

PERCEPTION OF PRE-MARITAL SEX AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL ADOLESCENTS IN AKUNGBA, ONDO STATE, NIGERIA.

OYEWOLE O. Olusanya

Department of Sociology, Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko,
Ondo State, Nigeria
oyebimpeolusanya@gmail.com

Abstract

The study examined the perception of adolescents towards premarital sex among secondary school children in Akungba-Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria. The study applied descriptive survey research design. Data were generated using structured questionnaire administered to 147 respondents from two secondary schools in Akungba-Akoko. Fifteen In-depth Interview (IDI) sessions were conducted. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Qualitative data were content analysed. The findings showed that 21% of the respondents perceived that adolescents should be involved in premarital sex while 79% did not agree. Also, 23% of the respondents believe in premarital sex, 77% did not believe. The test of hypotheses revealed that there was a statistically significant relationship between source of sexual information and perception ($p > 0.05$). Additionally, there was a statistically significant relationship ($p < 0.05$) between adolescents' perception and belief about premarital sex. The challenge of age-specific sexual information for children and adequate sources of sexual information for adolescents persist in the society. Indeed, there is a dire need for efforts geared towards sustainable development goals, particularly as regards the sexual and reproductive health needs of young people, to target repositioning parents and teachers towards early and friendly sexual health communication.

Keywords: Premarital sex, adolescents, perception, premarital sex and parents

Introduction

Premarital sex is normatively improper and widely unacceptable; however, rapid socio-cultural transformation across countries and continents of the globe appears to have altered these traditional norms and made acceptance of premarital sex a commonplace (Mbamba, Gyimah, Adaranijo, Ansie, Snakowuli, & Ndemole, 2025; Sadeghi & Agadjanian, 2022; Ofori, & Dodoo, 2016 Wells & Twenge, 2005). According to the World Health Organisation, adolescence is the period of life when a child develops into an adult; the period from puberty to maturity term. It is a time of significant

physical, psychological, and social change, and it is during this period that young people begin to form their beliefs and attitudes about sexuality (WHO, 2023). Adolescence is a period in which sex roles and psychosexual developments between the onset of sexual maturity, adulthood, self-identity and relationship with other persons are defined by young people between the ages of 10 and 19 years (Action Health Incorporated, 2006). This age bracket forms the nucleus of this study.

Adolescence also marks the emergence of increased autonomy, risk taking behaviours, and spontaneity

which makes this category more susceptible to sexual and reproductive health risks. These risks include unplanned or unprotected sex, which may lead to an elevated risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), unintended pregnancy, and unsafe abortion (WHO, 2023; Denno, Hoopes, & Chandra-Mouli, 2015). The period of adolescence can be frustrating; both cognitive and social development can be painful, traumatic, excruciating, and unsatisfactory. The onset of adolescent development brings physical and physiological changes, as well as new vulnerabilities, sometimes including human rights abuses, particularly in the areas of sexuality, marriage, and childbearing. As a result, adolescents face a range of environmental health and social challenges as they mediate the biological and social transition into adulthood.

The experiences of older adolescents (aged 18-19 years) vary greatly by gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and other factors that shape the way in which they respond to their physical and emotional development and assumption of the roles of adulthood (Rana, 2014; Santrock, 2005). People commonly develop a deeper sense of identity during late adolescence, such as a personal sense of gender and sexuality, establish values about sexual behaviour and develop skills for romantic relationships. However, lacking adequate knowledge and skills about developing sexual relationships can make adolescents vulnerable to a higher risk of unintended pregnancy, unsafe abortion and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS (Olusanya and Jegede, 2022). Nevertheless, while sexual and reproductive health problem of young people is critical among both sexes, adolescent girls are more affected because of their biological, economic,

and social vulnerability (Abdissa, Addisie, & Seifu, 2017).

Generally, premarital sex refers to having sexual relationship with the opposite sex before marriage. Premarital sexual relationship seems to be common among adolescents in secondary school. Premarital sex is the involvement in sexual intercourse by persons who have not engaged in marital vow or culturally recognized as having been enrolled in marriage institution. Although marriage rites take different forms depending on cultural permissiveness, nevertheless the crucial factor is the acceptance by the society. In most cases, premarital sex is not always a problem to individuals who are sexually matured since they may view it as a natural response to a natural stimulus. However, premarital sex is ethically unacceptable in almost every human society that regards marriage as the legitimate requirement for sexual permissiveness, and especially among adolescents who are considered vulnerable to sexual and reproductive health risk (Mbamba, Gyimah, Adaranijo, Ansie, Snakowuli, & Ndemole, 2025). Religion in Nigeria like Christianity and Islam are opposed to premarital sex and thus prescribed specific punishment for culprits (Onobumeh & Agbonifoh, 2020).

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2023) recognizes the importance of addressing adolescent sexual health and has established a set of guidelines for addressing the sexual and reproductive health needs of young people. These guidelines emphasize the need for comprehensive sexuality education, access to sexual and reproductive health services, and the reduction of gender-based violence and discrimination. According to the World Health Organization (2023), an estimated 21 million girls aged 15-19 years in developing regions become

pregnant and approximately 12 million of them give birth. Also, STIs remain a major health concern among adolescents, with an estimated 246 million new cases of four curable STIs (chlamydia, gonorrhoea, syphilis, and trichomoniasis) among whom adolescents are a huge part. In Nigeria, Olatunji (2019) noted that more secondary school adolescents are dropping out of school due to unintended or unwanted pregnancies. An estimated one-quarter of sexually active adolescents in Nigeria have been impacted by the increase in premarital sex (Olatunji, 2019). It undoubtedly has grave negative consequences including unintended pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and social and emotional effects (Chika & Ikechukwu, 2013; Raji, 2018).

Research has shown that adolescents want to constantly receive sexual information from their parents and teachers (WHO 2023; Olusanya and Jedge, 2022) However, parents are either shy to discuss sex-related issues with their adolescent children or they think the discussion would encourage them to indulge in sexual activities or lack the skill of such discussions (Olusanya and Jedge, 2022). Premarital sex among adolescents seems to have become prevalent and this is quite disturbing because of the life altering and serious negative consequences. Despite the numerous campaign of abstinence and sexual purity for adolescents, what appears to be daily witnessed in society are the negative consequences of adolescent risk-taking behaviour, therefore, this examined the perception of secondary school children towards premarital sex in Akungba-Akoko community, particularly how their perceptions influence their sexual decisions as well as their belief towards premarital sex. Two hypotheses were generated to guide the study.

1. There is no significant relationship between adolescents' sources of sexual information and the perception towards premarital sex.
2. There is no significant relationship between perception and belief of adolescents towards premarital sex.

Theoretical Review

The study adopted social learning theory for theoretical framework. This theory was first proposed by psychologist Albert Bandura in the 1960s and has since been widely studied and applied in various fields. At the heart of social learning theory is the idea that people learn by observing and imitating the behaviours of others. This is known as observational learning or modelling. Key factors that influence whether observational learning occurs are attention, retention, reproduction, motivation and the concept of self-efficacy. Social learning theory also emphasizes the role of reinforcement in shaping behaviour. Reinforcement can be either positive (rewarding) or negative (punishing), and individuals are more likely to repeat behaviours that are reinforced. In line with the theory, adolescents may learn about sex through observing and imitating the behaviours of others, such as peers, parents, and media figures. Adolescents may also be influenced by the reinforcement and punishment they receive for engaging in or abstaining from sexual behaviours. For example, if an adolescent observes their peers being praised or rewarded for engaging in sexual activity, they may be more likely to imitate this behaviour in order to receive similar rewards. The media can also play a significant role in shaping adolescents' perceptions of sex and sexuality. Television, movies, music, and social media can all provide

models of sexual behaviour and may reinforce certain attitudes and beliefs about sex.

Method and Research

Instruments

A self-designed structured questionnaire titled Perception of Pre-Marital Sex Among Secondary School Adolescents (PPSASSA) was employed to elicit information from 147

respondents from two secondary schools in Akungba- Akoko. To ensure the reliability of the instrument, Cronbach's Alpha was applied. A reliability coefficient 0.69 was obtained. Fifteen In-depth Interview (IDI) sessions were conducted. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Qualitative data were content analysed.

Presentation of Results

Table 1 shows the demographic information of respondents.

Table 1: Analysis of Demographic Information of Respondents

Gender	Frequency (n = 147)	Percentage (%)
Male	79	53.7
Female	68	46.3
Total	147	100
Age		
13	11	7.5
14	22	15.0
15	30	20.4
16	34	23.1
17	26	17.7
18	21	14.3
19	3	2.0
TOTAL	147	100
Religion		
Christianity	123	83.7
Islam	16	10.9
Traditionalist	7	4.8
Others	1	0.7
TOTAL	147	100.0
Ethnic Affiliation		
Yoruba	123	83.7
Igbo	16	10.9
Hausa	7	4.8
Others	1	0.7
TOTAL	147	100.0
Who are you living with?		
Mother and Father	98	67.6
Mother	17	11.7
Father	5	3.4
Family Member	20	13.8
Living alone	7	4.8
TOTAL	147	100

The majority 53.7% of participants were males while 46.3% were females. In respect to the age of

the respondents, the majority 23.1% were 16 years old. Fifteen (15) year old were 20.4%, 17.7% were 17 year old,

15.0% were 14 year old, 14.3% were 18year old, 7.5% were 13 year olds and 2.0% were 19 year old.

Data on the religion of the respondents revealed that the majority of respondents were Christians (83.7%), followed by Muslims (10.9%), while traditionalists were 4.8% and others who were 0.7%.

The table further indicated that 67.6% were living with both parents, 11.7% are living with their mothers, 7.6%, 3.4% are living with their fathers, 13.8% are living a family member, while 4.8% are living alone..

Adolescents’ Sources of Information about Premarital Sex in Akungba-Akoko

Table 2 indicates that 7.5% of the respondents first heard about sex at home, 55.1% from peers at school, 2.7% from friends, 1.4% from television/radio, 2.7% from the church, 6.1% from the internet, while 24.5% (Others) could not immediately remember where they first heard about sex.

Table 2: Analysis of Adolescents’ Sources of Information about Premarital Sex in Akungba-Akoko

Items	Frequency (n=147)	Percentage (%)
Where did you first hear about sex?		
Home	11	7.5
Peers in school	81	55.1
Friends	4	2.7
Media	2	1.4
Church	4	2.7
Internet	9	6.1
Others	36	24.5
Do you discuss about sex at home?		
Yes	39	27
No	108	73
Is sexual education taught in your school?		
Yes	97	66
No	50	34
Do you discuss sex among friends?		
Yes	77	52
No	70	48
What is your main source of sexuality information?		
School	17	12
Internet	13	9
Friends	3	2
Parents/Home	8	5
Television/radio	6	4
Others	100	68

The table shows that 27% have parents discuss sex with them at home, while 73% of the respondents do not have such benefit. Sex is a topic taught in school with 66% of the respondents while 34% noted otherwise. The result further indicated that 52% of the respondents discuss about sex with their friends, while 48% do not discuss it. As regards the main source of information about sex; 12% of the respondents noted the school, 9% indicated the internet, 2% noted their friends, 5% noted their home, 4% opined the mass media; lastly, 100% were not certain about their main source of information about sex.

From the interview sessions, some of the respondents heard it from school while others said they knew about it from home. Virtually all the female interviewees said they heard about sex from their mothers, while most of the male interviewees got their information from their peers in the school premises. A 14year old female respondent said:

I heard it from my mom. She told me that sex is not good in order to avoid early pregnancy, abortion, loss of womb and it can damage our career (SS 2 Female)

Many of these adolescents have various sources of sexual information but 9 out of 15 that were interviewed said their main source of information about sex was peers in the school environment.

13years old female in JSS 3, Oroke High School said:

I hear about it from my classmates (JSS 2 Female)

Results from the qualitative data shows that these adolescents get moral/proper information about sex from their parents while the ones they get from school is a perverted one. For instance, when asked about the things they hear from peers in school, the following was among the main excerpts:

Some set of girls in my class usually talk about how their boyfriends sleep with them in the school hall (JSS 2 Female)

Perceptions of Adolescents about Pre-marital Sex

Table 3: Analysis of the Perceptions of Adolescents about Pre-marital Sex

Items	Frequency (N = 147)	Percentage (%)
What do you think about pre-marital sex?		
May not be good for Adolescents	78	53
May be good for Adolescents	9	6
Not sure whether good or not for Adolescents	60	41
Do you think adolescents should be involved in pre-marital sex?		
Yes	31	21
No	116	79
Do you think pre-marital sex is beneficial to Adolescents?		
Yes	49	33.3
No	98	66.7

Table 3 depicts that 53% of the respondents felt sexual intercourse may not be proper for adolescents, 6% felt it may be proper, while the majority (41%) were uncertain about their

decision. When asked on whether they think adolescents should be involved in premarital sex, 21% answered yes, 79% said no. Similarly, the majority 66.7%

felt premarital sexual intercourse is not beneficial to adolescents.

Data from the interview session converge with quantitative data. Many of the respondents perceive premarital

sex as not beneficial. Although, there was a male adolescents who felt it is not good to enter into marriage without sexual experience.

Adolescents’ Beliefs about Pre-marital Sex in the Community

Table 4: Analysis of the Beliefs of Adolescents in Akungba-Akoko about Pre-marital Sex

Items	Frequency (n=147)	Percentage (%)
Do you believe in pre-marital sex?		
Yes	29	20
No	118	80
Do you believe that adolescents should be involved in pre-marital sex?		
Yes	35	24
No	112	76

Table 4 displays the distribution of the respondents in respect of their belief about premarital sexual intercourse. Few (20%) believe in premarital sex, while the remaining 80% were otherwise inclined. A similarly distribution goes for whether the respondents believe adolescents should be involved in premarital sexual intercourse. The majority (76%) said No 38.1% gave good reasons, 21.8% gave bad reasons, and 40.1% did not answer the question.

Data from the interview sessions revealed that most of adolescents do not believe in premarital sex, according to them, it is not good. However, a

17year old male said he believes in it. He noted as follows:

After the marriage, they will have children, so before marriage they should enjoy because in marriage the wife is pregnant, sexual intercourse will no longer be frequent. (SS2 Male)

Testing of Hypotheses

The hypotheses postulated for this study was at 0.05 level of significance using chi-square test.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant relationship between adolescent’s sources of sexual information and the perception towards premarital sex.

Table 5: Chi-square test showing relationship between adolescents’ sources of sexual information and perception of adolescents towards premarital sex.

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	924.570 ^a	253	.000
Likelihood Ratio	502.874	253	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	133.585	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	147		

Table 5 presents the results of a chi-square test that examines the relationship between adolescents’

sources of sexual information and their perception towards premarital sex. The chi-square value indicates 924.570 and

the level of significance indicates (p-value = .000). This means that there is a significant relationship between adolescents' sources of information and their perception of premarital sex. This implies that there is strong evidence to suggest that adolescents sources of information are related to their perception of premarital sex. Therefore, on the basis of the data, the

null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between adolescents' perception of premarital sex was rejected.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant relationship between perception and belief of adolescents towards premarital sex.

Table 6: Chi-square test showing relationship between perception and belief of adolescents towards premarital sex.

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	531.658a	88	.000
Likelihood Ratio	411.630	88	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	126.610	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	147		

Table 6 presents the results of a chi-square test that explores the relationship between adolescents' perception and beliefs of premarital sex. The chi-square value indicates 531.658 and the level of significance indicates (p-value = .000). This means that there is a significant relationship between perception and beliefs of premarital sex. It implies that there is strong evidence to suggest that adolescents' perception and beliefs of premarital sex have a link that ties them together. Therefore, the hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between adolescents' perception and beliefs of premarital sex was rejected.

Discussion of Findings

This study explored the perceptions of adolescents towards premarital sex among secondary school adolescents in Akungba-Akoko, Ondo State. Majority of the study respondents are within the age range of 15 and 17 years old. This is quite significant; because it represents peak period when the lives of boys and girls become wrapped in seeking identity that shapes their sexuality or sexual expression. Adolescents are not a homogeneous group in respect of their ages. At the lower end of the range they consist of pre-teenage boys and girls most of whom are not yet sexually active, while at the upper end, they consist of physically and sexually mature boys and girls many of whom may have become sexually active following from perception or sexual identity formed. This is in consonance with the works of Santrock (2005) and Rana (2014).

The study found that most of the adolescents first heard about sex from peers in school in the face of the fact that majority of the respondents live with both parents. This indicates that parents

in this community are not at the cutting edge of providing age-specific sexual information for their children, Olusanya and Jegede (2022) found that parents generally have inhibitions discussing sexual issues with their children. Little wonder, very few of them noted that sex is discussed at home while a good number discuss the topic with their friends. In addition, the finding that majority of the adolescents were not certain about their major source of sexual information strongly indicates that friends, peers and diverse other sources rather than parents or teachers or religious institutions continue to be the sources of sexual information for adolescents. This situation has great implication for sustainable development goals (in respect of sexual and reproductive health needs of young people) attainment. Providing adolescents with age-specific sexual health information empowers them to make responsible decisions about sexuality, thereby reducing the number of unintended pregnancies and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) incidence, including HIV/AIDs.

The first contact of children is with their parents. Hence, we should not fail to accept the fact that the first sex education begins with parents. Parents serve as the first source of sex role learning for their adolescents and often, relationship with parents forms templates for future sexual behaviour. Communication between parents and adolescents is a crucial part of adolescents' lives and it is one of the principal means by which parents socialize their children. This explains why children go to school with various backgrounds about sexuality. Some lack the rudimentary knowledge while others are deluded. Consequently, many

develop undesirable sexual attitudes and practices. Hence, despite several interventions, adolescents' knowledge of sexuality is made up of incomplete, misleading, and unreliable information received from films, peers, novels, music, media, internet and magazines. Such distorted information carries an approval of adolescent risky sexual behaviour which had been associated with higher levels of intention to engage in sexual intercourse and a higher amount of sexual activities in general (Olusanya, 2022; Olusanya and Jegede, 2022; Engle, Brown, & Kenneavy, 2006; Lieberman, 2006).

The finding indicates that many of the adolescents who participated in the study are having distorted/confused knowledge about premarital sexual intercourse. Hence, as revealed by the test of hypotheses; there was a significant relationship between adolescents' perception of premarital sex and belief; just as the relationship between adolescents' sources of information and their perception of premarital sex was significant. This situation greatly compromises adolescents' sexual health and explains why many of the adolescents are not sure whether premarital sex is proper for them or not.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study examined the perception of pre-marital sex among secondary school adolescents in Akungba, Ondo state, Nigeria; it amplifies the vital role of adolescents sources of information about sexual issues has in shaping the perception and belief of adolescents about premarital sexual intercourse. The challenge of age-specific sexual information for children and adequate sources of sexual information for adolescents persist in the society. The findings emphasize the

significance of the parent-adolescent sexual communication at the homestead. The study ultimately points to the need for further interventions by all stakeholders that target repositioning parents, schools and religious institution for early, friendly and age-specific sexual communication with children

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