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PREMARITAL SEX – LESSONS FROM AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

All over the world and in most of the current society and culture, most people consider premarital sex acceptable and harmless, but the major problem of premarital is sex that it often leads to divorce. The behavior and emotional problems are much higher in premarital sex situations than in marriages. An attempt is made to delve into the problems involved in premarital sex. The paper also provides some research findings of American experience, pointing out some implications for policy development and for the youth.

Keywords: Youth, Society, Culture, Pre-marital sex, Schools and Colleges.

JEL codes: A22; I12; I22; I28; J13

1. INTRODUCTION

All over the world, in most of the current society and culture, most people consider premarital sex as acceptable and harmless. But is it really so? There are many excuses as to why people believe premarital sex is okay. Premarital sex is all around us: Joe S. McIlhaney, Jr., M.D., president of The Medical Institute for Sexual Health says, "All we really know is that kids are over-exposed to sex. The old Hollywood remedy, 'just turn the channel if you don't like what your kids are seeing,' doesn't work anymore, if it ever did. One thing the study of McIlhaney, Jr. makes clear that sexual imagery and content are finding children and teens everywhere. It's on TV, the Internet, the radio, CDs, movies, and video games. Even if they tried, kids can't escape it." McIlhaney's research showed that "For every hour of television watched by teens, there are, on average, 6.7 scenes including sexual topics, and about 10 percent of these scenes show couples engaged in sexual intercourse." (McIlhaney).

Peer pressure and society says premarital sex okay. Schools say it is acceptable as long as you have "safe sex." It is pleasurable and acceptable, so why wait until marriage? But what does premarital sex do to those who have it, especially in the long run? What does reality prove about premarital sex? (Why Should I Save Sex for Marriage, 2004).

Reality proves different from what you are being taught by media and "safe sex" education. "Contrary to pop-culture wisdom, those who do choose to save sex for marriage are not doomed to a second-class sex life. Rather they typically report higher levels of sexual satisfaction and marital contentment. Moreover, early sexual experience has been linked to marital dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, and greater incidence of Divorce."(Hooten, 2004).

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Hooten, (2004) further stated that "In a sex saturated culture, people began to think that waiting till marriage seems outdated and prudish. Pleasure is the name of the game. But that's not the whole story. In addition to the risk of contracting STDs [sexually transmitted diseases] and AIDS [acquired immunodeficiency syndrome] or getting pregnant, premarital sex leads to emotional distress, distrust, regret, and emptiness. That is because sex connects two people in body and spirit; it is impossible to separate the two."(Sex) Premarital sex always comes with consequences.

So, why do so many people want to have sex before marriage? Here is one excuse. "I need to stay 'well-informed' on how to do it." "But if you take this line of reasoning to its logical conclusion, it follows that the more people you roll in the hay with, the better informed you are...Five partners? Ten? Would fifty be enough? But how many of us really want our spouses that well informed? ...they may become better informed about things they never anticipated – such as venereal diseases."(Morse, 2004) Is it really worth "staying informed?"

Another common excuse for many people is that "I have to have sex to know whether my partner is compatible for me." Research indicates that couples who cohabit before marriage have a 50 percent higher divorce rate than those who don not. These couples also have higher rates of domestic violence and are more likely to be involved in sexual affairs. If a cohabiting couple gets pregnant, there is a high probability that the man will leave the relationship within two years, resulting in a single mom raising a fatherless child. As a matter of fact, people who have sex outside of marriage usually don not wind up marrying each other. People not even thought of getting married because they had sex before marriage. There are many other ways to find out if you are compatible: spending time together getting to know one another through dates and talking to each other, finding out each other's likes, dislikes, passions, beliefs etcetera. Do you really want your future spouse to have tried "finding a compatible partner" by having many different sex partners?

Another excuse is "But we are in love!" True love will wait until marriage so that one can show and give his or her whole and complete self to the one that she or he loves. "Sex is a powerful force that can destroy if not used properly. Like atomic power, sex is the most powerful creative force given to man. When atomic power is used correctly it can create boundless energy; when it is used in the wrong way it destroys life. Sex is the same kind of powerful force... But if you play with this powerful force outside the bounds of marriage, it destroys you and those close to you."(Hanna, 2004) "Your virginity is the most precious thing you have to give to your spouse. Once you lose it, nothing in the world can bring it back. Don't lose something so precious in a thoughtless way."(Hanna, 2004) Save your virginity for your future spouse in marriage.

Yet another common excuse is "But we are getting married." "The possibility always exists that you may for some reason decide against marrying this person. When this happens you have, through sexual involvement, given a part of yourself to someone other

than your spouse, a part you should have saved for your future wife or husband.”(Hornor, 2004).

Also, “If one gives in to moral temptation before marriage, what is there to stop him or her from giving in to moral temptation once married?” If couples cannot control themselves before marriage, which is to say they will be able to control themselves, when they are married, from getting involved with other relationships? “The more promiscuous you are before marriage, the more likely you are to commit adultery after marriage. (The sexually self-indulgent have had no practice in self-restraint.)” Morse (2004) studies show that those who have premarital sex are most likely not to get married and if they do get married; they are more likely to divorce than those who have not had premarital sex. “Columbia University found that ‘only 26 percent of women surveyed and a scant 19 percent of men’ married the person they were living with.

2. COMPARISON

A major problem of premarital sex, that often leads to divorce. It is mainly because, one will always be comparing his or her partner's sex in the past to his or her spouse's sex and his or her spouse will always be worried about performing their sex as good as the last partner's. “Suppose you are sexually active, and do not find the love of your life, and they are your soul-mate, but they are not the best sex you've ever had. If you had nothing to compare them to, they would be the best sex you've ever had because they would be the only sex you've ever had.”(Benefits of abstinence, 2004).

According to Whitmore,(2004) Many marriage problems are related to the fear and jealousy that comes from not being able to forgive and forget that your spouse had had sex with another partner. The one who waited constantly struggles with a fear that their spouse secretly thinks about their past partners. This problem applies to sex partners before marriage as well as infidelity during marriage.

Not only is divorce more likely to occur had there been a premarital sex live-in situation than had there been a monogamous situation, but also abuse is more likely to occur. “Numerous studies have found that physical attacks are clearly much more common and more severe among live-in couples than among those who are married... A study found that 40 percent of cohabiting women were forced to endure a kind of sex they disliked. The U.S. Justice Department found that women are 62 times more likely to be assaulted by a live-in boyfriend than by a husband. Those who cohabit in college have twice the rate of violence and twice the rate of physical abuse than in marriage.” (Psychological reasons not to live together, 2004).

Stats of Washington State University, one of the most noted researchers on the issue of cohabitation found evidence ‘that aggression is at least twice as common among cohabiters as it is among married partners.’ “A survey conducted by the U.S. Justice Department shows that of all crimes against women by their relatives or intimate partners between 1979 and 1987, about 65 percent were committed by either a boyfriend or ex-husband, while only 9 percent were committed by husbands.” (Psychological reasons not to live together, 2004).

“Researchers have found no benefits of cohabitation. Some speculate that cohabitation has harmful effects because it teaches a couple they can have the benefits of marriage without full commitment, which in turn fosters a type of independence that is not compatible with a healthy marriage.” (Psychological reasons not to live together, 2004). Cohabitation results in two independent people, almost like roommates, who have sex, instead of a commitment to one another for the rest of their lives. A final excuse used mostly by the younger crowd who have premarital sex is, “Everybody is doing it and it is safe.” They give in to the peer pressure from those around them so that they can fit in with the crowd.

According to the statistics from “The State of America's Children Yearbook”: 73 percent of all teens say that the reason they engage in sex is due to the social pressure.”(the Children's Defense Fund, 2004) The schools even tell them in their “safe sex” education that it is okay as long as you use condoms and birth control pills. “Despite what you may sometimes hear, there is no abundance of evidence that “dual message” or “comprehensive” programs [those being taught in schools and elsewhere] are effective at preventing teen pregnancies and STDs (McIlhaney,2004).

In fact, there is precious little evidence that these programs are really successful at all. Proponents of dual message programs face the same problems today as they have for many years – and inability to document tangible success in protecting adolescent health. And to whatever extent these programs give young people the impression that “sex is really not a big concern, as long as you ‘protect yourself’, such ideas may even contribute to the problem.” (McIlhaney, 2004).

3. DO CONDOMS PROVIDE SAFE SEX?

They say condoms will protect, however, condoms have very little protection, if any, protection against STDs. “An epidemic of sexually transmitted diseases is striking America's young people. Tragically, the public health establishment seems wed to one primary response—condoms—eventhough the science is telling us this approach has failed... Based on the science and the science alone, there is only one conclusion: condoms do not make sex safe enough.” What is this science? “According to reliable studies, approximately 14 percent of couples using condoms for pregnancy prevention get pregnant during the first year of use. In addition, even with 100 percent use (which is uncommon), condoms at best only reduce the risk (not eliminate it) of STDs.” (McIlhaney, 2004; Whitmore, 2004).

“There is virtually no evidence that condoms reduce the risk of Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) infection at all, though they may slightly decrease the number of people who go on to get warts or cervical cancer.”(McIlhaney, 2004). “If used 100 percent of the time, condoms only reduce the risk of chlamydia and gonorrhoea infection by about half.” Condoms reduce genital herpes by about half too. “If used 100 percent of the time, condoms reduce the risk of HIV transmission by about 85 percent.” “Any risk reduction benefits of condoms, however, is dependant upon correct use of condoms, 100 percent of

the time. Generally speaking, consistent condom use (using a condom every time one has sex) is quite uncommon (McIlhaney, 2004).

Approximately 45 percent of 15 to 19 year old males report using a condom consistently over the past year. And another study revealed that 33 percent of male college students who consistently use condoms were nonetheless exposed to STD risk due to condom breakage or slippage, or incorrect use." Also, the more a male has sex with the same partner, the less he or she uses a condom with that partner whether he or she does or does not know if his or her partner has an STD. (McIlhaney, 2004).

Dr McIlhaney says this to America's parents: "...if condoms are not used 100 percent of the time it is little or no better than not using a condom at all, ever? If America's parents knew the facts...we know they would agree with us: their children need to hear that the only way to protect themselves from a sexually transmitted disease that can have lifelong, physically and emotionally painful ramifications, is to abstain from sexual activity."(McIlhaney,2004).

Another form (becoming more and more common) of having "safe sex" is to take a birth control pill. Birth control pills may stop those who take it from getting pregnant; however the pills do not protect against STDs, including HIV/AIDS. It is also less effective if it is not taken every day and/or if it is taken with other drugs. There are side effects to it also - at least when you first begin taking the pills - such as nausea, weight gain or water retention, irregular bleeding, or breast tenderness. And there is always a raised risk of heart attacks and strokes (the Pill oral contraceptives, 2004).

Society is becoming more and more aware of the need for abstinence to be taught in schools instead of "safe sex" because there is no "safe sex" outside of marriage. Many doctors are in support of it, "Abstinence education is finding support among a growing number of medical doctors."(Jordahl, 2004).

According to Jordahl (2004), Frederic Brown and McIlhaney are two of the many doctors who are promoting abstinence before marriage as the only truly "safe sex." "In the 1980s, I practiced permissive sexual advice,' Brown said. 'I had the feeling that teenagers would inevitably be sexually active and recommended birth control pills and condoms.' What changed his mind? 'The facts,' Brown said. 'I didn't realize until the mid-'90s that the scientific facts showed that condoms were not effective.' Brown is one of more than 20,000 physicians who now believe that abstinence is the only answer to a sexually transmitted disease epidemic.

McIlhaney, who heads the Medical Institute for Sexual Health, said there is really no other option. 'If condoms don't work, and there is no other protection for sexually active unmarried people, then that means their choice to avoid these diseases is to remain sexually abstinent,' 'That's a medical statement.'"(Jordahl, 2004).

President Bush Action:

The government also shows some support in the area of abstinence programs. President Bush said this at this year's State of the Union Address: To encourage right choices, we must be willing to confront the dangers young people face even when they are difficult to talk about. Each year, about three million teenagers contract sexually transmitted diseases that can harm them, or kill them, or prevent them from ever becoming parents. In my budget, I propose a grassroots campaign to help inform families about these medical risks. We will double Federal funding for abstinence programs, so schools can teach this fact of life: Abstinence for young people is the only certain way to avoid sexually transmitted diseases. Decisions children make now can affect their health and character for the rest of their lives. All of us—parents, schools, government—must work together to counter the negative influence of the culture, and to send the right messages to our children. (The State of the Union Address, 2004).

The government has helped in the funding of abstinence education programs, and hopefully will continue. If the young generation of America can be taught that premarital sex is truly not safe and free from consequences, then maybe there will be fewer with STDs and unplanned pregnancies that usually lead to abortion.

You may be thinking that sexually transmitted diseases are not that big of a deal compared to the thrill that you get out of a night of sex. So many people do not think of what the future holds when they give into premarital sex. What if in that one night of sex you contracted the HIV virus and that virus turned into AIDS and controlled your life until it eventually took it?

Research shows that "Three to four million STDs are contracted yearly by 15 to 19 year olds, and another five to six million STDs are contracted annually by 20 to 24 year olds." "It is clear that if and when young people begin sexual activity prior to marriage, they are at very high risk of acquiring an STD. In fact, age of sexual onset is a very strong predictor of the lifetime number of sexual partners. And an individual's risk of ever having contracted a sexually transmitted disease is strongly linked to his or her lifetime number of sexual partners." Now you ask, "what are these sexually transmitted diseases and how life threatening are they?" The most life threatening is the HIV, which is a virus that invades the human immune system and begins destroying it (McIlhane, 2004).

4. RESEARCH

In most people, HIV leads to AIDS and will eventually destroy the immune system so that it cannot fight anything from a common cold to cancer. This STD is painful and deadly and has no cure; doctors can only give drugs to prolong the life of a person with HIV/AIDS. It can also be passed on from a pregnant mother to her baby. "The CDC [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] estimates that there are currently 800,000 to 900,000 Americans living with HIV infection. About a fourth of these people don't know they are infected.

Approximately 320,000 Americans currently have AIDS, almost half a million Americans have died from AIDS since the beginning of the epidemic." "A study of sexually active college women showed that 43 percent acquired HIV infection within a 3 year period." The most common STD is genital herpes or the herpes simplex virus (HSV). It "infects the skin and mucous membranes (mouth, genital areas, etc.) of humans." It is another painful virus with no cure that can come and go for life; there are only treatments to help ease the pain.(McIlhaney,2004).

A person with HSV, has more of a chance of contracting HIV and if a woman has it, she can also pass it to her baby. "Genital herpes is the most common sexually transmitted viral infection in the United States, with an estimated 45 million people infected. This is over one in five Americans age 12 or over...In addition, one million people acquire genital herpes infection each year in the United States." The (HPV) is similar to the HSV with genital warts that attack the skin and mucous membranes. Five to six million are infected with it every year and there is no cure. It "can develop into cervical cancer. In fact, cervical cancer occurs in approximately 13,000 women every year in the United States, and kills almost 5,000 women yearly. HPV is the primary cause of over 99 percent of cervical cancers."(McIlhaney, 2004).

Chlamydia and gonorrhea are the two most common bacterial STDs. Many times a person can have no symptoms and so not knowing that they have it pass it on to others. Both can develop into pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) which can be severe and life threatening. This can be very painful and cause infertility. These are a selected few of the horrible sexually transmitted diseases. Vaginal sex is not the only way these diseases are contracted. They can also be contracted through oral sex and, depending on the disease, through bodily fluids. They can all be prevented, almost 100 percent, by both spouses waiting until marriage to have sex (McIlhaney,2004).

5. PROBLEMS OF PREMARITAL SEX IN USA

Another problem that results in premarital sex is unplanned pregnancies. Here are a few stunning statistics from "The State of America's Children Yearbook" about unplanned pregnancies. "Every 26 seconds a baby is born to an unmarried mother."(Children's) "In a 24 hour time period, 2795 teenager girls will become pregnant."(Children's) "1,106 teenagers have abortions every day."(Children's) The CDC estimates, "Some 11 percent of teenage girls between the ages of 15 and 19 become pregnant each year, accounting for approximately 1 million pregnancies."(Benoit,2004).

McIlhaney claims that "Even though the pregnancy rate among teens has declined, today, 78 percent of teen births are out –of- wedlock, compared to 15 percent in 1960. These out-of-wedlock births contribute to poverty, crime, and negative outcomes for children including physical and emotional health problems, and educational failure." "In 1995, 65 percent of families with children headed by a never married single parent were living in poverty." "White infants born to unmarried mothers are 70 percent more likely to die in infancy. Black infants born to unmarried mothers are 40 percent more likely to die." "Living in a single parent family approximately doubles the likelihood that a child will become a high school dropout."(McIlhaney,2004).

“Boys raised in a single parent home are twice as likely to commit a crime that leads to incarceration by their early thirties.” These are sad statistics that are derived from unplanned pregnancies and single parenting; yet such happenings can be prevented by waiting for sex within marriage (McIlhaney,2004).

If the rampant spreading of STDs and millions of unwanted pregnancies a year and the fact that condoms and birth control pills do not always protect you from these does not make you want to abstain from sex until marriage, then maybe the psychological and emotional effects of premarital sex will.

“When two people become ‘one flesh’ in a sexual relationship...a bonding occurs between them. If, after they become sexually involved, one partner severs the relationship against the wishes of the other, the separation has a wrenching effect, especially for the jilted person, who is left feeling mentally and emotionally burned.”(Hornor,2004) When two people have sex there is a powerful and significant bond that takes place. Psychologist Jess Lair of Montana State.

“Sexual bonding includes powerful emotional, psychological, physical, and spiritual links that are so strong that two people become one, at least for a moment. Sexual intercourse is an intense, though brief physical bonding that leaves indelible marks on the participants...To believe one can walk away from a sexual experience untouched is dangerously naïve.”(The Benefits of Chastity before Marriage,2004).

The mystery of two becoming one has been fascinating since the beginning of time. “Recent research may have discovered the psychological basis for this deep bonding – a hormone called oxytocin. This hormone is released in both women and men during sexual orgasm. It promotes an attachment between two individuals that is likely to grow with each sexual exchange.”(The Benefits of Chastity before Marriage,2004).

It is impossible to think that you will not be affected emotionally and psychologically if you have premarital sex whether it be with one or two people or fifteen or fifty people. “Many people need to work on reconnecting their sex life to their emotions once they are in a marriage relationship because it has been damaged by past promiscuity...a partner who finds him/herself frequently remembering past partners who may have been better in bed can cause guilt or conflicting emotions which will erode a marriage.”(The Benefits of Abstinence,2004; The Medical Institute for Sexual Health,2004).

Both men and women feel the heavy regret of losing their virginity. “When a woman has a casual sexual relationship, later she will often regret it...By holding fast to her virginity, a girl will, in the long run, win the respect of many males.” “In addition to their [men's] own later feelings of guilt for having used young women, they often find it hard to build and maintain a long-term relationship with one other person. A man will never be the same in the sense that he has surrendered a part of himself that he should have reserved for his bride.”(Hornor, 2004).

Sex is not as satisfying within marriage when those married have had premarital sex. "Once they have devalued their respect for each other through premarital sex before marriage, rarely can they find the same attraction and respect shared by couples who marry without premarital sex."(Hornor).

A poll taken by the Family Research Council in 2002 "found that 72 percent of all married 'traditionalists' (those who 'strongly' believe out of wedlock sex is wrong) report high sexual satisfaction. This is...roughly 31 percentage points higher than the level registered by unmarried 'non-traditionalists' (those who have no or only some objection to sex outside of marriage) and 13 percentage points higher than that registered by married 'non-traditionalists,'" It also "found that strictly monogamous women experienced orgasm during sex more than twice as often as promiscuous women."(Morse, 2004).

The behavior and emotional problems are much higher in premarital sex situations than in marriages. A study from Pediatrics says, "of 1500 girls studied, nonvirgin girls were 2.5 times more likely to have used alcohol than virgins, 6.2 times more likely to have smoked marijuana, and 4.3 times more likely to have been arrested or picked up by police." "The Medical Tribune reports that 'Sexual matters often predominate among the risk factors for adolescent depression and suicide.'"(Psychological reasons not to live together, 2004).

"Sexually active unmarried women are almost four times more likely to be under psychiatric care." "Cohabiting women have rates for depression three times higher than married women." "Unmarried people, in general [are not] as happy than those who are married. They tend to get sick more often and die younger."(Psychological reasons not to live together, 2004).

6. CONCLUSION

Sex may not affect a person physically with a STD or an unplanned pregnancy, but it will almost always affect a person emotionally and psychologically. Diseases, cancer, unplanned pregnancies, shame, guilt, adultery, divorce, impotence, etcetera - who would want to miss out on these? My guess would be that most people would not want these in their life. Am I right? These are all results of premarital sex. Do not sell yourself short for the little bit of excitement in having sex before marriage. Wait! And it will be extraordinarily better than if you had not. "True love waits. If a boy or girl truly loves you, they will want the best for you. They will not want you to suffer fear of disease, unwanted pregnancy and the psychological difficulties of premarital sex. They will want to experience love with you only in the very best place of all – the love nest of marriage."(Hanna, 2004).

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