

## **Influence of Sexual Behaviour among Secondary School Students in Ondo Metropolis, Ondo State**

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### **Abstract**

The study examined correlates of sexual behaviour among secondary school students. Descriptive survey research design was used in the study. The population consisted of 19,294 senior secondary school students in Ondo metropolis. The sample comprised 300 students randomly selected from six secondary schools in the metropolis. The instrument used to collect data for the study was a structured questionnaire titled "Questionnaire on sexual behaviour among secondary school students (QSBSSS). Reliability of the instrument was ascertained using Cronbach's Alpha statistics which yielded a coefficient of 0.82. Data collected was analysed using t-test and ANOVA. The results showed that gender of secondary students has significant influence on their sexual behaviour ( $t = 7.153, P < 0.05$ ). It was also found that age has significant influence on sexual behaviour of secondary school students ( $F = 3.107, P < 0.05$ ). It was therefore recommended that girls should be enlightened on dangers of staying alone with opposite sex who are found to be more sexually active than them. Girls should avoid lonely places in order not to become victim of rape. Boys should be given sex education on how to avoid early sexual initiation in order to concentrate on more profitable endeavour that could help them become great achievers. Comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education should be incorporated into secondary school curriculum. Girls should be trained to be assertive in their relationship with opposite sex.

**Keywords:** Sexual behaviour, Gender, Reproductive health, Age and Sexual debut.

### **Introduction**

Students are known to be full of energy, they are very adventurous and always want to experiment regardless of consequences, which most often compromise the young person's sexual and reproductive health. The desire of the adolescents to be with and be regarded as being a man or woman is responsible for most adolescents indulging in risky sexual behaviour. Many adults have difficulty in acknowledging adolescents as sexual being and therefore see adolescents' sexuality as something that must be controlled and restrained. Whereas adolescents nature or characteristics of sexual behaviour are very obvious in their heterosexual relationship. Due to the biological or physiological changes in the adolescence period as characterized by hormonal changes, it is natural for adolescents to become curious about making choices around sexual activities. Thus, the adolescents engage in various kinds of sexual behaviour like sexual intercourse, dating, masturbation, oral sex, anal sex, homosexuality and many other sexual activities. A lot of problems are associated with adolescent sexual behaviour and some of these problems are related to the reproductive health. Such problems include pre-marital sex, sexually transmitted diseases, unplanned pregnancy, sexual violence, multiple sexual partners and other related issues.

According to World Health Organization (2004), by 13 years, 5% of girls and 20% of boys have had their sexual debut. By age 16 years, 30% of girls and 75% of boys report having sexual intercourse. Knowledge

of risks of pregnancy, sexual transmitted infections (STIs) and AIDs do not consistently control behaviour. Young people's sexual behaviour have been noted to be influenced by a number of factors which include peers, exposure to information and gender (Okpani & Okpani, 2001). Pengpid and Peltzer (2021) found in their study that more than half (57.4%) of the students ever has sex, 68.4% among boys and 45.8% among girls. Among students who ever had sex, 41% had early sexual debut (less than 14 years), 57.9% had multiple sexual partners. Djamba (2004) reported that there is a declining age of first sexual debut, increasing number of sexually active adolescents and high risk sexual behaviour among adolescents. Fortunately, in recent years, researchers have brought unusual focus on the age at which adolescent boys and girls initiate sexual activity. One notable factor discussed in literature which affects sexual behaviour of young people is the issue of age.

Akwara, Mundise and Hinde (2003) found that age of a person is a factor which may influence sexual behaviour and risk of HIV infections and sexual problem. Hulton, Cullen and Khalokho (2000) opined that young people in their teens are at high risk when it comes to sexual behaviour. Duru, Ubajaka, Nnebue and Okoro (2010) in their study of 384 in-school adolescents in Anambra State, Nigeria found that 120 adolescents (34.3%) have had their first sexual exposure and are sexually active. Seventy eight (65.0%) were males while 42 (35.0%) were females. The mean, modal and youngest ages of initiation into sexual activity were  $15.08 \pm 0.2$ ,  $15 \pm 0.2$  and  $10 \pm 0.2$  years respectively.

Age is a significant factor influencing the sexual behaviour of young people, as it intersects with biological, psychological, and social dimensions of development. Adolescence, typically defined as the period between 10 and 19 years of age, marks a critical stage where hormonal changes drive physical and sexual maturation (Blakemore & Mills, 2014). During this phase, young people begin to experience heightened sexual curiosity and attraction, often leading to their first sexual experiences. Studies have shown that the average age of sexual debut varies by region, with many adolescents in sub-Saharan Africa initiating sexual activity by age 15, while in Western societies, it is often closer to 17 or 18 (UNICEF, 2021). These variations underscore the role of cultural norms and socioeconomic factors in shaping how age influences sexual behaviour. Kushal, Yahia, Amin, Reza, Hossain and Shawon (2022) investigated the regional and sex differences in the prevalence of early sexual initiation and its correlates among school going adolescents in 50 countries. Overall, 14.2% of adolescents aged 12-15 years had early sexual initiation, with boys reporting much higher than girls (19.7%, 16.9-22.5 vs. 8.9%, 7.6-10.3). The prevalence of early sexual initiation was the highest in the region of the Americans (18.4%, 15.2-21.5) and the lowest in the South-East Asia region (5.3%, 2.6-8.0).

As young people transition into their late teens and early twenties, their sexual behaviour often evolves with increased autonomy and exposure to diverse social environments. This stage of development is characterized by exploratory behaviours, which may include casual relationships or experimentation with different forms of intimacy (Arnett, 2015). However, early initiation of sexual activity, particularly before the age of 16, has been linked to adverse outcomes such as a higher likelihood of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unintended pregnancies (Kaestle et al., 2020). Conversely, delayed sexual initiation is often associated with healthier sexual practices and better outcomes, including consistent condom use and fewer sexual partners (Santelli et al., 2017). Thus, the timing of sexual debut plays a pivotal role in shaping the long-term sexual health of young individuals.

Cultural and societal expectations also influence how age impacts the sexual behaviour of young people. For instance, in conservative societies, strict norms around sexual abstinence can delay sexual initiation, while liberal societies may promote open discussions about sexuality and access to contraceptives, reducing risky behaviours

(Powers et al., 2021). Moreover, the developmental stage at which young people are introduced to comprehensive sex education significantly affects their sexual decision-making. Research has highlighted that when adolescents receive age-appropriate, evidence-based sexual education, they are more likely to delay sexual initiation and adopt safer sexual practices (Kirby, 2019). Recognizing the interplay between age, culture, and education is essential for developing policies and interventions aimed at fostering healthy sexual behaviours among young people.

Regarding the issue of gender, Ojong, Ojong-Alasia and Samjon-Akpan (2014) reported that gender significantly influences reproductive health knowledge, girls were more aware of reproductive health than boys, girls were more vulnerable than males to reproductive health problem. Majority of the males were exposed to social expectations which have a strong influence on their sexual family life and reproduction. Laddunuri (2013) equally found that a male student is 1.46 times more likely to have intercourse than a female. For boys, testosterone levels had a very strong relationship to sexual activity than girls with estrogen hormone. Contrary to this, Kingori and Kingori (2016) in their study, found no major gender difference in the sexual behaviours of male and female adolescents. They only differed in their interpretation of the reactions of their sexual partners, especially girls, to sexual advances. Both gender viewed boy-girl relationship as socially acceptable and normal. Thus, encouraging them to initiate and engage in sexual relationship with members of the apposite gender.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Today, adolescents engaged in so many activities that demonstrate sexual pleasure. Some of these activities are undoubtedly harmless but portend danger since they lessen the prohibition on premarital sexual activities. More importantly, teenagers and young people progressively engaged in them because of the permissive attitudes of the society towards these sexual practices. The danger inherent in these practices is based on the suspicions that most adolescents move through the less harmful practices to those that can affect them negatively. They begin sexual practices starting with embracing and kissing, moving through petting or fondling breasts and sex organs to end with intercourse. Gender and age have been noted to be important factors influencing adolescent sexual behaviour. Considering the consequences of these practices on adolescent sexual health, there is a need to investigate how gender and age can influence sexual behaviour among secondary school students, in a bid to curb their excesses.

### **Purposes of the Study**

The main purpose of this study is to investigate on the influence of sexual behaviour among secondary school students in Ondo metropolis, Ondo State. Specifically, it sought to:

1. Investigate the difference in the sexual behaviour of male and female secondary school students.
2. Determine the influence of age on the sexual behaviour of secondary school students.

### **Hypotheses**

To guide the conduct of the study, the following hypotheses were stated:

1. There is no significant difference in the sexual behaviour of male and female secondary school students.
2. There is no significant influence of age on the sexual behaviour of secondary school students.

### **Methods**

Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population consisted of 19,294 senior secondary school students in Ondo metropolis. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select fifty (50) students each from six secondary schools (i.e one boys' school, one girls' school, two mixed and two private

schools), making a total of three hundred (300) students as sample for the study. The instrument used for the study was a structured questionnaire titled “Questionnaire on Sexual Behaviour among Secondary School Students (QSBSSS)”. The questionnaire was divided into two sections (A and B). Section A was on personal data of the respondents while section B consisted of items on students sexual behaviour on a four Likert type scale of strongly agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). Reliability of the instrument was ascertained using Cronbach’s Alpha statistics which yielded a coefficient of 0.82. Data collected was analyzed using t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) statistics.

## Results

**Hypothesis one:** There is no significant difference in the sexual behaviour of male and female secondary school students.

In testing this hypothesis, the respondents were grouped based on their gender (i.e male and female) and scores on sexual behaviour were analyzed using t-test. The results are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Independent t-test summary of the difference between the sexual behaviour of male and female students

Variable	Gender	N	$\bar{X}$	S.D	df	t	Sig
Sexual behaviour	Male	122	30.61	9.047	298	7.153*	.000
	Female	178	26.20	5.271			

\*significant @ 0.05 level of significance

From Table 1, male subjects have a mean score of 30.61 and a standard deviation of 9.047 while female subjects have a mean score of 26.20 and standard deviation of 5.271. A t-test analysis of these values yielded a t-value of 7.153, which is significant at 0.05 level. This implies that gender of secondary school students has significant influence on their sexual behaviour. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.

**Hypothesis Two:** There is no significant influence of age on the sexual behaviour of secondary school students.

In testing this hypothesis, the respondents were classified into three groups based on their age and scores on sexual behaviour were analyzed using ANOVA. The results are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Summary of ANOVA on the influence of age on the sexual behaviour of students

Source variance	N	$\bar{X}$	St.D	df	SS	MS	F	Sig
13-15years	174	11.20	3.669	2	295.824	147.912	3.107*	0.04
16-18years	92	18.01	3.255	297	14138.336	47.604		
19-21years	34	23.20	4.104					
TOTAL	300	17.47	3.68	299	14434.16			

\*significant @ 0.05 level of significance

From Table 2, the mean squares between groups and within groups are 295.824 and 141.38.336 respectively. These yielded F-value of 3.107 which is significant at 0.05 level. This implies that age has significant influence on sexual behaviour of secondary school students. Hence the null hypothesis is rejected.

## Discussion of Findings

The results of the study showed that gender of secondary school students has significant influence on their sexual behaviour. Male students are more sexually active than their female counterparts. This is supported

by Pengpid and Peltzer (2021), who found that boys were more sexually active than girls. Ojong, Ojong- Alasia and Samson –Akpan (2014) also reported that there was a significant influence of gender on sexual behaviours as female students do not involve in actual sexual act as their male counterparts. Contrary to this, Kingori and Kingori (2016) found that gender differences had no great influence on the sexual behaviours and activities of the adolescents.

The study also revealed that age has significant influence on sexual behaviour of secondary school students with 19 – 21 years showing the highest level of sexual behaviour, followed by 16-18 years and 13-15 years having the least. This is corroborated by Pengpid and Peltzer (2021) who reported that adolescents above 14 years engage in sexual risk behaviour. Kingori and Kingori (2016) found that majority of the adolescent boys and girls had their first sexual encounter at the peak of their early adolescence stage (11-15 years) and in their middle adolescence (16 -18 years). Kushal et al (2022) also reported that adolescents aged 14-15 years had much higher odds of having early sexual initiation than adolescents aged 12 -13 years.

## **Conclusion**

Gender and age have significant influence on sexual behaviour of secondary school students with boys more sexually active than girls and adolescents above 14 years having early sexual initiation more than those below 14 years of age.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Girls should be enlightened on dangers of staying alone with opposite sex who are found to be more sexually active than them
2. Girls should avoid lonely places in order not to become victim of rape.
3. Boys should be given sex education on how to avoid early sexual initiation in order to concentrate on more profitable endeavours that could help them become great achievers.
4. There is a need for Ministry of Education at all levels to incorporate comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education into secondary school curriculum.
5. Peer-led programmes should be organized by school counsellors for the sake of emphasis and deeper understanding of sexual risk behaviour.
6. More rigorous effort should be put on enlightening older adolescents of dangers inherent in sexual risk behaviours.
7. Girls should be trained to be assertive in their relationship with opposite sex.

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