INTRODUCTION

Sexual behaviour of young people has been a source of concern to societies worldwide including the Akamba people of Kenya due to the adverse effects on the individual as well as society at large. Indeed, the transition of people from childhood to adulthood is difficult in any culture and according to Gullotta, et al. (1993), in every known culture, interest in the sexual curiosity of the young people, involvement and puberty based physical changes are fervently observed, either directly or indirectly. It is documented that all societies in the globe have had mechanisms of regulating adolescent sexuality, though it is observed to vary from society to society (Brooks-Gunn and Paikoff, 1997). The main gist of these mechanisms has been to ensure smooth transition to adulthood and survival of societies.

Kenya is home to approximately 34.7 million people with youth below age 19 comprising about 55 percent, while one-third of the entire population is between 13 and 19 years old (KDHS, 2003). The future of the nation depends wholly on the well being of this large population of young people, and one aspect which may jeopardise the sustainability of the nation is the sexual behaviour of its young people. Indeed, young people face a host of threats to their life in case of eventual indulgence in early and indiscriminate sexual behaviours. This is the reason why societies in Kenya and the globe at large have been keen on how young people manage their sexuality. Although there is virtual diversity between cultures and the people as well as varied ways in which societies are known to have applied mechanisms of control and monitoring the young people in relation to sexual behaviour, a majority of global cultures have endeared
themselves to produce a well adapted young person, keen to perpetuate their communities.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION TO THE STUDY

Historical accounts about adolescent sexuality as well as archaeological evidences suggest that concern over adolescent sexual behaviour was prevalent as human beings and societies evolved (Darwin, 1859; De Lumley, 1991; Margus and Sagan, 1991, and Wenke, 1990). Certainly, a healthy adaptive adolescent sexuality would seem to promote survival during human evolution. Wenke (1990) pointed out that as societies grew complex, various institutions that early cultures developed became a devise to control certain aspects of adolescent sexuality. This view is corroborated by Akong’a, 1988; Benedict, 1950; Mead, 1950 and Youri, 1994 who note that each global culture is known to have developed its own set of customs, rules and rituals to assist adolescents in the transition from non-sexual to sexual roles and behaviour.

The ancient Chinese, Hindu culture, Christianity, Islamic culture, native Americans, European cultures as well as traditional African cultures, each took a varied approach toward monitoring and safeguarding adolescent sexuality. According to Downs and Hillje (1993), in the 14th century Europe, Christianity had developed strict regulations to govern adolescent sexuality. It had established restrictive measures including proscribing pre-marital sex, homosexuality, masturbation, abortion and contraception. Boswell (1980) also observes that adolescent sexual experimentation with peers of either sex led to severe penalties in early Christian societies in Europe, including burning at the stake of heresy. The early stringent Christian traditions regarding sexuality
became more firmly entrenched in Europe during the 12th and 13th century as the church assumed greater powers (Masters, et al., 1988). Theology often became synonymous with common law and there was a generally oppressive "official" attitude towards sex except for the purpose of procreation. Moreover, the Christian Bible is very particular and distinctive in giving stern warnings to fornication and other forms of sexual illegalities.

For instance, in the five books of the Old Testament in the Bible (the primary source of the Jewish Laws) there are rules about sexual conduct. Adultery is forbidden in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:14) and (Proverbs 6:23-33), while homosexual acts are strongly condemned (Leviticus 18:22; Leviticus 21:13). Fornication is well captured in (Thessalonians 4:3-4) which reads, "God wants you to be holy so you should keep clear of all sexual sin". In other words, the verse warns people to abstain from sexual immorality. Moreover, in Acts 15 verse 20 and Jude 1 verse 7, the Bible warns about sexual immorality and admonishes Christians to abstain "from things polluted by the devil" including sexual immorality and murder. Similarly, the Hellenistic era in Greece (beginning 323 B.C.) was marked by a denial of worldly pleasures in favour of developing the purely spiritual (Masters, et. al., 1988). Along with the New Testament portrayal of the imminent end of the world, this led to Christianity placing a high ideal on celibacy, although St. Paul observed that while "it is good for a man to touch a woman...it is better to marry than to burn" (1st Corinthians 7:1-12). Further, most Christians believe that sexual lust must have brought the downfall of Adam and Eve (first humans according to theory of creation) in the garden of Eden and that this sinfulness was transmitted to children by the inherent lust that separated humanity from God.
(Masters, et al., 1988). Thus, sexual immorality in and outside marriage has for a long time been strongly condemned by Christian teachings.

Although evidence can be cited to show a rather broad tolerance towards sexuality in England and France in the 1700s, the Puritan ethic reigned in colonial America (Masters, et al., 1988). Sex outside marriage was condemned and family solidarity was exalted. Those found giving in to the passion of adultery or pre-marital sex, were flogged, put in pillories or stocks, or forced to make public confessions. This Puritan ethic was carried into America in the 19th Century. In Latin America, some societies applied very extreme and restrictive measures to control pre-adolescent sexual behaviour. According to Hilgard, et al. (1975), among the Cuna people of South America, children were not supposed to learn nor imagine about sexual matters. To them, children had to be completely ignorant about sex until they were married. For instance, in this community, children were not permitted to watch animals mating or giving birth.

In an equivalent perspective, in the Papua New Guinea highlands, sexual attraction between young men and women was highly frowned upon (EAS, 2nd July, 2007). For the inhabitants in these highlands, young men were known to fear all forms of contact with females including sex for it was believed that sexual contact weakened men. As a result, they segregated themselves in men’s houses and delayed their marriage. According to the report, some men did not even marry at all.

Among the Etoro people, also of Papua New Guinea, heterosexual intercourse was strictly for reproduction (EAS, 2nd July, 2007). Sex for any other purpose was vehemently discouraged by all means. Men and women who demonstrated a penchant for too much sex (for pleasure) were viewed as witches, hazardous to their partner’s health,
and this belief subsequently inhibited and controlled sexual promiscuity among the youth and the elderly (EAS, 2nd July, 2007). Similarly, the Tepoztlan Indians of Mexico are described to have vehemently discouraged sex before marriage (Ember, et al., 2002). In this community, a girl’s life became “crabbed, cribbed and confined” from the time of her first menstruation. She was not to speak to boys nor encourage them in any way. The authors contend that to do so would be to court disgrace, to show her self to be crazy. The responsibility of guarding the chastity and reputation of one or more daughters of marriageable age was often a burden on the mother. One mother is cited to have wished her 15 year old daughter would marry soon because it was inconvenient to ‘spy’ on her all the time (Ember, et al., 2002: 338).

The inhabitants of Ines Beag, Ireland, are documented as the most sexually inhibited people up to today (Santrock, 2005: 467). Ines Beag is a small island off the coast of Ireland. According to Santrock (2005), the inhabitants know nothing about the “French Kissing” nor hand stimulation of the private parts. Sex education does not exist. People are brought up ignorant about the complexities of sexuality. The author observes that the people in this island believe that after marriage, nature will take its course. To the men in Ines Beag, sexual intercourse is believed to be dangerous to their health and individuals in this culture detest nudity. Pre-marital sex is out of question and an abomination. After marriage, sexual partners keep their underwear on during intercourse. To Messinger (1971), it is not difficult to understand why females in the Ines Beag culture rarely, if ever, achieve orgasm!

The Victorian era in Europe (1800s) propagated sexual repression and a strong sense of modesty necessitated by the presumed purity and innocence of women and
children. Taylor (1954) points out, “So delicate did the sensibilities of the Victorians become, so easily were their thoughts turned to sexual matters, that the most innocent actions were taboo in case they may lead to lurid imaginings. It became indecent to offer a lady a leg of chicken...,” and clothing styles, showing not even a glimpse of ankle or bare neck, mirrored this conservatism (Taylor, 1954: 214). Victorianism was anti-sexual, banned pornography and to some extreme, in some Victorian homes, piano legs were covered with crinolines, and books by authors of opposite sexes were not shelved side by side unless the authors were married to each other (Masters, et al., 1988). Moreover, Victorian publications never dared show a bed in any of their advertisements. When illustrations of the bedroom were required, the bed itself was hidden by curtains. Victorianism was also strongly felt in America around this time.

In South Asia, the earlier relatively enlightened traditional practices of especially India, China and Japan grew androcentric and harsh with particularly adolescent girls (Chang, 1991; Fowkes, 1991; Morton, 1980; Sansom, 1963). In India for example, the “Kamasutra: The analytical treatise on sex and love” written by the great sage Vatsayana during the fourth century has Hindu teachings and is a classic guide to the issues reflecting on social and sexual customs of the time. In this book, sexual freedoms are restricted and there are prohibitions against immoral sexual behaviours prior to marriage (http/www.kamasutra.com). In the Islamic culture, the Shariah (sacred law) discerns the right from the wrong, and one of the issues sternly addressed to is sex before marriage. Indeed, Muslims classify pre-marital sex under illegal sexual relations or “haram”, meaning forbidden by Islam (http/www.shariah.com). Under Shariah, a hundred lashings is usually the legal penalty applied for fornication when the guilty parties are not married
Islam also outlaws pornography and rape, and has strict laws on dressing for men and women and on public decorum. Any form of sexual impropriety or exposure is expressly outlawed and heavily punished, sometimes through outright elimination.

In Africa, most of the documented traditional ethnic groups instituted strict social and physical control measures especially for the behaviour of the young people. They safeguarded the sexual behaviour of the young people until when they entered into marriage (Akong’a, 1988; Hilgard, et al., 1975; Gyepi-Garbrah, 1985; Kenyatta, 1965; Njau, 1993). For example, among the Ashanti people of Ghana, Africa, intercourse with a girl who had not undergone the puberty ceremony was considered so harmful to the community that the offence was punishable by death for the participants (Hilgard, et al., 1975). Other West African cultures were documented to have had secret and solitary institutions especially for young women which they would be conscripted to as part of the initiation procedure before marriage. According to Mbiti (1969:132), the Igbo of Nigeria had institutionalised exclusive institutions or special houses for preparing young women through fattening and social education prior to marriage. It is in these houses that girls were kept in seclusion (away from community) for several months, being well fed and anointed with oil. Mbiti (1969) asserts that when they were fully fat and their cheeks round, their bosoms big and their waists fully adorned with fat layers, then, they were fit for marriage. This type of initiation was augmented with guidance and counselling and equally glorified purity for girls before marriage (Mbiti, 1969). Boys would not be secluded, but they underwent training and induction on social responsibilities as well as guidance on how to handle their future wives in marriage. In South Africa, native ethnic
groups operated varied forms of male and female initiation rites of passage before marriage. Mufamadi (2006) observes that among the Ndebele people, girls would be secluded in female initiation camps while boys underwent excruciating experiences in the wilderness (beating with sticks and no food in the day) including circumcision. For girls, during period of seclusion which occurred between ages 12-15 years, they would also be inducted into social knowledge and skills about the future as well as moral values. Mufamadi (2006) avers that community experts would educate girls on skills and techniques of how to interact with boys, self control and avoiding sex before marriage; while boys were socialized on how to handle girls till marriage. Sex was strongly prohibited and punishable before marriage, which certainly occurred especially for girls after emerging from initiation camps.

In Swaziland, South Africa, there was a tradition known as “umchwasho” in the traditional periods – and by extension today. It is pointed out that in this ceremony, girls wore traditional tassels to signify their chastity (http://www.wikipedia.com/umchwasho). Tasselled woollen headgear was worn throughout by girls around the neck like a scarf until they became of age – when it would be removed in a ceremony of age – group initiates from childhood to adulthood. The tassel would be worn for more than five years – until the girl was “mature enough” for marriage. Girls aged 18 and under must wear blue and yellow tassels and were not allowed any physical contact with males. Virginity was highly cherished before marriage in this community and girls found to be going against umchwasho were fined one cow and suffered social ridicule. The tradition dissipated in the 20th Century but was reintroduced again in the year 2001 and its
culmination has been the popular Reed dance, when the King of Swaziland chooses a bride among thousands of assembled virgin girls every year.

In a variant version, several Islamic societies in the Horn of Africa namely Eritrea, Somalia and some Ethiopian Muslims, subject girls before marriage into excising their clitoris and external genitalia, then subsequently stitching the vagina with the belief of reducing sexual desires (Reuters, 21st July, 2007). The understanding amongst these Islamic cultures is that female circumcision reduces sexual desire and pleasure, thus, consequently prevents females from being promiscuous, and committing adultery in later life. The operation comes in three forms:-

There is the Sunna, meaning tradition in Arabic which involves the removal of the prepuce or the tip of the Clitoris; then Clitoridectomy which consists of the removal of the entire Clitoris and the Labia and lastly, the most extreme form, Infibulation which leaves the woman with only a tiny passage to pass urine through, thus, no sex can occur before marriage (Reuters, 21st July, 2007: 17). According to this report, so drastic is the mutilation that young brides have to be cut open to allow penetration on their wedding night and are customarily sewn up thereafter. In most of these cultures, girls who have not been circumcised are considered “unclean” and can find it extremely difficult to find a husband. They are often treated with ridicule by other women and many men believe folklore which says they will die if their penis comes in contact with a Clitoris (Reuters, 21st July, 2007:17). This tradition is common amongst the orthodox and modern Muslims even those living in Western diaspora. In an article titled, “Female Cut Exported to Europe”, the EAS, (July 21st, 2007), reported how African Muslim parents from Somalia and Gambia organise to have their girl children circumcised during holidays, back home
in their motherland (very discreetly), then return to Europe when fully healed. This is meant to ensure they conform to their tradition although living and wining in Western culture. This is what anthropologists refer to as Culture Lag (Munywoki, 2000).

In parts of East and Central Africa, traditional rituals of initiation prepared young people for their adult roles including education on the responsibilities of sex, marriage and child rearing. In this context, sexuality serves, "...as a source of relations of kinship and affinity thereby the basis of solidarity, reciprocity and co-operation" (Fuglesang, 1997: 1248). Since sexuality contributed to social cohesion, communities developed "rules" concerning the expression of sexuality as well as mechanisms for controlling sexual behaviour (Fuglesang, 1997). Sexual behaviour's potential to cause harm - through jealousy, unwanted pregnancies, emotional discord and infection as well as good, was widely recognised. Communities therefore developed codes of conduct relating to when, where, and with whom sexual relations could take place.

In order to communicate these principles to young people, initiation ceremonies were held, often separately for girls and boys. In Tanzania for example, initiation rites for girls, referred to as "unyago", were led by a ceremonial leader or "Somo" (Fuglesang, 1997). The Somo was not a relative, but an older woman recognised as knowledgeable and experienced in child-bearing and rearing. She continued to advise young women from puberty throughout marriage life. Menstruation and codes of conduct associated with it were explained to young girls as well as information about pregnancy and ways of preventing conception. Early sex involvement was frowned upon and most importantly, sex education was contextualised in terms of preparation for adult life (Fuglesang, 1997).
In Kenya, rituals associated with the transition from childhood to adulthood and which included sex education have also been documented (Balmer, et al., 1997). Majority of traditional Kenyan cultures had socially recognised “age set” or “age grade” systems which had their own codes of accepted behaviour, rights and responsibilities upon which one could discern the concept of adolescence. According to Gyepi-Garbah (1985), the age set systems were a feature to almost all major Kenyan ethnic groups. Boys and girls were initiated into the institution between age 14 and 17 years by means of circumcision and clitoridectomy, respectively. For boys, they further learned how to defend their societies, among other social responsibilities. Learning was both theoretical and practical, sometimes persevering excruciating experiences (ear piercing, whipping, and working hard). The female age-sets underscored the importance of marriage and procreation but they also gave support for their members and provided their own built-in values against pre-marital sex, and pregnancies which were condemned by a majority of traditional Kenyan ethnic groups. According to Akong’a (1988), each Kenyan ethnic community organised and conscripted young people to these age grade systems and youths were socialized with the desire to approximate the ideal individual as perceived by the community relative to its environmental condition.

Informal education was provided by the parents, peers, siblings and other agents of the community, while formal education was provided in seclusion by experienced and trusted men and women during the rites of passage. During such occasions (rites of passage sessions), boys and girls of relatively the same age were respectively exposed to the society’s heroic history, responsibilities relating to family life (including sex education) and the secrets of success as a son or a daughter, spouse, parent or as a
member of the community in general. According to Akong’a (1988), it was the time when in a formal context, society ensured that a generation of its members was exposed to a common code of ethics, values and beliefs from which they would derive self-control in their experiences as adapted members of the community. Further, Kalule (1986) and Kenyatta (1965) observe that sexual discipline was maintained through elaborate parental and societal control, guidance and supervision by a majority of Kenyan ethnic cultures.

The Kalenjin, Luo, Abaluhyia, Atharaka, Abagusii, Agikuyu and Swahili people amongst other ethnic groups in Kenya, firmly proscribed irresponsible pre-marital sex. Consequently, the effects that accompany early and indiscriminate sex involvement were quite minimal (Akong’a, 1988; Kalule, 1986; Kenyatta, 1965). Among the Kalenjin people of Kenya, a man who had carnal knowledge of a girl before either of them or both were married was considered as a moral weakling who could never be appointed to a leadership position throughout his lifetime. In this same society, a girl on whom clitoridectomy was performed when she was a virgin was highly honoured, respected and her parents praised (Akong’a, 1986a:125). Likewise, among the Luo and Abaluhyia people of Nyanza and Western Kenya respectively, virginity at marriage for women was rewarded with high status in society and her mother received material rewards in addition to the negotiated bride wealth payment usually received and controlled by the male household heads (Akong’a, 1988:4). Akong’a further observes that it was therefore in the best interest of girls to keep themselves pure until the day of marriage as they had to protect their own and their family’s honour and integrity. Boys in turn underwent learning about respect for girls and how to handle their sexuality till marriage.
The Abagusii community, also of Nyanza Province, Kenya, had very well organised though informal institutions of disseminating sex education knowledge as well as controlling the sexual behaviour of the young people (Ayiemba, 1986). According to this author, grandmothers “Makogoro” supplemented by elderly widowed women provided a good avenue for young girls to be inducted into sexuality matters while, boys visited and sometimes slept in their grandfathers’ huts “esaiga” where they were equally socialised on virtues pertaining to relationships, responsibilities as well as morality. Ayiemba (1986: 145) points out that during novitiate and girlhood, young women were warned that it was a curse to lose one’s virginity, their greatest honour and pride before marrying. Boys were equally inducted into respect for self and others in regards to intercourse. Ayiemba (1986) avers that the Abagusii culture never permitted pre-marital sex, even during courtship. They had institutionalised systems of reward and punishment for sexual offenders. For instance, parents often threatened their children with all forms of punishment if they engaged in pre-marital sex. Any girl becoming pregnant before marriage endured disrepute and could only be married to an old man or to male social outcasts amongst the Abagusii community of Kenya (Ayiemba, 1986).

In an almost similar perspective, Iteso people found on the border of Kenya and Uganda had an elaborate educational system whose main objective was to enable the young to become accepted members of their society, and just like most Nilotic groups of East Africa, they did not have physical circumcision of the young people (Olenja 1986: 114). Among the Iteso, children would go to live or visit their grandparents, uncles and aunts who took it upon themselves to provide knowledge on what they were supposed to know about being men and women. Moral education with regard to family life, clan
history and expectations and social relationships in the community was inculcated from an early age. Ekenya and Akonga (1986: 120) posit that virginity as a physical condition that a girl preserved before marriage was encouraged or presumed. Conceiving before marriage was fervently forbidden. According to Ekenya and Akonga (1986), a man who made a girl pregnant was either forced to marry her or pay, "emong lok' eluk"; that is, a bull to her father in compensation for her damaged purity. Furthermore, girls who became pregnant at their parents' home were severely chastised both verbally and corporally.

Some ethnic groups maintained chastity through strict parental supervision and seclusion. Among the Atharaka of Meru district, Kenya, an unmarried girl could never be allowed to go to places alone. Akong'a (1988) points out that girls were always accompanied by adults or given a youth to accompany them, and never allowed to converse with men on the way. In this same society, a young man never married a girl with a premarital child. Such a girl was taken from village to village in the neighbouring Akamba society by two old men and offered for marriage as a subsequent wife, and no bridewealth would be paid. Such a girl would be considered a disgrace. Besides, the Tugen, Pokot and Llchamus (sub-groups of Kalenjin) as well as in other pastoral groups of Kenya, once clitoridectomy (which was mandatory to all young girls) had been performed, she was secluded in her parental house until the day of marriage (Akong'a, 1986a). All this time of seclusion, a girl was not expected to perform any household chores but would be fed well and instructed as well as exposed to learning how to adjust to marriage and motherhood. On the other hand, boys after circumcision would undergo training on warriorhood and how to protect their communities, as well as future social
responsibilities as husbands. Moreover, training on morality was a key factor according to Akong’a (1986a), including virtues of self-respect and respect for others.

In a parallel manner, the Nandi people of Kenya (largest sub-group of the Kalenjin) both boys and girls were subjected to an institutionalised system of initiation. For their initiation, girls underwent what Mbiti (1969: 127) terms as a preparation for “adulthood and housewifery” and no woman could get married without going through it. Long before the initiation and when girls were about 10 years old, it was mandatory and considered part of growing up to sleep with boys of their age in places known as “Sikoroino”, referring to houses where girls and young men of a given village or groups of villages could go and sleep overnight (Cherotich, 1967: 62-77). This was obligatory, and if the girls or any girl refused it, the boys could beat them without the intervention of the parents. This Nandi cultural practise was meant to make girls conscious and “teach them” how to behave towards men and how to control their sexual desires. According to Mbiti (1969), no sexual intercourse was permitted when the boys and girls slept together in this way. Indeed, at a later stage, the girls would be examined for virginity, and it was a matter of great shame that produced anger towards the girls and their parents if any was found to have lost their virginity. Mbiti (1969) avers that in some cases, such girl(s) would be speared to death, while virgin ones would receive gifts of cows or sheep. It was after sleeping in “Sikoroino” that Nandi girls underwent physical initiation (clitoridectomy) then subsequently, seclusion for a period of six months to three years.

Additionally, Mbiti (1969) points out that during seclusion, Nandi girls would be educated and introduced into tribal knowledge and wisdom. The author posits that the Nandi people of Kenya believed that if a girl was not initiated into circumcision, her
clitoris would grow long to have branches, and that children of uninitiated women would become abnormal. Women who had not been initiated were also considered to still be “children”, and their off-springs known as “children of children” (Mbiti 1969: 130). Thus, unless a person had been through the ceremony, she really was “nobody”, “incomplete” and still a child. As soon as the girls had gone through the period of seclusion and the end of the initiation ceremony, they got married. On the other hand, Nandi boys also underwent circumcision in seclusion. During the process of healing, they underwent various ceremonies including warrior hood and security for their communities (Mbiti, 1969). Although not secluded for long, they learned about social responsibility and then joined community for further induction into physical, social duties and roles while awaiting marriage.

Similarly, the Keiyo-Marakwet, another sub-group of the Kalenjin people of Kenya, had an elaborate system of inculcating into its young people the basic tenets of their sexuality. According to Kipkorir and Ssennyonga (1985), Keiyo-Marakwet parents augmented community instructors in conveying sexuality knowledge. Most channels of communication were the various initiation and marriage ceremonies during which facts of sex, fertility, parenthood as well as appropriate moral values and norms were plainly expressed. The authors contend that the period of circumcision for both boys and girls and subsequent seclusion from the community provided the most appropriate opportunity for imparting general knowledge and in this case, sex education in a formal way known as “Kaptorus”. The community also had youth festival, “Kirenga”, held annually where uncircumcised boys and girls sang and danced throughout the night, but they were not allowed to engage in any sexual activity. There were also dances for those
circumcised and awaiting marriage where the young met and flirted with each other but according to Kipkorir and Ssennyonga (1985: 86), pre-marital sexual intercourse was however deemed to be improper and could result into corporal punishment. In the event of pregnancy of an unmarried or unbetrothed girl, the man responsible was liable to a fine of 30 heads of stock, while the girl could find it difficult to get a man to marry her. In practice, in most cases, the woman continued to associate with the man, either in his homestead or that of her father if her lover was not yet independent, in a state of “concubinage”, receiving part of the fine for her support and the baby.

An equivalent seclusion pattern for both boys and girls during the process of performing rites of passage was noted amongst the Maasai people of Kenya and Tanzania, in the East African region (Sifuna, 1986). For the Maasai youth, community education and physical initiation (circumcision) was mandatory as a rite of passage for both boys and girls before they entered into marriage. According to Sifuna (1986: 171), after circumcision, boys were grouped into sets of warrior hood or “Limurran” where they learned social skills, duties and responsibilities as adopted members of the Maasai culture. Personal discipline, self-control and respect for self and each other especially in the age-sets were strong virtues. Indeed, peers in an age-set group among the Maasai viewed each other as a “blood brother” and by extension, what belonged to one belonged to the other. That is why it is documented that Maasai members of one age group in their future life could “share wives”; that is, if a member came to his house and found a spear placed near the door outside, he would know that his warrior hood brother was inside performing conjugal rights, and this was well accepted in the culture and cut across all age systems (Kayongo-Male and Onyango, 1984).
Maasai rites of passage for boys, especially circumcision and Moranism (an institution where Maasai young men were trained into warrior hood and bravery) in the bush occurred during the age of 15-20 and thereafter, they would be obligated to join adult life and subsequently, marry. According to Sifuna (1986), girls on the other hand did not form age-set groups but the community would approximate a certain age (immediately after puberty) when all girls underwent initiation in seclusion but individually, each in their mother’s hut. After clitoridectomy (cutting off a portion of their sex organ or piercing) by an experienced old woman, the girl was to be isolated and inducted into Maasai ways of life as a woman and free from duties and interaction until healing. Subsequently, the girls went straight into marriage (Mbiti, 1969: 126) and indeed, there was no room to socialize with boys/men before marriage.

Synonymous to other Kenyan cultures, the Digo and Duruma people who are amongst major sub-groups of the Mijikenda people found along Kenyan coastal strip, social education or learning society’s accepted moral values was mandatory and imparted within the home environment, mostly by bona-fide parents (Kimokoti, 1987: 106). Boys and girls underwent physical initiation after puberty, subsequently followed by intensive training about responsibility for the home (boys), while girls were taught virtues of a good wife. Kimokoti (1987) observes that girls’ movement was highly restricted and both communities had high regard for a woman to be a virgin at marriage. This moral value of chastity for women before marriage could be replicated for the other Mijikenda communities as well as the Swahili people of Kenya.

For instance, the Swahili people of Kenya have had a tradition of testing virginity of the newly married girl by availing a white sheet to be used by the newly married (bride
and groom); that is, to lie on as they consummated their marriage sexually on the material day of their union (Akonga, 1988). Virginity for the bride was detected through blood stains on this white sheet the following morning/day. Failure for the blood stains to appear in this white sheet meant lack of virginity for the bride and could ultimately lead to the annulment of that marriage. This same orthodox tradition of checking or testing a girl’s pre-marital sex chastity after marriage was ostensibly common in many Muslim cultures across the globe and is still being perpetuated in traditional Islamic cultures (Ember, et al., 2002).

The Kikuyu community, the most populous ethnic group in Kenya had an institution called “Ombani na Ngweko” (platonic love and fondling) for boys and girls (Kenyatta, 1965:154). The community organised numerous nights and days for dances, recreation and enjoyment for both boys and girls. Only those who had undergone physical initiation (circumcision and clitoridectomy) for boys and girls respectively participated. Girls would visit boys’ huts known as “thingira” and would socialise with them overnight but penetrative sexual intercourse never occurred because the girls tied a leather apron around and between their legs to effectively protect their private parts. They would also in other occasions wear skirts tied with a special knot by the grandmother in such a way that she (grandmother) would know whether it had been tampered with. The idea was to teach boys and girls values of self-control, giving rise to morally upright people. According to Kenyatta, fondling was allowed but no sex, and virginity was highly valued before marriage. Any young man who rendered a girl pregnant or forced a girl into sex was severely punished by the tribal council and made a social pariah. Similar punishment was also extended to the girl.
The Akamba Society of the Eastern Province, Kenya, although probably the only recorded society in Kenya in which it was shameful for a bride to be a virgin at marriage, boys and girls interacted sexually under very strict control and supervision by the adult community. According to Kalule (1986: 113), in the traditional Akamba culture, sexual relations were expected to be an integral part of the young people's growth and development. But notwithstanding early sex involvement, pre-marital pregnancies and other consequences that accompany early sexual experimentation were as well unheard of (Kimilu, 1962; Kyalo, 1990; Mbula, 1974; Ndeti, 1972). This implies that the society highly monitored and controlled the sexual behaviour of the young people until when they became of age. The young people themselves were also socialized in such a manner that they were conscious of their sexuality. Both boys and girls interacted at the face of knowledge about their sexual conditions. Moreover, girls were taught to be conscious of fertile days and menstruation periods inorder to stay away from conditions likely to experience coital relations (Kimilu, 1962). They received sufficient training about their body functions during periods of initiation from grandparents, and this helped them to avoid what the society considered irresponsible sexual behaviour and its attendant consequences. Additionally, Akong'a (1988) and Kyalo (1990) assert that during occasions of sexual interaction, boys were very careful and afraid of the consequences of making girls pregnant. The consequences were severe as it involved payment of fine (goats), ostracism for both boys and girls and other expensive forms of cleansing rites. Boys took the responsibility of ensuring the welfare of the girls and that of their own.

Apart from the Akamba people who had institutionalised pre-marital sex as part of growing up, several other global cultures are documented to have instituted sex play
between boys and girls as part of induction into adulthood. Likewise, a number of other documented global cultures never inhibited sex at all before marriage. Adolescent pre-marital sexual experience was perceived to be normal to the cultures which permitted it, and as a crucial aspect of growth and development. For instance, among the Malanesian people of New Guinea, sex play among pre-adolescent children was taken lightly and purely accepted in their culture, while the Marquesans stressed the pleasure value of sex and were permissive of sexual behaviour in children (Mussen, et al., 1993). The authors further point out that among the Ila speaking people of Southern Zambia, Africa, childhood was regarded as a time of preparation for adult life and mature sexual functions. At harvest time, each girl was given a house to which she would take a boy of her choice where they would play as man and wife. It is reported that there were no virgins among these people after the age of 10 years. In a parallel observation, the Lepcha of India believed that girls would not mature without the benefits of sexual intercourse (Mussen, et al., 1993: 540). In this community, early sex play among boys and girls characteristically involved many forms of mutual masturbation and usually ended with attempted copulation. By the time they were 11 or 12 years old, most girls regularly engaged in full intercourse (Mussen, et al., 1993). Similarly, the Trobriand Islanders approved of and encouraged pre-marital sex, seeing it as important preparation for later marriage roles (Ember, et al., 2002). Both boys and girls were given complete instructions (theoretical and practical) in all forms of sexual expression at the onset of puberty as well as being allowed plenty of opportunity for intimacy before marriage.

In equivalent perspective and practice, the Mangaian Culture in the South Pacific, boys learned about masturbation as early as age 6 or 7. According to Santrock (2005:
467), at age 13, boys underwent a ritual that introduced them to manhood in which a long incision was made in the penis. The individual who conducted the ritual instructed the boy in sexual strategies, such as how to help his partner achieve orgasm before he realized his. Two weeks after the incision ceremony, the 13 year old boy was expected to have intercourse with an experienced woman. She helped him hold back his ejaculation so she could achieve orgasm with him (Santrock, 2005). Soon after, the boy sought girls to further his sexual experience, or they looked for him, knowing that he now was a "man". By the end of adolescence, Mangaians had sex now and then and no virgins (Santrock, 2005).

One critical observation to note in ethnographic literature about adolescent sexuality is the nature of double standards and gender biasness in enacting sexuality standards and morality during adolescence in most of the documented cultures. While it is clear that in most of the traditional cultures girls would be secluded (not to indulge in sex) and there were other mechanisms of detecting virginity for girls, the same was not applied to boys. Indeed, some cultures encouraged boys to be sexually adventurous and to experiment while for girls, pre-marital sex was an abomination. Several other classical examples suffice:

In Nicaragua, for example, where virginity was highly valued among young women, having multiple sexual partners was taken as a sign of virility in young men (Zelaya, et al., 1997). In this society, teenage boys faced social pressures from older men (including fathers, older brothers and uncles) to have sex as early as possible, and in the recent past, it was common for fathers to arrange for their son's sexual initiation with a sex worker (Zelaya, et al., 1997). But for girls, public disclosure of sexual activity led to
dishonour while bragging about sex was common for boys. Berglund, et al., (1997) notes that for young Nicaraguan men, the pressure to be sexually active and multi-partnered may have been so great that, those who did not fulfil this expectation were open to ridicule by their peers in not being real men.

Similar patterns prevailed elsewhere in the world. In South Africa in Natal Kwazulu, for example, having many sexual partners is reported as having been equated with popularity and importance among young men (Abdool and Morar, 1995). In a parallel version, interviews with high school students in Zimbabwe indicated that while boys could have (and indeed should have) many girlfriends, girls should stick to only one male partner (Basset and Mhloy, 1991). Although not all young men conformed to the dominant version of masculinity described above, those who failed to do so were often ridiculed and subjected to peer pressures to conform.

It is noteworthy that several cultural customs are universally associated with sexual prohibition of females (adolescents) before marriage. Broude (1976) and Minturn, Grosse and Haider (1969) found that pre-marital sexual restrictiveness for females was highly associated with societies where arranged marriages were predominant. Moreover, Schlegel (1991) demonstrated that sexual restrictiveness was also frequent in societies with marriage transactions of bridewealth, dowry or gift of exchange. Akonga (1988) in a supplementary view, observed that pre-marital restrictiveness was common in societies where male authority was supreme (patriarchal cultures) as well as where parents or clans were anxious of disgrace through pre-marital pregnancies.

It has been documented that there has been a strong tendency among a majority of traditional African, Asian and Muslim cultures to constantly check and sometimes
physically control the sexuality of the young people to a particular period. On the other hand, in the Western culture with some Western European cultures as an embodiment, young people for a long time have been seen as miniature adults; that is, as people who could think, evaluate and make individual choices concerning their sexuality. Certainly, many a decision on whether to engage in sexual intercourse, relationships or use a contraceptive has been the prerogative of the individual wholesomely. Indeed, Barry III (2007) observes that within the past century, pre-marital sexual liaisons have become more permissible in many Western nations. According to Santrock (2005), in Sweden, Canada, France among others, adolescent sexual expression has for a long time been viewed as normal and positive but there also has been widespread expectations and presumptions that sex would be predicated on some knowledge and in a well defined and organized relationship. In keeping with this view and presumptions, sex education programmes that provide more comprehensive information on sexuality have been institutionalized- almost in all schooling categories, and this is reinforced by the media (Santrock, 2005). These cultures therefore allow the adolescents to make independent decisions pertaining to sexuality issues, and integrate an elaborate openness and permissiveness, which is quite the antithesis of many other traditional cultures elsewhere.

It therefore emerges from the aforesaid discussions that there were and still exist significant differences between global cultures about society’s sexual standards. Indeed, adolescent sexual attitudes and practices varied widely from one culture to another, but a majority of global cultures, especially in Asia, Africa and Islamic world highly inhibited, checked and controlled the sexuality of the young people until they became of age. It can be said that the community (parents and society at large) in these cultures assumed that
young people required constant check and control for the purpose of ensuring smooth transition, more so, of their sexual behaviour.

Complementary reports from various parts of the world including Kenya indicate that the traditional notions and perspectives restricting and checking adolescent sexual behaviour before marriage are not at play any more in certain cultures, while they dissipate gradually among others. For example, the rites of passage institutions common to majority of African cultures appear to have become obsolete over time and most traditional structures which prepared young people to be well adapted members of their cultures have become virtually evanescent. Data is abound to the realization that young unmarried adolescents are highly involved in early and irresponsible sexual debut and the attendant consequences that accompany early sexual involvement are clearly substantial and probably rapidly growing (CSA, 2000; DUREX, 2005; SIECUS, 2005). Recent studies indicate high levels of early and indiscriminate sexual experimentation as well as various consequences (STDs/HIV/AIDS, teenage pregnancies, abortion, school dropout and early maternal deaths) that accompany irresponsible sex indulgence. This implies a phenomenal discrepancy about adolescent sexual behaviour which highly demands attention. The Akamba adolescents of Machakos district, Kenya, are not devoid of these characteristics and cultural dynamics and thus, they form the basis of this study.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The underlying problem is that despite the desire by a majority of global societies to check and control adolescent sexual behaviour, adolescent indulgence in sex activities appears unwarranted. There is noted sexual behaviour trajectory in the modern times that
was previously viewed as non-normative or deviant. Evidence is abound that adolescents increasingly initiate early and indiscriminate sexual liaisons. Consequently, this contemporary sexual pattern arouses concerns because of its association with numerous risky sexual behaviours such as having a greater number of sexual partners, more frequent sexual activity and failure to use effective contraception. A tragic expression in the contemporary sexual behaviour patterns is the high incidence of pregnancies, abortions and STDs including HIV/AIDS amongst the adolescents (CSA, 2000; DUREX, 2005; IPPF, 1994; KDHS, 2003; Miller, et al., 1993; Njau, 1993; SIECUS, 2005). The aftermath of early and indiscriminate sexual debut among adolescents inevitably has profound negative implications not only for their own growth and development but also for policy makers. Adolescents make up a half of the global population (SIECUS, 2005; UN Report, 2003) and thus, Governments whether in developing or developed countries have to be sensitive or responsive to their sexual needs for the survival of their economies.

Recent studies on adolescent sexuality embody an upsurge in adolescent sexual activity indulgence, and this is not in conformity with a majority of traditional global cultures. A world study in 41 countries among 350,000 adolescent girls, reveal that at age 17 years, over half have had pre-marital sexual intercourse. Further, teenage girls loose virginity earlier in the modern times with average age of becoming sexually active at 16 years (DUREX 2005). In a study by the Centre for Disease Control (CDC) (2001) in the United States and Canada, it was found that 45.6% of high school students (45.8% for males and 42.9% for females) have had sexual intercourse. A similar study carried out by BBC Radio1 in 2006 in Britain, nearly a third of 16 to 24 year olds lost their virginity
below the age of consent and the study further suggested that 43% of young people in the age category 16-24 had at least five sexual partners. The rate of sexual activity in United States and Britain is comparable and can be extrapolated to other developed nations (SIECUS, 2005). In South Asia where sex for adolescents has been a taboo, the age of sexual intimacy has also declined. According to a poll by DUREX (2005), 42% and 60% of school-going Indian girls and boys respectively have had sexual encounter before age 19, with a quarter having experienced sex before age 15. In China, studies carried out on sexual behaviour of the adolescents show that the percentage of Chinese people having pre-marital sex was 15.5% in 1989, which increased to 60 to 70% in 2004 (DUREX, 2005).

Further, reports from other parts of the world reveal that the number of sexually active young people is substantial. Gage-Brandon and Meekers (1993) in their analysis of seven selected countries in sub-Saharan Africa, found that almost 50% of women aged 15-19 years were sexually active. In other developing countries like Latin America, by age 19, more than 90% of males have had sexual intercourse compared with 45-60% of females (Wulf and Singh, 1990).

In Kenya, nearly 80% of young people have sexual intercourse, some with multiple partners before the age of 20 (Population Council Report, 1999). According to the 2003 Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (KDHS), almost half the girls have sex by the time they turn 18 years and more than one in 10 have sex by the time they are 15. The survey also found out that young men start having sex at an earlier age. A phenomenal 60% had sex by age of 18, and a quarter had sex by age 15, these are school going teenagers (KDHS, 2003). Moreover, the study indicates 50 percent adolescent girls

The incidence and prevalence of STDs/HIV/AIDS infection is on an upward trend globally. It is estimated that 60 percent of new HIV infections among women and 40 percent of those among men occur during adolescence while about 25 percent of sexually active teenagers get an STD every year (CDC, 2005; SEICUS, 2005). In Kenya, a Ministry of Education annual report (2000) indicated that over 20 percent of youths aged 15 and 19 years were infected with the HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.

The aforementioned figures clearly point out that young unmarried girls and boys engage in unwarranted sexual activities, and this arouses concern. Their sexual activities and practices are quite wanting, and thus, it is critical to understand, describe and explain them in the face of a changing society.

Early sexual debut among adolescents in Kenya may be as a result of changing economic conditions, peer pressure and mass media exposure as well as other forces of social change (Hawkins and Meshesha, 1994). Further, it has been observed that there has been a replacement of the original African extended family by the Western nuclear family (Akong’a, 1988; Gyepi-Gabrah, 1985; Kenyatta, 1965; Kioli, 1997). In effect, this seems to have reduced the supervision and monitoring of youth activities by parents as well as close relatives. Also, the parents in the extended family as well as other
community members who ideally should provide guidance and counselling information on sex matters seem to have abdicated that role. Therefore this study explores the current relationships between the Akamba adolescents and their parents as well as the broader Akamba community in order to understand how they interact and also prepare them for future sexuality challenges.

There are other forces outside the family which appear to play a critical role towards socializing the young people. According to the Njau (1993), the curtailment of the socialisation process by parents and other members of the community have meant that the adolescents are socialised by forces outside the family. These forces include the mass media, peers and other institutions which according to Cook and Wilson (1982), offer conflicting messages and information on sex which the adolescents adapt to without questioning. Adolescents in Machakos district, Kenya, are not insulated from these external forces of change and socialization. Their role in providing sexual information amongst the Akamba adolescents needed to be examined. Indeed, the peers, mass media and school create a frame of reference which adolescents can easily identify with.

Machakos district is one of the poor districts in Kenya with a poverty level of 66% (Ministry of Health Report, 2005). Thus, majority of adolescents in the district come from low-income families which are unlikely to provide satisfactory basic economic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, entertainment, transport and schooling fees. Individual financial demands seem to be on the increase due to reduced interdependence amongst members of the family. Failure to satisfy basic needs, adolescent girls are likely to be induced into sex by elderly men and boys of their age in return for economic
favours. Boys are also likely to get the inducement of sex from older women and men for economic gains.

There has been a lot of debate in Kenya regarding who should provide sexual and reproductive health information to the adolescents. Some religious groups do not condone the introduction and inclusion of sex education in the school curricula. It is argued that parents are in a better position to discuss reproductive matters with their children. While the debate continues, the figures available on indiscriminate sex indulgence and attendant consequences by the adolescents is abound and escalating (CAFS, 1993; CSA, 2000; KDHS, 2003; Mulama, 2006; Youri, 1994). It has thus been necessary for this study to identify the current patterns of interactions among adolescents, their parents and family members, the schools, the church, the community and the mass media amongst the Akamba people, of Machakos district, Kenya. In addition, the study sought to understand the Akamba adolescents’ attitudes, knowledge as well as describe their present sexual behaviour practice, and the conditions under which it occurs. This information may provide a baseline for organizing appropriate measures for the problem of adolescent sexual behaviour in the contemporary period.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions have guided this study:-

1) What is the current situation regarding sexual behaviour of Akamba adolescents of Machakos district, Kenya?

2) Do parents and family members among the contemporary Akamba people provide guidance and counselling to the adolescents on sex issues and why?
3) How is the attitude and knowledge of the adolescents and of the community on adolescent sexuality?

4) Under what socio-economic and cultural circumstances does sex occur among the Akamba adolescents in the modern times?

5) Do community leaders such as teachers, church leaders and social workers provide guidance and counselling on sexual matters to Akamba adolescents?

6) What is the impact of irresponsible sexual behaviour among the Akamba adolescents of Machakos district, Kenya?

7) Is there a rise of a new adolescent culture among the Akamba people of Machakos district, Kenya?

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The overall objective of this study has been to examine the sexual behaviour of the adolescents among the Akamba people of Machakos district, Kenya. In particular, the study endeavours to:-

a) Describe current sexual behaviour of the Akamba adolescents vis-à-vis the traditional.

b) Examine the role of parents and family members to adolescent sexual behaviour

c) Explore the socio-cultural and economic conditions or circumstances under which sexual behaviour among Akamba adolescents occurs.

d) Describe the community and adolescent attitude as well as knowledge on adolescent sexual behaviour.
e) Identify the major problems that accompany irresponsible sexual behaviour practices among the Akamba adolescents.

f) Propose appropriate measures to check the problems accompanying adolescent sexual behaviour among the Akamba people of Machakos district, Kenya.

g) Describe the new and emerging adolescent culture among the Akamba people of Kenya.

JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

Concerns related to adolescent sexual behaviour have transcended into the post-modern era and is well entrenched into the Millennium Goals espoused by the United Nations for the 21st Century. The first millennium goal as envisioned by the United Nations endeavours to eradicate poverty and hunger while the sixth is meant to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases. It is noteworthy that these two goals are directly related to adolescent sexual behaviour. Indeed, adolescent experimentation with indiscriminate sex is associated with debilitating socio-economic health and physical effects. Thus, poverty and hunger as well as STDs/HIV/AIDS cannot be phased out as espoused by the UN without first addressing the sexual behaviour of the adolescents across the globe which could otherwise curtail the growth and development of any society.

Adolescents are a key segment of any society. Their sexual behaviour can not only jeopardize the social order but also the overall survival and functioning of the society in many ways. Thus, understanding the contemporary attitude and practice of adolescent sexual behaviour among the Akamba People of Kenya is a way forward to
arrest the numerous vices and problems that accompany early and indiscriminate sexual involvement.

The study has been further designed to unearth information as well as understand the conditions and circumstances under which indiscriminate sexual behaviour occurs and its consequences. The study notes that most past studies in Kenya focus on understanding sexual intercourse, contraception and teenage pregnancies rather than on examining the context and circumstances under which sex within adolescence occurs. This knowledge can be utilized by organizations serving youth and the Government in formulating sensible policies and recommendations to arrest irresponsible sexual behaviour as well as the accompanying consequences. So far, there is no national policy on youth affairs in Kenya, thus, as the state endeavours to initiate one, the findings of this study can act as a guideline. Furthermore, the Sexual Offences Bill (2006) to protect women against violence and sexual abuse in Kenya is still currently under scrutiny as it undergoes its first phase of implementation. It has been suggested that law enforcers be inducted on the law, to be made aware and conscious of its pre-requisites as well as its implementation modalities. The findings of this study which unearths a lot of information on sexual abuse and defilement of the youth can be utilised by policy-makers and the society as they endeavour to implement the bill and help protect the young against sexual abuse or molestation. Moreover, the Kenyan society has been awash with media campaigns about “V sign”, “tume chill” and “je una yako” – messages targeting adolescents, which translates into “sexual abstinence”, “chastity” and “use of condoms during intercourse.” This is a reaction from the public and the civil society to combat the
spread of STDs/HIV/AIDS and teenage pregnancies. It has been the interest of this study to establish whether that campaign has been bearing fruit.

The traditional Akamba culture had a peculiar and unique perception about adolescent sexual behaviour. Indeed, adolescent boys and girls were deemed sexually experienced before entering into marriage. It has been the interest of this study to ascertain whether some segments of Akamba culture still perpetuate this practice. Further, there is the popular legendary sexuality view about the Akamba People held by “others” that, the Akamba youths are intrinsically obsessed with sex matters. This common prevailing myth is predicated on the tradition that Akamba adolescents were taught about and involved sexually before marriage. Thus, the Akamba youth are viewed as sexually permissive and immoral. This study endeavoured to demystify that popularly held view as well as sought to establish whether there is any link between this view and the prevailing adolescent sexual behaviour amongst Akamba People of Kenya.

It has also been the interest of this study to verify and update the findings of other earlier studies on adolescent sexual behaviour. The study also notes that there has not been any recent study describing sexual behaviour of the contemporary Akamba adolescents. Moreover, most recent studies on adolescent sexual behaviour are either national or have an urban bias. This view makes the study viable, for it focuses on an independent Kenyan ethnic group or entity. Furthermore, the findings of this study will augment the existing information and literature about adolescent sexual behaviour in addition to being a basis of stimulating further academic research on sexuality in Kenya.

Lastly, we hope that this study would be an eye opener to parents and policy makers that adolescent sexual involvement is a reality and neither fiction nor a farce.
Indeed, the government as well as policy makers have been silent to that reality and that is why neither the youth policy in Kenya nor adolescent issues are taken seriously in national decision-making, while parents do not want to admit nor recognise the sexual involvement of their young ones. It is very clear from this study that adolescents are quite involved in indiscriminate sexual behaviour. They are ignorant about their sexuality and no matter how much some adults might like to ignore that fact, sex has a great meaning in adolescent lives. As a matter of fact, adolescents form their sexual identity, engage in sexual exploration (whether kissing, petting, intercourse or just dreaming about sex), and negotiate autonomy and intimacy in sexual contexts.