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**Christian Students' Sexual Behavior and Their Religious Beliefs in Ghana,
West Africa**

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to establish the influence of religiosity among Christian high school students in West Africa.

Methodology: The study adopted a desktop methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low-cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library.

Results: The results revealed that there exist conceptual and contextual gaps relating to the study on the influence of religiosity among Christian high school students in West Africa. Preliminary empirical review reveals that 40% of the students had had sex, 58% of whom did not use a condom. The study also found no relationship between religiosity and sexual behaviour of high school students ($r=-.322$, $p>.05$). A majority (94.7%) of the students felt that counselling was appropriate in addressing sexual behaviour among them.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: Holton's conflict management model, human need theory and reconciliation theory may be used to anchor Christian students' sexual behaviour and religious beliefs. This study's findings may provide insight on the importance of religion in encouraging sexually responsible behavior in young people. The results may suggest that religious adolescence programs are a viable option for guiding young people's sexual behavior. Researchers hope their findings may inspire new approaches to adolescent sexuality counseling that draw on religious belief systems as a resource. The findings of this research could be used by religious authorities to develop programs aimed at teen sexuality in religious settings.

Keywords: *Religious Beliefs, Sexuality, Sexual behaviour, Adolescent, Christian Students.*

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INTRODUCTION

In Ghana, adolescent sexual conduct is a significant public health and social concern. Early sexual initiation, several sexual partners, the non-use of condoms during sexual contact, and multiple sexual encounters are characteristics of risky sexual conduct. The Demographic Health Survey from 2015 found that 40% of adolescents between the ages of 13 and 19 are sexually active. According to the survey, some of the teenagers engage in many sexual relationships. They run the danger of contracting STDs and unintended pregnancies as a result. Teenagers starting to act sexually is another issue that needs to be addressed. As early as the age of 13, both boys and girls begin having sexual relations (Demographic Health Survey, 2015). According to a study by Njoki (2021), teenage females have sex and subsequently, on the advice of their peers, turn to emergency medicines. They fail to take into account the dangers of having numerous sexual partners and engaging in unprotected intercourse. This indicates that there is a gap in sexual communication. According to Wasu (2021), 24 percent of adolescent girls and 31 percent of adolescent boys in Nairobi had had sexual experience. In a 2015 study, Nunnally and Bernstein discovered that Ghanaians, particularly the young and unmarried, had a poor understanding of the perception of the risk of HIV infection and sexual conduct.

Regardless of the teens' religion, this was the case. As a foundation for morality in cultures, religion is crucial. It controls how people act and behave in society. Being religious is defined as engaging in religious rites, activities, and practices (Graham & Haidt, 2020). It gives someone the chance to study and put into practice the teachings of a specific religion. It is assessed in terms of religious affiliation, regularity of attendance, level of participation in religious activities, and spirituality. The development of moral judgment has been linked to religion.

The typical level of moral reasoning proposed by Kohlberg is preferred by religious persons, claim Fraenkel and Wolen (2019). Conventional thinking relates to carrying out socially accepted morality. Sexual behavior among adolescents is discouraged by culture and religious teachings. This indicates that young people who identify as religious are more likely to adopt attitudes and beliefs that will improve young people's sexual behavior. Human conduct is influenced by ideas and socialization, according to psychologists. As a result, religion as a social agent exerts significant influence over adolescents' beliefs and subsequent behavior in a particular community.

According to Landor, Simons, Simons, Brody & Gibbons (2021), religiosity has a limiting influence on a person's attitude toward participating in sex. Adolescents who are religious appear to wait longer to make their first love. According to Bearman and Brückner (2015), people who regularly engage in religious activity postpone their sexual initiation compared to those who do not. Churches and other religious institutions are powerful social and cultural entities that influence and control sexual behavior in society, according to Mastai (2020). In their 2015 study, Zaidi, Couture-Carron, Oluwatoyin, and Modupe studied the impact of religious affiliation on pre-marital sexual behavior among adolescents in Canada and found a causal link between the two. As a result, teenagers who identify with particular religious groups tend to abstain from having sex before marriage. In Nigeria, it was discovered that adolescents who attended religious gatherings had a high level of this religious affiliation's restriction on premarital sex (Morhason-Bello, Oladokun,

Enakpene, Fabamiro, Obisesan and Ojengbede, 2018). According to Nishimura, Ono-Kihara, Mohith, NgManSun, Homma, and DiClimente (2017), who investigated sexual behavior and its correlates among young people in Mauritius, teenagers who belong to a particular religion are probably less sexually active than those who do not follow any faith. However, some research suggests that religion does not significantly influence sexual behavior. Religious affiliation did not significantly contribute to the reduction of dangerous sexual behavior, according to Wusu's study from 2021 of sexual behavior and religious affiliation among adolescents in Nigeria. Regarding how religion affects sexual behavior, gender differences have also been observed. Religiosity, according to Abar, Carter, and Winsler (2019), only inhibits sexual activity in female adolescents and not in male adolescents. Further research on the influence of religion on adolescent sexual behavior was required in light of these ambiguous findings.

By making sex knowledge available and fostering attitudes around sex, the Christian institutions in Ghana have an impact on adolescents' sexual behavior. They affect how people feel about HIV and how they perceive the danger of contracting the virus (Puffer et al, 2016). The moral questions raised by adolescent sexuality are addressed by Christian institutions, which also offer a moral code outlining acceptable sexual conduct for Christians. Premarital sex is one of the sexual practices that most religions forbid. On the other hand, Ghana's religious institutions can constitute a barrier to young people engaging in safe sexual practices. According to Murthy (2016), religious people believe that persons who contract HIV and AIDS have sinned against God. They are consequently inclined to believe that their risk of contracting HIV is low. Additionally, religious leaders in the nation have opposed policies like condom and contraception use as well as sex education in schools (Murthy, 2016). Teenagers' sexual conduct could be impacted by this. Although the majority of Ghanaians are thought to be Christians, it is unclear how Christianity has impacted students' sexual conduct in Ghana.

By observing the values and viewpoints of those around them, adolescents develop perspectives on various problems. It's possible that the religious views of those involved have a beneficial or negative effect on their outlook on life. A small number of studies have revealed that the more religious a person is, the less likely they are to accept cohabitation, but the more likely it is that they will have a good cohabitation (Willoughby & Carroll 2021). Numerous research have examined how religious beliefs and practices affect young people's actions. One's sexual behavior may also be affected by one's religious convictions. Adolescents who identify with faiths that teach radical ideologies, for instance, are less likely to engage in extensive sexual risk-taking. Among female adolescents, fundamentalism was found to significantly reduce sexual behavior, as was the presence of paranormal belief, according to research by Farmer et al. (2020). Adolescents in Europe were studied because they represent a culturally distinct group from Africans, and in particular from Ghanaians.

Adolescents who are religious are more likely to exhibit conservative sexual behavior since most faiths hold conservative beliefs regarding sex. Students who score higher on religiosity are less likely to have sexual interactions, and more likely to be aggressive while refusing sex, according to research published by Shirazi and Morowatisharifabad (2019). Religiosity was found to be a protective factor among adolescents at risk for participating in risky sexual behavior in a study

including 1,204 boys and 1,166 girls in Iran. However, Iran's majority Muslim population may be more conservative and different from the Christian community the study focuses on. Low religiosity was also linked to risky sexual behavior in a study conducted by Awaluddin, Ahmad, Mohd, Saleh, Aris, Mohd, Muhammad, and Nik (2015), which aimed to determine the frequency of sexual activity and the factors that contribute to it among Malaysian teenagers. In a health screening program, Awaluddin and coworkers randomly sampled 21,438 young adults who were not married. This research centered on young adults (aged 12–25) who were already participating in a health screening program. This research centered on in-school adolescents within the average high school age range in Ghana.

Statement of the Problem

The Christian faith promotes the moral growth of young people. Christian beliefs have an effect on adolescents' mental health because they may influence their perspectives and emotions regarding sexuality. Sex is sacred and should be shared only by married couples, according to biblical teachings on sexual morality. For this reason, Christian teaching condemns sexual activity among minors and marriage before the age of consent. Most Ghanaians are exposed to moral teachings about sexuality through their Christian faith. Your email will remain private. The religious identities, experiences, perspectives, and practices of today's adolescents must be comprehended. It is critical to learn if there is a connection between Christian practice (religion) and sexual behavior among adolescents in the country. Research shows that teenagers are among the most religious age group. However, the influence of such religiosity on sexual behavior was not particularly obvious or conflicting, and reports of high risky sexual activity among adolescents persisted even in the face of the prevalence of high religiosity within this age group. Therefore, this research aimed to examine the correlation between high school students' religion and their participation in sexually risky behaviors in order to better serve this demographic.

Theoretical Review

Peace and Reconciliation Theory

Montville (2018) model brings out clearly the process of reconciliation in the case of ethnic conflict. According to Montville, reconciliation involves three steps; Acknowledgement by the oppressor of their wrongs, contrition which involves taking responsibility for the past action, to express regret and to directly request forgiveness and the last step is forgiveness where victim forgave the aggressor and both sides mourning their losses, establishing a new equilibrium and relationship of mutual respect and security that is peace.

Montville (2018) three steps of reconciliation were important in the study as churches echo the principle of Montville: an acknowledgment by the oppressor of the wrong and asking for forgiveness. The practice of repentance through the sacrament of reconciliation (confession) provides a spiritual source of restorative justice and healing for broken communities. Likewise, to Lederach (2015), the Eucharist presents a fundamental understanding of encounter and reconciliation with God and the community, represented in the form of the body, the community gathered. The confession that is the act of telling the truth is therefore, an important element used by the Church in peace building as the Church in the sacrament of reconciliation ask for God's

forgiveness and seek by various means to repair their relationship with God, and with their neighbors. This is the same as Montville's steps of reconciliation which involve acknowledgment (confession) and asking for forgiveness.

Human Needs Theory

Burton (2020) human needs theory provides explanations of the causes of ethnic conflicts. Burton has explored the link between inter-group conflict and the realm of basic human needs, identity, recognition, and survival. He argues that inter group conflict is deeply rooted in unmet or inadequately fulfilled basic human needs of the parties and their individual members. According to Burton (2020), protracted social conflicts represents prolonged and often violent struggle by communal groups for basic needs such as security, recognition, acceptance, fair access to political institutions and economic participation. He stresses that many multi-ethnic society states emerge which are dominated by a single communal group. This group (or a coalition of groups) ignores the needs of other communal groups "thereby breeding exasperation and polarization.

Burton's theory was useful to the study as it provides a plausible explanation of ethnic conflicts in Africa. According to Burton, where such needs are not easily met by undemocratic regimes by communal groups for basic needs such as security, recognition, acceptance, that many multiethnic society states emerge which are dominated by a single communal group. This group or a coalition of groups ignores the needs of other communal groups, there by breeding exasperation and polarization".

Empirical Review

Ngidi, Moyo, Zulu, Adam & Krishna (2016) conducted a qualitative evaluation of selected social factors that impact sexual risk-taking behaviour among African students. The incidence of HIV and AIDS continues to be a source of great concern within universities in South Africa. Furthermore, university students constitute an important community in the intervention against the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Students in the age group of 15–24 years are at a greater risk of HIV infection than any other group in the country; yet, little is known about why they continue to engage in risky sexual practices. Objectives: This study was designed to explore the sexual behaviour of students in a metropolitan Durban University of Technology in KwaZulu-Natal to understand the social factors underlying their risk of HIV infection. This is a qualitative study that used cluster sampling where the population was stratified by campus and faculty. The study population was selected using a standard randomization technique. This was a part of a multi-phased research project aimed at providing a sero-prevalence baseline and an analysis of risk-taking behaviour at a Durban University of Technology in the eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality area. The study highlights peer pressure among students as an influence in promoting high-risk sexual behaviour. Within this context, the findings revealed that university students lack the ability to negotiate risk-aware decisions especially regarding sexual relationships. This study draws attention to the perspectives of African university students regarding their risk-taking sexual practices and selected factors which influence such behaviour. The findings are not exhaustive in exploring contextual antecedents that shape students' sexual practices. However, they provide an

important basis in understanding key factors which expose students to HIV infections. The study provides insights into opportunities for further studies as well as preventative implications.

Abbott, Harris & Mollen (2016) investigated the Impact of Religious Commitment on Women's Sexual Self-Esteem. Religious commitment is associated with decreased sexual activity, poor sexual satisfaction, and sexual guilt, particularly among women. The purpose of this paper was to investigate how religious commitment is related to sexual self-esteem among women. Participants included 196 female undergraduate students, 87 % of whom identified as Christian. Participants completed the Sexual Self-Esteem Inventory for Women (SSEI-W), Religious Commitment Inventory-10, Revised Religious Fundamentalism Scale, Brief Sexual Attitudes Scale, and a measure of their perception of God's view of sex. Results suggested that women with high religious commitment held more conservative sexual attitudes. Significant relationships between religious commitment and two subscales (moral judgment and attractiveness) of the SSEI-W revealed that women with high religious commitment were less likely to perceive sex as congruent with their moral values and simultaneously reported significantly greater confidence in their sexual attractiveness. A significant relationship between religious commitment and overall sexual self-esteem was found for women whose religion of origin was Catholicism, such that those with higher religious commitment reported lower sexual self-esteem. A hierarchical regression analysis revealed that high religious commitment and perception that God viewed sex negatively independently predicted lower sexual self-esteem, as related to moral judgment. Implications of the findings are provided.

Nsubuga, Sekandi, Sempeera & Makumbi (2015) conducted a study on Contraceptive use, knowledge, attitude, perceptions and sexual behavior among female University students in Uganda. A survey was conducted at Makerere University main campus in Kampala, Uganda during April 2014. The PRs were obtained via a modified Poisson regression model using a generalized linear model with Poisson as family and a log link without an offset but including robust standard errors. All analyses were conducted with Stata version 13. The study revealed that a total of 1,008 females responded to the survey; median (IQR) age was 21(20, 21) years, 38.6 % in year 2 of study, and nearly three quarters (72.3 %) were of Christian faith. Knowledge of any contraceptives was almost universal (99.6 %) but only 22.1 % knew about female condoms. Perceived acceptability of contraceptive use at the university (93 %) or being beneficial to male partners too (97.8 %) were high. Nearly 70 % had ever engaged in sexual intercourse and 62.1 % reported sexual intercourse in the past 12 months. Overall, 46.6 % reported current contraceptive use, with male condoms (34.5 %) being the commonest methods. Factors associated with higher contraceptive use were being in year 2, consensual union or perception that contraceptives are for females only. However, being evangelical/SDA or perception that contraceptive use is wrong was associated with lower contraceptive use. Overall, 9 % reported ever being pregnant, 2 % were pregnant at the time of the survey and a third (33.8 %) knew of a pregnant friend. About 40 % of ever pregnant respondents reported ever trying to terminate the pregnancy. The study concluded that knowledge, perceived acceptability and benefits of contraceptive use were nearly universal, but contraceptive use was suboptimal in this setting. Ever trying to terminate a pregnancy was common and a clear indicator of unintended pregnancies.

Sümer (2015) carried out a study on gender, religiosity, sexual activity, sexual knowledge, and attitudes toward controversial aspects of sexuality. The purpose of this study is to examine the role of gender, religiosity, sexual activity, and sexual knowledge in predicting attitudes toward controversial aspects of sexuality among Turkish university students. Participants were 162 female and 135 male undergraduate students who were recruited on a volunteer basis from an urban state university in Turkey. The SKAT-A Attitude Scale along with background information form, sexual activities inventory, and sexual knowledge scale were administered to the participants. Simultaneous multiple regression analyses revealed that religiosity, particularly attendance to religious services was the most significant predictor in explaining university students' attitudes toward masturbation, abortion, homosexuality, pornography, and sexual coercion.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a desktop methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library.

RESULTS

The results were grouped into various research gap categories namely as conceptual, contextual, and geographical.

Conceptual Gaps

Studies by Ngidi, Moyo, Zulu, Adam & Krishna (2016), Abbott, Harris & Mollen (2016), Nsubuga, Sekandi, Sempeera & Makumbi (2015), Sümer (2015) had conceptual framework gap. Additionally, none of the aforementioned research were able to determine how religion affected Christian high school pupils in West Africa. The research failed to provide a clear picture of impact or religion among Christian students. Therefore, our work aims to fill in these conceptual holes.

Contextual and Geographical Gap

Studies by Ngidi, Moyo, Zulu, Adam & Krishna (2016), Abbott, Harris & Mollen (2016), Nsubuga, Sekandi, Sempeera & Makumbi (2015), Sümer (2015) had geographical gap because they were not conducted in Ghana. This implies that the results may be inapplicable in Ghana since the influence or religiosity in Ghana and other countries differ. The current study seeks to address this gap.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The goal of this study was to determine whether religious approaches to racial harmony and peacemaking in Ghana, West Africa, were successful given the sporadic escalation of ethnic violence. Ethnic wars have a significant impact on people and nations around the world in terms of the destruction of property, the loss of lives, the displacement of people, and the harm they cause to the economy. Religious individuals and organizations have a holistic mission, which

involves both spiritual and social dimensions and can therefore employ the religious approaches to encourage peace and reconciliation.

The study fills in knowledge gaps on the factors underlying the lack of successful approaches to peace building and reconciliation by religious individuals and organizations in ethnic conflicts within Ghana and adds to the written sources on peace building and reconciliation in ethnic conflict areas in Ghana.

As this effort will add to the body of knowledge on peacebuilding and reconciliations, it was also anticipated that the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies will benefit from the study's findings. By doing so, acquired information might be applied to managing ethnic conflicts that arise on a regular basis.

The study's findings may also be advantageous to Ghana's religious community since individuals will be more motivated to foster an environment of tolerance, forgiveness, and understanding as a result of knowing what harm ethnic conflicts may cause. This research offered practical solutions for reducing the issue of interethnic conflict. Future instances of this type of incident can be avoided by employing effective strategies including problem-solving workshops, communication, negotiations, and mediations, among others. In order to fulfill their goal, religious organizations and leaders should be able to use the study's findings to better understand their position as peacemakers and how to use their resources to lessen the effects of ethnic strife.

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