

# ‘[A]nd when I came to her I found she was not a virgin’: A contextual re-reading of Deuteronomy 22:13–21 among Nigerian Christians

**Author:**Solomon O. Ademiluka<sup>1,2</sup> **Affiliations:**

<sup>1</sup>Department of Biblical and Ancient Studies, College of Human Sciences, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa

<sup>2</sup>Department of Religious Studies, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Kogi State University, Anyigba, Nigeria

**Corresponding author:**

Solomon Ademiluka, solademiluka@gmail.com

**Dates:**

Received: 08 Dec. 2021

Accepted: 25 Mar. 2022

Published: 10 Mar. 2023

**How to cite this article:**

Ademiluka, S.O., 2023, “[A]nd when I came to her I found she was not a virgin”: A contextual re-reading of Deuteronomy 22:13–21 among Nigerian Christians’, *Verbum et Ecclesia* 44(1), a2455. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v44i1.2455>

**Copyright:**

© 2023. The Author. Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

**Read online:**

Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

The traditional African society attached special value to female virginity, associating it with personal purity and honour. But today in Nigeria, virginity has lost its importance to premarital sex. The neglect of this virtue should be a concern to the Church in Nigeria because this is now a rising trend being witnessed among the Christian youth. This article, therefore, attempted a re-reading of Deuteronomy 22:13–21 as a response to the problem of premarital sex among Nigerian Christian youth. It employed the historical-critical exegesis and the descriptive approach. The work revealed that several factors are responsible for the prevalence of premarital sex in Nigeria, including a lack of sex education from parents, and the influence of western culture, among others. It also discovered that premarital sexual behaviour has social implications, particularly for female youth. These include unwanted pregnancy and abortion. The article concluded that the prevalence of premarital sex among Nigerian Christian youth is a challenge to the Church and postulated a sexual theology of the Church in which Deuteronomy 22:13–21 takes a central place. Taking a cue from the text, this theology would assign significant roles to the church community, the youth themselves and parents in a bid to provide sex education for the youth so that they avoid premarital sex.

**Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications:** This research involves the disciplines of the Old Testament and Christian ethics. It relates the narrative on virginity proof in Deuteronomy 22:13–21 to the Nigerian context with its high rate of premarital sex. The article postulates that the text can be employed in a sexual theology of the Church that would help in combating prevalent premarital sex.

**Keywords:** virginity; premarital sex; sex education; sexual theology; Nigerian Christian youth.

## Introduction

Deuteronomy 22:13–21 reflects the cultural value and significance that used to be attached to female virginity in many parts of the world. When referring to females, virginity is ‘a state of never having engaged in sexual intercourse’ (Nagpal & Rao 2016:2) and was considered an evidence of ‘personal purity and honor’ (Nagpal & Rao 2016:2). Culturally, the proof of virginity was the presence of bleeding from the vagina as a result of the tearing of the hymen during the first sexual encounter (Nagpal & Rao 2016:2). The intactness of the hymen thus ‘has sociocultural significance as a sign of purity and upright womanhood’ (Matswetu & Bhana 2018:2). It has been proved, though, ‘that the presence of the hymen or bleeding on first sexual encounter’ need not be evidence that a woman is a virgin (Matswetu & Bhana 2018:2). This is because it is a known fact that several other factors including sporting activities and injury also lead to the tearing of the hymen (Tigay 1993:130). Also available are procedures like ‘hymenoplasty, vaginal tightening and fairness creams marketed by media promising to recapture’ the loss of virginity (Nagpal & Rao 2016:2). Nonetheless, the fact that women adopt such measures to feign virginity is an indication of the importance that is still attached to the virtue of maintaining virginity in the modern world. In some places ‘girls’ virginity is [still] monitored through religious, cultural, and medical practices’ (Matswetu & Bhana 2018:2). However, generally the modern world is witnessing a decline in the importance of the virtue of virginity so much that young women ‘who do not engage in premarital sex are perceived by their peers as stupid, boring and unsophisticated’ (Mashau 2011:1). In Africa, Nigeria in particular, this growing trend should be a concern to all because of its adverse effects on young females and on marriage as being traditionally understood as a hallowed institution. The Church should be specially concerned not only because the trend is against the biblical understanding of marriage but more importantly because it has long crept into the Church such that ‘cohabitation and premarital sex [exist]

amongst Christian ... youth' (Mashau 2011:1; cf. Eriksson et al. 2013:455). It is important to note that the discourse on virginity is constructed on a patriarchal basis in that it relates mainly to women; that is, there is little talk about unmarried young men abstaining from sexual relationships. Hence, some consider virginity as virtually 'an element of normative patriarchal restrictions on women's sexuality' (Matswetu & Bhana 2018:2). In the Nigerian context, there are a few studies on the prevalence of premarital sex (Alo & Akinde 2010; Amakor 2018; Ekpenyong & Ekpenyong 2016), premarital sex in relation to HIV/AIDS (Ajaegbu 2015; Nweneka 2007) and disregard for the virtue of female virginity (Ayotamuno 2012; Azorbo & Ufford-Azorbo 2013), but there are very few or none at all relating Deuteronomy 22:13–21 to the subject. Therefore, focusing on both males and females, this article attempts a re-reading of Deuteronomy 22:13–21 in the Nigerian context with a view to addressing the growing trend of premarital sex among the Christian youth. The work employs the historical-critical exegesis for the study of the text, and the descriptive approach for the discourse on virginity as conceived in the traditional African society and the attitude towards it today, particularly among Nigerian Christian youth. It begins with the exegesis of the Deuteronomy text, from which it proceeds to the examination of the concept of virginity in the traditional African society. The study then delineates the attitude towards the virtue of virginity in the modern Nigerian society. Finally, it examines how the text can be employed as a response to the prevalence of premarital sex among the Christian youth in Nigeria.

## The concept of בתולה in Deuteronomy 22:13–21: An exegesis

In the Documentary Hypothesis, the book of Deuteronomy constitutes one of the four Pentateuchal sources, that is, the so-called Deuteronomistic Source (D), believed to have been composed in the late seventh century B.C.E. (Collins 2004:162). In this earliest form, Deuteronomy was meant to justify the religious reform of King Josiah (621/622 B.C.E.) purposed to centralise 'worship in Jerusalem and close down provincial shrines' (Ademiluka 2013:12; cf. Rogerson 2005:41; 2 Ki 22–23). Some believe that D was revised in the exilic/post-exilic period to accommodate the beliefs and customs of that time (Gerstenberger 2002:222). Scholars have identified four major literary units in the book of Deuteronomy, namely motivation speeches that the narrator attributed to Moses (1–11), the laws (i.e. the so-called Deuteronomic Code, 12–26), curses and blessings (27–28) and concluding materials (29–34) (Collins 2004, cited in Ademiluka 2013:12). The code contains regulations usually classified as ceremonial laws (12:1–16:17), civil laws (16:18–20:20) and social laws (21:1–26:19). The D code, therefore, contains more than religious matters, encompassing 'economic, political, social and even military matters' (Ademiluka 2013:15). Hence, Longman and Dillard (2006:298) assert that the D code was Israel's 'constitution'. Deuteronomy 22 thus belongs to the D code. After the miscellaneous regulations on lost animals,

cross-dressing, type of material for roofing, among other things discussed in verses 1–12, the rest of the chapter deals with sexual laws relating to female virginity (vv. 13–21) and violation of married women, betrothed and non-betrothed virgins in verses 22–29. Verse 30 stipulates against having sexual intercourse with one's father's wife. Hence, Edenburg (2009:44) observes that 'Deuteronomy 22:13–29 is a carefully drafted, self-contained collection of laws ... presenting an authoritative treatment of sexual offenses involving all categories of free women'.

Deuteronomy 22:13–21 states that if a man takes a wife and claims not to find her a virgin (Heb. בתולה), the parents of the woman shall produce evidence of their daughter's virginity to the court of the elders by spreading 'the cloth' before them (v. 17). If the parents are able to provide the evidence, the man shall be whipped and shall pay a fine of 100 shekels of silver to the woman's father. He would also not be allowed to divorce the woman throughout his life. But if the charge is proven, the woman shall be stoned to death. This exegesis focuses on the meaning of בתולה as used in this passage, the nature of the evidence of virginity and what the narrative signifies for the value of virginity in Hebrew culture. Waltke (1980:137) opines that in the cognate languages of the ancient Near East, בתולה does not denote biological virginity (Lat. *virgo intacta*). For instance, the parallel Egyptian *μwn.t* may denote 'girl', or 'virgin', but can also refer to 'a young marriageable woman, or a young woman who has had sexual relations'. The Akkadian cognate, *batultu*, is a reference to an age group although it may sometimes connote a virgin. In Ugaritic, the equivalent term, *btl*, is frequently used for 'Anat, Baal's wife, who repeatedly has sexual intercourse' (Waltke 1980:137). The scholar further explains that, as used in some passages in the Torah (e.g., Ex 22:16ff., [H 15f.]; Dt 22:28–29; Lv 21:2–3), it is not clear if בתולה is used to generally mean a young woman or specifically in the sense of a virgin. He, however, admits that the term denotes 'virgin' in Leviticus 21:13–14 and Ezekiel 44:22 where it is contrasted with women who have experienced sexual intercourse. But on a closer examination, one would find that while in some Old Testament (OT) references בתולה may simply refer to young men or young women (e.g., Dt 32:25; 2 Chr 36:17; Ps 148:12; Is 62:5; Jr 51:22; Lm 1:18; 2:21; Zch 9:17; cf. Waltke 1980:137), in most of its occurrences, especially in the Torah, the term most certainly connotes an unmarried woman who has not experienced sexual intercourse (Meacham 2009; Tigay 1993:130). This point is buttressed by the restrictive clause 'who has known no man' or its equivalents, which sometimes follows the term (e.g., in Lv 21:2–3; Jud 21:12; 2 Sm 14:5). In Deuteronomy 22:13–21, therefore, בתולה means 'virgin' in the biological sense of the word.

Waltke (1980:137) also argues that the proof of virginity demanded by the court of the elders<sup>1</sup> was not blood stains on a cloth arising from the first sexual intercourse between a couple on the wedding night but 'garment stained by blood

1. The Torah makes reference copiously to this judicial institution at 'the gates of villages and towns' (Adu-Gyamfi 2020:90) where the elders presided (Dt 16:18; 21:19; 22:15) 'to administer justice and decide disputes' (Amisshah 2011:128).

during her last period', which served as evidence that the woman was not carrying another man's child by the time she got married to her husband. McConville (1994:220) opines the blood-stained sheet from the first sexual intercourse could be the best possible proof of virginity, but the evidence from the last menstruation is more probable as that 'is more likely to be available to the parents to produce'. However, this suggestion is unlikely to be correct in view of evidence from Jewish customs and the ancient Near East. Guzik (n.d.) states that:

According to custom, a Jewish woman would first be intimate with her husband upon a special cloth, which would collect the small drops of blood which were accepted as evidence of the young woman's virginity. This blood-stained cloth would then become the property of the married woman's parents, who kept it as the evidence of the young woman's virginity. (n.p.)

This fact finds support from Tigay (1993:130) when he attests that 'bloodstained cloths are used widely in the ancient Near East and elsewhere to prove the virginity of brides'. Meacham (2009:n.p.) affirms that in later Jewish custom 'blood flowing after the first act of intercourse' was a sign of virginity. Tigay (1993) also provides support from later Jewish traditions to the effect that the Talmud mentions certain measures taken in some places on the wedding night to ensure that the bride:

[D]id not [carry] an already stained cloth with her [and] that [the groom] did not bring [with him] a clean cloth to switch with the legitimately stained one in order to destroy the evidence of virginity. (p. 130)

Moreover, in the rabbinic period:

[T]he fourth day of the week ... was the traditional day for virgins to be married, since the rabbinic court met on the fifth day of the week to accommodate claims of non-virginity. (Meacham 2009:n.p.)

All these prove that the evidence of virginity sought in Deuteronomy 22 refers to bloodstains from the first sexual relationship between a new couple and not bloodstains from a woman's last menstruation.

The evidence sought in the narrative, therefore, is to the effect that a woman was a virgin at the time of her marriage, the passage thus signifying that virginity was held as a virtue in ancient Israel. Hence, Guzik (n.d.) states that in ancient Israel virginity was greatly valued:

[I]t was seen as a great loss to give up one's virginity before marriage, and if a woman was known to have lost her virginity, it greatly reduced her chances of getting married. (n.p.)

For the same reason, a man would feel cheated if he believed that his wife was not a virgin, hence the provision in this text to address a dispute arising from such a situation (Guzik n.d.:online). The text thus signifies that it was an offense for a woman to lose her virginity before marriage, and if it happened the honour of her father was at stake unless 'he and his wife [could] produce the evidence of [their daughter's] virginity' (Havea 2005:5).

This understanding of Deuteronomy 22:13–21 shows that the value attached to virginity lay behind the imposition of fines on sexual abusers in the sexual violation texts. For instance, in Exodus 22:16–17 (cf. Dt 22:28–29) if a man violates a virgin, he shall pay the bride price to the father and marry her, the fine compensating him 'appropriately for the reduced price she would fetch, given the loss of her virginity' (Jacobs 2012:247). But as already stated by Guzik, it seems that the consequence of losing one's virginity was the probable loss of any chance of getting married rather than having the bride price reduced. Cole (2013:6) states that without her virginity, an Israelite woman was considered unmarriageable, in which case no bride price would be paid to her father at all. As Stefick (2020) puts it:

[T]he violation of a young woman's virginity included not only economic consequences that put her bride-price in jeopardy, but also social consequences that would have left her unmarriageable in a society that venerated female virginity. (p. 1)

The social consequences for an ancient Israelite unmarried woman who lost her virginity seem to be illustrated in the Amnon-Tamar encounter in 2 Samuel 13. After Amnon raped and drove Tamar away, she bemoaned the loss of her virginity, crying aloud, 'with her robe torn and ashes on her head' (v. 19; cf. Ademiluka 2019a:5). Gill (2017) affirms that Tamar's action indicated that her 'virginity was rent from her in a forcible manner' (cited in Ademiluka 2019a:5). Apparently, for the rest of her life Tamar lived in the house of Absalom her brother as a 'desolate woman, isolated from society and disqualified from marriage' (Baldwin 1988, in Ademiluka 2019a:5; cf. Mann 2011:201).

Deuteronomy 22:13–21, then, is an indication of the high premium placed on virginity in ancient Israel. It is in this regard that the passage is relevant in Africa, where in the traditional setting female virginity was also venerated. In the section below, the article examines the concept of female virginity in Africa, with particular reference to Nigeria.

## The concept of virginity in the traditional African setting

Female virginity as conceived in the precolonial African society is best understood in the traditional perceptions about sexuality generally. In most places, sexuality was 'approached with great respect' (Ajaegbu 2015:1) so much that it was a taboo especially for children to talk openly about sex or even to mention the sexual organs (cf. Akintunde & Dairo 2011:42). Ikpe (2004:6) puts it succinctly that:

Sexuality was consigned to the realms of marriage ... outside [of which] it was culturally [a] taboo to discuss sex and sexual matters. Sexuality was full of silence and discretions ... between parents and children. Sexual discussions were clothed in languages, which were not explicit to the uninitiated. (cf. Ajaegbu 2015:1)

In this context, it is an understatement to say that 'virginity in the African tradition was held in high esteem' (Ojua,

Lukpata & Atama 2014:44; cf. Akintunde & Dairo 2011:42). Sex was held as sacred and limited to the arena of marriage and to ensure compliance with this tradition, 'taboos were sounded and violation attracted family shame and penalties' (Ojua et al. 2014:48; cf. Ajaegbu 2015:1; Akintunde & Dairo 2011:42). Virginity as conceived in the traditional African society is best captured in the words of Azorbo and Ufford-Azorbo (2013) when they state about the Ijaw people of the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria that:

Virginity, being the state of an [unmarried] person who has never engaged in sexual intercourse is mostly demanded of females ... There are cultural and religious traditions which place special value and significance on this state ... associated with notions of personal purity, honour and worth ... The first act of sexual intercourse by a female is commonly considered within many cultures to be an important personal milestone. Its significance is reflected in expressions such as 'saving oneself', 'losing one's virginity', 'taking someone's virginity' and sometimes as 'deflowering'. The occasion is at times seen as the end of innocence, integrity or purity. Traditionally, there was a cultural expectation that a female would ... 'give up' her virginity to her husband in the act of consummation of the marriage. (p. 102)

As in Deuteronomy 22:13–21, the traditional African society employed some measures to ascertain the virginity status of brides. In many parts of Africa, there was the tradition whereby on the wedding night, 'the white bed sheet was brought out stained for all to see' (Ayotamuno 2012:9). In those days among the Yoruba of south-western Nigeria:

Two female kinswomen of the bride typically accompanied [the bride] to her husband's household. The women slept by the door of the bride and groom's bedroom in anticipation of the deflowering of the bride on the first bridal night and bridal cry of pain as her hymen [was] ruptured and blood [stained] the bedspread. In the early hours of the morning following the defloration night, the blood spotted sheet [was] covered in a calabash and returned to the bride's parents as proof of the bride's virginity. The return of the blood-stained sheet [was] followed by a congratulatory message to the bride's parents for properly raising their daughter. Proof of intact hymen is an occasion for jubilation and merriments by the bride's and groom's families and kinsmen and women. Non-blood stain generally resulted in the return of the bride to her parents with anger and disappointment from the husband and his kinsmen. (Nnazor & Robinson 2016:158, cf. Familusi 2012:303)

Similarly, according to the custom of the Fulani of northern Nigeria, on the wedding night, 'a white cloth was spread on the bed ... [and] in the morning it was examined for marks of blood' (Feyisetan & Pebley 1989:344). The presence of bloodstains on the cloth indicated that the girl was still a virgin while their absence showed that she was not. There was usually celebration if the inspection showed that the girl was a virgin, 'and word went round that the girl had kept her virginity' (Feyisetan & Pebley 1989:344). The people of Etsako in mid-western Nigeria had a custom in which 'older women stripped the young wife naked and checked the condition of the hymen to make sure that it was intact' (Ikpe 2004:8). The traditional Igbo believed that a woman would never forsake the man who broke her virginity (Feyisetan &

Pebley 1989:344). It was for this reason that in Igboland a newly married woman was compelled to 'confess any pre-marital relationship at the husband's ancestral shrine' (Ikpe 2004:8) with the threat of death if she lied. If in the process a woman was found to have lost her virginity, a compensation had to be paid by the man who deflowered her, and a ritual of propitiation had to be performed (Ikpe 2004:8; Feyisetan & Pebley 1989:344).

In many places, there were rewards for retaining one's virginity and punishments for its loss. In some communities, if a girl was found a virgin at marriage her bride price was increased while 'in some ethnic groups [her] mother received gifts of cash and cows' (Ojua et al. 2014:48). In the culture of the Shona of Zimbabwe, if the bride was a virgin the groom paid a cow (*mombe yechimanda*) as part of the bridewealth, 'a gesture of gratitude for ensuring that the young woman retained her virginity' (Matswetu & Bhana 2018:3). If a bride was found a virgin, the Hausa of northern Nigeria 'would send gifts of money and kola nuts to the parents', but if this was not done it was an indication that the woman was not a virgin (Feyisetan & Pebley 1989:344). Hence, Agbogu and Igbokwe (2015:7) state that in the traditional African society, a 'virgin bride is a pride to her parents and her husband'. Apart from forfeiting gifts, brides who were not virgins at marriage suffered some social consequences. For instance, among the Shona:

[They] suffered calamitous consequences [in terms of] social status ... [Loss of virginity was] indicated by the use of phrases [like] 'no longer a girl', 'destroying yourself' and 'wasted yourself'... One who was not a virgin might find it difficult to get married or be returned to her people if it was discovered after marriage. (Matswetu & Bhana 2018:4, 5)

In Igboland, non-virgin brides suffered 'social punishments like songs of contempt and degradation' (Ajaegbu 2015:1). In Yoruba culture, a girl who lost her virginity before marriage was called an 'incomplete bride', and such a woman 'suffered considerable approbation, as did her parents' (Feyisetan & Pebley 1989:344). To this end, as Ajaegbu (2015:1) rightly attests, in the past 'premarital sex was rarely ... heard of as the traditional society built enough deterrence for such [a] behaviour'. Commenting on the virtue of virginity in the traditional African culture, Nnazor and Robinson (2016:158) state, 'Within the cultural and symbolic meaning of intact hymen ... the virginity of females [was] a high stake "treasure" and a virtue that [was] guarded [by] the [whole] community'. As mentioned earlier, its overall social value resided in the fact that virginity was 'associated with notions of personal purity, honour and worth' (Azorbo & Ufford-Azorbo 2013:102).

It is noteworthy, however, that all the discourse about virginity relates only to females. Female virginity was a major quality for acceptability for marriage, but the same traditions did not prevent young men from engaging in premarital sexual relationships. On the contrary, certain 'beliefs [encouraged] the male sexual drive ... without contestation'

(Matswetu & Bhana 2018:5). Hence, as discussed in the section below, one of the reasons for the denigration of the value of virginity today is this 'sexual double standard' (Matswetu & Bhana 2018:5). In that section, the article examines the general attitude towards virginity among Nigerian Christian youth today.

## Attitude towards virginity among Nigerian Christian youth

As confirmed by many writers, premarital sex has become a normal way of life for many young men and women, particularly 'with the increasing unlimited access to the internet and the global world' (Ajaegbu 2015:2). Feyisetan and Pebley (1989:343) note 'prevalence of premarital sexual activities [as] an indication of [the] erosion in traditional [African] practices'. Amakor (2018:74) also states that nowadays, 'the majority of young people ... in developing societies make their sexual debut in their teens'. Nigeria is one of such societies, being one of 'the top ten countries in Africa with the highest rates' of premarital sex (Woog et al. 2015, cited in Amakor 2018:74). Studies in Nigeria have demonstrated that many young girls have their first sexual experience between the ages of 13 and 15 (Amakor 2018:74). For instance, all the 25 young women who participated in a study conducted by Amakor in Imo State of south-eastern Nigeria 'had at least one sexual encounter before turning eighteen' (Amakor 2018:74). Similarly, a survey conducted by Adebisi and Azusu (2009:92) among youths aged 10–24 in Oyo State of south-western Nigeria revealed that 74.9% of them had engaged in sexual intercourse. Researching in Akure, Ondo State, also of south-western Nigeria, Alo and Akinde (2010:12), found that 'not only is premarital sex nearly universal by age 20 but also common at much younger ages'. Hence, Ikpe (2004:8) notes that the twentieth century marked the beginning of 'a progressive departure from the importance of virginity'. As Tukker (2011:36) puts it, since the second half of the twentieth century, 'in many parts of the world ... sexual interactions have become a common and widely accepted part of romantic relationships'. Ayotamuno (2012) is therefore correct when she says that:

Virginity is a word that is almost lost in our modern day [Nigerian] society ... In fact, the question of being a virgin is rarely mentioned in forums (sic) today. If you introduce yourself as being a virgin, [you] will be looked at with surprise, doubt, and ... considered as old fashioned. [Thus,] presently, virginity is not celebrated but rather it has become unpopular and unappreciated. (p. 9)

Several factors are responsible for the negative attitude towards virginity in Nigeria today, that is, for the prevalence of premarital sexual activities. Perhaps, the most important one is identifiable with the traditional attitude towards sexuality, namely the silence that surrounded the subject of sex between parents and children even when virginity was venerated, as earlier discussed. The effect of this silence has been the unavailability of sex education to the youth. In his study mentioned earlier, Amakor (2018) found the lack of sex education as one major factor that led to the unmarried

mothers' pregnancies, as the majority of them had received little 'sex education from their parents, school or church' (p. 86). He states that:

[As] sex education is not provided to young adolescents while growing up ... they maintain wrong impressions on the purpose of sex before sexual initiation. Not armed with the right information regarding sex, they tend to explore blindly and, in their bid to explore, they end up with early/teenage pregnancy on their first 'sexual trip'. (Amakor 2018:85)

Because of the silence that still pervades when dealing with sexuality in most Nigerian homes, adolescents are left to learn about sex mainly from the media and Internet where they receive either incomplete or wrong education about sex (Amakor 2018:87).

Another factor that has made premarital sex commonplace in Nigeria is the influence of the western culture, together with urbanisation, which has led to the 'liberalisation of traditional society' (Ikpe 2004:8). In the traditional order, physical contact between intending couples was virtually prohibited so as to avoid premarital sex (Ojua et al. 2014:48). But this is no longer prevalent as the western culture has introduced the idea of intimate friendship between boys and girls, in which sex is almost always involved (Ademiluka 2018:58). To these young people, 'it is part and parcel of modernity to engage in sex' even when unmarried (Mashau 2011:3). In Amakor's research, most of the unmarried mothers 'confirmed that ... their pregnancy was borne out of ... boyfriend/girlfriend relationship which existed between them and the men who fathered their children' (Amakor 2018:75). The western culture also influences the pattern of dressing such that 'these days ... teenage girls [mostly wear] clothes that are ... revealing or tight-fitting [thereby] flaunt[ing] their bodies ... to sexual predators' (Mashau 2011:4). As expressed by Ojua et al. (2014:48), contrary to the traditional perception wherein lack of coverage of sensitive body parts 'constituted nakedness and moral violation, of recent nudity has become the new norm among young girls'. Closely related to western influence is the influence from mass and social media as well as the Internet. The youth are exposed to sexual material like pornography through these media, which negatively affects their 'sexual lifestyle ... because some of those who are bombarded by pornography also like to put it into practice' (Mashau 2011:3).

Influence from their peer groups like 'roommates, classmates, club associates and other' groups is another factor that makes young Nigerians to engage in premarital sex (Ekpenyong & Ekpenyong 2016:81). According to Ekpenyong and Ekpenyong (2016:81), studies have shown that 'young people whose friends are sexually active ... are most likely to be sexually active themselves'. In other words, in order to have a sense of self-belonging and to avoid rejection adolescents give in to pressure from their peers. In this way, 'premarital sex [becomes a kind] of passport to acceptance' among young Nigerian men and women (Mashau 2011:3). A similar factor is looking at sex as pleasure seeking. Boys especially hunt for sex 'for the

pleasure of it' and when they succeed they share their experiences with their peers (Ekpenyong & Ekpenyong 2016:81). The 'high correlation between [drug,] alcohol and sexual experiences' (Mashau 2011:4) is also worth noting. Seeking sex for pleasure among young men sometimes involves the use of drug and alcohol. And as 'it is very difficult for [them] to control their sexual drives when they are under the influence of drugs and alcohol' (Mashau 2011:4); sometimes they engage in sexual violence. For instance, some of the unmarried mothers in Amakor's research recalled that they were 'drugged before being raped' (Amakor 2018:77).

It must be acknowledged that sometimes economic factors account for reasons why young Nigerian girls, particularly students of higher institutions of learning, forfeit their virginity. This relates to students whose parents are:

[E]conomically disadvantaged [*so much that*] oftentimes [*they are*] unable to adequately provide for their daughters [*who then have*] to seek financial favours ... from men who in [*re*]turn for sexual favours from them. (Ekpenyong & Ekpenyong 2016:81)

Imitating their friends and peers who come from richer homes, these female students aspire to acquire costly clothes, shoes, jewellery, phones, etc., and oftentimes have to pay for them with sex (Ekpenyong & Ekpenyong 2016:81). Another aspect of the economic factor in Nigeria is 'the downward turn of the economy over the years, which has rendered most male youths unemployed' (Ademiluka 2021:2). In view of this, 'the majority of young Nigerian men [cannot afford] the high cost of mandatory marriage rites and ceremonies' (Amakor 2018:81). The implication is harder for their female counterparts in that the society soon labels them as 'too old for marriage' (Amakor 2018:80), a situation that puts many women under pressure 'to sacrifice ... their virginity for the option of having sex and getting married to their sexual partners' (Amakor 2018:80). Amakor (2018) states that in his research:

Several participants reported that their sexual initiation, experience and eventual pregnancy were as a result of the marriage proposals they received from the men that fathered their children. They initiated sex with them with the trust and hope that the men would marry them even if they got pregnant in the course of the relationship. (p. 80)

It is also important to note that unlike in the past, these days, generally, women marry at an older age, which makes it harder for them to maintain their virginity (Ikpe 2004:8). In precolonial Africa, before the advent of western education, child marriage was principally the norm. As girls would not go to school, after reaching puberty, the next stage in the life of a girl was to be prepared for marriage by her parents (Ojua et al. 2014:47). What occurred in those days can be illustrated with the happenings today in most places in northern Nigeria (with the prevalence of child marriage) where a 'girl is forced to marry the minute she reaches puberty irrespective of her level of education' (Adekola, Akanbi & Olawole-Isaac 2015:11). Sometimes a girl might be made to marry at a tender

age as low as 11 years (WHO 2002:157), that is, before her first menstruation. One major reason for marrying girls off at such a tender age is 'to ensure they marry as virgins and retain the family honour' (Agege et al. 2017:2; cf. Adekola et al. 2015:11). Today, most young Nigerian women aspire to have a higher education before getting married, which is one reason why a lot of them marry in their late 20s, some when they are 30 or above (Ntoimo 2012:1). Oderinde (2013:168) attributes the prevalent late marriage among Nigerian women to their pursuit of higher education and career. In the course of delaying marriage, the factors inhibiting the maintenance of virginity discussed above are at play, and in the long run, many succumb to premarital sex.

Disregard for the virtue of virginity with the concomitant effect of prevalence of premarital sexual behaviour among young Nigerian men and women comes with inevitable implications for the youth concerned, particularly the females. The problem with premarital sex usually begins with unwanted pregnancy, then the ills associated with it. When pregnancy occurs as a result of premarital sex, most often the next thing is the various attempts at abortion to conceal the act in order to avoid shame. Feyisetan and Pebley (1989:343) assert that girls who get pregnant from premarital sex are most 'likely to seek or attempt abortion'. Abortion may lead to the destruction of the womb or even death (Ekpenyong & Ekpenyong 2016:82). In Nigeria, premarital sex contributes to child trafficking. This happens through the activities of baby factories where:

[P]overty-stricken pregnant teenagers are enslaved ... and their babies preyed upon. [*Due to poverty*] ... these young women are ready to part with their babies in exchange for a paltry sum. (Omeike 2017:20; cf. Ekpenyong & Ekpenyong 2016:82)

Many young girls have had to drop out of school because of unwanted pregnancies arising from premarital sexual activities, thereby having their education truncated (Mashau 2011:3). This experience has 'prevented many female students from achieving their educational goals' and careers (Ekpenyong & Ekpenyong 2016:82). Most of these women have to live in poverty throughout their lives because the chance of getting good jobs has 'decreased as a result of lack of education' (Ekpenyong & Ekpenyong 2016:82). Moreover, oftentimes pregnancy arising from premarital sex leads to unplanned marriage. This happens sometimes when the parents of the girl insist on the boy marrying her, in which case 'the teenage girl [is] at a disadvantage in cases where the young man is not willing to do so' (Matswetu & Bhana 2018:8). Research has also shown that maintenance and loss of virginity affect a marriage's stability. For instance, it has been proved that:

[V]irgin brides are less likely to divorce than women who lost their virginity prior to marriage. [*This is because*] women who [*are*] virgins [*feel*] a higher level of commitment to their marriage partners. (Dooley 1999:6)

This proposition is plausible because a woman who gets married as a virgin is most likely to be morally disciplined

and faithful to her husband, whereas the one who has lost her virginity before marriage may still be in love with the man who deflowered her (as in the belief of the Igbo earlier mentioned) and possibly certain other past lovers (Mashau 2011:4). Loss of virginity before marriage, then, may be one of the reasons why some Nigerian married women indulge in extramarital affairs and eventually abandon 'their husbands for other men' (Ademiluka 2019b:865).

Many writers have plausibly suggested that 'premarital sex poses a lot of health challenges to those who engage in it. [They] run the risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections (STI)' (Ekpenyong & Ekpenyong 2016:82; cf. Mashau 2011:3). Dooley (1999:6) opines that the danger of contracting these diseases would be drastically reduced if premarital sex were avoided. The health implications of premarital sexual behaviour may take psychological dimensions. Studies have shown that 'those who had unwanted pregnancies ... tended to be depressed' (Ekpenyong & Ekpenyong 2016:82). Teenagers especially are weighed down emotionally when they get pregnant because of premarital sex (Dooley 1999:6) and having 'their hopes and dreams shattered [they] become miserable and disillusioned with life' (Mashau 2011:3). Being unable to cope with the concomitant effects of unwanted pregnancy, a number of teenagers have committed suicide (Mashau 2011:4).

In view of the foregoing discussion, Deuteronomy 22:13–21 becomes highly significant for the Church in Nigeria in addressing the menace of premarital sex. Hence, in the section below, the article examines how the Church can employ the text to address this problem.

## Deuteronomy 22:13–21 as a response to premarital sex among Nigerian Christian youth

Tukker (2013:6) is of the view that the Church need not be bothered about premarital sex among Christians. In fact, she considers the teaching of the Church on sex as contradictory in that it condemns sex before marriage but venerates it thereafter. This ecclesiastical approach towards Christian sexuality:

Can no longer apply to modern society [*because*] [*y*]oung Christians have adopted a better value system [*namely that*], responsible sex is part of a steady love relationship [*which*] is a more responsible biblical approach than the legalistic approach that encourages juridical marriage as the only norm for sexual intercourse. (Tukker 2013:6)

Tukker (2013) notes that marriage does not begin with the wedding ceremony; rather, it is a process that could, in fact, start with intending couples cohabiting:

Sex would become part of the [*cohabitation*] and every couple should decide for themselves when they are ready to enter this phase ... [*Thus,*] ... [*I*]iving together or premarital sex should not be seen as wrong or sinful – provided it is part of a marriage process. (p. 7)

The scholar concludes that 'Christians and councillors (sic) must dedicate themselves to promote sex in marriages ... rather than condemn sex before marriage' (Tukker 2013:6). This view finds support in the work of Nagpal and Rao (2016:2) when they state that nowadays young men and women have 'to move beyond age old traditional concepts of preserving virginity until marriage'. Tukker thus suggests that premarital sex and cohabitation before marriage be accepted as part of Christian living, declaring that this is 'a more responsible biblical approach', as mentioned earlier. Unfortunately, she does not cite any biblical reference to support this claim. Moreover, her position runs contrary to the general Christian stance on sexuality. As Ojo (2005:4–6) rightly affirms, the central Christian teaching about the value of virginity, premarital sex and sexuality in general subsumes under the concept of chastity. From this perspective, Christians are called to a personal morality that includes 'the biblical norm of virginity before marriage' (Ojo 2005:6). Christian teaching on chastity acknowledges that sexual emotions are normal but 'it is proclaimed that there is spiritual value in abstinence' (Ojo 2005:7). Mulya (2010:219) affirms that the Christian perspective on sexuality is not an arbitrary formulation but is based on biblical texts that condemn adultery and fornication (e.g., Ex 20:14, Mt 5:28; 1 Co 3:16; 7:4; Heb 13:4). Going by the contents of these passages premarital sex is simply fornication (Mashau 2011:2).

From the point of view of chastity, the prevalence of premarital sex among Nigerian Christian youth becomes a challenge to the Church, to which it can appropriately respond with Deuteronomy 22:13–21. The Church has a pastoral duty in this regard because, as earlier discussed, a good number of the youth are church members so much that 'there is no difference between church youths' sexual behaviour' and that of non-church attending youth (Nweneka 2007, cited in Mulya 2010:217). As expressed by Eriksson et al. (2013:455), 'The churches [are] therefore an asset, as young people in the community regularly meet in the churches for various activities'. It has also been discovered that young people's level of religiosity may help them to abstain from premarital sexual activities on account of the teachings of their places of worship (Somefun 2019:9). Moreover, usually the youth 'imbibe information when it comes from [their] role models such as ... church leaders' (Amakor 2018:92). So far, in Nigeria, the response to the challenge of premarital sex from the Church varies according to denominations. The Catholic Church, for instance, seems to hold to the traditional view that discussion on sex should be limited to only married people (Amakor 2018:94). According to Onyechoa (2014), in the Catholic Church 'sex education is simply a matter of teaching the sixth and ninth commandments' about adultery and covetousness, respectively (cited in Amakor 2018:95). Perhaps, for this reason, this denomination does not give any special place to teaching the youth on premarital sex. In some of the other mainline denominations, young people are generally encouraged to abstain from premarital sex because it is fornication (Eriksson et al. 2013:459). Sometimes young girls

are simply taught to maintain their virginity until marriage for the same reason (Amakor 2018:90). However, occasionally these denominations engage in special programmes relevant for teaching against premarital sex. For instance, as part of its HIV/AIDS awareness campaign in 2005, the Nigeria Baptist Convention introduced the 'True Love Waits programme among Nigerian Baptist students' in which both male and female young people were encouraged to avoid premarital sex (Ojo 2005:7). Some of the Pentecostal churches are more proactive in the fight against premarital sex. In the Deeper Life Bible Church, for example, kissing and holding of hands by boys and girls are prohibited; they must also avoid staying alone in secluded places. Young females must wear clothes that cover their bodies properly (Ojo 2005:7). In the early 2000s, 'through regular seminars, sermons, TV broadcasts', and magazines, Bimbo Odukoya of the Fountain of Life Church taught related to the relationship between Christian youths that excludes sex before marriage (Ojo 2005:7). Several Pentecostal pastors have rejected the use of contraceptives, insisting on total abstinence from sex before marriage. Young women must learn how not to 'lift up their skirts [while] young men must know how not to unzip their trousers until marriage' (Ojo 2005:8).

Nonetheless, as Amakor (2018) found in his study:

[I]n their teaching on abstinence, [the churches] are often biased, their teachings ... most times dominated by condemnation ... [N]ot taking into consideration the present realities of the world in which the teenager survives, [t]hey teach to instil fear in the teenagers and not necessarily to make them understand the biological implications and societal consequences associated with early sexual initiation. (p. 90)

Similarly, Ikpe (2004:8) observes that some churches teach the youth not to engage in premarital sex in order to avoid diseases or unwanted pregnancy, or so they can make heaven. 'Thus public shaming is no more a deterrent but hell fire and disease' (Ikpe 2004:8).

Perhaps, the inadequacy of these approaches explains the increasing rate of premarital sex among the youth in Nigeria. That means that the Church has to do more to provide 'a more comprehensive sexual education' to the youth (Eriksson et al. 2013:463). To address this, this article postulates a sexual theology by the Church in Nigeria in which Deuteronomy 22:13–21 takes a central place. The programme will take cognisance of the role of the church community as represented in the text by the elders' court which presided over the virginity proof meeting. It will also recognise the roles of the young men and women members of the Church as represented in the narrative by the husband and wife in the virginity controversy and of parents as represented by the father of the accused wife. All that the community in Exodus 22:13–21 does is to pass judgment in accordance with the outcome of the proof of virginity (vv. 18–21). But the Church will have to go beyond this and put in place measures to assist the youth to avoid premarital sex. In the passage, after making the accusation of non-virginity against his wife, the

young man is not heard of again, while the wife is not even heard at all. Havea (2005) observes that:

[T]he silencing of the penetrated daughter [indicates] gender prejudices [against women, while] the silencing of the accusing husband suggests age discrimination – a (presumably) younger man does not have the privilege of being heard as does a man of the generation before his. (p. 5)

Contrarily, in the sexual theology being suggested here, the Church will recognise both sexes of the youth as the principal actors in premarital sex and get them involved accordingly. As mentioned earlier, in Nigeria 'almost all churches forbid sexual activities outside marriage' but most often abstinence is the only method presented to the youth (Mulya 2010:219). Moreover, in addressing the problem church leaders are often oblivious of the 'the long – and getting longer – abstinent period between puberty and marriage' (Mulya 2010:219), especially in Nigeria where marriage is being delayed for many women because of economic factors, as earlier discussed. In his study, Amakor found that one of the major challenges faced by unmarried young women is 'being able to navigate through the demands of forming relationships that would lead to marriage without embarking on sexual activity' (Amakor 2018:82). Hence, the old method of just telling young women to desist from premarital sex has not yielded much result. The Church's sexual theology will have to take into view the economic factors that make young women vulnerable to premarital sex, as well as other factors delineated in the previous section, like influence from the media, the Internet, peer groups and drugs or alcohol. As part of this programme, the Church should engage professional counsellors to address the youth on the impact of these factors and how they can overcome them on a regular basis. They should also be sensitised on the dangers associated with premarital sex and the possible concomitant effects, as discussed in the earlier section. It is also important to help the youth to spend their time in many positive activities like sports, music and creative arts so that their 'mind will not just focus on sex' (Mulya 2010:219; cf. Somefun 2019:9). Where possible, the Church may consider modernising some of the traditional rituals and rites of passage to protect virginity, most of which 'include[d] private seclusion of the initiated females for informal, indigenous sex education' (Nnazor & Robinson 2016:157). To adopt this method, the Church may use the occasion of its youth camp meetings to admonish the young men and women on the virtue of virginity and the social problems associated with premarital sex. As in the text, and as already being practised in many churches in Nigeria, when unmarried youths encounter pregnancy both the males and females involved should be given appropriate punishments such as being suspended 'from particular groups in the church' (Somefun 2019:9).

In the Deuteronomic law under reference, the father of the accused woman has the responsibility to provide evidence for his daughter's virginity, which means that it is his duty to ensure that she gets married as a virgin. The patriarchal

prejudices that make the accused daughter unheard affect her mother; hence the latter has nothing to contribute to the virginity-related controversy affecting her daughter. Nonetheless, in Nigeria, this aspect of the narrative speaks to both parents of Christian youths. It is relevant in the context of their responsibility in providing sex education to their children. In the preceding section, it was shown that lack of sex education is one major factor responsible for the prevalence of premarital sex in Nigeria. In the Church's sexual theology, therefore, parents should be enlightened on 'the importance of ... sexual upbringing' of the youth (Nagpal & Rao 2016:2). Mothers, especially, ought to 'maintain a close and interactive relationship with [their female children] in their different stages of development' (Amakor 2018:87). For instance, a mother should know when her daughter starts menstruation and teach her how to manage it. Mothers should realise that the commencement of menstruation signals the possibility of unwanted pregnancy; hence it is the time that adolescent girls need closer attention and education on sex and its consequences. Unfortunately, some mothers do not really care enough for their children until unwanted pregnancy occurs. The only sex education some give at this time is to tell their girls 'not to go near a boy when she is in her period' (Amakor 2018:87), which may not really mean much to an adolescent.

In view of these inadequacies, the Church should have an important place for parents, especially mothers, in its sexual theology. This theology should ensure that sex education by parents is not limited to the developmental stages in female children's lives but include both sexes in other areas of their lives. It should include issues of the relationship between boys and girls in relation to the subject of sex (Amakor 2018:87). Parents ought to be taught to monitor their children's friendship formations in view of the influence of peers and drug or alcohol as contributory factors in the prevalence of premarital sex, as seen in the previous section. Parents should be reminded to provide adequately for their female children, particularly students, otherwise they 'are exposed to seek financial favours' from sex predators (Ekpenyong & Ekpenyong 2016:81).

All the facts of the Church's sexual theology suggested here should be reflected regularly in sermons, seminars and relevant programmes, with Deuteronomy 22:13–21 as a central text. They should also be incorporated in the manuals of the various groups like the youth, men's and women's fellowships. Where churches have schools and colleges, this theology will be a useful part of their curricula. If all these measures are put in place the youth will be 'motivated to delay sexual debut ... [with] young women accept[ing] the social valuing of virginity' (Matswetu & Bhana 2018:4).

## Conclusion

Deuteronomy 22:13–21 reflects the high premium that used to be placed on female virginity in ancient Israel as in many parts of the world, particularly Africa. In Africa, cultural and religious traditions attached special value and significance to virginity, associating virginity with notions of personal

purity and honour. But there has been a progressive erosion of this virtue in Nigeria, giving way to an increasing rate of premarital sexual activities. Several factors are responsible for this negative attitude towards virginity. Perhaps, the most important one is the silence that surrounds sexuality between parents and children, the effect of which has been the unavailability of sex education to the youth. Another factor is the influence of western culture that introduced, among other things, the idea of intimate friendship between boys and girls, often involving sex. The mass media and Internet have also exposed the youth to sexual material like pornography. Other factors like influence from peer groups and poverty account for reasons why young Nigerian girls forfeit their virginity. Premarital sexual behaviour among young Nigerian men and women comes with inevitable implications, particularly for females. They include unwanted pregnancy and abortion with the social ills associated with them. Many young girls have dropped out of school and had their education truncated. There are also health and psychological effects, including suicide. The article sees the prevalence of premarital sex among Nigerian Christian youth as a challenge to the Church and postulates a sexual theology of the Church in Nigeria in which Deuteronomy 22:13–21 takes a central place. This theology aims at providing sex education to the youth and assisting them to avoid premarital sex. It includes measures to sensitise the youth on the dangers associated with premarital sex and to get them engaged in recreational activities in order to take their minds off sex.

## Acknowledgements

### Competing interests

The author declares that he has no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced him in writing this article.

### Author's contributions

S.O.A. is the sole author of this article.

### Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

### Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

### Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed during this study.

### Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author.

## References

- Adebiyi, A. & Asuzu, M.C., 2009, 'Condom use amongst out of school youths in a Local Government Area in Nigeria', *African Health Sciences* 9(2), 92–97.
- Adekola, P.O., Akanbi, M.A. & Olawole-Isaac, A., 2015, 'A qualitative assessment of the effects of child marriage on female education and entrepreneurship in Northeastern Nigeria', *International Journal of Scientific Research in Multidisciplinary Studies* 2(1), 7–15.
- Ademiluka, S.O., 2013, 'The prohibition of cross-dressing in Deuteronomy 22:5 as a basis for the controversy among churches in Nigeria on female wearing of trousers', *Old Testament Essays* 26(1), 9–19.
- Ademiluka, S.O., 2018, 'Family dysfunction as a basis for corruption in Africa: Seeking a solution in the Book of Proverbs', *Theologia Viatorum: Journal of Theology and Religion in Africa* 42(2), 48–76.
- Ademiluka, S.O., 2019a, 'A study of 2 Samuel 13:1–22 as a solution to intimate partner violence in Nigeria', *Journal for Semitics* 28(2), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.25159/2663-6573/3751>
- Ademiluka, S.O., 2019b, "'For I hate divorce', says the Lord: Interpreting Malachi 2:16 in relation to prohibition of divorce in some churches in Nigeria", *Old Testament Essays* 32(3), 846–868. <https://doi.org/10.17159/2312-3621/2019/v32n3a5>
- Ademiluka, S.O., 2021, 'Reinterpreting Paul's perspective of celibacy in 1 Corinthians 7 in light of singlehood amongst Nigerian Christians', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 42(1), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v42i1.2147>
- Adu-Gyamfi, Y., 2020, 'Corruption of the "powerful" in ancient Judah in Micah 2:1–11 and 3:1–12: An African reflection', *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* 1(2), 86–99. <https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.2020065>
- Agbogbo, A.E. & Igbokwe, B., 2015, 'Gender profiling in Nigeria: The case of the Igbos of southeastern Nigeria', *International Journal of African Society Cultures and Traditions* 2(2), 1–10.
- Agege, E.A., Nwose, E.U., Odjimogho, S. & Igumbor, E.O., 2017, 'Legalities of child marriage in Nigeria: Implications on health and strategies of prevention', *Sex Health Issues* 1(1), 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.15761/SHI.1000105>
- Ajaegbu, O.O., 2015, 'Premarital sex, HIV and use of condom among youths in Nigeria', *Arts and Social Sciences Journal* 6(5), 1–4.
- Akintunde, O.D. & Dairo, A.O., 2011, 'Sexual sin in New Testament times biblical and contextual perspectives in Nigeria', *Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies* 1(1), 33–45.
- Alo, O.A. & Akinde, I.S., 2010, 'Premarital sexual activities in an urban society of southwest Nigeria', *European/American Journals* 2(1), 1–17.
- Amakor, G.O., 2018, 'Unmarried young mothers in south-eastern Nigeria: Attitudes and experiences', PhD thesis, Aston University, Birmingham.
- Amissah, P.K., 2011, 'Justice and righteousness in the prophecy of Amos and their relevance to issues of contemporary social justice in the church in Ghana', PhD dissertation, Kings College, London.
- Ayotamuno, A., 2012, *Virginity: A treasure*, Petra Digital Press, Port Harcourt.
- Azorbo, T.G. & Ufford-Azorbo, I., 2013, 'Female virginity and marital honour as virtuous acts among the Ijaw people in Akpos Adesi's Ebidein-Ere', *Mgbakoigba: Journal of African Studies* 2, 98–104.
- Baldwin, J., 1988, *1 and 2 Samuel: Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, InterVarsity Press, Leicester.
- Cole, M.E., 2013, 'Marriage customs in the Old Testament', Paper presented for REL 120, Introduction to the Old Testament, at Big Sandy Community and Technical College, Prestonsburg, viewed 13 February 2021, from [https://www.2.slideshare.net/ElizabethCole/paper-marriage-customs-in-the-old-testament-pdf?from\\_action=save](https://www.2.slideshare.net/ElizabethCole/paper-marriage-customs-in-the-old-testament-pdf?from_action=save).
- Collins, J.J., 2004, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, Augsburg Fortress, Minneapolis, MN.
- Dooley, C.R., 1999, 'Conservative Christian pre-marital and marital values', Senior thesis, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX.
- Edenburg, C., 2009, 'Ideology and social context of the Deuteronomic women's sex laws (Deuteronomy 22:13–29)', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128(1), 43–46. <https://doi.org/10.2307/25610164>
- Ekpenyong, N.S. & Ekpenyong, A.S., 2016, 'Perceived factors influencing premarital sexual practice among university students in Niger Delta University, Bayelsa State, Nigeria', *Canadian Social Science* 12(11), 79–88.
- Eriksson, E., Lindmark, G., Axemo, P., Haddad, B. & Ahlberg, B.M., 2013, 'Faith, premarital sex and relationships: Are church messages in accordance with the perceived realities of the youth? A qualitative study in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa', *Journal of Religion & Health* 52, 454–466. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-011-9491-7>
- Familusi, O.O., 2012, 'African culture and the status of women: The Yoruba example', *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 5(1), 299–313.
- Feyisetan, B. & Pebley, A.R., 1989, 'Premarital sexuality in urban Nigeria', *Studies in Family Planning* 20(6), 343–354. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1966437>
- Gerstenberger, E.S., 2002, *Theologies in the Old Testament*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN.
- Gill, J., 2017, *The new John Gill exposition of the entire Bible*, viewed 11 December 2017, from <https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/2-samuel-13-19.html>.
- Guzik, D., n.d., *A study guide for Deuteronomy 22*, viewed 13 February 2021, from [https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik\\_david/StudyGuide2017-Deu/Deu-22.cfm](https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-Deu/Deu-22.cfm).
- Havea, J., 2005, 'Stor[y]ing Deuteronomy 22:13–19 in missionary positions', *The Bible and Critical Theory* 1(2), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.2104/bc050003>
- Ikpe, E.B., 2004, 'Human sexuality in Nigeria: A historical perspective', *Africa Regional Sexuality Resource Centre* 2, 1–34.
- Jacobs, S., 2012, 'Terms of endearment? The desirable female captive and her illicit acquisition', in A. Brenner & G.A. Yee (eds.), *Exodus and Deuteronomy*, pp. 237–257, Fortress, Minneapolis, MN.
- Longman, T. & Dillard, R.B., 2006, *An introduction to the Old Testament*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI.
- Mann, T.W., 2011, *The book of the former prophets*, James Clarke & Co., Cambridge.
- Mashau, T.D., 2011, 'Cohabitation and premarital sex amongst Christian youth in South Africa today: A missional reflection', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 67(2), 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v67i2.899>
- Matswetu, V.S. & Bhana, D., 2018, 'Humandara and hujaya: Virginity, culture, and gender inequalities among adolescents in Zimbabwe', *Reproductive Health in Sub-Saharan Africa* 8(2), 2158244018779107. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244018779107>
- McConville, G., 1994, 'Deuteronomy', in D.A. Carson, G.J. Wenham & J.A. Motyer (eds.), *New Bible Commentary*, pp. 198–232, InterVarsity Press, Leicester.
- Meacham, T., 2009, *Legal-religious status of the virgin*, viewed 13 February 2021, from <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/legal-religious-status-of-virgin>.
- Mulya, T.W., 2010, 'Church youth sexuality in Surabaya: Teachings, attitudes, and behaviors', *Anima, Indonesian Psychological Journal* 25(3), 215–224.
- Nagpal, M. & Rao, T.S.S., 2016, 'Virginity – An update on uncharted territory', *Reproductive System & Sexual Disorders* 5(2), 1–3. <https://doi.org/10.4172/2161-038X.1000178>
- Nnazor, A.I. & Robinson, J.P., 2016, 'Virginity rituals and national development: Harnessing a traditional virtue to address modern challenges in Africa', *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 7(1), 155–160. <https://doi.org/10.5901/MS.2016.v7n1s1p155>
- Ntoimo, L.F.C., 2012, 'Prevalence, determinants and consequences of spinsterhood in Lagos, Nigeria', PhD thesis, University of Ibadan.
- Nweneka, C.V., 2007, 'Sexual practices of church youths in the era of HIV/AIDS: Playing the ostrich', *AIDS Care* 19(8), 966–969. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540120701249512>
- Oderinde, O.A., 2013, 'A socio-religious perspective of late marriage and stigmatization of single adults and its impact on the church in Nigeria', *Review of European Studies* 5(4), 165–171. <https://doi.org/10.5539/res.v5n4p165>
- Ojo, M., 2005, 'Religion and sexuality: Individuality, choice and sexual rights in Nigerian Christianity', *Africa Regional Sexuality Resource Centre* 4, 1–16.
- Ojua, T.A., Lukpata, F.E. & Atama, C., 2014, 'Exploring the neglect of African family value systems and its effects on sustainable development', *American Journal of Human Ecology* 3(3), 43–50. <https://doi.org/10.11634/216796221403585>
- Omeike, H.U., 2017, 'A theological retrieval of communal parenting as a moral response to baby stealing and childlessness in Nigeria', M.Th thesis, Saint John's University, Collegeville, MN.
- Onyeocha, A.E., 2014, *The cry of the African widow*, Opanto Productions, Owerri.
- Rogerson, J.W., 2005, *An introduction to the Bible*, Equinox, London.
- Somefun, O.D., 2019, 'Religiosity and sexual abstinence among Nigerian youths: Does parent religion matter?', *Public Health* 19(416), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-019-6732-2>
- Stefick, J., 2020, 'The case of virgin rape: Deuteronomy 22', *Priscilla Papers* 34(1), 1–4.
- Tigay, J.H., 1993, 'Examination of the accused bride in 4Q159: Forensic medicine at Qumran' *JANES* 22, 129–134.
- Tukker, M.E., 2011, 'Sexuality and marriage: Guidelines for the twenty-first century', MA thesis, University of Pretoria.
- Tukker, M.E., 2013, 'Where sexuality and spirituality meet: An assessment of Christian teaching on sexuality and marriage in relation to the reality of 21st century moral norms', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 69(1), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v69i1.1343>
- Waltke, B.K., 1980, 'בתורה', in R.L. Harris, G.L. Archer (Jr.) & B.K. Waltke (eds.), *Theological wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols., p. 137, Moody Publisher, Chicago, IL.
- Woog, V., Singh, S., Browne, A. & Philbin, J., 2015, *Adolescent women's need for and use of sexual and reproductive health services in developing countries*, Guttmacher Institute, New York, NY.
- World Health Organization (WHO), 2002, 'Sexual violence', *World report on violence and health*, pp. 149–181, viewed 07 August 2019, from [https://www.who.int/violence\\_injury\\_prevention/violence/global\\_campaign/en/chap6.pdf](https://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/global_campaign/en/chap6.pdf).