

Socio-Economic Predictors of Sexual Practices of Unmarried Adolescent Girls in Makoko Community, Lagos, Nigeria

By

Idongesit Eshiet, Michael O.N. Kunnuji & Temitope Owolabi
Department of Sociology
University of Lagos
Lagos, Nigeria

1.0 Background of Study

Adolescence is a transitional biological period marking the end of childhood, and the beginning of adulthood. Individuals between the ages of 10 – 19 years fall within this group. It involves a rapid change in many aspects of their lives including the biological, psychological and socio-cultural. Some of the physiological changes that occur during adolescence include increase in sex hormones, changes in body size and changes in body functions (puberty) and this makes adolescents' interest in sex to increase.

In present times, globalization and information and communication technologies have shrunk the global space, thus giving individuals access to limitless information. Adolescents in the developing world now have access to more information on puberty and sexuality and this has impacted on their sexual attitudes and behavior and has consequently resulted in high-risk sexual practices such as frequent sexual intercourse, multiplicity of sexual partners, casual sex, unprotected sex, etc. These sexual practices jeopardize the reproductive health of adolescents. The rapid increase in sexually transmitted infections (STIs) among adolescents, teen-age pregnancy, abortion and early motherhood are fallouts of this scenario. These reproductive health challenges have tremendous implications for adolescents' lives as well as for national reproductive health outcomes, such as fertility, unwanted pregnancy, abortion, safe motherhood, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). This calls for the need to interrogate the some of the socio-economic predictors of adolescent girls' sexual practices.

1.2 Statement of Problem

In Nigeria, the teenage population has risen to 60 million from 44 million in 2006 and it is expected to rise further to 73 million by 2020. This figure shows that adolescents constitute a sizeable share of the Nigerian population. This makes them integral to the country's socio-political and economic development, thus making issues affecting them such as reproductive health issues to be of utmost importance. As stated earlier, adolescence is a transitional biological period marking the end of childhood, and the beginning of adulthood. It is a period characterized by profound physical, biological, social and psychological changes. The physiological changes cause adolescents' interest in sex to increase. Thus, most adolescents reach sexual maturity before they attain emotional or social maturity or economic independence.

Some adolescents are however, unprepared for these changes and so do become victims of critical and defining life events such as experiencing first sexual intercourse, pregnancy and motherhood. This study therefore aims at investigating the socio-economic variables that may mediate adolescents' sexual practices with a focus on unmarried adolescent girls. Female adolescents' response to the profound physical, biological, social and psychological changes that characterised adolescence is mediated by some social, economic, psychological and cultural factors. The patriarchal nature of most societies characterized by males' dominance over females in all spheres of life has exposed females to vulnerability in all facets of life including sexual and reproductive health.

This study therefore aims at investigating the socio-economic predictors of adolescent girls' sexual practices such as living arrangement, educational status, knowledge of sexual health, religion, income, etc. in Makoko community, Lagos Nigeria. Sexual practices will be measured by age at first sexual intercourse; frequency of intercourse; number of partners; indulgence in unprotected sex, casual sex, anal sex and oral sex.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

Radical feminism perspective will serve as the theoretical underpinning of the study. Radical feminism perspective seeks to examine the root of women's oppression by men in the society. According to radical feminists, the human society is patriarchal and male dominated and this is the root of women's oppression and marginalization in all spheres of life including the

reproductive sphere. According to Weisberg (1996), men are socialized to express their sexual desires and to feel entitled to have those desires met, while women are socialized not to express their sexual desires, except helping men to gratify their own sexual desires. Thus, women are socialized to internalize accepted definitions of femininity and sexual objectification. And as men cling to the idea that their sexuality is an absolute expression of their need and dominance, women, especially vulnerable adolescents become their victims as the sexual act often times cannot be performed without a female partner.

Similarly, the feminist perspective argues that the socio-economic and political inequality in many developing countries create subservient female adolescents who depend on men for financial and material needs, thus creating inequality in negotiating for healthy sexual relationships. Therefore, the socio-economic deprivations which characterize urban slums predispose adolescent girls to indulge in pre-marital sexual practices. Economic deprivation considerably affects the ability to negotiate sex or adopt protective sex, especially among female adolescents whose sexual partners are often older men. The analysis of the socio-economic predictors of adolescent girls' sexual practices in Makoko community, Lagos, Nigeria will be situated within the radical feminist perspective.

1.3 Methods

Research Design – The study will utilize mixed methods to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. Cross sectional survey method will be used to gather quantitative data, while in-depth interview will be used to gather the qualitative data.

Research Setting – The study will be conducted in Makoko community (an urban slum) within the Lagos metropolis in Nigeria. Makoko is a multi-ethnic fishing community with an estimated population of 85,840 comprising of 43,280 males and 41,540 females. Some of the residents live on water due to inadequate landmass. The dominant occupation of residents is fishing and trading.

Study population – This will comprise of unmarried adolescent girls, ages 10-19 residing in Makoko community.

Sample Size and Technique – A sample size of 280 unmarried adolescent girls will be drawn for the study using the multi-stage simple random sampling technique.

Data Collection- Quantitative data will be gathered using the questionnaire instrument. The questionnaire will be administered by the researcher. The questionnaire will be divided into various sections reflecting questions on socio-economic and demographic characteristics of respondents and on sexual practices. In-depth interview guide will be used to gather the qualitative data.

Data Analysis - The quantitative data will be screened, edited, coded and processed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The processed data will be analysed using univariate, bivariate and multivariate statistics. The qualitative data will be transcribed, interpreted and analysed thematically to unravel the research objectives.

1.4 Expected Findings –

It is expected that the study will unravel the following -

- Adolescent girls’ sexual practices in Makoko community, Lagos, Nigeria.
- The socio-economic predictors of adolescent girls’ sexual practices in Makoko community, Lagos, Nigeria.
- The reproductive health challenges of adolescent girls in Makoko community in Lagos, Nigeria.
- Make available data on adolescent girls’ reproductive health challenges in Makoko community, Lagos, Nigeria that could inform policy.