

Societal Values and Sexual Morality among Adolescents in Nigeria

A.O. LAWAL, E.O. AKERELE, Y.O. UTHMAN-AKINHANMI,
O.L. SOLANA, O.D. YANGOMODOU
Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago Iwoye, Ogun State, Nigeria

J.B. LAWAL
Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State, Nigeria

Abstract. Morality refers to the way people choose to live their lives according to a set of guidelines or principles that govern their decisions about right versus wrong, and good versus evil. This work is basically an evaluative study as the subject under review is a contemporary issue. Descriptive – analytical approach method of data collection was adopted. Results from this study revealed that teens growing up in today's society are subjected to increased demands on their physical, mental, and emotional resources. This study therefore recommended that, awareness of public/private boundaries – Children and adolescents should understand public and private boundaries regarding sex in their own specific cultures and thus be able to navigate through these boundaries. This study concluded that, children and adolescents must understand what sexual morality and sexual immorality is, and build a sound ethical system to guide their temperament, including ideas of duties, respect for others, both ethical and unethical behaviors.

Keywords: Adolescents, Challenges, Morality, Sexual-Perversity and Value System

1. Introduction to the Study

In recent times, it is very rare, except in the villages, to find homes with communal child-rearing patterns, where all members of the family (uncle, aunt, grandmother, father and mother) are responsible for the upbringing of the children. It is noted that most university undergraduates are in their adolescent period of life. Action Health Incorporated (AHI), (2003) noted that, this is a period of transformation

from the dependence of childhood to adulthood independence as members of a society. This is the era, where and when behavioural patterns are instituted. Many University undergraduates begin sexual relations that seem to adversely affect conformity with cherished values of the society during this period. This situation has contributed to a number of social problems such as sexual assaults, adolescent pregnancies, school dropout, sexual immorality, child abuse and emergence of baby factory centres, that was unheard of before now in Nigeria but which has become a common phenomenon in many parts of the country.

Many university undergraduates in Nigeria today often engaged in sexual behaviours that adults find perplexing and absurd. It is observed that the rapid growth in the rate of social change in Nigeria in the past decades has led to certain difficulties both for parents and their children (Osalusi and Alonge, 2016).

Zulu (2002) observed that the youths and their parents seem to have grown up in different worlds socially, politically, economically and even sexually and this has brought about different behavioural changes in them coupled with the various contemporary issues in the society. For instance, the influx of pornographic films or x-ray films has greatly affected some of the societal values regarding modesty, integrity, purity and decency. This in turn may result into early initiation to sexual activities among the youths with far-reaching effects on sexual morality. Also, the socialization and peers' environment now is quite different from the past and

this has in no small measure affected the erosion of the cherished societal value.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Bada (2008) identified other behavioural problems as the ones relating to heterosexual activities variously called sexual abuse, sexual promiscuity, sexual maladjustment and sexual assault. Adejumo (2011) also reported truancy in schools, disobedience to authorities, drug abuse, vandalism, examination malpractices, robbery and cultism as behavioural problems common among University undergraduates. One may be right to say that the pursuit of pleasure seems to have contributed greatly to immoral activities and decline in appreciation of societal values among university undergraduates in Nigeria.

The Encyclopedia of World Problems & Human Potentials (1997) opined some major problems of societal values and sexual morality. Thus sexual immorality implies behaviour contrary to the accepted moral code, which may differ according to the society and the group of people concerned. Sexual immorality may therefore include any sexual deviation as well as 'deviant' marriage patterns and violence. It also includes prostitution. Sexual promiscuity may lead to children borne of two unmarried persons who are unable or unwilling to take care of them. That means that the community may be burdened with their care and may result in psychological traumas for the children, which could lead to deviant behaviour, thus further burdening the community. It also leads to (or is the result of) a diminished feeling of self-worth; and is said to be the main cause of the present dramatic increase in sexually-transmitted diseases.

Society at large has failed to define and support standards of sexual behaviour giving rise to varied and limited sexual codes. The viability and social benefit of any lasting images of sexuality have become impossible to determine. In any case, the biological and social needs of the whole of humanity are rarely, if ever, considered.

1.2 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The main aim of this study was to examine the contemporary problems of societal values and sexual morality among adolescents.

The specific objectives of the study are to:

- examine the remote causes of sexual immorality among adolescents;

- identify the challenges of societal values and sexual morality among adolescents;
- determine the problems of sexual morality in attaining societal values;
- the effects of sexual immorality among adolescents;
- proffer possible remedial measures to the problems identified.

2. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

Social values are most important aspects of a social system, which play a predominant role in running and maintaining the social order. They provide not only the general guidelines for social conduct and behavior, but also establish the norms in the society. For example – honesty is the most appreciated behavior of an individual in a social system, even those who do business based on adulteration and fake products, they also like and expect honesty from others (Sanjay, 2017).

2.1 Protected Value

A protected value (also sacred value) is one that an individual is unwilling to trade off no matter what the benefits of doing so may be. For example, some people may be unwilling to kill another person, even if it means saving many others individuals. Protected values tend to be "intrinsically good", and most people can in fact imagine a scenario when trading off their most precious values would be necessary (Ritov, Ilana, and Jonathan, 2018) .

Sexual ethics or sex ethics (also called sexual morality) is the study of human sexuality and the expression of human sexual behavior. Sexual ethics seeks to understand and evaluate the moral conduct of interpersonal relationships and sexual activities from social, cultural, and philosophical perspectives. Historically, the prevailing notions of what was deemed as sexually ethical have been tied to religious values (Encyclopedia of Bioethics. 20 Jun. 2018).

Sexual ethics involve issues, such as gender identification, sexual orientation, consent, sexual relations, and procreation (Encyclopedia of Bioethics. . 20 Jun. 2018). The terms ethics and morality are often used interchangeably, but sometimes ethics is reserved for interpersonal interactions and morality is used to cover both interpersonal and inherent questions (Henningsen, 2004).

However, not all approaches to applied ethics agree that there is an inherent morality:

Moral nihilism is the meta-ethical view that nothing is inherently right or wrong, and that all value judgments are either human constructs or meaningless.

Moral relativism is the meta-ethical view that moral judgments are subjective. In some cases this is merely descriptive, in other cases this approach is normative the idea that morality should be judged in the context of each culture's convictions and practices.

Moral universalism is the meta-ethical view that moral judgments are objectively true or false, that everyone should behave according to the same set of normative ethics.

The Theory of Traditional values, sexuality, gender equality, and religiosity is applied to this study. Theories of powerful media effects, assumed that, a wide range of social values and behavioral practices are learned from the ideas and images conveyed by popular television entertainment, glossy magazines, internet websites, music videos, consumer advertising, feature films, and news reports. Cultivation theory developed by Gerbner and his colleagues treat the mass media as one of the standard agencies of socialization, rivaling the role of parents and the family, peer-groups, teachers and religious authorities, and social norms operating within the local community and national culture.¹ Socialization is a multidimensional process involving the acquisition of knowledge, attitudes and values. In particular, cultivation theory suggests that frequency of exposure to the mass media, especially television viewing, leads towards the internalization of its messages. Through this process, the media are thought to be capable of influencing moral standards, including attitudes towards the family, marriage and divorce, orientations towards sex roles, support for gender equality, and tolerance of sexual diversity, and beliefs about appropriate ethical standards in public life, as well as shaping broader religious values, beliefs, and practices. Regular exposure to messages conveyed by mass communications is believed to have a cumulative effect upon moral values and behavior, with a particularly influential role upon impressionable young children and adolescents during their formative years as they transition to adulthood. There are several reasons why sexual socialization, in particular, might be influenced by mass communications, affecting everything learned about sexuality from the biology of reproduction and the risks of sexual behavior to attitudes towards love, romantic relationships, and marriage. First, sexuality is pervasive throughout the Western media.³ from prime time TV sitcoms and dramas to feature films and magazines, the media

present countless verbal and visual examples of how dating, intimacy, sex, love, marriage, divorce, and romantic relationships are handled. Content analysis studies have shown that the explicit depiction of sexuality has become more common in popular American television entertainment over the years. For example, a longitudinal analysis of American broadcast and cable channels from 1997-2002 found that talk about sex was shown more often than sexual behavior, though both types of contents increased significantly during the period under review; for example the percentage of shows portraying sexual intercourse doubled from 7 to 14%.

3. Research Methods

This work is basically an evaluative study as the subject under review is a contemporary issue. Descriptive – analytical approach method of data collection was adopted. Data and literatures for this work were obtained from the analysis of the views, comments and opinions in books, articles in journals, magazines, and newspapers, internet materials, as well as speeches and addresses in seminars, conferences, workshops and meetings. It was essentially a library research. Qualitative method was therefore employed in the analysis and presentation of the information collected.

The descriptive research design of survey type was used in this study with a view to describing the situation of societal values and sexual morality among adolescents in Nigeria.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Sexual Cultures, Youth, and Social Media

While understanding the material dimensions of social media has analytical value with which to understand the shaping of sexuality in everyday life, it also opens the door to much more complex questions about sexual cultures, youth, and social media. Rather than a unitary logic of social media working by it (Hepp, 2012, p. 46), many actors and processes of social transformation are involved. While social media logic may penetrate many different practices and domains of sexuality, social media logic may be supported or at the same time disrupted in many ways. Indeed, while social media logic may explore how people negotiate the affordances of social media platforms, it cannot explain the many messy and contradictory ways young people and society make sense of intimate and sexual social media practices. Altheide and Snow's (1979, p. 15) vision on how media are functioning is

therefore too limited. It is not so, as Altheide and Snow argued, that institutions and social practices simply conform to media's "dominant force." Rather, a more open-ended approach to media culture promises to be better at understanding media's role in young people's sexual cultures (Couldry, 2012, pp. 159-160). Such an open-ended approach to media culture and processes of change, which is referred to as medicalization (Hepp, 2012), needs to be situated within specific spaces, times, and practices.

Young people's sexual cultures are historically, in many ways, related to media and more recently social media. Media showing sexual images to children and young people have been central to many debates on the risks of bad media influences (Buckingham & Bragg, 2004). Given that social media are now infrastructures through which young people live their intimate and sexual lives, such risk discourses are omnipresent in talk about young people and social media. Social media are seen as risky for young people's sexual lives because of possible online predators and stranger dangers, sexualization of young girls' bodies, potential loss of sexual reputation, and so on (Livingstone & Mason, 2015). Associated with risk discourses, there is a strong reliance on individual responsibilities; society manages such risks by arguing that young people should be trained as rational actors to make safe choices in social media that maximize their online opportunities and help them avoid (sexual) risks (Ringrose, 2011b, pp. 122-123). Both risk and individualization are central to how sexual knowledge is constructed in youth cultures where social media are omnipresent. Discourses on young people's uses of social media are one of the many significant battlegrounds where sexual cultures are negotiated, where "sexual values and norms are struggled over" (Attwood & Smith, 2011, p. 237).

Such processes of social transformation, where young people's sexualities are seen as risky and individualized, have a history. Before the emergence of social media, modern Western societies attached huge symbolic weight to sexuality. Sex, per se, is seen

4.2 Adolescents Moral Development

Morality refers to the way people choose to live their lives according to a set of guidelines or principles that govern their decisions about right versus wrong and good versus evil. As youths' cognitive, emotional, social development continue to mature, their understanding of morality expands and their behavior becomes more closely aligned with their

values and beliefs. Therefore, moral development describes the evolution of these guiding principles and is demonstrated by ability to apply these guidelines in daily life.

Teens must make moral judgments on a daily basis. When children are younger, their family, culture, and religion greatly influence their moral decision-making. However, during the early adolescent period, peers have a much greater influence. Peer pressure can exert a powerful influence because friends play a more significant role in teens' lives. Furthermore, the new ability to think abstractly enables youth to recognize that rules are simply created by other people. As a result, teens begin to question the absolute authority of parents, schools, government, and other traditional institutions.

By late adolescence most teens are less rebellious as they have begun to establish their own identity, their own belief system, and their own place in the world. Some youth who have reached the highest levels of moral development may feel passionate about their moral code; as such, they may choose to participate in activities that demonstrate their moral convictions. For example, some college students may organize and participate in demonstrations and protests while other students may volunteer their time for projects that advance the ethical principles they hold important.

4.3 Adolescents Emotional Development

For many parents, the adolescent period can seem like a whirlwind of rapidly changing emotions. In fact, some earlier theories about adolescent development proposed that "storm and stress" was to be expected, and suggested adolescents characteristically tended to over-react to everyday situations. However, more recent research refutes that outdated notion. Developmental experts have since learned that what may appear as "storm and stress" is actually the natural outcome of youth learning to cope with a much larger array of new and unfamiliar situations. (Larson & Ham, 1993).

In addition to navigating new and uncharted territory, teens growing up in today's society are subjected to increased demands on their physical, mental, and emotional resources. Social relationships outside the family have exponentially increased with the advent of electronic social networking (e.g. Facebook, Twitter etc.). Academic standards have become more stringent. Sports and other recreational pursuits are more competitive. While teens are learning to cope with these challenges it should be expected that they

will have a diverse range of emotions, and may experience fluctuating emotions throughout the day or week.

4.4 Teen Boys Think Marijuana Makes Sex Better

FRIDAY, Oct. 30, 2020 (Health Day News) Teenage boys who see ads for pot are more likely than girls to link marijuana with better sex, a new study suggests. The reason? Many boys think people who use pot are less inhibited and enjoy sex more, which leads them to want to try marijuana in the future. Girls and young women, however, are less likely to use pot based on messages that connect it to sex, the researchers found.

"The messages adolescents and young adults are seeing are part of what is having impact, the type of appeal and the content, not just the fact that young people are seeing these messages on social media," said lead author Jessica Fitts Willoughby, an associate professor with the Murrow College of Communication at Washington State University. "Messages matter."

Beyond the connection between marijuana and sex, advertising and social media that portrays marijuana in any positive light affects teens and young adults, Willoughby added.

Parents need to talk with their kids about having a more critical attitude toward marijuana messages, said co-author Stacey Hust, an associate professor at Murrow.

"The next step is to identify how advertisements affect people as it relates to sex-related marijuana expectancies, as well as the intent for use before and after sex," Hust said in a university news release.

For the study, the researchers surveyed 350 teens aged 15 to 17 and nearly 1,000 college-aged adults. Regardless of age or sex, researchers found that those who saw more pro-marijuana content on social media intended to use pot in the future.

These findings suggest that regulations of the content of marijuana advertisements, not just where marijuana advertisements are placed, may be needed.

Females and college-aged men did not have the same expectations of pot and its effects on sex as younger boys.

The researchers don't know why older males weren't influenced in the same way, but one possibility is that college men have more sexual experience to draw on as a means of forming their opinion of sex and marijuana.

5. Recommendations

Adolescents are in the process of development that should lead to healthy sexuality. According to McKee et al. (2010), there are fifteen key points to understand when determining what is healthy sexual development. These points are as follows:

- Freedom from unwanted activity -Children and adolescents should be protected from any unwanted sexual activity.
- Education about biological aspects of sexual practice - Children and adolescents must understand how the reproductive system works.
- They must understand what behaviors are associated with pregnancy and the consequences of having a baby or abortion.
- An understanding of safety - Children and adolescents should understand what safe sexual practice is, including physical safety as well as contraception and protection from sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).
- Relationship skills -Children and adolescents should learn these skills more generally, such as communication skills and assertiveness, and then may learn to apply them to sexual relationships.
- Agency – Children and adolescents should understand their rights and know that they are in charge of their own bodies.
- Lifelong learning – Learning about sex occurs in various forms throughout childhood and adolescence, and also continues into adulthood.
- Resilience – Children and adolescents should understand that bad sexual experiences can be learning opportunities rather than damaging occurrences.
- Open communication – Children and adolescents should be able to communicate about sexual matters openly with adults, and adults should be open about such matters when communicating with children.
- Sexual development should not be “aggressive, coercive, or joyless”.
- Self-acceptance – Children and adolescents should be taught to develop positive attitudes toward their sexual identities and self-concepts of their bodies.
- Awareness and acceptance that sex is pleasurable- Children and adolescents should know that it is not shameful to enjoy sex when it occurs in healthy situations.
- Understanding of parental and societal values- Children and adolescents understand that values regarding sex vary widely and must be able to make informed decisions that relate to such values.

- Awareness of public/private boundaries – Children and adolescents should understand public and private boundaries regarding sex in their own specific cultures and thus be able to navigate through these boundaries.
- Competence in mediated sexuality – Children and adolescents should learn how to respond appropriately to sexuality seen in the media.

6. Conclusion

Children and adolescents must understand what sexual morality and sexual immorality is, and build a sound ethical system to guide their temperament, including ideas of duties, respect for others, both ethical and unethical behaviors.

References

- Action Health Incorporated [AHI] (2003). Comprehensive sexuality education trainers' resources manual. Lagos: Fine Print Ltd.
- Adejumo, G. O. (2011). Impact of family type on involvement of adolescents in pre-marital sex. *International Journal of Psychology and Counselling*, 3(1): 15-19.
- Age of Consent Laws By Country. www.ageofconsent.net. Retrieved 2021-04-12.
- Altheide, D., Snow, R. P. (1979). *Media logic*. Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE.
- Atran, Scott; Ginges, Jeremy (2012-05-18). "Religious and Sacred Imperatives in Human Conflict". *Science*. 336 (6083): 855–57. doi:10.1126/science.1216902. ISSN 003 6-8075. PMID 22605762.
- Attwood, F., Smith, C. (2011). Investigating young people's sexual cultures: An introduction. *Sex Education*, 11, 235–242. doi:10.1080/14681811.2011.590040
- Bada, F.O. (2008). The effects of social skills and moral development training on social and moral behaviour of maladjusted youths in Nigeria. An unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria.
- Baron, Jonathan, Ilana, Ritov (2009). Protected Values and omissions Bias as Deontological Judgements (PDF). Elsevier Inc. pp. 134–35.
- Buckingham, D., Bragg, S. (2004). *Young people, sex and the media*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Couldry, N. (2012). *Media, society, world: Social theory and digital media practice*. Malden, MA: Polity Press.
- Encyclopedia.com. 20 Jun. 2018 <<http://www.encyclopedia.com>>. "Sexual Ethics." Encyclopedia of Bioethics. Encyclopedia.com. 20 Jun. 2018
- Health Day News (Friday, Oct. 30, 2020)
- Hepp, A. (2012). *Cultures of mediatization*. Malden, MA: Polity Press.
- Hutson, Mathew (2017). "Why do people die fighting for a cause?". *Science*. Retrieved September 12, 2017.
- Livingstone, S., Mason, J. (2015). Sexual rights and sexual risks among youth online. Retrieved from: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/64567/>
- Livingstone, S., Sefton-Green, J. (2016). *The class. Living and learning in the digital age*. New York City: New York University Press.
- Liwanag, T. (2017) *The Western Sexual Morality*. Retrieved from <https://www.quora.com/What-is-Sexual-Morality> (April, 2021).
- Nature of Human Behaviour. (2017) doi:10.1038/s41562-017-0193-3. "The devoted actor's will to fight and the spiritual dimension of human conflict".
- Ringrose, J. (2011a). Are you sexy, flirty, or a slut? Exploring "sexualization" and how teen girls perform/negotiate digital sexual identity on social networking sites. In Gill, R., Scharff, C. (Eds.), *New femininities. Postfeminism, neoliberalism and subjectivity* (pp. 99–116). Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ringrose, J. (2011b). Gendered risks and opportunities? Exploring teen girls' digitized sexual identities in postfeminist media contexts. *International Journal of Media & Cultural Politics*, 7, 121–138. doi:10.1386/m
- Ringrose, J., Harvey, L., Gill, R., Livingstone, S. (2013). Teen girls, sexual double standards and "sexting": Gendered value in digital image exchange. *Feminist Theory*, 14, 305–323.
- Ritov, and Baron, Ilana, and Jonathan (2018) *Protected Values and Omission Bias*. University of Jerusalem, University of Pennsylvania. pp. 89, 90.
- Shallomi, B. (2015) *Causes Of Sexual Immorality Among Youths: Effects And Remedies*. Retrieved from <http://nigerianobservernews.com/2015/05/causes-of-sexualimmorality-among-youths-effects-and-remedies> (April, 2021)
- Tetlock, Philip E. (2016) *Thinking the unthinkable: sacred values and taboo cognitions*". *Trends*

- in *Cognitive Sciences*. 7 (7): 320–24. doi:10.1016/s1364-6613(03)00135-9
- The Encyclopedia of World Problems & Human Potential (1997) Immorality Unethical personal relationships Permissiveness.
- Zulu, S.P. (2002). A parent-effectiveness programme to improve parent-adolescent relationship. An unpublished M.A. Thesis. Department of Psychology, University of Zululand.