transition events - completing education, taking up employment, establishing independent households, sexual debut, marriage, and parenthood [1]. Few studies have focused on young people's conception of their transition to adulthood, what they conceive adulthood to mean, and how their development is facilitated or hindered by structural conditions.

The Status of Youth Report (SYR)¹ conducted in South Africa (SA) in 2003-2004 provides a useful case study of young people's conceptions of adulthood and how contextual factors influence the attainment of self-defined markers of adulthood [2]. The SYR was conducted as a baseline study to assess achievements in policy over the last decade and make future, regular evaluations of the state of young people in the country. The report was based on a literature review, second-

ary data analysis and a nationally representative survey of 3 541 young people between the ages of 18 and 35 years.

Meaning of Adulthood

Across culture, age and gender, there was a high degree of consensus among respondents that being able to set up and maintain an independent family and household that is financially sustainable (72.7%), safe (72.2%) and provides a nurturing environment for children (72.2%), is central to attaining adulthood (see Table 1). This was underpinned by the need to establish financial (62.5%) and residential (61.4%) independence from parents and the associated requirements of economic self-sufficiency through education (57.1%). Young people also placed significant value on psychological and personal autonomy through independent decision making (62.5%), acceptance of the consequences of decisions

(68.4%), control over emotions (64.6%) and relating to adults on an equal footing (63.8%). Marriage (40.2%), sexual intercourse (40.0%), and even attaining a specific age (50.9%) were given less emphasis.

American young people also rejected the notion that the transition to adulthood is marked by distinct events [1]. Rather they conceptualized their evolution to adulthood through a series of processes that

TABLE 1 : Respondents' perceptions of the characteristics necessary to attaining adulthood, 2003

	Respondents believing characteristic is necessary for adulthood	
	n	%
1. Capable of supporting one's family	2 575	72.7
2. Capable of keeping one's family safe	2 557	72.2
3. Capable of running a household	2 541	71.8
4. Capable of caring for children	2 484	70.1
5. Accepting responsibility for the consequences of one's actions	2 422	68.4
6. Learning to have good control of one's emotions	2 286	64.6
7. Establishing relationship with parent or adult as an equal	2 258	63.8
8. Being able to decide on one's personal beliefs and values independently of parents or other adults	2 214	62.5
9. Financially independent from one's parents/ caregiver	2 212	62.5
10. No longer living with one's parents/ caregiver	2 175	61.4
12. Having completed one's education	2 023	57.1
14. Reaching a specific age	1 801	50.9
15. Being married	1 424	40.2

¹ Richter L, and Panday S, the present authors, participated in the development of *The Status of the Youth Report 2003*; a publication of the Human Sciences Research Council



were largely psychological. Arnett [1] argues that conceptions of adulthood have become associated with characteristics such as equality and psychological, financial and residential independence.

Financial Independence

While contemporary young people, including those in resource-poor countries, place a great deal of emphasis on independence, high levels of poverty and unemployment

make it difficult to attain, producing a mismatch between their expectations and the reality of their experiences [3]. By 2003, young people comprised 47 percent (88 million) of the unemployed population globally [4] and in developing countries, they were 3.8 times more likely to be unemployed than their adult counterparts [4]. More than two thirds (67.7%) of respondents in the SYR indicated that they have never had a job in their life (see Table 2). What is more, only about a third of young South Africans (36%) were able to support themselves financially and the majority (64.7%) were residentially dependent on parents and other relatives.

Table 2: Percentage of respondents who ever had a job according to race, 2003

Ever had a job	Distribution for all	Race distribution(%)				
		n	%	African	Coloured	Indian
Yes	1 145	32.3	26.7	39.2	50.4	65.2
No	2 396	67.7	73.3	60.8	49.6	34.8
Total	3 541	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

High rates of youth unemployment in SA, and on the continent in general, are a result of very low levels of job creation, and the increase in the economically active population. More women are entering the workforce, and because of the low levels of job creation, demand by young people seeking work is higher than the supply.

Like other facets of youth transitions, the link between sexuality and marriage has undergone profound change in the last three decades and is inextricably linked to prevailing socio-economic conditions. Despite generally good health during this time of life, sexual risk through HIV/AIDS has become one of the most severe challenges facing youth across the globe, and especially in Africa. Of the 10 million young people living with HIV/AIDS, 6.2 million are from

sub-Saharan Africa. It is now widely accepted that programmes to address reproductive health challenges cannot be separated from efforts to improve the socio-economic, political and environmental situation that fuel such epidemics [5].

Sexual Debut

The World Youth Report [6] indicated that three quarters of women in Africa become sexually active during adolescence. Consistent with global and local trends [7, 8], young people in SA are embarking on sexual relationships at earlier ages. The median age at sexual debut (males-16 years, females-17 years) for 18- to 24-year-olds was lower than that of 25- to 35-year-olds (18 across gender groups).

Marriage

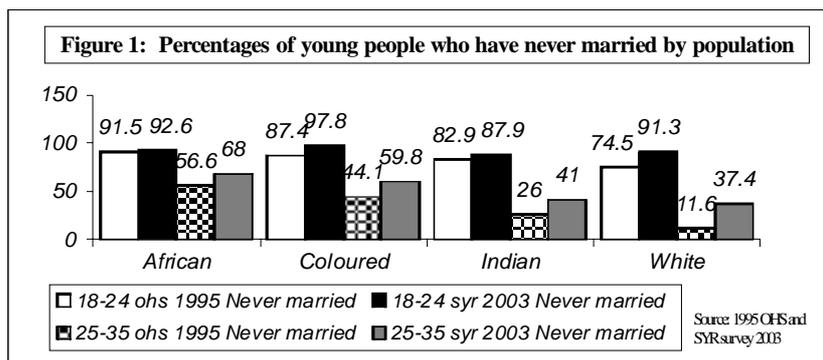
The link between sexual debut and

marriage has also become tenuous. Even though early marriage still persists in some parts of Africa [6], in line with global trends, marriage rates in SA are declining particularly among African youth (see Figure 1). Consistent with other studies in the country [9, 10], the SYR demonstrated that few people were married by age 24.

Customary marriages and cohabitation may displace or supplement conventional forms of marriage. However, the SYR survey showed that cohabitation alone could not account for the decline in marriage or the variations in marital rates amongst race groups. Lower marital rates have in part been related to concomitant increases in labour participation and migration among women, not only because women on their own need income, but also because single women have greater freedom to search for work in areas beyond the household [11].

Pregnancy

The de-linking of sexuality and marriage has also meant that pregnancy occurs more often outside of marriage. It is estimated that one in five births in sub-Saharan Africa is to a female below 20 years of age [6]. While SA's total fertility rate is relatively low compared to other African countries, fertility amongst adolescent females is high [7]. In the SYR survey, 32 percent of all respondents had been pregnant or had made someone pregnant, and just over a quarter of African females aged 18 to 24 years had fallen pregnant (see Table 3).



Changing Notions of Sexuality and Marriage

Like other facets of youth transi-

**Table 3: Ever fallen pregnant/made someone pregnant by gender, race and age, 2003**

Race	Gender	Age group	
		18-24	25-35
African	Male	11.7	43.3
	Female	26.2	64.4
Coloured	Male	10.1	50.0
	Female	15.1	48.5
Indian	Male	0.00	40.6
	Female	2.6	56.5
White	Male	9.8	71.2
	Female	3.8	49.1

Source: 1995 OHS and SYR survey 2003

What is more, of those who had been pregnant, 70 percent were unplanned pregnancies, a proportion similar to that found in previous surveys [7, 12]. Pregnancy also plays a significant role in interrupting education. In the KwaZulu-Natal Transitions study [12], although financial difficulties largely account for the interruption of schooling for both males and females, pregnancy was the most important reason cited by females (39%). Unplanned or unwanted pregnancy may therefore be a major determinant of delayed or incomplete education, limited future life chances and chronic poverty.

Discussion

The findings outlined in this paper illustrate two important points: (1) Young people's conceptions of adulthood have changed relative to the discrete events of school to work transition and work to family life transition that traditionally marked the transition to adulthood. There is a great emphasis on the establishment of their independence and responsibility for their own family. (2) However, progression along this path is severely constrained by the prevailing socio-economic conditions.

In common with young people in other parts of the world, young South Africans are spending more time in education, experiencing delayed entry into the labour market, and increasing the gap between sexual debut and marriage. Like their peers on the continent, they have to contend with inordinately high rates of unemployment. Consequently, the completion of education does not always

lead to a job. Marriage is also delayed - by the longer time spent in education; delays in finding employment; prolonged economic and residential dependence; and changing views of marriage as gender roles are re-negotiated and legislation governing relationships is increasingly rights-based, making it less necessary to be married. As the events of education, employment, marriage and parenthood do not represent a linear pathway to adulthood, how are they negotiating the more circuitous routes to adulthood made necessary by socioeconomic and other constraints?

The extent of unemployment, economic dependency and difficulties in establishing economic independence can lead young people to experience high levels of frustration, despair, envy and resentment because they are prevented from attaining the material and social success held up as important by society and the media. These obstacles also have important implications for young people's sexual and reproductive health, particularly in the context of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Earlier sexual debut, outside of stable relationships, increases the likelihood of HIV infection, as well as unplanned and unwanted pregnancy. For this reason, Rutenberg et al. [12] argue that "sexual health and youth opportunity outcomes are highly interconnected". Any attempts to influence sexuality and marriage patterns among young people cannot be separated from the broader social development context. Poverty and underdevelopment coupled with lack of opportunities for sustainable livelihoods, limited access to education, gender biases, traditional practices and sexual violence act in tandem to increase sexual risk and consequently poor reproductive health outcomes [5]. The

World Youth Report therefore asserts that after ten years of country level experience, a global consensus has been reached on the need to link reproductive health programmes with efforts that offer options and choices to young people through education and skills development [13].

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2

Issue
in Focus**Intergenerational Conflict and Adolescents as Counter-Hegemonic Agents in Namibia¹**

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An older woman counsels a young girl. Photocredit © R. Zurba/USAID Photo Gallery

‘The difference is the change of development, new technology; the world of our parents was different. Our parents should change with the new developments, and they also have to change with new technology. Our parents were using the approach of abstaining. Now the world has changed: people are developed.’ (FGD 3b girl, 17-year-old, urban)

‘Our parents are primitive. They follow the way they used to be. Nowadays, the technology is improving minute by minute and we are jumping onto every bandwagon. They need to let us on our own, we are responsible and they need to let us be on our own.’ (FGD3c, boy 17-year-old urban)

‘The way the kids look at us, they look down at us. We seem to be below them because we do not have [a formal] education.’ (Mrs K, 55-year-old, rural)

Introduction

Sometimes they want to treat us the way they were treated long time ago, but the world is changing. Look around you – everything is changing, but haha they do not want to change what they were told by their parents: what they were advised by their great grandparents then they expect us to do so ...

They do not understand that at the time they grew up condoms were not so famous, and the virus AIDS did not exist and sex was not taught in most schools, but now it is everywhere. ...[T]hey used to live in a different world, and their parents were poor and they did not use to live in an independent country. They could not afford [deodorant] roll-on; they could not go to school. Us, we are different, we are in an independent country. (FGD 3a female 16-year-old urban)

Discourses on sexuality in Africa have evolved from procreation and marriage to pleasure and enjoyment (made easier by the availability of condoms). These current discourses are creating conflict between different generations. The majority of

adolescents see themselves as more ‘modern’ than their parents. They see their sexual expression as being independent, and they see themselves as people who have outgrown tradition and who are embracing the global culture:

Intergenerational Conflicts

Adolescents perceive themselves as being enlightened because most of them are more educated than their parents, and they (adolescents) stress that they are different from their parents. This is reinforced by the fact that they speak English², are more familiar with computers, and know about condoms and the events in the world. They are demanding autonomy. Some adults believe that



the concept of children's rights³, especially their right to self-expression, is in contradiction with the Namibian culture, which until recently, viewed children as listeners and not as people who have anything to say. This has contributed to the conflict between parents and their children:

*'Today's children have not understood their rights properly. They do not know where it starts and where it ends. Even when they walk with their boyfriend, then they think it is their right, while they are supposed to be under the supervision and the care of an adult member.'*⁴ (Mrs PT 46-year-old urban)

In a globalised, industrialised world, each generation experiences its adolescence phase differently. Their experience is time and context specific.⁵ As adolescents come in contact with outside influences and new technologies, their sexual mores and values are redefined (Altman 2001). In this generation, there appears to be a move toward a more permissive set of attitudes on matters of sexuality. It has been argued that adolescents view sex as a way of expressing intimacy, romantic love, and their modern identity (see [1] which refers to the southeastern Nigeria context).

This adolescent discourse on sex contradicts adult norms and values. For instance, whenever the question was asked: 'Why are adolescents behaving differently from the way the adults did when they were young?' the adult response has been: *Mbera Oshinanena*, which literally translated means 'It is, maybe, today's ways'. Parents associate changes which do not conform to their social expectations as *Oshinanena*, a discourse influenced by globalisation and responsible for taking their adolescents away from them. As different cultures mingle, parents lose their hold, leading to different choices for individuals and a hybrid context:

In a situation where tradition has lost its hold and no longer guarantees the reliability or trustworthiness of individuals or institutions, each person is faced with a series of open choices about how to live her or his life. Self-actualisation, realising one's own identity through personal and social

encounters, precisely because tradition and custom no longer guarantee who we are, is a basic condition of modern social life. It is a condition that promotes personal autonomy from socially embedded expectations and opens up the world to exploration and personal experimentation... [2]

Perceptions About the Mass Media

Because the print and electronic media support the discourses of pleasure and enjoyment, adults often oppose *kykbooks*⁶ (photo novels) and television, seeing in them the dangers of exposure to sexual activity (or so-called 'adult' activities) that corrupt

The culture, norms and values that the parents hope to pass on to their adolescents are perceived as outdated and irrelevant by the young people

the minds of young people. The content of *kykbooks* and television programmes challenge the adults' discourses on sex, and adults see young people as vulnerable to *kykbooks* and television, which expose them to Western culture. Both *kykbooks* and television are explicit, something which has created discomfort in the adults:

It is television. At the beginning they started with those kykbooks, where people were kissing and doing all sort of things. Regarding those books, I had a law in my house that nobody was allowed to bring them in my house. The kids decided to bring them in the house secretly, and put them under the pillows. Than I used to get them and burn them. Because they were a disturbance as the

kids were just focusing on looking at the kykbooks; they did not want to go to church. It was just KYKBOOK. Then comes the TV and misbehaving and disobedience then took over, and the kids started trying out what they saw on television. (Mr FL 82-year-old, urban)

The President of the Republic of Namibia echoed the same opinion when (on 1 October 2002) he told the Namibian Broadcasting Corporation to stop broadcasting foreign films (that show violence and sex), as he was of the opinion that it had a bad influence on Namibian youth [3].⁷ Despite adult attitudes towards photo novels and television, young people have not been deterred from using them as resources.

Television's importance among teenagers has also influenced the broadcast of a different sort of advertising about sexuality. In their attempts to address the consequences of unwanted pregnancy, governmental institutions and non-governmental organisations have aggressively used the television and other media to broadcast messages about preventing AIDS and teenage pregnancies.

The messages confirm some parts of the adult discourses on adolescent sexuality ('Children are out of control') and challenges them ('It is too explicit'). Neither promotes a positive feeling, and most adults have expressed (formally or informally) their distaste for the messages:

The chat show of Namibia Broadcasting Corporation in the morning is worth listening in to. Talking is a vital component in the African culture. The chat show is interrupted frequently by adverts, which lecture in a straight way to use a condom. It does not give moral messages like 'do not sleep around, wait for the right partner', 'stick to one partner', 'report teachers who misuse and infect their pupils' etc. This message is just to 'condomise' the nation'. [4]

When we throw such a person a condom, we are encouraging her to 'go with the flow', much to the potential detriment of that individual. Isn't it better to teach our children to learn self-control, to not be enslaved to our fleshly desires, but rather to put them under our control? [5]



Challenges

Adults are aware of the sexual experimentation by adolescents, and doing the best they can to prevent their adolescents' exposure to what they think will influence their sexual behaviour. At the same time, they also seem to have difficulties in providing the necessary support during these trying times. Consequently, some adults take a victim blaming approach, asking questions such as: 'Why should she, at the age of 12, be pregnant?' Thus, they fail to question the environment of coercion or experimentation that surrounds the 12-year-old. In addition, adults try to find legitimacy in tradition as a way of resisting the current notions of sexuality. Adults want to challenge the influence of globalisation, but lack the authority and legitimacy parents had in the past:

We young people refuse to listen to our parents and other parents give up and others continue, because we are [contemporary] ... children and our parents are old-fashioned. I do not know why. We just think our parents are telling us things of the old times. I do not think our parents understand. We are teenagers, and we need to enjoy our lives. Those parents were already here; they did what they wanted; this is now our time to do what we want. I know that parents enjoyed their time; now they want to prevent us from enjoying ourselves. (FGD 3a, girl, urban)

We are out of fashion; we, the old people are out of fashion. Now when the young people get boyfriends they just say 'yes'. They do not tell their parents. They just tell you that they are married and arrive with their husband. They do what they want, and do not take our views into consideration. (Mrs H 52-year-old, urban)

The culture, norms and values that the parents hope to pass on to their adolescents are perceived as outdated and irrelevant by the young people. Adolescents resist the information because they are embracing 'modern' values, which adults see as a threat to the moral integrity of

society, redefining both the traditional and the modern culture and creating hybridised cultural norms, values and behaviours. As a consequence, adults feel powerless and helpless with regard to the changes occurring around them.

Notes

- ¹ This paper is part of a PhD thesis that was defended in 2005 at the Institute of Social studies. The study seeks to analyze the socio historical aspects of adolescent sexuality and reproductive behaviour in Namibia. The study primarily used qualitative research i.e. in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. More than 40 people between the ages of 12 – 82 years, in both urban and rural areas, were interviewed
- ² The adult informants in this study have an average of seven years of formal schooling. Adolescents are, in most cases, the first generation to be educated using English, which is the official language.
- ³ 'Children have heard about rights and freedom. It is like they can do what they want and no parent can tell them.' (Mrs H, 52-year-old, urban).
- ⁴ Original expression in Otjiherero: Ousemba wavo kavezu nawa, ousemba kutja wu uta pi noku wanda pi. Nai tjimakaondja no boyfriend, okutja manangasi ousemba. Ngunda uuhupa kehi yo mundu, wa so kukala kehi yo mundu ngo (Mrs PT, 46-year-old).
- ⁵ 'Today, children are in charge. If you go in the house you would not find young people at home. At sunset they are preparing to leave the house while the parents are preparing themselves to go back home. It is not only the church that is of concern, but also the government. But the problems of today, there are too many things. Independence created a lot of problems, people misunderstood independence. Wrongly they assume that with

independence they have freedom, even in the house, that nobody can tell them what they want.' (Mr K, 70-year-old, rural).

- ⁶ Kykbooks are pictures books (originally from South Africa, and were popular in the 1970s and 1980s and was available in both English and Afrikaans). These books focused on relationships and sexuality, especially depicting kissing, sleeping together and people who were partly naked. This did not go well with the adults, but since sex was a taboo subject (except when one was married), young people were attracted to these books, which in many ways became their sexuality education.
- ⁷ This comment applies here but was directed towards violent programmes because violence is increasing in the country. In search of a root cause, television was seen as one of the scapegoats.

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3

Region
Watch

Innovative Approach to Sexuality Education of Young People Piloted in Kenya

Introduction and Background

Currently, 55% of Kenya's population is made up of young people aged 19 years and below. One third of the entire population is between 13 and 19 years old. In Kenya as in other parts of Africa, young people face tremendous challenges in the transition to adulthood. Increasing poverty and destitution particularly arising from HIV/AIDS has made life increasingly difficult. Problems related to sexuality and reproduction; seem to play a central role in the lives of many young people.

In many parts of Kenya sexual debut begins early and in the absence of information and services. According to the latest DHS, 8 out of 10 young people in Kenya have had sex before the age of 20. This high level of sexual activity is associated with risks such as HIV/AIDS, pregnancy, unsafe abortion, economic hardship and school dropout. Currently 5 in 10 girls in Kenya have begun child-bearing before age 20 years¹. In most communities in Kenya, adolescents are faced with many of the same problems and violations of rights that adults face including sexual abuse as well as exposure to harmful cultural



In Kenya as in other parts of Africa, young people face tremendous challenges in the transition to adulthood. Photo © Board of Regents of the University of Winsconsin System.

and traditional practices such as early marriage and Female Genital Cutting (FGC).

Several reasons have been given to explain this situation; the break down in traditional family systems, influence of the mass media and urbanization as well as the lack of access to information and services are just some of the factors. In many countries, opposition from religious and community leaders as well as policy and decision makers often act as bar-

riers, preventing young people from accessing information and services, which would enable them meet their sexual and reproductive health needs². In addition, even where services exist, cultural attitudes about sexuality and the rights of young people create serious barriers and prevent young people from accessing these services.

While not seen as a problem a few years ago, the HIV/AIDS epidemic is now clearly more serious among



young people. According to UNFPA, 50% of all new infections occur among young people between the ages of 15 and 24 years. About 3.4% of all young men aged 15-19 are infected with HIV and the rate for young women of the same age group is 23%¹. Although young people suffer most from HIV/AIDS, the epidemic among youth remains largely invisible both to young people and society as a whole. They are more likely to carry the virus for years without knowing that they are infected. Consequently, the epidemic spreads beyond high-risk groups to broader population of young people making control harder. Yet young people often lack the information, skills and services they need to protect themselves from HIV infection. Not only do young people lack the information and skills they need to make sound, healthy choices, but they are at particularly high risk of serious, long-term consequences of poor decision-making about sexual activity.

A wide range of factors prevents adolescents from protecting themselves and making healthy decisions, including : hostile environments in which policy-makers, religious leaders, teachers, parents, and others important in young people's lives oppose the provision of accurate information and services to youth; a dearth of accurate information; and lack of skills and confidence needed to communicate effectively with peers and parents. A successful approach to helping adolescents will need to take these factors into account and must in addition include provision of information to adolescents, and development of their communication and decision-making skills.

Computer Based Programme

The Centre for the Study of Adolescence (CSA) in collaboration with the Dutch World Population Foun-

dation (WPF) has introduced a computer based sexuality education programme, "World Starts With Me" (WSWM) for young people between 12-19 years. This is an innovative and comprehensive school based sexuality curriculum that combines sexual reproductive health and rights (SRH&R) and information technology (IT). The WSWM curriculum combines two goals: One goal is to teach young people creative computer skills as a contribution to their socio-economic development. Simul-

The computer-based curriculum offers a safe environment for learning about sensitive issues

taneously, by using a curriculum on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRH&R) as contents, the program aims to support young people in decision making for responsible and safe sexual behaviour. Thus, WSWM is an innovative approach, which combines knowledge transfer, attitude development and skills building with training in computer skills.

The curriculum aims to effectively meet the needs of adolescents by embedding prevention of HIV/AIDS, teenage pregnancy, sexual abuse and stigma in the broader context of physical, psychosocial, emotional and sexual development of youth. The curriculum uses a positive approach towards sexuality and empowers young people with knowledge about their sexual and repro-

ductive rights, laid down in signed UN Conventions. In this way the World Starts With Me (WSWM) accepts young people as sexual beings promoting self-reliance and involving them in decision-making. Besides sexuality education, the program explores attitudes and develops skills in human development relationships, sexual behaviour, sexual health, society and culture.

The curriculum ends with mobilisation of young people as social actors in their own right: educating peers with what they have learnt in WSWM and involving the community during an exhibition on the classical results of working with WSWM.

The computer-based curriculum offers a safe environment for learning about sensitive issues related to sexual health. The WSWM program represents a self-guiding, interactive learning process, which powerfully combines text, figures, illustrations and images.

The Centre for the Study of Adolescence is currently piloting this program in 5 secondary schools. From the lessons learnt, plans are underway to rollout the program to many other schools across the country.

For further information, contact The Centre for the Study of Adolescence, Chiromo Road, UNHCR Compound, Westlands, PO Box 19328, Nairobi. Tel: 254-020-4445951/ Fax: 254-020-4444781. Email: csa@africaonline.co.ke

Footnotes

¹ Kenya Demographic and Health Survey 2003

² The opposition to the introduction of Family Life Education (FLE) into the school curriculum in Kenya in the mid-nineties is a good example of this.



4

Research Notes

Preliminary Findings on Youth, Sexuality and Marriage in Selected African Countries

By Richmond Tiemoko, Director ARSRC



Photo Story: © 2004 Courtney Crosson, Courtesy of Photoshare In Samburu, Kenya, a crowded room of women wait with drying nails for the ceremonial kidnapping of the bride by the groom's family. In Samburu tradition, women of the bride's family must firmly resist this kidnapping to show their love for their betrothed relative. Eventually, the bride is released by her family after women of the groom's family meet a list of demands.

Introduction

There is a growing concern about the state of sexual and reproductive health of the young people in Africa. The concern is over the generally poor condition of the sexual and reproductive health of youth on the continent and the HIV epidemic as indicated in the millennium Development Goals [1]. Other areas of concern include the generational conflicts arising from the attempts by older people to control the sexuality of the younger generations; especially girls [2].

It is not uncommon to hear in the family, the community or even from policy makers comments such as: 'young persons today, especially adolescents, engage in sexual activities (understood as sexual intercourse) at a very young age'. On moral and programmatic levels, young persons are urged to abstain from sexual intercourse and to emulate the older generations; who presumably in their teens exercised more self-control.

This preliminary research aims to update our knowledge of changes in adolescent sexual behaviours in Af-

rica. The main question of this enquiry is: Are there discernible changes in the last few years with respect to the sexual behaviour of youth? Are the current claims, that youth are engaging in sexual activity early, valid? Are there any gender and time differences associated with these perceived changes? The answers to these questions are important to inform sexuality and reproductive health programming.

Methods

Data provided by the Demographic and Health Survey¹ series serves as the basis for this study. The surveys conducted in the early 1990s and 2000s will be the reference. A few countries with available data have been selected across the continent for this study. The country surveys were conducted using the same methodology, thus to a large extent, the data collected are comparable.

To gauge the magnitude of change in recent years we compare data collected in the early 1990s with those from the 2000-2004 series. To as-

sess changes that have occurred in the long term, statistics on sexual debut and age at first marriage for two generations have been compared: that is for youth at the time of the survey (i.e. individuals aged 20-24 years) and adults aged 45-49 years. The paper begins with a brief discussion of the legal age at marriage where this information is available and then compares age at sexual debut in the early 1990s and early 2000s.

Youth and First Marriage

Marriage remains a highly valued social institution on the continent. Until recently, nearly every woman on the continent would have been involved in some form of marital relationship by the time they reach their 50th birthday.

In most societies sexuality has been confined to marriage life. While legislators in many countries have prescribed the legal age at marriage (that is the age at which an individual is considered to be legally marriageable; see Table 1), it is astonishing to note the silence on the legal age at which a person should be considered legally mature or ready for sexual intercourse. In Nigeria until the adoption of the Child Rights Act in 2003, there was no stipulated minimum age at marriage [3]

TABLE 1: Legal Age At Marriage In Selected African Countries

Country	Female	Male	Year
Algeria	18	21	2003
Benin	16	18	2003
Botswana	21	21	2003
Burkina Faso	18	21	2003
Cape Verde	18	18	2003
Côte d'Ivoire	18	21	2003
Egypt	16	18	2003
Kenya	18	18	2003
Madagascar	18	18	2003
Morocco	18	18	2003
Namibia	21	21	2003
Nigeria*	18	18	2003
South Africa	18	18	2003

Note: * According to the Child Rights Act adopted in 2003 and yet to be domesticated by all the states.



In spite of the prescribed legal age at marriage, many citizens marry at a younger age. Early marriages and in many cases child marriages remain major issues in most African countries. However, there have been some positive developments in the last decade. Age at marriage is increasing in most of the African countries with the exception of Namibia.

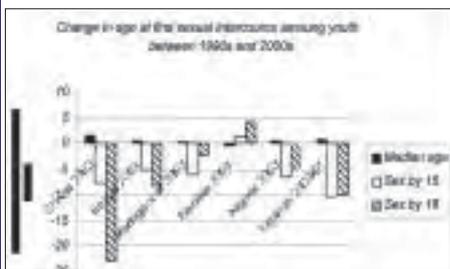
Sexual Debut in the 1990s and 2000s

Compared to ten years ago, the general trend is that age at first sexual intercourse is increasing. Generally, for most of the African countries, the median age has increased with the exception of Namibia where it has decreased. A large number of adolescents have their first sexual intercourse by age 18. In other words, compared to ten years ago, there has been a drop in the proportion of youth who have had sexual intercourse before they celebrate their eighteenth birthday. That is, youth aged 20-24 years in 2003 were less likely to have had sexual intercourse by the age of 18 compared to those interviewed in the early 1990s.

The delay in sexual debut does not occur uniformly across the continent. *When are youths likely to abstain from first sexual intercourse; before 15 years and/or before 18 years?* Two groups of countries emerge in response to this question. In the first group comprising Nigeria, Uganda and Madagascar the major delay in sexual debut in the last decade is due to the numbers of youth abstaining from sexual intercourse before age 15. In this group of countries, there is no marked change or difference in the sexual behaviours of 16-18 year-olds in the 1990s and 2000s.

In the second group of countries [Ghana, Kenya, Namibia], the major changes are taking place in the age group 15 to 18 years. In other words, if a young person succeeds in abstaining from sex until her 15th birthday, she is likely to continue to abstain until she is 18 years old.

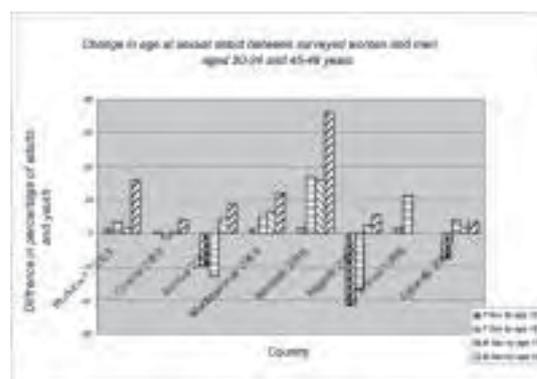
FIGURE 1: Long-Term Change - Comparing the Age At Sexual Debut for 45-49 Year-Olds and Youth Aged 20-24 Years



Sexual Debut Patterns Then and Now

Compared to their parents' generation how do youths fare in terms of sexual debut and first marriage? This analysis compares the proportions of contemporary youth (20-24 years old) and adults (45-49 years) who had their first sexual intercourse by age 15 and 18.

Youth behaviour with regard to first sexual intercourse has changed in the last 25 years. This change is highly gendered. Boys are increasingly having their first sexual intercourse earlier, compared to the adult generation examined in this research. In all the selected countries, the proportions of male youth having their first sexual intercourse by age 15 and 18 has substantially increased. More worrying is the fact that the proportion of those who had first sexual intercourse by age 15 has increased by at least twenty percent across the countries. It is worrying because the sexual partners of these boys are likely to be of the same



age or younger. In Nigeria this proportion has doubled (5.1% among 20-24 year-olds as against 2.4 % among men aged 45-49). In Namibia and Madagascar the proportion has tripled!

The contrary was recorded among surveyed females – a higher proportion of female youth abstain from sexual intercourse before age 18 compared to women in the surveyed adult group. In Kenya, Nigeria and Uganda, the proportion of girls who experienced early sexual debut decreased. The maximum decrease in the proportion is in Nigeria where the figure has been halved (from 42.7% to 21%). It should be however noted that in Nigeria, this change occurred in the last decade (between 1993 and now) because data from the DHS 1993 did not point to any major change. Kenya is the second country where an increasing proportion of girls are delaying their first sexual intercourse.

In other countries (South Africa, Namibia and Madagascar) proportionally fewer girls are presently abstaining from sexual intercourse till their 18th birthday compared with the results recorded for the adults surveyed.

Conclusion

This preliminary analysis clearly shows substantial changes in adolescents and youth's sexual behaviour especially with regard to age at sexual debut. The general perception that younger generations are experiencing their first sexual intercourse earlier than individuals in the older age group did, is not altogether valid for a number of the countries examined. Moreover, these preliminary findings indicate that the general perception may be truer for men but not necessarily for women. In-depth analyses and more investigations are needed to understand the reasons for the changes observed and for exceptions such as Namibia. There is need to investigate further why higher proportions of boys are engaging in sexual intercourse at an early age. Certainly, at the programmatic and policy levels, sexuality education for boys should be a priority.

References

1. Brown A.D., S.J Jejeebhoy, I. Shah and K.M. (2001) *Sexual Relations among Young People in Developing Countries: Evidence from WHO Case Studies*. Geneva: World Health Organization
2. Tiemoko R. (2003) *Coffee, Children and Family Relations: Understanding Reproductive Change in Western Cote d'Ivoire*. Maastricht: Shaker Publishing
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Footnotes

¹ For more information on DHS visit <http://www.measuredhs.com/aboutsurveys/>



5

Viewpoint

On the Proposed Bill to Ban Same Sex Marriages in Nigeria

*By Leo Igwe
Executive
Secretary, Nigerian
Humanist
Movement*



Introduction

On January 18, 2006, the Federal Executive Council proposed a bill that prohibits same-sex marriages and relationships. This bill provides for a term of five years with no option of fine for anyone who contracts or has a relationship with a person of the same sex; including anyone who aids or supports in any way same-sex marriages or relationships.

Two government ministers - the Minister for Information and National Orientation, Mr. Frank Nweke Jr., and the Minister for Justice and Attorney General of the Federation, Mr. Bayo Ojo - provided insights into this bill. According to Mr. Nweke, the

bill has become necessary in order to “check basically the possible erosion of our value system” in a Nigeria that is “basically a conservative society”.

On his own part, Mr. Ojo said that same-sex relationship “is unAfrican and is prohibited in the Bible and Koran”. Thus re-echoing a statement made by President Olusegun Obasanjo, who told African Bishops last year that homosexuality “is clearly un-Biblical, un-natural and definitely un-African. Ojo further stated that “we all know that marriage is a unique institution between a man and a woman and this fact is universally acknowledged and it is

contained in the Holy Books”.

Cultures, Values Bound to Change

I would like us to critically look at these points. First, cultures and values systems are never static. They are constantly undergoing changes and transformations. Is there any society in the world whose values have always remained the same? So, no one should expect the value system in Nigeria to remain static. Just as the value systems in other cultures are changing, ours in Nigeria will continue to change.

Again, diversity defines how human beings are and do things. Human beings think, live and relate differently. Just as there are different individuals and groups with different ideas and opinions of life, so also, there are different value systems. But this does not rule out the fact that there are common moral values and decencies shared by all.

As new ideas come up and new discoveries are made, values are bound to change - and will keep changing. Without such changes, the individual and the society will stagnate and die. Without such changes, there will be no improvement; there will be no progress. Nigeria is such a diverse country of people with different ideas, beliefs and philosophies. There are conservatives as well as liberals. And the Nigerian government should make laws that take into cognisance the nation’s plurality as well as dynamism; laws that are fair, balanced and inclu-



sive.

Homophobia UnAfrican

And so, is homosexuality unAfrican? No, not all. Homosexuality is definitely not unAfrican. Homosexual practices have been going on in Africa for ages. The anti-homosexual attitude is largely a response to the Christian Bible and Islamic Koran. Before the coming of Christianity and Islam, African societies were largely tolerant and accommodated people with diverse sexual preferences and orientations.

So, what is unAfrican is not homosexuality but homophobia - strong resentment and fear of gays and lesbians. Admittedly, homosexuality is perceived as a religious (cultural) taboo - often proscribed by law in many African countries. But in Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Congo Brazzaville, Eritrea, Gabon, Reunion, Sao Tome and Principe and South Africa, homosexuality is legal. In fact, under South Africa's new constitution, discrimination on the basis of the sexual orientation is illegal. And if homosexuality is unAfrican, why is it legal in some African countries?

It is true that gays in western nations are more open, expressive and assertive of their rights and liberties. And no one should think that they won the freedom they currently enjoy on a platter of gold. Gays in Europe and America went through - and are undergoing - a lot of persecution and oppression. Homosexual practice is therefore not a Western lifestyle. After all, the Western world has made tremendous progress in the areas of human rights, democracy, science and technology? Does that make these values Western?

Human Sexuality Complex

And that brings me to the next question. Is homosexuality un-natural? According to Random House Webster's College Dictionary, the word natural means, "existing in or formed by nature". That means something that is part of a thing's (a person's) inherent qualities or makeup. Going by this definition one can rightly say that homosexual acts are natural, because they are - and they reflect and express - inherent feelings, passions and desires of gays.

The claim that homosexual practice is unnatural raises a lot of questions. Is everything natural good? Is everything unnatural bad? Is every natural behaviour right? Is every unnatural behaviour wrong? Is every unnatural act morally reprehensible? When we talk about morals, values and attitudes, are we not talking about culture, and not nature? Since culture is "unnatural", is culture then immoral?

These questions point to the fact that there are still a lot of issues yet to be resolved about human sexuality and morality in general. And does the proposed executive bill banning same-sex marriage resolve these issues in any way? No.

Religion and the State

Now let us examine the claim that homosexuality is un-Biblical and un-Koranic? Definitely there are statements in the Holy Books that prohibit homosexual practices. But essentially morality has nothing to do with religion. And why should Nigerian politicians in this 21st century still refer to the Bible and Koran when making laws or drafting legislations particularly when we have a constitution that provides for the separation of religion and state?

Definition of Marriage

Lastly, on the definition of marriage. Agreed, marriage is popularly defined as a union between a man and a woman. But this definition of marriage like every other human expression has not always remained the same. The concept of marriage has been changing and will continue to change as we gain more knowledge about human and sexual relationships. In traditional African societies, marriage is not a union between a man and a woman, but a union between a man and many women (polygamy). Hence, the idea of marriage as a union between a man and a woman is unAfrican! Monogamy is not universally acknowledged and practised.

At a time, marriage entailed a man going to acquire a woman like a piece of property. And formerly, marriage in Europe and America was anti-miscegenetic. It did not embrace the union of people from different races. But now all that has changed. And who says the definition of marriage

will not also change to include a union between a man and man or a woman and a woman? Who says that our understanding of marriage will not change such that we can talk about homosexual and heterosexual marriages - or better partnerships - just as we have monogamous, polygamous, bigamous, polyandric marriages?

No one should make a scapegoat of homosexuality. No one should blame homosexuals for the problems confronting our nation. In fact there are absolutely no connections between homosexual practices and much of the social and moral problems that Nigeria faces - poverty, diseases (including bird flu), corruption, ignorance, ethnocentrism, religious bigotry, the crisis in the Niger Delta and the decaying infrastructure.

HIV/AIDS

We cannot put the blame for the spread of HIV/AIDS solely on homosexual attitudes or practices. In fact, in Nigeria particularly, HIV/AIDS is mostly contracted through heterosexual acts.

It is very evident that the debate over homosexuality in Nigeria is characterised by ignorance, prejudice, holy hatred, dogma, intolerance and religious fanaticism. There is need for caution, knowledge, love, tolerance, human solidarity, and empathy in the management of issues like homosexuality and other human affairs in the country.

President Obasanjo should not copy the U.S. President George W. Bush who wants to change the American constitution to make gay marriages unlawful. Instead, Nigeria should emulate South Africa and make discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation illegal. Nigeria should honour its commitment and obligations as a signatory to the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other human rights documents.

I am using this opportunity to appeal to the honourable members of the National Assembly not to pass the bill banning same-sex marriages. Nigeria is a better, freer, more progressive, more promising and more democratic nation without this bill.

First Published in The Guardian newspaper in Nigeria on March 1, 2006



Notes to Contributors

Guidelines for Submissions

The editors welcome submissions on the thematic focus of future issues of the Magazine, as well as other areas of sexuality, sexual health and rights. Themes for upcoming 2006 issues include:

2006

- Sexuality Beyond Reproduction
- Cultural, Religious Beliefs and Healthy, Pleasurable Sexuality
- Healthy and Responsible Sexuality: Lessons from People Living Positively

ARSRC seeks articles for submission which are objective, analytical and mirror current / contemporary issues and debates in the areas of Sexuality, Sexual Health and Rights in Africa. Articles should reflect a holistic /comprehensive approach to sexuality; taking sexuality discourse beyond health to incorporate broader

issues of the expression of sexuality without guilt, fear or ill-health. While priority would be given articles that have not been previously published, already published material may be considered depending on how relevant the subject area and focus is to ARSRC's work. However, for already published articles, full details of previous publication and where to seek permission for reprint must accompany the article.

We particularly welcome articles related to our thematic focus for the following sections :

Region Watch: Topical issues with a country or sub regional focus

Programme Feature: best practices from programme implementers

Research Notes: Focus on relevant research and methodologies

Viewpoint: Reactions to previous magazine issues or on a subject area that a reader

wishes to express very strong views or opinion.

Length

Feature articles: 1,000 -1,500 words

Research issues: 800-1,000 words

Opinion articles: 400-500 words

Photos

We welcome photos with or without articles and will give appropriate credit when photo is used.

Presentation

Please submit initially, an abstract with your name, contact address, phone number, email address and details about yourself as you would wish it to appear on the list of contributors

*****All contributors will receive a copy of the issue in which their contribution has been published.

About Contributors to this Edition

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Leo Igwe is the Executive Secretary, Nigerian Humanist Movement.

Sexuality Resources

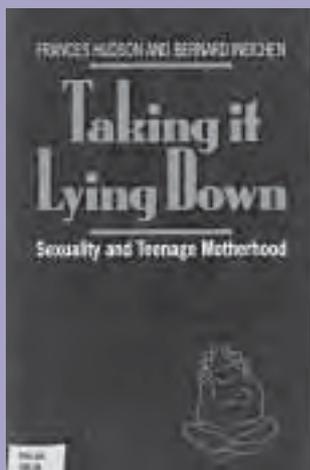
Love, Motherhood and the African Heritage: The Legacy of Flora Nwapa

Author: Femi Nzegwu

Publisher: African Renaissance, 2001

ISBN: 1-903625-09-2 (Paperback)

Through a study of the writings of Flora Nwapa, the author examines the historical role that Igbo women in southeast Nigeria exercised in their society. In particular, the book highlights the pivotal and highly revered role of motherhood as an all-encompassing ideological framework of social ordering of the nation and as the philosophical ethos which governed women's social, cultural, political, economic and spiritual life.



Taking It Lying Down: Sexuality and Teenage Motherhood

Author : Frances Hudson and Bernard Ineichen

Publisher: Macmillan, 1991

ISBN: 0 7619 6206 5 (Paperback)

How is it that today, when contraception is in theory freely available, and AIDS is a reality, many people still fail-or choose not- to use any form of birth control? Why is it that some accidental, unplanned adolescent pregnancies lead to motherhood? Are young teenagers able to understand what their future holds as parents with few adult skills and competencies?

In this book, the authors look at the behaviour of young people .. and discuss their attitude to sex and sexual relationships.

Online Resources: Youth, Sexuality and Marriage

These documents can also be accessed at the ARSRC On-line Library

Fact Sheets & Briefs

1. Counselling Young People on Sexual and Reproductive Health: Individual and Peer Programmes. Raj Brahmabhatt
http://www.who.int/reproductive-health/publications/towards_adulthood/32.pdf
2. Youth and Contraception: Needs and Challenges. Global Health Technical Briefs
<http://www.maqweb.org/techbriefs/tb9youth.pdf>
3. Supporting Married Girls: Young Wives and Young others. Nicole Haberland Population Council
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4. Addressing The Needs of Married Adolescents Girls In Burkina Faso

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ICRW
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Research Reports and Reviews

1. Survey of Youth and Adolescent Reproductive Health and Sexual Behaviour in Mozambique (INJAD) 2001.
<http://big.berkeley.edu/injad.english.pdf>
2. Forced Sexual Relations Among Married Young Women In Developing Countries Population Council
<http://www.popcouncil.org/pdfs/popsyn/PopulationSynthesis1.pdf>
3. Married Adolescents: An Overview Nicole Haberland, Erica Chong, Hillary Bracken
<http://www.popcouncil.org/pdfs/MA-Overview.pdf>
4. Including Married Adolescents in Adolescent Reproductive Health and HIV/AIDS Policy. Judith Bruce, Shelly Clark
<http://www.popcouncil.org/pdfs/CMImplications.pdf>