

MASTURBATION IN HIGH FIELD SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF HARARE, ZIMBABWE: A YOUTH CHALLENGE, REFLECTION AND SUGGESTED BIBLICAL RESPONSES

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ABSTRACT

Masturbation appears to be a growing challenge among today's youths with many seeking professional counselling in a bid to find solutions to curb the vice. Despite the fact that many are battling masturbation addiction, questions have been raised regarding the biblical premise upon which masturbation is considered a sin. However, these questions have been met with an apparent dearth in literature. It is in this light that this study analyses the scriptural basis for discouraging masturbation. The study argues that while there seems to be no explicit reference to masturbation in the Scriptures, there is implicit evidence that discourages the act. To validate this assertion, the study characterizes masturbation and its effects before providing biblical texts that circumstantially discuss masturbation. Different ways through which one can overcome masturbation are provided.

KEYWORDS: *Masturbation, Bible Responses, Abstinence, Youth, Counselling.*

PURPOSE: Whereas masturbation amongst the secondary school students in High field location of Harare, Zimbabwe is a challenge, the paper seeks to document the factors prompting youths to engage in this practice. It will attempt to explore the signs and symptoms as well as the consequences of masturbation. Above all the study will unpack the biblical principles on preventing, mitigation and managing the challenge of masturbation in an endeavor to reclaim some youths involved in the practice as well as to help others to completely abstain from the practice.

FINDINGS: Findings revealed that young people's feelings and knowledge about masturbation were caused by a developmental process. The process includes amassing knowledge about the act of masturbation and implementing it. Some youths need to explore the pleasure attached to it. It was discovered that most young people learnt the act through friends and social media. While both males and females indulge in masturbation, it is generally the males who engage in it more.

1. INTRODUCTION

In various youth gatherings organized by the Seventh-day Adventist church in its territorial region of North Zimbabwe Conference, the subject of masturbation features prominently. Young people from both sexes who are mostly secondary school students approach pastors for counseling on various issues of which masturbation addiction is one of them. From anecdotal evidence emanating from direct conversations with the youths at churches and secondary schools as well as fellow ministers of religion, it can be inferred that masturbation is a widespread practice among young people. Amongst the many definitions of masturbation, has been conceptualized

masturbation as one form of sexual behavior in human beings, which has come to be regarded as an appropriate sexual outlet for them. Perhaps this is the reason why some youths request bible-based responses that discourage the practice of masturbation. Since the bible is not explicit about the practice of masturbation, some youths assume that the practice should be regarded as a legitimate method towards the attainment of sexual pleasure. However, this paper argues that masturbation is not a legitimate avenue for sexual release. Further exploration of the discussion in this paper will make this more apparent.

The research is based on the assumption that the incidence and prevalence of masturbation among the youth in the schools and churches is on the rise, therefore there is need to generate scriptural response to deal with the challenge. With several young people seeking counseling, it is imperative to conduct this research so that the strategies proffered to address the challenges of masturbation be based on empirical evidence. The research seeks to expose the negative effects of masturbation, showing harmful effects of masturbation and its consequent challenges and recommend some effective strategies of dealing with masturbation among the youths.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews related literature on signs and symptoms of masturbation and etiology (how and where studies assume it started). A close analysis on the effects of masturbation will be conducted, especially on the four aspects which include physical, mental, psychological and social effects.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF MASTURBATION

Studies have shown that there is a plethora of signs that indicate that one is accustomed to masturbating. Some of the signs of masturbation include, but not limited to paleness, dark circles under the eyes, excessive tiredness and faintness, drowsiness, memory loss, anxiety, depression, anger, trembling of the parts of body and despair (Kochetkov, 1990) [1].

ETIOLOGY

The masturbation challenge, which was and is done in secret, seems to have begun in the Western culture since around the 1800 (Thomas 2003) [2]. Cook (2009) [3] also believes that masturbation started in the European Cultural politics during the 18th century. He further termed it as the Onanism panic, which gripped Western Europe in 1712, and it developed when pleasure was somehow legitimized in intellectual discourse. Ellen GW (1977) [4] adds that, "Some children begin to practice self-pollution in their infancy; as they increase in years, the lustful passions grow with their growth and strengthen with their strength" (Ellen GW, 1977) [4]. This will cause the debasement of young people's minds as addiction slowly takes its toll on them.

EFFECTS OF MASTURBATION

While there have been a lot of debates on the positive effects of masturbation, the paper focuses on the numerous side effects of the practice with the view of preferring biblical based solutions to the 'challenge' of masturbation among the youth. Maulana and Madrasah, (1996) [5], Islamic scholars, believe that the effects of masturbation may range from religious, physical, psychological and social harms. Several scholar's effects of masturbation. Studies conducted in Europe found that some of the side effects of masturbation include, blindness, pallor, faintness, headache, epilepsy, insanity, and even death (Thomas, 2003 [2]). The dangers of the masturbation can be put in the four categories discussed below

a. SPIRITUAL DAMAGES

Youths engaging in masturbation risk developing highly corrupted mindsets; hard-heartedness, an aversion towards people and cheerlessness in the heart (Maulana and Madrasah, 1996) [5]. According to Ellen GW (1954) [6] the secret vice is the destroyer of high resolve, earnest

endeavor and strength of will to form a good religious character. This will compromise perceived followers of Christ from faithfully serving their master.

b. PHYSICAL DAMAGES

There seems to be a general consensus in literature that masturbation weakens sexual organs and the nerves (Maulana and Madrasah, 1996) [5]; affects the growth of the limbs; creates seminal (spermatic) inflammation in the testicles, which causes premature ejaculation; creates weakness in the cerebral glands of the brain, which, in turn, weakens the power of perception and reason. Ultimately, this leads to a weakened memory. Shakarey et al (2011) [7] adds that masturbation leads to weakness of physical power, poor vision, damages to the sexual organs (premature ejaculation) and impotence.

c. MENTAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DAMAGES

Ellen GW (1954) [6] takes the view that masturbation debases the mind if young people engage in it. She further acknowledges that the vital forces of the body system will be destroyed among the young since, “the vital capital, the brain, is so severely taxed at an early age that there is a deficiency and great exhaustion which leaves the system exposed to disease of various kinds” (Ellen GW, 1989) [8]. If an individual does excessive masturbation, he may end up insane (Umair, 2018) [9]. According a study by Dr. Richard (1995) [10], masturbation has been linked to several negative mental effects namely, mental, moral and physical deterioration, breaking down of the finer and sensitive of the nervous system. He also argues that there is a possibility of masturbation being a condition that can be passed on to the next generation through social and cultural practices.

d. Social Damages

One can argue that masturbation leads to severe feelings of loneliness and causes one to become anti-social. The social and behavioral science article suggested that a person’s social and human identity will be weakened and the society deprived from a young and creative person. When such things happen, the youth may encounter various challenges with his family and the society at large.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research employed a mixed methods research design which is a combination of quantitative and qualitative methodological elements. A mixed method study involves the collection or analysis of both quantitative and/or qualitative data in a single study in which the data are collected concurrently or sequentially, are given a priority, and involve the integration of the data at one or more stages in the research process (Umair, 2018) [9]. The mixed methods approach helps the researcher answer questions that cannot be answered using only qualitative or qualitative methods alone. Mixed methods provide a more complete picture by noting trends and generalizations as well as in-depth knowledge of participants’ perspectives.

The study was conducted in High field residential suburb in Harare. The population of the study included five secondary schools namely, Mukai Secondary School, High field High 1 School, High field High 2 School, Mhuriimwe Secondary School, and Kwayedza Secondary School and the school teachers of each of these schools. Each of the schools has six grades that is form 1 to form 6. The five secondary schools are government schools under the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in Zimbabwe. The five schools have a combined enrolment of eight thousand two hundred (8200) pupils. Non-probability and probability sampling methods were used in the study. The secondary schools were selected for the study using purposive sampling as they are the only public schools in the High field area. The school teachers were purposively selected,

where a teacher for each grade from each school was selected for the study. Therefore, 6 teachers were selected from each, in total, 30 teachers were selected and interviewed for the study. A sample size of 400 pupils was selected for the study. According to Gay (1987) for a population range of 5000-10000 respondents, a sample size of 3% is appropriate. For this study, a sample size of 400 is 4.8% of the population which is more than the recommended sample size. The grades were used as strata for the study. Each strata comprised of two grades from each school. Form 1 and Form 2 formed a strata, form 3 and form 4 formed another strata and form 5 and form 6 formed the final strata. A total of 30 pupils were systematically selected from strata of form 1 and form 2 and form 3 and form 4 from each of the five schools. The pupils comprised an equal number of males and females. A total of 20 pupils were systematically selected for the form 5 and form 6 strata. For all the 5 schools the form 1 to form 4 grades have the most students compared to the form 5 and six grades. Data were collected using questionnaire survey and focus group discussions. A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed according to the strata specified. Pupils for the focus group discussion were purposive selected from pupils who had been selected through the first stage of sampling. Ten pupils were selected for the focus group discussion in each strata from each school.

The data analyzed using qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic and content analysis. Where themes were developed based on the questions asked and coded. Quantitative data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel to produce descriptive statistics in form of charts, tables and graphs for analysis.

A study of this nature was sensitive because it involved a theme on sexuality among minors. According to Zimbabwean Laws any person below the age of 18 years is considered a minor and cannot be exposed to certain issues with the consent of an adult or a higher authority. In order to gain entry into the research setting and conduct research with minors, the researcher applied for ethical clearance from the Adventist University in Africa where he is a Doctor of Ministry student, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in Zimbabwe which is the parent ministry for primary and secondary schools and the school authorities. The ethics clearance application specified the purpose and objectives of the research and methodology to be used. Most importantly it explained that the researcher, after being granted permission, would seek the consent from the pupils to be interviewed and also would protect the identity of the pupils by using code names and pseudonyms instead of their real names. Further, the researcher assured the respective authorities and respondents that the data collected would solely for academic purposes only.

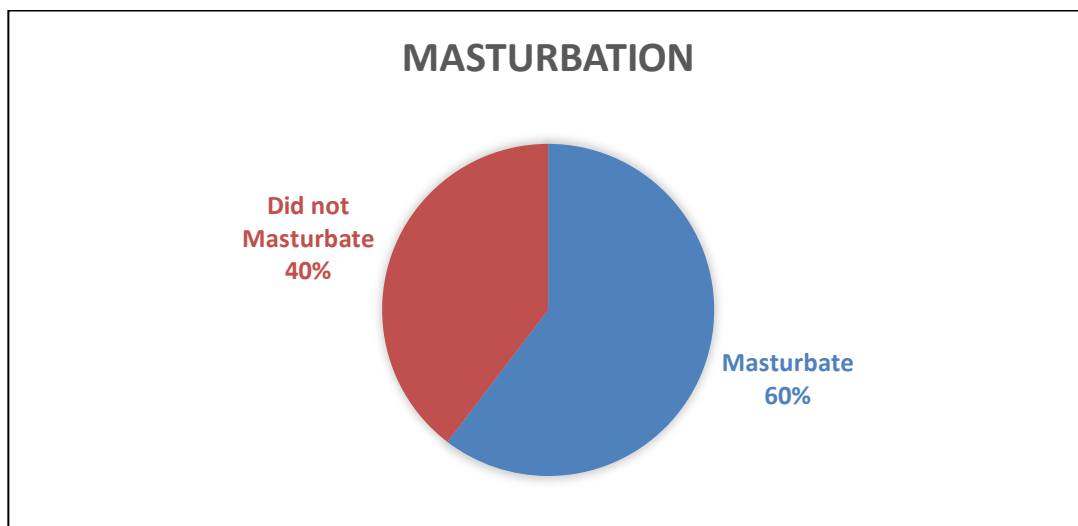
4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study was conducted in five secondary schools in High field suburb of Harare. High field is one of the oldest suburbs in Harare and Zimbabwe. High field was established in the 1930's by the then Southern Rhodesia Colonial Government as a suburb to house the black labourers for the Willowvale industrial area. After independence in 1980 High field has continued to grow in terms of population. Like most neighborhoods in developing countries, High field has a wide population pyramid base, comprised of the youthful population below the age of 30 years. Children and youths with ages ranging from 13 years to 21 comprise the largest population group. Where there is rapid population growth and incidences of urban poverty, morale decay is bound to happen. Sexual immorality and drug abuse are among the vices experienced in High field. As such, in an attempt to understand the motive behind the sexual activities among young people, the study looked at the issue of masturbation among students at 5 secondary schools in High field. Out of the 400 questionnaires distributed to pupils in the six grades that is form 1 to form 6 in the 5 secondary schools in High field, 270 questionnaires (67%) were completed and returned for analysis. The remaining 130 questionnaires were either not returned or returned incomplete, so they were discarded from analysis.

The school teachers indicated that masturbation was identified as one of the most common activities that push students to engage in sex. The school teachers indicated that the form 1 to form 6 pupils ages range from 13 years to 18 years. It is during these teenage years that pupils begin to develop and mature sexually. It is also the same age that pupils in this age range begin to be curious about sex and their sexuality. The teachers highlighted that during these ages, in order to feed their curiosity, the pupils tend to explore directly or indirectly sexual issues. Directly through learning about reproduction through the education curriculum, social and religious teachings. However, the cause for concern was among the teachers was print and electronic media which the teachers or the parents could not control. The pupils were exposed to a lot of sexual content in electronic media like internet based pornographic websites and social media. Moreover, the pupils were watching a lot of films with sexually explicit content. Peer pressure was also highlighted as one of the leading causes of masturbation and premarital sex among the school children in High field.

The findings from the student’s questionnaire survey revealed that 60% of the students were engaging in masturbation as shown in figure 1 below. Masturbation was more prevalent among male pupils than female pupils. This exercise is a vehicle that drives teenagers to experiment with sex as some indicated that there came a time, they felt the need to experience the physical sexual act with a female or male partner. In an interview with one of the boys, he stated that;

Figure 1: The Percentage showing the students who engage in Masturbation



Source: Research Findings (2020)

“I masturbate because I feel like having sex but I cannot have sex because my girlfriend always tells me that we cannot do it before marriage, so I will be helping myself...”

The researcher observed that one of the reasons behind masturbation among adolescents is the need to experiment with their bodies which later leads to sexual encounters. During an interview with one of the pupils, it was revealed that some masturbate after taking sex enhancers. He said that;

“I took the silver bullet pill one day because I wanted to see if what some of my friends were telling me was true. Then I started having this intense feeling of engaging in sexual intercourse. After a long time, I then decided to use masturbation as a solution to deal with the strong sexual urge. After that experience, I never stopped masturbating.”

Profile Age of Respondents

Gender		Percentage
Female	145	54%
Male	125	46%

The table above showed the number and percentage of the profile of the respondents and five secondary schools. From the table there are 54% females and 46 % male respondents. This automatically shows that there are more girls who participated in the study than boys. The table below shows which gender participated more in sexual activities.

TABLE 1. GENDER PARTICIPATION IN SEXUAL ACTIVITIES

Sexual Activity	Male	Female	Total
Premarital Sex	57	42	99
Masturbation	113	49	162
Viewing Pornography	199	54	253
Kissing	177	68	245
Sexual romancing	195	59	254
Intimate Hugging	172	84	256

The responses from the questionnaires indicated that some students had engaged in more than one immoral activity. From the table above, one would wonder why females who participated more than males have the low prevalence in the sexual activities than boys. One author suggested that females have more negative attitudes towards sexual activities, such as shame and guilt compared to males and are less likely to engage in premarital sex as well as sex with non-regular partners (De Martino, 1999) [11].

The table below shows the relationship between Peer influence and premarital sexual intercourse amongst boys and girls at secondary schools in High field. The percentage rates for both boys and girls were taken from the questionnaire responses.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PEER INFLUENCES ON MASTURBATION

Variable	Boys	Girls
Peer Influence	70%	30%

The responses from the questionnaires indicated the results on the table above showing the significant relationship between peer influence and premarital sexual intercourse. The findings indicated that peer influence propelled masturbation and premarital sexual intercourse. The study indicated that the boys were more exposed to masturbation than the girls. The analysis has shown that the boys may have the urge to gain skills and sexual contentment.

Biblical Response to Masturbation

The bible appears not to have direct scriptures that directly address the vice of masturbation. Nevertheless, there are quite a number of related passages and biblical principles, which discourages young people from conducting masturbation. The paper submits that masturbation is contrary to biblical teachings.

Jesus Christ during his ministry with his disciples condemned lustful thoughts (Matt 5:27—30), which also includes this act. Masturbation can be committed when someone has thoughts that are not palatable with true Christian principles. The actions leading to the act are sinful and also of lustful thoughts, sexual stimulations and of pornographic images. One author argued that if sins linked to this act as in lust, immoral thoughts and pornography are forsaken to overcome masturbation will then become easier (John, 2013) [12].

Apostle Paul's writings appear to concur with the above assertion as he advises that there should not be found any hint of sexual immorality or any kind of impurity. The Bible also encourages people to glorify God in everything they do (1 Cor 10:31). It can be contended that when one is in the act of masturbation, it is difficult to glorify God. The bible adds that if anything is not inspired by faith is a sin (Rom 14:23). In fact, an individuals' body is a temple of God who dwells in it (1 Cor 6:19-20), and therefore there is nowhere we can be allowed to abuse the temple of the God.

The Scriptures make reference to a number of sins that may make one lose heaven and sexual where masturbation falls under are among those sins. The Bible notes that, "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind" (1 Cor 6:9). Such words as self-abuse can be likened with the word masturbation since an individual will conduct the act not in public but alone and to oneself.

While many scriptural passages do mention the sins of sexual impurity and sexual immorality and encouraging people to avoid them by all means, there is no direct or explicit reference to masturbation. The fact that masturbation is not explicitly referred to as such does not nullify it as a sin before the Lord.

Whereas the Apostle Paul mentioned that sexual immorality should be strictly avoided (1 Thes 4:3-7) since two or more people may conduct the act, the researcher is of the view that when someone is in the act of masturbation, he will be having imaginations in the mind. Paul once wrote saying, "Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more" (Eph 4:19). So, there is a continual lust for more. For the true sex addict who may have sex or masturbate more than once a day, such a person reaches a point where an erection cannot be maintained even during masturbation. There will be a continual lust for more.

Some biblical references can be used to respond to such questions asked on why masturbation is wrong. Masturbation cannot be a gift of God for single people and it is not a prevention for sexual crimes but is indulging the flesh, which leads to sin-slavery (John 8:34). The vice may cause the victim to live life according to the dictates of flesh therefore becoming the slave of sins of the body (Rom 8:13). The book of Romans pointed such other acts, which may include masturbation as high expressions of loving self and of sexual self-idolatry. "Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness. When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness" (Rom 6:19-20). Youths need not to offer their parts of their body to sin as this will lead them to become slaves to sin instead of being slaves of the cross.

Masturbation fixes the mind on the desires of the flesh, and burns the image of nudity and sex into the mind. With each occurrence of masturbation, that image becomes clearer and more intense, and can become a tool of the devil to set up a thought-stronghold (2 Cor 3:1-5). So the Apostle Paul emphasized this notion when he said, "So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom 8:8).

Other Biblical examples include, "If a man has an emission of semen, he shall bathe his whole body in water and be unclean until the evening. And every garment and every skin on which the semen comes shall be washed with water and be unclean until the evening (Lev 15:16-17). Then Judah said to Onan, "Go in to your brother's wife and perform the duty of a brother-in-law to her, and raise up offspring for your brother." But Onan knew that the offspring would not be his. So whenever he went in to his brother's wife he would waste the semen on the ground, so as not to give offspring to his brother. And what he did was wicked in the sight of the Lord, and he put him to death also (Genesis 38:8-10).

We see at one-time God speaking to Moses and Aaron, saying, “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, when any man has a discharge from his body, his discharge is unclean. And this is the law of his uncleanness for a discharge: whether his body runs with his discharge, or his body is blocked up by his discharge, it is his uncleanness. Every bed on which the one with the discharge lies shall be unclean, and everything on which he sits shall be unclean. And anyone who touches his bed shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water and be unclean until the evening (Leviticus 15:1-33)

Ways to overcome Masturbation

Most human communities experience the challenge of masturbation. Rachel (2019) suggested that majority of people have participated in the act once or twice or even more. Cohut (2021) pointed that masturbation is a normal healthy sexual activity enjoyed by a large proportion of people. In response to this, there are many proposed ways to avoid masturbation. Amongst various tips of avoiding masturbation, New Health Advisor (2019) suggested that the victims need to have the right mindset and a commitment to stop the behavior. The results of one study showed that sex education had an effective role on healthy behaviors, sound sexual behavior, mental health and prevention of sexual disorders, healthy life style and appropriate sex identity. So sex education need to be planned and implemented in wider forums.

Physical exercises may help in preventing masturbation and various immoral behaviors. The affected youth need to program enough time for exercising such as swimming, hiking and various other physical activities among others (Biyabangard, 1999) [13]. Quality and enough sleep are recommended in order to prevent this challenge (Paknejad, 1970) [14]. Neelman and Persud (1995) [15] advised that deep further scriptural studies can uplift the spirituality of the youth, ultimately preventing this aberrant behavior. The youth members are advised to inculcate themselves with a sense of prevention from masturbating (Creswell, 2006) [16]. He further mentioned that if the affected want to fight with this unpleasant habit, they should first picture the negative consequences as well as picturing the advantages and benefits of giving up this habit in their mind. In other words, young people should always have a sense of responsibility regarding the health of their body and mind. [17, 18,19]

The researcher concurs with an article which suggested that one needs to strengthen his or her willpower and avoid spending time alone. There are so many other ways to prevent from masturbating and as space constrains, we just mention some of them: Marriage, awareness of parents, hydropath and abstention from watching bad movies, which can catalyze the unwanted behavior. [20, 21, 22]

5. CONCLUSION

The discussion of this paper has shown that the scriptures discourage masturbation. Therefore, masturbation qualifies to be regarded a sexual vice that should be avoided at all costs. Paul once said he could do all things through Christ who gives him strength (Phil 4:13). Jeremiah wrote calling people to call the powerful lord who can give them power to stop this unacceptable act (Jer 33:3). Those who are still committing this act are also given another chance to abstain from this act and they can be forgiven and thereby starting a new page with the Lord (Acts 17:30). Paul admonishes us about our thinking when he says, “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things” (Phil 4:8-9). Thus the youths should choose to please the Lord by offering their bodies as a living sacrifice rather than pleasing themselves through masturbation.

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