

**FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS AND ADOLESCENT SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR IN YALA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF CROSS RIVER STATE**

**Abstract**

This study investigated family characteristics and adolescent sexual behavior in Yala Local Government Area of Cross River State. The study employed descriptive research survey type was chosen for this study. The population for this study consisted of all adolescents in public secondary schools from senior secondary one to senior secondary three in Yala Local Government Area. A sample of three hundred (300) respondents (students) from senior secondary school one to secondary three was selected using simple random sampling techniques. The instrument employed in the study was a self-developed structured questionnaire Adolescent Questionnaire (AQ). The data collected after coding were analyzed using Mean, Standard deviation and t-test statistic. T-test statistic was used to test the four hypotheses formulated at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed that family structure, parental monitoring, socioeconomic status and religious background have a significant influence on adolescent sexual behavior in Yala Local Government Area of Cross River State. It was therefore recommended that parents should discuss sexuality issues with their adolescent children to disabuse their minds from early engagement in sexual activities. Parents should also respect the institution of marriage and the core values that keep a family together so that their adolescent children will follow their examples.

**Key word:** Family characteristics; parents; adolescents, sexual behaviour; Yala

**Introduction**

Adolescence is the transition period between childhood and adulthood. During this period an individual is regarded neither as a child nor as an adult. Developing into adolescence is a gradual process and this has to do with different phases of development. The first phase is the early adolescence, which covers the period of 11-14 years. The second is middle adolescence from 15-18 years, and the third is late adolescence, from 18-21 years (Abu and Akerele, 2006).

Hall (1904) opined that adolescents are associated with emotional instabilities and hyper-activities which make them to experience storms and stress. Also Erickson (1965) averred that identity formation creates tension in the adolescents to the level that some of them become confused about their personality. In the midst of these rapid physical, emotional, and social

changes, adolescents start to question adult standards and the need for parental guidance. It is also a time of search for identity and the beginning of sexual activity and experimentation.

In the last few years, studies from different parts of Africa revealed a trend of high incidence of premarital sexual activity among adolescents (Hargeaves, Bonell, Morison, Kim, Phetta, Porter, Watts and Pronyk, 2007). One in every five people is an adolescent and the World Health Organization (WHO, 2012) puts the population of adolescents at 1.2 billion and 85% of them live in developing countries. Okonta (2007) stated that adolescents are not homogeneous group; their needs vary greatly by age, gender, religion, socioeconomic status, cultural context etc. According to him, their sexual and reproductive health needs also vary differently across groups, cultures and religion.

Studies from various parts of the country have shown high level of sexual activity among unmarried adolescents of both sexes with progressively decreasing age of debut risky sexual intercourse with multiple partners (Ola and Oludare, 2009). Girls often bear the consequences of early sexual activity which results in unintended pregnancies, teenage births and abortion by quacks. Also sexually transmitted diseases occur in both sexes and when not properly treated, lead to chronic reproductive tract infection (Duru, Ubajaka, Nnebue, Ifeadike and Okoro, 2010).

It has also been estimated that close to 30million of the Nigerian population is below the age of 19 years, and these groups along with the population of young adults, constitute about 45% of total Nigerian population. More than 83% of women from this age have had sex by age 20 (Osagie, 2003). Adolescents being the future adults and leaders of tomorrow, these figures are frightening. Traditional norms in most Nigerian cultures which encourage premarital sexual abstinence until marriage are rapidly fading away.

### **Statement of the problem**

The incidence of sexual abuse and risky behavior among adolescents in our secondary schools has become a source of worry and grave concern. These have led into unintended pregnancies, teenage parenthood and illegitimate children.

The government and Non-governmental Organizations (NGOS) have made concerted efforts against child-abuse, one of the major reasons for the introduction of sex education into the school curriculum and many women activists agitating for child-right act-reports reveal that early sexual involvement by adolescents is still alarming; such reports include that of Abu and Akerele (2006) who reported that male adolescents have had sexual experience from early age of 14 years.

According to them, parents spend less time with their children and leave them with nannies and guardians.

In Yala Local Government Area especially Okuku and Okpoma, parents subject their adolescent children of school age to child labour and make them hawk in market places, streets, motor parks and filling station premises. By doing this, they expose these adolescents to early sexual activities.

It is against this backdrop that this study was conducted to examine family characteristics and adolescent sexual behavior in Yala Local Government Area of Cross River State.

### **Research questions**

The following research questions were raised to guide the study

- i. Is there any difference in sexual behaviour of adolescents from intact and non intact family structure in Yala Local Government Area?
- ii. Is there any difference in sexual behaviour of adolescents monitor by father and mother in Yala Local Government Area?
- iii. Is there any difference in sexual behaviour of adolescents from high and low socioeconomic status in Yala Local Government Area?
- iv. Is there any difference in sexual behavior of adolescents from religious and non-religious background in Yala Local Government Area?

### **Statement of hypotheses**

Based on the research questions, the following hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance.

- i. There is no significant difference in sexual behavior of adolescents from intact and non-intact family structure in Yala Local Government Area.
- ii. There is no significant difference in sexual behavior of adolescents monitor by father and mother in Yala Local Government Area.
- iii. There is no significant difference in sexual behavior of adolescents from high and low socioeconomic status in Yala Local Government Area.
- iv. There is no significant difference in sexual behavior of adolescents from religious and non-religious background in Yala Local Government Area.

### **Literature review**

#### *Family structure*

A family is one of the most important agents of socialization of the child. In African context, family structure comprises extended family, single parental family, step family, matrilineal

family and patrilineal family structure (Ojua, et al., 2014). Family lives have been disrupted as a result of rapid change associated with globalization. In fact, sexual activities among adolescents have been on the increase worldwide.

Wallerstein and Lewis (2004) reported that girls who come from single parent families engage in sexual relationships at an earlier age than girls who come from two parent families. In the same vein, Forste and Haas (2002) found that adolescents residing with two biological parents at age 14 were less likely to have ever had sexual intercourse when compared to adolescents residing in other family structures. Some researchers argued that adolescents living with two biological parents fared the same as those from single-parent families (Wilder and Watt, 2002; Upchurch and Kusunoki, 2004).

However, the negative effects of living in a step family or single family are at times significant for one gender but not for the other (Longmore et al., 2004 and Pearson et al., 2006). Cleveland and Gibson (2004) revealed that females from intact families had slightly fewer sexual partners than their peers in non-intact families but such relationship existed for males.

A study conducted in Lagos among out-of-school female adolescents found that more than 60% of those who reside with relatives or friends were sexually active compared to those who lived with both or either parents (38%) (National Population Commission (NPC) and ICF Macro (2009)). A survey based study in a slum in Kenya, reported that when a father lived in the same household as his never married daughters, they were much less likely to have had sex than when neither parent nor only the mother lived in the household (Biddlecom, et al, 2009). In Ghana, (Alan Guttmacher Institute , 2006) and Cote d'Ivoire Biddlecom, et al (2009) they revealed that adolescent females who lived with both parents were less likely than females who had other living arrangements to have ever had sex, though, the same was not found for males. Two parents are more likely to provide a best emotional support and life lessons necessary for a child's development and psychosocial adjustment.

Also, adolescents living in two parent families take advantages of the presence of their parents in the home and can internalize from both father and mother about heterosexual love and commitment (Markham, et al, 2003 and Miller, 2002). Research has also shown that adolescents whose parents are not married have a tendency to believe that premarital sexual intercourse is socially acceptable and thereafter to initiate sexual intercourse prematurely.

Other causes of family instability such as divorce, remarriage, parental death and mother-only families have been found to increase the likelihood of sexual initiation among adolescents. These conditions are reportedly more prevalent among the out-of-school females compared to their in-school counterparts (Biddlecom, et al, 2009).

#### *Family monitoring*

Parental monitoring according to De Graaf et al., (2010) refers to parents' knowledge of where, who, and with whom their children spend time. In this respect, Huebner and Howell (2003) found that middle and high school students who perceived high levels of parental monitoring were more likely to have used a condom at last vaginal intercourse and report having only one sexual partner in their lifetime compared with adolescents who perceived low levels of parental monitoring.

Relatively, studies carried out by De Graaf et al., (2010) and Pedersen et al., (2003) indicated that stricter parental monitoring is associated with delay of first sexual intercourse and with consistent contraceptive and condom use as well.

Studies on both maternal and paternal monitoring yielded mixed findings. In one Japanese study, mother monitoring was associated with later first sexual intercourse for girls, but no associations were found between father monitoring and the sexual behavior of either boys or girls (Nagamatsu and Sato, 2008). In contrast, one study in nine countries showed that boys who reported a low level of maternal monitoring were likely to indulge in early risk behaviour than girls, while low paternal monitoring was associated with early sexual behavior only for girls (Lenciausiene and Zaborskis, 2008).

#### *Family socioeconomic status*

Parents' socioeconomic status refers to the family occupation, income or educational attainment.

Hobcraft and Kiernan (2001) opined that young women who live in poverty, deprived conditions or come from less privileged backgrounds are more likely to become pregnant while a teenager. In the same vein, Singh and Darroch (2000) affirmed that teen living in poverty and deprivation are more likely to become pregnant and teen parents often have lower lifetime earnings.

Odimegwu et al., (2002) reported that adolescents with low parental income were more sexually active than those who reported high parental income. And that economic hardship would encourage girls to become sexually active at an early age. The perceived or real

rewards, both financial and material are also main enticements to indulge in early sex (Ankomah et al., 2011).

Research carried out by Johnson and Way (2003) using Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) data gave conflicting findings on the relationship between poverty and HIV status. In Kenya, the wealthiest women are almost three times more likely to be HIV positive than the poorest women. Also Donnelly (2006) reported that in almost all countries, the rich people have the highest number of HIV rates. These findings suggest that the relationship between parental income and sexual activities is unclear.

#### *Religious background*

One variable that has not been given proper attention is the impact of religious belief on adolescents' behaviour.

A lot of researches have been conducted to find a correlation between adolescents' sexual behavior and religious commitment (Lehrer, 2004), but no serious attempt to corroborate the mechanism through which religion impacts sexual behavior exists in Nigeria. Since religious values are the source of moral instructions for many individuals, the teachings of the churches are likely to play a role in the formation of individual attitudes, values and decisions. The extent to which religion affects individual attitudes and behavior is dependent on the specific doctrines and policies of the churches and on the degree of integration and commitment of individuals to their respective religious institutions (Thorton and Camburn, 1988 and Lehrer, 2004).

The influence of religion as a social control occurs through provision of norms for acceptable sexual behavior. Religious adolescents are less likely to involve in sexual intercourse than those who do not, even though church involvement is not a yardstick that adolescents will abstain from sexual activities (Bezuidenhout, 2004).

Bearman and Brucker (2001) found that religious beliefs delayed coital debut for white, Asian and Hispanic middle and late adolescents, but had no impact on Black adolescents (Rostosky and Regnerus, 2003). They also revealed that religious parents teach norms, values and responsibilities to their children from religious views so as to help them abstain from involving in sexual activities at infant age.

Some studies showed relationship between the perception of Godor religion as important, involvement in religious activities and decreased risk behaviours ranging from drug and alcohol abuse (Miller, Davies and Greenwald, 2000), to juvenile delinquency (Benda and Corwyn, 2001; Roehlkepartain, King, Wagener and Benson, 2006). In addition, a study of

954 Australian teens (ages 15-19) showed that youths who see themselves as being highly religious were less involved in behavior than youths in the study grouped as high risk.

Smith and Denton (2005) carried out a study with 3000 youths and their findings revealed that teens who report that religion is important in their lives and who take part in organized worship and religious activities will exhibit lower rates of risk behaviours.

Lammers, Ireland, Reisnick and Blum (2000) conducted a study in the United States of America revealed that religiosity didn't predict frequency of intercourse, but more frequent intercourse was correlated with adolescent decreased religiosity.

In other studies where only one item on religion was considered, findings reveal that Catholics and Protestant females initiate sexual intercourse later than their counterparts; frequent attendance at religious services was related with more sexual attitudes and less frequent sexual intercourse (Wilcox, Rostosky, Randall, Wright, 2001).

## **Methodology**

### *Research design*

The descriptive research survey type was chosen for this study. It is a survey type which is aimed at collecting data and describing them in a systematic way, the characteristics, features or facts concerning the given population (Nworgu, 2006 and Adeyemi, 2007).

### *Population*

The population for this study consisted of all adolescents in public secondary schools from senior secondary one to senior secondary three in Yala Local Government Area.

### *Sample and sampling techniques*

A sample of three hundred (300) respondents (students) from senior secondary school one to secondary three was selected using simple random sampling techniques.

### *Research instrument*

The instrument employed in the study was a self-developed structured questionnaire Adolescent Questionnaire (AQ). The questionnaire validated with a reliability of 0.90 was used to collect responses from adolescents (students). A four point scale, modified Likert type strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and strongly Disagree (SD) was used. The questionnaire had two sections. Section A elicit from the respondents demographic information such as name of the school, class, sex and age. Section B was a scale that measures the variables under investigation.

### *Data analysis*

The data collected after coding were analyzed using Mean, Standard deviation and t-test statistic. T-test statistic was used to test the four hypotheses formulated at 0.05 level of significance.

## Results and discussion

### Hypotheses testing

#### Hypothesis one

There is no significant difference in sexual behavior of adolescents from intact and non-intact family structure in Yala Local Government Area.

Table 1 t-test analysis of adolescents from intact and non-intact family structure

Family structure	$\bar{X}$	SD	N	Df	t-cal
Intact family	23.5	4.17	300	298	5.55*
Non-intact family	21.5	3.28	300		

$P < 0.05$ , critical  $t = 1.96$

The mean score of intact family structure (23.5) was higher than the mean score of non-intact family structure of value (21.5). The t-test analysis revealed that the calculated t-test value of 5.55 was greater than the critical t-value of 1.96. With this result the null hypothesis is rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis. Hence, there is a significant difference in sexual behavior of adolescents from intact family and non-intact family structure in Yala Local Government Area.

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#### Hypothesis two

There is no significant difference in sexual behavior of adolescents monitor by father and mother in Yala Local Government Area.



Table 2 t-test analysis of adolescents monitor by father and mother

Parental monitoring	$\bar{X}$	SD	N	Df	t-cal
Mother monitoring	24.9	4.09	300	298	7.52*
Father monitoring	22.6	3.37	300		

$P < 0.05$ , critical  $t = 1.96$

The mean score of mother monitoring (24.9) was higher than the mean score of father monitoring of value (22.6). The t-test analysis showed that the calculated t-test value of 7.52 was greater than the critical t-value of 1.96. With this result the null hypothesis is rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis. Hence, there is a significant difference in sexual behavior of adolescents monitor by mother and father in Yala Local Government Area.

### Hypothesis three

There is no significant difference in sexual behavior of adolescents from high and low socioeconomic status in Yala Local Government Area.

Table 3 t-test analysis of adolescents from high and low socioeconomic status

Socioeconomic status	$\bar{X}$	SD	N	df	t-cal
High	20.6	4.21	300	298	5.32*

Low	18.8	4.08	300
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$P < 0.05$ , critical  $t = 1.96$

The mean score of high socioeconomic status (20.6) was higher than the mean score of low socioeconomic status of value (18.8). The t-test analysis showed that the calculated t-test value of 5.32 was greater than the critical t-value of 1.96. With this result the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis upheld. Therefore, there is a significant difference in sexual behavior of adolescents from high and low socioeconomic status in Yala Local Government Area.

#### Hypothesis four

There is no significant difference in sexual behavior of adolescents from religious and non-religious background in Yala Local Government Area.

Table 4 t-test analysis of adolescents from religious and non-religious background

Religious background	$\bar{X}$	SD	N	df	t-cal
Religious	24.2	4.12	300	298	5.17*
Non-religious	22.2	3.31	300		

$P < 0.05$ , critical  $t = 1.96$

The mean score of religious background (24.2) was higher than the mean score of non-religious background of value (22.2). The t-test analysis revealed that the calculated t-test value of 5.17 was greater than the critical t-value of 1.96. With this result the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis upheld. This means that there is a significant difference in sexual behavior of adolescents from religious and non-religious background in Yala Local Government Area.

#### Discussion of findings

The result of hypothesis one revealed that there is a significant difference in sexual behavior of adolescents from intact and non-intact family structure in Yala Local Government Area. This finding is in agreement with National Population Commission (NPC) and ICF Macro (2009) and Biddlecom, et al, 2009 who found that more than 60% of adolescents who reside with

relatives or friends were sexually active compared to those who lived with both or either parents (38%). Also that when a father lived in the same household as his never married daughters, they were much less likely to have had sex than when neither parent nor only the mother lived in the household.

The result of hypothesis two showed that there is a significant difference in sexual behavior of adolescents monitor by mother and father in Yala Local Government Area. This finding is in consonance with Lenciausjiene and Zaborskis (2008) who found that boys who reported a low level of maternal monitoring were likely to indulge in early risk behaviour than girls, while low paternal monitoring was associated with early sexual behaviour only for girls.

The result of hypothesis three revealed that there is a significant difference in sexual behaviour of adolescents from high and low socioeconomic status in Yala Local Government Area. This finding is in consonance with Odimegwu et al., (2002) who reported that adolescents with low parental income are more sexually active than those who with high parental income. And that economic hardship would encourage girls to become sexually active at an early age. Also according to Ankomah et al. (2011), rewards both financial and material are also main enticements to indulge in early sex.

The result of hypothesis four revealed that there is a significant difference in sexual behavior of adolescents from religious and non-religious background in Yala Local Government Area. This finding is in line with Bezuidenhout (2004) who opined that religious adolescents are less likely to involve in sexual intercourse than those who do not, even though church involvement is not a yardstick that adolescents will abstain from sexual activities. Also Rostosky and Regnerus (2003) revealed that religious parents teach norms, values and responsibilities to their children from religious views so as to help them abstain from involving in sexual activities at infant age.

## **Conclusion**

Adolescence period is a stage of transition biologically, physiologically, socially and economically from childhood to adulthood. This is a period when every child looks forward to and has the belief that he/she is no longer a child. It is a period when an individual becomes aware of how he/she feels, thinks and behaves. The influence of family is very important in that the family determines to a large extent the success or not of this stage of childhood to adulthood. From the findings of this study, there is indication that family structure, parents' socioeconomic status, parental monitoring and parents' religious background have a significant influence on

adolescent sexual behaviour. It was therefore recommended that parents should discuss sexuality issues with their adolescent children to disabuse their minds from early engagement in sexual activities. Parents should also respect the institution of marriage and the core values that keep a family together so that their adolescent children will follow their examples.

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