

## Social Influences as Determinants of Sexual Attitudes and Behaviours among Adolescents of Reproductive Age in Nigeria

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**Abstract:** This study established the influence of parenting style, siblings, sexual partners and friends/peers interactions on adolescents' sexual attitudes and behaviours. A total of five hundred and forty secondary school adolescents from three senatorial districts in Oyo State were randomly involved in the study. Their ages ranged between 15 and 21 years with a mean age of 18.2 years and standard deviation of 4.2. The two instruments used were author-constructed questionnaires with 0.81 and 0.69 reliability coefficient, respectively. The data obtained were analysed using multiple regression analysis. The result indicated that significant relationship existed between parenting style, friends/peers interactions and sexual partners but not with siblings. The results further indicated that, a combination of the independent variables significantly predicted adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviours. Based on the findings, it was recommended that, those in the helping professions should take cognizance of those variables that have been found to influence adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviours.

**Key words:** Parenting style, sexual partners, adolescents, siblings, Nigeria

### INTRODUCTION

In the last few decades adolescents' sexual attitudes and behaviours have changed dramatically, resulting in an increased incidence of adolescent sexual intercourse and a decreased age at the first intercourse for both boys and girls (Forrest and Singh, 1990; Zelnik and Kanter, 1980). The proportion of adolescents who are sexually experience has decreased in recent years (Kann *et al.*, 2000) but 34% of early adolescents and 61% late adolescents report ever having had sexual intercourse and 7% of high school students say they first had intercourse before age 13 (Grunbaum *et al.*, 2002). Every year, approximately 900,000 females aged 15-19 become pregnant (Henshaw, 2001) and three million adolescents (one in four sexually active teenagers) acquire an STD (AGI, 1994). Adolescents who initiate sexual activity at young ages tend to have more sexual partners and to use condom less than those who initiate sex later and are at increased risk for STDs and pregnancy during the teenage years (Coker *et al.*, 1994). Therefore, understanding influences on early initiation of sexual attitudes and behaviours and identifying possible strategies for delaying sex have important implications for adolescent health.

A recent study of adolescents in Nigeria revealed that boys in and out of school constitute a prominent

group among most sexually active adolescents in the world (Airiohuodion, 1997). A higher percentage of the samples of between 14 and 19 years show signs of having had sexual intercourse. Also in the study, which focused on "Reproductive Health Nigerian Adolescents-Knowledge, Attitude and Practice" - the experts indicated that 68% of Nigerian males aged between 14 and 19 years showed signs of ever having sexual intercourse while 43% of the female counterparts were sexually experienced. This shows that Nigerian adolescents like their counterparts in the world are sexually active. Studies also confirm the high emotional sexuality of the Nigerian adolescents who conversely lack knowledge on reproductive health.

Donovan (1990) writing about the situation in Britain said that adolescents' sexual behaviour is causing a great concern among the medical circle. As at 1990, nearly 1 out of three women become pregnant before age 20 and there were about 40,000 abortions among adolescents each year. Wellings *et al.* (1995) also affirmed that the age at which people become sexually active has fallen sharply and drastically. These past few decades have seen a progressive reduction in the age at which sexual attitudes and behaviour takes place and an increase in the proportion of young people who had sexual relationship before the consent age.

In the same vein, Makinwa-Adebusoye (1997) confirmed that several studies have indicated that sexual

relationship is particularly high among unmarried youths and this premarital sexual behaviour is more common among urban girls (Onwuamana 1982; Makinwa-Adebusoye, 1991; Odujirin, 1991).

The Nigerian Demographic Health and Survey (NDHS, 1990) confirmed that sexual relationship is very high in urban centres; it has also revealed that it is not limited to such places alone. While we have 30.9% of never married urban women aged between 15 and 19 years having had sexual relationship, there is also 21.3% in rural areas. Furthermore, 48.4% of both rural and urban girls have had sexual relationships by age 15.

Socio-psychological theories of health behaviour (Jessor, 1991) and empirical research (Resnick, 1997) suggest that timing sexual relationship and behaviour is influenced by a broad array of individual and social environmental factors. Among the most powerful sources of social influence are the parents, siblings, sexual partners and peers/friends (Miller and Families, 1998). Reviews of recent research highlight aspects of adolescents' friendships that are key influences on their sexual risk behaviours: friends' sexual behaviours, adolescents' perceptions of friends' behaviour and attitudes and level of involvement with friends (Brown and Theobald, 1999). A consistent finding across studies of young black teenagers and of urban sixth grader from diverse ethnic background (Jaccard *et al.*, 1999) is that young, sexually experienced adolescents are more likely than their sexually experienced counterparts to report that their friends are also sexually experienced.

Longitudinal studies have found that adolescents who perceive that their friends favour postponing sexual relationship are themselves more likely than others to do so (Kinsman *et al.*, 1998). These perceptions may be shaped by a combination of friends' attitudes and adolescents' own attitudes (Wilcox and Udry, 1984). Adolescents who are highly involved with their friends may find themselves in social contexts that encourage early dating and entry into romantic relationship which have been linked to earlier sexual initiation (Miller and Schvaneveldt, 1997). In addition, an individual's close circle of friends may influence sexual debut more than a single best friend does, possibly because an immediate network of friends is more stable over time than a specific best friendship (Bearman and Bruckner, 1999).

To date, very few studies have prospectively tested the relative power of multiple forms of friend influence on adolescents' initiation of sexual relationship and behaviour. And few have examined how various forms of

friend influence may operate jointly. In addition, many studies have been based exclusively on adolescents' perceptions of friend attitudes and behaviours, which may bias estimated associations with sexual debut because of a "false consensus" effect (Marks and Miller, 1999). Some studies examining relationships between friend variables and adolescent sexual relationships have not controlled for other known influences on sexual debut; therefore, observed associations may be confounded by unmeasured factors.

The quality of relationship between parents and their children adolescent predict sexual behaviour involvement. Poorer quality family relationships are associated with more adolescents' involvement in sexual behaviour like necking, petting, kissing, (Wagner, 1980) and intercourse (Crockett *et al.*, 1996; Wagner, 1980). Adolescent boys, Billy said are closer to their fathers after their first sexual intercourse, distant to their mothers and select their friends from sexually experienced peers.

Parental style and influence as a major factor in adolescent's pre-marital sexual involvement cannot but be noticed. No other social institution has a great influence throughout human development than the family. Most studies indicate that most adolescents have few, if any, serious disagreement with parents (Steinbeing, 1991). Moreover, adolescents typically gravitate towards those who exhibit attitudes and values consistent with those maintained by their parents for their peers (Guemey and Arthur, 1983). Poor parental monitoring, guidance, or communication are indices of the development of problem behaviours like pre-marital sexuality. Parental rejection (Simons *et al.*, 1989) and ineffective parenting services, Pattersons (1989) argued are the original sources of problem behaviours. Hence associated with conduct problem is ineffective parenting (Haapasalic and Tremblay, 1994). Abnormally strict parents also make criminals out of their children (Ononye and Morakinyo, 1996). Walsh (1995) noted that poor parental attachment encourages drug use and promiscuity.

Peer of friend influence is widely and popularly believed to be one of the major sources of involvement in negative relationships for adolescents. Lightfoot (1992) viewed peer pressure as rooted in the adolescents' desire to participate in experiences that are relevant to the group. Engaging in the premarital sex gives the adolescent a sense of independence from parents and at the same time win popularity with the approval of peers, a phenomenon highly valued by adolescents. Adolescent sexual relationship is an expression of non-conformity to adult values (Owuamanam, 1984). Ecket (1989) and Echerem (1977) in a re-analysis of the Coleman data set, found evidence of influence from friendship studied.

Jenson (1976) also found out that some adolescents engage in sexual relationship in order to gain acceptance from their friends. Thus peers involved in risky behaviour will negatively affect each other. Peer influence seems greater than parental influence during adolescence.

Most studies on adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviour have been based exclusively on adolescents' perceptions of friend attitudes and behaviours, which may bias estimated associations with sexual debut because of a "false consensus" effect (Marks and Miller, 1999). It is therefore not to the knowledge of the researcher that studies linking social influences to adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviours have been carried out. It is against this background that this study becomes relevant in filling such missing gaps in our knowledge in the issue of social influences and sexual attitudes and behaviours among adolescent of reproductive age in Nigeria.

**Purpose of the study:** The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between social influences such as peer/friends influence, parental style and influence, sibling's support and participation and sexual partner roles and adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviours in Nigeria.

In order to achieve the purpose of this study, the following research questions were answered at the probability of 0.05 alpha levels.

- To what extent would social influences (as the parenting style and influence, sibling's support, sexual partners and friends/peers influences) when combined predict sexual attitudes and behaviours among adolescent of reproductive age in Nigeria?
- What is the relative contribution of each of the factors to the prediction of sexual attitudes and behaviours of the adolescent?

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This study employed a descriptive survey research design in which data were collected through questionnaire from the respondents on the variables studied.

**Subjects:** The target population for the study comprised secondary school adolescents in senior schools in Oyo State, Nigeria. A total of 540 subjects were randomly drawn from 10 participating senior secondary schools from three senatorial districts of Oyo State, Nigeria. A total of 180 adolescents from each of the senatorial districts were involved in the study. In all, 391 female

adolescents and 149 male adolescents were involved in the study. The ages of the subjects ranged from 15 years and 21 years with a mean age of 18.2 years and the standard deviation of 4.2.

**Research instrument:** The two instruments used to collect data for the study were: (i) Adolescent Sexual Attitudes and Behaviour Inventory (ASABI) and (ii) Self-Reporting Questionnaire on Social Influence (SQSI).

Adolescent Sexual Attitudes and Behaviour Inventory (ASABI) is a researcher-constructed instrument, developed with the assistance of experts in psychometrics. The inventory measures adolescent sexual involvement, reasons for involvement, knowledge of the consequences and attitudes and behaviour in sexual intercourse and initiation. The inventory contained 36-item responses ranging from strongly agreed to strongly disagree. The internal consistency and test-retest reliability of the instrument was found to be 0.81 and 0.85, respectively.

Self-Reporting Questionnaire on Social Influences (SQSI) was also author-constructed questionnaire with the support of expert in psychometrics. The questionnaire measures friend/peer perception and influence on premarital sexual involvement, parental monitoring, guidance and communication as indices for adolescent sexuality. The instrument also highlights adolescents' sexual partners that influence sexual risky behaviours and the siblings' support and participation in encouraging sexual risky behaviours and attitudes. The questionnaire is made up of 25-item responses ranging from very true to very untrue. It has 0.69 and 0.74 as the internal consistency and test-retest reliability, respectively.

**Procedure for data collection:** The subjects for the study were administered the two sets of questionnaires in their respective schools in the three senatorial districts of Oyo State, Nigeria, with the assistance of the school counsellors. The collected questionnaires were scored and the data obtained were analysed to answer the research questions raised and tested. On the whole, 450 copies of questionnaires distributed were returned fully filled, giving a return rate of 100%.

**Data analysis:** Data analysis involved using Multiple Regression analysis procedure to examine the relationship between Adolescent Sexual attitudes and behaviours (Dependent Variable) and social influences factors as the parental style and influence, sibling's support, peer/friends influences and sexual partners (Independent factors).

**RESULTS**

**Research question 1:** To what extent would social influences as the parent style and influence, sibling’s support, sexual partners and peer influence when combined predicts sexual attitudes and behaviours among adolescent of reproductive age?

Table 1 indicate that the combination of the four independent variables (parental style and influence, siblings, sexual partners and peers influence) as predictors of adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviours yielded a co-efficient of Multiple Regression (R) 0.7456 and a Multiple R-square of 0.5559 accounting for 55.6% of the variation of adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviour. The table shows a significant F-ratio of 223.605, which implies that R<sup>2</sup> value is not due to chance. This is essence means that the combination of the variables is capable of predicting adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviours.

**Research question 2:** What is the relative contribution of each of the factors to the prediction of sexual attitudes and behaviours of the adolescents?

The results on Table 2 showed that, parenting style and influence contributed significantly to adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviour (B = 0.40; t = 11; p<0.05). The result of the Regression Weight implies that parenting style and influence accounted for 40% in the prediction of adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviours. The result further showed that, sexual partners had a significant contribution to adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviour (B = 0.11; t = 3; p<0.05). The findings also indicated that sexual partners accounted for 11%. The influence of friend/peers was also significant in the prediction of adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviours (B = 4; t = 11; p<0.05).

However, the result indicated that the sibling’s support (B = -0.03; t = -0.67; p>0.05) was not a significant predictor of adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviour.

Table 1: Regression analysis on sample data using a combination of independent variables to predict sexual attitudes and behaviours of the adolescents

Multiple R	= 0.7456				
Multiple R-square	= 0.5559				
Standard error estimate	= 0.5756				
Analysis of variance					
Sources of variation	Sum of square	Mean square	df	F	p
Regression	28400.908	94666.970	3	223.605	<0.05
Residual	226924.685	423.367	536		
Total	34290.835		539		

Table 2: Testing the Significant Contributions of Social Influences as the Parents, Siblings, Sexual Partners and Peers to the Prediction of Adolescent Sexual Attitudes and Behaviours

No	Variable description	B	SEB	Beta	T-value	Sig. T
1	The Parents	1.2092	0.1060	0.4012	11.406	<0.05
2	The Siblings	-0.02079	0.03105	-0.03076	-0.669	>0.05
3	Sexual Partners	0.3507	0.0930	0.1166	3.603	<0.05
4	Friends/Peers	111.3671	0.1191	0.3889	11.480	<0.05
	Constant	-6.0709	5.2369		-1.159	

\* Level of Significance at 0.05 alpha

**DISCUSSION**

The results obtained from the statistical analysis of the research questions indicated that, parenting style and influence, sexual partners, siblings and friends/peers influence variables made significant contributions of about 55.6% to the prediction of adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviours. This joint contribution could not have come by chance factor because the F-ratio value of 223.605 lends credence to the effectiveness of the four independent variables predicting adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviour. On this premise, it could be conveniently concluded that about 55.6% of the variance in adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviours is accounted for by the combination of the four factors. The outcome of the research question in effect confirmed the submission of Coker *et al.* (1994), Resnick and Jessor (1991), Brown and Theobald (1999), Jaccard *et al.* (1999) who reported the effectiveness of the social influence factors in the explanation of adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviour.

The result on Table 2 revealed that the contribution made by each independent variable to the prediction of adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviours is shown by the T-ratio values associated with the different variables shown on Table 2. From the results, three of the four independent variables made significant contribution to the prediction of adolescents’ sexual attitudes and behaviours in different degrees. The most potent predictor is friends/peers influence factor (t-ratio = 11.480) closely followed by parenting style factor (t-ratio = 11.406) and the sexual partners factor (t-ratio = 3.603) while the sibling factor could not predict adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviours (t-ratio = 0.669). This discovery did not come as a surprise because it upheld Lightfoot (1992) earlier findings that friends/peers influence negatively is believed to be one of the major adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviours. This position is further upheld by Guemey and Arthur (1983), Ononye and Morakinyo (1996), Walsh (1995) all noted that, abnormal parents make criminals out of their children, poor parental monitoring and guidance are indices of adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviour. This assertion is further

confirmed by Miller and Families (1998) that the most powerful sources of social influences are the parents, sexual partners and the friends/peers. Also, Connolly, Furman and Konarski (2000) and Miller and Schuvaneveldt (1997) have linked sexual initiation to adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviours.

The outcomes of these two research questions are not unexpected. This is because sexual attitudes and behaviours of the adolescents is a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon. The outcome of this study, which confirm the combine and separate contributions of the four diverse factors only affirm its complexity and multi-dimensional nature. In Nigeria, the problem of adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviours is further compounded by the effects of urbanization, westernization and the mass media.

### CONCLUSION

The findings of this study have a number of implications for those in the helping professions-the psychologists, social workers and guidance counsellors. One, it has clearly demonstrated that a single factor cannot adequately explain the incidence of adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviours. Miller and Families (1998) stressed this when he succinctly stated that powerful sources of adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviour are the parents, the siblings, sexual partners and friends/peers.

Similarly, the fact that, the joint contribution of the parents, siblings, sexual partners and friends/peers variables could only be used to explain about 56% of the incidence of adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviours implies that there are other variables masterminding its occurrence apart from those identified by the study. On this premise, it is recommended that:

- The guidance counsellors, psychologists and social workers should take cognizance of the variable tested, as they have been capable of predicting adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviours.
- Those in the helping professions, whose responsibility is to correct maladaptive behaviour of the adolescents, should engage in further studies that would expose all variables that are capable of predicting adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviours.
- Guidance counsellors should develop packages that would educate and inform the adolescents of the inherent dangers of engaging in premarital sexual relationship.

- Adolescents in the secondary schools should be taught family life education and conferences and seminars should be organize to occupy the leisure hours of the adolescents.

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