

Research on the role of sexuality within the Islamic community in Bolgatanga

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Summary

Worldwide people encounter negative consequences of unsafe and (unwanted) sexual actions, like sexual transmitted diseases (std's), unwanted pregnancies and traumatisation. Sexual education turned out to be an important method to prevent these problems. Ghana is facing these problems as well. Especially the northern region of Ghana copes with poverty and poor health conditions.

The research for this thesis took place in the Upper East Region (UER) of Ghana; Bolgatanga. The Christian youth in the Bolgatanga district is facing a lot of challenges related to unsafe and (unwanted) sexual actions, unwanted pregnancies, sexual transmitted diseases and (unsafe) abortions. The Youth Harvest Foundation Ghana (YHFG) aims to help the youth of the Bolgatanga district to develop their skills and equip them with the appropriate information that will help them gain the self confidence necessary to fight through the factors that are promoting the cycle of abject poverty (Youth Harvest Foundation Ghana, 2010).

The research question is:

Which conceptions and practices do the Islamic community have in the Bolgatanga district in relation to sexuality and sexual health education?

The research is based on qualitative research methods. Which consist of a theoretical framework, open interviews and participatory observation. The target group is the youth of the age of 14 up to 24. The respondents consist of the Christian youth and a social worker, a health worker, a teacher and a parent.

The research goal is focused on the conceptions and the practices of the Christian youth in the Bolgatanga district on sexuality and sexual and reproductive health. In order to make recommendations to the YHFG to improve their sexual and reproductive health classes. They say they experience a lack of knowledge on the perceptions of the youth about these topics.

Conclusion

The results show that the youth doesn't have the correct information on topics related to sexuality. The result is that they experience problems such as (unsafe) sex, (unwanted) pregnancies, STD's and HIV, (unsafe) abortions. The finding suggests that the knowledge of Islamic youth and parents is limited or incorrect regarding sexuality and sexual and relational education. The result is that most of the young people have unsafe sexual contacts. Not only limited knowledge is the cause of this behaviour, but also poverty plays a role. Relationships are not made from love. Girls often have sex with older men in exchange for money or material things. This increases the risk of being infected with an STD or AIDS or unwanted pregnancies. The youth is in a vicious circle of poverty. They have limited access to education and poverty is causing school drop-outs. The drop outs have never had sexual education, so they are more vulnerable for risks regarding their sexual and reproductive health. The youth has low self-esteem and they don't think they can change their situation. Which also results in passive attitude to improve their situation.

A lot of schools, churches and mosque don't spend a lot of time giving reproductive health classes, because talking about these topics is a taboo. They advise the youth not to get involved in sex before marriage and encourage abstinence. They don't give the youth the right information for them to make healthy decisions when it comes to their sexual activities.

A part of the community especially the people who work in the welfare sector see that, not talking about sexuality has negative effects on the behaviour of the youth. They experience that the youth will talk openly about their problems, if you approach them without being judgmental. Parents don't communicate openly with their children regarding subjects like sexuality and relationships. They feel uncomfortable talking about these subject because it is a taboo. Parents don't know how to control their children. The youth has access to a lot of information sources like internet and television. They want to be more modern because they see how the people live in the western world and the parents hold on to old traditions which creates a gap between the youth and the parents. The result is the youth doesn't listen to their parents anymore.

Intervention methods based on results

It would be helpful if the parents develop a more open communication pattern with their children so the children will feel safe to come to the parents with their problems. Sexuality is a taboo so the youth harvest foundation should organize lessons for the parents on sexual en reproductive health and parenting next to their activities with the youth.

Outreaching activities for the youth in the rural areas.

If the youth finishes their reproductive health classes of the Youth Harvest Foundation Ghana (YHFG), they give a presentation of everything they have learnt. The parents are invited for this presentation. This gives the parents and the youth a opportunity to talk about sexual related subjects.

Every year there are Dutch volunteers working at the YHFG. They give reproductive health classes in the schools. We advice that it should be mandatory for the volunteers to attend a course, where they learn how to speak openly about sexuality related subjects.