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**SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST COUNSELLORS' COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FOR REDUCING PRE-MARITAL COHABITATION/SEX AMONG TEENAGERS IN SOUTH-WEST NIGERIA**

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**Abstract**

Intersexual marriage is seen as a sacred institution among Christians and people of Nigeria. It is therefore alarming to note that cross-gender cohabitation which was a foreign phenomenon is gaining ground in Nigeria. This research was carried out to examine the perception of premarital cohabitation in Nigeria, causes and possible solution. The study used secondary data while it is hinged on Inertia Theory. The study however observed that premarital cohabitation with sex is adopted by a lot of people due to many factors which include peer pressure, exposure to explicit contents on the internet and television, poor economy and use of drugs. The study recommends among others that parents should guide their children on the danger of over-exposure to television and internet. The youths should be controlled by their parents as to what they watch on television and exposed to, on the internet.

**Key Words:** Cohabitation, Premarital Sex, Peer Pressure, Internet, Media, Seventh-day Adventist

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**INTRODUCTION:**

In Nigeria, nay many parts of Africa, marriage is seen as a sacred institution. Many things that happen within the institution are not also usually discussed especially with the children and unmarried youths. Little wonder then that sex and sexuality do not get discussed between older adults and the youths. It is almost a taboo for parents to engage in conversation on sexuality. This great caution notwithstanding, it has been observed that there is prevalence of pre-marital cohabitation and sex among teenagers across the world.<sup>1</sup> The situation has been attributed to many factors including influence of mass

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<sup>1</sup> Ajiboye S. Kolawole, Aina J. Shola, Oyebanji T. Oyeyemi and Awoniyi S. Adebayo, "Possible Causes of Premarital Sex Among Youths as Perceived by Lecturers of University of Ilorin, Nigeria," *European Journal of Educational Sciences* Vol.1, No.4 (2014)

media and internet<sup>2</sup>, socio-economic status of parents, curiosity among the youths as well as family background and structures.<sup>3</sup> A key issue in the concept of family structure is the nature of communication relationship among members of the family which is a crucial factor in shaping the social behaviour and general attitude of the children to life especially at their teen years. An area of growing concern is the attitude of teenagers to sexuality and the prevalence of sex before marriage among the teenagers.

This paper examined the prevalence of premarital cohabitation and sex among teenagers; its causes, effects on youths and how the problem can be solved using interpersonal communication, workshops, seminars and spiritual counselling tips.

Research Questions:

1. What are the causes of premarital cohabitation with sex?
2. What are the possible solutions to the issue of premarital cohabitation with sex using communication strategies by a Seventh-day Adventist counsellor?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Theoretical Framework

#### Inertia Theory

This theory, postulated by Stanley, Rhoades and Markman in 2006, states that some individuals are aware of relationship problems and risks and so would likely desire intimate knowledge of their future spouse in order to select the right partner in marriage. Such individuals like to engage in premarital cohabitation to reduce the risks of future breakup. To them, sharing a household increases constraint commitment; making the cautious individuals more likely to get married to only those they already 'knew' through cohabitation association. This theory strongly recommends cohabitation if marriage must be successful.

#### Concept of Premarital Cohabitation and Sex

It has been observed that involvement in sexual activities among teenagers and adolescents is on the increase not only in South-Western Nigeria but the world over.<sup>4</sup> As the incidence of pre-marital sex is on the increase across the globe, it has also been observed that sexual values are experiencing a transformation where promiscuity is being regarded as a virtue to adopt. Youths are under severe pressure from friends and peers to engage in sexual activities. They are also exposed to explicitly sexual contents

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2 Olusesan S Asekun-Olarinmoye, Esther O Asekun-Olarinmoye, Wasiu O Adebimpe, Akin G Omisore, "Effect of mass media and Internet on sexual Behavior of Undergraduates in Osogbo Metropolis, Southwestern Nigeria," *Dove Medical Press Limited* Volume 2014:5 . (28 January 2014) Pages 15—23

3 John S. Santelli, Richard Lowry, Nancy D. Brener, and Leah Robin, "The Association of Sexual Behaviors With Socioeconomic Status, Family Structure, and Race/Ethnicity Among US Adolescents," *American Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 90, No. 101582 (October 2000)

4 Adeoye Ayodele . Ola Omolayo and Aliu, Bose, "Prevalence of premarital sex and factors influencing it among students in a private tertiary institution in Nigeria," *International Journal of Psychology and Counselling* Vol. 4(1), (January 2012) pp. 6-9,

both on the traditional and social media platforms. As they contend with whether or not to bow to the influence from all these quarters they also face fear of ridicule and rejection from their peers as teens who refuse to engage in premarital sex unlike their peers are considered timid and old school. Pre-marital sex which is sexual intercourse between two people who have not exchanged marital vows therefore seems like a commonplace in today's society. This is in agreement with the opinion of Alexander E, and Hickner J<sup>5</sup> who wrote that "adolescents are now involved in sexual activities at an early age." Unfortunately however, early exposure to sexual activities has pre-disposed young people to various risks like unwanted pregnancy, abortion, early marriage, HIV/AIDS, Sexually Transmitted Diseases and even death. They suffer from all these physical and emotional pains as an offshoot of pre-marital sex; most of which they cannot muster enough courage that would enable them discourse their pains with their parents and other adults.

The society expects the home, as a centre for character building and first institution of learning to inculcate the socially acceptable moral behaviour especially proper understanding of desirable sexual behaviour in children through constant communication between parents and children, leading exemplary lives by significant adults in a child's life and setting of boundaries by parents. Through all of these and intentional teaching and communication, children learn acceptable sexual behaviour and how to adjust to pressures and demands of new environment outside the home.

This is important because almost every culture all over the world frowns at pre-marital sex<sup>6</sup>. In a study conducted in Maiduguri, Northern Nigeria, it was observed that in "Maiduguri, a predominantly Muslim community with strict adherences to religious moral values, issues relating to sex activities are seriously monitored and great emphasis is attached to the need to abstain from sexual activities outside marriage."<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, Alo and Akinade's findings reveal a very high rate of pre-marital sexual activities among youths in an urban society of Southwest-Nigeria. According to them, "14.24% had had sex before age 14, and 84% had sex before their 20<sup>th</sup> birthday at which age only 1.28% of the sample had married."<sup>8</sup>

The two predominant religions in Nigeria oppose pre-marital cohabitation and sex in strong terms. In some denominations when one is caught in the act of fornication, he or she is banned from engaging in public religious activities over a period of time; until the person is 'cleared' from the act. In Islamic religion, any individual caught in fornication which can otherwise be referred to as pre-marital sex should be flogged with hundred

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5 Alexander E, Hickner J "First coitus for adolescents: Understanding why and when." *J. Am. Board Fam. Pract.*, 1092, (1997) pp 96-103.

6 ibid

7 Musa Abdullahi and Abdullah Umar, "Consequences of Pre-Marital Sex among the Youth: a Study of University of Maiduguri" *Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)* (Mar. - Apr. 2013), Volume 10, Issue 1 PP 10-17

8 Alo, O.A. and Akinade I.S. "Premarital sexual activities in an urban society of Southwest-Nigeria," (2010) Ea vol.2 No.1. [www.eajournal.com](http://www.eajournal.com)

strokes of the Cain in a public place without compassion from anyone.<sup>9</sup> Quran also says: "Nor come nigh to it (premarital sex) for it is a shameful (deed) and an evil..."<sup>10</sup> these are indications of the displeasure Islamic religion has towards pre-marital sex.

In Christian religion too, the woman caught in adultery was to be stoned to death according to the Mosaic law. It was further mentioned in The Bible, (Heb 13:4) which is the Holy Book of the Christians, that "marriage should be honoured by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral."<sup>11</sup> Communication which is the exchange of ideas, philosophy, religious and cultural beliefs has proven to be a veritable tool which can be used in the transmission of divine principles about pre-marital sex from parents to their children. Passing of adequate and correct information about the divine gift of sexuality would help children - before getting to teen years - understand God's intention in creating human beings male and female and in His image. Communication can come in various forms - intra-personal, interpersonal and Mass Communication. Parents engage in interpersonal communication which is otherwise known as one-on-one or face to face communication with their children; during which education about their religious beliefs, beliefs about sexuality can be handed down to their children.

One of the basics of the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is to communicate messages of hope to the world in this end time. The family is regarded in the Seventh-day circle as the first place to evangelise the child. It is therefore expected that sexuality education would be embedded in the home-school education or training of the child. The purposes of Christian Sexuality Education<sup>12</sup> are:

1. Celebrate God's goodness in creating humans as sexual beings
2. Identify Biblical principles regarding sexuality and foster the development of Christian beliefs, attitudes and values
3. Provide accurate, developmentally appropriate information about human sexuality
4. Dispel myths about sexuality
5. Empower parents as primary component and trustworthy sources of information regarding sexuality
6. Foster the wholeness development of men and women as persons and enhance their capacities for caring relationships
7. Foster the wholeness development of men and women as persons and enhance their capacities for caring relationships
8. Foster connectedness with God and others in the family and in community

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<sup>9</sup> The Holy Quran chapter 24 verse 2

<sup>10</sup> ibid chapter 17 verse 32

<sup>11</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible References in this paper are to the New International Version (NIV) (International Bible Society, 1820 Jet Stream

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<sup>12</sup> Flowers Karen and Flowers Ron, *Human Sexuality* (Silver Spring; MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Church) (2004) pp 1 and 2

9. Enhance a person's capacity for a loving, supportive, non-coercive, mutually pleasurable, intimate and sexual relationship with a marriage partner
10. Broaden understanding of the different responsibilities family members assume and how they interchange and interact
11. Increase understanding of the stages of marital and family lifecycles and their impact on the sexual functioning of the couple
12. Empower individuals to exercise responsibility regarding sexual relationships
13. Develop interpersonal skills necessary for assertively communicating personal values and decisions regarding sexuality

### **Causes of Pre-marital Cohabitation and Sex**

Several reasons have been alluded to why youths engage in pre-marital sex. Some blame the problem on African cultural taboos<sup>13</sup> which prevent parents from discussing the issue of sex in detail with their children, peer pressure, lack of understanding of reproductive health, family structure, media and the internet etc. Some of the most common ones include:

- i. **Youthful Age:** youthful age is characterised by youthful exuberance; it is also the age of exploration during which youths want to try anything possible. Some youths at this time feel 'testing' boys or girls is part of life. This age is also characterized by rapid development of different parts of the body with its attendant heightened emotions<sup>14</sup> which further predisposes the youths to questioning and search for identity and answers. Youthful age is also associated with youthful exuberance which further leads to alcohol consumption, smoking, drug use and experimenting with boys or girls.
- ii. **Family Background:** the child's family has a lot to do in determining his or her sexuality. Prominent among family issues that can affect the teenagers' sexual behaviour include: age of the parents, educational attainment, relationship between husband and wife and employment status of the parents/family income. Studies<sup>15</sup> have shown that the age of the parents especially mothers can predispose their children especially again, the girl child to premarital sex. If the mother herself is immature and inexperienced, there would be little she would be able to offer her children in terms of sex education. Many parents especially in Nigeria are ill prepared for the challenges associated with marriage. They are equally not well equipped for the tasks of parenting which include offering sex education to children and

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<sup>13</sup> Adeoye Ayodele , Ola Omolayo and Aliu, Bose, "Prevalence of premarital sex and factors influencing it among students in a private tertiary institution in Nigeria," p1

<sup>14</sup> Musa Abdullahi and Abdullah Umar, "Consequences of Pre-Marital Sex among the Youth: a Study of University of Maiduguri," p5

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

answering their questions. Inability to provide satisfactory answers can make the children seek counsel from adults who might eventually take advantage of them and turn them to sex objects. Added to this is the myth in Western Nigeria that if a woman gave birth to a child through pre-marital, unprotected sex; the child is likely to repeat history. Insufficient or lack of formal education on the part of the parents can also dispose a child to pre-marital sex. This is especially true as parents with formal education are likely to be well exposed to issues surrounding sexuality and be able to offer sex education to their children. Formal education might offer them good job offers which would also help in acquiring comfortable accommodation that would shield the children from glare of adults who might want to take advantage of them if they were living in clustered houses with male and females sharing same toilets and bathrooms. Pre-marital sex is also made easy in this kind of family setting where children of opposite sex are allowed to share same rooms; they therefore have heightened emotions as they are regularly exposed to the nakedness of the other family members of the opposite sex. In a family where children see genuine love being freely expressed between parents, would help them in having the determination to have similar family setting. The children, wanting to replicate the virtues found in their parents can decide to want to sacrifice all it takes to have functional family devoid of regrets of pre-marital cohabitation and sex. Presence of true love relations would also afford the parents opportunity to encourage their children with their own love experiences. Free flow of parent-child communication can also be consequent of a family where there is genuine love. This would create an enabling environment suitable for open discuss of any issue, including sexuality.

- iii. Media and the Internet: this age otherwise known as computer age can be said to be suffering from information overload because of its exposure to an array of information. Some traditional media like television are especially guilty of explicit sexual contents capable of disposing youths to pre-marital cohabitation and sex. The media is equally guilty of only showing sexual content without corresponding messages to warn against effects of pre-marital cohabitation and sex. It has been found that “uncontrolled exposure to mass media and Internet could negatively influence the sexual patterns and behaviour of youths.”<sup>16</sup> The internet which is growing rapidly and is available to many youths also discuss and display explicit contents without restraint. The fact that internet contents are beyond the purview of the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC – the body that regulates broadcast

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid (2004 pp1)

industry in Nigeria) has increased dramatically unwholesome contents available to the youths especially on the internet thereby creating in their sub-conscious pictures of sex, sexual feeling and sexual arousal.

- iv. Peer Pressure: many youths who may want to be chase receive accusations from friends and peers. They also receive derogatory alias like 'old school' and many more. Studies<sup>17</sup> have shown that peers provide pressure for youths because of their acclaimed access to information and closeness. The quest for acceptance among peers can make a youth succumb to peer pressure and engage in premarital sex. Further Studies<sup>18</sup> have also found that there is a significant relationship between peer influence and prevalence of pre-marital sex among youths.

### **Effects of Pre-marital Cohabitation and Sex on Youths**

It is amazing that youths engage in pre-marital cohabitation and sex despite obvious negative effect this dastardly behaviour has had on many youths. The accusing finger pointed at the media for presenting one-sided, unbalanced report, parents neglecting to communicate about sexuality with their children, youths themselves going through period of recognition and acceptance do not in any way remove the negative effects pre-marital cohabitation/ sex has had and continues to have on the youths. The effects can be very devastating since it is usually permanent and irreversible. Many youths live with the scar for the rest of their lives. The effects of premarital cohabitation and sex can be physical, emotional or psychological. It is always difficult to deal with these effects but with right help from professional counsellors, referral centres, religious organisations and creation of effective communication medium between parents and children some of the effects can be taken care of. Some of the effects of pre-marital cohabitation and sex include:

1. Severed relationship with God: Christians believe human body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 6:16; 1Corinthians 3:17; I Corinthians 6:19). Therefore a Christian engaging in pre-marital sex knows he is committing sin against God. This can lead to a severed relationship between the individual and God. This feeling can degenerate to feeling of nothingness, low self-esteem and low expectation of oneself. A Christian involved in pre-marital sex feels he or she

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<sup>17</sup> Ramesh A, "Factors Affecting Pre-marital Sex among Male College Students of Kathmandu, Mahendra Ratna Campus, Tribhuvan University Kathmandu Nepal" (2008).

<sup>18</sup> Kintu Jackson, "Causes And Characteristics Of Pre-Marital Sex Among The Youths Of Madudu Subcounty, Mubende District" (Diploma In Common Wealth Youth

Development Programme Research Report, Department Of Distance Education, Institute Of Adult And Continuing Education, Makerere University, 2011),

is naked just like Adam and Eve felt after eating the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3:9-13).

2. Change in physical appearance: this is a normal change in physique which happens to every married person especially women. With pre-marital sex comes the need for contraceptives to prevent unwanted pregnancy; this can lead to enlarged breasts and increase in weight of the 'woman.' The use of contraceptives can begin to take its toll on the woman as she looks older than her age.
3. Sexually transmitted diseases: this occurs mostly when an cohabiting partner has unprotected sex with a carrier of any of the sexually transmitted diseases like herpes, gonorrhoea, syphilis and the much dreaded Human immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) or has multiple sex partners. Once contracted, the victim begins to experience some discomfort around the genital area which require some heavy medication before it can be cured. In the case of HIV/AIDS, no cure is available as yet, and the carrier has the potential of transferring the virus to a non-carrier of the virus.
4. Unwanted pregnancy: General opinion and studies<sup>19</sup> have it that girls are the most vulnerable in the problem of pre-marital sex. They lose their dignity, self-worth, most cherished possession (virginity), carry unwanted pregnancy and many times drop out of school while their male partner continues his education without any hitch. Associated with unwanted pregnancy are the complications of abortion, other reproductive problems and even death.
5. Loss of family support: many youths whose parents are aware of their involvement in premarital cohabitation and sex may suffer rejection from such parents and other family members. This proves to be very devastating as both extended and nuclear family relations thrive and are enjoyed in Africans societies.
6. Depression: often times, people around the victim of depression do not notice this problem. It is so as symptoms of depression manifest as other psychological problems like prolonged sadness, loss of interest in hitherto enjoyed activities, persistent fatigue, worry, anxiety, thought of suicide, sleeping disorder, eating disorder, drug use and abuse among others.
7. Feeling of entanglement: through pre-marital cohabitation and sex, an individual may feel entangled with the person or persons he or she has cohabited and had sexual intercourse with. Sometimes when there is no genuine love, a teenager may feel compelled to remain in a relationship because of the commitment they have made through cohabitation and sexual intercourse.

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<sup>19</sup> Musa Abdullahi and Abdullah Umar, "Consequences of Pre-Marital Sex among the Youth: a Study of University of Maiduguri," p12



8. Feeling of guilt: a teenager who started experimenting with sex and cohabitation at an early age may have to suffer from sense of guilt for having broken another person's heart and has therefore committed a grave offence.
9. Possibility of having a dysfunctional home: a teenager who has engaged in a premarital cohabitation and sex might have lost the opportunity of having a functional and happy marriage later in life. It is also possible that history would repeat itself in his or her family. Waiting until the time of marriage before having sex allows one to have meaningful and in-depth marriage relationship rather than focusing only on physical attractions

### **Seventh-day Adventist's Position on Premarital sex**

The Seventh-day Adventist Church recognising that the issue of premarital sex has become more open and constitutes a serious and growing threat to the ideals and purposes of the Christian home, in its official statement issued on October 12, 1987 vehemently opposed any form of sexual intercourse outside of marriage and not within a husband and wife. By this, the Church supports God's ideal for marriage (Hebrews 13:4) which should only be between married male and female adults as against the growing trend in some Western and African cultures where adultery and premarital sex, as well as obsessive sexual behaviour, sexual abuse of spouses, sexual abuse of children, incest, homosexual practices (gay and lesbian), and bestiality<sup>20</sup> have become the order of the day and are being promoted in most movies on the internet and television.

Although there is no direct Biblical injunction as regards male virginity, Seventh-day Adventist Church echoes the biblical approval of female virginity till marriage as seen in its laws against premarital sex in the old and new testaments (Deut. 22:20, 21; 1 Tim 1:10; Heb. 13:4; Eph. 5:3; 1 Thess. 4:3). The Bible holds human dignity and sanctity of marriage in high esteem and so does the Seventh-day Adventist as a Bible believing Church.

While emphasising that sexual intimacy is a gift from God to be enjoyed by a husband and his wife, the Church concludes its statement by supporting the counsel of Paul to Titus in Titus 2:11-14, NEB. "For the grace of God has dawned upon the world with healing for all mankind; and by it we are disciplined to renounce godless ways and worldly desires, and to live a life of temperance, honesty, and godliness in the present age, looking forward to the happy fulfilment of our hope when the splendour of our great God and Saviour Christ Jesus will appear. He it is who sacrificed himself for us, to set us free from all wickedness and to make us a pure people marked out for his own, eager to do good."

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20 Official Statement of Seventh-day Adventist Church on Sexual Behaviour <http://www.adventist.org/en/information/official-statements/statements/article/go/0/sexual-behavior/54/> (Oct. 12, 1987)

### **The Seventh-day Adventist Position on Cohabitation**

Miroslav M. Kiš while writing on the Seventh-day Adventist position on cohabitation also defines cohabitation as “a living arrangement of any unmarried heterosexual couple who share common residence and sexual intimacy.”<sup>21</sup> While identifying some problems associated with cohabitation, Kis says “Seventh-day Adventists maintain the biblical stance on human intimacy. Marriage is the only context where true and complete closeness can be achieved with the most benefits and security. (Genesis 2:24)”. Some of the problems of cohabitation which probably inform the position of the Seventh-day Adventists include the dishonesty involved in the cohabiting relationship. While the couple keeps living together as though they were husband and wife, separation can occur at any time. Another problem is lack of vows which characterize marriage.

As viewed by Seventh-day Adventist Church and expressed in many of her official documents<sup>22</sup>, cohabitation is more like a private arrangement between the two people involved and too weak to offer support to any societal values.

Kiš concludes that:

the Seventh-day Adventist Church echoes the biblical disapproval of any arrangement other than the institution of marriage. It recognizes that the emergence of cohabitation often signals deeper needs. Frequently the partners who seek refuge in such arrangements carry the wounds of repeated marital failures, infidelity, abuse, selfishness, or many other tragedies. For that reason, the Church seeks to minister to each individual, while upholding the biblical standard of conjugal union as the only legitimate form of cohabitation. (pg1)

### **Solving the Problem of Premarital Sex**

Many recommendations on curbing the problem of premarital sex have been made. Some studies suggest that parents need to lead exemplary lives that children could emulate,<sup>23</sup> other suggestions range from adequate supervision of both academic and social lives of youths in tertiary institutions,<sup>24</sup> effective monitoring of youths by parents, punitive measures against parents who force their children into premarital sex,<sup>25</sup> need to educate teenagers on internet and television content use, training for media contents

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21 Kis, Miroslav K. 2001. “Seventh-day Adventist Position on Cohabitation.” Biblical Research Institute General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, <http://adventistbiblicalresearch.org/adventist-heritage-practical-christian-living/seventh-day-adventist-position-cohabitation>

22 Bruinsma R. 2015. Is Cohabitation Always Wrong? In church and society Missiological Challenges for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Maier R. (ed). Patterson Printing, Michigan. 575-586

23 Adeoye Ayodele , Ola Omolayo and Aliu, Bose, “Prevalence of premarital sex and factors influencing it among students in a private tertiary institution in Nigeria,” p4

24 Musa Abdullahi and Abdullah Umar, “Consequences of Pre-Marital Sex among the Youth: a Study of University of Maiduguri,” p1

25 Kintu Jackson, “Causes And Characteristics Of Pre-Marital Sex Among The Youths Of Madudu Subcounty, Mubende District” px

producers on the need to balance transmission of programmes with sexual content with the consequences of engaging in sexual activities at an early age among others.

As Christian counsellors therefore, while we pitch our tent with those of other scholars in using the aforementioned strategies to reduce the issue of cohabitation and premarital sex, we would in addition organise family life seminars in our local churches, schools and community, that would involve parents and their children where the issue of premarital sex would be discussed in detail with its causes, consequences and solutions clearly spelt out. Parents and children would also be involved in the planning, execution and assessment of the success of the family life seminars and workshops for our church, school and local community; this is to ensure they own the programme and try the lessons learnt in their various families.

Although total eradication of premarital sex may be a mirage, it must not be left without being curtailed. We would encourage parents within our circle of influence to engage in positive communication with their children from childhood to ensure that children build trust and confidence in their parents.

For teenagers who are already engaged in premarital sex and cohabitation, we will not leave any stone unturned. We will apply some counselling theories - person-centered or client centered theory, rational-emotive theory and behavioural theory - to guide teenagers who are already involved in premarital sex. Counselling sessions to help modify the adolescents' thoughts, attitudes and beliefs that affected their emotions and behaviour and made them start experimenting with sex would also be held. For example if the teenager has been addicted to viewing sexual contents on television or the internet, recreation activities with parents and other family members of the victim to replace the time spent before the television or surfing the internet could be planned. A constructive communication model that would guide their communication such that the issue of premarital sex would be touched on, but without hurting the person experimenting with sex could be designed.

All the counselling skills in order to get the adolescent out of the problem of premarital cohabitation and sex should be explored. We will use one-on-one method to counsel the individual. We will also help look for additional mental and health experts to help in the counselling process. All the factors that could have led the individual to premarital sex would be explored. In trying to do this, our search light would be beamed on the roles played by the individual, the parents and the society at large. In order to unravel this and dig deep to the root of the matter, we would ask some questions that would be answered by the aforementioned parties. We would direct the first set of questions below at the cohabiting partners:

1. What is the rate of your sexual engagement now compared to when he or she started?
2. What has been the contribution of friends to the start and continuation of this habit?

3. Are you willing to stop?
4. What efforts have you put in place to stop?
5. Where do you get money to purchase your movies or pay internet subscription fee?
6. Who amongst your friends are involved in this act?
7. What special pleasure do you derive from engaging in this act?

After getting some information from the partners, we would interview family members especially parents of the cohabiting partners. Examples of questions that would be directed at them include:

1. When did you notice that your child or ward is experimenting with sex?
2. What strange behaviours did you notice in him or her?
3. Would you say your family has a history of pre-marital cohabitation and sex?
4. What efforts have you put in place in helping your child overcome his/her habit?
5. What relationship exists between you and your child or ward?

Information gotten from all these questions would help us as counsellors in the discharge of our duties. Some of the suggestions would therefore include:

1. Positive line of communication should be established between the parents and the child. The one-on-one communication should be devoid of criticisms of the victim of premarital sex, rather the child should be daily encouraged through intentional communication between parent and child. Negative consequences of premarital sex should also be injected into the regular conversation between parent and child to guide against involvement in the act and help those already involved.
2. Victim should be separated from negative friends and be surrounded with more positive ones. This might mean temporary withdrawal from his/her place of abode or school.
3. If the victim has been hitherto idle, it is better at this time to gainfully employ or engage the person
4. Deliberate or intentional steps should be taken to detach the victim from contact with his or her sex partners
5. More positive and cordial relationships should be established between the victim and members of his or her family.

Where all these seem to prove not sufficient enough to help the teenager, we would refer the individual to a professional counsellor like a clinical psychologist, social worker, school counsellor and child and adolescent psychiatrist. All these are to ensure that the victim is properly managed.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations:**

It has been observed that premarital cohabitation and sex is a menace in the world today. It spreads like wild fire devouring the love lives of many talented and highly promising young people. Unfortunately, many young people feel their lives revolve around having sex while young girls feel sex is a way of showing love to their partners. Its persistence and new entrants into the 'club' is an indication of the fact that its causes which range from spiritual, family background, lack of adequate sex education, peer pressure and other environmental factors are yet to be unravelled. Premarital cohabitation and sex has led to altered behavioural patterns with its results being youths' involvement in other vices like abortion, drug use and abuse, violence, drunkenness etc. Therefore:

We would advise that government as a matter of urgency need to wade the legal wand by legislating against premarital cohabitation and sex.

We would work with religious organisations and advocacy groups in deliberately and constantly organizing trainings, seminars and workshops to help young people cohabiting and are sexually active in overcoming the problem. Such programmes would focus on highlighting the causes, dangers and methods of overcoming their problem. We would also encourage family units to deliberately talk about the dangers inherent in premarital sex during family worships and meetings.

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