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Premarital Sexual Relationships and Academic Performance among University Students: A Case of Ardhi University, Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

Engaging in premarital sexual relationship is found to have effect such as HIV/AIDS infection, STDs/STIs, early and unplanned pregnancies and stress to most youth worldwide. Despite the mentioned effects, most of the youth including university students are still engaging in premarital sexual relationships. This being the case, it was necessary to conduct a study on premarital sexual relationships and academic performance among university students in the study area. The aim was to find out why University students engage in premarital sexual relationship. And how engaging in premarital sexual relationship affect students' academic performance in the study areas? The Social Exchange Theory (SET) was used to guide the study. In addition, a Cross-sectional research design was used in this study whereby both probability and non-probability sampling procedures were employed. The study found courtship, peer pressure, poverty, mass media and curiosity as the drivers for students' engagement in premarital sexual relationship. The study concludes that, although there are positive impacts of engaging in premarital sexual relationship among university students, negative effects outweigh positive impacts; and these include stress, which results from fear of being cheated upon or losing a partner, poor performance, and unwanted pregnancies leading to abortion. The study recommends that, the youth specifically university students should be educated on the impact of engaging in premarital sexual relationships on academic performance. Moreover, different programs should be established within universities to expose first-year students to what may happen if they engage in premarital sexual relationship.

Key words: Premarital Sexual Relationship, Academic Performance, Students, Tanzania

1. INTRODUCTION

Most of the youth engage in premarital sexual relationships worldwide (Okigbo

and Speizer, 2015) thus, making it very common in many countries. Premarital sex is a voluntary sexual intercourse between unmarried individuals (Alexander et al., 2007; Adhikari and Adhikari, 2017). According to Abdissa et al., (2015), premarital sexual relationship is a situation where a female and a male are voluntarily engaging in an intimacy or family kind relationship before marriage. In this kind of relationship, couples are practicing sexual intercourse subjecting them to sexual consequences as similar to those facing married couples. Most young girls and boys engage in pre-marital sexual relationship for many reasons, which include economic, social issues and peer pressure (Chiao et al., 2012; Abdullahi and Umar, 2013; Stephen and Stephen, 2016). Another reason is technological influence including using of contraceptives which is perceived by many parents as a way of avoiding pregnancy. In addition, a study by Noroozi et al. (2014) found that, child-rearing practices, parents' interactions, children's economic support, beliefs and sexual awareness are the drivers of premarital sexual relationships. This shows that the process of raising a child may in one way or the other influence sexual behaviour. Literature shows that, life challenges within families and open mindedness of some teenagers due to advances in technology contribute to pre-marital sexual relationship (Bocar and Biong, 2016). As Momah (2007) argues, movies, televisions, magazines, and pornography of every kind are used to expose the youth to sexual issues at a young age.

Based on the above, engaging in premarital sexual relationship results into many effects including, early pregnancies which lead to discontinuation from school specifically for girls, getting infected with sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), HIV/AIDS and unnecessary abortions for girls (Bocar and Perez, 2014). According to Abdissa et al. (2017), HIV/AIDS is the third leading killer of young people worldwide while in Africa, it is the first killer of the youth aged 15 to 29 years old, which is the productive age group within a population. Despite the mentioned consequences, students specifically youth at higher learning institutions engage in premarital sexual relationships. Literature shows that 53.9 percent of sexually active respondents started sex after joining the University (Abdissa et al., 2017). This is because, joining university makes the youth be away from their parents/guardians and teachers' supervision. It is a time where most of the youth are more independent and freer to decide what to do without being questioned (Abdullahi and Umar, 2013). However, engaging in sexual relationships needs commitment and concentration. It is a situation of dealing with another person's emotions and feelings in a sense that, if an individual is destructed, he or she can lose focus on whatever he/she is doing. Moreover, university students are supposed to concentrate on studies

and build their future career. Therefore, engaging in premarital sexual relationship can influence their academic performance both positively and negatively. In this paper, academic performance is considered as an academic achievement or the extent to which a student is aiming to attain a short or long - term educational goal. Therefore, engaging in premarital sexual relationship can affect the students' process of attaining the intended goal because they may use most of their time solving problems in their relationships than concentrating in studies. However, the effect may depend on the capacity of the student to handle many issues at a time.

In view of the above, there was a need of conducting a study on premarital sexual relationships among university students and academic performance. Basically, the study aimed at answering the following questions: why do university students engage in premarital sexual relationship? And how does engaging in premarital sexual relationship affect students' performance in the study area. Answers to these questions are expected to assist university student have better understanding on how engagement in premarital sexual relationship can affect academic performance and their future careers in general.

Theoretical framework

This study was guided by the Social Exchange Theory (SET), which allows one to examine relational processes in marital and family relationships (Nakonezny and Denton, 2008). The paradigm of the SET seeks to explain the development and maintenance of marital relationships. For example, solidarity and power as well as decay of exchange relationships in terms of balancing between the rewards and the costs sexual partners obtain and incur respectively by selecting themselves into marital relationships (Thibaut and Kelley, 1959). The SET theory was found relevant for the study because it enables one to explore the effects (positive or negative) resulting from engaging in premarital sexual relationships and the manner in which this could be associated with the performance of university students. For example, negative effects could lead to poor performance while positive effects could lead to good performance of a student who is engaged into premarital sexual relationship. However, the SET was meant for married couples, it was nonetheless quite handy when it was used for unmarried people engaging in premarital sexual relationships. Moreover, people engaged in premarital sexual relationships perform marriage acts and they are definitely faced with the same benefits and challenges the married people face. Among the challenges are contracting sexually transmitted diseases/infections (STDs/STIs) and HIV/AIDS, suffering from stress and financial distresses that damage the thinking capacity. Therefore, this theory was used to find

out the rewards and challenges regarding correlation between premarital sexual relationship among university student and academic performance.

2. METHODOLOGY

Description of the study area

The study was conducted at Ardhi University (ARU), which is a Public University in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. ARU was established on the 28th March 2007 though it had been offering trainings before this period. Formally, ARU was a constituent college of UDSM from 1996-2007, when it was known as University College of Lands and Architectural studies-UCLAS. Ardhi located next to the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM). up to 1956 ARdhi was a Surveying Training School offering land surveying technician certificate courses. In 1972, the school became Ardhi Institute. The Institute offered two-year diploma programs in the fields of Land Surveying and Land Management and Valuation. In the same year, a three-year Diploma program in Urban and Rural Planning was introduced. At the time of this study, ARU consisted of 4673 undergraduate students whereby 70percent were males and the rest were females. ARU was selected because the establishment of social science programs led to an abrupt increase in the number of female students. Therefore, it was worth undertaking this study to see how premarital sexual relationship affect students in their academic performance.

Research Design

The study employed a cross-sectional research design. According to Orji (2016), the design is often used when a researcher intends to obtain responses from a relatively large number of respondents in a short period of time. This type of research design can be used across various disciplines such as (but are not limited to) business, psychology, social science, retail, medicine, education, religion, and government (Hemedi, 2015). Moreover, findings and outcomes resulting from cross-sectional studies can be analyzed to create new theories/studies or in-depth research.

Sampling procedure

The study employed both probability and non-probability sampling procedures. The School of Spatial Planning and Social Sciences (SSPSS) was purposely selected among four Schools found at Ardhi University. SSPSS was used because of the presence of social sciences courses that increased the number of female students hence increased interaction between male and female students within Ardhi

University and elsewhere. The selection of courses within SSPSS was based on the proportional number of male and female students in which Bachelor of Arts in Economics (BAE) and Bachelor of Arts in Community Development Studies (CDS) were selected. Purposive sampling procedure was used to select final year students from the selected courses because they had stayed longer at the university hence, they might have experienced or observed the pros and cons of engaging in premarital sexual relationships and academic performance. Stratified sampling procedure was used to separate female from male students from the selected courses. Thereafter, simple random sampling was employed to select 25 students from each stratum, which led to 100 respondents from the above-mentioned programs. The respondents were selected regardless of whether or not they in sexual relationship. The selected number of the respondents was based on the homogeneity of the data provided. Purposive Sampling procedure was used to select 11 key informants, which included academic and administrative staff within four schools found at Ardhi University.

Methods and tools for Data collection

Questionnaire with open and close-ended questions was used to collect information from the respondents. In addition, a checklist was used to collect information from eleven (11) key informants who were lecturers and other administrative staff at Ardhi University. A tape recorder was used to record the interview with the key informant after getting their permission.

Data analysis

Quantitative data, which were collected using questionnaire, were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Packages for Social Sciences) whereby descriptive statistics in other words, frequencies, and percentages were obtained. In addition, content analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data obtained from the key informants. The first step in analyzing the qualitative data was listening to the recorded information to be familiar with the information ready for transcription. The second step was data transcription whereby the researcher had to write all the reported information after listening to the recorded responses from key informants. The third step was the feedback session where the transcribed data were taken back to the key informants for them to confirm on whether what was transcribed was exactly what they reported. The next step was data coding, where different categories were identified. Categories with the same meaning were collected together and read to get meaningful information.

Reliability

Prior to data collection, questionnaires and checklist were pre-tested whereby 10 copies were distributed to students who were not part of the sample. the data were then analyzed to be sure that the objectives of the study were covered by getting the right answers. Next, the identified gaps were addressed by readjusting and creating other questions to remove ambiguity.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Drivers of engaging in premarital sexual relationships

on the drivers of engaging in premarital sexual relationship in the study area, the respondents were asked to mention what push students to engage in premarital sexual relationships. The findings of the identified drivers of engaging in premarital sexual relationship are as shown in Figure 1.

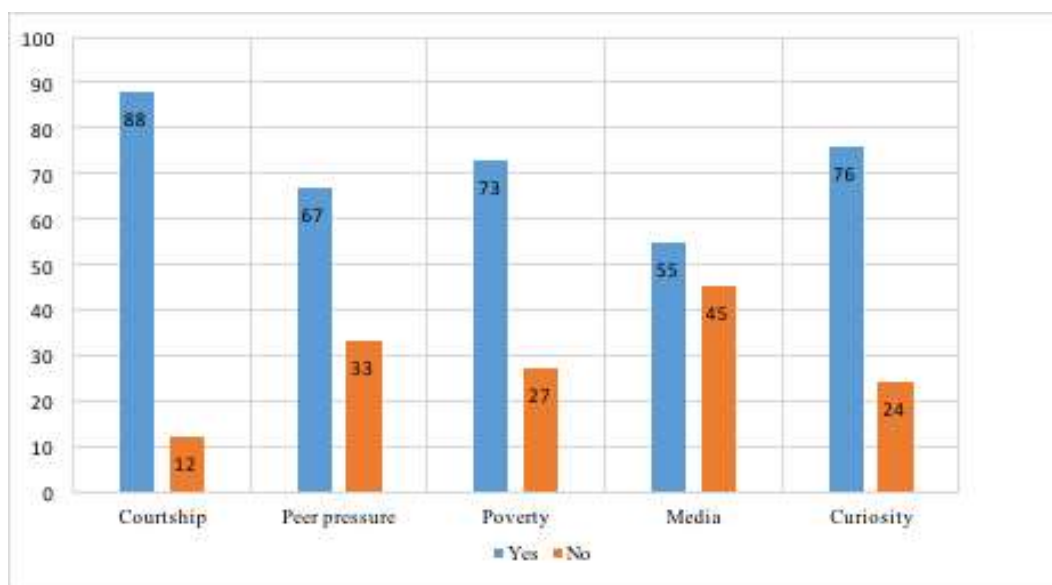


Figure 1: Drivers of engaging in premarital sexual relationships

Results in Figure 1 show that courtship, peer pressure, poverty, mass media and curiosity in knowing what entails in sexual relationship were the drivers of engaging in premarital relationship among university students. Based on the results, 88 percent of the respondents cited courtship as a driver of premarital sexual relationship. Normally, courtship is a situation where a man or a woman desires to

start a relationship with a person he/she loves. This is a situation where a person can learn the behaviour of another person and be sure that an individual is the right person to be with. Based on religion, a person is not obliged to engage in marital sexual relationship before marriage. But, this is not currently the case because most of people wed when they have already started marital sexual relationship. This has been supported by the key informant, who commented that,

Premarital sexual relationships create a room for courtship and also prepare couples for a better marriage in the future (Key informant 2, Ardhi University, May 2019)

The above quote justifies why some students/individuals engage in premarital sexual relationships before marriage. However, some literature has shown the effects of engaging in premarital sexual relationship among which is early pregnancies, diseases including STI/Ds, HIV/AIDS, frustrations, and death (Noorroz et al., 2014). Therefore, it is important for the youth especially university students to be educated on the effect of premarital sexual relationship in their university life to enable them concentrate on their studies and career pathways so as to achieve their intended goals.

Poverty was also mentioned as a driver of engaging into premarital relationship by respondents in the study area. When elaborating why university students engage into premarital relationship, one of the respondents had this to say,

Most of university students are engaging in premarital sexual relationships because of difficult condition in their families (Respondent 14, Ardhi University, May 2019).

One of the key informants added,

...Some students like to dress nicely, go to saloon regularly so as to look attractive. This makes them engage into pre-marital sexual relationship with men who are capable of taking care of them even if these men are married. These men are called "sponsors" as their nickname. (Key informant 3, Ardhi University, May 2019).

The above quotes show that, some of university students engage in premarital sexual relationships not because of love but because of material things. Engaging in sexual relationship because of finding someone to take care of individual needs is

dangerous because it may lead to contacting deadly diseases and disappointments. This may happen because the so-called sponsor may take advantage of many young women who are desperate for money. It may also result to breakup of some marriage because most of sponsors are married men. So when their spouses find out that their husbands are having affairs, they may end up seeking for separation or divorce. The study conducted by Mapfumo (2016) on “unfaithfulness among married couples” cited diseases, stress, violence and divorce as the effects of unfaithfulness among married couples.

Other respondents pointed out that, some of the university students are engaged in premarital sexual relationship because of curiosity of knowing what prevails in the relationships as well as the influence from peers and the mass media. Nowadays, young people learn a lot from mass media for example you tube, and films and drama and in some television channels where everything is exposed. According to Bocar and Perez (2013), in the present world modern technology is responsible for some changes in human sexuality whereby continued exposure to some sexually related issues has led to indifferent attitudes among the young population due to liberalism. Generally, liberalism offers open-mindedness that makes young people including university students wanting to practice in their real life what they learn from the mass media. However, it is important for the educated youth such as university students to be analytical on any issues and predict the impact of whatever they are doing on their future life. Others are engaging in premarital sexual relationship out of the influence or pressure from friends (peers). Therefore, there is a need of educating the youth on the disadvantages of engaging in premarital sexual relationships and applying knowledge that they get from mass media in their real life. This should start in the family level. According to Norooz et al. (2014), it is necessary to educate and support families and also revise the neglected aspects on the effect of premarital sexual relationships.

Although there are many disadvantages of engaging into premarital relationship, some respondents proclaimed that, engaging into premarital relationship had positive result because it is part of the preparations for marriage. For example, one of the key informants reported,

Premarital sexual relationship is not always a bad thing since it prepares an individual for marriage. I was involved in such relationships for a reason of searching for my future partner and I succeeded since the only thing I had in mind regarding such relationship was the positive outcome of it (Key informant 2, Ardhi University, May 2019).

The above quote shows that, some youth engage in premarital sexual relationship for the aim of searching for their future/life partners. However, this reason may not always be reciprocal, since it may happen that, when one is seeking for a life partner the other one may be doing the opposite, searching for a person to pass time or to have a fling or adventurous dating due to loneliness. This was also supported by a key informant, who said,

Loneliness can drive someone into engaging in premarital sexual relationships. This is because; human beings need someone to share their problems and happiness with. Therefore, by being connected to someone, the loneliness can be taken care of (Key informant 7, Ardhi University, May 2019).

The quote above shows that, an individual can engage in premarital sexual relationship because of loneliness instead of love. This may result to confusion and heartbreaks specifically when two people engage into a relationship with two different goals. According to the SET, confusion and heartbreak are negative rewards. Generally, negative rewards may result into high blood pressure, heart diseases, and failure in realising one's dreams specifically for students. Therefore, it is wise for university students to have ordinary friends who would understand their intentions and goals. Understanding someone's intention can enable one avoid the possibility of getting married to a wrong person.

Premarital sexual relationship and students' performance

The information on premarital sexual relationship and students' performance was obtained by finding out how engaging in premarital sexual relationship may affect academic performance for a university student. In this respect, the respondents had to answer yes and no questions and provide explanations of the answers they provided. The findings are as presented in Figure 2.



Figure 2: Effects premarital sexual relationships in Academics performance

The respondents in this study cited poor attendance in class, poor academic performance, and poor academic motivation as negative effect of engaging in premarital sexual relationship among university students as shown in Figure 2. In elaborating the answer, one of the respondents reported the following,

I have a sister who had a boyfriend whom they were in the same course at the university; they rented a room and stayed together as a husband and wife but they were not married. According to my sister, the boyfriend cheated on her and she was frustrated. My sister was intelligent but she ended up getting a very low GPA (2.3) in the final year. Respondent 57, Ardhi University, May 2019).

In supporting the quote from the respondent, one of the key informants said,

Some of the students who in premarital sexual relationship tend to lose interest in studies and concentrate in relationships. Therefore, they spend most of their time thinking of their couples specifically when problems such as breaking up or cheating happen. During this period, one of the partners becomes heartbroken and confused so he/she ends up getting poor performance and/or become least motivated in academics (Key informant 3, Ardhi University, May 2019).

The quotes above show the negative effect of engaging in premarital sexual relationship for university students. In such relationships, students tend to play the roles of married couples while they are not yet married. When one of them is not faithful, the other one is badly hurt. If not well handled, the affected student can possibly fail to meet his/her academic goals (better performance) which results in ruining their future life. In another study, Abdullahi and Umar (2013) revealed that pre-marital sex among the youth in the University has many effects and consequences include HIV/STIs, regrets, and unwanted pregnancies. Others include loss of self-respect, loss of family support, depression, and become victims of rituals among others.

Similarly, stress, conflicts, diseases, and early pregnancies were also cited by the respondents as some of the effects of premarital sexual relationship. All these have negative effect on the academic performance of university students who are in such relationship. In this regard, one of the key informants provided her experience concerning the matter as follows,

Well, I admit to have been engaged in such relationships when I was a student at the University. In my premarital sexual relationship, I faced two main challenges, which are fear and insecurity. Currently, I still see a number of students who are facing the same challenges. I always felt being insecure with my partner because, I usually thought in my absence he used to see someone else. I also feared that, if I do not fulfil his wishes, he might end up choosing someone else over me..."
(Key informant 10, Ardhi University, 3rd May 2019)

Another key informant gave his account of his university life by saying,

When I was at the university, we lost one of our female classmates who happened to be my best friend's partner. She secretly had an abortion without telling her partner: in the process, she lost a lot of blood and died" (Key informant 3, Ardhi University, May 2019).

The quotes above suggest that some university students in premarital sexual relationships are normally insecure and living in fear. Being insecure and living in fear can negatively affect student performance. According to Muhammad et al. (2017), students who confront fatal and chronic fearful experiences often lose their learning capacities that lead to poor academic performance and low learning performance or failing grades. Additionally, Mittermeier (2009) argues that

adolescents who engage in premarital relationships and sexual activity are at the same risks as those of the married women.

The extract from key informant 3 reveals issues of abortions and death resulting from engaging in premarital sexual relationship. All these have an impact on the performance because, a student may be psychologically affected by the act of abortion and lose concentration on studies or die. According to Mlyakado and Timoth (2014), students' involvement in sexual relationship puts them into lots of relational and social problems, which adversely affect their social as well as academic lives. Thus, a student ends up failing his/her university exams requiring him/her to re-take the exams or at times even being discontinued from studies. A student may end up losing her life or fail to get pregnant in the future because of practicing unsafe abortion to maintain her status quo. According to Stephen and Stephen (2016), among the consequences of premarital sex are unwanted pregnancies, poor academic performance, regret, health, effect, and depression. Hence, it is important for the university students to know the implication of engaging in premarital sexual relationship to their life.

Measures of avoiding the effects of premarital sexual relationship

The respondents were asked to state what should be done to avoid negative effects of engagement in premarital sexual relationship. Most of the respondents mentioned religious education and sexual education as ways of cubing the menace of premarital sexual relationship among university students. Religious education can be among the protective measure of avoiding the effects of premarital sexual relationship. This is because sex before marriage is against Gods' commandment. Sex education on the other hand would educate the youth about abstinence before marriage and be faithful in their marriage life in future.

For the respondents who advocate religion, the safest way for them is to abstain from sex until you get married. This is a good way of evading problems resulting from engaging into premarital sexual relationship and being able to concentrate on studies and realise their goals. Other literature (Eze, 2014; Ghani and Abdullah, 2014) show that there are values and norms in different societies which forbid sexual relationship before marriage. As for the advocacy of sex education, we have seen that, sex education has advantages and disadvantages to a university student. Through sex education, a student can engage in relationship and be able to avoid contacting diseases including HIV/AIDS and STDs and unwanted pregnancies (Somers and Anagurthi, 2014). But sexual education has disadvantage specifically

when one partner or both create stress, insecurity to the other as a result of cheating, abandonments and having different goals when engaging into a premarital relationship. This can definitely result into failure of meeting the intended objective of a university student.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The study concludes that most of the university students are engaged in premarital sexual relationships because of courtship, poverty, and influence from peer groups, technology, and curiosity. However, engaging in premarital sexual relationships make university students insecure and living in fear of being cheated by their partners, getting unwanted pregnancies and being stressed by their partners on many other grounds. This results in poor academic performance because students tend to concentrate much on solving relationship issues instead of studying.

Recommendations

The youth specifically university students should be educated on the impact of engaging in premarital sexual relationships on academic performance.

Different programs should be started within the universities on exposing first-year students on what may happen if they are engaged in premarital sexual relationship. The positive impacts should be mentioned with caution that “it is always difficult to understand what someone else is planning for you” in other words, you cannot read someone’s mind.

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