



**ATTITUDE TOWARDS PREMARITAL
SEX AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL
ADOLESCENTS IN IBADAN
METROPOLIS, NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT

This paper explored the adolescents' attitude towards premarital sex. The influence of age, gender and religious affiliation of adolescents on the variable was examined. Participants for this study were drawn from a survey of 1902 secondary school adolescents in Ibadan, South west Nigeria. The students whose ages ranged between 12-20 years ($n=16$; $SD = 1.46$) were selected from public and private owned schools. On gender, male respondents constitute 48.2% while 51.8% were females. All the participants were in the Senior Secondary School (SSS) classes one to three. The results obtained revealed a conservative attitude towards premarital sex. A non significant difference was observed between male and female adolescents on attitude toward premarital sex, but age of adolescent and their religious affiliation has significant influence on attitude toward premarital sex.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescent health and well-being would continue to remain significant for a long time to come. At present, there are more than one billion 10-19 year olds in the world with 70 percent living in developing nations (Hindin and Fatusi, 2009). This implies that one in every five people in the world is an adolescent, and 85% of them live in developing countries.

The reproductive health concern of adolescent ages 10-19 years has attracted wide publicity from print and broadcast media. The academic community is continually initiating research efforts geared towards demystifying this developmental phase, which hitherto had in time past labeled as crisis period. For many reasons, adolescents are susceptible to a number of health challenges. Of significance is the outcome of their early sexual debut, in form of premarital sex, which invariably exposed them to unsafe sex, unintended pregnancy, as well as the risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS. Nearly two thirds of premature deaths and one third of the total disease burden in adults are associated with conditions or behaviours that began in adolescence, which may include unprotected premarital sex, unwanted pregnancy and complications arising from induced abortions.

Sexual activity among adolescents and young adults is quite high and the upsurge in the behaviour is quite disturbing (Alarape, et al, 2008, Adegoke, 2013). Various researches have observed that premarital sexual behaviour is increasing in sub-Saharan African (Cherlin and Riley, 1986). The percentage of women reporting sex before age 15 is substantially higher in Nigeria than in other countries (20.7% for women, 6.5% for men) while condom use at last high-risk sex is lower than other countries (24% for women, 46% for men) (DHS, 2003).

Sexual intercourse before marriage, often termed premarital sex is gradually becoming a norm than exception. In most of the current society and culture, most people consider premarital sex as acceptable and harmless (Rena, 2006). Several findings (Slap, et al, 2003; Ajuwon et al, 2006; Fatusi and Blum, 2008; Ola and Oludare, 2008; Adegoke, 2013) have shown steady decline age of sexual debut among adolescent population in Nigeria. There is a widening gap between sexual debut and age of marriage, and this has increased possibility for sexual activity before marriage; (Bearinger, et al, 2007; Singh, et al, 2005) Traditional norms in most Nigerian culture demand sexual abstinence before marital unions. However, due to the increase in the age of marriage, such norms have almost disappeared in all ethnic groups (Orubuloye, Caldwell and Caldwell, 1991; Oladepo and Fayemi, 2011).



The current situation contrast the traditional Nigerian societal context in which girls avoids premarital sexual experiences for fear of social punishment usually meted out to girls who lost their virginity before marriage (Okwonko and Eze, 2000). The era of virginity before marriage is gradually fading away, giving way for a more permissive sexual culture that tends to accept premarital sex as norm. The influence of socioeconomic development has made the sexual attitude of adolescents to become more open and independent from the ties of traditional, cultural and sexual behavior norms (. Ghule, Balaiah and Joshi, 2007). It has been observed that modern education exposes adolescents to different value systems, and the school environment enables them to interact more with partners of the opposite sex (Adeokun, 1990; Bauni, 1990). It is also believed that the traditional social controls of adolescent sexual behaviour are less effective in urban areas.

Adolescents engaged in premarital sex as a result of a number of factors, which include uncontrollable sexual urges, peer pressure, and financial or material benefits (Oladepo and Fayemi 2011) Economic status had also been identified as a major influencing factor. Being economically dependent on a romantic partner hinders adolescent ability to abstain from premarital sex. Cherlin and Riley (1986) remarked that different motivations exist for sexual activity among unmarried teenagers. For one group of females, sexual activity is spontaneous and is not geared toward a specific goal. In this case, sexual activity is spontaneous and is not geared toward a specific goal. In this case, sexual activity is believed to result from a breakdown of social controls by the elders over the youth. Premarital sexual intercourse among adolescents increases their sexual health risks, leading them to various reproductive health problems including HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), early mother hood, unwanted pregnancy, induced abortion, maternal mortality and other reproductive morbidity (Ogunniyi and Faleyimu, 1991; Owolabi, et al, 2005). Owolabi et al (2005) had observed that one thing that endangers the life of adolescents most is the practice of unprotected premarital sexual intercourse. It also includes having short term and multiple concurrent sexual partners:, and that failing to practice safe sex (consistent use of condom at every intercourse) or maintaining abstinence, constitute major source of adolescents' reproductive health problems. Adolescents who begin sexual activity early are more likely to have a greater number of life time partners (Webstrom and Mardh, 1990). In addition to the risk of contracting Sexually Transmitted Diseases(STDs) and HIV/AIDs, or getting pregnant, premarital sex leads to emotional distress, distrust, regret and emptiness (Rena, 2006).

Studies conducted in some countries revealed that factors which militate against adolescents abstaining include the influence of the media which brazenly endures sex, low self esteem and personal values, desire to confirm to perceived peer's premarital sexual activity and difference between the age of puberty and age of marriage (Kiragu and Zabin, 1993); Miller and Benson, 2001; Resnick, 1997. Those adolescents who abstain from premarital sex do so for a number of seasons: lack of interest, fear of HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted infections (STI), pregnancy and other diseases, religious inclination and parental influence and care(Oladepo and Fayemi, 2011). Literature has also documented unequal gender norms that perpetuates a sense of entitlement to sex among young men, whereas, young women are expected to remain virgin until marriage (Oladepo and Fayemi, 2011). The widespread perception those men's sexual needs are beyond their control and demand immediate satisfaction has been reported in other regions (Brown, Jejeeboy, Shah and Yount, 2001).

Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study are to:

- i examine the attitudes of adolescent towards premarital sex



- ii describe the influence of adolescent's gender, age and religion on their attitudes towards premarital sex

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance.

- i Age of adolescent will have no significant influence on attitude toward premarital sex.
- ii Gender of adolescent will have no significant influence on attitude toward premarital sex.
- iii Religious affiliation of adolescent will have no significant influence on attitude toward premarital sex.

METHOD

Design and Sample

The study adopted a descriptive survey design and data were collected cross-sectionally from the sampled adolescents. Participants for this study were drawn from a survey of 1902 secondary school adolescents in Ibadan metropolis, South west Nigeria. The students whose age ranged between 12-20 years ($M=16$; $SD = 1.46$) were selected from 20 public and private owned schools. On gender, male respondents constitute 48.2% while 51.8% were females. All the participants were in the Senior Secondary School (SSS) classes one to three.

Measures

As part of the survey, respondents completed a self administered questionnaire that has different sections on the major variables under examination. Items on attitudes towards premarital sex were derived from the 1995 and 1998 American National Survey of Adolescent Males (NSAM) instrument used by Boggess and Bradner (2000). The NSAM measured attitudes about premarital sex using the following questions: "which statement best describes how you feel about sexual intercourse before marriage?" Potential responses were: "Sexual intercourse before marriage is never okay"; "sexual intercourse before marriage is okay, but only if the couple is planning to marry"; "sexual intercourse before marriage is okay, as long as the couple is close, even if they don't plan to marry"; or "sexual intercourse before marriage is Okay, if both people agree to it." To analyze attitudes toward premarital sex, we used two response categories (yes=2, No=1).

RESULTS

Descriptive analyses

The general picture from the frequency and percentage distribution of adolescents on attitude toward premarital sex revealed a range of 24.8% to 55.8%. While majority of adolescents (71.4%) felt that sexual intercourse before marriage is never okay, 55.8% approved sex before marriage if the couple is planning to marry each other. Close to half (46.3%) of the respondents approved premarital sex if both partners agree to it and 24.8% of them supported sex before marriage, as long as the couple is close, even if they do not plan to marry. Table1 presents the percentage distribution and chi-square values of items described on attitude towards premarital sex.

Table 1:Percentage Distribution and Chi-square Values of Adolescents on Attitude towards Premarital Sex

	YES	NO	N	χ	p-val
Never OK until marriage	71.4	28.6	1659	303.00	0.001
OK if the couple is planning to marry	55.8	44.2	1642	21.99	0.001
OK as long as the couple is close, even if they don't plan to marry	24.8	75.2	1628	415.04	0.001
OK if both people agree to it.	46.3	53.7	1639	8.71	0.001

Bivariate analysis

Chi-square analysis and independent t-test were adopted to analyse the variables. The cross tabulation and chi-square values of response categories to items on premarital sex is presented along the percentage distribution shown in Table 1.

The results of the influence of gender on the variables are presented in Table 2: No significant gender difference was found between male and female adolescents on attitude toward premarital sex [t (1610) = 1.562; p = 0.118]. The hypothesis that gender of adolescent will have no significant influence on attitude toward premarital sex is accepted .

Table 2: Independent t-test analysis on the Influence of Gender on Attitudes toward Premarital sex

Sex	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	df	P
Male	791	6.025	1.1915	1.562	1610	0.118
Female	821	5.935	1.1173			

The result of the independent t-test analysis computed for the age groups on the recorded for influence of age on attitude toward premarital sex is shown in Table 3. It was revealed that a significant difference exist among the age groups on attitude toward premarital sex [t(1573) = 3.00, p = 0.003]. The hypothesis that age of adolescent will have no significant influence on attitude toward premarital sex is rejected and alternate hypothesis accepted. It was concluded that age of adolescent has significant influence on attitude toward premarital sex. The older group (16-20 years) showed more liberal attitude towards premarital sex than the younger (10-15 year) group.

**Table 3: Independent t-test analysis on the Influence of Age of Adolescent on Attitudes toward Premarital sex**

Group	N	Mean	Std. Dev	df	t-val	Sig
10-15yrs	1039	5.92	1.14	1573	3.00	0.003
16-20yrs	536	6.10	1.18			

The result of the independent t-test analysis computed on the influence of religious affiliation on attitude toward premarital sex is shown in Table 4. It was revealed that a significant difference exist among the religious groups on attitude toward premarital sex [t (1601) = 4.15, p = 0.001]. The hypothesis that religious affiliation of adolescent will have no significant influence on attitude toward premarital sex is rejected and alternate hypothesis accepted. It was concluded that religious affiliation of adolescent has significant influence on attitude toward premarital sex

The Muslim adolescents showed more liberal attitude towards premarital sex than their Christian counterpart.

Table 4: Independent t-test analysis on the Influence of Religious affiliation on Adolescent's Attitudes toward Premarital sex

Group	N	Mean	Std. Dev	df	t-val	Sig
Muslims	447	6.17	1.13	1601	4.15	0.001
Christians	1156	5.90	1.16			

DISCUSSION

Findings on premarital sex revealed an overwhelming disapproval for premarital sex among adolescents. More than seventy percent of the sampled adolescents were against premarital sex, and almost fifty percent approved sex before marriage, if the partners agreed to it. More than half of the adolescents approved premarital sex if the partners plan to marry each other. Intimacy was given by a quarter of the adolescents as condition for premarital sex. The conditional approval for premarital sex given by adolescents had been documented in previous studies (Kalof & Wade, 1995; Leigh et al., 1994; Salts, Seismore, Lindholm & Smith, 1994). Werner-Wilson, (1998) revealed a growing acceptance of premarital sexual activity if the relationship involves someone they love. Adolescents, especially females, believe that it is acceptable to engage in premarital sexual activity within the boundaries of a dating relationship (Kalof & Wade, 1995; Werner- Wilson, 1998). Adolescents of the present generation also appear to be rejecting casual sex in favour of committed and affectionate relationships despite the fact that these relationships may be temporary rather than leading to marriage (Werner-Wilson, 1998). The finding from this study is consistent with Ghule, et al (2007) study which showed that the majority of the students expressed conservative attitudes towards premarital sex.

The finding also corroborates Family Planning Foundation (1992) report where three in four respondents disapproved of premarital sex, but deviate from Goparaju (1993) study where college students reported liberal attitudes to premarital sex, even a majority of those who had not become sexually active approved of premarital sex. It was noted that the more permissive the attitudes, the more likely that premarital sexual activity will occur. The relationship between sexual attitudes and behavior has been described to be a vital linkage for young people to decide upon and engage in premarital sex, and that adolescents with



more liberal attitudes towards sexuality are more likely to experience premarital sex (Ghule, et al, 2007).

The mean age of 13.7 years (boys) and 14.3 years (girl) obtained for first sexual intercourse is consistent with previous findings on decline age of sexual debut for the adolescent population (Okpani and Okpani, 2000;) Fawole, et al, (1999). Oladepo and Brieger, 2000; Izugbara, 2001, Ajuwon, et al, 2001). A number of factors which include modernization, which bring about urbanization, increased female schooling, improved transportation, breakdown of the traditional norm and practices have been adduced for higher rate of premarital sex among adolescents and unmarried adults. Adolescents are also exposed to lot of sexual messages from the media, internet and global system of mobile communications devices. There is more liberalization in the society and there seems to be some level of permissiveness on sexual matters. Sexual thoughts are natural phenomena in the process of maturing. It is reasonable to expect that the nature and frequency of sex thoughts will have an important bearing upon sexual attitudes as well as behaviour (Ghule, et al, 2007).

On the influence of age that was found to be significant, a review of earlier studies identifies the fact that age is positively related to attitude towards sexuality. The older the individual adolescent, the more permissive the attitude towards sexuality (Rakesh, 1992, Abraham, 1997, Ghule, 2004). Ghule et al (2007) study also reported an association between age and attitude towards sexuality among male students. In Oladepo and Fayemi (2011) study, more respondents in the 10-14 year age bracket abstained from premarital sex compared with those aged 15-19 years. These can be attributed to older adolescents being more vulnerable to extraneous factors such as peer and media influences, lack of parental control and development of secondary sexual characteristics (Ihejimaize, 2001). The influence of gender was not significant in this study. This result is similar to what Amazigo et al (1997) obtained, where a non significant sex difference was observed in the percentage of male and female adolescents reporting premarital sex, but contrasts the findings of some previous works which have documented gender differences in adolescents' view of some of the socio-economic and health consequences of premarital sex (Barker and Rich, 1992; Hulton, et al 2000; Nzioka, 2001). Female adolescents have been found to generally recognize negative socioeconomic and health consequence of a premarital pregnancy, whereas, males have been found to be more likely to engage in premarital sex and to have more positive attitudes towards premarital sex than do females (Abraham, 2001). The established age difference in this study shows that age is another important component in premarital sex, because it determines the initiation of sex. It has also been noted that perception and attitudes do vary by age (Kekovle, Kiragu, Muruli, and Josiah, 1997).

The influence of religious affiliation on premarital sex for adolescents was found to be significant. Studies have shown that religious beliefs have a significant impact on attitudes towards sexuality (Ghule, Balaiyah and Joslu, 2007), and the extent to which religion influences individual attitudes, depends on the specific doctrines of each religion. Rangaiyan (1996) had also noted that the negative influence of self-religiosity on attitudes towards sex clearly shows that individuals who perceive themselves as more religious display conservative attitudes towards sex. All religions maintained explicit statements about the inappropriateness of sex before marriage and emphasized sexual abstinence except within marriage (Ghule, et al, 2007).

Conclusion and Recommendation

Various findings has indicate that adolescent sexual activity and premarital sexual activity are a fact of life in most African countries, as is the case in many Western societies. The norms regarding premarital sexual activity in African societies vary from society to society. In such a situation, it is necessary to educate the adolescents and the general youth about the responsibilities associated with sexual activity and the potential consequences. Also, given the high prevalence of premarital sex without corresponding protective measure



against sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS, there is the need for extensive and efficient behavioural change communication programmes as reiterated by Fatusi and Blum (2008). From all indications, a comprehensive policy on adolescent reproductive health is needful. As pointed out by Otoide, et al (2001), such policy must clearly outline a strategy for educating both in-school and out-of- school adolescents about reproductive health before they initiate sexual activity.

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