

Kamaara, E.K. (2005). *Gender, Youth Sexuality, and HIV/AIDS: A Kenyan Experience*. Gaba Publications, Limuru, Kenya.

Reviewed by: Monica Dorothy King

The book discusses the socio-cultural environment within which young people in Kenya live. All researches on HIV/AIDS concur that HIV/AIDS in Africa is a gender issue, whereby girls and women are more vulnerable to HIV infection than boys and men.

Chapter one presents a general introduction to youth and sexuality in Africa. Adolescence, as an aspect of human development and its stages, is discussed. The author emphasises that 'adolescent is a period of turbulence and an adolescent is a person in crises' (Kamaara, 2005:3). The adolescent experiences an identity crisis, as well as a sexual crisis. Some views and theories on human sexuality, as well as some forms of sexual behavior that are common among young people in Africa, are also presented. The author points out that human sexuality cannot be explained by one theory alone, but by a synthesis of various theories.

Chapter two presents 'the traditional African socio-cultural context of gender relations and sex, with a specific reference to Kenya' (Kamaara, 2005:21). It analyzes gender and sex in traditional Kenyan societies. The importance of both male and female initiation processes is depicted. Initiation from childhood to adulthood is a significant passage through which masculinity and femininity are affirmed in traditional African societies.

In chapter three, the author gives a Christian view on gender relations and sex in Kenya. Historical developments of gender relations and sex in Christianity are analyzed, 'to explain the patriarchal attitudes that characterized male dominance and female subordination in Christian sexual relations' (Kamaara, 2005:48). The chapter indicates that there is a positive relationship between gender and youth sexual activity in Kenya, in the light of traditional African societies, Christianity, and contemporary attitudes and practices on gender and sex.

The response by the Government of Kenya to HIV/AIDS, in general, is then presented in chapter four. The Kenya National HIV/AIDS Strategic Plan of 2000-2005 clearly stipulates the issues of concern and indicates the way forward. The initiation of the National AIDS Control Council, with its elaborate and exhaustive structure, is presented. Despite all these measures, HIV/AIDS continues to spread fast and its destructive effects continue to diminish human life in Kenya and in Africa, as a whole. For the government to successfully develop and implement multi-faceted approaches to the control of HIV/AIDS among its youth, the support of the Church, development partners, and Kenyans of goodwill is profoundly needed.

Chapter five presents the attitudes and the youth`s sexual behavior in relation to HIV/AIDS, from a gender perspective with a special reference to Kenya. The author asserts that it is clear that most young people in Africa are sexually active and a significant number of them have multiple sexual partners. Although a significant number of the youth are aware of the dangers of HIV/AIDS and its main mode of transmission, many of them still engage in irresponsible sex.

Chapter six discusses the role of the Church in Kenya in addressing the needs of young people in the context of gender relations, youth sexual activity, and HIV/AIDS. It shows what the Church has done and what it is still to do in this area.

In conclusion, chapter seven offers recommendations of what the Church should still do to address the real needs of young people through the re-designing of the Christian youth ministry. It stresses that the youth and, indeed, all people look up to the Church for liberation from unjust gender relations, irresponsible sexual behavior, and the consequent HIV/AIDS scourge.

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