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4 UNPACKING RELIGIOSITY, TEENAGE PREGNANCY AND REPRODUCTIVE CHOICES IN KENYA

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INTRODUCTION

Religion and morality have for the longest period been seen as correlates, where religion has been seen as a prerequisite for upright moral behaviour. Some notable African scholars, however, refute the claim, arguing that morality is determined by a societal culture and not by religion.³ Norms, whether in the society or in religion, guide human behaviour for peaceful coexistence, acceptance and attainment of a transcendent and revered life. Evaluation of behavioural choices is pegged to either the cultural or religious norms to which one ascribes. The dichotomous argument on whether morality is a result of a societal culture or religion traces its origin to African religious scholars finding ground for African religion in the arrival of and subsequent proselytisation of Africans in the Christian missionaries' religion. This chapter departs from an appreciation that religion and cultural norms shape human behaviour and social life. As Philip Nel, a biblical scholar and theologian, rightly observes, post-colonial expressions of what defines morality are a hybridity of African social cultural and Christian norms.⁴ It is within this context that the viability of religiosity in curbing teenage pregnancies and opening an avenue of making healthy reproductive choices is examined in this chapter.

GIRLS BEAR THE BRUNT OF TEENAGE PREGNANCIES

According to United Nations Population Fund, nearly 378 400 adolescent girls in Kenya, aged 10-19 years, became pregnant between July 2016 and June 2017.⁵ The Covid-19 pandemic has seen a heightened upsurge of teenage pregnancies in the country due to imposed lockdowns and closure of schools. Sophie Partridge-Hicks, writing for the anti-poverty journal *Global Citizen*, reports that 152 000 Kenyan teenage girls became pregnant over a period of three months (March-June 2020) when the country was in lockdown, which is an increase of 40% of the country's

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3 Gyekye K. 1995. *An essay on African philosophical thought: The Akan conceptual scheme*. Temple University Press; Wiredu K and Gyekye K. 1992. *Person and community*. Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy.

4 Nel P. 2008. "Morality and religion in African thought", *Acta Theologica* 28(2):34.

5 United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). 2017. UNFPA Kenya Annual Report 2017.

monthly average.⁶ Nairobi County topped the numbers with 11 795 teenage pregnancies, while Kakamega County came second with 6 686 teenage pregnancies in the period Jan-May 2020.⁷ The World Health Organization (WHO) documents that pregnancy and childbirth are the leading causes of death for girls aged between 15 and 19 round the globe.⁸ According to Kenya's 2018 HIV estimates and status report, HIV infection amongst this group is driven by early sexual debut amongst girls and low knowledge of HIV modes of transmission (at 11% for women and 43% for men).⁹ Other factors contributing to new HIV infection and high teenage pregnancies in this age group of girls are intergenerational and transactional sex,¹⁰ along with harmful cultural practices, such as the prevalence of early marriages and sexual gender-based violence.¹¹ Poverty and "sex for sanitary pads" are other factors contributing to high teenage pregnancies during lockdown in Kenya.¹²

These high and increasing cases of teenage pregnancies and HIV incidence affect the health and education of the girls. The problem of unintended pregnancies attests that the teenagers are engaging in premarital unprotected sex, a fact that contravenes Christian morality. Parents, religious leaders, politicians and other stakeholders still take pride in solid socio-cultural and traditional Christian norms known for shaping people's behaviour. As a result, they shy away from engaging teenage boys and girls on sexual and reproductive health issues, such as unexpected pregnancies, in spite of glaring evidence that the teenagers are engaging in sex.

The cultural and religious paradox as it pertains sexual conduct is evident. On one hand, the culture promotes pre-marital sex on some events such as initiation; on the other hand, the same culture commends virginity for girls before they get

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- 6 Partridge-Hicks S. 2020. "Rise in Teenage Pregnancies in Kenya Linked to Covid-19 Lockdown", *Global Citizen*, 19 August.
 - 7 Kahurani E. 2020. "Teen pregnancy in Kenya: Verifying the data and the facts", AFIDEP, 26 June.
 - 8 World Health Organization (WHO). 2020. Adolescent Pregnancy. Online at: <https://bit.ly/3smHIhb>
 - 9 Kenya Ministry of Health/ National AIDS Control Council. 2018. Kenya HIV Estimates: Report 2018. Online at: <https://bit.ly/3qeQECM>
 - 10 Intergenerational sex is defined as heterosexual intercourse with varying non-marital partners who are either ten or more years older. Transactional sex is a non-marital, non-commercial sexual intercourse for exchange of material goods, such as sanitary pads and money for up-keep, amongst other benefits.
 - 11 World Health Organization (WHO). 2017. Global Accelerated Action for the Health of Adolescents (AA-HA!): Guidance to Support Country Implementation. Geneva: World Health Organization.
 - 12 Wafula P. 2020. "Kenya: Sad Reality of 23.4 Million Kenyans Living below Poverty Line", *Nairobi News*, 12 August. Even though the government of Kenya provides sanitary pads to teenage girls at school, the provision was discontinued when schools closed and learning went virtual. This reality forced many poor teen girls to fall for older men who promised to procure the pads in exchange for sex.

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married.¹³ In some African cultures the mother-in-law provides a white bed sheet to ascertain whether the newlywed bride is a virgin.¹⁴ The sheet is to be returned with blood to signify the breaking of hymen accompanied by ululations from the community members. In the view of theologian and ethicist Steven Tracy, “sex is a gift from God for married persons”.¹⁵ However, the religious paradigm of safe sex in marriage is a threat to young girls who are forced into early marriage. Marriage is presented as a safe haven for sexual activity, when culture assigns to men all the powers to determine the what, when, where and how of sex.¹⁶

After initiation, boys are encouraged to sleep with girls as a proof of masculinity.¹⁷ In other cultures, boys are required to sleep with girls to cleanse themselves from the initiation process.¹⁸ In this sexual enterprise, only the girls are required to take responsibility of pregnancy. If they fall pregnant, they are shamed for becoming pregnant with the just-initiated boys. Largely, the adolescent girls have little or no access at all to contraceptives, unless administered to them by their mothers, which is rare. In addition, the same girls are expected to be virgins in their wedding night and at the same time fulfil their cultural sexual obligations on “purity” amidst initiated “hungry” boys. A cultural-religious paradox is thus created that is detrimental to the girl child’s reproductive health decision making.

The place of women and their roles in African patriarchal societies is largely determined by cultural norms and attitudes, which are prevalent in the thinking of both men and women. This system was found in many parts of Africa even before the whites came with their Western capitalistic culture, which, of course, made it worse for the African women. A woman minister and one of the founders of the Circle of Concerned African Women theologians, Nyambura Njoroge, adding her voice to the conversation on women in African culture observes that in this context, women are socialised to take childbearing as the central function of their existence.¹⁹

13 Bilyeu AS. 1999. “Trokosi – The Practice of Sexual Slavery in Ghana: Religious and Cultural Freedom vs. Human Rights”, *Indiana International & Comparative Law Review* 9(2):457-504.

14 On virginity testing and celebrations see Kioli FN, Were AR and Onkware K. 2012. “Traditional perspectives and control mechanisms of adolescent sexual behavior in Kenya”, *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology* 4(1):1-7. See also Vincent L. 2006. “Virginity testing in South Africa: Re-traditioning the postcolony”, *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 8(1):17-30.

15 Tracy SR. 2006. “Chastity and the goodness of God: The case for premarital sexual abstinence”, *Themelios* 31(2):54.

16 Moyo FL. 2004. “Religion, spirituality and being a woman in Africa: Gender construction within the African religio-cultural experiences”, *Agenda* 18(61):72-78.

17 Njoroge KM. 2014. *Male circumcision and the shaping of masculinities in Muranga, Kenya: Implications for public health. A focused ethnographic study*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Northumbria.

18 Warria A. 2018. “Girls’ innocence and futures stolen: The cultural practice of sexual cleansing in Malawi”, *Children and Youth Services Review* 91:298-303.

19 Njoroge NJ. 1997. “The missing voice: African women doing theology”, *Journal of theology for Southern Africa* 99:77-83.

In this context, a woman is seen only from the perspective of being a wife and child bearer. Once pregnancy occurs at a tender age, the girls are married off to older men, sometimes as second or third wives.²⁰ This implies that teenage pregnancy is not a new issue; it is only that the older system had of course an illegal way of navigating it. Girls are prepared for this role early in life, so as to embrace their cultural roles. To maintain this structure there are taboos. The taboos are not written rules and regulations, but the fear of the consequences of breaking the taboo is imposed by the society. The founding father of psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud notes, "The punishment for the violation of a taboo was no doubt originally left to an internal, automatic agency: the violated taboo itself took vengeance."²¹ When, at a later stage, ideas of gods and spirits arose with whom the taboo became associated, the penalty was expected to follow automatically from the divine powers.

Contemporary hybrid religio-cultural norms might appear to be eroded, yet they remain strong and influential. Teenage pregnancy, which has been part of Kenyan culture for a long time, does not seem to upset society or create a crisis as much as might be expected. In 2018, Secretary of Education Amina Mohamed, in releasing Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) results, raised an alarm about increasing teenage pregnancies amongst learners. She ordered an investigation of the matter, arguing that "most of our children are falling prey to pedophiles and opportunists".²² Mohamed eventually lost her position, probably because of her feminist approach to teenage pregnancy that blames the men and the system that supports them. Then Kenya National Examinations Council Chairman George Magoha, after assuming power in the Ministry of Education, blamed parents with an assertion that they "were responsible for their children falling pregnant at an early age".²³ In response to a surge in pregnancy during the Covid-19 period, President John Pombe Magufuli of Tanzania announced that his administration would not allow pregnant mothers to go back to school, but they could instead join vocational technical trainings and learn tailoring. Magufuli is reported to have said, "No one with a child from Class one to secondary school will be allowed back to school. If they chose to rear children, let them stick to that."²⁴ The Tanzanian president seemed only to be repeating what culture had taught him.

20 Gitau T, Kusters L, Kok M and Van der Kwaak A. 2016. "A baseline study on child marriage, teenage pregnancy, and female genital mutilation/cutting in Kenya", *Royal Tropical Institute, Amsterdam*, 1-48. This report was produced by YES I DO, a Netherlands-based organisation working in Africa. For more information, see <https://www.kit.nl/project/yes-i-do/>

21 Freud S. 2012. "Taboo and emotional ambivalence", in Freud S (eds). *Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Lives of savages and Neurotics*. London and New York: Routledge, 23.

22 See Wamuswa N. 2018. "Number of teenage pregnancies higher than thought", *The Standard*, 20 November.

23 See Ndonga S. 2018. "Magoha Blames High Teen Pregnancies on Tumbling Family Values", *Capital News*, 6 November.

24 See Oduor A. 2021. "Magufuli and Education: He banned pregnant girls from schools, urged caning", *The Standard*, 19 March.

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Structural injustices perpetrated by patriarchal culture continue to haunt young girls and women's well-being in Kenya. The Christian Church in Kenya is situated within an African culture that is patriarchal and pervasively informs the practice of the church. Therefore, the Church's view of sex is borrowed from a patriarchal cultural system that enables violation of sexuality of women and girls.²⁵ Moreover, male sexual predation in the churches is tolerated.²⁶ In most instances, the victims are adolescent girls, who are then blamed for the men's transgressions. The church is not a safe space for women and girls, since they are sexually harassed and abused in the premises of the church and often silenced. There have been reports of girls who were impregnated by their pastors or other church leaders. For instance, there were reports from Kirinyaga of a pastor who defiled his own daughters, and fortunately he was convicted to 140 years in jail.²⁷ However, many such cases go unreported, and the victims are silenced.

In order to address the challenge of silence and gender injustices, the revised Constitution of Kenya, 2010, enshrined the right to health in Article 43(1)(a). The article provides that "every person has the right to the highest attainable standard of health, which includes the right to healthcare services, including reproductive health".²⁸ However, the constitutional promise of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in Kenya are clouded with discrepancies. For instance, Article 26(4) states that "abortion is not permitted unless, in the opinion of a trained health professional, there is need for emergency treatment, or the life or health of the mother is in danger, or if permitted by any other written law", whereas Article 27(4) provides that "the State shall not discriminate directly or indirectly against any person on any ground, including race, sex, pregnancy, marital status, health status, ethnic or social origin, colour, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, dress, language or birth."²⁹ Notable nuances revolve around prohibition clause on abortion and provision of safe abortion under the guidance of a health professional. Further, discriminatory tendencies are shunned on sexual grounds and especially on teenage pregnancy. Though progressive as the constitution may sound, the nuances hinder full realisation of sexual reproductive health rights for all.

To address the discrepancies in the spirit of attaining universal health care for all, Senator Susan Kihika presented the Reproductive Health Bill to the Kenyan

25 Sultana A. 2010. "Patriarchy and women's subordination: a theoretical analysis", *Arts Faculty Journal* 4:1-18.

26 Frawley-O'Dea MG. 2007. *Perversion of power: Sexual abuse in the Catholic Church*. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press; Block H. 2011. *Understanding sexual abuse by a church leader or caregiver*. Mennonite Central Committee. Both sources point to victims' tolerance and silence on sexual abuse perpetrated by men and male ministers.

27 Kariuki T. 2021. "Kirinyaga pastor convicted for defiling his two daughters sentenced to 140 years in jail", *The Standard*, 14 January.

28 Constitution of Kenya, 2010, art 43(1)(a).

29 Constitution of Kenya, 2010, arts 26(4) and 27(4).

Parliament in 2019.³⁰ The senator explained in the Memorandum of Objects and Reasons that the proposed law was meant to actualise the constitutional guarantee that every person has the right to the highest attainable standard of health, including the right to reproductive healthcare as noted in the Kenyan Constitution Article 43(a).³¹ The bill's objective was to prompt national and county governments to ensure access to adolescent-friendly reproductive health services. The bill obligates the state to provide adolescents with correct information, guidance and counselling on reproductive health. The Church and other moralist voices rejected the term "reproductive health", which they believed to be a euphemism for legalised abortion and indiscriminate access to contraceptive services.³² The Atheists in Kenya Society, however, praised the Reproductive Health Bill, 2019 as "progressive" in stating "we believe that this Bill will increase educational and economic opportunities for women and lead to healthier families and communities."³³ Even then, attempts to not only pass the bill, but also guarantee teenage mothers' knowledge and access to reproductive health care services, such as safe abortion, has failed terribly.

It is evident that teenage sexuality remains a hotly contentious public issue in Kenya, in spite of the surging numbers of teenage pregnancies reported around the country and the threat this poses to the future of girls. Attempts to introduce sex education in schools have been fiercely resisted over the years, especially by the Church. For instance, the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops opined that the bill "is inconsistent with the constitution" and needed to be withdrawn from the house "because it cannot be redeemed."³⁴ The Catholic bishops insisted that they were pro-life and that "the right to life and to human dignity cannot be separated and divided into vague forms of rights."³⁵ The argument of the opponents, however, is that sex education will increase immorality amongst teenagers, and they maintain that it is the responsibility of parents and religious institutions to teach children about sexuality. However, the surging numbers of teenage pregnancies, unsafe abortions and dropping out of school due to early pregnancy do not suggest parents and faith groups are succeeding in this responsibility.

In this chapter, we address the problems that occur when religious and societal morality that demands sexual purity from girls in ways that challenge their developing sexual and ethical agency as well as community norms. The problem of teenage pregnancy is too often met by a deafening indifference from religious circles, as well as the society at large. When the problem is addressed, most often the

30 Parliament of Kenya. 2019. "Reproductive Health Bill, 2019", *Kenya Gazette Supplement No. 186* (Senate Bills No. 23), 20 November.

31 Constitution of Kenya, 2010, art 43(a).

32 Kisia A. 2020. "Reproductive health Bill elicits heated debate", *The Star*, 12 July.

33 Ben-Hur J. 2020. Atheist in Kenya supports controversial Reproductive Health Bill 2019. *The Standard*, 13 July.

34 Maina M. 2020. "Kenya's Reproductive Bill 2019 'unconstitutional, be withdrawn': Bishops to Senators, *Aciafrica*, 23 September.

35 Maina, "Kenya's Reproductive Bill 2019 'unconstitutional, be withdrawn'".

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girls are blamed for it. This raises profound questions of gender injustice, since the girls bear the brunt of the consequences of teenagers engaging in unprotected sex.

In order to understand how religiosity affects a human person's ethical behaviour, a working definition of "religiosity" is required, along with understanding of an individual's internalisation of religion, particularly in practical dimensions of life, such as ethical decision making, and how it drives positive or negative ethical behaviours. To this end, this chapter examines the relevant literature on religiosity and spirituality, the latter being a frequent correlate or sometimes an alternative to religion, from a multidisciplinary perspective. Subjective rationales for ethical choices to engage or not engage in pre-marital sex will be analysed insofar as these are affected by religiosity. This multidisciplinary approach can lead to effective interventions and practical initiatives to promote positive sexual behaviours amongst teenagers.

RELIGIOSITY AND SPIRITUALITY DIFFERENTIATED

Africans have been characterised as religious in all dimensions of their life.³⁶ Religious traits permeate and undergird all their undertakings.³⁷ In Kenya, most societal expectations and cultural beliefs are drawn from religion, which acts as a guide to upright behaviour and as prohibition of what is classified as immoral behaviour. There is scholarly consensus that religion is connected to morality.³⁸ We argue in this chapter that it is also a matter of personal practice and an individual's uptake of religion and religious norms, which are involved a complex relationship with morality. Broadly, religion denotes an organised entity with rituals and practices and a "meaning system" directed to an ultimate reality, a higher power or God.³⁹ We argue that personal religious involvement, including commitment and consideration in undertaking human actions that are morally upright, is a subjective undertaking that points to one's religiosity. The individualistic uptake of religion is predicated on religiosity and spirituality, two diverse concepts that are worth clarifying, especially with regard to understanding one's morality.

36 Mbiti J. 1969. *African philosophy and religion*. Nairobi: African Educational Publishers; Parrinder EG. 1969. *Religion in Africa*. New York: Praeger Publications.

37 Idowu EB. 1962. *God in Yoruba belief*. London: Longman Publishers.

38 Idowu EB. 1970. *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief*. London: Longman Publishers. Idowu is amongst the first African Christian theologians from Nigeria, Africa who have argued that "morality is certainly the fruit of religion", 146. See also Shorter A. 1974. *African Culture and the Christian Church: An Introduction to social and pastoral anthropology*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 62. Shorter opines that in "an African Traditional society, morality is seen to be an intimate relationship with the ontological order of the universe. This "order" is given, if not explicitly "God given", and it is expressed in the system of symbolic classification current in the society".

39 Turaki Y. 1997. *Tribal Gods of Africa: ethnicity, racism, tribalism and the gospel of God*. Crossroads Communication, 99.

Psychologists Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen postulate that morality reflects on human persons' deeply held values.⁴⁰ In their view, it is "a prescriptive judgment of justice, rights, and welfare pertaining to how people ought to relate to each other" with regard to the goodness or evilness, and rightness or wrongness of a human act.⁴¹ Other scholars who have considered the issue, such as Kwame Gyekye, Paul Kollman and Kwasi Wiredu share in the view that morality is a social phenomenon, where a set of norms and values are put in place to guide the conduct of people for harmonious living.⁴² However, these scholars fall short in failing to take into account that cooperative living is a two-way endeavour, where the individual's consideration for the interest of others is important, and ideally gives rise to a sense of duty to others in order to attain harmony and peace in the society. The moral subject is a communal being, whose actions flow from aspirations. Moral behaviour is influenced by the subject's view of what they hold to be of value to themselves within their culture, habits, social norms, perceptions, attitudes and motivations, as well as other life situational or circumstantial factors. The embeddedness of these values in the religiously moral subject can be manifest in two distinct phenomena – spirituality and religiosity.⁴³

Spirituality is a subjective, intangible, and multi-faceted inherent component of a human person that is beyond religious and cultural boundaries but moves towards a deep connection with a spirit-god.⁴⁴ Cheryl Delgado, an adult care nurse practitioner, posits that "spirituality is characterized by faith, a search for meaning and purpose in life, a sense of connection with others, and a transcendence of self, resulting in a sense of inner peace and well-being".⁴⁵ The transcendence of self is, however, experienced and realised only in a deep relationship with a spirit-god, who is conceptualised in a spiritual realm. In light of this, for purposes of this chapter, we argue that spiritual connection with the divine begets numinous

40 Ajzen I and Fishbein, M. 1980. *Understanding Attitudes and Predicting Social Behaviour*. Prentice-Hall, Upper Saddle River, NJ.

41 Turiel E. 1983. *The development of social knowledge: Morality and convention*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 3.

42 See Gyekye K. 1996. *African cultural values: An introduction*. Accra: Sankofa Publishing Company; Kollman, P. 1988. "Tribalism and justice", *African Christian Studies* 4(2):49-70 and Wiredu K and Gyekye K. 1992. *Person and community: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies* 1. Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy.

43 See Hyman C and Handal PJ. 2006. "Definitions and evaluation of religion and spirituality items by religious professionals: A pilot study", *Journal of religion and health* 45(2):264-282; Schlehofer MM, Omoto AM and Adelman JR. 2008. "How do 'religion' and 'spirituality' differ? Lay definitions among older adults", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 47(3):411-425.

44 Arrey AE, Bilsen J, Lacor P, and Deschepper R. 2016. "Spirituality/religiosity: A cultural and psychological resource among Sub-Saharan African migrant women with HIV/AIDS in Belgium", *PloS ONE* 11(7): e0159488, 8.

45 Delgado C. 2005. "A discussion of the concept of spirituality", *Nursing science quarterly* 18(2):157.

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experiences that may not be fathomable to the societal relations at least not from a moral sense.

This form of spirituality is distinguished from religiosity in their levels of interaction in a human person. Religiosity involves a subjective commitment, involvement and intentional consideration of teachings, beliefs, rituals and practices emanating from a particular religion. The commitment and involvement point to a particular identity that is embraced not only by the subject, but also by the society in which they live. The subject, in adhering to the religious teachings, is prompted by a need for a sense of belonging and an identity that is ratified by the society. An understanding of this is necessary in order to unpack religiosity and the moral dilemma of surging teenage pregnancies and other reproductive choices such as whether teens decide to abstain from unprotected sex.

UNPACKING RELIGIOSITY

As noted above, scholars agree that religiosity has a complex relationship with morality.⁴⁶ Psychologists Gordon Allport and Michael Ross proposed a typology of measuring religiosity which included (1) the intrinsically motivated, for whom the self serves religion, (2) the extrinsically motivated, for whom religion is said to serve the self, (3) the indiscriminately pro-religious, who have a superficial conviction that all religion is good, and (4) the indiscriminately anti-religious, who disagree with religion.⁴⁷ According to the above typology, there is a sense that people with extrinsic religious orientation are disadvantaged compared to people with an intrinsic religious orientation with regard to moral reasoning because they see religion in instrumental terms.⁴⁸ The intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity orientations are said to be crucial in inculcation of moral values. Studies from the 1990s onwards have delved on the positive relationship between religiosity and subjective well-being, particularly in health care decision-making context, such as HIV and AIDS, cancer and mental health.⁴⁹ Research has been on how religiosity has positive and

46 Allport GW and Ross JM. 1967. "Personal religious orientation and prejudice", *Journal of personality and social psychology* 5(4):437-483; Batson CD. 1976. "Religion as prosocial: Agent or double agent?", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 15(1):29-45; Ernsberger DJ and Manaster GJ. 1981. "Moral development, intrinsic/extrinsic religious orientation and denominational teachings", *Genetic Psychology Monographs*, 104(1):23-41; Glover RJ. 1997. "Relationships in moral reasoning and religion among members of conservative, moderate, and liberal religious groups", *The Journal of Social Psychology* 137(2):247-254; Sapp GL and Gladding ST. 1989. "Correlates of religious orientation, religiosity, and moral judgment", *Counseling and Values* 33(2):140-145.

47 Allport and Ross, "Personal religious orientation and prejudice", 432.

48 Batson, "Religion as prosocial: Agent or double agent?". See also Wahrman IS. 1981. "The relationship of dogmatism, religious affiliation, and moral judgment development", *The Journal of Psychology* 108(2):151-154.

49 See Doué CM and Roussiau N. 2015. "Religiosity and Depressive Episodes among African Migrant HIV-positive: The Mediation of Subjective Health", *Archive for the Psychology of Religion* 37(3):358-378; Cobb Leonard K and Scott-Jones D. 2010. "A belief-behavior gap?

negative effects moral reasoning of a person, with parents' religiosity being fronted as crucial in shaping children's behaviour.⁵⁰

In this chapter, we posit that the "self" is worth understanding especially with regard to the expected compliance on the taught religious values. Cognisant of plurality of religions; it is important to note that this chapter's arguments are hinged on Christian doctrine and morality. For instance, Christian teenage girls are socially expected to abstain from sex until marriage, as taught in their church's doctrine and cemented by parents and teachers as agents of socialisation. When the contrary occurs, the teenage girl is blamed for promiscuity in a way that does not take into account the structural factors that may underlie her choices but remain hidden from the eye. Insistence on adherence to abstinence and purity fails to take into account social vulnerabilities and forces that characterise the lives of Kenyan young girls. The meaning of abstinence for girls coerced into sex, lured into sex and forced into early marriages is blurred. Power play, gender inequalities and feminisation of poverty are amongst the central components worth reflecting on, if religiosity and morality would continue to relate positively.

Within the African traditional morality, one hears laments of morals falling apart.⁵¹ In affirmation, Hannah Kinoti a religion scholar, asserts that "it is a state of near chaos in the realm of morality".⁵² Religious moral values and the communal values that had been trusted to inculcate moral behaviour are being challenged by modernity. Kinoti captured the scenario in a folklore tale of a hyena who sensed

Exploring religiosity and sexual activity among high school seniors", *Journal of Adolescent Research* 25(4):578-600; Sun F, Park NS, Roff LL, Klemmack DL, Parker M, Koenig HG, Sawyer P and Allman RM. 2012. "Predicting the trajectories of depressive symptoms among southern community-dwelling older adults: The role of religiosity", *Aging & mental health* 16(2):189-198; Pargament KI, Koenig HG, Tarakeshwar N and Hahn J. 2004. "Religious coping methods as predictors of psychological, physical and spiritual outcomes among medically ill elderly patients: A two-year longitudinal study", *Journal of health psychology* 9(6):713-730; Parsons SK, Cruise PL, Davenport WM and Jones V. 2006. "Religious beliefs, practices and treatment adherence among individuals with HIV in the southern United States", *AIDS Patient Care & STDs* 20(2):97-111.; Szaflarski M, Ritchey PN, Leonard AC, Mrus JM, Peterman AH, Ellison CG, McCullough ME and Tsevat J. 2006. "Modeling the effects of spirituality/religion on patients' perceptions of living with HIV/AIDS", *Journal of general internal medicine* 21(5):28-38; Yi MS, Mrus JM, Wade TJ, Ho ML, Hornung RW, Cotton, S., Peterman AH, Puchalski CM and Tsevat J. 2006. "Religion, spirituality, and depressive symptoms in patients with HIV/AIDS", *Journal of general internal medicine* 21(5):21-27.

50 De Roos SA, Iedema J and Miedema S. 2004. "Influence of maternal denomination, God concepts, and child-rearing practices on young children's God concepts", *Journal for the scientific study of religion* 43(4):519-535.

51 See Kinoti G. 1994. *Hope for Africa and what the Christian can do*. Nairobi: Aisred; Kinoti HW. 1999. "African morality: Past and present", in Mugambi JNK and Nasimiyu-Wasike A (eds). *Moral and Ethical Issues in African Christianity: Exploratory Essays in Moral Theology*. Second Edition. Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 73-82.

52 Kinoti, "African morality", 86.

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presence of meat and chose to follow the direction of the smell.⁵³ The hyena came to a crossroad, and since it did not want to take chances, it chose to follow both paths, putting its legs astride on both paths. Attempting the impossible, it split in the middle! The moral crisis depicted in surging teenage pregnancies enables a search for the problem between the trusted religious modes of inculcating moral values and their adherence. It brings to the fore a strained relationship between religiosity and morality.

The increase in teenage pregnancies points to a reality that does not thrive in a vacuum, but rather within a webbed environment in which overlaps occur, both positive and negative. If Allport and Ross's definition of how the "intrinsically motivated" person lives their religion is anything to go by, then religiosity is open to external influence that the "self" may evaluate morally.⁵⁴ Csilla Lakatos and Tamás Martos capture the external component in intrinsic religiosity with their assertion that "intrinsic religiosity means a deep, internalised, mature faith with a deeply experienced and realized, unified outlook, along with increased spiritual wellbeing and more effective coping strategies".⁵⁵ The "unified outlook" and "effective coping strategies" point to an outward happening in the life of the "self" must negotiate. Adherence to and sustenance of intrinsic religiosity then becomes a process of action that is chosen with regard to what adds value to the self. We argue that the transcendental component that is implied in intrinsic orientation is not as mystical as scholars may think, but rather exists within a subject's range of choices with regard to what is of value to the self.

Extrinsic religiosity implies adhering to religious rituals for purposes of conforming to societal religious dictates to secure acceptance that gives one a sense of belonging. The intention or motivation to act in a particular manner is guided by aspirations that the self wishes to attain. In this context, malicious actions and hypocritical play by the subject can result, for purposes of "conforming" to societal expectations and attaining value. For instance, if purity and virginity are treasured in African traditional religious morality and pregnancy is the evidence of transgression of these, then contraceptives would be easily embraced, regardless of the socialised religious doctrine to conceal the "evidence". In such an orientation, the intentions, motivations and aspirations of the self-undergird determine and deter adherence to religion. Thus, in morality the practice of religiosity becomes a "survival strategy" for "self" in this world, here and now,⁵⁶ rather than a spiritualised or mystical achievement of ascending to another world.⁵⁷

53 Kinoti, "African morality", 86.

54 Allport and Ross, "Personal religious orientation and prejudice", 434.

55 Lakatos C and Martos T. 2019. "The role of religiosity in intimate relationships", *European Journal of Mental Health* 14(2):261.

56 Asamoah-Gyadu JK. 2010. "Pentecostalism in Africa", in Stinton DB (ed). *African Theology on the Way: Current Conversations*. London: SPCK, 63.

57 Hackett JE. 2018. *Persons and Values in Pragmatic Phenomenology: Explorations in Moral Metaphysics*. Wilmington, DE: Vernon Press.

Religiosity therefore, serves the self in building an identity that is acceptable and respected in the society in this physical world. The mystical component purported in intrinsic religiosity may be elusive in moral evaluations. As South African Christian scholar Bennie van der Walt has argued, African traditional and religious morality is said to be “communalistic, humanistic or anthropocentric, pragmatistic and utilitarian, tribalistic, shame-oriented and this-worldly.”⁵⁸ Most African scholars of morality point to the worldly characteristics outlined by Van der Walt.⁵⁹ In fact philosopher, Segun Gbadegesin avows that “far from having a religious foundation, then, we have here a system of morality which, while it makes use of religion as a motivating factor, is clearly pragmatic and ‘this-wordly’ to the core.”⁶⁰ The inculcated moral values can be said to only serve the self’s ego and social identity.

The blend of African communalistic moral and Christian religious values within the “self” influences the play of religiosity, whereby conformity to the norms within one’s culture and religion are driven by values that are significant to the “self”, in this world. Religiosity, according to Jörg Stolz, a religious sociologist, becomes a matter of an “individual’s preferences, emotions, beliefs, and actions that refer to an existing (or self-made) religion.”⁶¹ The reference to divine expectations is not promptly considered, implying that in morality, spirituality may not be apparent. Personalised internalisation and practice of socialised religion in matters morality can be said to be this worldly, whereas the expected reward or punishment for the same, in the near future touches on spirituality, which is other worldly. The practice of religiosity is all about what is of value to me as a subject, a concept that creates a self-haven, a subjective world intentionally driven by intangible and invisible motivations. There is no guarantee that the inculcated religious moral values will be adhered to the letter, thus creating a gap such that religion, even though it shapes people’s morality, is devoid of the skills necessary for negotiating the real-life norms.

Deviance from the socio-cultural, religious morals and government policies is usually not pre-planned, but it occurs when norms and policies are negotiated in a rationalised manner depending on the situation and the conditions in play. This argument follows moral psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg’s theory of moral development and how development of a moral society is dependent upon the

58 Van der Walt BJ. 2003. “Morality in Africa: yesterday and today. The reasons for the contemporary crisis”, *In die Skriflig* [In the Spotlight] 37(1):54.

59 See Bujo B. 1990. *African Christian morality at the age of inculturation*. Nairobi: St Paul Publications; Wiredu and Gyekye, *Person and community*; Gbadegesin S. 1998. “Individuality, community and the moral order”, in Coetzee PH and Roux APJ (eds). *Philosophy from Africa: A Text with Readings*. Johannesburg: International Thomson Publishing (1998), 305; Mojola AO. 1988. *Introductory ethics for college students and teachers*. Nairobi: Heinemann; Turaki, *Tribal Gods of Africa*; Van der Walt, “Morality in Africa”.

60 Gbadegesin, “Individuality, community and the moral order”.

61 Stolz J. 2009. “Explaining religiosity: towards a unified theoretical model”, *The British Journal of Sociology* 60(2):347.

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moral standards of the individuals that live within it.⁶² The internalisation of the norms and subsequent evaluation of the same in different moral situations towards choosing the right action depicts a morally developed individual.⁶³ Outwardly, the moral judgment on premarital sex for instance would be considered deviance, even though the personal identity and pleasure fulfillment of the “self” would be guided by personal aspirations. As psychologists Sarah Schnitker, Jay Medenwaldt and Emily Williams argue, “adolescent religiosity may exacerbate sexual identity conflicts and increase prejudice towards prescribed outgroups.”⁶⁴

The subjective choices are influenced largely by the environment of relations of which we are part. An environment that shapes and ratifies our identity that we so value. As such, the self becomes the main player of religiosity and morality. The relationship between the two disciplines is understandable with the “self” at the centre. Apart from religious norms, culture, media, socio-economic status, government policies and parental dictates are other sanctioning authorities worthy of moral consideration in any ethical decision-making processes over and against the self’s aspirations. This self-centred approach to religiosity and morality as Schnitker, Medenwaldt and Williams posit, adds to other “person-centred approaches to religious development across adolescence” in ways that “reveal diverse trajectories of change”.⁶⁵ The conformity expected by the socialising agents, including religious clergy, parents, teachers and other gatekeepers, is bound to fail within this framework. Mystical interconnections of self in the practice of religion become paramount in the inculcation of moral values. Intrinsic religiosity that fails to convoke the spiritual intersection, in reality, poses a challenge to religion’s trusted role of shaping upright morality. The interplay of culture and normative inculcating teachings are discussed in relation to surging teenage pregnancies in the following section. We posit that when the self and the communal expectations are in tension, most often it is skewed towards male domination.

TENSIONS SURROUNDING TEENAGE PREGNANCIES AND RELIGIOSITY IN ETHICAL DECISION MAKING

In an environment characterised by access to media and technological gadgets such as smart phones, television and tablets amongst others, the internet has permeated every facet of human life, especially for the teenagers whom John Palfrey and Urs

62 Kohlberg L. 1976. “Moral stages and moralization: The cognitive-developmental approach”, in Lickona T (ed). *Moral development and behavior: Theory, research, and social issues*. New York: Hold, Rinehart and Winston, 31-53.

63 Musili TK. 2017. *Christians’ perceptions and practice of ‘ABC’ strategy in the context of new HIV infections in Kiambu County-Kenya*, unpublished PhD thesis, Kenyatta University, Nairobi.

64 Schnitker SA, Williams EG and Medenwaldt JM. 2021. “Personality and social psychology approaches to religious and spiritual development in adolescents”, *Adolescent Research Review* 15:1-19.

65 Schnitker, Williams and Medenwaldt, “Personality and Social psychology”, 15.

Gasser refer to as “digital natives”.⁶⁶ It has not only made pornography accessible, but has also taken over the parenting duty, as most youngsters spend most of their time using the internet. In most of the cultures in Kenya, sex and sexuality have always been conceptualised as a private and personal affair.⁶⁷ As such, young people have been expected to take responsibility for their sexuality as sexual agents. According to sociologist Heather Albanesi, sexual agency has been individualised in the West, to the point that the concept of “personal choice” has as a result dominated in most sexual and reproductive health policies used for lobbying and advocating for inclusion, equity and justice in sexuality.⁶⁸

We argue that this concept of “personal choice” with regard to sexuality is problematic, however, since a person is always a person in and within a community. The webbed relationships that exist within societies are complex, as cultural and religious structural inequalities often dominate self-urgency. One, therefore, wonders whether culture and religion form an effective moral compass to regulate sexual behaviour amongst the adolescents and the youth in this era. This question is embedded in cognition that gender injustice has been the main fuel for teenage pregnancies over history. Socialising agents, who are tasked with the duty of inculcating moral values regarding sex, shy away from the duty, as talking about sex is regarded as a taboo.⁶⁹

Socio-cultural tenets are known to shape people’s behaviour either positively or negatively. African patriarchal culture and religion have been two institutions that have worked together to create and maintain social structures that enable teenage pregnancy. For instance, in most cultures in Kenya, pregnant teenage girls are often married off to old men to conceal the ill of premarital sex as it is also shunned in Christianity. Further, circumcision trainings that even take place in churches, duped as alternative rite of passage, prepare initiates for marriage life at a tender age of between twelve and thirteen years. We are in agreement with psychologists Bede Agocha, Asencio Marysol and Carlos Decena in their assertion that “culture provides a significant framework for understanding sexuality”,⁷⁰ where the “values,

66 Palfrey J and Gasser U. 2008. *Born Digital: Understanding the First Generation of Digital Natives*. First Edition. New York: Basic Books.

67 See Barasa SF, Wamue-Ngare G and Wanjama, L. 2013. “Experience of school-related gender-based violence by pupils and the culture of silence: A case of primary Schools in Kasarani District, Nairobi County, Kenya”, *International Journal of Education and Research* 1(3):1-20 and Nyamongo GB. 2007. “Gendered silence: Sexual violence against women during ethnic conflicts in Kenya”, *Asian Women* 23(4):61-74 for arguments on the silence around sex and sexuality in most cultures.

68 Albanesi H. 2010. *Gender and sexual agency: How young people make choices about sex*. Rowman & Littlefield.

69 Nyamongo, “Gendered silence”.

70 Agocha VB, Asencio M and Decena CU. 2014. “Sexuality and culture”, in Tolman DL, Diamond LM, Bauermeister JA, George WH, Pfaus JG and Ward LM (eds). *APA handbook of sexuality and psychology, Vol. 2. Contextual approaches*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 183.

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beliefs, and behaviors associated with the sexuality of individuals also reveal a great deal about the larger beliefs and values of the society they inhabit or from which they originate".⁷¹ Morality in Kenyan patriarchal structures, for example, is depicted as a woman's preoccupation, as captured by the Swahili idioms *Mwanamke ni Tabia* (a woman is character) and *mwanaume ni effort* (a man is effort). These expressions have been repeated over and over in songs, speeches and preaching in a way that has shaped Kenyan Christian behavioural expectations for women and girls. In this context, the responsibility to maintain high moral standards and good manners is what defines womanhood. The centre of this morality is the sexual conduct of the woman. If the woman is married, then she must be faithful to her husband; if she is not married, then she must remain a virgin. Women who do not adhere to the prescribed high moral standards are described as having "loose morals". In order to sustain the standards, most elder women report putting their girls on contraceptives without their consent, for fear of reproach by their husbands and the society at large.⁷²

Again, it is worth noting that the same standard does not apply for men, and there are no requirements for men to be virgins in most cultures.⁷³ To maintain the so-called moral fabric of the society, men become "moral police" punishing women who deviate. The women are beaten and shamed by men with view to disciplining them. The same applies to religion, where women are held to higher moral codes than men. The woman caught in adultery in the gospel of John is perhaps the classic example of double standards in the society when it comes to sexual conduct. Since then, nothing seems to have changed.⁷⁴ Women must be sexually pure when their male counterparts are free in this regard. Virginity therefore is gendered.

Christianity upholds chastity and purity until marriage. Christian religious beliefs and ideas are frequently influential determinants of sexual preferences and action. When abstinence is taught, it is premised as God's will. This concept flows from the biblical scripture, where "sex before marriage is morally wrong because God prohibits it".⁷⁵ It is also punishable, since it is said that one would not inherit the

71 Agocha, Asencio and Decena, "Sexuality and culture", 183.

72 "Passaris explains why she put her daughter on birth control at 16", *The Standard*, 20 June 2019. See also Onsase L and Mirit K. 2020. "Kilifi County Continues to Increase Funding for Family Planning and Adolescent and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health", *TCI Urban Health*, 10 June.

73 Maina B, Yandisa S, Ferguson L and Kabiru CW. 2020. "Conceptualizations of Masculinity and Sexual Development among Boys and Young Men in Korogocho Slum in Kenya", *Culture, Health & Sexuality: An International Journal of Research, Intervention and Care*, December, 1-15; Ninsiima AB, Leye E, Micielsen K, Kemigisha E, Nyakato VN and Coene G. 2018. "Girls Have More Challenges: They Need to Be Locked Up: A Qualitative Study of Gender Norms and the Sexuality of Youth and Adolescents in Uganda", *International Journal of Environment Research and Public Health* 15(2):193. Maina, Yandisa, Ferguson and Kabiru writing on idealised and dominant masculinity, they point to the perception that Kenyan men have more sexual freedom, unlike girls.

74 Bible. Revised Standard Version (RSV). John 7:53-8:1-11.

75 Tracy, "Chastity and the Goodness of God".

kingdom of God. Teenagers are presented with a God who monitors their sexual life, demanding unwavering commitment and loyalty with a promise of eternal life.⁷⁶ In light of the surging teenage pregnancy rate, the designation of a supernatural monitor of human lives and sexual decisions does not guarantee loyalty to religious norms. Further, the teleological goals of either burning in hell or inheriting the kingdom of God may or may not readily form the foundations of ethical decision making regarding young people's sexual behaviour. We therefore argue that "the polarity between the present and the not-yet realization of the kingdom of God challenges the probability of awaiting the realization of God's goodness which appears to be far-fetched",⁷⁷ especially in matters relating to reproductive choices.

The framework for understanding religiosity and morality in terms of individual ethical decision making that we have proposed explains why it is challenging for adolescent girls to adhere to the prescribed norms. Other structural injustices inflict the pain of unexpected pregnancies by interposing other challenges that cloud their decision making. Apart from teaching sexual norms, parents and religious leaders ought to serve the girls better by imparting life skills that can enable them navigate this volatile space. The Reproductive Health Bill, 2019,⁷⁸ for instance, proposes that reproductive services include mentorship, spiritual and moral guidance, counselling on sexual abstinence, education about the consequences of unsafe abortion and of drug abuse and training in life skills. All of these are components that can help the girls in the process of ethical decision making over and against the taught norms. Even as church leaders and other moral authorities rejected the bill, some members of parliament, along with atheist and civil society groups, maintained that it was time to bring the uncomfortable subject to the table. In the wake of this social and political debate, some parents admitted to administering contraceptives to their teenagers to evade the menace of unsafe abortions and avoid reproach from the society.⁷⁹

EFFECTS OF SEXUAL AGENCY ON REPRODUCTIVE DECISION MAKING

As the nation grapples with the threats of teenage pregnancies, truthful conversations are called for between idealism and realities that human persons are facing. Culture changes with time, prompting worldviews to change as persons rationalise and adjust to the changing times. One of the worldviews religious members and clergy need to readjust involves acceptance of the reality that people tend to make choices with regard to what is of value to them and not necessarily adherence to stipulated norms. The volitional drive to make a choice introduces the concept of self-agency. Self-agency is inherent in a person, and it refers to a feeling of being

76 Musili, *Christians' perceptions and practice of 'ABC' strategy*, 187.

77 Musili, *Christians' perceptions and practice of 'ABC' strategy*, 188.

78 *Reproductive Health Bill*, 2019.

79 "Passaris explains why she put her daughter on birth control at 16".

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in control of one's actions. According to one group of psychology researchers, self-agency is "volitional and [is] described in terms of self-regulated, goal-directed actions where actions are defined as self-initiated and purposive activities."⁸⁰

The concept of self-agency does not deviate from the commonly held framework of communality amongst Kenyans, but it appreciates the subjectivity and privacy of sex as taught in the communities. Self-agency opens a space of interconnections between culture, religiosity, morality and the self in relation to the individual's values. The individual's experience of the higher values being strived for convokes a sense of affirmation or guilt, thus inviting the experiential component of religion, which is spirituality. Whether other-worldly or this-worldly, the inner subjective experience of aesthetic values creates a platform within which the self, regardless of their religion, would make morally upright decisions and choices that are universally life affirming.

We argue that self-agency in the face of sexual advances becomes intentionally rationalised and premeditated for execution in line with one's religiosity. A Christian teenage girl may opt to engage in premarital sex over and against the Christian norm of purity for her own values and reasons. In such instances, the morality of the girl is questioned, most often with blame being diverted to the parents and other socialisation agents. However, in instances where consenting to engage in premarital sex is not attained, then rape, which is a crime is committed. It therefore follows that the legislature and its processes ought to sternly and without compromise punish the perpetrators of such sexual violations. In this case, the perpetrators are not limited to direct perpetrators, such as rapists, but also to people who hold the power and opt to silence the victim by various means, infringing on their right to speech. Severe punishment should be meted out to people who engage in sexual crimes, such as rape with consenting or non-consenting minors. Biases of gender injustice, where teenage mothers are fronted as the victims, without addressing the responsibility the teenage "fathers" and the actions other male perpetrators and accomplices of whatever gender, ought to be brought to a halt. In addition, Article 35 of the Constitution of Kenya 2010 upholds the right to access information.⁸¹ Knowledge is power, and its wealth within a person's disposal can enhance negotiating powers even in matters sexuality. All the stakeholders should promote comprehensive and age-appropriate sexuality education that would assist the teenagers in making informed decisions concerning their reproductive health and bodies.

As the world of scholarship strives for a global ethic, it is becoming apparent that religions offer distinct and diverse values undergirding morality that does not fit all humanity. Embracing our humanness as theologian Hans Küng would have it, requires nothing less "but the necessary minimum of common values, standards

80 Little TD, Snyder CR and Wehmeyer M. 2014. "The agentic self: On the nature and origins of personal agency across the lifespan", in Mroczek DK and Little TD (eds). *Handbook of personality development*. New York: Psychology Press, 61.

81 Constitution of Kenya, 2010, art 35.

and basic attitudes.”⁸² Put differently and into perspective, it requires “a minimal basic consensus relating to binding values, irrevocable standards and moral attitudes, which can be affirmed by all religions despite their ‘dogmatic’ differences and which can also be supported by non-believers.”⁸³

CONCLUSION

The chapter acknowledges the sad reality of surging teenage pregnancies in Kenya. It also brings to light the tensions embedded in teaching of morality in a gendered way, the tensions of self and community in the practice of ethics. Concerns for religious adherence and sustenance lose the transcendental and mystical component and become a process of action that is chosen with regard to what adds value to the self. We, however, note that sexual activity is not individualised and subjective, but rather exists within a web of relationships, many of which are dominated by bias. Tensions within culture and religion unmask the structural inequalities that affect sexuality choices. Inasmuch as religion shapes peoples’ morality, we argue that young people ought to be served with life skills for navigating normative teachings on sexuality. Sexual violation of girls is too often rationalised, and perpetrators need to face stern punishments within a legal framework. Governments, in partnership with other sectors, ought to stem the tide of sexual abuse. Stakeholders in society ought to embrace age-appropriate sexuality education to enhance informed ethical decisions regarding sexuality, especially as appertains to provision of knowledge on reproductive health. Shared human values and attitudes form a solid bedrock in the search for global ethic and sexual ethics that respect the intrinsic worth of each and every human person.

82 Küng H. 1998. *A global ethic for global politics and economics*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 79.

83 Schier P. 2018. What is the Global Ethic? Preface to “Declaration toward a Global Ethic”, Kuala Lumpur 2006 (2nd edition), 2. Online at: https://www.academia.edu/7041150/What_Is_The_Global_Ethic