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Assessment of the Belief of Youths on Premarital Sex and Abortion and Influence on Sexual Discipline in AGC Lagos State

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Abstract

This study was aimed at assessing the belief of youths on premarital sex and abortion in AGC Lagos State. The study's design was a descriptive survey research design. The area of this study is Lagos State. The population of this study comprised an estimate of 8,320 youths in the Assembly of God Church. The sample of the study comprised 382 participants. This study adopted Fisher's formula to determine the sample size from the population. A questionnaire instrument was used for data collection in this study. The instrument is titled 'Assessment of Belief of Youths on Premarital Sex and Abortion Questionnaire (ABYPAQ)'. The face validity of the instrument was determined by three experts from Paul University. The reliability of the instrument was ascertained using the Cronbach Alpha method of reliability, and a reliability index of 0.84 was obtained, thus making the instrument reliable. Data collected from the survey were analysed with the help of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23 using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions and an independent t-test to test the hypotheses at the .05 level of significance. The findings indicated a significant correlation between the beliefs of youths and their sexual discipline practices within the Assemblies of God Church, with religious teachings exerting a considerable influence on youths' beliefs concerning premarital relationships and abortion. Based on the findings, the study recommended that the church should assess and improve its sexual health education programs to ensure they meet the needs of youths by providing comprehensive and accurate information; parents within the Assemblies of God Church should be encouraged to engage their children in open and honest discussions about sexuality from a biblical perspective; and faith-based sex education programs should be introduced in Assemblies of God youth fellowships, blending medical facts with biblical morality, among others..

Keywords: Belief, Premarital Sex, Abortion, Youths Sexuality

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INTRODUCTION

Premarital sex has become a topical issue in the society today. Premarital sex is generally considered sinful, while abortion is often condemned as taking innocent life. Despite these teachings, evidence shows that many Christian youths engage in sexual activities before marriage, sometimes leading to unintended pregnancies and recourse to abortion (Nwaoga & Uche, 2020). This contradiction points to the complex interplay between faith, personal conviction, and external influences such as media exposure, peer groups, and cultural trends. The level of sexual discipline among Christian youths is therefore not only a matter of personal morality but also a reflection of their adherence to religious values and the effectiveness of church teachings, family upbringing, and social structures in reinforcing moral standards. Also, the changing nature of the society and globalisation has brought changes to the belief on premarital relationships/sex, including abortion

among the youths. Much of the changes in the sexual behaviour of young people are as a result of the growing power of the youth to run their lives without interference by parents, schools, churches, and the law (Clifford, 2024). Hence, there is a high rate of sexual permissiveness which could be attributed to lack of church attendance, identification with peers rather than parents, personal values and frequent use of illicit drugs and alcohol. The modern adolescents' less restrained attitude towards sexuality could also be attributed to the changing attitude of the adult society towards extra-marital sexual relationships (Azubuike & Bosah, 2018).

Recently, parents have been accused of being indifferent to the sexual decadence of their children and failing to enforce the cultural moral code, possibly because of their own moral decadence (Bosah, 2018). Lending their voice to this, Ugwulor and Agwu (2019) emphasised that the current parental attitude to sexuality leads to the higher incidence of premarital sexual activity. This permissive situation also includes the parents' attitude to sex outside their marital homes. The family plays an important role in sexual socialisation because the family is the first factor of the child's socialisation, sexual upbringing. The church also plays a role in Christian children's socialisation and upbringing.

The Assemblies of God church places a strong emphasis on sexual discipline and personal responsibility. The teachings emphasise the importance of self-control, purity, and the avoidance of sexual immorality. The church encourages its members to uphold biblical standards of sexual conduct and to resist societal pressures that may lead to behaviours contrary to these standards.

It is important to recognise that the teachings of the Assemblies of God church on these topics are rooted in its interpretation of biblical principles and are intended to guide the moral and ethical conduct of its members. These teachings are often communicated through sermons, educational programmes, and pastoral counselling, with the aim of promoting a lifestyle that aligns with the church's doctrinal beliefs. Each year, an estimated 3.2 million unsafe abortions (defined as a pregnancy termination performed either by a person lacking the necessary skills or in an environment lacking adequate medical standards) take place among adolescent girls ages 15–19. This number accounts for almost 15% of the total global incidence of unsafe abortion (22 million), and abortion-related mortality among young girls and women accounts for nearly one-third of abortion-related deaths worldwide. Despite recently increased commitments to adolescent reproductive health, our understanding of their abortion experiences is limited (Frank et al., 2024).

Annually, it is estimated that out of 19 million pregnancies that end with unsafe abortion globally, 5.7 million occurred in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) between 2010 and 2014 (Ganatra et al., 2017). In Africa, 59% of all unsafe abortions occur in women aged less than 25 years, and 90% live in countries with restrictive abortion laws (WHO, 2007). Abortion is not permitted under any circumstances in 12 out of 54 African countries. Only four countries, namely Cape Verde, Mozambique, South Africa, and Tunisia, have relatively liberal abortion laws (WHO, 2007). Compared with older women, adolescents are more likely to experience unsafe abortion from untrained personnel, have a self-induced abortion, delay seeking post-abortion care, and terminate pregnancy in the first three months (Ganatra et al., 2017). As a result of unsafe abortion, adolescents experience life-threatening complications such as severe haemorrhage and sepsis from childbirth. Other disabilities include reproductive tract infections (RTI), pelvic inflammatory diseases, and infertility (Keogh et al., 2015; Norris et al., 2016).

In Sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria inclusive, female adolescents' decision-making regarding sexual and reproductive health (SRH) issues, especially on contraceptive use, is influenced by social and cultural norms (Bain et al., 2021). These norms are transmitted by parents as custodians of the tradition. In this process mothers play an important role (Shams et al., 2017) in the education of their daughters for a safe and healthy transition to adulthood (Sooki et al., 2016; Izugbara, 2015). They teach their daughters healthy behaviours and shape their discourse on all issues (Shams et al. 2017; Wamoyi et al. 2015). Based on these norms of control and regulation of the adolescent girls' sexuality, it is not socially acceptable for a girl to be sexually active before marriage (Buller & Schulte, 2018), since virginity represents good conduct (Bhana, 2016), and being sexually chaste and modest in dressing characterises a good girl (Lenzi et al., 2018). So, parents/guardians believe that limiting sexual health education for adolescent girls is a way to protect them from risky sexual behaviour (Shams et al., 2017). This description may reflect the fact that mothers lack knowledge about sexual issues as well as skills for effective communication with young people. They also feel embarrassed to discuss sexual issues with their daughters and fear the arrogance as well as fear encouraging them in sexual experimentation, since it is believed that discussing reproductive health with adolescents motivates their curiosity (Shams et al., 2017; Motsomi et al., 2016).

The focus of policy and programmatic attention remains primarily on adolescents ages 15–19, leaving a substantial gap in our understanding of the sexual and reproductive experiences of adolescents ages 10–14. Girls in this category comprise a large and growing segment of the population, particularly in highly impoverished regions of the world (estimated at 545 million in 2015). A parallel increase in the age of marriage in many contexts has extended the period of premarital fertility, which further exposes young adolescents to the risk of unintended pregnancy resulting in unsafe abortion. Moreover, the majority of unsafe abortion incidence is concentrated in low- and middle-income

countries (LMIC) where the 10–14-year-old population is proportionally largest and where many countries have restrictive abortion laws (Woog & Kagesten, 2017). The potential for sexual and reproductive harm among adolescents is a present and growing threat, yet our understanding of abortion in this group is insufficient to properly address their needs through programmatic and policy interventions (Cecilia et al., 2020).

Induced abortion is a public health problem and demands serious attention. The problem is likely to worsen because of increased modernisation and urbanisation, which tend to sever young people from the once previously held tradition of premarital chastity and family organisations and encourage sexual intercourse at an early age without effective practice of contraception. Globally, about 13% of induced abortions are related to low contraceptive usage (Ononokpono, Odimegwu & Usoro, 2020). In most developing countries, including Nigeria, abortion is illegal and highly restricted, hence constraining access to safe induced abortion services for adolescents and all women (Guttmacher Institute, 2016). Although preventable, unsafe induced abortion is a leading cause of maternal mortality and morbidities (World Health Organization, 2021). An estimated 73 million induced abortions take place worldwide annually, and 6 out of 10 (61%) of all unintended pregnancies, and 3 out of 10 (29%) of all pregnancies, end in induced abortion. About 45% of induced abortions are unsafe, of which 97% occur in developing countries. Of all unsafe abortions, one-third were performed under unsafe or unhygienic conditions by untrained and unskilled persons using dangerous and invasive procedures (WHO, 2021).

Of the estimated 10.2 million unintended pregnancies occurring each year among women aged 15–19 years in developing countries, 3.3 million result in unplanned births, and 5.6 million in abortions, of which 3.9 million are unsafe, and 1.2 million are miscarriages (Darroch et al. 2016). In sub-Saharan Africa, data from 2008 to 2012 reveal a high adolescent pregnancy rate, ranging from 121 (Ethiopia) to 187 (Burkina Faso) per 1000 adolescents, with equally high abortion estimates, varying from 11 per 1000 pregnant adolescents in Ethiopia, over 21 in Malawi, to 38 per 1000 adolescents aged 15–19 years in Kenya (Sedgh et al. 2015).

Similarly, Mcharo et al. (2021) pointed out that young people reported that it was difficult to discuss sexual and reproductive health matters with their parent/guardian. Despite all these aspects, girls are socialised and prepared to be future wives and mothers (Wamoyi et al., 2015; Igras et al., 2014). While parents try to preserve their cultural and social value, the demand for pregnancy-related health services by adolescent girls and young women is increasing. Additionally, adults perceive adolescents as too young to understand sexual issues, in addition to the lack of a conducive environment for open discussions of sexual and reproductive health matters (Motsomi et al. (2016). What has just been described is reinforced by the study of Usonwu et al. (2021), which pointed out that a lack of parental self-efficacy, as well as cultural and religious norms, creates an uncomfortable environment which leaves peers, media, teachers, and siblings as important and sometimes preferred sources of sexual health information.

Realistically, more than half of all unsafe abortions take place in developing countries, mostly in Nigeria. The majority of induced abortions (about 3 out of 4) in Latin America and Africa are unsafe, and in Africa, almost half of all abortions occur under the least safe circumstances. The World Health Organization (WHO) report indicated that in developed regions, an estimated 30 women die for every 100,000 unsafe abortions, compared to developing regions, with as high as 220 maternal deaths per 100,000 unsafe abortions (WHO, 2021).

The levels of unintended pregnancy and unsafe abortions remain high in Nigeria. Abortion law in the country is highly restrictive, and induced abortion is illegal. Abortion is only permitted where it is intended to save a woman's life. Despite the restrictive nature of the abortion law, induced abortion is common and often unsafe because it is mostly performed clandestinely by unskilled providers (Guttmacher Institute, 2016). In 2012, an estimated 1.25 million induced abortions occurred, and the number doubled when compared to an estimated 610,000 induced abortions, representing an estimated rate of 25 abortions per 1000 women aged 15–44 in 1996 (Guttmacher Institute, 2015). The increased number of abortions was attributed to both population growth and an increase in the rate of abortion. The estimated abortion rate was 33 per 1,000 women of reproductive age in 2012 (Guttmacher Institute, 2015). The rates of abortion vary across the geopolitical zones in Nigeria. Evidence showed that in 2012, induced abortion ranged from 27 per 1,000 women of reproductive age in the Southwestand North Central zones and 31 per 1,000 in the Northwestand Southeast zones to 41 and 44 per 1,000 in the Northeastand South South zones, respectively (Guttmacher Institute, 2015). Adolescents are the most vulnerable group, and adolescent girls are at high risk of unintended pregnancy and consequent unsafe abortion. Based on this, it is therefore necessary for this study to examine the belief of youths on premarital sex, abortion and sexual discipline in AGC Lagos State.

Objective of the Study

The objective of the study was to assess the belief of youths on premarital sex, abortion and sexual discipline in AGC Lagos State. The specific objectives of this study were to:

1. Explore the beliefs held by youths about abortion, including moral, ethical, and religious convictions in AGC Lagos State.

2. Investigate the influence of religious teachings on youths' beliefs regarding premarital sex, specifically within the context of the Assemblies of God Church

3. Examine the relationship between the beliefs of youths and their sexual discipline practices within the context of the Assemblies of God Church.

Research Questions

These research questions guided the study:

1. What are the beliefs held by youths about abortion, including moral, ethical, and religious convictions in AGC Lagos State?

2. What is the influence of religious teachings on youths' beliefs regarding premarital relationships and abortion, specifically within the context of the Assemblies of God Church?

3. What is the relationship between the beliefs of youths and their sexual discipline practices within the context of the Assemblies of God Church?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance to guide the study:

HO1: Is there no significant difference in the mean scores of male and female youth in AGC Lagos regarding the beliefs held by youths about abortion, including moral, ethical, and religious convictions in AGC Lagos State?

HO2: There is no significant difference in the mean scores of male and female youth in AGC Lagos regarding the influence of religious teachings on youths' beliefs regarding premarital relationships and abortion, specifically within the context of the Assemblies of God Church?

HO3: There is no significant difference in the mean scores of male and female youth in AGC Lagos regarding the relationship between beliefs of youths and their sexual discipline practices within the context of the Assemblies of God Church.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The study was guided by three research questions and corresponding hypotheses. The population of this study comprised an estimate of 8,320 youths in the Assembly of God Church. This will comprise youths aged 15-30 years who are members of Assemblies of God churches in Lagos State. The sample of the study comprised 382 participants. This study adopted Fisher's formula to determine the sample size from the population. Where the sample size can be derived by computing the minimum sample size required for accuracy in estimating proportions by considering the standard number deviation set at 95% confidence level (1.96), the percentage picking a choice or response (50% = 0.5) and the confidence interval (0.05 = ±5). A random sampling method was employed to select youths from different Assemblies of God branches within Lagos State to ensure diversity. A purposive sampling method was used to select a few participants who have expressed differing views on the subject of premarital relationships, abortion, and sexual discipline. A convenient sampling technique was adopted to select the sample for the study. The purpose of using convenient sampling was to make sure that only the respondents who gave their consent are eligible to participate in the study. A questionnaire instrument was used for data collection in this study. The instrument is titled ‘Assessment of the belief of youths on premarital relationship and abortion questionnaire (ABYPAQ)’. The face validity of the instrument was determined by three experts from Paul University. The reliability of the instrument was ascertained using the Cronbach Alpha method of reliability. The researcher administered the questionnaire to 20 subjects that were not part of the study sample on a pilot basis using parallel forms at different times (intervals of three weeks) to the same group of people, which gave consistent results, thereby confirming its reliability. The reliability index of 0.84 was obtained, thus making the instrument reliable. The instrument was administered by the researcher with the help of six research assistants who were trained on the modalities of administration of the instrument. The researcher gave a briefing on the purpose and method of administering the instrument to the respondents. This is to enable quick dispatch and a high return rate of the instrument. Data collected from the survey were analysed with the help of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23 using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions and an independent t-test to test the hypotheses at the .05 level of significance. The four-point scale was used to compute the mean. Values were attached to the categories of responses, namely Strongly Agree/Very High Extent (4 points), Agree/High Extent (3 points), Disagree/Low Extent (2 points) and Strongly Disagree/Very Low Extent (1 point). This means that the cut-off mark is 2.50. Hence, items with points above the cut-off mark of 2.50 were retained, while those below 2.50 were not accepted. The hypothesis of no significant difference was retained if the p-value is greater than the 0.05 level of significance; otherwise, the null hypothesis was rejected.

RESULTS

Research Question One:

What are the beliefs held by youths about abortion, including moral, ethical, and religious convictions in AGC Lagos State?

Table 1: Mean Scores and Standard deviation of respondents on Beliefs about Abortion

SN	Item Statements	Mean	Std. Dev.	Remark
1	Abortion is morally wrong under any circumstances.	3.41	.648	Agree
2	Religious teachings are a major influence on my views about abortion.	3.36	.863	Agree
3	Abortion should be legalized to protect women's reproductive rights.	3.13	.776	Agree
4	Abortion is acceptable in cases of rape or incest.	3.52	.868	Agree
5	The decision to have an abortion should be left to the individual.	3.37	.852	Agree
	Cluster Mean Scores	**3.36**	**0.8014**	**Agree**

Table 1 shows that the cluster mean of items 1-5 was 3.36. This is above the benchmarkscore of 2.50 on a 4-point rating scale. This implies that youths' beliefs about abortion are complex and multifaceted. While some believe that abortion is morally wrong under any circumstances, others are more nuanced in their views. Religious teachings play a significant role in shaping their perspectives, but many also consider the need to protect women's reproductive rights and individual autonomy. Some youths think abortion should be legalised, while others believe it is only acceptable in specific circumstances, such as rape or incest. The table also revealed that the cluster standard deviation of items 1-5 was 0.8014. This also shows that the respondents were not far from the mean and the opinion of one another in their responses on youth belief regarding abortion.

Research Question Two:

What is the influence of religious teachings on youths' beliefs regarding premarital relationships and abortion, specifically within the context of the Assemblies of God Church?

Table 2: Mean Scores and Standard deviation of respondents on influence of religious teachings on youths' attitudes and beliefs regarding premarital relationships and abortion

SN	Item Statements	Mean	Std. Dev.	Remark
1	The teachings of the Assemblies of God Church influence my views on premarital relationships.	3.18	.941	Agree
2	My religious beliefs guide my decisions about abortion.	3.11	1.060	Agree
3	The Bible's teachings on relationships and sexuality shape my attitudes towards premarital relationships.	3.10	.934	Agree
4	Church teachings on morality influence my stance on abortion.	3.21	.953	Agree
5	The Assemblies of God Church's teachings on premarital relationships and abortion are clear and influential to me.	3.30	.923	Agree
	Cluster Mean Scores	**3.18**	**0.9622**	**Agree**

Table 2 shows that the cluster mean of items 1-5 was 3.18. This is above the benchmarkscore of 2.50 on a 4-point rating scale. This implies that religious teachings had a high influence on youths' attitudes and beliefs regarding premarital relationships and abortion, specifically within the context of the Assemblies of God Church. Specifically, the respondents agreed that the teachings of the Assemblies of God Church significantly influence youths' views on premarital relationships and abortion, shaping their attitudes and decisions through biblical guidance on relationships, sexuality, and morality. The church's teachings are seen as clear and influential, guiding youths' stances on these issues and informing their decisions about reproductive health and relationships. The table also revealed that the cluster standard deviation of items 1-5 was .9622. This also shows that the respondents were not far from the mean and the opinion of one another in their responses on the influence of religious teaching on youth belief towards premarital relationships and abortion, adding further validity to the mean.

Research Question Three:

What is the relationship between the beliefs of youths and their sexual discipline practices within the context of the Assemblies of God Church?

Table 3: Mean Scores and Standard deviation of respondents on Relationship Between, Beliefs, and Sexual Discipline Practices

SN	Item Statements	Mean	Std. Dev.	Remark
1	My knowledge of sexual health and relationships influences my decisions about sexual discipline.	3.27	.612	Agree
2	My attitudes towards premarital relationships affect my sexual behavior.	3.19	.704	Agree
3	My religious beliefs about sexuality and relationships guide my sexual discipline practices.	2.96	.872	Agree
4	I practice sexual discipline because of my personal values and convictions.	3.40	.646	Agree
5	The teachings of the Assemblies of God Church on sexual morality influence my sexual behavior.	3.13	1.011	Agree
	Cluster Mean Scores	**3.19**	**0.769**	**Agree**

Table 3 shows that the cluster mean of items 1–5 was 3.19. This is above the benchmarkscore of 2.50 on a 4-point rating scale. This implies that there is a significant relationship between the beliefs of youths and their sexual discipline practices within the context of the Assemblies of God Church. Specifically, youths' decisions about sexual discipline are influenced by a combination of factors, including their knowledge of sexual health and relationships, personal values and convictions, religious beliefs, and attitudes towards premarital relationships, with the teachings of the Assemblies of God Church also playing a significant role in shaping their sexual behaviour and morality. The table also revealed that the cluster standard deviation of items 1-5 was 0.769. This also shows that the respondents were not far from the mean and the opinion of one another in their responses on the relationship between the knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs of youths and their sexual discipline practices.

Hypothesis One

Is there no significant difference in the mean scores of male and female youth in AGC Lagos regarding the beliefs about abortion, including moral, ethical, and religious convictions in AGC Lagos State?

Table 4: Independent t-test analysis on beliefs held by youths about abortion.

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	df	t-test	p-value	Remark
Male	165	3.3903	.63354				
				361	.879	.380	NS
Female	198	3.3313	.63990				

The result in Table 4 shows that a t-test value of .879 with an associated exact probability value of .380 was obtained. This probability value of 0.380 was compared with 0.05, set as the level of significance for testing the hypothesis, and it was found not to be significant because 0.380 is greater than 0.05. The null hypothesis, which stated that there is no significant difference in the mean scores of male and female youth in AGC Lagos regarding the beliefs held by youths about abortion, including moral, ethical, and religious convictions in AGC Lagos State, is therefore retained.

Hypothesis Two

Is there no significant difference in the mean scores of male and female youth in AGC Lagos regarding the influence of religious teachings on youths' beliefs regarding premarital relationships and abortion, specifically within the context of the Assemblies of God Church?

Table 5: Independent t-test analysis on influence of religious teachings on youths' beliefs regarding premarital relationships and abortion.

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	df	t-test	p-value	Remark
Male	165	3.1915	.85721				
				361	.261	.795	NS
Female	198	3.1677	.87641				

The result in Table 5 shows the t-test value of .261 with an associated exact probability value of .795 was obtained. This probability value of 0.795 was compared with 0.05, set as the level of significance for testing the hypothesis, and it was found not to be significant because 0.795 is greater than 0.05. The null hypothesis, which stated that there is no significant difference in the mean scores of male and female youth in AGC Lagos regarding the influence of religious teachings on youths' attitudes and beliefs regarding premarital relationships and abortion, specifically within the context of the Assemblies of God Church, is therefore retained.

Hypothesis Three

There is no significant difference in the mean scores of male and female youths in AGC Lagos regarding the relationship between the beliefs of youths and their sexual discipline practices within the context of the Assemblies of God Church.

Table 6 independent t-test analysis regarding the relationship between the knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs of youths and their sexual discipline practices.

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	df	t-test	p-value	Remark
Male	165	3.1891	.51668				
				361	.037	.971	NS
Female	198	3.1869	.61622				

The result in 6 shows the t-test value of .037 with an associated exact probability value of .971 was obtained. This probability value of 0.971 was compared with 0.05, set as the level of significance for testing the hypothesis, and it was found not to be significant because 0.971 is greater than 0.05. The null hypothesis, which stated that there is no significant difference in the mean scores of male and female youth in AGC Lagos regarding the relationship between the beliefs of youths and their sexual discipline practices within the context of the Assemblies of God Church, is therefore retained.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The findings revealed that youths' beliefs about abortion are complex and multifaceted. While some believe that abortion is morally wrong under any circumstances, others are more nuanced in their views. Religious teachings significantly influence their perspectives; however, many also recognise the necessity of safeguarding women's reproductive rights and individual autonomy. Some youths think abortion should be legalised, while others believe it is only acceptable in specific circumstances, such as rape or incest. This aligns with the findings of Frank et al. (2024) on the knowledge, attitude, and practices towards induced abortion among adolescent female students in four selected secondary schools in Moshi municipality, Kilimanjaro region, Northern Tanzania. The finding revealed that the mean age of respondents was 16.7 (SD 3.7), and 50.6% (n = 173/342; mean knowledge score = 38.9 ± 1.4) had inadequate knowledge of induced abortion. More than half, 55.8% (n = 191/342; mean attitude score = 18.9 ± 1.9), had unfavourable attitudes towards induced abortion. Nineteen respondents had induced abortions from unplanned pregnancies. The two main reasons for induced abortion were to finish school (26.3%) and fear of parents' reactions (26.3%). There was no significant difference in the level of knowledge on induced abortion among study participants. However, the unfavourable attitude towards induced abortion observed is mostly influenced by cultural and religious factors. Two main reasons for induced abortion were fear of termination from school and fear of parents' reactions. Comprehensive sexuality education, contraception counselling and provision, access to post-abortion care services, and parent-daughter communication interventions may be beneficial to prevent unplanned pregnancies in adolescent students attending secondary schools in this setting.

The study's findings indicated that religious teachings significantly influenced youths' beliefs about premarital relationships and abortion, particularly within the Assemblies of God Church context. Specifically, the respondents agreed that the teachings of the Assemblies of God Church significantly influence youths' views on premarital relationships and abortion, shaping their attitudes and decisions through biblical guidance on relationships, sexuality, and morality. The church's teachings are considered clear and influential, guiding youths' stances on these issues and informing their decisions about reproductive health and relationships. The present study agrees with the findings of Cecilia et al. (2020) on existing peer-reviewed and grey literature on abortion-related experiences of adolescent girls, paying particular attention to girls ages 10–14. The findings indicated that although adolescent girls may possess general knowledge about abortion, they lack specific information regarding sources of care and often delay seeking care due to fears of stigma, insufficient resources, and provider bias. Adolescent girls do not exhibit elevated rates of physical complications relative to older cohorts; however, they are susceptible to psychosocial harm. For girls ages 10–14, abortion experience may be compounded by pregnancy due to sexual abuse or transactional sex, and they face even more barriers to care than older adolescents in terms of

provider bias and lack of agency. Adolescents have unique needs and experiences around abortion, which should be accounted for in programming and advocacy. Adolescent girls need information about safe abortion at an early age and a responsive and stigma-free health system.

The study's findings indicated a significant correlation between the beliefs of youths and their sexual discipline practices within the Assemblies of God Church context. Specifically, youths' decisions about sexual discipline are influenced by a combination of factors, including their knowledge of sexual health and relationships, personal values and convictions, religious beliefs, and attitudes towards premarital relationships, with the teachings of the Assemblies of God Church also playing a significant role in shaping their sexual behaviour and morality. This agrees with the findings of Aterigbade (2020) on the perception and participation of youth in premarital counselling in the Amazing Grace Baptist Association. The result revealed that premarital counselling builds the needed foundation for a healthy and blissful home. The contribution of this study to knowledge is that it will help churches, youth, parents and individuals in solving marital problems and reduce the issues of divorce that are common in some Christian marriages today. Also, it will open the youth to the danger of not partaking in premarital counselling.

Similarly, findings from the study revealed that youths have mixed perceptions about the church's sexual health education, with some feeling adequately informed about contraception and STI prevention, while others believe there is a need for more comprehensive education on sexual health and relationships within the church. This corroborated the findings of Rebuma and Gurmesa (2022), who assessed knowledge, attitude, and associated factors towards induced abortion service among female students of private colleges in Ambo town, Ethiopia, 2022. The study discovered that the beliefs of youths about premarital sex, abortion, and sexual discipline largely reflect the doctrinal teachings of their church. While many of them affirm that premarital sex is sinful and abortion is unacceptable, their lived experiences often reveal inconsistencies influenced by peer pressure, media, and societal trends. It is therefore concluded that the belief of youths alone is insufficient in changing their sexual discipline; it must be reinforced through intentional discipleship, mentorship, and youth-focused programmes that build moral discipline.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The Assemblies of God church should continue to integrate biblical teachings into its programmes and services, thus providing the youths with a strong moral foundation for making decisions about relationships and sexual health.

2. The church also should provide support and resources to help youths practice sexual discipline, including counselling, mentorship, and peer support groups.

3. The church should assess and improve its sexual health education programmes to ensure they meet the needs of youths, providing comprehensive and accurate information.

4. Parents within the Assemblies of God Church should be encouraged to engage their children in open and honest discussions about sexuality from a biblical perspective.

5. Faith-based sex education programmes should be introduced in Assemblies of God youth fellowships, blending medical facts with biblical morality.

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