

**Discover News-sheet  
for colleagues in Africa  
July 2020**



**Sex and Gender: Challenges and Recommendations**

Dear Friends

During the corona crisis domestic violence and sexual abuse have increased. Robert Bwambale says that in Maliba village where he lives, 36 schoolgirls have become pregnant.

That is bad news. It is bad news for the girl; now she must care for her child instead of being educated. It is bad news for the child to be born, who in most cases must grow up without a father. It is bad news for Uganda; there are now more mouths to feed and more demand on resources, such as trees. And it is bad for the climate crisis that affects the whole world –more land must be devoted to housing and, because through daily living each person contributes more carbon dioxide to the atmosphere, global warming will get worse.

Many pregnancies arose out of desperation. Many families have suffered severe hunger. “Food for sex” was a solution out of desperation. Families in Uganda, on the other hand, who had been trained by Discover partners in organic farming and natural healthcare, have coped through the crisis. This provides the strongest possible affirmation of how important this training is.

Family planning is an urgent issue.

In 2018 I visited a village in Uganda. There were women and very many children, but few men to be seen.

I asked, how is this possible? Are virgin births a regular occurrence here? I was told that the men spend most of their time elsewhere, sometimes in Kampala looking for work, sometimes drinking beer nearby, but playing little or no part in working in the home or garden or caring for the children. The men do return from time to time, and when they return, they demand food and sex. The next day they may leave again.

There are many other situations in which women are abused. To pass their examinations at school or to be given a job, teachers and employers may demand sex. Older men who pay school fees may demand sex without a condom. Some girls are even anxious about going to the outside toilet or to collect water from the well for fear of being attacked and raped.

It is no surprise that the incidence of HIV is still high.

I do not intend to condemn all men – but there is too much truth in what I have written for the behaviour of many men to be ignored. I am told that a man is held in high regard if he has many children with several women. And a woman is only a proper woman if she bears many children.



I visited a village in Uganda. There were women and children everywhere, but not many men to be seen. Where were they?

I am also told that, in many homes, the woman is a slave to the man. The wife has no say in matters concerning family planning or even what happens in the home.

Is this situation acceptable?

Young women have other challenges. When menstruation begins, if they have no sanitary pads, they must miss one week of school very month, or drop out of school altogether. Today it is generally accepted that countries climb out of poverty when women, and therefore mothers, are educated.

Further, women who have been raped may be rejected by their families, even though the blame should lie with the male rapist.

If a girl or woman becomes pregnant against her will, what are her options? Many evangelical churches and the Catholic church take the so-called “moral high ground” and say that it is a terrible sin to have an abortion. This is compounded by prevailing attitudes in the community. What is the alternative? Where abortion is strongly condemned, there are more secret abortions, resulting in injury and even the death of many women. What is the solution? Compassion must take precedence over principles, especially principles declared by men!

In 2018, the average number of births per woman in Uganda was 5.0. In Germany it was 1.6! Such a high birth-rate has consequences. Could it mean that Uganda will have a young, dynamic workforce? I fear that is wishful thinking; earlier this year Makerere University graduates were demonstrating because there are no jobs, even for graduates. It is more likely that there will be an increase in poverty and even more conflicts over land.

#### Methods of birth-control

First and foremost: Husband and wife should talk openly with each other and decide how many children they would like to have. How many children can they afford to feed, clothe and educate? “Every child a wanted child” is a good principle for parenthood.

1. Spacing. Have intercourse only when there is no danger of an egg being fertilised. The so-called “moon beads” may help here.
2. The man must use a condom during intercourse.
3. The morning after treatment: The woman must drink a cup of full-strength artemisia tea.

For more information on family planning from the World Health Organisation, see <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/family-planning-contraception>

#### Challenges to bringing about change

1. Currently in Uganda, family planning and child spacing information is only shared with women who go for antenatal and postnatal check-ups to the hospital. Even then it is hard to change their mindset, especially as only women are informed; men do not escort their wives to the hospital.
2. A big percentage of women give birth deep in the villages with the help of village birth attendants without going to the hospital! They never get informed!
3. Cultural traditions must change:
  - a) women must not be seen to be fulfilling their duty by becoming pregnant and having many children.
  - b) men must also take responsibility for the wellbeing of their children.
  - c) Girls who suffer rape or have an abortion must receive love and compassion.

## Recommendations

Talking about sex and man-women relations must no longer be taboo. There is a need for massive sensitisation on

- a) family planning methods, with emphasis on avoiding unwanted pregnancies, and
- b) the roles and responsibilities of both father and mother in the family.

Such awareness teaching should be widespread, with educated and uneducated people, men and women, boys and girls. It should occur in primary and secondary schools, tertiary institutions, universities, religious meetings of all faiths, community village meetings, community savings groups, sacco, groups of women and youths, community development programmes and health programmes.

I am encouraged that the Catholic Church has initiated the “Faithful House” training workshops about child spacing and birth control.

The implications for Discover partners

I suggest the following:

1. In training seminars participants be invited to discuss:
  - a) the roles played by men and women in family life,
  - b) the challenges faced by teenage girls,
  - c) methods of family planning in which men take equal responsibility.
2. Local Discover groups provide young women and men the opportunity to discuss their challenges openly. First let the women talk in an all women’s group, and the men in an all men’s group. Each group should then share their conclusions with the others.
3. Local Discover projects look at the possibility of setting up a facility to produce reusable sanitary pads.
4. In many schools in Kaliro District, Uganda, these social issues are addressed through music, dance and drama. See the picture. More information from Eric Kihuluka.
5. As I said at the start of this newsletter, the more people who are training in organic farming and natural healthcare, the better families will be fed and the less need there will be to trade sex for food.

I look forward to receiving your feedback on these issues.

Keith Lindsey

Many thanks to Evelyne Nakamatte and Rehema Namyalo for their help in preparing this newsletter.



A primary school class in Kaliro District act out a drama in which the family protests against the father who wants to give his young daughter to be married to an older man because she has not done well at school. To see a short video clip on our homepage, [click here](#)