

Research Article



The attitude of college students towards premarital sex: Implication for guidance and counseling in Nakuru County, Kenya

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Abstract

In many African countries, discussing sexuality still remains a taboo, despite the increasing number of sexual activities among college students. The study sought to find out college students' attitude towards premarital sex and the implication of guidance and counselling. It was guided by the social learning theory. Using a descriptive survey design data was collected through personally delivered questionnaire to 452 students who were randomly selected from middle level colleges in Nakuru County. The questionnaire was validated through piloting in one college outside Nakuru. Reliability coefficient for questionnaire was estimated through test-retest method and Cronbach's alpha stood at $R=84$. Data was analyzed using qualitative and quantitative data. Study findings indicate that 258 or 57% of the respondents were liberal about premarital sex and viewed it as a normal act that should not attract criticism. A total of 194 or 43% were conservative and believed that it is against the norms of society and the teachings of the church. Factors associated with premarital sex, include love, peer pressure, drug abuse and economic factors. Counselling was seen as the best strategic to handle sex issues, but was not effective due to stigma associated with premarital sex. The study recommended the college administrators step up strategies to supervise both the social and academic life of the students. By providing them with information, to make informed consent on sexual matters.

Keywords: attitude, counselling, guidance, premarital sex, students

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Public Interest Statement

The study will help all stakeholders to understand the attitude of college students towards premarital sex and how this affects their sexual behaviours and the role of guidance and counselling. Appropriate counselling approaches and techniques can be identified to help students improve their attitude

Introduction

Education plays an important part in an individual's life thus affecting personal, social and economic development of the nation. It empowers students to be able to make important decisions in life. Students in colleges are trained to provide the high-level skills necessary for every labour market but also looked upon as the foundation on which future generation is based. As students join the colleges, they experience a lot of freedom and independence since they live away from their parents and free from parental control, (Gurmesa, Fesshay, & Sisay 2012).

As students attempt to adapt to the new-found freedom and independence, they assert their independence by embarking on risky behaviours. These include unprotected sexual behaviours, drug abuse and violence which has serious consequences. The behaviour can lead to unplanned pregnancies, unsafe abortions which can endanger their lives, HIV/AIDS infection (Abdullahi, 2013). This is made worse as they live in campus where they have limited restriction. Students also share hostels, encounter peer pressure, economic problems and lack of youth friendly recreation activities to engage in. They lack access to quality preventive services, including discomfort with facilities and services designed for adults, and do not know how to find appropriate resources to answer their questions (Lechner, Gracia, Frerich et al, 2012). Without information college students are likely to suffer negative consequences of their risky sexual behaviours.

Premarital sex is a sexual activity practiced by people before marriage (Nebaraj & Saraswati 2017). Young people experience a series of development that results in cognitive, biological, social, mental, and physical maturity. During this time, they face a set of challenges and end up making decisions that eventually have detrimental effects on the quality of their life and health. Most significant life events and health-damaging behaviors contributing to premarital sex are perpetuated while they are in college. Despite the religious society and moral gurus condemning premarital sex, there has been a steady increase in the number of premarital sex acts reported annually among college students. According to (Regmi, Padam, and Edwin 2010), the decline in the age of sexual maturation and the subsequent rise in the age of marriage have created the window of opportunity for young people to actively engage in premarital sexual activities.

Sexual activity among young people is a global concern affecting 30% to 50% of young men and women from developed and African countries where the average age of first sex is between 15-19 years of age, (Noor, Khadija, Rahman, Khanaira, & Ramayan, 2017). In a study done by Cheong et al (2015) in Korea, students' involvement in sexual activities increased from 27.6% to 41.6% in 2010. In another study done by National College Health (NCH) (2016) found 11% of men and 9% of women reported having more than four sexual partners in their life time and only 30% had used protection during their last sexual intercourse. In a study done by UNAIDS (2006), young people aged between 15 to 24 years, 12% of men and 25% women did not use condom during their last sexual encounter with a non-regular partner. The above statistics indicate that students not only engage in sexual activity but also do not protect themselves, putting themselves at risk. Initiation of sexual activities among college students' is linked in turn to a variety of negative life consequences, including unwanted pregnancies, single parenthood, decreased marital stability, abortion and increased depression, sexual transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS, and interference in

academic performance (Kirk, Shannan, Laureen, Robert, 2003).

Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (KDHS) (2014) posit that 15% of women age 20-49 had their first sexual intercourse by the age of 15, 50% by the age of 18 and 71% by the age of 20 years. 22% of men aged 20 to 49 years had first sexual intercourse by age 15, 56% by age 18 and 76% by age 20. This means men have an earlier sexual debut than women, a pattern that holds true to most age groups. Out of that group, 37% of women and 38% man aged 15-24 years have never had sexual intercourse. Median age at first sex for women is 17 years while for men is 18 years.

Factors associated with sexual initiation include pubertal development, past history of sexual abuse, poverty, parental neglect, cultural or family pattern of early sexual experience, drug abuse and peer pressure. While factors associated with delay in sexual initiation include connectedness with parents' family stability, non-parental adults model, peer role model, academic achievement, future aspiration and religiosity, (Wondmnew, Taye & Kassawmar, 2017).

Student's experience many challenges while in college, therefore they need protection both from the government and the experienced adults around them. Information should be availed to them so as to make informed decision and understand the consequences of premarital sex. They need to be taught on life skills to build on their self-esteem as well as fight against negative peer influence.

Sexual attitude refers to the beliefs one has toward sexuality or sexual behaviors, which could be either liberal or conservative (Siddhartha & Manjala, 2017). The study looked at college student's attitude towards pre-marital sex. Factors that influence college students' attitude towards premarital sex include the following, permissive environment where sexual activities are encouraged, Peer pressure or wanting to conform to group members (Bingenheime, Asante & Ahiadeke, 2015): parental influence where parents talk to their children on abstinence are likely to delay sexual initiation, (Biddlecom, Awasaba & Bankole, 2009: Influence of media where sexual content is aired can influence their attitude in a negative and positive way (Soledad, Susan, Christine, Patricia & Barbara, 2011). Religion plays a significant role in the lives of individuals in any society: Studies done by (Eileen, Herbert & Duane, 2011) indicate a strong correlation between adolescent sexual behaviours and religious participation. The acceptance of sexual activity is greater among those with low religious engagement compared to those with higher religious engagement.

Counselling plays a major role in academic, vocational, personal/social development as well as emotional social and life planning effectiveness in individuals. Counselling college students on sex issues is an important aspect of education (Ajidahun, 2013). They must have information on issues surrounding their growth and development. Through Counselling students can develop life skills such as self-esteem, negotiation and self-awareness. All stakeholders, parents' lecturers and professional counselors should all play their role in counselling students. According to (Bidell, 2005 & 2012), teachers have a role to play in counseling sexuality in colleges as students spend more hours in schools than anywhere else:

Problem Statement

Studies done indicate that, there is prevalence of premarital sexual practices among college students in society, which leads to high incidence of pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. The government and different stakeholders have taken various steps to curb the problem by creating public awareness on the dangers of premarital sex as well as introducing guidance and counselling. Despite this college students still engage in premarital sex. Given the amount of public concern for the consequences of indulgence in premarital sex, finding out the attitude towards it will provide the

necessary information for planning useful intervention programmes aimed at solving the problems arising from seemingly premarital sexual practices

Research Questions

1. What are the college students' attitudes towards premarital sex?
2. What factors influence college student's attitude towards premarital sex?
3. What is the role of guidance and counseling in premarital sex?

I. Material and Methods

The study adopted descriptive survey research design which allows collection of data on factors whose manifestations have already happened leaving the researcher with no direct control over the independent variable (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2004). The design allowed an assessment of college student's attitude towards premarital sex. The study collected data from four training colleges within Nakuru County. The accessible population was 7000 students. Simple random sampling was used to identify 452 respondents. Research assistants were trained to provide explanation and instruction to the participants. Data collection was done through self-administered questionnaires with close ended questions on 5- Likert scale and items scored on strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. Validity of the instruments was done by piloting in Laikipia County. Reliability coefficient for questionnaire was estimated through test-retest method and Cronbach's alpha stood at R=84. Data was analyzed using qualitative and quantitative data.

II. Results and Discussion

This section outlines the outcome of the study. The discussions that follow are per the order of the issues raised. Table 1 represents demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of college Students

Age	Frequency	Percentage
17-18	98	22
18-24	320	71
24-26	34	7
Total	452	100

The above table, indicate age of the respondents was between 17 and 26, with the majority being between 18-24 (71%) years. Average entrance age is 19 years. This implies that approximately 70% belonged to the late adolescence stage, which can easily be influence by peer pressure.

Table 2: Respondents by Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	210	46
Female	242	54
Total	452	100

Table 2 indicates gender representation, with female being 54% as compared to male 46% indicating higher number of female than men.

Table 3: Religious affiliation

Religion	Frequency	Percentage
Protestants	223	49
Catholics	191	42
Muslims	32	7
Others	6	1
Total	452	100

Table 3 Respondent religious affiliation, where majority are protestant, followed by Catholics

Table 4: Respondent means score on students' attitude towards premarital sex

Sexual attitude towards pre-marital sex	Means score	Standard deviation
Engaging in premarital sex before marriage is ok	4.32	1.010
Sex is for people who love one another	4.31	2.997
Sex should be left for married people	4.27	1.081
There is nothing wrong with young girls engaging in premarital sex	4.25	1.003
There is nothing wrong with boys engaging in premarital	4.16	1.003
Premarital sex is important in people's lives	4.15	1.004
Sex is acceptable if its consensual	3.88	1.32
I enjoy sex plays	3.59	1.400
Sex helps to release tension	3.1	1.267
Casual sex is acceptable	2.1	1.292
Sexual relationship with many partners is ok	1.79	1.303
Grand mean score	3.326	1.229

Inferring from the above table it can be deduced that the respondent had moderately positive attitude towards premarital sex at (Grand mean 3.326). Those with favorable attitude against premarital sex at (mean 4.32) Sex for those who love one another (mean 4.31): Sex to be left for married people (mean 4.27). The view that there is nothing wrong with young boys or girls engaging in sex (mean 4.25 and 4.16) respectively. The least favored aspect is the fact that casual sex is ok at (mean 2.1) and having sex with many partners (mean 1.79). The findings are inconsistent with the study done by (Adaji, Warenius, Ong'any and Faxelid 2010) which observed that Kenya youth have a conservative attitude towards premarital sex.

Factors that influence college students to engage in premarital sex

The following table shows the respondents' insight into factors that influence college students towards premarital sex. All the respondents, liberal and conservative, were asked to fill this part

appropriately. For those who were tolerant towards premarital sex, they were asked to mention factors that influence them into the act. Those with conservative attitudes were also asked to give their opinions on what influenced their attitude towards premarital sex.

Table 5: Factor leading to Premarital Sex

Items	Frequency % Male		Frequency % Female		Frequency % Total	
Economic factors	13	6.19	56	23.14	69	15.27
	40	19.05	33	13.64	77	17.03
Pleasure	60	28.57	22	9.10	82	18.14
Proactive dressing	35	16.67	7	2.89	42	9.29
Academic advantage	10	4.76	48	19.83	58	12.83
Love	52	24.76	76	31.4	128	28.32
Total	210	100	242	100	452	

From the tabulations, it is evident that love is the leading influential factor towards college students engaging in sex, as 128 respondents representing 28.32% of the sample space cite it as what propels students to premarital sex. It is followed by pleasure at 18.14%, peer group influence at 17.03%, economic factors at 15.27%, academic advantage at 12.81%, and lastly, provocative dressing at 9.29%. Both males and females had the opinion that those influenced by love into premarital sex succumbed to it because they hoped for a long-term relationship that would eventually lead to courtship and marriage. Those who believed that pleasure influences premarital sex indicated that it was fun having sex, especially after parties and during night-outs. Male respondents who mentioned having premarital sex due to group influence argued that it was due to the mockery and intimidation from other students that leads to the act. This concurs with a study done by (Bingenheime, Asante & Ahiadeke, 2015) that posits Peer pressure or wanting to conform to group members can lead to engaging in sexual activity. There were overwhelming opinion that ladies who engaged in sex for academic advancement were fond of giving in to their male lecturers hence having sex in exchange for good grades. This concurs with a study done by (Zelalam, Worku, Gatachew & Bizuuyhu, 2013). This posits that college students engage in sexual activities after receiving and paying money.

Based on gender, it is noticeable that most ladies (31.40%) engage in premarital sex due to love. Economic factors at 23.14%, academic advantage at 19.83%, peer group influence at 13.64%, pleasure at 9.10%, and provocative dressing at 2.89%. Contrary to ladies, the number one influential factor among the male respondents is pleasure at 28.57%, love at 24.76%, peer group influence at 19.05%, provocative dressing at 16.67%, economic factors at 6.19%, and academic advantage at 4.76%. The study, therefore, approves the suggests that college students involve in premarital sex due love.

Role Played by Guidance and Counseling towards Premarital Sex

Respondents were also asked to give comments the role of guidance and counseling department in relations to premarital sex They rated the services as Fair, average or good. Below is a table with their tallied responses.

Table 6: Role of Guidance and Counselling Premarital sex

Item	(1) Frequency	(2) Fre- quency	(3) Frequen- cy	Total
Imparting problem solving and decision-making skills	170 (37%)	182 (40%)	100 (22%)	452
Creates self-aware- ness	84 (19%) 200 (44%)	168 (37%)	452	
Enhancing personal development	200(44%)	182 (40%)	70(15%)	452
Broadening knowledge about premarital sex	70 (15%)	100(22%)	282 (62%)	452
Fostering resilience factors for students	174 (38%)	208(46%)	70 (15%)	452
Assisting students who get pregnant	300(66%)	77(17%)	75 (17%)	452
Diagnosing students' problems	24 (53%)	112 (25%)	100 (22%)	452
Referring students to relevant social agencies	122 (27%)	210 (46%)	120(27%)	452

Most colleges have guidance and counselling department. Most respondents agreed to the fact that the department is doing its best to broaden the students' knowledge about premarital sex, Majority of respondents rated the service as effective totaling to 282 reflecting 62.39%. In relation on being trained problem-solving and decision-making skills, 40% agreed it was average. Most respondents were, however, dissatisfied with the approach the guidance and counseling department is putting in place to assist students who get pregnant in college, 300 (66%) respondents rated the service as average. Another area that the respondents noted the need for improvement is the diagnosis of the students' problem. 53.10% of the respondents rated this service as fair. A study by (Enejoh et al 2015) links self-awareness and self-esteem with responsible sexual behaviours.

Conclusion

According to the findings of the study, it concluded:

1. That majority of college students have a moderate attitude towards premarital sex.
2. The major cause of engaging in premarital sex is love, pleasure and Peer pressure
3. Students approve the importance of guidance and counselling programs. They rated the service as average. Key areas trained in, include self-awareness and decision making.
4. The respondents were however dissatisfied with the approach the guidance and counseling department has put in place to assist students who get pregnant in college.

Recommendations

In respect to the findings, and the conclusion of the study the following recommendations were made

1. Students to be given appropriate information on sexuality to be able to make informed decisions
2. Guidance and counselling department provide students with information on sex issues and come up with strategies to identify students in need and be able to help them.

Ethical clearance

Ethical standing and protocol of this study were approved by the National Commission for Science Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). Participant reserved the right to take part in the survey. Written consent was obtained from all participants. They were not expected to indicate their names.

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Conflict of interest

The author has no conflicts of interest to declare. I certify that the submission is original work and is not under review at any other place.

Author Bionote

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