

**CIRCUMSTANCES OF DEBUT SEXUAL INTERCOURSE AMONG OUT-OF
–SCHOOL ADOLESCENTS IN ILORIN, NIGERIA**

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Abstract

Objective: To determine the circumstances of debut sexual intercourse among out-of-school adolescents aged 15-24 years in Ilorin, Nigeria.

Methods: A total of 253 apprentice tailors were sampled and pre-tested semi-structured questionnaires were administered to them by trained interviewers.

Results: Mean age of respondents was 18.8 ± 2.4 years and consisted of 184 females (72.7%) and 69 males (27.3%). Most respondents were single (93.7%) and were not educated beyond primary school (60.1%). Majority of respondents (69.2%) were sexually experienced and there was no significant difference by gender ($p=0.768$). Some 16% of sexually-experienced respondents initiated sex between the ages of 10-14 years and over 85% of sexually-experienced respondents commenced sexual intercourse before 19 years of age. Mean age of commencement of sexual intercourse was 17.3 ± 2.4 years for males and 16.2 ± 2.6 years for females and the difference was statistically significant ($p = 0.007$). Age at debut sexual intercourse was significantly lower among younger respondents compared to older ones ($p = 0.0001$) hence suggesting that the age of sexual debut is decreasing in younger generations. About a third (31.2%) of female respondents were either coerced or raped at their debut sexual encounter whereas all male respondents indicated that their debut sexual encounter was consensual.

Conclusion: This study showed a high rate of early sexual exposure among teenagers, as well as a high incidence of sexual violence on teenage girls among the study population. Communication between minors and their parents/caregivers should be nurtured from childhood to identify potential and actual abuse early. Sexual violence on under-aged females can also be reduced by ensuring that abuses are reported and male perpetrators apprehended and punished.

Key words: *violence, debut sexual intercourse, out-of-school adolescents*

Introduction

Sexual activity and the adoption of safe sexual practices are some of the major factors affecting adolescent reproductive health status in any community. Several studies have reported high rates of premarital sexual activity among Nigerian adolescents^{1, 2, 3}. In fact, data from the 1999 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey showed that 44% of women 15-19 year old were sexually active 4 weeks preceding the survey⁴. In addition, a survey of 17-19 year old female adolescents in South-Eastern Nigeria showed that 19.4% of them had sexually-transmitted infections (STIs)⁵. Several hypotheses have been offered to explain the high rates of sexual activity and STIs among Nigerian adolescents. These include Nigeria's deteriorating socioeconomic situation, the erosion of traditional African values, the early onset of menarche, a widening gap between age at menarche and age at marriage, infrequent and ineffective use of barrier contraceptives and the decreased value placed on virginity⁶.

Adolescents are perhaps the most important group in a society, and given their size and characteristics, they are a country's valuable future assets. The global population picture showed that the median age for the entire world is 25 years – that is half of the world's people are under the age of 25 years⁷. Although evidences of high-risk sexual activities among adolescents abound, the age at first sexual intercourse varies considerably across regions⁸. The problem of sexual violence and coercion has also assumed a worldwide dimension with young adults and children suffering the physical and emotional traumas of sexual assault and rape^{9, 10}. In a study on sexual coercion among young people in Nigeria, coercive behaviours identified include rape, unwanted touching, incest, assault, verbal abuse, threats, unwanted kissing, forced exposure to pornographic films, use of drugs for sedation and traditional charm for seduction; perpetrators were also found to be acquaintances, boy friends, neighbours, parents and relatives^{11, 12, 13}. The study is an exploratory research to provide more information on this important group as a significant proportion of the adolescent population is out-of-school.

Objectives of the Study

- (1) To describe the sexual behaviour of adolescent apprentice tailors in Ilorin.
- (2) To determine the prevalence of sexual violence at debut sexual encounter by the respondents

Methodology

The study group consisted of 271 male and female apprentice tailors between the ages of 15-24 years learning their vocation under the tutelage of 137 master trainers in Kulende, Ilorin East Local Government Area, Kwara State. The semi-structured questionnaire was pre-tested and administered on all units of the study population that were willing and available for the study. Sexual violence was defined as sexual intercourse which was carried out without the consent of one of the partners but rather obtained as a result of violence or the threat of violence.

The data obtained was manually sorted out, edited and coded before they were fed into an IBM computer for statistical analysis using the EPI-INFO software package version 6.04. Data analysis was done using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Data analysis was done to produce frequency distribution tables and cross-tabulations. In testing for association, chi square statistics was used in comparing proportions while analysis of variance was used in comparing means. P-values less than 0.05 were regarded as statistically significant.

Sexual violence was defined as “sexual intercourse conducted without the consent of one of the partners but through the use of violence (rape) or the threat of violence (coercion)”.

Results

Socio-demographic Characteristics

A total of 253 respondents made up of 69 male and 184 female respondents participated. Female respondents thus constituted 72.7% of all respondents.

Some 32.6% of the female respondents had male master-trainers while majority (67.4%) had female master-trainers. However, all male apprentices were training under male master-trainers and no male respondent (0%) was apprenticed to a female master-trainer.

The mean age of all respondents was 18.83 ± 2.39 years.

TABLE 1: EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF RESPONDENTS

EDUCATIONAL STATUS	TOTAL (%)
NONE	44 (17.4)
PRIMARY	152 (60.1)
JUNIOR SECONDARY	25 (9.9)
SENIOR SECONDARY	28 (11.1)
POST-SECONDARY	4 (1.6)
TOTAL	253 (100)

Majority (60.1%) of respondents had only primary education and only 1.6% had post secondary education. Almost two-third (63.2%) of respondents had spent more than one year as an apprentice and only 16.6% had spent more than three years in apprenticeship.

Sexual Behaviour

Most respondents (69.2%) had engaged in sexual intercourse.

Though a slightly higher proportion of male respondents had commenced sexual intercourse compared to female respondents, the difference was not statistically significant (p=0.768).

The proportion of those who had commenced sexual intercourse did not significantly differ between respondents from monogamous and polygamous family backgrounds (p= 0.776).

TABLE 2: SEXUALLY EXPERIENCED RESPONDENTS’ AGE AT DEBUT SEXUAL ENCOUNTER AND GENDER

AGE AT DEBUT SEXUAL INTERCOURSE	TOTAL (%)
10-14 YEARS	28 (16.0)
15-19 YEARS	125 (71.4)
20-24 YEARS	22 (12.6)
TOTAL	175 (100)

Over 85% of sexually experienced respondents had their sexual debut while they were aged less than 20 years.

The mean age of debut sexual encounter was 16.5 ± 2.6 years for all sexually experienced respondents. However, mean age at debut sexual encounter for sexually experienced females was 16.2 ± 2.6 while that for males was 17.3 ± 2.4 . The difference was statistically significant (p = 0.007). The median age of debut sexual intercourse were 18 years and 16 years respectively for sexually experienced male and female respondents.

Among respondents who were sexually experienced, younger respondents were significantly more likely to have commenced sexual intercourse earlier than their older respondents (p<0.001); however, there was no significant difference in age of debut sexual intercourse between male and female respondents (p=0.713). Age was therefore a more important determinant of age at debut sexual intercourse than gender.

TABLE 3: CIRCUMSTANCE OF DEBUT SEXUAL ENCOUNTER OF SEXUALLY EXPERIENCED RESPONDENTS' BY GENDER

CIRCUMSTANCE OF DEBUT SEXUAL INTERCOURSE	GENDER		TOTAL (%)
	MALE (%)	FEMALE (%)	
CONSENT	53 (100)	84 (68.8)	137 (78.3)
COERCION	0 (0)	28 (23.0)	28 (16.0)
RAPE	0 (0)	10 (8.2)	10 (5.7)
TOTAL	53 (100)	122 (100)	175 (100)

Over three-quarter of all sexually experienced respondents (100% of males and 68.8% of females) reported that their debut sexual encounter was consensual; however, among female respondents, 23.0% and 8.2% respectively were coerced (threat of violence) and raped (actual violence) at their debut sexual encounter.

Discussion

The proportion (69.2%) of respondents in this study who had initiated sexual intercourse was higher than for most similar studies among adolescents. For example, Sunmola et al reported 33% in Niger State among both school based and non-school based adolescents aged 11-24 years ¹⁴. Araoye also reported that 24% of adolescents aged 10-19 years in secondary schools in Ilorin had initiated sexual intercourse ¹⁵. Some of the factors that may account for this huge disparity include the survey method used, whether or not respondents were school-based, as well as gender and age distribution of those studied ^{14, 15, 16, 17}. This must therefore be borne in mind when comparing sexual behavior among adolescents as all these factors may be different. For instance, among both male and female adolescent apprentices aged 12-24 years in Ghana, 64.5% were sexually experienced ¹⁸; this finding was similar to what was found in this study. However, much lower rates of sexual experience was recorded among out of school youths aged 10-24 years in Ibadan (46.2%) and female secondary school students aged 18-23 years in Port-Harcourt (25.7%) ^{19, 20}. Studies in Jamaica and India also showed that among female adolescents, 6% and 13% respectively had commenced sexual intercourse ^{21, 22}; these proportions were much lower than what is reported in this study. It is important to note that generally, studies on sexual behavior involving both school-based and non-school based

adolescents had found a higher prevalence of sexual activity among the non-school based group^{14, 18, 23, 24, 25}.

Lower age of debut sexual intercourse for younger adolescents compared to the older adolescents was a rather unusual finding, different from what has been documented in other studies^{15 18, 23, 26}.

The lower age of debut sexual encounter among females, viewed alongside the observation that a slightly lower proportion of females in the study area had initiated sexual intercourse when compared to males, justified the need to explore the circumstances of debut sexual encounter for both sexes.

While all sexually experienced male respondents had engaged in their first sexual intercourse willingly, almost a third of sexually-experienced female respondents averred that their debut sexual encounter was not with their consent as it was either through coercion or rape. This degree of sexual violence was much higher than what was reported by Ajuwon et al in studies among adolescents in Ibadan^{13, 27}. Studies in Ghana and Cameroon had also reported that 25% and 40% respectively of sexually experienced female adolescents reported that their first sexual experience involved rape and force^{18, 28}, similar to the prevalence of 31.2% found in this study. Young women sometimes give in to having sex for fear that if they refuse, they will be raped anyway²⁹.

This observation has a lot of implications in planning interventions towards reducing sexual risk-taking among adolescents. It is difficult to practice safe sex in such circumstances because when there is no room to negotiate sex, it is even more difficult to negotiate condom use. It is therefore important that studies on adolescent sexual behavior especially among females, explore the circumstances of their sexual activities to arrive at the best intervention design. Many studies on adolescent sexual behavior did not document whether or not sexual activities by adolescents were intended and consensual^{14, 15, 18, 19}. In studies where such circumstances were investigated, the prevalence of sexual violence was usually found to be high^{11, 23, 24, 27}.

Higher proportion of males who were sexually experienced as noted in this study was in agreement with findings from some studies^{14, 15, 21, 22 23}. However, the observation that the median age of onset of sexual activity was lower for females was in agreement with results from some studies^{30, 31}, while it contradicted those from others which documented earlier age of onset of sexual activity for males^{14, 23, 25}.

Conclusion

Majority (69.2%) of respondents were sexually experienced and mean age of commencement of sexual intercourse was significantly lower among females and younger adolescents. About a third of female respondents were either coerced or raped at their debut sexual encounter. Multiple partner sexual behavior was not common but consistent condom use was being currently practised by less

than a third of sexually active respondents with significantly higher use rate among females and younger adolescents.

The problem of sexual violence especially among female adolescents should be addressed urgently. Part of such measures is by encouraging victims of such acts to report to the relevant authorities to ensure that violators are diligently prosecuted and punished.

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