GENDER, SELF-COMPASSION AND RESILIENCE AS PREDICTORS OF SEXUAL IMMORALITY AMONG YOUTHS IN OWERRI

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated gender, self-compassion and resilience as predictors of sexual immorality among youths in Owerri. Three hundred youths (132 males and 168 females) aged 15 to 29 years from Imo State University and Ekeonuwa market were selected using simple random sampling technique. Four hypotheses were postulated and tested. Three instruments, the sexual immorality scale, the self-compassion scale and the resilience scale were used for data collection. Multiple regression statistics was used for data analysis. The results showed that gender was not a significant predictor of sexual immorality ($\beta = -0.04$, t= -.74, p> .05), whereas self-compassion ($\beta = 0.11$, t= 1.99, p<.05) and resilience ($\beta = 0.13$, t= 2.25, p<.05) were significant predictors of sexual immorality. The overall model showed that together gender, self-compassion and resilience significantly predicted sexual immorality [F (3, 296) = 3.06, p= .03]. This study concluded that while there is no gender disparity in sexual immorality, young people who have high self-compassion and those who are highly resilient seem to be more involved in sexual immorality. The study recommended that sexual and reproductive health education should be a mandatory aspect of the training of young people at home, school, and faith-based organizations. All organs of society involved with child rearing, growth and development of adolescents should intensify their teachings against sexual immorality.

Keywords: Adolescence, Immorality, Imo, Multiple regression, Predictors, Resilience, Self-compassion, Sexual, Youths.

Introduction

Youths are often described both as the wealth and pride of a nation. The future of any nation therefore depends on the young ones who constitute the potential human resources needed for the community or the society (Austin, 2006). Culturally, sexual relationship between the opposite sex, is supposed to be preserved till marriage, but the prevalence of premarital sex in contemporary times with its accompanying consequences cannot be ignored (Alo, 2008). Sexual immorality is a subject of greater concern today than ever before, its nature and magnitude need to be clearly understood. It is a phenomenon ascribed to sexual acts that violate social convention. Concerning the activities of the flesh, immorality is the violation of some moral laws, norms or standards (Barker, 2014 cite in Oyediran, 2020). According to Oyediran (2020) sexual immorality is a worldwide phenomenon and one of the crucial steps towards mitigating this societal ill is to understand the reasons behind it. This societal ill has wasted a lot of youth as well as matured men and women of today. Most young men have had their dreams shattered, denied, or diverted because of sexual immorality. According to Dabhoiwala (2012), the evil company of some youths who are into cultism, pornography films, chain smoking, substance abuse and sexual activities will propel and initiate the adolescents into sexual immorality. No wonder, Oyediran (2020) discovered that a good number of students do not complete their secondary school education, that the educational pursuit of some is terminated by unwanted pregnancy, some others are forced into unprepared fatherhood and motherhood and many are suffering from various sexually transmitted disease including Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Hepatitis B. One could say that the population that falls victim to this phenomenon of sexual immorality is mostly undergraduates.

Sexual immorality seems to have become the order of the day based on the observation that girls no longer cherish the dignity of womanhood, while boys have lost control

over their emotions. Therefore, this study on sexual immorality is deemed necessary to investigate some of the factors that could influence this behavior and the rate of its occurrence among youths in Imo state.

There are different types of sexual immorality but this study focused on pre-marital sex, pornography, extra-marital sex, immodesty, homosexuality and masturbation. The virtual world or the internet and the worldwide web (WWW) are filled with pornographic materials and sites encouraging, proliferating, and validating many sexual and immoral issues. However, it is important to ascertain if any differences are evident in the occurrence of sexual immorality across genders. Gender as one of the factors in this study refers to the physical differences between people who are male, female, or bisexual.

Gobopamang (2011) examined the association between gender role attitudes and sexual immorality via a population-based survey. Cross-tabulations and logistic regression analysis were used to assess the influence of gender role attitudes on sexual immorality. The cross-tabulated results of the study showed that generally females had egalitarian gender role attitudes towards sexual behaviors compared to the males. Bivariate analysis showed that about 47% of the respondents believed males can have more than one sexual partner at a time while 42% indicated that females can have more than one sexual partner at a time. After controlling important socio-demographic variables, the analysis showed that traditional gender role attitudes were not significantly associated with sexual immorality of non-use of condoms and engagement in multiple sexual relationships. The relationship between gender role attitudes and sexual behavior is very complex and detailed qualitative research may provide more answers to the research questions than a cross-sectional study design. Additional research is required to understand this complex relationship.

Again, Isaac (2012) investigated the involvement of sexual Immorality among female students in Secondary Schools in Kogi State. The objective of this study was to find out the causes of and effects of perceived sexual immorality among female students and to suggest possible ways of minimizing it. The population of this study comprised of secondary school students and teachers in Kogi state. A total of seven hundred and fifty (750) respondents were selected as the sample for this study. The sample size of students selected was four hundred (400) while the sample size of teachers selected was three hundred and fifty (350) randomly sampled across the three senatorial districts in Kogi state. A questionnaire containing four sections was developed, standardized and structured based on the research questions, hypotheses and objectives and T-test was used in the analysis of the data. Major findings of this study revealed that sexual immorality among female students is caused by factors such as parental negligence, poverty, peer group influence and watching of immoral video films. The study revealed that the effects of sexual immorality among female students include unwanted pregnancy, abortions and spread of sexually transmitted diseases. The research concluded that parents/guardians should take special interest in curbing moral decadence among their female children, failure of which, will contribute negatively on their female children.

Self-compassion as another variable of interest in this study, is a construct developed by Neff (2009) that captures the feelings individuals have for themselves during difficult times and how they experience challenges. The construct of Self-compassion consists of three continuums: self-kindness versus self-judgment, a sense of common humanity versus isolation, and mindfulness versus over-identification (Neff, 2009). In the general population, high self-compassion is associated with good psychological health, and negatively correlated with psychopathology and scores on depression,

anxiety, stress, neuroticism, rumination, thought suppression, and neurotic perfectionism (Barnard & Curry, 2011; Macbeth & Gumley, 2012; Muris & Petrocchi, 2016; Neff, 2009). Increasingly self-compassion has been found to be associated with various positive psychological outcomes including happiness, optimism, contentedness, wisdom, emotional intelligence, resilience, and adaptive coping (Neff, Rude & Kirkpatrick, 2007; Scoglio, Rudat, Garvert, Jarmolowski, Jackson & Herman, 2018). Higher Self-compassion tends to have good interpersonal characteristics including empathic concern, perspective taking, forgiveness, and altruism thus leading to enhanced relationship functioning (Neff & Pommier, 2013).

Koller (2016) investigated the role of self-compassion and religious affiliation on sexual risk among young people living in poor social conditions in Brazil. In addition, they investigated if religiosity plays a protective role in young people's sexual life, with specific regard to delay of first intercourse, condom use, and contraception. This was a cross-sectional study with 7572 participants, 14-24 years old, from seven states of Brazil, who answered a self-administered questionnaire with 109 questions in the school environment. They found an association between self-compassion and lower odds of sexual debut. The group that had already initiated sexual intercourse was not different on the sexual risk behavior. Young people of low socioeconomic status in Brazil had their sexual behavior slightly influenced by religious norms. The findings of the study linked self-compassion to lower odds of sexual debut.

Magnusson (2019) assessed the role of low self-compassion as a mediator or moderator between early age at sexual debut and sexual immorality in young adulthood. Data was collected from 5734 Participants. Self-compassion, age at sexual debut and sexual immorality were used in a structural equation modeling framework to assess the relationships of interest. The result showed that approximately 17% of respondents

were involved in sexual immorality in young adulthood. Among females only, both early age at first intercourse and low self-compassion mediated the relationship between low self-compassion and sexual immorality in young adulthood. There was evidence of moderation in the male-only model such that lower impulsivity strengthened the relationship between early sex and sexual immorality. This study confirms the role of executive functions in sexual behaviors and suggests that interventions aimed at improving self-compassion may be beneficial in reducing sexual immorality.

Philips, *et. al.* (2019) carried out a comparative study that addressed the relationship between sexual immorality and self-compassion while using neuroticism and pornography as covariates. All participants were recruited through Mechanical Turk (MTurk), an online marketplace where individuals are paid to complete surveys. Participants were compensated with $1. The researcher hypothesize that self-compassion will have a direct negative relationship with sexual immorality and that for participants with high self-compassion, sexual immorality would rarely occur than for participants with lower Self compassion. The sample was comprised of individuals who endorsed viewing pornographic material in the past month. In this study, pornography was defined as videos, images, or other sexually explicit material depicting nudity and sexual behavior. Of the participants, 201 were male, 160 were female, and three respondents identified as "other." The mean age for the sample was 20.6 with a range of 15–22 years. The sample was predominantly Caucasian but also consisted of Black Hispanic/Latino, Asian and six other respondents. Almost 65% of the participants were in a committed relationship while 6.3% of participants stated they had never been in a relationship, 14% indicated they are single currently but had previously been in relationships. The Participants reported their average pornography use per week, ranging from 0–28 hours with a mean of two hours of use per week. When asked about

pornography use in the past month, nearly 26% of participants reported using pornography one to three times, 26.9% of participants indicated they had used pornography—four to six times, 15.1% stated they had used it—seven to nine times, and 32.1% reported they had used pornography 10 or more times. The results indicated that individuals who had low self-compassion tended to have higher hypersexual behavior. These findings suggest that self-judgment, over-identification, and isolation may be important for clinicians and researchers to consider in the development of hypersexual behaviors.

Like self-compassion, over the last two decades, researchers have shown greater interest in studying resilience. This psychological construct has been defined as the patterns of positive adaptation to risk and adversity (Masten & Cicchetti, 2012). They also define it as a process mediated by individual, family, and social factors for overcoming challenging situations. Leppink, Odlaug, Lust, Christenson, and Grant (2016) defined resilience as a concept that incorporates two components: (a) exposure to significant stressors or risks, and (b) demonstration of competence and successful adaptation. This definition fits the concept of resilience as a factor in the prevalence of sexual immorality. Hypersexual individuals tend to have more difficulty regulating their negative emotions and they may use sexual behaviors both for pleasure and to cope with negative emotional states (Leppink, Odlaug *et al*., 2016).

Enero (2017) carried out a comparative study on sexual immorality among high school students and differentiated them by age, gender, and level of sexual resilience. The sample consisted of 182 adolescents, aged 15 and 16 years from two educational institutions selected through stratified random sampling technique. The research instruments used presented acceptable reliability values. Sixty nine percent of the adolescents were 16 years old and 64% were female. Adolescents aged 16 years had

higher averages on sexual immorality. Regarding gender a significant difference was found between females and males. Also, a significant difference was found across levels of sexual resilience. The age 15 group presented lower levels than the age 16 group. A Lineal Regression Model showed that age, gender, and marital status were the main contributors to sexual immorality. Another Linear Regression Model showed that age, gender and marital status were significant predictors of the level of resilience. Research on sexual immorality among adolescents and factors that affect such conduct is valuable to understand the adolescents' motivations to practice or avoid sexual risk behavior.

Similarly, Nery-Hurwit (2017) carried out a study to examine the roles of self-compassion and resilience on perceived health-related quality of life. The participants included two hundred and fifty-nine youth groups around the United States. Self-compassion, health-related quality of life and resilience were assessed using self-report measures. A simple mediation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between the independent variable, self-compassion, the depended variable health related quality of life and the mediating variable resilience. Results showed a significant direct effect between self-compassion and health-related quality of life as well as an indirect relationship through resilience. The results contributed to the theoretical knowledge of how self-compassion influences health related quality of life in this population. The researcher stated that when challenges occur engaging in self-compassion may provide a strategy to cope with debilitating conditions and reframe perceptions of their health. The researcher additionally stated that increasing resilience may help individuals overcome stressful and traumatic events and experience quality of life with disability. Self-compassion and resilience are both modifiable constructs that can be targeted by programs seeking to improve overall wellness.

Finally, this study argues that individuals whether male or female, who have high sense of self-compassion and resilience would most likely avoid sexual immorality.

Statement of the Problem:

In our society today sexual immorality has become a norm for most young adults. Moral decay is increasing and immoralities like 'baby mama' which refers to childbearing outside wedlock are being celebrated. Some youth tend to indulge in these acts because of peers, others go as far as justifying it as a means of acquiring money to take care of their needs or lack of control for sexual desire. Sexual purity and morality should be one of the remarkable virtues of sustainable human society but these values are quickly eroding in modern societies. Due to the increasing incidence, acceptance and problems of sexual immorality, this study investigated gender, self-compassion, and resilience as predictors of sexual immorality among youths in Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the study

The general purpose of this study is to determine if gender, self-compassion and resilience together, will predict sexual immorality among youths in Owerri.

Other specific objectives are:

To investigate gender as a predictor of sexual immorality.

To examine self-compassion as a predictor of sexual immorality.

To determine if resilience is a predictor of sexual immorality.

Operational definition of terms

Gender: This was measured as being either male or female.

Self-compassion: This is the cognition and emotions associated with compassionate and uncompassionate responses towards oneself. It was measured with the Self-compassion scale developed by Neff (2003).

Resilience: This is measured in this study using the Resilience scale by Connor and

Davison (2003). It is individuals' level of personal competence and strengthening effect of stress.

Sexual immorality: This was measured using the Sexual Immorality Questionnaire developed and validated by the researcher based on the concept of literature.

Hypotheses

1. Gender will not be a significant predictor of sexual immorality among youths in Owerri.

2. Self-compassion will not be a significant predictor of sexual immorality among youths in Owerri.

3. Resilience will not significantly predict sexual immorality among youths in Owerri.

4. Gender, self-compassion and resilience together, will not significantly predict sexual immorality among youths in Owerri.

METHOD

Participants

Three hundred (300) youths between the ages of 15 to 29 years with a mean age of 22.04 and a standard deviation of 2.69 participated in this study. The respondents comprised 132 males and 168 females selected Imo State University, Owerri and Ekeonunwa Main Market in the city of Owerri through simple random sampling technique.

Instruments

Three instruments were used for data collection. They are the Self-Compassion Scale (SCS), Resilience Scale and Sexual Immorality Questionnaire.

The Self-compassion scale was developed by Neff (2003). It is a 26-item scale used to measure cognitions and emotions associated with compassionate and uncompassionate responses towards oneself. This scale has 6 subscales measuring Self-kindness (items

5, 12, 19, 23 and 26), Self-Judgment (items 1, 8, 11, 16 and 21), Common Humanity (items 3,7,10 and 15), Isolation (items 4, 13, 18 and 25), Mindfulness (items 9, 14, 17 and 22) and Over-identified (items 2,6,20 and 24). Subscale scores were computed by calculating the mean of subscale item responses. To get the total self-compassion score, reverse score the negative subscale items – self judgment, isolation and over-identification (i.e., 1 = 5, 2 = 4, 3 = 3, 4 = 2, 5 = 1) – then compute a total mean. This scale has a good internal reliability with Cronbach's Alpha of .92 with the six subscales having a Cronbach's Alpha ranging from .75 to .81. The test-retest reliability over a three-week interval showed a good total score of Cronbach's Alpha = .93 with the six subscale scores showing Cronbach's Alpha ranging from .80 to .88.

The second instrument is the Resilience scale developed by Connor and Davison (2003). It measures individual's level of personal competence and strengthening effect of stress. The instrument is made up of 25 items and each item is rated on a 5-point likert scale ranging from "not true at all or zero" to "true nearly all the time or four". Total possible scores range from 0-100, it is scored directly and higher scores indicates high resilience. The scale has an internal consistency reliability of Cronbach Alpha = .88 and .89, test-retest reliability of .87 and a good convergent and divergent validity. The third instrument is the Sexual Immorality Questionnaire developed and validated by the researchers.

 Procedure

The study started with ethical approval gotten from the ethical board of the Department of Psychology, Imo State University, Owerri. Imo State University, Owerri, and Ekeonunwa were purposively selected with the aim of getting a representative sample of both in-school and out-of-school young adults. Respondents were randomly selected in each location using simple random sampling technique. At

Imo State University, the researchers and research assistants went to lecture halls, and recruited respondents during lecture free hours by assigning random numbers to the students available in the lecture hall and selected the first 15 students in ascending order. The respondents were selected from 10 lecture halls located in different faculties of the University. In each lecture hall, the researchers introduced themselves, created rapour, and briefly informed the students about the aim of the study before distributing the questionnaires. On the other hand, the researchers issued questionnaires to every fifth likely respondent found in various sections of Ekeonuwa Market until a total of 150 respondents were selected. The respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. On completion of the questionnaire, each respondent was verbally thanked and encouraged to avoid sexual immorality, they were not timed. Data collected were organized and presented for data analysis.

Design and Statistics

The Cross-Sectional Survey design was used because data were collected across a large population of males and females from different localities and age brackets using questionnaires. Descriptive Statistics was employed to describe the participants. Multiple regression statistics was used for data analysis because the criterion variable was in continuous format and the study aimed to predict.

RESULT

Table I: Summary of inter-Correlations between Gender, Self-compassion, Resilience and Sexual Immorality

Variables	Sexual Immorality	Gender	Self-compassion	Resilience
Sexual Immorality	1.0			
Gender	-.038	1.0		
Self-compassion	.110*	-.021	1.0	
Resilience	.123*	.047	-.036	1.0

* =Significant, p < .05

The correlation result from Table I above revealed a weak negative relationship between gender and sexual immorality (r= -0.04, p > .05), indicating that as scores on gender increases, scores on sexual immorality decreases. This finding is not significant. The table also shows a weak positive relationship between self-compassion and sexual immorality (r= 0.11, p < .05), indicating that as scores on self-compassion increases, scores on sexual immorality also increases. This finding is significant. The table also shows a weak positive relationship between resilience and sexual immorality (r= 0.12, p < .05), indicating that as scores on resilience increases, scores on sexual immorality also increases. This finding is significant.

Table II: Summary of Linear Multiple Regression Analyses with Sexual Immorality as the Criterion Variable

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	8.230	2.988		2.754	.006
Gender	-.625	.849	-.042	-.737	.462
Self-Compassion	.064	.032	.114	1.990	.048
Resilience	.022	.010	.129	2.253	.025

Note: R = .173, Adjusted R^2 = .020, F (3,296) = 3.0, p = .029

According to Table II above, the summary of the result indicates that gender is not a significant predictor of sexual immorality (β = -.04, t=-.74, p> .05). The regression

coefficient above shows that for every increase in gender, youths' sexual immorality decreased by -0.04. Therefore, the first null hypothesis that gender will not predict sexual immorality is hereby accepted. While the result showed that Self-compassion was a significant predictor of sexual immorality (β = .11, t=1.99, p<.05). The regression coefficient above shows that for every increase in self-compassion, youths' sexual immorality also increased by 0.11. Therefore, the second null hypothesis that self-compassion will not predict sexual immorality is hereby rejected. The result also showed that resilience was a significant predictor of sexual immorality (β = .13, t = 2.25, p < .05). The regression coefficient above shows that for every increase in resilience, youths' sexual immorality also increased by 0.13. Therefore, the third null hypothesis that resilience will not predict sexual immorality is hereby rejected.

Finally, the result of the overall model of gender, self-compassion and resilience [$F_{(3, 296)}$ = 3.06, p= .03)] showed that together gender, self-compassion and resilience together, significantly predicted sexual immorality. The result also showed that the predictor variables have a weak positive association (R= .17) with the criterion variable. Together, gender, self-compassion and resilience accounted for (adjusted R^2) 2% of sexual immorality among youths. Hence, the hypothesis that gender, self-compassion and resilience together will not predict sexual immorality is here by rejected.

Discussions

This work investigated three independent variables: gender, self-compassion and resilience as predictors of sexual immorality among youths in Owerri. Four hypotheses guided this work. The the first null hypothesis that gender will not predict sexual immorality was accepted. The findings of this study are in line with the findings of Gobopamang (2011) whose result showed that gender role attitudes were not significantly associated with sexual immorality. But this result contradicts the findings

of Isaac (2012) who reported that gender was a significant predictor of sexual immorality and Isaac (2015) who found significant difference in the opinion of male and female students on the causes of sexual immorality. The present finding could be attributed to the fact that sexual immorality is more of a social situation or problem and thus, could be looked at from the point of a group behavior. Therefore, irrespective of the gender, sexual immorality is a moral decadence that affects youths in Nigeria.

The second hypothesis stated that self-compassion will not be a significant predictor of sexual immorality. The result showed a weak positive relationship between self-compassion and sexual immorality, indicating that as scores on self- compassion increase, scores on sexual immorality also increase. This finding was significant, meaning that self-compassion is a significant predictor of sexual immorality among youths. Therefore, the second null hypothesis that self-compassion will not predict sexual immorality was rejected. This result contradicts the findings of Philips (2019) study that showed that individuals with low self-compassion had higher hypersexual behavior and individuals with higher self-compassion had lower hypersexual behavior. Comparing this result to the findings of Magnusson (2019) who assessed the role of low self- compassion as a mediator or moderator between early age at sexual debut and sexual immorality in young adulthood, the findings contradicts the result of this study, as it recommended that interventions aimed at improving self–compassion may be beneficial in reducing sexual immorality. The result of this study also contradicts the findings of Koller (2016) whose result found an association between self - compassion and lower odds of sexual immorality.

The reason for this finding cannot be farfetched. People with high self-compassion tend to feel positive over every situation irrespective of what life throws at them, thereby making involvement in sexual immorality easy and fun for them.

The third hypothesis stating that resilience will not be a significant predictor of sexual immorality among youths was rejected because the result showed a weak positive relationship between resilience and sexual immorality, indicating that as scores on resilience increases, scores on sexual immorality also increases. This finding was significant and in line with the findings of Enero (2017) whose study showed significant differences in the level of sexual resilience. However, this result contradicts the findings of Nery-Hurwit (2017) whose result indicated that individuals who exhibited self-compassion and resilience were found to live a healthy life and thereby withdrew from sexual immorality.

A possible reason for the findings of this study is high economic hardship. These youths in a bid to survive the current country's economic hardship may start engaging in risky sexual behaviours as coping strategy. Thus, as economic hardship increases, their coping strategy (engaging in sexual immorality) increases.

Finally, the last hypothesis stated that sex, self-compassion and resilience will not combine to significantly predict sexual immorality was rejected. Possible reason for the findings of the study can be attributed to environmental factors. The society in which an individual is raised will determine the sexual behavior of such an individual. Nowadays, immorality is taken lightly in face of modern and global transformation which has worsened as we move down generations from the time of Baby Boomers (1946 -1964), Generation X (1965 – 1980), Millenial Generation (1981 -1996), to the current Generation Z (1997- 2012) which form the larger part of this study sample. Risky sexual behaviours are often displayed by significant persons in the society and even the family as coping and survival strategies and thus, are seen as no big deal without considering the direct and indirect effect on the younger ones who look up to them as role models. With time, this begins to shape the sexual behaviours of these

youths negatively as they may perceive such behavior as ways to cope with life stressors. Thus, the more resilient and compassionate they are to survive life events, the more they engage in sexual immoralities. Again, most undergraduates and youths in Owerri are late adolescents who mostly lived by themselves or cohabited with their friends off campus or in rented accommodations with less supervision from parents, guardians and university management. As such, peer influence, group behaviour and positive attitude towards premarital sex are very strong and might be a strong factor predicting sexual immorality.

Implications of the study

1. As seen in the result, self- compassion and resilience are significant predictors of sexual immorality. Having self-compassion and being resilient to oneself can predict one's involvement in sexual immorality.

2. Gender does not predict sexual immorality, environmental factors and social influence might be responsible for the current study. Peer influence may be predominant in male and females and might be a strong factor predicting sexual immorality.

3. Parent's attitude was also one factor that could predict sexual immorality in this study, whereby the parents of adolescence modeled some of the scope associated in sexual immorality there by making the adolescent to follow and in turn increases sexual immorality.

Conclusion

This study investigated gender, self-compassion, and resilience on sexual immorality among youths in Owerri. Four hypotheses guided this study. It was found that the first

variable, gender, did not predict sexual immorality. While the second and third variables, self-compassion and resilience predicted sexual immorality.

This study concluded that people who have high self-compassion or high resilience are more likely to be involved in sexual immorality.

Recommendation

In consideration of the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. Parents/lecturers/teachers/school-authorities/government should help young people develop a better understanding of resilience as a personal character.

2. Government should see to it that guidance and counseling services be equipped and empowered at all educational levels; Primary, secondary and tertiary institutions, and attention focused on helping young people understand the dangers of sexual immorality and how resilience can help them overcome it, instead of indulging in it.

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