

Comprehensive sex education in Kenya: Islamic perspective

Presented by Dr. Hassan Kinyua Omari and Dr Edith Kayeli Chamwama

University of Nairobi

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to address the Comprehensive sex education debate in Kenya curriculum from a religious perspective. This is tackled from the Islamic perspective. The discussion is premised on the current debate in the country on sex education and the rejection of faith based organizations especially in its implementation in schools based on religious persuasions and reasons. The fundamental questions addressed in this paper are:

- (1) What are the sexual values addressed by Islamic sharia**
- (2) What are the sexual lessons permitted by Islam?**
- (3) What are sexual behavior currently observed among Muslim students?**
- (4) To which extent does Islam allow teaching of sex education?**
- (5) What are causes and solutions to teen pregnancies in Kenya?**

Sex education in Islam is paradoxical: on the one hand, Islam allows for it and actually calls for students to exercise their sexuality but, on the other hand, there seems to be discrimination between male and female sexuality due to a misinterpretation of the scriptures. It seems like boys are given more rights with regard to the expression of their sexuality. The combination of these contradictory views with the current trends on teenage pregnancy leads to an inquiry of the Islamic perspective on sexual education.

Keywords: Comprehensive sex education, reproductive health, jurisprudence, Islamic sharia

Introduction

The debate on sex education in Kenya has been ongoing for the past five years. This debate was thrust into the limelight by Senator Judith Achieng Sijeny through her presentation of a reproductive health care bill in the senate. This bill sought to have adolescents given comprehensive sexual education and confidential services in matters of reproductive health. The bill did not sail through the senate as many of the legislators termed it an attempt to “spoil”

children. The then Education Cabinet Secretary Prof. Jacob Kaimenyi said that his ministry would not allow for “introduction of immorality” in schools. Religious bodies as well chimed in and were in the front line rejecting the introduction of sex education in schools. Many of the religious leaders argued that introduction of sex education would open up children to promiscuity, moral decadence and flouting religious guidelines which in turn affects their religiosity. Some people even claimed that this should be rejected as it is un-african.

Nonetheless, the reality on the ground is that even though the young ones are denied sexual education in schools they are already engaging in it. This is evidenced by the high number of pregnancy cases witnessed towards the end of 2018 as the students sat for their national examinations. Many were either pregnant or had recently given birth, while in some cases across the country, young girls had to sit for their examinations in maternity wards. This occurrence therefore calls for a sober re-examination on the whole issue of sex education. It should be noted that issues of sex education and teenage or adolescent engagement in sexual matters is not unique to Kenya. This has happened and even continues to happen in other countries within and without the continent. What is key however, is the manner in which this is approached and handled. Religions here play a key role. This is because religions are the major mobilizing and rallying institutions for many Kenyans. Religions through the religious leaders play a key role in the country and have an unmatched ability to rally masses in any social or cultural issue. Religious leaders are the voice and conscience of many people in Kenya and therefore it is imperative that their doctrines and teachings on sex be examined and discussed. Thus, this paper addresses this emotive subject from the Islamic point of view.

Sexual values addressed by Islamic sharia

Islam teaches that sex is a form of worship as the Prophet (PBUH) said, "When one of you have sex with your wife, it is a rewarded act of charity." The Companions were surprised and said, "But we do it purely out of our desire. How can it be counted as charity?" The Prophet replied, "If you had done it with a forbidden woman, it would have been counted as a sin, but if you do it in legitimacy, it is counted as charity." (Hadith). It should be noted here that, Islam though esteemed is only permitted within wedlock or the institution of marriage. Sex within marriage is seen as a pleasurable form of worship that is highly rewarded by Allah.

To appreciate sex as a form of worship, believers are supposed to learn Sexual Health. Islam jurisprudence teaches that sexual health comprises of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality. A Muslim is supposed to maintain good sexual health to avoid divorce because failure in physical health is among the reasons that may lead to divorce in Islam. Male dysfunction, according to Islamic jurists leads to divorce. Therefore Sexual health requires a positive approach to sexuality. Islamic teachings guide that couples must practice safe sex for

both to enjoy the act. This should be free from coercion and violence as Allah SWT and His Prophet taught.

The man in the Islamic account is perceived as a brother to the woman and the woman is the other half of the pair. The Messenger (blessings and peace be upon him) says, "Women are the sisters of men." [Narrated on the authority of Mother of Believers Aisha by Imam Ahmad (6/256); Abu Dawud (236); Al-Tirmithy (113) and others. The Qur'an, on its part, treats this issue of fraternal equality from more than one perspective. On a purely religious level for instance, the Qur'an says: "Verily, the Muslims (those who submit to Allah in Islam) men and women, the believers men and women (who believe in Islamic Monotheism), the men and the women who are obedient (to Allah), the men and women who are truthful (in their speech and deeds), the men and the women who are patient (in performing all the duties which Allah has ordered and in abstaining from all that Allah has forbidden), the men and the women who are humble (before their Lord -Allah), the men and the women who give Sadaqat, (i.e. Zakat, and alms, etc.), the men and the women who fast (the obligatory fasting during the month of Ramadan and the optional Nawafil fasting), the men and women who guard their chastity (from illegal sexual acts) and the men and women who remember Allah much with their hearts and tongues (while sitting, standing, lying, etc. for more than 300 times extra over the remembrance of Allah during the five compulsory congregational prayers or praying extra additional Nawafil prayers of night in the last part of night etc.) Allah has prepared for them forgiveness and a great reward (i.e. Paradise) (Qur'an 33:35). This infers that men should treat their wives as they would a sister who is very close and dear to them. This calls for handling them in a way that the men would want to be handled or how they would want those near and dear to them to be handled.

The holy Qur'an establishes socio-economic and spiritual equality by maintaining: "The believers, men and women, are "Awliy," (helpers, supporters, friends, protectors) of one another, they enjoin (on the people) Al-Ma`ruf (i.e. Islamic Monotheism and all that Islam orders one to do); and forbid (people) from Al-Munkar (i.e. polytheism and disbelief of all kinds, and all that Islam has forbidden); they offer their prayers perfectly (Iqamat-as-Salat), and give the Zakat and obey Allah and His Messenger. Allah will have mercy on them. (Qur'an 9:71). Thus, here we find that in Islam equality of the genders is emphasized as a co-dependency. The husband and wife here thus regard each other as a companion, a helper and a key support of the other. The man, naturally has the duty of protecting the woman physically. In return the woman offers the man spiritual protection through prayers and service that complements the man.

In Islamic jurisprudence men are taught how to approach their spouses based on the Hadith of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) "Let not one of you fall upon his wife like a beast falls. It is more appropriate to send a message before the act." This hadith espouses that spouses should prepare each other in good time before approaching them for sex. Some Muslim scholars advise that spouses should have certain signs signaling for the desire to engage or commence the sexual act. Among the Swahili of the East African coast, if a wife puts rose flowers or jasmine on the bed, it

is a signal to the man that she is need of her conjugal rights. The same message can also be passed through putting a *Leso* with a love message on the bed. The man then needs to act upon this and please his wife.¹

Nonetheless, sexual issues between spouses should be treated in confidentiality as the Prophet PBUH) taught, "Do not divulge the secrets of your sex life with your wife to another person nor describe her physical feature to anyone."

(2) What are the sexual lessons permitted by Islam

The basis of sexual lessons are enshrined in the Holy Qur'an where Allah SWT says "O mankind! Be dutiful to your Lord, Who created you from a single person (Adam) and from him (Adam) He created his wife (Eve), and from them both He created many men and women and fear Allah through Whom you demand your mutual (rights), and (do not cut the relations of) the wombs (kinship). Surely, Allah is Ever an All-Watcher over you. " [Surah 4:1]

This verse teaches that human beings (men and women) were created by Allah from a single soul or self. This self is a nucleus from which Allah created its companion i.e., wife to complete the creation of human being. Thus no human being is complete without the other. The verse refers to Adam and his wife Eve. Allah states that He created Eve for Adam in order that he enjoy the pleasure of living with her." [Surah 7:189] from this point in history Allah, blessed the two and scattered the multitudes of men and women of different races and color across the globe. All of them worshipped one God. They were all children of the same parents. This indicates that they are all united in a fraternity, embracing each other as brother and sister. It is Because of this that the Qur'an commands human beings to fear Allah as their Lord, appreciate Him as their Creator and be heedful to His teachings. The Quran also teaches respect of the duties towards parents and observing respect for the womb respect as a symbolic of human bond. This verse when observed keenly is the foundation of sex education. However, it is to be explained and expounded depending on age and mental capacity of the recipient.

Islam is a way of life which calls for education throughout one's life. However, education must be based on age Appropriateness. When we talk of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE), whoever teaches should be cognizant of age of the students at different levels. Sexual education, like any other education provides opportunities to learners to explore their own value and attitude. It also helps in building learners' decision-making capacity as well as enhance respective appropriate communication skills. When this is achieved, risk as a result of sexual activity is reduced in a big way in all aspects of sexuality

Islam respects culture and appreciate is as a way of life for particular people. As long as culture does not contradict sharia principles then it is embraced. Otherwise some amendments have to be

¹ interview with sheikh Abdul Aziz Merabaksh at Pumwani Majengo, Nairobi County on Saturday 23rd March 2019.

made to omit the contradiction. Therefore Islam permits sex education as long as it is culturally relevant. Nonetheless, the approach to teach children of different cultures should be customized in order to have the interests of the cultures brought on board.

(3) What are sexual behavior currently observed among Muslim students?

Among the prevalent sexual behavior observed among Muslim students is legitimate mixing between boys and girls. In Islam socializing freely between boys and girls is prohibited unless there is a guide like a teacher or parent who observes that the fraternization is in accordance with the shariah. Currently the youth socialize freely terming it as "mingling." During the era of the Prophet (blessings and peace he upon him), the era of the companions who succeeded the prophet (PBUH), and the era of their followers, Muslim men and women met at different occasions , religious or otherwise, to discuss various issues affecting them. This was recommended by Prophet Muhammad(PBUH). The socialization of human beings which is natural is not prohibited in Islam, the only guidance given is the manner in which those gathering should conduct themselves.

In the contemporary society mingling has become very common. It is however important to mention that socialization is among the recommended activities in Islam. The religion only prohibits the kind of mingling that might lead to sin.

In meeting between boys and girls, as discussed in the second volume of *Contemporary Legal Opinions* (Fataawa Mu'aserah), the author states that greeting women, handshaking women, and the treatment of women by male doctors as matters that need a lot of sensitization. This is especially in those areas where Islam is a prevalent religion and it is advisable for one to adhere to the best guidance as given by Prophet Mohammed (PBUH), his righteous caliphs and educated companions as advocated for by the prophet (PBUH). Doing this assists in avoiding being trapped between the two extreme paths of western leniency and severe eastern asceticism.

Observance of the guidance of the Prophet (PBUH), reveals that women are not incarcerated or isolated. Similarly this does not occur during the era of the caliphs after the death of the prophet (PBUH). Women attended major Islamic events and congregational prayers on Fridays at the Prophet's masjid. They also they prayed the night salat (Al-Esha)as well as dawn (Al-Fajr) prayers. The only guidance the Prophet (PBUH) gave was that the women were to form salat rows behind the men. This was to avoid physical mingling after prayers. This was also as a precautionary measure so that both men and women would not see the sensitive (sexualized) parts of the other. It should be noted that, when the prophet gave this directions, underwear and trousers were not common form of attire. In addition the mosque did not have a partition between the men and women prayer halls. Moreover, during that era men and women used on entrance to the mosque, hence crowding would occur. In one instance upon seeing the crowding of men and women at the entrance, the Prophet (PBUH) said, "If only we left this entrance to the women". [Transmitted by Abu Dawud on the authority of Ibn Umar (462) (463). After this a separate entrance for women to

the mosque was allocated and aptly named the "woman's Entrance." During the Friday congregation, women attended prayers behind the Prophet and listened to the sermon to an extent that some of them memorized entire sermons which they later shared with their children at home. Um`Ateyya, a prominent woman companion during the Prophet's era, said, "We were frequently instructed to go out for the Bairams."

In another account, Um`Ateyya stated, "The Messenger of Allah (PBUH) instructed us, the house helps, and the ones menstruating to go out and gather with others. The menstruating women would stay away from prayer and witness the joy (of the day) and Muslim's prayer (to Allah). So I said, `O the Prophet of Allah, there may be one of us who does not have a *Jilbaab* (dress)." He replied, `Let her sister (in Islam) give her one. [Sahih Muslim "The Prayers of the Two Eids" (890).] Analyzing the above hadith, we realize that some Muslim communities ignore women in their countries by misinterpreting the Quran and thereby misrepresenting Islam.

Other behaviors observed among some Muslim girls is nude dressing. This is proscribed in Islam as it is seen as demeaning the woman. We learn that women always attended the learning sessions of the Prophet (PBUH). During these sessions they would dress modestly. They would address Aisha with the questions they found uncomfortable or too bold to ask themselves directly to the Prophet. The Prophet's wife, Aisha (R.A), praised the women of the supporters whose shyness did not prevent them from seeking knowledge of Islam and asking questions about major issues such as impurity, complete sex or ejaculation which prevented one from performing some forms of worship, bathing from impurity, menstruation and other such matters. When women realized that they need ample time with the prophet, they demanded a special day of teaching especially for them. They said openly, "Oh Prophet of Allah, the men have taken complete possession of your company, so devote one of your days to us." The Prophet (PBUH) promised to give them a day during which he preached and gave them instruction. [Transmitted by Bukhaari in *The World (Al-Alam)* 1/34 on the authority of Abu Said.]. Um `Ateyya says, "I went on seven military expeditions with the Prophet (PBUH); I would guard the fighters, provisions, make their food, treat the injured and nurse the ill ones". [Transmitted by Muslim (1812).]

Another sexual behavior witnessed today is open seduction among the youth without care or fear. When one examines the Qur'an's discourse on women affairs, especially during the era of the prophets we find that women were highly respected and men strived to avoid sin. A good example is Moses. When he met Aaron's daughters who were suffering, he asked them some questions. He got their answers without any particular feeling of guilt or embarrassment. In the end he assisted them. One of them even suggests to her father to hire Moses, describing him as a strong and honest man. This is how the Qur'an puts it: "And when he arrived at the water of Midian (Madyan) he found there a group of men watering (their flocks), and beside them he found two women who were keeping back (their flocks). He said, "What is the matter with you?" They said, "We cannot water (our flocks) until the shepherds take (their flocks). And our father is a very old man." So he watered (their flocks) for them, then he returned back to shade, and said: "My Lord? Truly, I am in

need of whatever good you bestow upon me!" Then there came to him one of the two women, walking shyly. She said: "Verily, my father calls you that he may reward you for having watered (our flocks) for us." So when he came to him and narrated the story, he said: "Fear you not. You have escaped from the people who are Zalimun (polytheists, disbelievers, and wrongdoers)." And said one of them (the two women): "O my father! Hire him! Verily, the best of men for you to hire is the strong, the trustworthy. [Surah 28:23- 26] This is the kind of behavior that Islam espouses the young ones to embrace. They should always be ready to assist the other gender without intention of receiving payment or a form of reward in return for their service.

(4) To what extent does Islam allow teaching of sex education

Islam permits teachings on Reproductive Health. These lessons are found both in the Qur'an and hadith. In reproductive health learners are supposed to be taught their body parts and their functions. Students are also taught in madrassas in jurisprudence books their state of complete physical body. They are also instructed on how to preserve their mental health through *dhikr* (remembrance of Allah at all times) as well as how to take care of their social well-being. In Islam social wellbeing is not only being physically healthy, it also includes one being fine in all aspects of life which include social, economic and spiritual well-being. The prophet Muhammad (PBUH) used to emphasize on Muslim youth marrying in his famous hadith in *sahiih Bukhaari* where he always mentioned "Oh Youth...whoever of you who is capable..." the word capable here means all matters relating to the reproductive health as well as system, its functions and processes.

Children are a trust of Allah on parents. It is therefore the responsibility of parents to make sure that their children live the best life as was narrated from 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar who said: I heard the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said:

"Each of you is a shepherd and each of you is responsible for his flock. The ruler is a shepherd and is responsible for his flock. A man is the shepherd of his household and is responsible for his flock. A woman is the shepherd of her husband's house and is responsible for her flock." Narrated by al-Bukhaari (853) and Muslim (1829)

Part of the responsibility that parents have towards their children is protecting them from everything that may lead to corruption or have a negative impact on their morality. Teaching children morality from covering the *'awrah*, controlling the gaze and seeking permission before entering designated private spaces, begins from an early age. When they attain puberty or reach the age of discernment, the boys and girls have and sleep in separate bedrooms. This is as per Allah (SWT) revelation "O you who believe! Let your legal slaves and slave-girls, and those among you who have not come to the age of puberty ask your permission (before they come to your presence) on three occasions; before *Fajr* (morning) prayer, and while you put off your clothes for the noonday (rest), and after the *Isha* (late-night) prayer. These three times are of privacy for you, other than these times there is no sin on you or on them to move about, attending (helping) you each other. Thus Allah makes clear the *Ayat* (the verses of Quran, showing proofs for the legal

aspects of permission for visits, etc.) to you. And Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise” [an-Noor 24:58].

Imam Ibn Katheer (R.A) explained that in this verse Allah (SWT) instructs the believers that their servants and slaves, and their children who have not yet reached the age of puberty, should ask permission before entering rooms in three situations, the first of which is before *Fajr* prayer, because at that time people are usually sleeping in their beds. “And while you put off your clothes for the noonday (rest)” that is, at the time of siesta or midday nap, because a person may take off his clothes at that time with his wife. “And after the *Isha* (late-night) prayer” because this is the time of sleep. The reason why children should not be allowed to enter rooms at these times is for fear that the parents may be in an intimate situation or may be sleeping naked due to heat. Taser Ibn Katheer (6/82)

When children reach the age of puberty, they are obliged to seek permission before entering their parents bedrooms at all times, as Allah instructed, “And when the children among you come to puberty, then let them (also) ask for permission, as those senior to them (in age). Thus Allah makes clear His *Ayat* (Commandments and legal obligations) for you. And Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise” [an-Noor 24:52]

In Islam children undergo basic training from birth to seven years, after which serious teaching and instruction begins as was narrated from ‘Amr ibn Shu‘ayb, from his father, that his grandfather said: The Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said: “Instruct your children to pray when they are seven years old, and smack them if they do not do it when they are ten years old, and separate them in their beds.” Narrated by Abu Dawood (495). Separating the children in the beds when they reach the age of puberty is a precaution against provocation of desire, even among siblings.

Following these verses it is clear that when children reach puberty they should be taught the signs of puberty and be sensitized on the physical characteristics which distinguish men from women, as well as the types of discharge that may be secreted from their sexual organs. They should also be taught the rules of ablution’ and *ghusl*, paying attention to the phrases used in teaching and ensuring that it is taught according to what the child needs to know. Both boys and girls are taught what their *awrah* is and that it is private, and that it should be covered from non *mahram*(non relatives who can marry them) . This is aimed at instilling in them chastity and modesty which will safeguard them from transgressing against Allah’s commands.

Majority of the Muslim scholars argue that comprehensive sex education touching on intercourse, should be taught at an appropriate age when marriage is approaching. Many state from age nine or when children are mature enough to comprehend issues of *fiqh*, such as the rulings on *zina* (fornication or adultery) and the like, which have to do with intercourse and ‘*awrahs*.

The jurisprudence scholars also argue that basic knowledge on natural and instinctive nature is what children should be taught gradually, in accordance with the stages of their development, as taught by *fiqh*. The scholars advice that the words and phrases we use, should be modest and attention must be paid to the appropriate ages and stages of human development. Allah teaches that "And of everything We have created pairs, that you may remember". [Surah 51:49] It is therefore upon teachers to teach students about the pairs and what the pairs entail.

Islam as per this verse teaches that there is no healthy gender existence without the other. This is why when Allah created our father Adam as the first human soul, He also created for him, our mother Eve to be his counterpart, so as to accompany each other in the journey of life and find peace in each other. After creating Eve Allah advised both, "Dwell you and your wife in the paradise and both of you freely with pleasure and delight of things therein as wherever you will, but come not near this tree or you both will be of the *Zalimun* (wrongdoers)". [Surah 2:35]

These lessons are taught to students in madrassa on daily basis all over the world. We therefore find sex education in madrassa. This approach is what might be triggering the debate on comprehensive sex education. Men and women complete each other. Indicating that none of them is complete without the other as the Qur'an emphasizes that difference: " And the male is not like the female." [Surah 3:36] They are as unlike as earth and heaven which highly complement each other without which the world would not be in existence. No gender is higher in rank than the other in creation as Allah says, : "you are from one another" [Surah 4:25] , "And Allah has given you wives of your own kind". [Surah 4:25]

In Allah's wisdom both male and female have physical and psychological construction which some are alike, while others are different. Both have elements that attract each other like a magnet. Though females have more of those elements which attract men, the ultimate reason for women attraction is Allah's wisdom to equip her with a natural desire and a strong passion that leads to their attraction which leads to communion for life to continue and generations to be brought forth.

Islam allows women to be taught sex education by female teachers not male. This is because Islam from onset set religious codes for both men and women on how they should relate and interact with each other as well other relevant codes, instructions and rules pertaining human life. The woman is to safeguard her femininity and acknowledge her respect. Allah (SWT) as per His wisdom created a barrier between men and women to protect women from predators who are out there to 'enjoy' their bodies then dump them. Some of the teachings of Islam on how men and women should relate are as follows:

- i) Islam protects femininity to maintain the stream of tenderness and beauty running to remain in women. For this reason there are things forbidden for men and permissible to women. For example women are allowed to wear gold and pure silk while it is prohibited for men as we

find in this hadith , "These two (substances) are prohibited for the men of my nation and allowed for its women". [Transmitted by Ibn Majah on the authority of Ali (3595), Hadith Sahih.]

- ii) Women on their part are prohibited from putting on things that go against their femininity, such as men's wear, adopting movement and behavior which is masculine in nature. No gender is to wear the garment of the other The Prophet (PBUH) says: "Allah condemns the man who dresses like a woman and the woman who dresses like a man". [Transmitted by Abu Huraira, Abu Dawud (4098); and Ahmad 2/325; and Ibn Hibban (1904); and others.] For men to behave like women and women to behave like men is equally condemned by Allah. Again the Prophet (PBUH) taught, "Three (kinds of people) will not enter Paradise and will not enjoy Allah's gaze upon them on the Day of Judgment : a son who is disobedient to his parents, a mannish woman and an adulterer. [Transmitted by Ahmad Ibn Umar and approved by Sheikh Shaker as Sahih (1680); and Al-Nisa'i 5/80; and Al-Hakim 1/72 and others.]
- iii) Islam supports the female in view of her relative weakness in some issues. It places some of her interest in men to support her. An example is in securing the costs of living and the provision for their needs especially in communities where women are restricted by nature and environment to work, as well as circumstances like after giving birth where she needs time to rest and recuperate. In this situation, her guardian, father, husband, son or brother are all obliged to look after her needs as an obligation under the Sharia. No basic need should constrain her from appreciating life.
- iv) Islam protects the female's morals and decency. It guards her reputation and dignity. It defends her chastity against evil beings who misuse their thoughts and tongues trying to misuse her to harm her. In order to achieve these, the Qur'an teaches women to lower their eyes and preserve chastity and purity. As Allah states, "And tell the believing women to lower their gaze (from looking at forbidden things), and protect their private parts (from illegal sexual acts etc.)". [Surah 24:31]
- v) Islam teaches women to maintain a decent, unrevealing manner of dress and ornamentation. This is not intended to oppress her but protect her. Allah says, "and not to show off their adornment except that which is apparent and to draw their veils all over *Juyubihinna* (i.e., their bodies, faces, necks, and bosoms, etc.) " [Surah 24:31] The visible or apparent ornament that the verse refers to has been interpreted to be inclusive of *kohl*, the finger ring, the face, the two hands and, some exegetes and jurists establish, the two feet. [During the time of the Prophet (PBUH), it was customary for some women to cover their face. The flexibility of Islam allows the woman the option of covering her face or not. The woman is to cover the other attractions that do not show, such as the hair, neck and throat, arms and legs, from all people except her husband, and her consanguineous, non-marriageable relations or *mahrim* [Those persons whom the woman is forbidden to marry because of the proximity of the relation such as brothers, uncles etc, whom she finds it hard to hide these from. "and not to reveal their adornment except to their husbands, fathers, their husband's fathers, their sons, their husband's sons, their brothers or their brother's sons, or their sister's sons or their (Muslim) women (i.e.

their sisters in Islam), or the (female) slaves whom their right hands possess, or old male servants who lack vigor, or small children who have no sense of the shame of sex". [Surah 24:31]

(5) What are causes and solutions to teen pregnancies in Kenya?

In response to this question, we conducted a research commissioned by Muslim education council (MEC) on Causes of Teenage Pregnancy at Pumwani area of Majengo Nairobi county Kenya.

The responses we got include:

- i) poverty
- ii) broken home
- iii) separation of couples
- iv) single parent
- v) death
- vi) peer pressure
- vii) Influence
- viii) Lust
- ix) religious beliefs
- x) rape and
- xi) sexual abuse
- xii) alcoholism and drug abuse
- xiii) lack of knowledge
- xiv) environmental influence and
- xv) Pornography.
- xvi) absence of chaplaincy services in schools

- a. **Poverty** – This refers to the state of being poor. This often leaves many young girls vulnerable and at the mercy of those who provide for them. In an interview at Pumwani hospital, a pregnant teenager said her parents could not provide her basic needs like food, clothes and learning materials. She therefore used to visit a male classmate to study with him and also take some of his books home. They liked each other more and by the time she realized they were in a serious relationship that later led to her pregnancy. Others interviewed stated that their parents pushed them into commercial sex work so as to bring home an income, while others were lured by rich men using money, and the end result was pregnancy.
- b. **Broken Home** - refers to a family that either lacks parental guidance due to their absence or lack of control due to influence of drugs like *khat* and alcohol. It may also refer to a home where the parents are not staying together either by divorce or separation or death of one of them. Teenagers in such a home suffer a lot, there is no or little parental love and affection. There is also no parental control and the girl may therefore be preyed upon by school mates or some irresponsible men leading to pregnancy.

- c. **Separation of couples** - is when couples are separated due to marital problems or one works in a different town. In Pumwani there are many of such cases. Some parents disappeared as it is documented and therefore their whereabouts is unknown. Some get jobs in Middle East and only come back after two years. Separation is very dangerous because naïve girls may be lured to engage in premature sex. Some of the girls also take advantage of this and get entangled in premarital sex. Some play the parents against each other by claiming she is visiting the other parent when in real sense she is not. Some take advantage of the fact that the parents are not in communication due to marital differences. In the end she goes to her boyfriend and the end result is teenage pregnancy.
- d. **Single parent** – is when one of the parents is only taking care of the children due to death, or separation, or divorce. There are many single parents in Pumwani. Some of the girls therefore take advantage of the parents being away for most of the time and spent time with boyfriend(s) and at the end may get pregnant. The parents, mainly women, are out eking a living to make ends meet.
- e. **Death** – some teenagers are orphaned at a very early age and therefore lack adults as a role models and guides. Thus due to lack of parental control and guidance end up in illicit relationships that lead to pre-marital pregnancies.
- f. **Peer pressure or influence** – those teenagers who get pregnant in their teens in Pumwani its due to peer influence. Most young teenagers who are in boy – girl relationship laugh at their peers who are not making them view themselves as ‘back ward’.
- g. **Lust** – some teenagers get into sexual relationships because of lust. In adolescent stages both males and females go through some psychological and physical sexual feelings and may put into reality or act on it. This often results in teenage pregnancy.
- h. **Religious beliefs and practices** – it is a practice among some Muslims to allow teenage marriage. They claim that Islamic jurisprudence allows a girl from as young as 9 yrs to marry. They believe in early marriage and some parents do not even allow their girl children to have formal education.
- i. **Rape and sexual abuse** – some teenagers get pregnant as a result of rape or may be sexually abused by some of the people within the society including teachers, or an elderly persons.
- j. **Alcoholism and drug abuse** – many students are fond of taking alcohol and hard drugs. There is a saying that the devil finds work for an idle hand, these alcoholics and drug addicts end up indulging in casual sex which then leads to teenage pregnancy.
- k. **Lack of knowledge or ignorance** – many young girls lack knowledge in matters of sex. Thus many end up in relationships with little or no knowledge on how to manage their sexuality. These end up pregnant and are clueless of what happened. This is especially the case with those who are uneducated.
- l. **Environmental influence** – this refers to the social norms and values in the community. In some communities, the moment the girl child gets her first menstruation, she can get married. Some times too it is normal for a teenager to get pregnant in the community because the parents and grandparents were once the same. In Pumwani due to Gikomba market there are many visitors on a daily basis

who prey on Pumwani girls. Those from poor families and broken families reported having sex before 18.

m. **Pornography** – pornographic videos and photos easily available to the young ones on the internet, magazines, newspapers, books, and other media lure teenagers into indiscriminate sex and may lead to teenage pregnancy. In Pumwani there are many video places where youth go to watch movies, football and other shows. This is where many boys especially learn bad behaviors which lead them to lure the girls into sex

n. **absence of chaplaincy services in schools-** Absence of chaplaincy services in schools is seen to have dealt a major blow to our children's morals. Majority of the teenage pregnancies occur in schools which do not have chaplains. Many of the causes of teenage pregnancies and teenage immorality can be solved by having chaplains in schools. For example fatherless children can take chaplains as their father figures. Children from leaderless families can also be constantly assisted by a chaplains.

Effects or Consequences:

The research by MEC team found out that teenage pregnancy has an adverse effects and consequences on the individual or victim, family, and the society as a whole. The following are some of the effects or consequences: school dropout, fatherless children, street children, armed robbery, dependency burden, death, increase of economic hardship, spread of diseases, abortion, and family conflicts.

- i) **School dropout** – many teenagers who get pregnant are not able to complete their education. Furthermore, in most cases when they get pregnant they are forced out of their homes. They either go to those men who are responsible for the pregnancies, but in many instances they become prostitutes or 'waziba' the term used in Pumwani to refer to prostitutes.
- ii) **Fatherless children** - many children born by teenage mothers do not know their biological fathers because the men responsible deny responsibility. These children are marginalized by the community leading to stigma which they live with for their entire life.
- iii) **Street children** – some children born by teenage mothers end up being street children. This happens because; the teenage parent(s) may not take proper care or cannot afford to provide for the children.
- iv) **Armed robbery** – the study found out that many armed robbers were born by teenage parent(s) and single parents. This is due to lack of father figure. Some of the street children grew up to become armed robbers.
- v) **Death** – some teenagers do not survive. Some decide to deliver at home. In some instances they succumb to excessive bleeding and die.
- vi) **Spread of diseases** – teenage mothers or parents usually spread sexual transmitted diseases (STD). When the relationship starts, the guy may have indiscriminate sex likewise the girl hence increase in spread of STDs may occur.
- vii) **Abortion** – teenage girls usually makes the attempt to abort their babies. Abortion is not accepted in many nations and also immoral according to the Qur'an. The effects of abortion are childlessness in future, death, deformities of the teenager or the baby etc.

- viii) ***Family conflicts*** – usually teenage pregnancy results in conflicts between the girl's parents and the guy or boy's parents. This may be due to tribal issues, finances, religious beliefs, etc.

Solutions to the causes is Prevention and Control of teenage pregnancy

The community should engage its members in preventing teenage pregnancy by all means and offer counseling where necessary. There should be holiday workshops for teenagers during school holidays where they offer them sex education

Providing community outreach program, and other social interventions like visiting schools to talk to teens on how to protect themselves will be a big solution .

Education partners should offer Spiritual ***counseling*** to teens and their parents.

Our curriculum should produce studying materials geared towards guiding the young ones on how to protect themselves and being productive citizens.

MoE should enhance Adult ***education*** to parents and guardians of school going children. Through its County education boards representatives they should seek to play a role in offering advice and lectures to parents on the importance of their children education and future.

MoE should conduct ***Community outreach programs*** where known influential leaders should visit mosques, media with an aim of addressing teenage pregnancy

MoE should begin a program where all ***School dropout*** will be encouraged to go back to school and acquire necessary qualifications to make them employable hence solve poverty challenge among the youth. It should also target teenagers who get pregnant and not able to complete their education and assist them complete education.

The entire community should stop discrimination of ***Fatherless children*** for they were not part of the sin. Nonetheless the government should seek to establish the biological fathers of these children and order them to take responsibility of their deeds.

On Street children, the county government should collaborate with partners and solving the menace of street children.

On robbery, the GoK should partner with all stakeholders in rehabilitating some identified robbers who in turn can be utilized as detectives and investigators as well as counselors in their respective fields.

On Family conflicts, GoK should to set up conflict resolution centers in the counties where children suffering from the same, will report and get necessary assistance which involve counseling the parents

Recommendations

The government has opened the first children rights investigation center at CID training school ²this is commendable. Establishing 47 more branches in all the 47 counties will be a great achievement in curbing teenage pregnancies

Government administrators throughout the nation should work hand in hand with schools and other partners in bringing all sex offenders to book

The government through MoE should conduct annual symposium for schools, colleges and universities where they address teenage pregnancy and collect data on cases available

The government should deploy chaplains in all schools across the nation. The chaplains should be mandated to address all issues related to youth in collaboration with teachers, parents and all education stakeholders.

Parents should resume their duties of parenting and stop delegating that responsibility to anyone because they are the best education foundation for their children.

Conclusion

Sex education is a subject that can no longer be pushed under the carpet. Its implementation is long overdue given the rise in teenage pregnancies as reported in the media. The parents, who traditionally were mandated to undertake this task no longer do so as they are very busy trying to make ends meet. Religions on the other hand are not taking the task upon themselves. When it is done, it is shrouded in mystery and lots of “sanitization” so as to fit the religious outfit yet the repercussions are visible to all. As a country we are losing many young people through illicit abortions procured in backstreet alleys and bogus clinics. These deaths can be prevented if the young people are given comprehensive sexual education. The children need not get conflicting messages and wrong advice from social media platforms. As a country we are capable of coming up with age-appropriate sexual education that takes cognizance of the various religious ethics.

² *Citizen News* Monday 25th March 2019 9:00p.m

It is time for us to get our heads out of the sand and catch the bull by the horns. It should be noted that restrictive sexual education has gained a lot of mileage and become idealized as a result of the rejection of the Comprehensive sex education by faith based organizations. Currently, religion is no longer the only point of reference which provides guidance concerning sexual practices. There exists policies on sexual laws which in their own merit influence this field. This calls for a reform of societal norms through the reinterpretation of holy texts, which in this case is the Islamic text.

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