



**UNIVERSITY OF  
KWAZULU-NATAL**

**(School of Religion Philosophy and Classics)**

An Investigation of Christians' Attitudes on the Practice of Virginity Testing as a Means of Preventing HIV Infection with Specific Reference to Methodists Members in Pietermaritzburg and Howick Circuit

By

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Masters Degree in Practical Theology in the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics of the University of KwaZulu Natal Pietermaritzburg Campus

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**Date:** November 2015

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## **Abstract**

The HIV and AIDS pandemic remains a challenge given that there is no cure, despite claims by some practitioners that a cure exists. In the absence of a cure, prevention methods are critical to reducing rates of infection such as the use of condoms. For many, these prevention methods have failed and there are calls for cultural interventions including Virginitiy Testing (VT). The fact that only girls are tested and not boys indicates a gender issue, although the researcher is writing from a pastoral perspective of the practice.

In Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) province, some Zulus have revived the culture of virginitiy testing for girls. As a Zulu woman who has lived in Pietermaritzburg for eight years, the researcher has witnessed these events recurring every year in Zululand. The researcher has also observed that the Church has been rather silent about this prevention method – unlike the use of condoms, where the voice of the Church has been clear. Since this study focuses on The Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA), Wesley's theories of social ethics are used and integrated from a pastoral care perspective.

This study examines the stance of Christians on the cultural ritual of VT which is currently regarded as an HIV infection prevention method. The focus is on members of the Methodist Church residing within the Pietermaritzburg and Howick Circuits, respectively. The central focus of this research project is concentrated on investigating the attitudes of members of the Pietermaritzburg and Howick circuit regarding the practice of VT as a means of preventing HIV infection. The thesis gives the socio-cultural and historical background of VT among the Zulus with regard to its history and purpose. It also provides an analysis of the attitudes of church members towards the practice of VT. There is a need for all Methodists to familiarize themselves with the teaching of their church on this issue in order for them to respond critically to the challenge to participate in VT practices, or to give guidance on how to go about this.

Hence, this dissertation places emphasis on pastoral guidance relating to the practice of VT. The practice is a sexually related issue and sexuality is not often discussed in the church, This paper also calls for the Theology of sexuality.

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Khange Cira, who passed away before the completion of this work. Not only did she instill strong moral values, but she demonstrated these through her lifestyle. I am who I am today because of her. I will always love and miss her. May her soul rest in eternal peace.



## **Acknowledgements**

With gratitude, I acknowledge those who contributed and supported me in the writing of this dissertation. Some gave technical guidance; others shared unpublished results, while others have offered emotional support. My heartfelt thanks to those who have most importantly, contributed to this research project financially.

I would like to thank my supervisors Dr. Steve Muoki and Prof Simangaliso Kumalo for their support; without them this research would not have been successful. They have been patient and understanding with me. During this research, I experienced major challenges that at times made it difficult to retain my focus on my studies, but they have consistently kept on motivating me.

I appreciate the cooperation of the leadership of the Pietermaritzburg and Howick circuit for granting me the opportunity to do research and for their participating in the discussions.

I would like to thank all my friends and my family for their unstinting support, especially my fellow seminarians at Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary who supported me through difficult times.

Thank you to my friend Sthembile Ngwenya; she has been emotionally supportive and persuaded me to finish this dissertation.

Thank you to my friend Rev Hlengiwe Mncwango who always says, “Thembeke you are still young; study as much as you can”.

I highly appreciate the financial support provided by CHART to fund this research project. Thanks to the University of KwaZulu-Natal PMB Campus for this privilege.

God bless you all: *ukwandakwaliwaumthakathi*.

**Thembeke Cira**

## **Abbreviations**

AIDS	:	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ARVs	:	Antiretroviral Drugs Used in the Treatment of HIV Infection
HIV	:	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
KZN	:	KwaZulu-Natal
MCSA	:	Methodist Church of Southern Africa
PMB &HWK	:	Pietermaritzburg and Howick (Circuit)
SA	:	South Africa
VT	:	Virginity Testing

## **Definitions of Terms**

*Methodists* is a term used to refer to members of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa.

*Society* is a term used by the Methodist Church to refer to a congregation or branch in a particular area of the Methodist Church.

*Circuit* is a term used by Methodists to describe a combination of societies.

*District* is a term used by the Methodist Church to describe a combination.

*Circuits* in a particular geographical area based on their map or area boundaries.

*Isangomais* a traditional healer who relies on ancestors' guidance for prophesy and healing.

*Lobola* is a marriage payment from the husband-to-be and his family to the woman's family, understood as compensating them for daughter, and as cementing kin relations between the two families.

*Nomkhubulwana* is the Zulu Goddess of rain, nature, and fertility; she is believed to be capable of changing into different types of animals.

*Ukushikilais* a Zulu word describing a situation whereby a girl was expected to raise her skirt and expose her lower abdomen, back and front, upon the command of any adult family member.

*Ukusoma* is the Zulu term meaning non-penetrative sex.

*Umhloli* is the inspector of a girl's virginity.

*Umhlonyane* is a ritual performed when a girl reaches her first menstruation.

*John Wesley* is the name of a founder of Methodist movement.

*Wesleyan Theology* is a Methodist church theology which is rooted in John Wesley's teachings.

*Wesleyan* is a follower of John Wesley's teachings.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION TO STUDY**

#### **1 Introduction**

This chapter is an outline of the whole dissertation. It gives background information to the study including the motivation to the study, aims, objectives, methodology and structure of dissertation.

#### **1.1 Structure of the Dissertation**

Chapter one is an introduction and provides background information. It provides an outline of the dissertation, a discussion of the background of the study and the motivation for the study. In addition, the approaches and models used during research are discussed. The location of the study, literature review, research methods, theoretical framework and validity of the study are also explained.

Chapter two contains a discussion of the socio-cultural background of virginity testing among the Zulu people. Virginity testing is an ancient Zulu practice, carried out because they considered virginity as a very precious character trait for a girl. Hence, this chapter deals with VT in the Zulu culture with regard to its history and purpose. It includes the definition of VT with detail on how women conduct VT.

Chapter three explores the attitudes of Methodists in the Pietermaritzburg and Howick Circuit towards the practice of VT as a means of preventing HIV infection. Methodists have taken their stand regarding VT and this is informed by various aspects that this chapter seeks to explore.

Chapter four is a Wesleyan critique of the perspective of the Pietermaritzburg and Howick Methodists on VT based on an analysis of the attitude of these Methodists towards virginity testing.

Chapter five presents a summary, recommendations and the conclusions based on the findings and discussion in the preceding chapters.

## 1.2 Introduction and Background Information

This research project is a study of the attitudes of Methodists towards a cultural ritual known as virginity testing (VT). This ritual is currently viewed by people from Zulu culture in South Africa, especially in KwaZulu-Natal as an HIV infection prevention intervention. The focus is on Methodists in the Pietermaritzburg and Howick Circuit. The researcher's motivation for this study stems from two main areas of involvement.

First, the researcher's academic readings have covered the works of Suzanne-Leclerc Madlala, and Martin Marcus, among others. These works look analytically at the practice of VT from various angles. These readings are discussed in detail under the literature review of this research. These readings led to an interest in conducting research that would contribute to this ongoing debate.

Second, the researcher's experience as a member of the Umzinto Circuit comprises practical observations of how Christians have responded to VT. The Umzinto Circuit forms part of the greater KwaZulu-Natal Province. There was an instance where the observation was made of a woman who conducted VT on her daughter. After the woman had discovered that her daughter was no longer a virgin, she requested the Church leaders to apply the same procedure that is observed when a Methodist woman falls pregnant outside of wedlock. This resulted in the girl being suspended from the Young Women's *Manyano*. That drew the attention of almost everybody in the Church, and one can imagine the humiliation and embarrassment the girl experienced. This partly constitutes the motivation behind this study.

Virginity testing is the process whereby the condition of the hymen is examined to determine whether an unmarried girl has ever had sexual intercourse. It is primarily a cultural practice among certain communities of South Africa such as the Zulus, and is deep-rooted.

The practice has however become a center of controversy, especially within Christian circles. One of the controversies inherent in this practice is in ascertaining whether the hymen was destroyed during consensual penetrative sexual intercourse or coercion. This is important because in some cases a girl may lose her virginity through unreported rape experiences. The loss of virginity can also occur as a result of certain games, medical practices, and so on. Isabel Apawo Phiri (2003:70) argued that VT is exaggerated because it inaccurately equated with female genital mutilation. Those who take this view also argue that VT is one form of violence against women.

Tessa Marcus in Benedict Carton (2008:539) stated that “The issue of virginity testing does not end with the problem of definition or with the more evident difficulties surrounding proof of the condition. To be sure, a ritual can be entirely acceptable to people if it has some social value beyond its systematic corroboration”.

The presence of HIV and AIDS has necessitated an investigation to determine whether the practice of VT has any significant impact on HIV prevention. The proponents of VT insist that VT helps to protect young girls from HIV infections. Nomagugu Ngobese, one of the women who has revived the practice of VT among Zulus in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal, has argued that VT protects Zulu girls from HIV and AIDS, and teenage pregnancy (Phiri2003:65).

Preliminary research has indicated that the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) has no written policy on VT. There is, however, an assertive fact-finding discussion prevailing among Methodists regarding this practice. This research is an undertaking to embark on a critical study of the attitudes of Methodists within the Pietermaritzburg and Howick Circuit towards VT as an HIV preventative method. It is therefore important for all Methodists to know exactly what their church’s teaching is on this issue in order for them to respond creatively to the challenge to participate in VT practices, or to give guidance to their sisters, and daughters on how to go about VT as a preventative measure, together with all its challenges.

### **1.3 Review of the Literature**

For the purpose of this research there will be an emphasis on the types of relevant literature available on the topic of VT. The literature will be from different perspectives, inter alia, the cultural viewpoint of Suzanne Leclerc-Madlala and Nobuhle Nonhlanhla Khuzwayo as well as feminist viewpoints such as those of Patricia Bruce and Isabel Apawo Phiri.

There is also the Methodist Church view on human sexuality as described by Neville Richardson and Ndikho Mtshiselwa.

In addition, non-theological literature is referred to, such as the writings of Louise Vincent (2006) who argues from the political studies platform, and Annete Wickstrom (2010) who writes from a population studies perspective. Engaging literature from other disciplines provides an all-encompassing view on the issue of VT which only serves to strengthen the rationale of this research.

Suzanne Leclerc-Madlala wrote an article entitled “Virginity Testing: Managing Sexuality in a Maturing HIV/AIDS Epidemic” (2008:533). Leclerc-Madlala argues that VT is an attempt to deal with the epidemic by exercising greater control over women and their sexuality. The Natal Witness quoted Leclerc-Madlala saying “I do not believe in western civilization and culture as they say we must use condoms and contraceptives that promotes adultery. That is why I believe in African culture”. She concludes by saying that VT has emerged as a new way to empower older women, since they had always held power and authority over younger women; consequently VT reaffirms that power. In a province where there is a high rate of unemployment, the knowledge and skills to do genital inspection are currently highly marketable (Leclerc-Madlala 2008:547). If parents are unemployed, a virgin girl is seen as a hope that will take a family out of poverty because the full *lobola* will be paid prior to her marriage.

Nobuhle Nonhlanhla Khuzwayo wrote a thesis investigating the development of virginity testing among the Zulus in the KwaMashu district of KwaZulu-Natal. She observed that the Zulus used VT as an imperative social tool to bring pride to a virgin girl, the parents and the community. The motive was to receive the full *lobola*, especially the eleventh cow, because in Zulu culture *alobola* for a virgin should be eleven cows. More recently, it has been used as one of the tools to combat women abuse, teenage pregnancies and HIV and AIDS. (Khuzwayo 2000:8). Khuzwayo posits that VT promotes abstinence from sex and it is another important practice that helps prevent teenage pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. She further argues that although VT does not help in cases where the child is born with HIV and if a person is injected or infected with affected equipment, sexual intercourse is the most common way that the disease is transmitted, hence, in this regard, VT seems to play a major role in prevention (Khuzwayo 2008:36).

Khuzwayo and Leclerc-Madlala wrote about VT from a cultural perspective, evaluating other views opposing this practice. Their viewpoints are very useful, because they defend VT with a strong Zulu cultural bias. However, they have not considered that Zulus are also influenced by Christianity and denominationalism. Hence this research investigates the views of the people who are not just culturally Zulu but also Christians and, more specifically, Methodist Church members.

Giulia Sissa (1990) traces the female body to the understanding of ancient Greece. She argues that the problem of interpretation can be solved once there is a clear understanding about Greek images of the maternal and virginal body. Sissa (1990:1-2) insists that the basic

questions are “did the hymen exist according to Greek perception of anatomy (among laymen as well as physicians)? Is the hymen perhaps a hypostasis, a fetish? In which representations of the female body and of female sexuality does the hymen play a central role? What are the effects and advantages of this unduly generalized way of envisioning the intact woman?”

Sissa’s research does not give answers to her questions: it limits itself to an investigation of the ancient world on virginity and her investigation is based only on marriage songs which are about the hymen. She argues that there was no proof of the hymen’s existence (1990:2). Nevertheless, Sissa’s work is used in this research to analyze what is really tested in VT. Hence, this research takes the issue a step further. Sissa’s research is concerned with the hymen whereas this research seeks to know the attitudes of Methodists on the issue and what impact the testing of the hymen has on this faith community. It explores further how VT can be facilitated in the context of HIV.

Patricia Bruce (2003) values virginity as supported by the Bible, but she argues against the manner in which VT is done. According to Bruce, it is oppressive to women, since women’s voices were not considered in approving most cultural rituals. This is somehow similar to Phiri’s (2003:76) question, “Can the girls choose to remain single and virgin for the rest of their lives without being forced into marriage, because culture demands that they do?” Both Phiri (2003) and Bruce (2002) agree that abstinence and VT are relevant in a time of HIV and AIDS but should not be imposed on women.

Bruce (2002:51) quotes Scorgie when saying, “The virginity testing movement is far more than an HIV/AIDS intervention, rather it is a cultural initiative, aimed at promoting virginity, which has become increasingly widespread since the mid -1990’s in KwaZulu-Natal” (Bruce 2002:51).

One should not view VT as a practice that was created in response to HIV infection because it existed a long time ago. In her article, Bruce strongly opposes this practice, believing it is unfair to women. She suggests that there is a need for new sexual ethics in the Church, because virginity is an essential aspect of sexuality. She argues that there is a need to critique the Old Testament texts and cultural practices pertaining to virginity (2002:67). This is an exceedingly high-quality article that traces the people of the Bible and how they viewed virginity. On the other hand, it does not attempt to contextualize the issue on a denominational level. The present research focuses on the Methodist denomination to hear its view on the practice.



Isabel Phiri (2003:69) emphasizes that the revival and recreation of VT has a particular context, which needs to be taken seriously. Virginity testing is coming at a time when South Africa is faced with an increase in incest and rape of children and girls. South Africa is also faced with an increase in cases of teenage pregnancy, which has increased the burden on grandmothers who raise these children with very few resources (2003:69). She also analyses arguments of those who are strongly opposed to VT; for instance, the Gender Commission and the Human Rights Commission have argued that VT is an abuse of children's rights (Phiri 2003:70).

Both Phiri and Bruce write from a feminist perspective. Although they acknowledge the religious influence on people's behavior, they did not consider the denominational influence; hence the focus of this research is on one denomination. This research proceeds from a practical theology premise. The main concern is not the empowerment of women, but rather the challenges and opportunities presented by VT and HIV from a pastoral perspective. Certainly, VT presents new opportunities and challenges to the ministry of Methodism, especially in KwaZulu-Natal. In general, statistics convey that KwaZulu-Natal is a region that is host to the largest number of AIDS infected patients in South Africa.

In 2007, Neville Richardson wrote an article titled *Dodging the Dogmatism: Methodist Reflection on Abortion*. He wrote this article to address the issue of abortion in the MCSA; however, the article is relevant for this research because he also talks about Methodist understanding of human sexuality. Richardson (2007:10) argued that the debate over the use of condoms as a preventative measure against the spread of HIV is an example of the failure of Natural Law ideology to see beyond the structures of its own firm common sense.

It is this inflexibility that has led critics even from within the Natural Law fold to appeal for more flexible forms of moral reasoning, forms that allow for human experience and contextual considerations to play a part. His research seeks ways of preventing HIV and AIDS, and for him, contextualization is important especially in sexual matters (Richardson 2007:8).

Ndikho Mtshiselwa wrote an article "How the Methodist Church of Southern Africa Read Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 in View of Homosexuality". Mtshiselwa (2010:769) says that the Doctrine, Ethics and Worship Committee of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (DEWCOM) emphasizes Natural Law and the scientific age as major influences on moral theological thought, which teaches that there is a purpose behind everything created.

In the case of sexuality, the purpose of sex is procreation. DEWCOM, in engaging the subject of natural and social sciences, was led to the following conclusions: The ways in which the complex reality of human sexuality is understood and described are continually developing. In published literature the MCSA authors have not yet explored the MCSA's understanding of human sexuality. Mtshiselwa and Richardson, like other MCSA authors, have discussed the issue of human sexuality only because they needed to engage in the discussion of homosexuality, abortion and use of condoms. This research is on VT, which is a sexual matter. That why it is imperative for this research to look at the Methodist understanding of human sexuality.

In 2003, Kelly Brown Douglas wrote an article entitled "Sexuality and the Black Church". She argued that it is required to chart a new way of acting with regard to sexual concerns and tread toward living out the radicality of God's disclosure in Jesus. She further elaborates that the time has come for Black Church people to understand the profound meaning of the choice in relation to who they are as sexual beings. Only when the taboo of sexuality is discarded will black women and men be free to experience what it means to wholly love and be loved by the God that became flesh in Jesus (Douglas 2003:42-43). Virginity testing involves sexual matters; it is imperative to engage the topic of human sexuality when talking about VT. This research project is based on the above literatures and seeks the position of the Methodist Church in this matter, because in the materials that are already in existence, none are about the voice of Christians or a denomination on the practice of VT

Louise Vincent (2008) wrote an article entitled "Virginity Testing in South Africa: Re-traditioning the Post Colony".

Louise suggests that in a democratic country such as South Africa, male children are given the right to object to partake in traditional initiation ceremonies which include circumcision. He also says the practice of VT is regarded as so disturbing to the new democratic order that the state has chosen to take the heavy-handed route of banning it. Finally, his paper asks what these two challenging cases in the country's new democracy tell us about the nature of liberal democratic citizenship in South Africa, ten years after apartheid's formal demise. It is on this basis that his paper asks why the state's approach to traditional male circumcision has been so different to its approach to VT (Louise 2008:18-23).

Annete Wickstrom (2010) article "Virginity Testing as a Local Health Initiative" focuses on virginity testing in Nkolokotho in northeastern rural KwaZulu-Natal. Wickstrom argues that

VT is an approach that involves the use of communal pressure and emblematical means both to increase the individual's and the community's responsibility for sexual affairs, and to strengthen the position of girls and women at a time of persistent HIV and AIDS. She further says, in the absence of effective procedures against AIDS, inhabitants try to find different ways to shield young people. She shows how VT is a 'preventive ritual' more than a 'diagnostic measure', while emphasizing how both South African and Western projects aimed at improving the situations are grounded in perspectives that sometimes collide with how local people conceive of both relationships and sexuality. The aim of her study is to understand the reasons for undergoing VT from the perspective of teenage girls and boys. The study explores the importance attached to VT administered to teenage girls and boys (Wickstrom 2010).

#### **1.4 Location of the Study**

This study was conducted in KwaZulu-Natal within the Methodist Church in the Pietermaritzburg and Howick Circuit. The structure of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa is organised in a descending order as follows: Connexion, districts, regions, circuits and societies, however some local structure has sections before societies. In KwaZulu-Natal, there are two Districts namely; Natal West and Natal Coastal, but Pietermaritzburg and Howick circuit are under Natal West District. Some parts of societies are situated in the city, while others are in informal settlements.

The ones in the township have both literate and illiterate people. The one in the city comprises predominantly educated people. It has become a centre of the circuit, because there are people from different societies within the societies in the city.

## **1.5 Objectives**

The objectives of this study were to:

- Explore the socio-cultural background of VT among the Zulu people.
- Investigate what Church Leaders of MCSA in Pietermaritzburg and Howick have said and done with regard to VT in the last 10 years.
- Study the relationship between MCSA sex education material and VT practice, as expounded in sermons, teachings, and prayers.
- Establish what selected members of MCSA in Pietermaritzburg and Howick think and say with regard to promoting VT to prevent the spread of HIV and AIDS.
- Explore the MCSA's theological understanding of human sexuality.
- Understand the relationship between VT and the preventing the spread of HIV infection in KwaZulu-Natal.

## **1.6 Main research question**

The central research question on which this research is based is: What are the attitudes of Methodists in the Pietermaritzburg and Howick circuit regarding the practice of VT as a means of preventing HIV infection?

Sub questions include:

- What is the socio-cultural background VT in the Zulu context?
- What have leaders of MCSA in Pietermaritzburg and Howick said and done with regard to VT in the last 10 years?
- What is the relationship between MCSA sex education material and VT practice, as expounded in sermons, teachings, and prayers?
- What is the understanding of some selected members of the Pietermaritzburg and Howick circuits on VT?
- What is the MCSA's theological understanding of human sexuality?
- What is the relationship between VT and the prevention of the spread of HIV infection in KwaZulu-Natal?

## **1.7 Research Methods / Approach to the Study**

This research project acknowledges that VT is a sensitive sexual matter. However, the main concern of this research was not to hear from girls or women who had been examined, but rather to investigate the attitude of the Pietermaritzburg and Howick Circuit with regard towards the practice of VT.

This research project involved both field work and library study. The empirical method was adopted in order to uncover the views of the Methodist Church members concerning VT within Christian circles. Martin Terre Blanche (2006:50) observes the general rule of research design, namely that it is better to focus your research question in such a manner that you can explore in detail a small instance of a phenomenon rather than attempt to study a large issue with an inadequate sample. Hence, an unstructured interview method was used to enable deeper discussions and interactions between interviewer and interviewees. This type of interview was appropriate for this research because the researcher was able to follow up on interviewees in cases where there was need for clarity and that strengthened the research process. However there was a set of questions paper as an instrument to collect data and also to serve as a guideline for the interviews.

Kevin Durheim in Blanche (2006:50) mentioned three types of sampling: convenience sampling, random sampling and purposive sampling. In this research, informants were Methodists members who were under Pietermaritzburg and Howick. Informants were selected for theoretical reasons. Hence, the researcher used a purposive sampling type. This type was chosen because participants were selected according to the requirements of being Methodist members under Pietermaritzburg and Howick circuit. As the researcher has discussed above on the location of the study, in the same way, the participants were from the same location (PMB and Howick).

It was valuable for the researcher to interview Methodists from each section under Pietermaritzburg and Howick circuit. The researcher interviewed local preachers and ministers in training whose views are important because they are the local Methodist theologians and represent every circuit in Pietermaritzburg. The MCSA has a seminary in Pietermaritzburg and almost all of their seminarians are attached to circuits located in Pietermaritzburg, hence they were also interviewed.

The researcher is of the opinion that their views also represent the views of the Pietermaritzburg and Howick circuit. The ministers' wives were also interviewed.

In the traditional set up, a Methodist minister's wife becomes a leader of Women's Manyano; in that sense the researcher anticipates their views also partly represented the views of women in the Methodist church.

The participation of Methodist lay women as also beneficial because women play a major role since VT is done by women only. In addition, Methodist lay people have the privilege to pass on knowledge and influence the entire congregation with their views, because they are given chances to preach among their Manyano. They also represented ordinary women and men who are not in any of the positions so that voices from diverse groups were included. The Wesley Guild (youth organization) was interviewed. While virginity testing is performed by women for women only; some members of the Young Men's Guild were interviewed, including their leader at Church Street, the society in the city. The researcher is a Methodist and felt that this was an advantage in identifying interviewees with some relative ease, and in ensuring that the research outcomes would indeed represent the views of the majority of those in the PMB and Howick circuit.

In this study one of the key functions of pastoral care, "guiding", was used as framework. As Lartey says, "The term guidance has a paternalistic and archaic connotation to it. In many contexts, the function it refers to is conveyed by current terms like problem-solving or decision making skills" (Lartey 2003:64). He further contends that guiding is about allowing individuals, in the course of faith and love, to reveal what lies within them, while not rejecting the input of information, ideas and views (2003:65). Based on Lartey's (2003) work, the researcher is appealing for pastoral guidance for the community and those Methodists who are practicing VT, whether their concern is to preserve virginity or abstain from sex before marriage or HIV prevention. This theory provides answers to questions such as "how does one weigh the relative merits and demerits of any option? How is one able to examine and decide among the different possibilities?" (Lartey 2003:64). He pointed out seven key functions of pastoral care, which are healing, sustaining, guiding, reconciling, nurturing, liberating and empowering. Sustaining has to do with transformation of a situation by traversing through it, and is more about with attitude than escape. Reconciling involves bringing together again those who have become estranged or alienated from each other.

Nurturing is an ongoing process that is sensitive to the crucial life-stages through which we go (Lartey2003:63-66).

Liberating involves the intricate and delicate processes of raising awareness about the sources and causes of oppression and domination in society. Empowering takes various forms. It is seen most often as a communal affair. Some of the ways in which it expresses itself include working together with people to attempt to restore community spirit (Lartey 2003:66-68).

### **1.8 Validity, Reliability and Rigour**

HIV and AIDS still exist as a challenge in communities. Hence, it should not be. If a certain group of people come up with some means of preventing the epidemic. Any kind of preventative method has a huge impact on the community. In that sense this study is valid through its framework which will be looking at the practice of VT and its relation with HIV and AIDS.

The methodology that was used rendersthis study and its findings reliable since the interview method was used for data collection. However, only Methodist Church members in Pietermaritzburg and Howick were interviewed. Women who are practising or have practiced VT were not interviewed. The consent form was clear that it is the prerogative of all participants to withdraw from participation at any time if they so wished. Full details of the researcher and supervisor appeared on the consent form.

### **1.9 Limitations**

This research investigated the attitudes of Methodists towards the practice of VT, as a means of preventing HIV infection, with specific reference to Pietermaritzburg (PMB) and Howick Methodist circuit.It was impossible to interview all Methodist Church members in KwaZulu-Natal. However, as it is mentioned in the research methods, the Methodist Church has different organisations. For the whole circuit to be represented, the researcher involved participants from each organization. In that sense all church organizations were interviewed. The fact that girls who are practicing this ritual were not interviewed can raise a sense of doubt about the authenticity of this research. Conversely, the main concern of research was not to hear from those who practice or have practiced the ritual, it was an investigation of PMB and Howick circuit's position on the practice. The researcher is also aware that this topic involves her somehow subjectively as she is a young Zulu woman and a Methodist.

To avoid the error of extreme subjectivity that is presented by her close relationship with the study subject, she used literature written on this topic. Besides, being an insider strengthened her research in terms of better understanding the culture, language and MCSA belief systems.

### **1.10 Conclusion**

In this chapter, the researcher discussed the background of this study. That discussion entailed the theme, research problem and the motivation for this research topic. There are also objectives, goals and questions that the study attempted to answer. The methodology explained the criteria and approaches that were used throughout this study. The literature review was based on literature relevant to the research title, which is an investigation of Christians' attitudes on the practice of VT as a means of preventing HIV infection, with specific reference to Methodists in the Pietermaritzburg and Howick Circuit. The researcher's theoretical framework is discussed in terms of the historical background of the framework, its models, theories, achievements, advantages, and its disadvantages. In progressing, the following chapter discusses the socio-cultural background of VT among the Zulu people.



## CHAPTER TWO

### 2.0 SOCIO-CULTURAL BACKGROUND OF VIRGINITY TESTING AMONG THE ZULU PEOPLE

#### 2.1 Introduction

This section intends to give a historical background of the practice and its socio-cultural background. Virginity testing is not a new practice among Zulus. Rather, in a time of HIV and AIDS prevalence, it was introduced as a preventative method. Virginity testing was a cultural custom long before the first diagnosis of HIV and AIDS was made. Traditionally, it was normal practice in the home to ensure that girls maintained their virginity until they got married. However, currently they are practicing it for other reasons such as HIV prevention. Scorgie (2002:64) contemplates that the VT movement is far more than just an AIDS intervention, but it is also aimed at promoting virginity. This chapter includes definition of the practice, how it is done or practiced, its background and purpose.

#### 2.2 Definition and How Virginity Testing is Done

Virginity testing is a multifaceted issue. Hence just defining the term may not bring clarity since there are different ways of doing it. Generally, VT is understood to be the process whereby the condition of the hymen is checked to determine whether a girl has ever had sexual intercourse.

Fiona Scorgie defines and clarifies how VT is done: “The girls line up, and then lie in a row on their backs on grass mats spread out on the ground. They part their legs while the *umhloli* (inspector) peers briefly at each girl’s exposed genitals before making her judgment. Occasionally the inspector will use her hands to part a girl’s labia” (2008:538). This definition functions where there is a group of girls who have made themselves available for testing. In this form of testing, it is essential that the girl lies down and parts her legs for the inspector; she can lie down on anything, and it does not have to be the grass mat.

Marcus (2008:536) has also highlighted another technique of testing where a female elder - who leads and inspects - notes the muscle tone of a girl, as well as evaluating the girl’s general behavior, which is taken into account when determining their virginity status. This form of testing is more controversial for the reason that the elder just looks at a woman’s body muscle in order to assess whether she is a virgin or not.

Furthermore, it has to be asked how valid it is to observe or evaluate virginity just from the behavior of a girl. It is for these reasons that this method is questionable. Leclerc-Madlala (2008:544) says the practice of “*ukushikila*”, whereby a girl was expected to raise her skirt and expose her lower abdomen, back and front, upon the command of any adult family member, is one such example.

More recent information suggests that this was also done in an effort to assess the girl’s degree of physical maturity and to determine her readiness for courtship and marriage. However, this was also used as an index of virginity. In that sense, Marcus (2008:539) says “The issue of VT does not end with the problem of definitions or with the more evident difficulties surrounding proof of the condition, because to be sure, a ritual can be entirely acceptable to people if it has some social value beyond its systematic corroboration”. What social value does VT have?

### **2.3 Historical Background of Virginity Testing Among Zulus**

Phiri (2000:65) argued that VT existed in pre-colonial Zulu religion and was abandoned as more and more Zulus became converted to Christianity. The reason for forsaking VT in the past may not apply to all Methodists, because currently many Methodist members have not abandoned their cultural practices even though they are Christians. Most Zulu people are traditionally conservative.

Leclerc-Madlala (2008:543-545) asserts that there is a high level of uncertainty today regarding the nature of its historical practice, its frequency, and the setting for conducting the test. Nonetheless, debates on the origins and practice of VT are rooted in the common assumption that virginity before marriage was highly regarded and a socially regulated norm. Traditionally, the amount of livestock or money reflected the importance placed on a girl’s virginity. This is different when one looks at VT critically, because if preserving virginity before marriage is highly regarded by girls themselves, why should there be an overseer of a girl’s virginity? The girl’s virginity will be her pride only if it belongs to her. But if a girl’s virginity belongs to her husband and parents then who really owns it? Furthermore, Leclerc-Madlala (2008:545) notes that cattle were the major factor in a bride’s wealth transaction known as *ilobolo*. The standard head of cattle could be supplemented by an additional head, the ‘eleventh cow’, if the girl was found to be a virgin.

The virginity of a Zulu girl is a profit to her parents; therefore, a girl's virginity is seen as an opportunity to bring wealth to the family. Bruce (2003:44) says, bearing in mind the extent of the HIV and AIDS pandemic in South Africa and the fact that in most cases the virus is sexually transmitted, it is imperative that the Churches commit themselves to an open discussion of sexuality and the various social, cultural and economic factors that impact on the way individuals exercise their sexuality. If the Methodist Church in KZN intends to engage the youth, it should not ignore the VT issue. Phiri (2008) argued that religion and culture are inseparable.

The main subject matter around VT is sexuality; hence Bruce (2003) urges churches to commit themselves to discussions about sexual issues. In addition, ethnography highlights other forms of social control that helps to instill the value of premarital chastity. Talking to girls about the importance of maintaining virginity before marriage formed part of the traditional puberty ritual known as *umhlonwane* (Krige 1968). In training for this, a girl needed to be taught how to ensure that she would not 'expose her mother's cattle', that is, lose her virginity (2008:544).

According to Leclerc-Madlala, "Historically, the extent to which routine virginity checking of girls or young women took place is difficult to deduce from written accounts. However, these accounts make clear that even if girls did not regularly submit to genital inspection, there was a high value placed on virginity, and wide social interest was shown in a girl's developing body" (Leclerc-Madlala 2008:44). This means even without VT, good moral sexual behavior among Zulu girls seems to have been taken seriously.

Michael Lambert, in Benedict Carton (2008:45), remarks that "The *Nomkhubulwane* festival is an annual event in rural *isiZulu*-speaking areas. It was apparently the brainchild of prominent Zulu *isangoma* and teacher, Nomagugu Ngobese, who claimed to be inspired by a dream in 1994, predicted the *Nomkhubulwane* (and, presumably, virginity testing) would help to fight the spread of AIDS and 'unnecessary' pregnancies, as well as to foster reconciliation among Black the peoples of Africa". VT in Pietermaritzburg (PMB) was revived as a result of this. Although VT was abandoned after many people became Christian, it is now showing a revival in some places in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). Phiri (2003:69) says Nomagugu Ngobese's aims for reviving the *Nomkhubulwane* festival were to educate the Zulu girls and to teach them that they have the power within themselves to prevent being infected with HIV.

She furthermore envisaged instilling a sense of self-esteem in these girls as women and pride in their Zulu culture. “Virginity testing is part of the *Nomkhubulwane* annual festival, because it’s only virgins who are allowed to conduct the whole festival” (2003:65). Nomagugu Ngobese has argued that VT protects Zulu girls from HIV and AIDS and teenage pregnancy (Phiri 2003:65). As a result, young women flock to the *Nomkhubulwane* rituals, where VT is conducted, in different centers in KwaZulu-Natal, with the hope of evading HIV infections and maintaining sexual purity. There have been differing views on this practice. Traditional Zulus and other people who support African cultural practices have encouraged this practice and welcomed its revitalization. However gender activists from across the country have condemned it and called on government to impose a prohibition on it.

Marcus, in Carton (2008:541), has also raised the issue that “virginity testing is another thread in the web of meaning that places women and women’s sexuality at the epicenter of blame for the current AIDS epidemic”. African women theologians, such as Phiri (2003:8) and Musawenkosi Dube (2003:169) have argued that African women are the most vulnerable to HIV infection. They say African cultural practices should not be undervalued, in particular their implications for women (Khuzwayo 2000: 24).

In KwaMashu around 1997, Andile Gumede revived the practice, because of teenage pregnancies, HIV and AIDS, rape and child abuse. Another motive which brought the ritual back is the ascendance to political power by the black majority regime following the first inclusive elections of 1994. People felt the need to go back to their roots. In almost all areas in KwaZulu-Natal, VT is now practised. Leclerc-Madlala comments that “While some informants today insist that girls were once subjected to routine examination, there is little by way of ethnographic proof to support this statement”(Khuzwayo 2000: 24).

Louise Vincent (2006) says in South Africa, the Zulu ethnic group, who live mainly in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, practices VT. In July 2005, the South African Parliament passed a new Children’s Bill, which has prohibited virginity testing of children. She asks why the practice of virginity testing is regarded as so troubling to the new democratic order that the state has chosen to take the heavy-handed route of banning it. He further asks why the approach of the state to traditional male circumcision has been different from its approach to VT. Finally, he asks what these two challenging cases in the country’s new democracy tell us about the nature of liberal democratic citizenship in South Africa.

Vivian Msomi (2008:44) stated that “In 1988, the present Zulu King revived the *Umhlanga* festival in KwaZulu. Girls who have reached maturity carry reeds to the King’s kraal at Nongoma. They dance in the presence of the King and other members of the Royal family”. Until today, there is an annual *Umkhosi Womhlanga* (Reed Dance Festival) at King Goodwill Zwelithini’s Nyokeni Palace at Nongoma KwaZulu-Natal, where all virgins who were tested in their local areas go for this event. Msomi further stated that “The Zulu King was a third generation Anglican Christian. His concern to revive this *Umhlanga* custom is proof of the depth of traditional practices among the Zulu” (2008:44). The spokesperson for the Department of Arts and Culture, Lethukuthula Mtshali, told the City Press that as part of the festival they have set up educational programs for the youth to enlighten them about matters of life. In addition, they have made them aware about human trafficking, the use of substances, and the dangers involved in the use of social networks and HIV and AIDS (City Press 2013).

#### **2.4 Practice of Virginitv Testing**

Vincent (2006:26) stated that “the constitutionally enshrined Commission on Gender Equality has been at the forefront of advocacy efforts to halt the practice of virginitv testing which it has described as discriminatory, invasive of privacy, unfair, impinging on the dignity of young girls and unconstitutional”. In Zulu culture, VT is predominantly applicable to girls in the areas where this ritual is commonly practiced; all young girls are compelled to go for a test. While in many cases it is said the girls participate voluntarily in VT, and although they may not be coerced to go, if a girl does not go her behavior becomes questionable. Her behavior will be suspect and frowned upon, to the extent that the community will assume that the girl is sexually active and thus socially and religiously immoral. Vincent (2006:27) says “Clearly, virginitv testing is not regarded as a ‘civil’ practice and those who participate in it are not good liberal selves, so much so, that to continue to participate in the practice risks exclusion altogether, at least temporarily, from citizenship through criminalization”.

Although the inspectors for VT are women only, VT is promoting sexual attractions. While it is true that no man is allowed to perform any of these tests, because when a girl is tested, she has to expose her private parts. The assumption is that, it would negate the purpose of the test if men were to be doing the testing; hence women remain the only testers to avoid sexual attractions.

However, one cannot necessarily say that to allow other women to test girls is ethical either. A woman can have a sexual relationship with another woman, how can one secure the protection of the girls from sexual attractions? It might happen that among inspectors there are those who are lesbians, since it is not always obvious when a person is attracted to the same sex. It is on these bases that the researcher says that the VT promotes sexual relations. Vincent (2006:19) postulates that “Post-1994 South Africa has seen the emergence of a set of institutions for the protection of values of individual human rights, freedom of choice, diversity, tolerance, and the rule of land constitutional supremacy - in short, a liberal political system”. Critics of the practice of virginity testing argue that it violates liberal norms of governing children’s rights to privacy, bodily integrity and dignity all of which are enshrined in the country’s constitution. Furthermore, Vincent (2006:18) says that “The participants who appear freely to choose to have their virginity tested are either not really freely choosing, because they are influenced by an oppressive cultural milieu or are incapable of autonomous choice, because they are minors. Therefore the state’s interference in their choice is allowable”. Vincent (2006:18) continues to say that in a democratic country such as South Africa, male children are given the right to reject participation in traditional initiation ceremonies which include circumcision.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

This chapter traced the socio-cultural and historical background of VT among the Zulus. In the ancient times, VT was practiced among the Zulus in homes and communities but later it was demolished. The original purpose of VT was to encourage girls to remain virgins until they were married, because it was considered to be a disgrace to the family when a girl lost her virginity or fell pregnant before marriage. This also had economic motivations and consequences, because the loss of virginity would naturally mean that her family would not qualify for the full *lobola*.

The practice is now revived again. The definition of VT is discussed in detail in this chapter. There are various ways and methods Zulus use in practicing VT among the girls. In that sense the discussion in this chapter focused on how VT is done or practiced. The chapter discusses why VT is done by women only, since it is only girls who are tested for virginity.

The background of VT testing is also presented. Recognizing that not everyone embraces VT, the following chapter focuses on different views of the practise of VT from different perspectives, including the attitude of the Zulus towards the practice of VT as a preventative intervention against HIV and AIDS.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODISTS' (PMB AND HOWICK) ATTITUDES ON THE PRACTICE OF VIRGINITY TESTING AS A MEANS OF PREVENTING HIV INFECTION**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

There is a thriving discussion at praxis level among Methodists on the practice of VT. This chapter presents the attitudes of Methodists of Pietermaritzburg and Howick circuit on VT as an HIV preventative method. Hence, this chapter includes views of Methodist interviewees on the practice of VT. In this chapter the views are categorized and discussed using quotations from interviewees, and they are in a table form consisting of key statements from the interviews. In South Africa, there are divergent views on VT. Some strongly support the practice while others are against it. The views of Methodist people are influenced by different perspectives. The names and portfolios used in the study are not the true names of the participants. The researcher has provided analysis of different views on the practise of VT from a variety of perspectives in the table below.

### 3.1 Key Statements of the Research Findings

Number	Name of interviewee	Manyano Category	Sex	Age	Key Statements on VG	Category
1	Sanda Xaba	Young Men's Guild	Male	42	<p>“They go to Umhlanga to test if they have maintained their virginity. It is good for girls to remain pure.”</p> <p>Every time during the ritual there are lessons, it is not just a matter of testing. Sanda says “Virginity testing can be helpful because girls are being advised by the testers”.</p>	<p>Virginity Testing is a sign of purity and should be encouraged.</p> <p>Virginity testing is viewed as an opportunity to teach values to young girls.</p>
2	Mr Mafu	Young Men's Guild	Male	57	<p>“Virginity testing is a traditional practice that controls and helps youth not to engage in sexual intercourse before marriage.”</p>	<p>Virginity testing is a sexual moral heritage.</p>



3	Mrs Kulu	Minister's wife (Women's Manyano)	female	39	"For me, for a girl to accept Christ means you need to remain a virgin (look after yourself) until the time to get married comes."	Virginity testing encourages Christian values.
4	Pinky Malinga	Wesley Guild	Female	39	"Virginity testing can be helpful because girls are being advised by the testers."	Virginity testing is an opportunity to give advice to young girls.
5	Lihle	Young Women's Manyano	Female	42	"It feels like a violation to woman rights and personal rights."	VT is a violation of women rights
6	Nokuthula Golela	YWM	Female	42	There is a need for youth workshops.	Guidance

7	Nomonde	Wesley Guild	Female	35	We as changed members (repented) encourage young girls to participate.	Virginity encourages Christian values.
8	Nomvuyo Sosibo	YWM	Female	52	“As an ordinary church member, I cannot say fully. L & D will assist to get the answer.”	Expectation of theology of VT.
9	Nokuzola Mgigqiza	YWM	Female	36	“VT is a good idea to prevent the youth in sexual disease.”	VT testing as HIV prevention.

10	Smangele Khoza	YWM	Female	47	“ Yes I support VT because I want our nation to grow”	Positive attitude towards VT testing.
11	S Ngwenya	YWM, LPA, Wesley Guild	Female	25	Virginity Testing has no impact because any girl can discipline herself without being tested. But I would encourage those who cannot discipline themselves to go for VT. But in the Methodist church we are treated the same whether you are a virgin or not.	It has no impact but it needs to be practiced.

## **3.2 Engaging With Outcomes**

### **3.2.1 Virginity is a Sign of Purity and Should Be Encouraged**

The Zulus understand a virgin girl as pure. Their understanding of sexual intercourse is that sex contaminates a person. It is believed that if one is unmarried but sexually active, then you are unclean, especially if you are a woman. Zulu culture provides that when a boy impregnates a virgin unmarried girl, then he pays for damages to the girl's parents. Immediately after the parents become aware that the girl is pregnant, her mother, accompanied by other women and girls of almost the same age as the pregnant girl, go to the boy's homestead to report the pregnancy. The payments are made in the form of cows and goats for the cleansing ritual. Parents of a pregnant girl, and the girl, are purified through a cleansing ceremony. It is against this background that Methodists in the PMB and Howick circuit see VT as a means of keeping young unmarried girls pure and pontificate that it should be encouraged.

Seven interviewees have drawn attention to the relation between VT and purity. Xaba stated that young unmarried girls participate in the event called *Umhlanga* to be tested if they have maintained their virginity. Xabainsists that for girls to preserve their virginity is to maintain a lifestyle of purity. Kulu and Sosibo shared this view. According to Sosibo, VT provides that girls are able to maintain their purity because they refrain from sexual intercourse with boys at a younger stage in their life. In the same way, Kulu says, accepting Christ means that a girl needs to sustain her virginity until the day that she enters into holy wedlock. For Kulu, virginity is not just about purity but it also includes holiness.

It is against this background that one can draw the inference that girls who are not virgins are labeled as impure or unholy while those unmarried virgins are regarded as pure and holy. It thus implies that a community can be divided into two groups based on their sexual activity and either the protection or the loss/surrendering of their virginity. Society encourages this unhealthy social division when it hails those whom it calls holy and frowns upon those whom they call impure. If VT becomes a source of division among young unmarried girls, using their sexual activity/passivity, how then does that community envisage dealing with cases of HIV and AIDS infection without dividing the society?

This is exactly the same way with the way that HIV was initially viewed. For a long time, HIV positive patients were labeled as unfaithful and those who were negative were seen as faithful. Consequently HIV positive people were marginalized and left alone with their struggle. Gideon Byamugisha said that, “61 percent of all women in Africa who are HIV-positive have never had sex with more than one man. They have waited, have been faithful, but they are now HIV positive (Byamugisha 1994:15). The same happened in the case of virginity. A woman’s shy man can be torn irrevocably without having sex. That cannot render a person unholy or HIV positive, because a hymen is no protection whatsoever in preventing any woman from contracting HIV.

Byamugisha reminds his audience that the message says abstains, if you cannot abstain, be faithful, if you cannot be faithful, use condoms. Byamugisha says that the message is a half-truth or totally wrong message. According to Gedeon, there are two problems with this message. “The message implies that if I am faithful, then I can’t get AIDS, which gives me a false security so that when I discover I am positive, I curse God. Therefore, faithfulness, it is not a right message, it may bear good message spiritually, but to assume it will protect you against contracting HIV infection, is an illusion (Gedeon 1994:16). He further argues that there is a need to evaluate some cultural and biblical views on human sexuality and their impact on HIV and AIDS prevention and control.

### **3.2.2 Virginity Testing as an Opportunity to Teach Values and Sexuality to Young Girls**

Malinga and Mafu indicated that they see VT as a wonderful opportunity to teach values to girls. Malinga says girls need to be given advice and then be tested so that they cannot do as they like. This provides girls with particular pride in their identity. Christians object to this wholeheartedly, because they say that it is violating the human rights of girls. She further argues that, on the other hand, the Church is very silent about VT. Mafu pointed out that there is a need to teach VT from the foundational grades, because with tradition it does not matter whether you are old or young. Mafu argued that Zulus need to admit their ignorance about their identity, as they normally turn to culture when things are hitting them and have no way of getting help. He said there is need to take cultural practices seriously.

The research partially agrees with them in that there is the need for teachings. In this technological age information spreads rapidly because of social networks and other technologically related resources. Everything is easily accessible, even to teenagers. They are exposed to sexuality while they are sexually immature.

It is common nowadays for an innocent urban girl who is still a virgin to be ridiculed by her peers. VT brings virgin girls together and through each other's company they are encouraged to protect their virginity. Traditionalists support VT, because for them it is not just a ritual but also a form of caring and protecting women. According to the research of Marcus, VT was also used to help a mother to encourage her children to remain virgins until they got married (Marcus 2008:540). Hence, it is in such environment where they can be taught. Malinga emphasized that VT creates an opportunity to give advice to young girls.

Teaching moral values and sexuality is indeed an indispensable norm for any postmodern society. The VT event is considered a golden opportunity to teach young unmarried virgins these norms and values pertaining to their sexuality. This cultural event also unites a number of girls as they are introduced to each other on their journey in buses to the event and this is how they start to socialize with one another and flock together. They get an opportunity to see other young girls who are virgins like them. Girls are also taught life skills, behavior skills and how to respond to a man who proposes to marry them. The nagging question still remains: What about those who lost their virginity? And what interventions are used to afford them the same teachings on norms and values that relate to their sexuality? These young people who are not virgins also need to be cared for and to be taught these moral values. It is not fair to exclude, reject or marginalize them on the assumption that they have already broken the moral code and are thus impure, unholy and thus not worthy members of their community.

### **3.2.3 Virginity Testing is a Sexual Moral Heritage**

Virginity testing is viewed as a traditional practice which gives traditional guidance and teachings to young girls. This tradition is passed on from parents, families, and communities to children. This practice has existed in some places and families for many years, and proud Zulus are persistently holding on to old customs since this is part of their heritage. A white mark on virgin foreheads symbolically informs the whole community that girls are still virgins and this helps them to keep their pride in their virginity. This is indeed a practice of which the Zulu nation is very proud.

Scorgie and Leclerc-Madlala recorded a march in August 2000 held in central Pietermaritzburg, where the girls and their matrons were protesting against the accusation that the girls are forced to go for testing.

During an interview, Mafu said that VT is a traditional practice that controls and helps youth not to engage in sexual intercourse before marriage.

Nomagugu Ngobese also argued strongly that the girls come voluntarily for testing, because they want to be identified with Zulu culture and tradition. "In the Mail and Guardian newspaper of December 16 of 1999, Leclerc-Madlala asserted that VT has struck a sensitive cultural chord, with some people arguing it to be a "cultural right". Her views reveal debatable issues regarding virginity testing" (Khuzwayo 2000:27).

### **3.2.4 Virginity Testing as a Christian Value**

Christianity encourages people to preserve their virginity exclusively for marriage. In the Bible, virginity was a pride and dignity of a woman, her parents and her religious community (Deuteronomy 22:20 and Exodus 22:16-17). It is against this background that the PMB and Howick circuit of the MCSA encourages the practice of VT. Kulu and Malinga see it as something that encourages and is in line with biblical teachings. To maintain virginity is a Christian virtue that justifies virginity testing. They even use the word 'holy', a religious term. It refers to the maintenance of holiness. Kulu argues that for a girl to accept Christ means she has to protect her virginity until the day she enters into Holy Matrimony. Sleeping around amounts to pretending to be already married and this disqualifies you for Christian marriage.

### **3.2.5 Virginity Testing Created for Women**

Among those who were interviewed, only two people viewed VT as a violation of the human rights of women. Ntuli (not her real name) said VT feels like a violation of a woman's rights. There are many who disagree about this practice. Disagreement centres around the fact that first, only girls or women are tested; second, that it is practiced in public; third, that the process on its own is not scientifically proven; fourth, it is a form of advertising virgins; and fifth, it does not relate that much to HIV prevention as is claimed.

Those who argue from a gender and human rights perspective are normally opposed to VT for women; they perceive it as an abuse. They argue that VT is an abuse of children and women's rights because in some cases its proven some girls are tested and found not to be virgins. This means that the girls are either forced or pressurised by parents and testers to go for VT.

The contradiction part of it is that, when the girl is no longer a virgin, the community perceives her as sexually immoral. However, medical investigations prove that VT is not accurate, because there are many other reasons for the absence of hymen other than sexual intercourse. It can be destroyed by falling off from a bicycle, athletic activity, horse riding, medical examinations or procedures, or through vaginal penetration by a tampon. It is based on these that VT does not make sense. VT is equated with female genital mutilation. Phiri says such comparison however is an exaggeration if one knows what genital mutilation entails (Phiri 2003:70).

The venue where VT is conducted has also been another source of disagreement. According to Phiri, “the arguments are based on the perception that the testing of girls takes place on an open field and this is dehumanizing to them and their privacy is violated. The VT that was observed by Leclerc-Madlala was conducted at a sports stadium, thus supporting evidence of the concern that was raised by the Gender Commission” (2003:70). There are numerous dangers during the event. For instance, the event that was conducted on 31 August 2013 was reported in the City Press News Paper as having had a case where a man was arrested by security staff and charged for filming virgin girls who were bathing the morning before annual reed dance. This means this ritual exposes women’s bodies to the public.

Based on the Gender Commission’s argument, Leclerc-Madlala and Fiona Scorgie agree that one of the biggest problems in using VT as a means of preventing the spread of HIV and AIDS infection is that it confirms the patriarchal argument that women are the source of HIV and AIDS (Phiri 2003:73). The Gender and Human Rights Commission have proven that some girls are partaking in this practice because of pressure from parents and testers. This dehumanises girls in a variety of ways, robs them of their privacy and disregards their right to decide for themselves whether they want to participate or not, since they are tested in public. Hence, gender and human rights activists are against this practice, because it is a form of women abuse. Many human rights advocates argue that VT is immoral, offensive and a violation of gender equality.

Some argue that it is not a genuine Zulu cultural practice but a re-creation of the development of tradition. Such arguments deny Africans the opportunity to apply a cultural practice or religious belief, which was practised at family level, to the new situation that requires a large-scale application.



With good intentions, Nomagugu and the others who support the ritual have transformed one aspect of culture to answer today's problems, in this case, the issues of HIV and AIDS and teenage pregnancy (Phiri 2003:71). How then can those who are not Zulus benefit from this practise? Because HIV and AIDS is everybody's challenge, it is not just for Zulu girls. Leclerc-Madlala (2008:533) is of the view that VT is an attempt to deal with the epidemic by exercising greater control over women and their sexuality.

### **3.3 Impact of Attitudes**

This research aspired to know the attitudes of Methodists on the issue of VT and what impact the *testing of the hymen has had on this faith community as far as HIV and AIDS is concerned*. It explores further how VT can be facilitated within the context of HIV. The Church is a very strong organization within community structures; hence, it has power to influence. The attitude of the Church on any issue, one way or the other, has an impact on the society. The spread of HIV has exacted everyone's attention, because the virus continues to spread unabatedly. It is mentioned in chapter one under the motivation of this study that the MCSA, like any other denomination in South Africa, has not expressed their views about VT as a means of preventing HIV and AIDS. However, there are denominational opinions about some preventative methods of HIV and AIDS. Those opinions have resulted in both negative and positive impacts regarding the virus. Musa Dube stated, "The world is raising about fourteen million orphans and taking care of many critically ill individuals (2006:132). The Church has played both a positive and a negative role in the HIV pandemic.

#### **3.3.1 Negativity towards HIV Best Preventions Methods**

The involvement of the Church in the HIV and AIDS prevention discourse has mostly been influenced by theological teachings or reflections. These attitudes have an immense impact on society. The Church has in certain cases dealt with HIV preventative methods in a very inappropriate way, sometimes consciously and sometimes unconsciously.

It was hardly admitted that some members of the Church are HIV positive, and that they are practicing unsafe sex while some are practicing safe sex. This makes it more difficult for those who are infected to admit and face the situation. Those who use preventative methods have found it difficult to ask for guidance from the Church. This has had a major impact on the Church; while it was ignoring the virus, its people were dying silently or using perceived preventative methods that were not helping them at all.

Philippe Denis has argued that “Religion thus contributes significantly to the moralization of HIV and AIDS discourse. In the most extreme form, it explains the disease as a punishment from God. Because God is the cause of everything, it is assumed that God is also the cause of HIV” (2011:61).

This view has possessed the Church and so it is assumed that HIV infects those people who are sexually immoral. A church person is not supposed to engage in unlawful and unsafe sex. The Church generally thought the role that they can play is to introduce Christ to people so that they can behave well and not contract HIV, however knowing Christ does prevent one from getting HIV and AIDS.

Denis (2011:37) argued that the confrontation between the condom and abstinence or fidelity has closed the door on any possibility for negotiating other prevention methods. It has polarized political attitudes that clash with the public view and reacted against official efforts toward AIDS prevention. When the Health Department suggested the use of condoms as one of the preventative methods, the Church was not happy about it. The Church opposed the use of condoms for its members. The refusal by the Church to sanction the use of condoms was problematic because church members were sexually active like anybody else. Hence, they put themselves at risk for practicing unsafe sex and contracting the much feared virus. In this case, the Church contributed to the spread of the virus rather than preventing it.

Phiri states that, “African women are aware that, despite the constant message of abstinence and faithfulness, the majority of Christians are not following the Church’s message. Therefore, while we are sorting out our power games surrounding patriarchy and the sanctity of marriage as originally intended by God, life has to be protected by whatever means is available today” (2004:428).

This then raises questions as to why the Church is quiet about VT as a preventative method. Is the Church for or against the use of this preventative method that is predominantly practiced by women only? Why is the MCSA that is based in KwaZulu-Natal, where VT is proudly and mostly practiced, so quiet on the matter? If the voice of the Church was so loud against the use of condoms, why is VT perceived to be taken for granted? To some people, VT is not even an issue for discussion. Jill Olivier says, “The most visible area of conflict between the biomedical and the religious sector has been the controversy over condoms.

There are religious practices or ideals that promote abstinence but oppose the use of condoms which are often portrayed in direct opposition to biochemical prevention strategies” (2011:37).

It is still problematic to find a cure for HIV and AIDS. However the arrival of anti-retroviral drugs (ARVs) has helped to suppress the virus. The Church has somehow preferred prayers rather than ARVs. Some Christians claim to heal HIV through prayer, and they advise people to stop taking ARVs, but to engage in fasting and prayer. This is very dangerous, because a person who has already started ARV treatment is not supposed to stop; he or she has to take the medication until they die. Jill Olivier says “religion and religious values can also have a positive or negative effect on perceived risk behavior in general. Religious fatalism, suggesting that life is predetermined by God and that individuals are powerless to change what happens to them, has been found to influence participation in HIV testing and other HIV preventative strategies negatively”(2011:36). The Church’s attitude towards virginity testing is very shocking, because they rejected condoms but they accepted VT uncritically.

### **3.4 Church Realization of its Attitudes towards HIV Preventative Methods**

The Church has largely corrected its negative contribution towards HIV infection. Lately it facilitates prevention seminars and is more open in its participation in this discourse. In KwaZulu-Natal where VT is mostly practiced, a Methodist minister, Neil Oosthuizen, opened the Hillcrest AIDS Centre in 1991(Denis 2011:36-37). In Uganda, church leaders were invited to serve on national AIDS committees as soon as they were established in the early 1990s. Theologians have influenced the Church to question its identity in order to deal with HIV infection. Hebert Moyo is of the view that “If the Church is the body of Christ, its members are different parts of the body; if one member is not well (affected or infected) then the whole body is not well, it is infected and or affected, therefore it has got AIDS”. He states, if the Church which is the body of Christ, has HIV and AIDS then the body of Jesus Christ has got HIV and AIDS” (2011:15).

Although some might interpret it differently from Moyo, this is one of those verses that motivate the Church to respond with love and compassion to those who are infected or affected. This view also does not contradict the cultural custom of helping one another.

Dube argues that, “According to *batho*, a person’s humanity and existence are inseparably united and being respected by others. Hence, a person’s humanity can be realized only through relationships” (2006:140).

According to Olivier, the number of religious organizations that are engaged in home-based care, primary health activities and the provision of ARVs and accompany care has increased (2011:37). It is not all denominations who have fully accepted the use of ARV’s, because some Pentecostal churches still believe that only prayer is the answer. Olivier stated that “At a public health level, there is emerging evidence suggesting that religious organizations are particularly involved in the provision of psycho-social support and in the provision of end-of-life and bereavement support” (2011:37). It is only the Church that provides spiritual support to mourning people. Denis says mainline churches have abandoned the view that HIV is a punishment from God but it continues to be upheld in some Pentecostal and African Independent Churches (2011:61).

Phiri posits that Africa is now exploring new ways of reading and interpreting the Bible that equip the Church to move away from a theology that condemns HIV and AIDS as a punishment from God, to a theology of God who is in solidarity with the HIV and AIDS-affected and infected people in the same way that liberation theologies have portrayed God to be on the same side as the poor and the marginalized (2004:427).

Denis, in quoting Rob Garner’s survey among mainline, Pentecostal, Apostolic and Zionist churches, found that the Pentecostals recorded the lowest degree of participation in extra- and premarital sex. According to Garner, the strength of the Pentecostals is visible in the four categories of indoctrination, religious experience, exclusion and socialization which allowed them to change the behavior of their followers (2011:64). It is generally clear that faith-based communities and government have all admitted that HIV and AIDS exist and needs to be taken seriously. Phiri says the formation of a new theology that deals with HIV and AIDS needs to recognize that HIV is more than a medical circumstance. Christians have examined their religious and cultural beliefs and practices in their understanding of mission. Reflection on a new theology is based on how the Church understands itself as having been sent by God to bring wholeness to a broken world (2004:423). The Church’s mission is never only for its members but it challenge is the need to reach outsiders. In the same way VT needs to be examined.

Phiri said “Nicolson has also rightly argued that ‘While not pretending that there are easy solutions, a major contribution which the Churches can make to the issue is to hold fast to the way forward, for all the theologies of Africa are to unite and take the current context of HIV/AIDS into theological reflection” (2004:429). The researcher fully agrees with Nicolson that for theologies of Africa, unity is imperative so that it can reflect ecumenically on the HIV and AIDS challenge. However the researcher argues that they should also take into consideration African cultural practices that are viewed by Africans as HIV and AIDS prevention methods, for an example, VT. If the MCSA wants to be relevant and engage the gospel in KwaZulu-Natal, they should not ignore the social issues in this area. Methodist reflection not as an HIV preventative method needed.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

This chapter listed the thoughts of Methodists of the Pietermaritzburg and Howick circuit about VT as a preventative method for HIV and AIDS. It included the feelings or views of Methodist interviewees on the practice. The research outcome is categorized in a table consisting of quotations from interviewees and by key statements from interviews. Besides that, the communities themselves have divergent views on VT. According to the research outcomes, Methodists support VT. They strongly encourage the use of the practice; very few Methodists are against it. However their perspective on the issue is influenced by many things, such as culture and biblical interpretations.

The researcher attempted to analyse the different reactions to VT and has also discussed the views on the practice of VT from a variety of perspectives, such as gender and human rights views, Zulu traditionalist views, general views and different authors’ views, as well as the negative and positive contribution of the Church to their preventative methods. The researcher found that the PMB and Howick Methodists also believe there is a relationship between VT and the prevention of HIV and AIDS. They even explore the socio-cultural background of VT among the Zulus. However, Church leaders of MCSA in Pietermaritzburg and Howick have not said or done anything with regard to VT in the last 10 years. In the same way, there is nothing that any PMB and Howick members are aware of relating to MCSA sex education material in sermons, teachings, and prayers.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **4.0 A WESLEYAN CRITIQUE OF METHODISTS' (PMB AND HOWICK) PERSPECTIVES ON VIRGINITY TESTING**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

It was evident from the interviewees on more than one occasion that traditions and customs define every aspect of a Methodist person's life. For example, one of the interviewees, Mafu, said that based on the tradition, he accepts the VT practices with excitement. One cannot separate culture and religion, since the lives of people are facilitated by both. However, culture is not constant or static, and too frequently culture seems to dominate the lives of women and children, even in the things that are not life affirming. Among those that were interviewed, no more than two people had different opinions about VT; whether male or female, they all strongly support this practice. The relevant chapter gave key statements on attitudes of the PMB and Howick circuit. These Methodists cannot ignore the practice of VT because it is a practice that is entertained by the community, an annual event. Methodists' teachings within a society should promote social justice and However, those teachings should be within Wesleyan theology while being contextualized for the sake of justice and transformation. The MCSA doctrines are based on Wesleyan theology or Wesleyan doctrine; even local churches follow Methodism. Hence their way of doing and seeing theology ought to be based on Wesleyan theology. This chapter gives a Wesleyan critique of the attitude of the PMB and Howick circuit on the practice of VT. It engages the outcomes of the empirical research with Methodism or the doctrine of Methodist Church by looking at John Wesley's themes regarding social ethics. However these themes are integrated with pastoral care perspective.

#### **4.1 Aims of John Wesley's Social Ethics**

Virginity testing in KZN is a social interest and HIV is a community or communal challenge. The Methodist Church founder had his own social ethics and the aim of his social ethics was the renewal of the individual (self-awareness and moral conduct, responsibility and solidarity) (Marquardt 1991:137). Virginity testing has the propensity to make some feel that they are better than others. Girls who are virgins are viewed as well-behaved girls as opposed to those who are not virgins. Wesley's work in education and training is significant for a study of social ethics and discloses an important part of his anthropology. Wesley regarded compassionate tasks as an essential part of the Christian life.

This emphasis gave him the hypothetical foundation and the frame of reference to set goals for his multiple education works (Marquardt 1991:60).

A girl who is tested and found not to be a virgin surely needs pastoral care, because she becomes exposed to the public; the community would know about it. Girls who are not virgins are exposed to unfair and insensitive treatment by the community. Historically, The Methodist groups had the task of not making another-worldly existence easy or possible, but of practising good manners of social conduct, developing sensitivity to the needs of others, and setting in motion effective measures of assistance (Marquardt 1991:137). There is insensitivity in VT and for the Methodist person to support it is questionable. Virginity testing does not encourage solidarity, instead it promotes division.

Marquardt (1991:119-132) further said another aim of Wesley's social ethics was the renewal of society and its power. The society will never renew its power without the renewal of individuals, including men and women, girls and boys. Wesley wrote in one of his sermons that all people were created as rational creatures, or creatures that are capable. Every person, whether Christian or non-Christian, has a "spiritual nature," to which belonged his or her understanding, and affections, and a degree of liberty and self-governing power. Otherwise he would be a machine, a stick, or a stone (Marquardt 1991:119-132). Is it not that girls are not given a chance to exercise their self-governing power, that this practice banishes their right of owning and self-governing a sacred part of their bodies?

Elizabeth Amoah (1996:80) says "In many cultural and religious traditions the woman's body is conceived in such a way that the autonomy of her will and wishes is completely denied, she is seen as an object for unlimited access".

#### **4.2 John Wesley Engaged his Community Pastorally**

In Zulu culture, women are still oppressed in some ways; there are cultural practices that oppress them. The culture domesticates, oppresses and marginalises them. Nevertheless the current Methodists must consider the way John Wesley treated the marginalised and the oppressed. Wesley did not confine his activity to providing pastoral and generous help for the oppressed. He had his way of being in solidarity with the oppressed. He had a concern for contemporary social problems (Marquardt 1991:70).

Virginity testing is a social problem. Marquardt (1991:70) argued that without the religious motivation that shaped the leading representatives of this Methodist movement, its final success would have hardly been possible. The contents and strengths of this motivation were exemplified in John Wesley's attitude toward oppression and his commitment to its abolition. The John Wesley that one's learn about would never support any form of oppression towards anybody whether male or female.

Marquardt 1991:33) further says that Methodist societies, as a field of love for one's neighbour, stimulate a sense of accountability to one's contemporaries in suffering. Sympathy and courtesy are respectful to the outcast, who should be loved for the sake of their Creator and Redeemer. Their body and soul, their temporal and eternal happiness, are valued equally with others.

It should be the concern of current Methodist people to sympathise with girls whom they have robbed of their freedom, but the MCSA is quiet on this issue. The body of those girls and their happiness should be valued equally to that of boys.

Marquardt (1991:34) stated that, "The point was not just to do good, to help the poor, and to be active in charitable works; this was no more than what the 'religion of the world' was already doing". John Wesley's involvement was, "rather, allowing one's fellow human being to share the high regard and esteem rightfully belonging to them in the same measure, on the basis of God's love, and this could not be denied without incurring guilt before God"(1991:34). Methodists should also emulate this example. Virginity testing seems to be a problematic way of facing the HIV challenge. In addition, the respect for girls is not taken as seriously as it is in the case of boys. The researcher is of the view that the body of a girl or a woman belongs not to her parents, but to herself. The showing of their private parts robs them of their self-esteem and this is in contrast to John Wesley's model that promoted the culture of high regard for everyone's humanity.

#### **4.3 Every Person has a Natural Conscience**

The sense of right and wrong is natural to humans. More than ten people who were interviewed said VT is practised to ensure that girls are not sexually active before marriage. The act of VT is done by somebody else and this means a girl's life is externally controlled.



Even if sex before marriage is unacceptable, girls themselves ought to know how to differentiate right from wrong.

John Wesley, Marquardt (1991:93) states, believed that every person has a “natural conscience” which aided him or her to a certain extent in distinguishing between the morally good and the morally evil. However, besides the natural consciousness, it is good to know that invite girls are also taught life skills and even given information about HIV and AIDS. Nevertheless the researcher’s opinion is that girls should be given the responsibility through their natural conscience to choose between good and bad morality. Every person has “some desire to please God”. This is held true even for those who did not know God, and although the level of this desire varied from one individual to another (1991:93).As Methodism discourages the practice of sex before marriage, this means they already have religious views on the issue that they are capable of building upon, based on their doctrinal view.

#### **4.4 Discussion of the Research Findings**

This section discusses the findings, based on the Wesleyan critique. Virginity testing divides the community more than it unites it. It is about time that the Church seeks preventative methods that unite people rather than those that separate them. Second, there is confusion among church members; they are not clear whether the practice of VT is even something that they can discuss as church people. They are not comfortable discussing cultural practices in the Church although they believe in them. Hence there is a need for guidance on VT. Methodists cannot ignore that they are Wesleyan or Methodist; there is a need for them to some extent see things through Wesleyan theology. Therefore this section discusses the theology of sexuality, seeking for preventative methods that unite, guide and are viewed through the lens of Wesleyan theology.

##### **4.5.1 The Theology of Sexuality**

The researcher is of the view that the MCSA has taken its stands on most issues, but it is not clear on a theology of sexuality. Methodists give their opinions on sexual issues only if there is a particular element that they have to deal with, like that of homosexuality. Khathide (2003:2) said that “The Church, as the body that claims to be the conscience of humanity and the custodian of moral values, needs to lead in the campaign to break the conspiracy of silence. But because of the history of silence on sexual matters, except to condemn, the Church finds it difficult to open up”. It is one of the researcher’s findings that Methodist

people hardly talk about sexuality. It is imperative to consider that although sex is a private activity, it has public consequences.

The MCSA has a duty to be concerned about the theology of sexuality within the Church in order to engage with social morals; to create social sexual morality for the welfare of those who are sexually active and young ones who are not yet sexually active.

The researcher is of the view that Methodists members are encouraging oppressive practices such as VT. It is not an intentional oppression towards women - rather it is a purely sincere concern - but they are sincerely misguided. Khathide (2003:2-5) says as a transmitter of values and moral code, culture has undoubtedly played a considerable role in ensuring that posterity knows what is acceptable and what is not. This is possibly the reason why the Church finds it difficult to handle sexuality related issues; for far too long the Church has considered sex as belonging to the domain outside the dominion of God. Khathide further argues that though we may find it hard to admit, it is the truth that human beings, including the Church, regards sex to belong to the devil, something that is associated with darkness, evil and wickedness. The Church seems to be comfortable with the fact that sex education is the responsibility of governments, schools and NGOs. Thus sex remains taboo for the Church (2003:5).

The researcher is of the view that the VT awareness is a demand in Churches located in KZN. The theology of sexuality needs to be evaluated so that the church can engage more effectively with HIV preventative methods. It is important to include various forms of human sexuality, cultural views of human sexuality, biblical views on human sexuality, gender, age, race, class and liturgical approaches to human sexuality (Dube 2003:161).

There is a demand for the Church to produce a document of the theology of sexuality that will guide not just girls but humanity, men and women, concerning the need for undivided sexual moral values. Girls go to virginity testing areas half-naked in their traditional attires and that on its own is ethically questionable. Khathide (2003:6) postulates that, "It is not as if human beings cannot control themselves sexually". It is for this reason, among others, that we need a theologically sensitive anthropology. The message of abstinence and faithfulness needs to be destigmatized. It is a message that needs to be understood against the background of a desire to build human character.

She also suggests that it is imperative to demystify human sexuality, and to reaffirm sexual equality.

There are groups pulling in different directions, such as the Department of Health, the Church, gender and human rights activists and cultural or traditional people, and that makes the issue more complicated.

Olivier confirms that “religious taboos on sexual education have been harassing AIDS prevention throughout Latin America” (2011:37). This is similar to South African unmarried Church members who discover that they are HIV positive, but find it hard to speak out because they will be judged. An HIV positive Christian hardly seeks advice from anyone because she or he is known as a Christian and fears that people will be judgmental if they know that he or she is sexually active. The practice of VT is a sexuality-related issue and the Church hardly talks about sexuality or anything related to it. Dube says that, “Among the infected who found themselves called to carry their crosses alone, the policy of confidentiality groomed anger, leading at times to the deliberate infection of others” (2006:138). If people who are HIV do not speak out they become depressed. The Church should talk openly, freely and sincerely about sexuality-related issues. Paterson, in (Haddad 2011:356). HIV, AIDS and Stigma: Discerning the Silences, argued that “In November 2001, the African Church leaders meeting in Nairobi stated: our difficulty in addressing issues of sex and sexuality has often made it painful for us to engage, in any honest and realistic way, with issues of sex education and HIV prevention” (The issue of the Church not discussing sexual related issues has been very problematic, because it has complicated and delayed the implementation of methods for HIV prevention. Christians feel uncomfortable to talk about anything that involves sexuality. Young people fall pregnant before marriage and this signifies that they actively engage in sexual intercourse. The high rate of teenage pregnancy reveals the significant need for discussing sexuality in the Church. The few seminars on sexuality are usually per invitation to married couples only, whereas sex is also practiced outside marriage, although it is encouraged only within marriage. The Church is silent on issues related to sexuality and this hinders the open teaching of safe HIV and AIDS preventative methods. Debbie Dortzbach states that it is the responsibility of the Church to help married couples and youth to be aware of sex from God’s point of view, through dialogue, reflection, and practicing righteous living (1996:17).

In most churches it has been emphasized adequately that God wants us to have sex after marriage, but seemingly very few people obey that law. It is time to emphasize sexuality as a whole; not just to teach about the right time to have sex, but to teach about the ways of having safe sex.

It is imperative to acknowledge that no one deserves to be infected, regardless of whether she or he is practicing sex in or out of marriage. Consequently, guidance on matters of sexuality should be provided to everyone irrespective of who is allowed to engage in sex and who is not. Dortzbach's strategy regarding those who are practicing sex in marriage promotes the development of booklets on biblical sexuality for married couples, to help them to begin talking about it (1996:17). It makes matters worse when even those who are married do not talk about their sexual issues. It is about time that the Church admits that it is not wrong or sinful to talk about sex; in fact, it is wrong and sinful in God's eyes to withhold any information that may be life-giving or life-threatening, as in the case of not constructively engaging in talk about sexuality at a time when HIV and AIDS infections kill more people around the world than some of our largest past wars.

Dortzbach (1996:18) say we must "Create forums where youth can discuss freely with adult Christians who are not afraid to discuss openly and answer questions with God's word". It is time to face the reality that although some young people know God's Word that teaches them to practice sex after marriage; they still do things their way and nevertheless engage in sexual intercourse before marriage. It might be helpful with regard to particular sexual issues, to give detailed guidance to the youth, and dig into the reality of the issues involved. It is generally known that some children, even as early as 5 years old, are actively engaged in sexual intercourse. Dortzbach further points out that there is a need to develop foundations in sexual education early in pre-school years and build on these through to adulthood (1996:19). It would also be helpful if parents could, from an early age or stage, make their children aware about sexuality in relation to HIV infection. Dortzbach (1998:4) says, "Youth are sexually active at very young ages. Information to help youth understand sexuality and abstinence must be given before the age of eleven".

Dortzbach discusses how youth, parents, and church leaders can be trained in HIV and AIDS counseling, and the provision of accurate information on sexual behavior and AIDS (1998:1-8).

She proposes the development of HIV or AIDS materials that are biblically based, culturally relevant, appropriate and acceptable to the target communities. Her objective is to reduce high risk sexual behavior among the Churchgoing population.

Bruce (in Phiri 2002:67) argues that there is a need for a new ethic of sexuality in the Church. Such ethics need to promote the view that sex is not a taboo for pastors and church members themselves, and that they should engage in discussions on sexuality.

Another important issue for the Church to admit is that even some Christians are sexually immoral. Ezra Chitando (2003:220) says, “The male quest for sexual pleasure has had negative consequences for women, children and men themselves in the era of HIV. Although there are many factors that facilitate the spread of HIV, including poverty, migrant labour, international injustice and others, patterns of male sexual behavior require urgent attention”. This thinking should include both men and women. Musa Dube in (Phiri 2003:87) says there is a need for unity that aims to provide information on human sexuality, sexuality transmitted diseases and HIV and AIDS, from perspective of African cultures and Christian churches

#### **4.5.2 Promotion of Equality for Girls and Boys**

The Church ought to promote equal fairness towards boys and girls in terms of sexual morality; undivided sexual moral values. The Methodist youth should formulate their own doctrine of sexuality before they evaluate whatever is thrown at them by society. The MCSA needs to find the necessary ethics to perform their daily life tasks in the community of the PMB and Howick circuit. The central interest is the pastoral concern, because these practices impact on the lives of women. It is necessary to consider women’s rights and not to exercise control over their sexual life.

The inspectors of girls in VT have power over the girls’ sexuality. The Church also has its own stance; hence, girls find themselves in different mentoring programs. It is a challenge in the Church because society teaches and prepares girls just for marriage, but if a girl does not get married she becomes confused because she was never taught how to survive without a man in her life. Then for her, life becomes meaningless. Aune says, “Many single women struggle with the experience of being on the margins of society. But the lifestyles of the married or at least their partners are constantly reinforced by social interaction and cultural patterns by the media; single women’s lifestyles are rarely legitimized” (2002:10). In that sense, the root of the fact that only girls are tested for virginity but not boys, might be the marginalizing mentality of society towards girls. Marcus (2008:540) asks, “If the social value

of virginity is largely one sided in the contemporary world of some isiZulu-speaking young adults, what merit might testing for virginity have in the South African population at large”? Marcus continues, “The concept of virginity itself has limited social worth because its preservation is no longer linked to a vital institution of sexual regulation: marriage. In KwaZulu-Natal, and South Africa more broadly, female virginity is hardly going to serve as a barrier to keep girls from penetrative sex” (2008:542). Marcus argues, “Intimacy not virginity is a bargaining chip that isiZulu-speaking girls and women use to get things they need or desire from men. If anything, common sense suggests that the public indication of girls deemed pure makes them more vulnerable to potential male predation in a world of transactional sex” (2008:542).

#### **4.5.2 Zulu Culture versus Methodism**

It is clear how strongly influenced people’s existence is by cultural practices in a particular context where culture is seemingly the dominant force in people’s lives, especially women. If Methodists intend to engage the PMB youth in discussion concerning the, they should be at the forefront of engaging with the youth’s challenges. In a patriarchal context such as KwaZulu-Natal, the Church can at least speak out on HIV preventative methods that are negative. It is evident that an immense obstacle for HIV prevention is that women are perceived to be the primary carriers of the virus.

Religion and culture are inseparable, for this reasons, congregations are confused as to how to interact with and navigate between cultural practices and religion. Gwendolynn Purushotham (2007:1) writes, “An essential task of the Church is the articulation of what it wants to communicate through its life and witness”.

Virginity testing is also commonly done in a Swazi culture and some other African tribes. In Swaziland, young virgins are requested to dance at a special occasion for the king, whereby he has the liberty to choose his next wife. The system is oppressive to young virgins who are hoping that holding on to her virginity will make her find favor with the king. This practice is simultaneously culturally significant and very oppressive to the freedom of women. The only honor a woman has is when she maintains her virginity and potentially lifts her family out of poverty by the amount of *lobola* paid for her. When VT was revived in Zulu society, whether as a cultural practice or an HIV preventative method, those who were advocating it certainly did not consider Christian religious identity that Zulu people adhere to.

This practice evidently bends more toward the importance of culture rather than the religious identity and the importance of sexual teachings. In some instances, it is obvious that the protection of culture is strongly fueled by resistance against religion and politics overriding culture.

One of the participant's responses was that people take for granted cultural traditions while they take the Church seriously.

#### **4.6 Guidance**

This research is, from a practical theology viewpoint, based on pastoral care. The researcher's main concern is not empowerment of women as such, but rather on the challenges and opportunities presented by VT and HIV from a pastoral perspective. Lartey (2003) views guidance as a form of pastoral care. He defines guiding as a method of following individuals, in the course of faith and love, to reveal what lies within them, while not rejecting the input of information, ideas and views (2003:65). There is a need for pastoral guidance that should assist KZN communities that practice VT as a means of HIV prevention. Guidance may answer questions like: how does one weigh the relative merits and demerits of any option? In this case we look at VT. How is one able to examine and decide among the different possibilities? (Lartey 2003:64). Guidance is the most important tool; for example in the case where people believe that sexual intercourse with a virgin will cure HIV and AIDS.

Men also believe that sleeping with a virgin reduces her confidence and power. It is a strong belief that if they have sex with a woman, they will discourage her. This belief is so widespread among men, and it can put the life of those who are publicly advertising their virginity at risk. If, for example, a man is thinking that a woman is better than he is, and if he has this mindset of believing the way to discourage a woman in anything is to have sex with her, he can end up raping her. Rakoczy (2004:287) stated that, "The increasing prevalence of rape (a BBC news report in November 2002 commented that a woman in South Africa has a greater chance of being raped than learning to read) is fueled by male dominance which is undergirded by cultural values".

#### **4.6.1. Towards Guidance that Liberates**

The kind of guidance that is needed is a liberating one. It is said that when girls are gathered for VT they are also given lessons on how to behave as young women. However, the fact that they are not just taught but they are also tested for their virginity means they are viewed as people who cannot be responsible for themselves. This way of teaching is so domesticating.

Paul Freire (1993:4) argues, based on principles of education, that the pedagogy of the oppressed treats students as an empty vessel to be filled with knowledge, like in a banking system. The banking approach to education is a metaphor that suggests students are considered empty bank accounts that should remain open to deposits made by the teacher. Freire (1993:5) rejected the banking approach, claiming it promotes the dehumanization of both learners and lecturers. He argued that the banking approach fuels oppressive attitudes and practices in society. Instead, Freire suggested a genuine approach to education which allows people to be aware of their incompleteness and to together strive to be more fully human. The researcher is of the view that, Girls also need to see the world their own way by applying their minds. This is the most effective way of giving advice and can be relevant in different areas of life.

Freire further offered a solution to this issue of banking education. He emphasized that students should be problem posing. A problem posing student speaks his or her own opinion about a topic. The student does not allow the teacher to come up with all ideas (Freire 1993:6). Virginity testing does exactly what Freire opposed. The suggestions of Freire would be immensely helpful as a guide. His education principles are very insightful. For instance, in South Africa, Bantu Education has resulted in dependency by those who have undergone that system. Education was not empowering and liberating to people.

The Zulus dominate the KwaZulu-Natal province in South Africa. Therefore, in the MCSA and any other churches that are located in KwaZulu-Natal, the majority of their members are Zulu. Hence, in engaging ministry or HIV prevention Methodist's Ministers in KZN need to know about VT.

“The variety of sexual norms is apparent not only in different times but also in different places. Related to this, is also the fact that even the relevant biblical statements must be separated from the contemporary setting which often conditions them and interpreted in the light of our changing situation today” (Lerclerc-Madlala 1978:295). This is contrary to the situation found when one looks critically at VT, because if virginity before marriage is highly



regarded, why should there be an overseer for a girl's virginity? The girl's virginity will be her full pride only if it belongs to her.

However, if a girl's virginity belongs to her husband and parents then who really owns it? There is a need for strategic engagement that will lead to transformation of thinking and ways of doing things. The Methodist Church of Southern Africa located in KZN needs to change the way they think about some cultural practices. The Church has to consider things that should be changed in order to strengthen the Church's identity, vocation and witness.

Lewis (1996:51) said most religious leaders struggle with the question of where the Church headed, the purpose of a church and leader's vision of what that church should become. He further said leaders become reactive instead of proactive (1996:52). There is initiative needed in the Church. In most cases, churches take too much time just praying for issues but rarely take first step towards acting on those particular issues. If it keeps on praying and doesn't take the first steps toward its purpose or towards what it is praying for, it might be praying for something that was answered long time ago.

The Church needs to be an initiator; if a church shows no action; its inertia will lead the church to nowhere. Transformation is needed in many areas where there is church. The researcher is of the view that congregations need a change in the way they think about things; the main reason being that there are continual changes in their context. In some cases it is impossible to use old systems with people who were not part of structuring them - they may not be comfortable with the structures simply because they are not relevant to them. Christian education needs to involve everyone in the Church, not just children or new converts, so that they could be changed to strengthen the Church's identity, vocation and witness. Second, there is the need for transformation on topics discussed during the learning process. Education should not be just doctrinal anymore. There is a need for relevant topics that reflect the concerns of the society. In practical terms, the researcher is of the view that the Church is the light of the society. Consequently, the Church has a duty to speak whenever there is injustice, whether it applies to men or women. How long is the Church going to be silent about cultural rituals that are not life affirming, while somewhere, every day, a woman is being oppressed?

The state organs have failed and are still failing to address cultural issues. Instead, the state is uncritically supporting almost all cultural practices. In the case of VT, the South African government is sponsoring these events. There are things that the Church cannot just leave to

the state organs. Hendricks (2006) has argued that “We who claim to know God became aware that any of God’s children are caught in webs of oppression and abuse .it is our divine duty to struggle for liberation and deliverance of our suffering neighbors in the same way that we would struggle for our own”. The Church is agent of transformation and the voice of the voiceless. We should not limit servant hood. The Church ought to take the leading role in combating moral degeneration manifested in some cultural practices. Hence, the researcher would like to know what the Methodist attitude on this issue is and what informs it.

It is critical to view human sexuality positively and thus allow the light of scripture to shine upon the area of sex. Perhaps it will be helpful to avoid traditional clichés like sex is wrong, sex is sinful, and so on. Both abstinence and faithfulness are positive messages for the human race (Agrippa 2003:6).

#### **4.6.2. Singleness is Normal Too**

Another area where guidance is needed is in teaching parents not to just raise or train girls for marriage only but to teach them that there is life even without marriage. The VT issue is all about preparing girls for marriage. Rakoczy commented that there is a saying among Luo people which goes, “a son is pole, but a girl is wildcat”. This means that a girl will search for a husband and leave the family, whereas a son is a permanent member of the family. Although this is a saying from West Africa, she notes that many African cultures share the same belief (2004:286). The researcher agrees, based on what she has absorbed from Zulu culture. In Zulu culture, a woman or a girl is treated as an alien in her own home, since she is expected to get married and to be a complete person through her husband. In her home, she takes no decisions and gives no opinions unless she is asked to say her view, whereas a boy is free. This can be the reason why girls have watchdogs for their virginity and why VT is done in order to prepare them for marriage. What happens if they do not get married after being prepared for married life? In terms of general Zulu beliefs towards marriage, they believe that marriage is a requirement for women to be honored. To be fully human, a woman is expected to get married; all the training that a girl gets from home is for her to be a goodwife and mother one day.

#### **4.7. Towards Preventative Methods that Unite**

Krige (1965) said that Zulu mothers used to regularly examine their girl's pudenda for the purpose of supervising against defloration. The girls would not eat meat at the wedding of a seduced girl; that meat was said to be unclean. This implies that non-virginity meant isolation

by both sexes of the community. The researcher considers HIV to bear challenge that demands unity from people and the researcher is of the view that VT divides community more than uniting it to consider “social holiness” as John Wesley did, we need to revisit VT in terms of asking how it benefits those who do not partake in the practice. There is the challenge of being caught in cultural pressure, whereas one is expected to demonstrate a Christian lifestyle.

It should be a basic Christian principle, for not just Methodist girls but for all people called Methodists, to be responsible for their bodies or sexual morals without being governed by someone else. How relevant is this practice to those Methodist Zulu girls who will get married to people from other tribes where this ritual is not practised? Is it not that even holiness itself is lived by the grace of God? Where do we put faith and the grace of God if the girls’ virginity should have watchdogs who are, in this case, virginity testers? The VT on its own can create space for sexual attractions. In modern society there are lesbians. The reason for the testers to be women is so that sexual attractions are avoided. Even when women test women? Same sex people can engage in sex. How can one be assured that sexual attraction is avoided?

It could be argued that Wesleyan theology, or Methodist doctrine given to Methodist people, does not sufficiently engage with the attitudes of cultural people. More engagement and research is needed to bring transformation to the minds of ordinary people.

#### **4.8 Towards a Preventative Method that is Safe and Relevant**

There is a controversy about VT in terms of its safety. Nomagugu Ngobese has argued that the girls are in danger even without VT because some of their rapists are within their homes and already know that they are virgins (Phiri 2003:73). “It promoted the preservation of the self, especially for women, and thereby raised awareness of the dangers of sexually transmitted diseases, especially HIV/AIDS” (Marcus 2008:536). Another controversy is how relevant this practice is. According to Marcus’s observations in research he conducted with a university focus group, he said, “Equally important, it was so clear from discussions in the focus group that testing could not safeguard virginity, even if that was the desired intention. Some remarked disparagingly that VT had no meaning beyond the event itself. At some areas, it is like you are advertising yourself, said one young woman” (Marcus 2008:540). The opinion that VT has no meaning beyond the event itself is probably true, because government provides for all the needs of the event. The event becomes a trip of sorts; truly some girls might just be interested in the event knowing that they will be taken care of for a weekend.

He further said, “VT will not alter the course of HIV infections, nor is it likely to safeguard idealised norms of chastity. In fact, VT seems to have little impact on young isiZulu-speaking people and other segments of contemporary South Africa at risk in the current pandemic” (2008:542). If VT helps, it is only helping the few Zulu girls who are participating.

Marcus(2008:542) says, “In KwaZulu-Natal and South Africa more broadly, female virginity is hardly going to serve as a barrier to keep girls from penetrative sex, an experience defined as much by coerced consent as mutual agreement, especially where coercion is seen as an intrinsic, even straightforward, part of intimate relations with the opposite sex”.

It is logical that VT on its own may not stop girls from having sex; the fact that they are tested does not mean they cannot have sex. Marcus states that it is unlikely to make a positive input towards lessening the burdens shouldered by older women in the HIV and AIDS epidemic. It may even worsen domestic and community tensions since it can fuel recriminations. “If the social value of virginity is largely one-sided in the contemporary world of some isiZulu-speaking young adults, what merit might testing for virginity have in the South African population at large” (Marcus 2008:536)?

Khuzwayo (2000:27), quoting a paper presented by Leclerc-Madlala at the University of Natal in 2000,states that contemporary VT events take place in a wide multiplicity of settings that range from the privacy of the family home, the kraal of the village, school halls, community centers or large, public sport stadiums. This means some girls are tested by parents in their home and it ends there, they are not part of the public or big event. The Daily News of23 August 2000 has also contributed in reporting about the topic. It states that an old Zulu tradition is enjoying new popularity. The tests were conducted by the elderly women of the neighborhood, who broke the early Saturday morning cold in Pietermaritzburg for the practice. They hope it will drastically reduce high levels of sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies (Khuzwayo 2000:27).

#### **4.9Methodist Members of Pietermaritzburg and Howick Methodist Circuits have Tolerated VT as a Necessary Zulu Ritual**

The practice is highly supported by most Methodist people involved in the study. In chapter three the researcher applied Methodist theology to the issue of VT. Apparently, the Methodist theology is silent on VT but it does encourage young people to abstain.

As a result, one may conclude that Methodist theology is essentially supportive of VT. The positions or opinions of most interviewees strongly support VT. It was mostly Methodists ministers in training or seminarians who were critical on this issue and most of them do not support the practice. However the Methodist teachings are silent on VT even while their members support it. In chapter three of this research, the researcher used Methodist theology to study, investigate and evaluate the prevalence of VT within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa.

There is no clear indication that Methodist theology prohibits this cultural practice. Consequently, one may draw the inference that Methodist theology essentially finds it difficult to decide which one will take precedence -western Methodist theology or indigenous Zulu culture. There is ambivalence around the question as to whether it supports or rejects the practice of virginity testing.

#### **4.10 Conclusion**

In summary, this chapter critique PMB and Howick Methodist attitudes toward the practice of VT through Wesleyan theology. It looked at how John Wesley engaged with society's issues and his aim of social ethics. John Wesley's aim was the renewal of each and every individual in society. In his engagement in society's crises or matters, he was involved pastorally, where he made sure he was on the side of the poor. It was his belief that every person has the ability to differentiate between what is morally right and wrong and this just happens thorough natural conscience.

This chapter also shared research findings. The researcher founded that there is a need for theology of sexuality.

In teaching sexual morals or rules, there should undifferentiated sexual moral values, in that they should be the same for both boys and girls. Somehow Methodists are unenlightened on what cultural practices they should embrace and what not to embrace. To an extent there is internal tension of being a cultural Zulu and a Wesleyan Methodist. It is hoped that the Church would provide guidance that will set girls and women free to live their lives, even while they are single, to know it is okay to be single, and also to be at liberty to own and be in control of their body parts. It is also important to use preventative methods that do not bring division to the community, unlike VT which promotes the view that virgins are better than those who are not.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **5.0 Summary, Conclusions and Recommendation**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter serves as a conclusion of the work covered in this dissertation. It also gives a brief summary of issues that are discussed in depth in this dissertation. In this research the researcher have realized number of thing, those things are summarized in this chapter. The aims and goals of the research were clarified. The methodology explained the principles and advance within which are used throughout this study, the method which is mostly use are interviews to strengthen the research. The historical background framework for this study, it models, theories, achievements, advantages and its disadvantages are discussed.

#### **5.1 Summary**

Although VT is widely practiced in PMB, not everyone thinks critically about it. It is viewed as a cultural ritual which is not questioned and that has nothing to do with the Church, yet the Church supports it anyway. As a result there is no guidance given in the form of teaching on VT. Second, in the MCSA there is rarely theology of sexuality or anything in relation to sex education. It is time that Methodists stop shying away from talking about sexual issues, for the benefit and protection of their youth. Most ordinary Methodist people divide their lives into two, namely their life as members of the Church and their life outside the normal operations of the Church, and that includes cultural rituals.

There are also concepts of power embodied in gender, doctrine, tradition and cultural constructs. These elements operate within the secular world and in the Church. These elements operate also within the challenges of HIV prevention; hence, such methods need to be evaluated to determine whether they are life affirming or life depriving. This evaluation can be used by the MCSA with special reference to the Methodist way of life, which is grounded in Wesleyan theology.

Based on the socio-cultural background of the practice, virginity testing was practiced among the Zulu people. It was basically practiced in the homestead, though after some time it was practiced communally. It is not new, but renewed.

The MCSA leaders, including Pietermaritzburg and Howick, have not said or done much with regard to VT in the last 10 years. There is no clear theology of sexuality in MCSA;

hence there is no relationship between MCSA sex education material and VT, even in sermons, teachings, and prayers. The central research question is what are the attitudes of Methodists in Pietermaritzburg and Howick circuit on the practice of virginity testing as a means of preventing HIV infection? The answer is that Pietermaritzburg and Howick support VT and believe it can prevent HIV.

### **5.3 Conclusions**

This study scrutinizes the Methodist standpoint regarding the cultural ritual called VT which is currently considered as an HIV infection preventative method. The central research focused on the Pietermaritzburg and Howick circuit of the Methodist Church. Attitudes of those within the circuit towards the practice were analyzed. There is a need for all Methodists to know the teaching of their church on this issue in order for them to respond creatively to the challenge. They should also participate in VT practices with the aim to give guidance to church members on how to react towards this practice. Virginity testing is a cultural practice and in South Africa it is mostly practised by Zulus. Since the Methodist Church is also represented in KwaZulu-Natal, VT is a rampant cultural ritual with which the Methodist Church is confronted, because Zulu Methodists are an intrinsically part of the Church. Some are practising VT and some are encouraging its practise. There is also a measure of ambivalence among some who ask whether Methodist people should embrace this practice or not. The researcher makes the following conclusions.

#### **5.3.1 In the Ancient Time VT was Practiced among Zulus in Homes and Communally**

It was learnt that in the ancient times VT was practiced among Zulus in homes as well as communally to encourage girls to remain virgins until they were married. It must still be ascertained whether the support for this practice is based on fear and concern for the spread of HIV and AIDS, or whether it is just people being proud of their ancestral teachings. Once that fact has been established, the Methodist Church will have to take and state its position with regard to virginity testing. The researcher has furthermore argued that VT is nothing else beyond the event itself. There is still a need to investigate whether VT is still relevant. This research uses practical theology as its premise. The researcher's main concern is with the experiments conducted and opportunities presented by VT and HIV for pastoral intervention.

The researcher has also learnt that within the context of the MCSA there are different views on the practice of VT. She discovered that the Methodist PMB and Howick circuit strongly supports it. The researcher has thus suggested that the Church study and develop a theology of sexuality, evaluate VT using Wesleyan theology as a lens, and search for preventative methods that unite rather than divide its people.

### **5.3.3 The Gender Qualification of Virginité Inspectors is overlooked**

The inspectors for VT are women only. No man is allowed to perform any of these tests. The reasons for this are self-explanatory, in the sense that when a girl is tested, she has to expose her private parts. It would therefore defeat the purpose of the test if a man would do the testing. However, one cannot necessarily conclude that allowing another woman to test girls is ethically justifiable, because our postmodern society endorses same sex relationships. There is thus no guarantee that a girl's dignity will be protected or that she will escape sexual attractions if the inspector happens to be a lesbian. There might be sexual feelings developed by the VT among women of the same sex, where VT is practiced to prevent girls from engaging sex. Therefore, the rule that it is only women who practice this ritual does not make it better.

### **5.3.4 Virginité Promotes Division**

The researcher also found that VT causes and promotes division among the members of the community, especially among the youth. These divisions emphasize that those who are practicing VT are justifiably faithful, pure and well-behaving girls who will have a shining future and potentially good husbands. On the other hand, those who are not practicing this ritual are regarded as unclean misbehaviors with bad morals, which have not only disgraced their parents and families, but deprived them of the full *ilobolo*. They are furthermore suspected of being HIV and AIDS carriers undeserving of anyone's son as a good husband. The *ilobolo* price for such a girl is thus valued lower than what is culturally determined.

In the same way, it can cause division among parents - between parents whose girls have undergone VT versus those whose girls do not practice this ritual. Where the same parents and girls are church members, it may also cause divisions in the church. Those who are virgins may think they are better than those who are not. In the same way, it also promotes inequality between girls and boys in the sense that boys see themselves better, since only girls are tested. Tabona Shoko says women are treated as the inferior sex and ranked low. Shoko



further says they are effectively ranked second in status to men along with their children (2008:76). VT needs to be weighed up in terms of whether it is a practice that promotes unity or division. If it promotes division, is it a right thing for Methodist to support?

### **5.3.5 VT is Bringing New Challenges and New Opportunities**

VT presents new opportunities and new challenges to the ministry of Methodism, especially in KZN. Since church members are silent about VT, perhaps because it is an issue related to sexuality, VT opens a space for the church to talk about sexual related issues. This will somehow help to expand to the topic of HIV and AIDS, which is information that youth need to know. The MCSA has the capacity to assist young teenagers with their behavior because it has command over and knowledge of the prevailing doctrines. There will be cultural challenges, but it should be clear where the church draws the line. Byamugisha says, “HIV/AIDS is feeding on the appropriateness of our culture, of our economic structures, of our relationships”. It is not just a disease. It is a symptom of things that have gone wrong (1994:11).

The researcher discovered that Methodists favor culture more than being Wesleyan or their behavior being doctrinally sound. The Wesleyan critique on the attitude of the PMB and Howick circuit towards VT was used. Using Wesleyan theology, the researcher has argued that John Wesley engaged his community pastorally. If Methodists want to engage the community on community, cultural, traditional or spiritual issues, they need to be pastoral. To approach the challenge of HIV by using VT is not pastoral at all; instead it is oppressive to girls.

Another Wesleyan belief is that every person has a natural conscience, which gives a person the ability to differentiate between what is wrong or right. Virginity testing does not promote any of the above; hence the researcher is appealing for alternative methods of prevention, methods which will promote equal sexual morals among boys and girls. Such prevention methods should unite the community and should be safe and relevant. In these prevention methods, guidance is needed in a form that liberates girls.

The MCSA (2015) shared on its Facebook page a quote from a speech by Graça Machel where she says, “We need to invest in the girl child, give her same value and opportunities as the boy so that we get to a point when men can stand up and say not to my mother, sister, and aunt on violence and gender based abuse. We need to change the way society sees itself and

sows the seeds of social transformation”. Girls and boys are of the same value and the church ought to live that out.

Methodists in KZN need to be clear on their stand regarding this practice. Through this research it was learnt that the practice is highly supported by most Methodist people, especially in KZN and specifically in the PMB and Howick circuit.

VT certainly presents new opportunities and challenges to the ministry of Methodism, especially in KZN. In addition, Wesleyan belief is that every person has a natural conscience, and this furnishes one with the ability to differentiate between what is right or wrong. Virginity testing does not promote any of the above, hence the researcher is appealing for alternatives of HIV and AIDS prevention methods which will promote equal sexual morals to both boys and girls, which are uniting to a community and are safe and relevant. Preventative methods need to give guidance that liberates girls.

#### **5.4 Recommendations**

As part of the way forward based on analysis of Methodists’ attitudes towards VT, the researcher has the following recommendations.

##### **5.4.1 A Document on Sexuality**

In the Methodist Church there are various things that show the need for a theology of sexuality and VT is one of them. It will never be easy for Methodist people to engage with social problems related to sexuality if they themselves do not have sex, or sexual education or guidance to give to their people. It is about time that the MCSA discusses sexual matters in depth. Both HIV and VT are sexual issues. The church which does not talk about sexual issues may not be helpful in discussing issues around the two; there should be sexuality education or a document. Sexuality needs to be addressed as a matter on its own, not only if other matters are discussed, like that of homosexuality. A post on the MCSA Facebook page on 30 June 2015, quoted the Youth President Megan Thomas saying that the young Methodists have challenged the Methodist church through Conference, to become more open and willing to discuss issues of sexual identity, pornography and sexual relationships. Methodist youth feel the need for open discussions on contemporary views of sexuality.

On the page they further say that sex is an important topic for young people, but despite the Church having strong views on sex related issues, they are rarely talked about or discussed openly. They say it is imperative that if we are going to hold moral positions on sexual issues in the Church, then we need to be willing to talk about them freely and honestly. The Church needs to provide information to children and young people that they may otherwise not receive.

#### **5.4.2 Application of Wesleyan theology or Methodism**

This is a call for Wesleyan thinkers. The researcher is not saying Methodist people should be Wesleyan. However, the MCSA is grounded in Wesleyan theology. The challenge is that the relevance of Methodism will rely on how Methodist people of today apply this theology to current issues. People called Methodists are expected to live a Methodist ethos; hence if they support VT, it has to be evaluated through the lens of Methodist doctrine and ethics. If Methodists support VT as a cultural practice, it should also be demonstrated that they believe and live Wesleyan theology.

As much as Methodists have a right to practice their cultural traditions, they should also in the same way think and engage as Methodists. Hence the researcher is saying that Wesleyan people should engage in social issues as people under doctrine.

#### **5.4.3 Mission Relevance**

If Methodist churches in KZN need to engage the gospel and contribute toward HIV prevention, they need to understand that VT impacts the KZN community as a whole; it should not just affect Zulus or girls but should be something that helps the entire community. But virginity testing is nothing else beyond the event. There is a need for alternative HIV prevention methods. Further, there are power issues within gender, doctrine and cultural settings. These elements operate within the secular world and in the church. If these elements operate in relation to the challenge of HIV prevention, they need to be evaluated as to whether they are life affirming or life denying. This evaluation can be done by the MCSA with special reference to the Methodist way of life, which is grounded in Wesleyan theology. The MCSA will be more relevant in KZN if they make use of the challenges and opportunities presented by VT and HIV from a pastoral perspective.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study examines the stance of Christians on the cultural ritual that is VT. The focus is on members of the Methodist Church located within the Pietermaritzburg and Howick circuits, respectively. The central focus of this research project is concentrated on investigating the attitudes of members of the Pietermaritzburg and Howick circuits regarding the practice of VT as a means of preventing HIV infection.

The VT process is viewed as a prevention method by some Methodist members; to them it is a cultural way of dealing with the HIV and AIDS challenge. The standpoints of Methodist members on this practice diverge. However, most of them support the practice. While this is the case, it is still important for the church to teach or guide its members about this issue. It is imperative that the church talks about sexually-related issues. The theology of sexuality should be the starting point. In this way the church will be relevant to current sexual challenges. VT presents another opportunity to talk about sexual issues. The silence of the church might affect many. Wesley's theories of social ethics can help to deal with the issue from a pastoral perspective.

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## Appendix One

### Letter of Consent

Dear Respondent

This is a request to interview you on the topic *An Investigation of Christians' Attitudes on the Practice of Virginity Testing as a Means of Preventing HIV Infection with Specific Reference to Methodists in Pietermaritzburg and Howick Circuit*. The project is done by Thembeke Cira (the student of University of KwaZulu-Natal), under the supervision of Dr Steve Muoki and Dr RS Kumalo. Their contact numbers are: for Dr Kumalo: Office 0332605850–email [KumaloR@ukz.ac.za](mailto:KumaloR@ukz.ac.za), and for Dr Muoki are: Cell no. 0744652132 – email address: [pastorstevo@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:pastorstevo@yahoo.co.uk). Your participation is voluntary, responses will be protected. You are free to withdraw at any time.

I .....have read and understood the condition of my participation in this research, I agree to participate.

Signature.....

Date.....

**Appendix Two**  
*(For interviews)*

1. What is your understanding of Virginity Testing?
2. What impact does it have in PMB and Howick?
3. What is your perception of this traditional practice?
4. What do you understand to be the position of Pietermaritzburg and Howick and your position on VT?
5. If you were given a chance what would you teach the congregation on VT and why?
6. Which church policies inform your understanding of VT?
7. What is the relationship between VT and HIV prevention?
8. Is there any preventative method that you suggest besides VT?
9. Can a Methodist rely on VT as means of preventing HIV?

## **The Selected Few Participants**

### **Appendix Three**

**Seminarian Name:** Rev KholekaGaven

**Gender:** Female

**Manyano:** Wesley Guild and Young Women Manyano

**Contacts:** 072822544

I do not understand VT; I just know that it is performed on young girls for virginity testing. I do not think it helps as a means of preventing HIV / AIDS because it depends on an individual not engaging in sexual activities. I have never had any engagements by the MCSA on this issue. I personally do not support it, I believe it is very dangerous, especially if it is conducted by people without formal medical experience; it exposes children for men to take advantage of the young girls. MCSA should provide workshops, other ways of helping children not to be involved in sexual activities. The church must do more educational workshops and talks around HIV. They need to preach abstinence, honesty and faithfulness to the elderly either married.

## **Appendix Four**

**Name and Surname:** Sanda Xaba

**Age:** 42 **Gender:** Male

**Manyano:** Men's Guild

### **Contacts:**

They (girls) go to Umhlanga to test if they (girls) have maintained their virginity or purity. But in present days of HIV and AIDS, that (VT) is one of the means they use to prevent it (HIV). For me I think AIDS has reached enormous proportions, so if there is one way of preventing it, I do not have a problem with it as long as participants are willing participants.

I will be sucking this one from the thumb: I have never heard anyone talking about it (VT), but I have seen buses going to kwaNongoma, so my assumption is that they (Methodists in the PMB area) approve it (VT). That is a tough one. I have got sisters but they have never been there. However, virginity testing is one of the ways that I believe can prevent HIV and AIDS and even get it away. The way people relate to something new; as people we need to allow you to do it even if you fail, we must allow you to fail. If it fails we will leave it and do something else. For me failure is success. But boys too need to be taught about their sexual behavior. I will specifically talk about Percylee (His society). There used to be sister Dladla who was teaching about HIV and AIDS prevention methods.

## **Appendix Five**

**Name and Surname: Mr Mafu**

**Age:      Gender: Male**

**Manyano: Young Men's Guild**

*Phela iqiniso lalimi kanje kuqala kwakuwusikompilo lwalukade lugada izingane ukuthi zingenzi inoma kunjani until zifike ezingeni zithi uma sezikhulile kubenokuhlukanisa ukuthi usungena emendweni*

(The truth is in the old days the tradition was to protect children to not do as they please until they have grown up to a certain age where it is acceptable for them to get married).

*Umzali akwenzela umcimbi wokukubonga ukuthi uzihloniphile usikompilo lwakhe nasendaweni uziphathekahle. Njengokuthi lababantu abadala abakubhekile oAunti nogogo.*

(Your parents will make a traditional dance to celebrate that you have respected them by looking after yourself well by staying a virgin).

*Ogogo abenza lokhu hhayo mama ngoba ugogo ngeke acheme uma wonile bakumangalele kumbe bakujezisa. Umamaubuyeabenalokokokuthiumntanami lona angifuni ihlazo lakhe laziwe. Mina ngokosikompilo ongiyakumukela lokhu futhi ngiyakuthakasela.*

(The people who will check if you are a virgin be the celebrations would be the grandparents and not mothers because mothers will sometimes hide the truth to console the shame against the family and in my opinion I accept and am happy in how it's done).

*Koda ke manje sihlushwa ukuthi usikompilo selibukelwa phansi kanti lalisikhulisa isizwe. Sekwa qhamuka ipolitiki angisho ukuthi ngiyayigxeka ipolitiki. Ipolitiki inomthelela ukuthi usikompilo asisalenzi ngokuthembeka nonembeza. Kwafikanenkolo isiko asangalenza.*

(But now we are in the times where tradition is not highly appreciated whilst it helped in shaping the nation. Now there are politics involved - not that I am talking against politics but politics have major inputs in not being faithful to our traditions anymore and the Christian religion as well).

*Umakuzofundiseka obizwa ngentombazane koda lowomfana engafundisiswe Khona ukuhlulela lapho nokuhluleka.*

(There are things which in the church say that you are not supposed to do this (traditionally) and my question would be where it is written in the Bible).

Another issue as well is for girls' virginity testing is done but not with the boys. We must not teach a girl child to look after herself but not a boy child).

*Ngoba okunye loku thelelana kwezifo akunayo incazelo eqondile. Ukuthelelana kwezifo akukona okoncansikuphela. Imfundiso zithi akengithathe ngokuthi Uma mina ngimiphambi kwenu ngibukeni phela ukuthi ngikhuluma ngento engazi ukuthi uma ingangehlela ngingamelana kanjani nalesosimo.*

(Because some other sicknesses have no straightforward explanation of whether is it only through sexual activities that you get these sicknesses or not. The lessons are, if I stand in front of you, I'm saying you look at me and see if I practice what I teach and how would I deal with whatever circumstances someone else is facing).

*Asifundiseke kusukela emazingeni aphansi ngoba kwisikompilo akukho ukuthi umdala noma umuncane kangakanani. Kufuna ukuthi simukele, Sikhapha igama elithi uma selingishaya sengingedwa ngingasakwazi ukubuyela ebantwini abantu abakhuluma into eyakhayo engathi kubo ngingamalungelo. 100 percent kuyahlangana ukuhlolwa kwezintombi nokuvikela igculazi.*

(We need to teach from very low grades because with tradition it does not matter whether you are old or young. It needs us to accept, we normally say on our own when things are hitting us and have no way of returning back to people for help 'I have the right'. 100 percent I agree that virginity testing can help with curing AIDS).

## Appendix Six

**Name and Surname: Mrs Kulu**

**Age: 38 Genders: Female**

**Manyano: Women's Manyano (Minister's wife)**

*Mina ngokwe understanding yam lento yokuhlolwakwentombikwelami icala mina lento ngiyibonairight. On my side I see this as a good thing*

*Kalokhuukuhlolwa kwentombi kwenzela ukuba umuntu ahlale ezigcinile aziphathe kakuhle.*

*Kuze kufike isikhathi sokuba uyashada eyintombazane. Kaloku uma ulala nabafana ungumama okanye uziphathisa komntu ungumama. Kalokhu uma uhlala ujongwa. Ewe ingakhona impact for instant especial iKZN ikeyaphezulu ngezinga leHIV and AIDS but ngokuhlolwa kwazo mna ndicinga ukuba Kukhona abantwana abasindawo, but on the other side baphephile abaphephanga,ngobanakwelinye icala Khona nale rape ngoba Khona abantu abaninzi banala Believe ukuba xa uneHIV uma ulala nomuntu oyintombi uyasinda. Uba umuntu uma esiya uzobasafe. Iright iphinde ingabikho right. But still naxa ehlolwa akaphephanga ngoba. Xa engahlolwa ngokuba abantwana baphephile uphephile umntwana mayehlolwa but ukwirisk because kukho izirapist South Africa but still naxa ehlolwa sengarashwa.*

(For me for a girl to accept Christ means you need to stay a virgin (look after yourself) until the time to get married comes because if you sleep around you are the same as a mother or you are carrying yourself like a married woman, but if you are constantly checked if you are still a virgin it helps. Like KZN has been very high in HIV / AIDS but by using the virginity testing method it helps to save some girls. But on the other side, there is the rape scourge that is affecting every woman, virgin or not, because there are some people who believe that if you sleep with a virgin your HIV gets cured).

*Mna I can support into yokuhlolwa kwabantwana provided bazo hlolwa behlala endaweni eyaziwayo ukuba bayahlolwa basafe abaphumi bangadiwekuyo. Ngikwenzele umzekelo eca kwasekhaya kukho umntwana obehlolwa but ekugqibeleni wabonwae sekhulelwe. So into yokuhlolwa ihamba neseecurity. Otherwise ukuba umntwana uyahlolwa nje hhay. Kwelinye icala iright kwelinye icala ayikho right.*

*Kukho abantwana abathi mina angifuni ukuluza ivirginity yami ngisemncinci before marriedge. Kalokhu ihlazo ukumitha kwabantwana.*

(On my part I can support the virginity testing provided they stay in a secured place and do not go unattended. An example would be, in my neighborhood there was a child who got tested regularly but in the end she was found pregnant. For me it means virginity testing goes with security so in other times it is good and bad. There are children who are committed to not losing their virginity).

*Enye into ile grant eyenza abantwana bamithele igrant apha KwaZulu-Natal kude kuthiwe imali yeqolo gamangala koda kekuthiwa ukhona lomphathi wengayifuniyo wayibizange maliyeqolo. Kodake ne Poverty. (Most probably this grant from our government is damaging more girls)*

*Izimfundiso zikhona eWeseli ngeHIV and AIDS but kudependa ngendawo okuyo. But afundisange VT angikawezwa. Koda kebukhona ubudlelwana kwi HIV neVT.*

*Umuntu cannot be HIV positive engakhange alale namuntu.*

*Condomise be faithfull to partner abstain*

*Ngokwe understanding lapho, yes Xa uwuMweseli ungarelaya kwiVT but izwe esiphila kulo likhohlakele ungathi gqi kotsotsi laba abarephayo. Ungayenza but one day uzohlangana nesigebengu. Isizweli kaNkulunkulu nokukholwa izinto eziright but ungawayeki amaphilisi owanikwa udokotela. For instant mnangimuthemba kakhulu uThixo but uma ngigula ngiyathandaza kuThixo asebenze nangeyeza.*

(What I find is that this grant is not helping matters as well, especially here in KZN. They even give it a pet name. Poverty is a big issue as well and I feel most probably this grant is damaging our girls. In our church there are teachings about HIV/AIDS and other teaching as well about VT, which is condoms, be faithful to a partner and abstain. But the world we live in is full of rapists but the word of God helps and taking medication).



## Appendix Seven

**Name and surname:** Miss Pinky Malinga

**Age:** 39 **Genders:** Female

**Manyano:** Wesley Guild and Young Women's Manyano

*Ukuhlolwa kwezintombi ukubheka ukuthi baseyizintombi yini abantu, kona kungasiza ngoba phela bayayalwa ilabantu ababaphethe. Kufuna bayalwe besebayahlolwa ukuze bangenzi noma ikanjani. Umuntu usuke enepride ngayengalokho umuntu uba negugu ngobuyena.*

*Nakuba abazalwane abakholiwe bengayizwisisi kahle ngiye ngizwe begxeka nje bathe ukuhlukumeza izingane lokhu mina angikuboni kanjalo. Isikhathi esiningi amantombazane ahlohwayo. Hhay lana esontweni angikaze ngizwe befundisa nge VT.*

(Virginity testing is to see if a girl is still a virgin. This can help because the girls are given advice from those who look after them. They need to be given advice then tested so they cannot do as they like. This gives you pride in yourself and in who you are, even though Christians do not believe and don't want to hear anything about it most of the time. I only hear them speaking badly of it, saying is violating girls. I, on the other hand, see it that way. I don't normally hear it in churches).

## Appendix Eight

**Name and Surname:** Miss Ngwenya

**Age:** 24 **Gender:** Female

**Manyano:** Local Preacher, Wesley Guild and Young Women's Manyano

*Yaqaalwaabanyeomamangasekhaya. I started joining my friends but ehighschoolhhay  
It was nothing to do with isikole. Umausayinganeawubinandaba. Kuleya age awunandaba to  
show your private part kunalokhouba excited because uyazibazothola lento abayifunayo.  
Ngaphandleumausuno 15. Uma uqalaukuyenza uyenza for one reason ukuthiabangani  
bathobayayenza. Once abanganibakhobayeka. Sayekasesifunda 05 because masenifunda u5  
nisukesenisilengobavelesasidudenesabangani.*

(Some women from where I come from initiated Virginitiy Testing. I started to join my high school friends even though it had nothing to do with school. If you are still young, you don't care, at that age you don't mind to show your private parts, instead you become excited because you know that they will find what they are looking for, unless you are fifteen. If you do it for the first time you do it for one reason – that your friends are doing it. Once your friends stop, you stop. We stopped doing it in seventh grade because when you are in grade seven you are a teenage).

*Uhhh iyasiza ekuthenini hlalela ovalweni awuhlangani nabafana awuqomi, ngoba  
mawuqoma uzulala nomfana. Uma ungaseyo na intombi uba indaba endaweni beseku  
mgroupana wakho mabehamba wena uyasala uyabona Khona amadote sasiwafaka  
amhlophe. But angikaze ngilibone elired but ngangazi ukuthi uma ungeyona ufaka elired.  
May belaba ababengasazo naba bengezingoba kwakwi embarrassment ukuthi ufake ured.*

(Uhhh it helps in that you stay in fear, you don't give yourself to boys – you don't have a boyfriend, because if you get a boyfriend you will have sex with him. When you are not a virgin, you become a joke in the community and you do not feel like you belong. I have never seen a red dot but I know that if you are not a virgin they put a red dot on you. Maybe they didn't come – those who knew that they are not virgins anymore – because it was an embarrassment to have a red dot.)

*Ukuhlolwa kusiza ngokuthi uyasaba Uhlala usovalweni. There was no impact because ungakwazi ukuqhubeka wena uzi discipline wena without going ukuyohlola. Ngaphandle ke Khona laba abangakwazi ukuzidisciplina. I would encourage ukuthi abanye bayenze Khona abantu abahlulekayo ukuzi disciplina bona badinga ukuphushwa ukuze ungagcini usungena kulegroup Khona uzohlala uso valweni.*

Virginity Testing helps because you stay in fear and you do not do as you please. However, afterwards there is no impact because you can continue to discipline yourself.

Out there, there are those who can't discipline themselves. I would encourage that others do get checked – those who can't discipline themselves, who need to be followed.

*But the moment ungena eWeseli lontoiyasala. Nonkeni vele nifane. KwaShembe benza sure uthi there is a different between umuntu onengane nongenayo ngisho ukuhlala kuhlalwa ngokuhlukana But eWeseli kuyafana, noma uyiyona noma awuyona kuyefana. They do not praise you for that. Kuyahlalwa nje ndawonye. Mhlampe ingayivikela nayo ingayidlala Indimanyana yayokoda igculazi ayingeni ngokulalakuphela. Nganginabo abangani ababethola ippresure ekhaya labo ukuthi bahlolwe ekwakuwumthetho wasekhaya.*

*Uma usukade uhlolwa bese uyolala awuvikelekile koda kuya encouragwa uku abstainer. Uma uyeka uku abstainer ke aay..*

The moment you enter The MCSA you leave that thing behind. The Shembes make sure that there is a difference between a person who has a baby and one who doesn't. They even sit separately but in The MCSA we are all the same, whether you are a virgin or not. They do not praise you for that, people just sit together. However, abstinence from sex is encouraged.

*Kuncono ukuyalwa bese uyahlolwa uma ngihlala nawe phansi ungiyala ngingenza kahle emehlweni akho kuphela base ngingalengenze engikuthandayo. Mhlampe ke abazali went wrong ekusiphoqeni ukuthi sikwenze thina esasi ku enjoya kwakungena nkinga. Koda kothandayo kuhle. Kulaba abangaku enjoy usuke usumcindezela umuntu.*

*They(MCSA) do not recognize lababantu abazigcinile. Like esontweni ngathethiswa ukuthi ngiveze izingalo ekubeni mina anginangane. Mina ngazi ukuthi uma usunengane Kufuna uhloniphise. Kumalo benze umehluko konengane nongenayo abasi recognized nangendlela esigqoka ngayo.*

It is okay to warn girls about sexual diseases but some of them need to be tested. I can 'do good' in front of you then when I'm alone I do whatever I like. Maybe parents were wrong by forcing us to do it; there was no problem when we enjoyed doing it on our own. It's fine for those who love it. It gives pressure to those who don't. The MCSA does not recognize those who are virgins, for example at church they shouted at me for showing my arms when I

don't have a child. I know that if you have a child you must cover yourself to show respect. They must show the difference between those who have children and those who don't.

**Appendix Nine****Seminarian Name:** Rev Dumipatsoe**Gender:** Male**Manyano:** Wesley Guild, Preachers Association and Young Men Guild**Contacts:**

Virginity Testing is a process whereby young girls are tested if they are maintaining their virginity. VT does not prevent HIV and it is against law. I do not know if the church has any position on this practice. I do not support this practice since it is against law. MCSA should provide other ways of teaching children about sexual related diseases.