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AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION, FAMILY AND SEXUAL IMMORALITY AMONG ESAN PEOPLE OF EDO STATE, NIGERIA: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION

Sylvester Ogbeni

Abstract

Sexual immorality is prevalent among adults and youths in Nigeria today. Young girls now put on suggestive or seductive dresses and appear half dressed, just to be attractive to their male counterparts. Sex is promoted through mass and social media. Romance scenes are now more interesting in many television programs. A good example is the beach parties of the last Big Brother House program, tagged Level Up. Moreover, sexual immorality could lead to unwanted pregnancy and the attempt to cover it up could snowball into abortion. Many promising young girls have died through complications from abortion, particularly when it is handled by a cheap quack. Some have passed on to the great beyond after taking strong concoction in a desperate move to flush unwanted pregnancies. Those who managed to succeed could damage their wombs and live a life of perpetual regret later. Others who swallowed their pride and keep the pregnancy despite all odds experienced the unthinkable. They are often treated as social misfits, rejects and disgrace to themselves and their families. In most cases the education of the girl is usually truncated. Some even give birth to bastards a situation that pricks their conscience for the rest of their adult life. These ugly development expose the helplessness of the family and the society. Hence, the paper interrogates factors that are responsible for sexual immorality, using Emily Durkheim's functional theory for its framework. It examines the effects revealed on the individual, family and society. The paper recommends self-discipline and educational enlightenment as ways to mitigate this social scourge. The scope of the work is Ayobo in Alimosho Local Government Area in Lagos state. Historical analytical method is deployed for data collection. Findings revealed that the lack of discipline in the home front is the cause of indiscipline among youths in the entire society.

Keywords: Religion, Sexuality, Society, Behavior and Abortion.

Introduction

Sexuality relates to the erotic development in an individual and their reaction to it. Human sexuality is as old as the existence of man on earth. Naturally, sex is the biological urge of an individual that activates reproduction and the continuity of the Human Race. In sub-cultural setting-rural or traditional society, sex is regarded as a sacred issue. Thus, it is seldom discussed. Moreover, it is treated as an opened secret in modern or contemporary society. People's response to sex differs from place to place and from one individual to another. This paper emphasizes that sex is better discussed than being kept as a deep rooted secret because of its negative effects on the people in the society. The liberalization and socialization of the subject under review in modern time, has to a large extent reduced its negative effects. Thus, the family, individual and society have gained some quantum of control over it. Notwithstanding, people or individuals have developed different sexual behavior, prompted by the right of an individual to sexual expression, this is legally protected and defended as part of the Fundamental human Rights of an individual. Thus, some people developed pansexual attitude. This relates to an individual that is sexually

attracted to male and female. Some tailored themselves towards bisexuality, which is a sexual behaviour where an individual is attracted to more than one gender. Some are homosexual, which means they are attracted to the same gender. Others are pedophiles, which imply that they are attracted to children, while some people are sexually attracted to animals like dog, pig, horse, cow, goat etc, a practice or sexual tendency that is referred to as bestiality. It is imperative to note that the phases of socio-sexual behavior of people could be influenced by culture, individual response to erotic development and socio-cycle an individual socializes. The governments of many countries (particularly African countries) have put some socio-moral mechanism like refusal to legalize abortion, prostitution and gay marriage in place. This is in a bid to regulate the sexual behavior of people under their jurisdictions. However, some people interpreted the move of the government as an infringement on their fundamental human right and concluded that they are being oppressed and dehumanized. Hence, the protest from this set of people. It is sad that the constitutional inclusion and societal acceptance of this social freedom, by the generality of the people and the government has heaped a huge moral burden on the government, society, family and individuals. The socio-moral development of any sane society requires that sexual immorality should be subjected to control. Else, mortals will be reduced to the level of animals. But, after a thorough examination of sexuality in contemporary society, it has been observed that it require a critical exposition.

Theoretical Framework

Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) functional theory is adopted for this study. The theory views society as a gathering of people with set of interconnected parts; they are socially, economically, politically and educationally connected to the whole, in such a way that makes it functional and workable (Haralambos, Holborn, Chapman and Moore, 2013). Durkheim compared the society to the human body that functions effectively as a result of the contribution from its various parts, without which the entire body would have been worthless. Similarly, the seat of government, functions in such a way that it regulates other institutions for the general good of the society. Just as the organs of the body need to be active for maximum performance, exactly how the socio-system works. Families and religious institutions are required to function for the survival, general well being and continuity of the society. Sexual immorality is not a healthy development in any society, as it can affect the socio-structure and human capital negatively, a satisfactory result can be attained only when the observable social problems are addressed by those that are saddled with such responsibility.

Factors that could Influence the Sexual Behaviour of an Individual

Sexual behavior can be influenced by the following factors:

- i. Culture: According to Skinner (Cited in Sibani, 2018) culture is the totality of how people live and behave in the society while (Klockhohn and Kelly, 1988) holds that culture includes all those historically created designs for living explicit and impact, rational, irrational, which existed any time as potential guide for behavior of men. African Culture regulates the sexual behavior of Africans through the recognition of incest and other related taboos, This is the belief in ancestral sanctions for public morality. However, Gyekye Opined those Africa ancestors have died and should be left to rest in peace. He further stated that their existence and functions are created from the



figments of the imaginations of the Africans. Notwithstanding, their regulatory mechanism of sexual behavior among Africans should be appreciated. Unfortunately, the restriction place on sexual behavior by African culture was punctured by acculturation/globalization, which according to (Suarez, 2013) is a process where members of one cultural group adopt the beliefs and behavior of another group. In this context, the sexual behavior of Africans is greatly influenced by western culture that has trivialized sex. There by, neutralizing the sacredness placed on it by Africans. The result of this is indecent sexual behavior, women and young girls now move around half-dressed by putting on clothes that reveal sensitive parts of their body. Divorce is now prevalent among married couples. This is not healthy for the development of a sane society.

- ii. **Social Influence:** Human beings are highly dynamic and flexible; they can change easily either for good, better, bad, worse or otherwise, especially as it relates to sexuality. Some factors that affect or influence the sexual behavior of individuals are as follows: life experience of mentor or mentees, influence of electronic and print media, the content of books an individual reads and religious organizations. Social agents and related institutions must be intentional with regards to the development of the sexuality of the youths in their spheres of influence.
- iii. **Personal influence and orientation:** Individuals could personally cultivate distinctive sexual behavior. This could be influence by all or any of the following: Hard drugs like cocaine, tramadol, heroine etc, excessive alcoholic intake/consumption, hormonal development e.g. puberty, lack of self restrain (www.acf.hhs.gov) and natural or biological sexual urge, can influence the sexual behaviour of an individual, it could be too strong for some people to control.

Factors Responsible for Sexual Immorality in Nigeria

Poverty: It is a state of acute economic deprivation, which is a major characteristic of developing countries. Poverty could be caused by the following factors, unemployment, poor saving habit, poor implementation of birth control policy, laziness, poor security system/network, moribund government policies. (www.makemoney.ng.causesofpoverty.com). Nigeria Bureau of Statistic (NBS) of 2022 puts Nigeria poverty index rate at 0.257, which statistically shows that roughly about 133 million Nigerians are extremely poor (www.nairametrics.com). Nigerians lack access to the following: Quality health services, qualitative education, Good/high standard of living, employment opportunities and good working condition, adequate security, available water facilities, quality housing etc. The Nigeria Bureau of Statistics (NBS) further revealed that Gombe, Bayelsa, Sokoto, Jigawa and Plateau state are the poorest states in Nigeria, while, the least poor states in Nigeria are Edo, Ondo, Lagos, Abia and Anambra (Tunji, 2022).

Steps that should be taken to liberate Nigeria from the shackles of poverty and sexual immorality include:

- i. There must be increased accountability in public enterprises and civil service; the government must wrestle corruption to a standstill. Wasteful expenditure must be prevented at government cycle, Fraud in the petroleum sector must be curtailed. Friendly electricity tariffs must be introduced by the power sector. There must be conscious effort to harmonize the exchange rate between Naira and Dollar. Moreover, foreign and local currencies must be made available, education must be revamped at all

- levels and must be made affordable, There must be provision for quality and affordable primary health care, There should be improvement in the business environment, so as to encourage private businesses and attract foreign investors, the government must try as much as possible to improve on the security situation of the country. (www.worldbank.org) and the agricultural potential of the country must be harnessed, as it will generate employment and food will be made available and affordable.
- ii. Peer group Influence: Some people have strong influence over others. In a social group, a leader must definitely emerge; this leader could influence others negatively or positively. Signs to show that a youth is being influenced negatively: The individual could be derailed from his or her academic pursuit, the person could stop some social activities e.g. he could stop/start going to club, or start or stop attending church services, the individual could begin to be conscious of his/her appearance, some youths could begin to feel that they don't fit into some organizational setting e.g. religious organization, he/she could start experiencing low self esteem, some could even begin to compare themselves with others, they could start to maintain new hair style/cut, the youth could begin to put on different dress styles e.g. rugged jeans and so on, might stop or start smoking cigarettes, hard drugs like cocaine, heroin, tramadol, etc. and they could be so influenced that they start having girlfriends, thus, begin to indulge in sexual intercourse, peer group could turn a youth into a bully and some could lure others into school or street cult. Social groups could influence members positively. This could be through the following ways (Amy2022). The group can advise one another for a positive/envious behavioural outcome. They can support themselves financially and otherwise, they are always a role model to one another, they encourage saving habit/culture, social group could discourage gossip among themselves, they usually encourage one other to be serious with their studies, the group could encourage compliance to family and societal norms
 - iii. Pornographic films: Pornography means a movie that is intended to make people feel sexually aroused or excited by showing naked or sexual acts in its raw form. This could be offensive to many people (Horny, 2010). Pornography could affect people in the following ways: It could lead to addiction. Pornography could detach an individual from reality, the awkward pleasure derived from pornography could affect the mentality of an individual, it has an emotional effect on an individual, it could destroy relationship, pornography could make an individual become promiscuous, violence and aggressive towards sex, it could lead to erectile dysfunction, this could result from over sensitization of the sex organ. The effects of Pornography according to Amy (www.prestigemensmedical.com) can be overcome through the following ways: Self-control, seek advice from professional counselor, loneliness should be avoided, read scary books and re-engineer the mind.
 - iv. Literature/Books: The digestion of erotic books has the tendencies of spurring an individual into sexual arousal. This could prompt the individual to try new sexual activities or could make him/her desire to try new sex technique (Anderton, 2010).
 - v. Influence of alcohol: Individuals that consume alcohol and hard drugs like cocaine, heroin, tramadol, etc. often manifest reckless sexual behavior; such people could indulge in casual sex without protection, keep numerous sex partners and harass ladies for sexual gratification, that can result to unwanted pregnancy. In most cases, abortion becomes an option. Those that left the pregnancy ended up populating the society with

children without parental care, love and discipline, such children could be problematic to the entire society. Moreover, people with multiple sex partners are vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) like HIV, Gonorrhea, Syphilis, etc (Brown, Nicole-Gause & Northern, 2017).

- vi. Exposure to sex: This could propel an individual to experiment sex, which could lead the individual towards oral and anal sex, have numerous sex partners and unprotected sex. The danger of all these are the likelihood of contracting Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD). However, sex education could equip the adolescent with self-control mechanism like abstinence, self-discipline and self-control. Sex education should therefore, be infused into school curriculum across the country (Esere, 2008).

Consequences of Sexual Immorality

Sexual immorality has devastating effects on the society. Some of these effects are as follows:

- i. Unwanted pregnancy: Unwanted pregnancy is also known as unplanned or unintended pregnancy. It could result from some factors that include: Failed contraceptives, unprotected or naked sexual intercourse and rape. Some people could settle for abortion or willful termination of the development of an unborn child. This also has its own health implication which includes: mental stress, it could lead to depression and the individual find it extremely difficult to integrate in the social cycle. It could affect the educational ambition of an individual.
- ii. It reduces the chances of getting employed. In some cases, the irresponsible father could deny the pregnancy. The implication is that a bastard will be born. Meanwhile, it has been discovered through social observation, that single unemployed mothers always find it extremely difficult to bring up a child and inculcate morals and socially acceptable norms into the child. Such a child could likely become a social deviant (www.scivp.org/paperinformation.com), thus, employers of labour would not want to engage such individual.
- iii. Pre-Marital Sex: Sexual immorality breeds pre-marital sex, which is intercourse between two people that are not married. All religion and societies frown at it, it is majorly common among youth that are between 20-30 years. Mostly done between youths that are domicile in the same street, attend the same school/church or live in the same neighborhood.

Effects of Pre-Marital Sex among Youths and Young Adults

The effects of pre-marital sex are as follows:

- i. Prospective couples could lose interest in each other and this could be prompted by over exploitation of themselves. The relationship could be terminated because of sexual dissatisfaction.
- ii. Pre-marital relationships are often shrouded in high level secrecy and this could make an individual to be alienated from other family members. Gossip might set in. This could upset the individual emotionally, moreover, people that are involved in pre-marital sex are often prone to unwanted pregnancy, risked sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), lack faithful partners, could be easily depressed and lack security in the relationship.

- iii. There is 100% likelihood that pregnancy in such unsecured relationship could lead to abortion, which is illegal in Nigeria, yet, it could be traumatizing and might witch hunt both parties for the remaining part of their adult life if done secretly (www.bonobology.com).
- iv. Pre-marital sex could lead to the process of deflowering a girl, once a lady loses her virginity, her body metabolism will change, her view about sex and the opposite sex will definitely change as well, thereafter, she could start developing unprocessed sexual urge, which she might not be able to control.
- v. Pre-marital sex could create an avenue for parties to develop subconscious sexual relationship that might not lead to marriage. Married couples could start comparing their previous relationship with their marriage. These feelings for old relationship could interface with marriages in several ways, this kind of situation usually leads to anger, betrayal, separation might set in, if it is not properly managed (www.bonobology.com).
- vi. It promotes infidelity which could be prompted by lack of sexual satisfaction from a new relationship, this could gravitate into cheating. Moreover, such people might oppose love and could develop low self-esteem.
- vii. Pre-marital sex leads to self-debasement which places an individual on low spiritual ebb that exposes the individual to spiritual entanglement, which can be attributed to spiritual nakedness. It should be avoided for a healthy spiritual growth or development (www.bonobology.com).

Effects of Sexual Immorality on the Family

- i. Sexual immorality exposes the failure of the Family with regards to the moral upbringing of their children. This failure or weaknesses of the family could drive the children into sexual recklessness, that could end in unprecedented development capable of dragging the family name in the mud.
- ii. Sexual immorality shows that a family is not discipline. This often sends negative vibes about the family to the entire society. This is evident in many African societies.
- iii. Among Esan people, a family that is known for immorality is often isolated by other members of the community, because of the general notion that the trait runs in such family. Thus, prospective suitors could be discouraged by their family members from approaching or proposing to girls/ladies in such family.
- iv. It diminishes the spiritual energy of an individual, because it is an act that separates a person from God who cannot behold iniquity.
- v. Sexual immorality tarnishes and rubbishes the reputation of an individual, particularly those in the helms of affairs. In fact, it can reduce an individual below the value of a loaf of bread.
- vi. It affects marriages in such a way, that it could lead to separation, majorly because the partners could be afraid of contracting sexually transmitted diseases like burning, itching, ashes around their private part, herpes, gonorrhea or even HIV.
- vii. It is one of the numerous causes of unanswered prayers, which is why the bible admonishes Christians not to be equally joke with unbelievers and that they should flee from all appearances of evil.
- viii. In the religious cycle, sexual immorality negates the inflow of power of God, through the Holy Spirit. A man of God that indulges in it will operate in carnality.

- ix. Sexual immorality attracts the wrath of the ancestors, mostly in cases that relates to adultery and incest. Evidence is abounding among Esan people of Edo central senatorial district. Edo state Nigeria.

Ways Family can Control Sexual Immorality

The heads of various families must be discipline and must put disciplinary measures in place within the family cycle, family members must serve as role models to one another, parents must make sure that their children are given quality education and counseling, while the children must listen to them, Parents must try as much as possible to provide for their family members, must make conscious effort to know and familiarize themselves with the friends of their younger siblings, by so doing they will be able to identify and correct negative impression or development, older family members should be able to provide leadership for their younger siblings; this process will provide an avenue for them to be positively influenced. Parents should introduce their children to the ways of God early in life, because the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom.

African Traditional Religion and Measures to Control Sexual Immorality

African traditional religion is the religious conviction of the Africans; it is practised all over Africa; the characteristics of the religion are the same all over Africa, with slight changes/differences in some parts of the continent. However, the religion is the religion that the Africans inherited from their forebears. It has no recorded scriptures like the bible, Quran, Vedas, etc and conspicuous sacred buildings like the temple, churches, cathedrals, mosques and pagodas that are dedicated to the worship of God.(Quarcoopome,1987) Morality is controlled in African traditional religion through the acknowledgement of the existence of God, conscience and recourse to the ancestors, which are regarded as invisible police that can affect sanctions which can affect man in reality. For instance, among the Esan people of Edo state, Nigeria, the ancestors sanction a woman who commits adultery, all forms of incest, the use of spiritual means to inflict harm, lies, etc. The ancestors are activated among the Esan because the people venerate and acknowledge them.

Acts of Adultery among Esan People

The actual carnal knowledge and the utterances that suggest sexual intercourse is an abomination.

Crossing over the outstretched legs of a married woman by another man

When a man put his legs on a married woman's leg or touches her cloth, waist or beads.

When a man shakes the hand of a married woman

When a man tickles a woman from behind, particularly below her ribs

When a man wink at a married woman suggestively

For a man to sit on the laps of a married woman

For a man to sit on the same bed with a married woman

When a man beckons to a woman inside his room

When a man gives money or gift to woman without the consent of her husband

A woman can only be exonerated from all the aforementioned, if she reports any suggestive move from a man to her husband. However, all illicit move or affairs are regarded as awa-forbidden or abominable. When a woman commits adultery and confesses before the council of elders-edion, she will be reprimanded, counsel and be made to undergo cleansing.

But in a situation where she conceals the act, the ancestors will act, their judgment is often grievous.

Recommendations

- i. Government at all levels should initiate and execute policies that will aid job creation, so that larger percentage of the populace can be gainfully employed.
- ii. The government should put in place, facilities that will give short and long term low interest loan to the citizens, this will enhance productivity.
- iii. The government can create job for her teeming population through agriculture. Soft loan can be given for agricultural purposes, farm settlement can be established for crops and animal husbandry etc.
- iv. Parents must eschew laziness and make provision for their family.
- v. Parents and older members of the family must control, checkmate and discipline erring members of the family.
- vi. Children in the family must respect, obey their parents and older members of the family.
- vii. The school must educate, discipline, inculcate morals and enviable values into their students/pupils.
- viii. Parents must know, guide, mentor and teach their children the ways of God.

Conclusion

Fathers must be responsible for the socio-economic upbringing of their children, it is important that they guide their children properly. Children must adhere to parental guidance and instruction. They must behave responsibly and avoid tendencies that are capable of tarnishing the name of their family. Mothers must love, respect, and be submissive to their husbands. By so doing, they will be influencing their children positively. Children are expected to emulate and respect their parents. Religious institutions should teach morals, provide leadership, and plant the fear of God in the heart of their congregation. Educational institutions at all level should teach and inculcate admirable social values on their product, who will be chucked out into the society. When every member of the family and other related institutions play their role as expected, intentionally and responsibly, the society will be peaceful, acceptable norms will be upheld, behavior of people will be regulated, the society will be a better place to live and it will be devoid of rancor and acrimony. Thus, there will be no more hooligans, thieves, area boys or street urchins that are often contracted by influential socio heavy weight to foment trouble in the society.

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