



## PARENTAL INFLUENCE ON ADOLESCENT SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN OGBOMOSO, NIGERIA

OLUYEMI Joseph A.<sup>a</sup>, YINUSA Mohammed A.<sup>a</sup>, ABDULLATEEF Raji <sup>a</sup>, KEHINDE Kadiri<sup>b</sup> and ADEJOKE Joseph<sup>c</sup>

### ABSTRACT

*One of the aims of social work as a discipline is to improve the quality of life of families by finding solutions to inherent problems such as sexual behaviour in the adolescent. This study investigated the influence of parental communication and parental monitoring on adolescents' sexual behaviour in Ogbomoso, South-West Nigeria. Data was collected using self-administered structured questionnaire. 860 participants were selected through multi-stage sampling method. 99% of the participants were found to be close to both parents, 63% of which were closer to their mothers. 52% of the participants already had a boyfriend/girlfriend, 40% had kissed and 14% had previously had sexual intercourse as at time of the review. 64% of participants' parents never had the knowledge of these happenings in the life of the participants. Monitoring measures adopted by parents included standing rules (34%), banning from visiting opposite sex (28%), stay-at-home order (21%), and tracing adolescents' movements when they go out (20%) and timing their outings (13%). Some of the avenues participants employed in accessing their sexual partners despite parental monitoring include: when sent on errands (18%), during school periods (15%), sneaking out of the home (9%) and lying to their parents to see boyfriend/girlfriend (7%). A significant relationship was found between participants' sexual behaviour and parental communication and parental monitoring ( $p < 0.05$ ). The study recommended increased parental involvement in communication and monitoring of adolescent sexual behaviour, bearing in mind the consequences of risky sexual behaviours on the adolescents' health and the society at large.*

**KEY TERMS:** parents, sexual behaviour, adolescent, sex, social work.

<sup>a</sup> Arthur's Details: PhD student, Department of Sociology, University of Ilorin, Nigeria. E-mail: josepholuyemi1@gmail.com

<sup>a</sup> Arthur's Details: Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Ilorin, Nigeria. E-mail: aymuhammeduil@yahoo.com

<sup>a</sup> Arthur's Details: Lecturer 2, Department of Sociology, University of Ilorin, Nigeria. E-mail: aymuhammeduil@yahoo.com

<sup>b</sup> Arthur's Details: Lecturer 1, Department of Mass Communication, University of Ilorin, Nigeria. E-mail: kcube007@yahoo.com

<sup>c</sup> Arthur's Details: Lecturer 1, Department of Medical Microbiology and Parasitology, Bowen University, Iwo, Nigeria. E-mail: josephadejoke2012@gmail.com

## INTRODUCTION

Adolescence marks is the transition between childhood and adulthood and is usually characterised by secondary sexual growth, emotional changes, hormonal milieu, as well as psychological and cognitive development (Connell, 1990; Olukoya & Ferguson, 2001; Olukoya & Ferguson, 2002). Growing into adolescence is a gradual process, and entails different stages of development with distinct behavioural pattern. According to Abu & Akerele (2006), the first stage is referred to as early adolescence spanning between the ages of 11 and 14 years while the second stage called the middle adolescence is between the ages of 15 and 18 years and last stage is from 18-21 years. Adolescence is usually very adventurous and it is during this stage that behavioural patterns such as risky sexual behaviours which have long life consequences on the life of an adolescent are formed and established (Clement, Robert & Dermott et al, 2001). What happens to adolescents, either good or bad, is sometimes a pointer to what becomes of him or her in the future. Therefore, the adolescent age is a very sensitive one that must be well guided especially by parents and other significant others in the area of sex and sexualities so that adolescents are not misguided.

Research has shown that the influence of the family on adolescents' sexual intercourse has been linked to the emotional support that parents provide for the adolescent during early adolescence (Neema, Ahmed, Kibombo & Bankole, 2006). It has also been found that living apart from parents and guardian was a risk factor for early sexual initiation and that father's absence or family disruption increased the odds of adolescents' adverse sexual health outcome. (Ngom, Magadi & Owuor, 2003). In Nigeria, various studies carried out on adolescent sexual behaviour have found diverse risky sexual behaviours while a continuous decrease in the age of sexual debut has also been observed (Okonofua 2000; Okpani & Okpani 2000; Adegbenga & Sunmola et al, 2002). According to UNAIDS (2006) report, adolescents in Nigeria initiate sexual intercourse before reaching the age of 16 and also engage in high risk sexual behaviours like unprotected sex and multiple sex partners. This may expose them to sexually transmitted infections and unintended pregnancies which they may not have the capacity to handle due to their age.

Nigeria is said to have one of the highest birth rate for adolescents in the world while the prevalence of sexually transmitted infections including HIV among adolescents is also gradually increasing (UNAIDS 2000). Unfortunately, the Nigerian government cannot boast of any functioning programme that is specifically geared towards addressing adolescent reproductive health issues (Okonofua, 2001). Most of the family planning services available in the country do not cater for adolescents; rather efforts are concentrated on married couples (Arowojolu, Ilesanmi, Robert & Okunola, 2000). In addition, sex education among adolescents is a controversial issue that is begging to be resolved while parental aversion in discussing sexuality issues with their children is becoming increasingly high (Ekoh et al, 2003). Parents are shy to educate their adolescents on sex and sexual behaviours because of the fear that such discussion may stimulate their interest in sex, while others see education as immoral as a result of religious beliefs to discourage adolescents from pre-marital sex (Richard, 2001). Many families are also shifting their role of educating adolescents on sex to other agents of socialization like schools and peer groups, thus gradually eroding the societal moral value that was obtainable in the past (Olubayo-Fatiregun, 2012).

Incidentally, the relationships that exist between parents and adolescents have also been proven to have significant effects on adolescents' sexual behaviour (Newcomer & Udry, 1985; Miller et al, 2001). Research has also established constructive parental monitoring as the most important and effective factor for mitigating the early onset of sexual activity for the adolescents (Coley et al. 2009). A cross sectional and longitudinal studies conducted by Miller (1998) & Romev et al. (1999), have established a significant relationship between parental monitoring and the initiation of sexual intercourse while lower level of perceived parental monitoring has been associated with several risk behaviours among adolescent including an earlier onset of sexual activities. (Diclemente, Crosby & Wingood, 2002). In addition to this, the pattern of communication that goes on in the home between the parents and the adolescent is a pointer to the sexual behaviour of the adolescent. Family relationship and its association with adolescent pregnancy risk have been investigated in more than 35 studies and result across these studies varies significantly (Miller et al, 2001). Furthermore, studies carried out by Jaccard et al (1996) & Miler et al (1999) have equally demonstrated that parents' sexual values have an important effect on adolescent intercourse experience because such values are learned consciously or unconsciously by the child.

Adolescent behaviour especially when it relates to the family is paramount to social work as a discipline because of the far reaching implications of such behaviour on the family and society at large.

Social work as a discipline assists individuals and families with their needs and solves their problems using a multidiscipline approach (Gordon, 2000). Family System Theorist like Bowen (1950) has suggested that individual functioning shapes family functioning and family systems can create pathology within the individual. He contended that, boundaries, roles, communication, family structure goes a long way in influencing family functioning. It is believed that, individuals cannot be understood in isolation from one another, but rather as a part of their family, as the family is an emotional unit. Other theorists like Bowlby (1969), in his attachment

theory; has also suggested that parental attachment begins at infancy and continues throughout the lifetime of a person. The theory claimed that the bond that is formed between the parent and adolescents at infancy would help the child's successful social and emotional development and in particular, in learning how to effectively regulate their feelings at adolescent age. Also, Nye (1958) in his social control theory has also emphasised that the process of socialization and social learning builds self-control and reduces the inclination to indulge in behaviour recognised as antisocial. This control may be in the form of direct enforcement, in which punishment is threatened or applied for wrongful behaviour, and compliance is rewarded the by parents.

It is against this backdrop that this study investigates the influence of parental communication and parental monitoring on adolescent sexual behaviour. The aim of the study is to determine the significance of parental-communication and parental-monitoring on adolescent' sexual behaviour in the study area.

## METHODS

The study was conducted in Ogbomoso in Oyo State, South-West Nigeria. The population of Ogbomoso was approximately 299,535 in 2006 census (Population Census, 2006). The majority of the people are members of the Yoruba ethnic group. Yams, cassava, maize, and tobacco are some of the notable agricultural products of the region (Chernow & George, 1993). The study was conducted in the study area because of the Christian moral values introduced to the town by Christian missionaries in the late 19th century which is still evident today (Nigerian Baptist Convention, 2016). It is expected that this would reflect in the behaviour of adolescents in the town if they are passed down to them by their parents.

The study employed multi-stage sampling method which included first, a purposive selection of four secondary school in the study population comprising of public and private school to have a mixture of parental social background and secondly, an hierarchal selection of Senior Secondary 1, 2 & 3 where adolescents majorly occupy and the third stage included a random selection of 215 participants from each school based on the number of students available in the schools when the survey was been conducted totalling 860 participants.

Information was gathered through administration of self-administered questionnaire. Data was analysed with the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) 17.0 which was presented in tables and simple percentages. The Chi Square Statistical tool was used to test the relationship between variables while verbal permission was given to the researcher by the school authorities to conduct the research. The students were duly informed on what the research was all about and the benefits of the research to them. The questionnaires were also filled in anonymity to gain the confidence of the students, bearing in mind the sensitivity of the topic and to ensure that the participants give accurate information.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings revealed that the participants were almost evenly distributed; comprising of 51% male and 49% female. About two thirds (76%) of the participants were between the ages of 15-19 years while 92% of the participants were Christian. Almost all (96%) were Yorubas. Forty-three percent (43%) were in Senior Secondary 2 class, 31% were in Senior Secondary 1 class while 26% were in Senior Secondary 3 class. The mean age for participants that have previously kissed was  $14\pm 6.5$  years; while those that already had sex are  $15\pm 0.7$  years. This corroborates UNAIDS (2006) report that adolescents in Nigeria initiate sex before the age of 16.

Although almost all (99%) of the participants were close to both parents, 63% were closer to their mothers. This rests on previous research conducted by Phrases, Renk, Duhig, Fields & Sly, (2009) which submits that adolescents are closer to their mothers than their fathers as a result of warmth and affection associated with mothers and the longer time mothers spend with their adolescents than fathers. Furthermore, result showed that 52% of the participants already have a boyfriend/girlfriend. This is in keeping with the result of the study conducted by Lenhart, Anderson & Smith (2015). In addition, 40% of the participants had kissed before and 14% had previously had sex. This result is also in tandem with previous work conducted by O'Sullivan, Cheng, Harris & Brooks-Gunn, (2007).

The study also revealed some measures employed by parents in monitoring participants' from engaging in sexual behaviours, they include: giving standing rules (34%), not allowing participants to visit opposite sex (28%), not allowing participants to go out (21%), tracing participants' steps (20%), and timing their outings (13%). However, despite parental communication and parental monitoring, 64% of the participants' parents who have kissed before knew about it while only 26% suspected their ward have boyfriend or girlfriend. This is contrary to the submissions of Miller (1998) Romev et al. (1999), that a significant relationship exists between parental monitoring and the initiation of sexual intercourse. Also, despite the fact that 82% of the participants are being prevented from having opposite sex as friends, participants were still able to access their boyfriend/girlfriend.

The avenues employed by participants to access their boyfriend/girlfriend despite parental monitoring include when they run errands for their parents (18%) during school period, (15%) by sneaking out of the house (10%), when parents are not at home (9%), in the church (8%), by lying to their parents to see their boyfriend/girlfriend (7%), through phone calls, and during holidays (5%). This agrees with the study conducted by Wamoyi et al, (2011) among adolescents in North –Western Tanzania and contrary to the studies conducted by (Newcomer & Udry, 1985; Miller et al, 2001).

**H0<sub>1</sub>: Parental communication and adolescent sexual behaviour**

Sexual Behaviour	Have you had sex before?		
	Yes (%)	No (%)	Total (%)
<b>Are you close to both Parents</b>			
Yes	102(13.1)	677(86.9)	779(100.0)
No	19(23.5)	62(76.5)	81(100.0)
<b>Total</b>	<b>121(14.1)</b>	<b>739(85.9)</b>	<b>860(100.0)</b>

Source: Researchers’ Survey, 2015  $\chi^2 = 6.517$   $df = 1$   $p\text{-value} = 0.01$

**H0<sub>2</sub>: Parental monitoring and adolescent sexual behaviour**

Monitoring	Have you had sex before?		
	Yes (%)	No (%)	Total (%)
<b>Parent prevent opposite sex as friend</b>			
Yes	113(16.0)	593(84.0)	706(100.0)
No	8(5.2)	146(94.8)	154(100.0)
<b>Total</b>	<b>121(14.1)</b>	<b>739(85.9)</b>	<b>860(100.0)</b>

Source: Researchers’ survey, 2015  $\chi^2 = 12.221$   $df = 1$   $p\text{-value} < 0.001$

The first hypothesis tested in the study showed a significant relationship between parental communication and participants’ sexual behaviour as  $p < 0.05$ . This connotes that parental communication has a positive effect on participants’ sexual behaviour in the study area and corroborates earlier studies conducted by Weinstein & Thornton (1989) Jaccard, Dittus, & Gordon (1996), Resnick et al., (1997) that, parental closeness with adolescents can help to postpone their sexual intercourse and a more consistence contraceptive use. This result also confirms the result of the study carried out by Miller et al., (2001) that suggests that, parent-child closeness is associated with reduced adolescent pregnancy risk through abstinence from sex, having fewer sexual partners and using contraception more consistently.

The second hypothesis also showed a positive relationship between parental monitoring and participants’ sexual behaviour. This suggests that parental supervision and control on adolescents in the study area affects adolescents’ tendency of being involved in sex till a later date when they are more matured to handle it. This result is in tandem with previous studies conducted by Hogan & Kitagawa (1985) Ku, Sonenstein & Pleck (1993), Small & Luster (1994) Luster & Small (1994) Danziger (1995), Upchurch et al, (1999) which confirmed a significant relationship between parental supervision and monitoring specifically family rules, household routines, parental supervision in dating activities with adolescents not having sexual intercourse till a later date or having fewer sexual partners.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study was able to assess the significance of parental communication and parental monitoring on adolescents' sexual behaviour in Ogbomoso, South-West Nigeria, sampling students in senior secondary class from four (4) secondary schools in the town. Equal number of students was sampled from each of the school. Result showed a significant relationship between parental communication and monitoring on adolescent sexual behaviour in the study area. That is, parental communication and monitoring has a positive effect on the sexual behaviour of the adolescents in the study area.

Based on the outcome of this study, it is therefore imperative for social workers to note that, adolescents have peculiar sexuality and sexual development and as such, social workers must recognise adolescents' tolerance and diversity in sexual values. In addition, social workers must advocate adolescents' access to appropriate sexuality education, sexual reproductive health care, and counselling. This will undoubtedly promote prevention of risky sexual behaviours and enhance positive development for adolescents.

Parents also should increase their communication with their adolescents especially on sex and sex related issues in order for adolescents to be adequately informed. In addition parents should ensure that they keep an eye on their adolescents so that they do not become vulnerable to risky sexual behaviour by monitoring them from time to time especially in relating with the opposite sex since they may not be able to handle the consequences of their action at this age. Also, parents should endeavour to impact on their adolescents the right values by being good examples to them and stand as role models to them since adolescents form behavioural pattern through observation especially from their significant others.

Furthermore, parents should not be left alone in this campaign. Other agents of socialization such as the school and religious organizations should also see to it that adolescents are well informed on sexualities and the risk involved in engaging in risky sexual behaviours. Government and other relevant agencies should also take it as part of their responsibility to ensure that in Nigeria, there are functioning programme that specifically addresses adolescent reproductive health issues. Finally, family planning services in Nigeria should not only cater for married couples but efforts should be geared towards adolescent reproductive health issues.

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