
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH FINDINGS

3. RESEARCH FINDINGS

3.1 BIOGRAPHICAL DATA OF RESEARCH GROUP

This study involves 42 black Christian women between the ages of eighteen and twenty four. All the respondents are students at a tertiary college, which indicates a high level of education. They all reside in Soweto and 93% describe themselves as world-wise city women. The average age of the respondents is twenty one years of age. None of the respondents are married. Only one of the respondents in this study is already a mother of a child. One of the most important questions for this study is whether they were still virgins or not. The answer comes as no surprise: 79% of the respondents are no longer virgins, while 21% are. One young woman engages in casual sex while another admits to having multiple partners. Almost all the young women engaged in relationships, have one partner at a time. Serial monogamy is thus practised by 96% of young women in relationships. The average age of losing their virginity is eighteen years old. One of the respondents starting having sex at the age of fifteen, whilst one woman lost her virginity at twenty two years of age. 38% of the respondents live with both parents, 26% live with their mothers and the same percentage lives with relatives. 9% live elsewhere. Although a few respondents indicate that their mothers are dead, they are all more or less influenced by parental figures in their lives. The respondents fall into two groups, namely virgins and non-virgins, and I shall divide my analysis accordingly.

3.2 PRACTISING VIRGINITY IN THE CURRENT SOCIETY

3.2.1 INTRODUCTION

This group of young women, nine out of the 42 respondents who took part in this study, choose to remain virgins until they get married. They can obviously not answer all the questions in the same way as young women engaging in sex, because they do not have the same experiences. Peer pressure to lose one's

virginity at a young age is evident in the replies these young women give. One respondent replies that being a virgin is “like I was left behind because all my friends were not virgins”. Elisa, who is no longer a virgin, responds as follows: “Some of my friends are virgins. They feel good about themselves and respect themselves the way they should”. I detect a feeling of pride, self-respect and individual accomplishment amongst the young women who are still virgins.

3.2.1.1 PRACTISING SAFE SEX

In general, this group did not really respond to the issue of condoms in relationships, because they are not having sex. They, by and large, feel that condoms have no place in a relationship, because sex should only take place after marriage. One young woman responds by saying that using a condom “means that there is no trust in the relationship and using a condom conveys that they are sluts”, whilst others feel that condoms prevent diseases and unwanted pregnancies. If a couple decides to have sex, a condom should be used at all times. Some respondents point out that condoms are not perfectly safe; the only safe sex is no sex. HIV/AIDS is as big a concern amongst the virgins as with non-virgins. This group feels that AIDS is a fatal disease, cutting short both lives and dreams. One respondent feels that having an HIV-positive male partner means that he cannot be trusted and that a sexual relationship will be a constant gamble with one’s life. Two of the nine respondents who are still virgins, are currently in relationships. One young woman feels pressurised by her boyfriend, but will not agree to pre-marital sex. The other young woman does not feel pressurised at all, because her boyfriend agrees with her that they should remain virgins until they marry. All of the respondents in this group believe in sex only after marriage. Sex should happen for the right reasons and not because of pressure. Respect is a big issue between partners in relationships for these young women.

As these young women are all virgins, they respond strongly to the issue of virginity. They feel that peer pressure causes teenagers and young women to feel as if something is wrong with them if they are not having sex. Young women have lost the regard they have previously had for the high price of virginity. They also feel that boyfriends pressurise young women into having sex. Unless the woman

has sex with him, the boyfriend will leave her for someone else. Tumi feels that having freely available condoms does not act as a deterrent any longer and actually invites young women to have sex. The respondents have a wide variety of responses to the issue of masturbation, ranging from disgusting to a natural and safe way of releasing sexual tension, but they all seem to agree that it is a safe way of avoiding the risks of having sex.

3.2.1.2 RESPONSES TO CULTURAL ISSUES

The virgins and non-virgins in this study mostly feel that *lobola* is a traditional cultural issue and where it is expected, it should be adhered to without question. Some respondents feel that it is old-fashioned and the high price of *lobola* results in marriage being postponed, but in general they feel that *lobola* is required to show respect for the parents and thank the parents for raising the daughter. As with *lobola*, male circumcision is viewed as a traditional issue. Male circumcision is mostly seen by the young women as a preventative measure, protecting the male against infections and sexually transmitted diseases.

3.2.1.3 GENERAL RESPONSES ABOUT SEXUAL ISSUES

The virgins overall do not respond to the issue of orgasm. They mostly reply that they do not know about orgasm. One respondent feels that orgasm is necessary in a relationship because it heightens the passion between male and female. On the issue of pregnancy there is general agreement within this group that children are not important now. The reasons are different, though: some feel that pregnancy is only advisable once marriage has taken place while others feel that a steady job and income would be a prerequisite for having children. Motherhood involves responsibility and these young women do not feel that they are mature enough to have children.

3.2.2 THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN THE LIVES OF YOUNG ADULT WOMEN WHO CHOOSE TO REMAIN VIRGINS UNTIL MARRIAGE

3.2.2.1 INTRODUCTION

21% of the respondents indicate that they are still virgins. Parents in this study generally regard virginity as an ideal until marriage. Most of the respondents who

are still virgins indicate that their parents are proud of them and of their decision to remain virgins until they get married. Surprisingly, two of the respondents indicate that even though they decided to remain virgins their parents mistrust them and regard them with suspicion most of the time. I find that the responses regarding virginity from the viewpoint of the virgins illustrate an openness and frankness between parent and child about their sexual lives and decisions, because the young women have got nothing to hide. Tumi exemplifies this by stating, “I wouldn’t be shy to let the world know about my virginity at my age”. The respondents who are still virgins are adamant that they will not change their behaviour. They will only have sex after marriage: “if a man wants to have sex with me, he has to have a license [*sic*], a marriage license [*sic*]”.

3.2.2.2 FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

Family relations within this group are generally open, honest, communicative and involved, although some indicate that there are pressures and anxieties in the home about the general behaviour of young women in society. This mindset results in arguments and stress in the home. One respondent complains that her father finds fault about petty things while another feels that her mother believes that financial support of her daughter is enough.

The majority of respondents who are still virgins experience a loving home environment where love, respect for each other and caring abound. They experience their home as a place where happiness, trust, security and concern are found. One respondent describes her family life as follows:

We have a typical African family. Both my parents are involved in my life and I think I was fortunate to be raised in such an environment where I was taught to make my own decisions and be supported no matter what the outcome. So when I was twelve years old my parents told me everything I was to know about sex so that I could think of the benefits and bad things of having sex at an early age. They even took me to a clinic, so I decided to wait.

3.2.2.3 VIEWS ON RESPONSIBLE PARENTHOOD

All respondents here feel that parents still have a responsibility towards guiding and teaching their children. Maria feels that her parents must keep on reminding her of what is right and wrong even if it annoys her. Norah feels that her parents are secretive and over-protective towards her and needs them to be more open and honest in their advice. The young women want and need advice.

Parents also tend to link the issues of virginity and pregnancy together. Parents believe their daughters should marry and then have children only once they are married and can afford to have them. Teenage pregnancies are accompanied by risks and carry a great responsibility. The parents feel that virginity is something to be proud of and needs to be celebrated. The parents take their parental responsibilities seriously and some young women respond by explaining how they live according to their parent's examples. Some parents do not talk to their daughters, though. Abigail responds: "I don't think that my mother feels that any child needs parental guidance, she does not talk to me about sexual issues. She says it is a white cultural thing". Tumi thinks that it is a hard thing to give parental guidance, yet her mother feels it is her duty to guide her daughter.

3.2.2.4 PARENTAL INFLUENCE

The parents of these young adult women play a significant role in their lives and life's decisions. The parents generally discuss sexual matters openly and advise their daughters to use condoms should they enter into sexual relationships. They are scared of the HIV/AIDS-pandemic and about the safety of their children; they warn their daughters about the dangers of this disease. One respondent admits that her parents are in denial and do not want to face reality – they will not welcome anybody with the disease into their home. It is interesting that most of the respondents in this group initially describe their family relationships as open and honest, yet some of them later admit that they do not really talk about sex in the house. Where sex is talked about, pre-marital sex is seen as wrong. Orgasm and masturbation are rarely discussed in the home. All the respondents think that their parents approve and welcome *lobola*. I find a tendency here that the parents relate cultural issues like *lobola* and male circumcision to traditional values; for

example male circumcision is good, “because then they would become real men”, whereas the young women relate male circumcision to health issues.

3.2.3 THE INFLUENCE OF THE CHURCH IN THE LIVES OF YOUNG ADULT WOMEN WHO CHOOSE TO REMAIN VIRGINS UNTIL MARRIAGE

3.2.3.1 INTRODUCTION

The respondents who are still virgins are all dedicated church-goers. They go to church to praise and worship God, for spiritual growth and guidance and to learn more about God. They experience the church as a positive place where they meet other people who share their values and who do not judge. This is in direct opposition to some of the responses of the non-virgins, who feel that the church judges and shames them. The women, who are virgins, have done nothing to feel guilty about, and this manifests in their sanguine attitude towards the church. They know exactly what the church preaches about sex before marriage, and indicate that sex before marriage can only have bad consequences for the individual.

3.2.3.2 THE INFLUENCE OF THE CHURCH

The church is an important aspect in the lives of the young adult women in this group. They are proud of their virginity and the fact that they live according to what the church propagates. The pastors do not condone the use of condoms, feeling that the use of condoms encourages people to engage in sexual relationships. I find these replies very interesting, because some of the non-virgins actually reply here that their pastors encourage them to use condoms to prevent HIV-infection, showing that either the young women’s lifestyles and decisions colour their perceptions about what the church prescribes or that some pastors actually do promote safe sex. One respondent feels that her pastor sees HIV/AIDS as a good way of punishing young people for their sexual behaviour; another pastor simply does not talk about AIDS, but in general the young adult women find their pastors sympathetic and compassionate towards people with AIDS. Their pastors regularly warn young people about the risks of sleeping together before marriage and the devastating effects of HIV/AIDS. They state unequivocally and unambiguously that sex before marriage is a sin. They therefore think in no uncertain terms that pregnancy and pre-marital sex are wrong. The pastors

generally feel that *lobola* is a cultural issue and people should adhere to it, but they do not often speak about male circumcision. One pastor has a very practical viewpoint on this: “He said it was dangerous and it should be stopped. Young men who want to do it should do it in hospital and then go home and do the traditional ceremony”. The pastors do not speak about sexual issues such as orgasm and masturbation; some respondents reply that masturbation is against God’s will.

3.2.4 THE INFLUENCE OF BELIEF ON THE DECISIONS OF YOUNG ADULT WOMEN WHO CHOOSE TO REMAIN VIRGINS UNTIL MARRIAGE

The women who choose to remain virgins until they get married generally display a strong belief and determination to adhere to their values and belief system. Belief means commitment and trusting God. It also means applying in everyday life what is taught in church. They fully integrate being African with being Christian. One respondent indicates that she loathes many things that Africans do nowadays, “like drugs, crime and abuse”, but she still adheres to her culture and cultural beliefs. God is an omnipotent, all-encompassing presence in their lives. “He is everywhere. In my heart and my life, in everything I do” and “He is the centre of my being”. He helps them make choices and helped Patience “in many ways regarding the relationship that I was in”. Gail summarises the general trend that I perceive in regard to the place of God in decision-making: “He is with me every step of the way. That is why I am still a virgin today.” The virgins all feel that God gives them guidance to make the right decisions. Busi regards the presence of God as a catalyst in her decision to stay a virgin: “In my mind, that is why I was able to stop before things went too far”. Maria gives a very interesting reply regarding the place of God in her life: “He is with me, to help me make the right decisions, but if I make the wrong decisions, He drifts away.” She also mentions that she is ashamed and embarrassed of what young people do and say nowadays. The only way that change can take place is by growing spiritually and accepting responsibility for reckless behaviour. The young women who are still virgins know exactly what they expect from a sexual relationship. They want communication, openness, sharing, dedication, responsibility and friendship. Faithfulness is also an attribute they are looking for.

3.3 EXPERIENCING PRE-MARITAL SEX IN THE CURRENT SOCIETY

3.3.1 INTRODUCTION

Almost 80% of the respondents in this study engage in pre-marital sexual relations. Most of these young women believe they are in monogamous relationships. They talk openly about the love and sharing that they experience in these relationships. Many of these relationships are open and honest, where the partners talk to each other openly and candidly. They appreciate the fact that they make love and not just have sex, where the male partner has regard for the feelings of the woman. They indicate that their sexual relations are not characterised by force and intimidation but by mutual benefit and fulfilment. Butle describes her boyfriend as someone “who loves me for me, who satisfies me in every way. A man who cuddles me, secures me, romances me from head to toe, who knows what I like and don’t like”. It is clear from the answers given here that sex is not the ultimate goal for these young women. They respond to the feeling of belonging, of being able to open up and communicate about their feelings and dreams and to be supported by somebody they love. They react to the emotional sharing, the friendship and the closeness they experience in their relationships.

Unfortunately not all relationships are healthy and stable. Some have doubts, like Sandra who feels that “[N]ot knowing whether I am the only woman in his life” makes her sad. Others also experience the humiliation of “a lying and cheating man” and of having an unfaithful partner who goes “after other girls”. Two-timing partners constitutes by far the biggest concern for the young women. Other factors that make them unhappy include situations when they are coerced or forced to have sex when they do not feel like it, when their partners lie to them or when there are fights and arguments. They do not like emotions and actions which make them feel uncomfortable and unhappy.

3.3.1.1 HIV/AIDS AND SEX

It is clear that the HIV/AIDS campaign for responsible sexuality has paid off in the environment of these young adult women. They feel very strongly about using condoms when having sex. Most of them will simply not have sex without using a

condom. Condom-use is important because it prevents sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS and unwanted pregnancies. One respondent replies that she trusts her boyfriend but not enough to have sex without condoms. Many young women feel that the use of a condom can show a lack of trust between partners, but they still use condoms. Some respondents indicate that they have had sex without condoms at times, but generally prefer to use condoms. Dorcas confesses: "I always want to use a condom, but I've made a few stupid mistakes". The young women are also very passionate about the prevention of HIV/AIDS. They all agree that it is a killer disease, and that they need to act responsibly to safeguard themselves. They are all very well informed about the disease. The issue of trust between partners is again raised here: "I trust him and he trusts me, but it is an issue because we are not together all the time" and "I do trust my boyfriend but I don't know what he is doing with me because sometimes he might not be able to control his feelings". HIV/AIDS is a reality that is never very far from their minds: "I have seen lots of young people my age die, because of AIDS".

3.3.1.2 RESPONSIBLE SEXUALITY

Some of these sexually active young women feel that sex before marriage is wrong, but they do it anyway. It is mostly the result of a decision that they feel is responsible. Most young women feel that they are doing it with the right partner and for the right reasons. They feel if you love and respect your partner, it is the right thing to do. One respondent is having sex because she is afraid she will die without experiencing the feeling of sex. Most of these young women also feel that engaging in a sexual relationship is acceptable if one is not pressurised into having sex. One respondent also feels that once you have sinned, there is no turning back, "so I'll just finish what I started". Talk about orgasm points towards the mutual satisfaction of both partners and the fulfilment of the sexual act. Innocentia responds as follows: "[Orgasm is] the whole point of it and being close to one another and being loved, that's what counts for me". Some young women feel that masturbation is another issue in a relationship that needs attention. While a few women feel masturbation is a deterrent to unsafe sex, a release for sexual tension and prevention from diseases, others feel it is dirty, immoral, disgusting and insulting to one's sexual partner.

3.3.1.3 VIEWS ON VIRGINITY

“Virginity used to be a big issue in the old days, but not anymore” and “These days it is not important for a woman to be a virgin”. These quotes seem to summarise the general feeling of the young adult women towards virginity. Having pre-marital sex is the norm rather than the exception – they do not think it is such a big deal, “because it seems everybody is doing it and if you do not, you seem like an outcast or not normal”. Pre-marital sex is also beneficial for the self-image of young women; it makes you feel proud and fills you with self-confidence. This is an interesting phenomenon in a society where women generally suffer from a lack of self-esteem. The young women freely admit that many teenagers engage in sexual relations because of peer pressure. Many young women feel that virginity is something that you are going to lose anyway, through either sex or rape. One respondent feels that she would rather voluntarily have sex with someone she cares about, than be the rape victim of a man who believes that having sex with a virgin would heal him from AIDS.

The idea of remaining a virgin until marriage has changed over time for these young women. Most of these girls reply that when they were still at school, they saw virginity as something to treasure. They valued their virginity at a younger age and thought it was important to remain a virgin, but things change. Pumzile regrets her decision to enter into a sexual relationship: “But most of the time I feel I should have waited”.

3.3.1.4 VIEWS ON IRRESPONSIBLE SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR

Although the young women are participating in sex, they view rampant and promiscuous sex as wrong, sinful and sick. They feel that sexual behaviour should be controlled and wise and they will not partake in sexual actions that are dangerous and irresponsible. Sex must never be put before love and sex should be the result of communication and trust which are built over time. Reckless and immature sex puts a woman at risk of contracting sexually transmitted illnesses like HIV/AIDS and also of pregnancy.

3.3.1.5 THE ISSUE OF PREGNANCY

Pregnancy is something that most of these young women do not feel ready for yet. They mostly want to have a career first, marry and then have children. They feel a child will jeopardise their young lives and they do not feel financially and emotionally ready yet for the responsibility of children. For these young women sex is clearly for recreational purposes and not for procreation. They all have a dream of having children in the future. The one respondent, who is already a mother, reacts as follows: “The experience I went through when I was pregnant and after the baby was born, made me realise that you can’t be pregnant and have a child until you are married”. Most respondents regard pregnancy as a stumbling block to their dreams and futures.

3.3.1.6 RESPONSES ABOUT CULTURAL ISSUES

The women who involve themselves in pre-marital sex hold the same attitudes as the virgins regarding cultural issues like *lobola* and male circumcision. *Lobola* is a traditional cultural value that many participants in this study still believe in and adhere to. It shows respect towards the young woman to be married and towards the parents of this woman for raising and educating her. Male circumcision is seen as a traditional issue and several young women view this as something positive. Although *lobola* and male circumcision are still practised, I can see that some women already regard this as old-fashioned and a waste of money. They feel it is up to the individual male to decide whether he wants to take part in these cultural issues.

3.3.2 THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN THE LIVES OF YOUNG ADULT WOMEN WHO CHOOSE TO ENTER INTO SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS BEFORE MARRIAGE

3.3.2.1 INTRODUCTION

Sex before marriage is definitely something that parents do not condone. They either tell their daughters to abstain from pre-marital sex or they simply do not know that their daughters are already in sexual relationships. “They do not know that I am having sex behind their backs” seems to be the general response here. I

also establish a common response of denial here: “I think they like to believe that I am still a virgin. They don’t want to believe that I am sexually active”. Where parents do raise the issue of pre-marital sex it is frequently to warn their daughters about the risks of pre-marital sex, the devastating results of HIV-infection and other sexually transmitted diseases. The young women often feel that their parents are suspecting that they are sexually active and the word *suspicious* is commonly used when they talk about their parents’ attitude towards them. Many parents plead with their daughters to “play it safe”, to be responsible and careful. Rosemary’s mother told her that she should use condoms to protect herself against HIV/AIDS as well as pregnancy. Some parents react passionately about the sexual behaviour of their children. In their daughter’s words, they “react stupidly”, one father “freaks even hearing the word sex” and another mother will “flip if she hears that I am having sex”.

3.3.2.2 THE INFLUENCE OF PARENTAL DISAPPROVAL ABOUT SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR

The young women are also not inclined to change their sexual behaviour even if their parents disapprove. Most of them indicate that they will simply hide their sexual activities better. Mary will try her best to hide it from her mother and Yvonne would “try and hide my activities better so that my parents would not notice, but I don’t think that they will believe that I have stopped”. Another respondent is adamant that she will continue with her behaviour: “I will not stop to please anyone, not even my parents”. Many young women feel that their sexual behaviour is private and does not concern anybody: “I think that what I do behind closed doors is my business and mine alone and the person involved at that time”. It seems that these young women believe that their behaviour is responsible and that they will not change it.

3.3.2.3 THE IMPACT OF PARENTAL VIEWS IN THE LIVES OF YOUNG ADULT WOMEN

A very important notion about the relationships between parents and young women was discovered during the research. When asked if what their parents think and say still matters to them even though they are now adults, 83% of the respondents in this study replied in the affirmative. Parents can definitely take

note of this, because they still have a major impact on what their daughters think and do. In general the family relationships are happy and caring. The respondents use words like love, respect, communication, caring and happiness when describing their family relationships. There seems to be a lot of respect for parents and parents are ostensibly involved in their children's lives, except that most parents do not seem to know that their daughters have a secret sexual life!

The young adult women prefer to talk about their mothers as the loving parent, while fathers are generally seen as strict and unrelenting. One respondent lives with her father and they have a very warm loving father-daughter relationship, but she is the exception. Some respondents feel that pressures outside the home and the widespread behaviour of young people today contribute to stress inside the home. Not all young women have a happy life at home. One respondent declares: "Nothing is good about my family", while another feels that she is continually arguing about money with moody parents.

As with the young women who abstain from pre-marital sex, this group feels that parental guidance is very important. They do not want to be told what to do, but they do appreciate encouragement, open-mindedness about sexual issues and guidance about life in general. One respondent feels that parents are scared and embarrassed to talk about sexual matters with their children. Another feels that parental guidance is still imperative for parents, because it is their responsibility. Rebecca is of the opinion that her parents should "just talk to me, maybe tell me about their experiences and guide me". Many respondents also feel that parents should guide young people when they make mistakes or do wrong things. The issue of parents as role models is also addressed here, while another respondent thinks that parents should seek professional help on how to face issues with their children.

3.3.3 THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN THE LIVES OF YOUNG ADULT WOMEN WHO CHOOSE TO ENTER INTO SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS BEFORE MARRIAGE

3.3.3.1 INTRODUCTION

62% of the young adult women in this study belong to a mainline church, with the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Church being the predominant churches. The majority of the respondents indicate that the church and their pastors play a significant role in their lives. A third of the respondents go to church regularly, a third go to church often while another third seldom go to church. For the young women who go to church regularly, it is a spiritual experience. The church is seen as a place where they worship, pray and praise the Lord. Many mention that they go to church to ask forgiveness for their sins. They also go to church to hear what the Bible teaches. The response Dorcas gives echoes most of the responses of the regular church-goers:

I go to church because I want to hear the Word of the Lord. I want to share the gospel with the members of the church. I go to church because they teach us about our everyday life and how we can make a difference in our lives and other people's lives. They teach us the value of sharing, loving and respecting one another.

Others do not go to church anymore: "I seldom go to church because I've lost interest and don't see the use", while others have more pragmatic reasons, like "I cannot wake up in the morning" or "because I sometimes work over the weekends". Some respondents do not go to church because they feel that the church judges them and their behaviour. 76% of the respondents indicate that their pastors discuss sexual issues in church, while 90% indicate that their pastors talk about HIV/AIDS in church. 86% feel that their pastors clearly outline what is right and wrong behaviour. Most respondents also feel that the pastors know very well how young adults behave. The respondents all agree that the church is against sexual relations outside marriage and that sexual immorality is a sin. The churches strongly encourage abstinence, so much so that some churches support the visual display of virginity: "only women wear red blouses and unmarried women wear white blouses". 60% of the respondents feel that they think of the

values taught in church when they enter a sexual relationship, and 69% indicate that they feel guilty if they do not adhere to these values.

3.3.3.2 CHURCH VIEWS ON SAFE SEX

Although many young women report that their pastors are against condoms, because they are against pre-marital sex, some do not know how to answer this. Some do say nevertheless that their pastor promotes safe sex. One respondent has the following to say about her pastor's views: "My priest says we should practice safe sex so he recommends that we all use condoms to protect ourselves against these diseases that spread like wildfire", while another says her pastor "encourages young people already involved in sexual relations to use them". Alice says her pastor "encourages us all to use condoms because I think they know by now that we are sexually active". A few pastors are quiet on the subject, and one pastor decided not to say anything to make his feelings clear: "I don't remember my pastor talking about condoms in the church. But one day a lady from an AIDS organisation came and talked about condoms and when they were busy talking about it he just got up and left without saying anything".

3.3.3.3 THE CHURCH AND HIV/AIDS

If some pastors are silent about condoms, they certainly have a lot to say about HIV/AIDS. I see a picture of a very compassionate and caring clergy when I read what the young women have to say. In general the pastors pray a lot for people infected with the disease, but their compassion is accompanied by serious warnings to young people about sex. I feel here that almost all the pastors take an ethical stance and do their best to curb this threat to the community. Only one respondent feels that her pastor sees AIDS as a judgement for wrong behaviour. I am greatly encouraged by the stand which the pastors take and the positive values that they convey to the young women; they are at least not left in a moral morass about the causes and effects of this deadly disease. At least the silence about HIV/AIDS is broken in most of the churches that these young women attend.

3.3.3.4 THE CHURCH AND PRE-MARITAL SEX

The young women almost unanimously agree that their pastors see pre-marital sex as a sin. Only two women do not know what their pastors think. I again have the feeling that pre-marital sex is something that actually is addressed in church. One respondent agrees: “He makes sure that no one leaves before they hear about it, especially young people”. The pastors have the same standpoint about pregnancy. They feel that having a baby before marriage is irresponsible and sinful. One pastor is actually openly disgusted by the many babies he has to baptise without the parents being married. Another pastor warns young people “of the consequences of becoming pregnant at an early age”. A few pastors apparently never touch the subject.

The young women generally regard the guidance they receive in church very highly. They also report that the pastors feel that even grown children can benefit from the guidance of parents. It is clear that the young women are influenced by what they hear in church.

3.3.4 THE ROLE OF BELIEF IN THE LIVES OF YOUNG ADULT WOMEN WHO CHOOSE TO ENTER INTO SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS BEFORE MARRIAGE

3.3.4.1 INTRODUCTION

76% of the respondents feel that they are spiritual. They describe their spirituality as belief, as trust and as honesty. Palesa defines spirituality as:

Believing with all your heart, body and soul and also trusting fully in God, that God is alive and that nothing is impossible in the eyes of God, as long as you trust and believe.

The young adult women also believe that their Christianity overrides their culture – they cannot escape their culture and cultural practices but “Christ comes first”. One respondent replies that there is a vast difference between African ways and Christianity, but most believe that you can be an African and a Christian at the same time. As with the respondents who are still virgins, I find a very strong belief

in God and a great love for God in the group who engages in pre-marital sex. God is everywhere in their lives, protecting and guiding them. God controls their lives, but “when I do wrong things, I don’t believe He is in me telling me wrong things”. I also come across a very strong belief in the forgiveness of God. “I am always asking his blessing and forgiveness”, “I always pray every day for forgiveness” and “before making any decisions about sexual behaviour you ask for forgiveness because you know it is important in his eyes”.

3.3.4.2 LIVING WITH GUILT

The question about where God is when they make decisions about sexual behaviour provides some very interesting replies. It is clear that many young adult women suffer from guilt-feelings about their sexual behaviour. They clearly indicate that they are sinning, but they forget about God while having sex:

... the devil will tell you that you will have enjoyment that will only last for ten minutes and you will suffer afterwards with guilt. Some people leave Christianity because of guilt.

I did think about that and felt guilty, but I don't want to feel guilty, because I felt the person with whom I was fornicating was the right one, so I decided to stop thinking about God, in that way I did not feel guilty.

I tend to put Him last when I behave like a tart.

I guess I don't really think about God when it comes to matters like this because I think I am an embarrassment...

I don't want to involve God in my sexual relationship, because I know that it is a sin.

I do not think about God or Jesus during that moment. I think it is very rare to think about another person except yourself and your partner.

When doing sex, I know that I disobey God, but after everything I apologise to God.

50% of the respondents think that what you do with your body has nothing to do with religion. It is obvious that for many the sexual act precludes any thoughts of God. Some young adult women land in a never-ending circle of sexual acts and begging for forgiveness. I find the strong words that some respondents use here very interesting. It is only in response to the question about their relationship with God that some of them refer to having sex as fornication and others describing themselves as tarts and sluts. It discloses the weight of guilt that they have to bear as they engage in sexual behaviour which is against the will of God.

It is clear that young women are influenced by a myriad things in their decision-making. On the one hand they are influenced by the feelings they have for their partners. One woman says the growing love for her partner affects her decisions: "The feeling of loving my boyfriend – it grows every day. Caring about him. The respect we have for each other. Planning the future together". Another feels that the trust, honesty, faithfulness and love in her relationship influences her. Others are directed by moral values, friends, family and religious values.

3.4 SUGGESTIONS FOR A HEALTHIER CO-EXISTENCE BETWEEN YOUNG WOMEN, PARENTS AND CHURCH

The young women were asked to make suggestions about how to enhance the relations between themselves, their parents and their church.

3.4.1 WORKING TOWARDS BETTER RELATIONS BETWEEN PARENTS AND YOUNG WOMEN

Many of the respondents feel that open and honest communication between parents and children is necessary. They feel satisfied about the way their parents treat them and the interaction that already exists. Although many parent-child relationships are healthy and open, some young women would like their parents to stop treating them like children and more as responsible young women. They would like their parents to be "more open and frank with us. To teach us more. That way we are not going to seek help from other people like friends. Maybe they know more about sex than we do", and to "speak louder, open, about sex". They feel that emotional support and guidance about relationships are necessary so

that their relationships with their partners can grow and stay strong and healthy. Many young women feel that their parents have already experienced sex and the emotions that accompany sexual relationships and therefore the parents can give them advice about sex and relationships. One young woman's plaintive cry describes the feelings of a young woman where the relationships at home are not good: "Talk to me, just talk to me". Another woman responds about how she would like her parents to respond to her: "They must talk to me. Talk to me about relationships. Talk to me about sex".

3.4.2 YOUNG WOMEN, THE CHURCH AND SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS

Whereas many young women do not experience guilt towards their parents about their sexual relationships, they certainly do experience self-reproach and shame when they describe their feelings towards the church and God. Some young women separate their church from the decisions they make in their sexual relationships. Zandile feels that the church does not influence her at all: "I don't tell anyone about the decisions I make in my relationship. I think there is no need because I am not married". Others experience feelings like shame and guilt and feel deceitful and scared. Noncebo feels what you do "will eventually catch up with you". One young woman is obviously influenced by what the church and her pastor prescribe: "Slowly but surely I'm starting to think about abstaining from sex".

Many young women feel that their pastor is already doing enough to guide and direct them in their life's decisions. They consider their pastors must carry on with what they are already doing. Others are of the opinion that their pastors can do more. More than one respondent felt that their pastors are old-fashioned and should be more realistic about what is going on in the world of the modern young person. They are of the opinion that "the youth of today is different from the youth of the 1950s and 1960s" and that issues must be discussed more openly and honestly. The pastors must "speak about the reality of sex" and talk "about sex and relationships openly". Many indicate that a pastor must strive to change their lives spiritually and emotionally. The pastor must guide and show the correct way. They want the pastor to speak openly about sex and all issues relating to sex at

church. Nkagisang feels that her pastor could talk separately to the young people at church about sexual issues. Katometse agrees that her pastor should “at least once a week organise a meeting with the youth to discuss things he knows. Especially relationships”. Maggie wants her pastor to stop “going around in circles about the HIV/AIDS-issue and get straight to the point and call a spade a spade”.

3.4.3 WORKING TOWARDS RESPONSIBLE SPIRITUAL ETHICAL BELIEFS AND VALUES

As already mentioned, many respondents put aside their ethical values and beliefs when they need to make decisions about their sexual lives. Some respondents separate their spiritual values totally from their decision-making process. Tebogo responds as follows: “I don’t think relationship decisions have anything to do with spirituality, ethical beliefs and values. You decide what you believe in”, while Portia feels that she makes her own decisions: “I do what is best for me first, then my family and friends”. Many auspiciously do believe that their decision-making is based on their belief and ethical value-system. Ethics and values regulate their lives and the decisions they make: “They influence my beliefs in decision-making because that way I can come up with positive decisions”. Another respondent feels that her ethical beliefs influence her a lot, “because that is the road I choose to walk and if I feel that I don’t live up to my standards then I would have failed myself and more importantly I lied to myself. That means I cannot trust myself with anything”.

Even though the young women mostly indicate that their sexual behaviour is responsible and mature, 69% of the respondents specify that they at times feel dominated and overwhelmed when they make decisions pertaining to their sexual relationships. A few young women periodically have regrets about not abstaining from sex for longer and also regret the decisions that they have made. Some decisions also make their parents unhappy and disappointed. The young women who decided to abstain from pre-marital sex have a lot more confidence in their ability to make choices and to adhere to those choices than the group indulging in pre-marital sex. They seem to know that their choices are the right ones and are based on their ethical and moral values. They do not ever have to put their moral

values on hold and do not experience guilt about their decisions regarding sexual behaviour.

Many young non-virgins indicate that they have to put their spiritual and moral values aside in order to enjoy their sexual relationships. They also have to continue asking God for forgiveness because of their sins. Some feel guilty and embarrassed because of their behaviour and regret their decisions. Others feel that their sexual behaviour has little to do with the values of the church. Many of the young women cannot distinguish the difference between responsible sexuality and Christian sexuality. They feel that their actions are responsible and mature and therefore God has nothing to do with their behaviour. They even feel that the church condones responsible sexual behaviour, as long as it does not manifest in unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted illnesses such as HIV/AIDS. I also found a dichotomy between what many young women believe and what they actually do. They know that sex before marriage is a sin, but yet indicate that nothing will convince them to stop their behaviour. Their sexual behaviour is seen as something apart from their values, their mores and their upbringing. It is seen as an individual decision which must be kept from their parents, their church and as something not really influenced by what they know, but rather by what they feel.

3.4.4 HANDLING PEER PRESSURE

Most of the young women in this study deny that peer pressure has any influence over their decisions. This is unexpected, as they indicate throughout that peer pressure plays a major role in the decision to have pre-marital sex. But the fact remains that their perception is that they are not influenced by peer pressure. They indicate that they make their own decisions regarding their relationships: "I don't usually talk about it to them. I feel that my decisions are my decisions and nobody else's". The young women who are still virgins especially feel very strongly that their friends do not influence them. Tumi feels that she is not influenced by her friends, because she is still a virgin and most of her friends are not. She says: "I like doing things my way and being unique, so having sex like them is the least of my priorities". Maria on the other hand feels that her friends

are a positive and supportive influence in her life, “because I got the encouragement on still being a virgin at my age from them. They are older than me and they are still virgins. They are encouraging me to stay a virgin until a guy puts a ring on my finger”.

3.4.5 TALKING ABOUT SEX, RELATIONSHIPS AND LIFE’S DECISIONS

The questionnaire provided an opportunity for the young women to talk about sex, relationships and to give advice to younger women on relationships. Many of them speak about love, and the fact that a woman must wait to have sex only until she meets the right man and loves him deeply. Casual sex is dangerous and not worth risking your life for. Sexually transmitted infections and diseases may spoil your chances of a deep and loving relationship. Bodies are important; you must love and respect your own body. Never give in to somebody who wants to coerce you into sex. Abstinence is the preferred situation, but if you want to have sex, protection by means of a condom is imperative. Multiple sex partners are condemned; you must keep to one partner and behave responsibly and sensibly. Experiencing sexual feelings is normal, but “sex is only part of, not your whole life, and you need to know what you get into before you start experimenting. Starting to have penetrative sex is a major step. Sex is a great thing but also think about your life”. Maggie gives the following advice:

You should feel proud of your sexuality and never give your body away easily, because sexuality is an asset that every woman should feel proud of. Wait for the right guy before giving your precious body away. From my mistakes in the past, I would say I regret most of them because I picked up along the way that you lose your self-esteem because you meet guys who want to use you and move on to the next victim. Never be fooled by their lies because they will promise you heaven and earth just to get sex and leave you just like that.

Young women should make their own decisions and let nobody influence what they feel is right for them. They must be ready to face the consequences of their decisions. Elisa points out that all actions have consequences; life does not only belong to yourself, it “belongs to your parents, brothers and sisters, because if anything bad happens to you, your family will also be affected as you are if not

more". Aubeng also feels that young people must think about their parents, because "they love us and we must not let them down".

To encapsulate their thoughts and viewpoints, I would say that they stand for responsible sexual behaviour, for taking control of one's sexuality in an accountable, mature way and for regarding their own bodies with respect and reverence. Sex should only happen with one person you are deeply in love with and should be accompanied by deep and strong mutual trust and respect.

3.5 IDENTIFYING THE MAIN DISCOURSES ABOUT YOUNG FEMALE ADULT'S SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR

The following main discourses about young female sexual behaviour are identified:

- Parents view pre-marital sex as forbidden.
- Where young adults are engaging in sex, the parents plead for safe sex.
- The church views pre-marital sex as sinful and against the will of God.
- The church is frank and sincere about warning young adults about the risks of pre-marital sex.
- Young adult women engage in sexual relations because everybody is doing it.
- Sex is given for mutual enjoyment.
- Young women engage in sex for the sake of womanhood.