

# **INFLUENCE OF FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS AND CULTURAL NORMS ON PRE-MARITAL SEX AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN OJO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA.**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of family characteristics and cultural norms on pre-marital sex among secondary school students in Ojo Local Government Area of Lagos State, Nigeria. A simple random sampling technique was used to select 500 secondary school students in the Local Government Area. The instrument used for data collection was a 4-point Likert scale questionnaire designed by the researchers and validated by test and measurement experts in the Faculty of Education, Lagos State University Lagos, Nigeria. A test – retest of 0.76 was got when the instrument was subjected to Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC), which was an indication that the instrument was reliable and suitable for the study. The data collected were analysed using frequency count and simple percentages while inferential statistic of chi-square was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that family characteristics and cultural norms were some of the factors responsible for pre-marital sex among secondary school students in Ojo Local Government Area of Lagos State. It was recommended that parents should model good sexual behaviour to their children, parents should also teach their children sexuality education and that children should do away with any cultural norms that could attract them to engage in pre-marital sexual act.

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**Keywords:** Family characteristics, cultural norms, pre-marital sex, sexual behaviours

## **Introduction**

Adolescence can be a confusing and unsettling time for young adults. Changes to their bodies, their interests, and their social relationships cause them to question who they are and how they fit into the dynamic and confusing world around them. They question their place in their family, with their friends, with their teachers, and with others around them. This is a time of increased self-awareness, self-identity, self-consciousness, preoccupation with image, and concern with social acceptance. Adolescents are trying to discover and solidify their sense of self and their roles in society (Moffit, 1993)

Young people's decisions about whether and when to engage in sexual activity and how to do so safely are influenced by many factors. Family values, religious beliefs and affiliations, parental monitoring, social and cultural background, self image, media, peer influence, and education all play major roles. For adolescents who make a decision to abstain or postpone sexual activity, the support of family, health professionals and educators is important to counteract peer pressure and other societal influences. Adolescents who perceive themselves as having such support usually exhibit healthier decision making (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2010).

Practicing abstinence or using contraceptives is less influenced by education and information than by cognitive developmental stage, personal beliefs, lifestyle, social and cultural background, opinions and practices of peers, and external support systems. Values involving choice of partner, self-image, peers or family and even pregnancy may have a powerful influence on decisions about contraceptive use. Information about practicing abstinence and the proper use of each method of contraception, in addition to recognition of emotional, cultural, psychological, or economic issues, is critical to reducing and preventing adolescent pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and HIV infection (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2010).

Cultural norms and expectations were identified as playing a significant role amongst Lebanese-born women in Sydney where more than half the study participants were married before the age of 20, with many becoming mothers in their teens (Siedlecky, 1996). The traditional sexual script specifies the male as the initiator of sexual activity and the female as the object of male advances. Thus males engage in more sexual activity than females (Treas, 2002).

Values involving choice of partner, self image, peers or family, and even pregnancy may have a powerful influence on decisions about contraceptive use. Knowing the factors that influence this act and how they operate, will not only help to target those youths who are at greatest risk for negative health outcomes but also help in reducing the scourge of

HIV, sexually transmitted infections and teenage pregnancy. Few young people receive adequate preparation for their sexual lives. This leaves them potentially vulnerable to coercion, abuse and exploitation, unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV. Many young people approach adulthood faced with conflicting and confusing messages about sexuality and gender. Reported sexual activity among adolescents in developing countries is generally high, although there is considerable variation between countries, and data validity is often poor. In sub-Saharan Africa, 75% of young women report having had sex by age 20 (Singh, Bankole and Woog, 2005; Plummer, Ross, Wight, Changalucha, Mshana and Wamoyi, 2004). This is often exacerbated by embarrassment, silence and disapproval of open discussion of sexual matters by adults, including parents and teachers at the very time when it is most needed.

There are many settings globally where young people are becoming sexually mature and active at an earlier age without any knowledge or skills that will enable them to live a healthy life and thus become a victim of premarital sex. The focus of this study therefore is to find out the perceived factors influencing pre-marital sex among secondary school students who are also adolescents in Ojo Local Government Area of Lagos State so as to equip them with necessary skills and knowledge that will enable them to prevent and guard against problems associated with premarital sex. The study will provide young people with age-appropriate, culturally relevant and scientifically accurate information to manage relationships with their peers, parents and other adults and their communities. It will also equip young people in secondary schools with knowledge and skills to make responsible choices in their lives, particularly in a context where they have greater exposure to sexually explicit materials through the internet and other media.

### **Review of Related Literature**

Adolescence is a time of extreme introspection. More than their male counterparts, females look to media to help them define and explain the world around them (Polce-Lynch, Myers, Kliever, and Kilmartin, 2001). Females seeking information about their current developmental tasks will take that information from any available source (Granello, 1997). Adolescence can be a period marked by severe psychological and emotional stress (Durham, 1999). It is during this time that gender identities, values of self-worth and sexual attitudes become topics of relentless and serious contemplation. Adolescents are moving from childhood into adulthood. They want to understand their new roles, their new ideas and their new feelings. This exploration of self and new found independence can result in feelings of anxiety and uncertainty. While these changes are occurring in both males and

females, it has been found that females experience a more difficult time with this transition than males (Block and Robins, 1993).

Adolescent girls are more apt to experience decreased feeling of attractiveness and self-esteem. Girls are more likely to feel ashamed and distressed by the changes in their body and appearance. They become more insecure and self-aware of the changes that occur. Boys however find the progression of adolescence to be a more positive and reassuring time. They tend to experience improved feelings of body satisfaction and self-assurance. While both are increasing in size and changing in shape, boys welcome this change and girls dread it (Durham, 1999).

Norms and values of society are inherent in sexuality, but the norms of adolescent peers are particularly influential. A study of American college students indicated that whether friends discussed sex and practiced safe sex was a strong predictor of whether a participant was engaging in safe sexual behaviour. The results indicate that much of what young men and women do is influenced and entrenched by what others like themselves are doing. Within this group there were gender differences in the influence that friends were able to have over participants. Men, while prepared to discuss sexual matters, were less likely than women to morally pressure their friends into specific behaviours (Lear, 1995).

Moore and Rosenthal (1993) pointed out that in western societies the prolonged transition to adulthood has given rise to a distinct youth culture. This culture has a considerable impact on teenagers' opinions and behaviours, with many young people conforming to particular fashion, music or leisure activities as well as sexual attitudes and behaviour. Cultural norms and expectations were identified by Siedlecky (1996) as playing a significant role amongst Lebanese-born women in Sydney where more than half the study participants were married before the age of 20, with many becoming mothers in their teens.

In time past, sexual activity was regulated by the community. For example, among the Kikuyu in Kenya, newly circumcised young men and women were taught how to practice Ngwiko- non-penetrative stimulation of the sexual organs before marriage, which permitted sexual release but reduced the risk of pregnancy. Boys have heightened expectations and make sexual demands on girls away from the watchful eyes of their elders (Bledsoe and Cohen, 1993). Race/ethnicity and culture have been identified as powerful influences on adolescents' sexual experience. The research in the USA indicates considerable differences in the acceptability of early sexual experience and motherhood between African-American and white youth. The reasons for this appear to be quite complex with some writers suggesting that socio-economic differences play the major part and others suggesting cultural norms (Barone, Ickovics, Ayers, Katz and Voyce, 1996).

International surveys of sexual attitudes and experiences point to considerable differences. For example, Japanese adolescents have been identified as having less sexual experience in comparison to their American counterparts. Differences were also observed between English, German and Norwegian adolescents and their Canadian and American counterparts (with the first group being less restrictive in their attitudes and behaviours (McCabe and Cummins, 1998). Rosenthal, Moore and Brumen (1990) and Khoo,(1985) point to diversity of views about the practice of pre-marital sex between young women of Chinese and Greek, or more generally, Southern European background compared to those of Anglo-Celtic background. Rosenthal, Moore and Brumen (1990) also found considerable differences in sexual behaviour in relation to ethnicity, with Greek males least likely to be virgins (23%) compared to Chinese men (60%). The proportions of women with no sexual experience were 62% for Italian women surveyed, 78% for Chinese and 32% for Anglo-Saxon women.

The family is the first institution that the child comes in contact with. It is also an intimate social setting where the child first experiences love, care and attention that eventually help in launching him/her into the larger society (Viatonu, 2004). Parents also may be important in influencing young people's use of contraceptives. Direct discussions about sexual behaviour between teenagers and their mothers were found to be most effective in high school years and beyond where peer approval was quite more influential (Treboux and Bush-Rossnagel, 1995). This suggests that parental influence may be particularly significant through indirect means and, to a lesser extent, through direct communication. The relevance of these findings is not clear but studies have found little association between teenage sexual experience and parental relationships (Cubis and Raphael, 1985).

Parental attitudes and views may influence adolescents but the available research evidence suggests that this is very limited. Moore and Chase-Lansdale (1999), found that parents who held strong traditional views about premarital sex and communicated these to their daughters were the only group able to influence their children's sexual behavior. Relationships within the family are also significant. It has been suggested that there is a link between the young people's satisfaction with their child-mother relationship and the likelihood of them being sexually experienced (Jaccard, Dittus and Gordan 1996; Moore and Rosenthal, 1993).

The lack of attentive and nurturing parents was linked to early sexual activity while a stable family environment was associated with later initiation of sexual intercourse (Whitebeck, Hoyt, Miller and Kao, 1992). Family control variables are a measure of the pervasiveness of the parental influence on adolescent behavior. Parents, especially mothers, exert a great influence on the child's attitudes, norms, values and standards of right or wrong.

Performance of socially accepted behaviour is rewarded while performance of socially undesirable behaviour is punished. Parenting style is measured in terms of the youth's perception of their parent's level of strictness; perceived parental attitude towards smoking, drinking and early marriage as well as whether the family prays together. It is safe to assume that adolescents who see their parents to hold conservative attitudes regarding these matters are more likely to have been reared in a more conservative family setting and thus are expected to refrain from engaging in risk behaviors. On the other hand, those who view their parents to be more permissive are expected to eventually adopt a more liberal attitude and thus are more likely to engage in risk behaviors as well (Panopio and Rolda, 2000).

Adolescents who perceived their parents to frown upon such practices are more likely to restrain from engaging in such behaviours even as teenagers from divorced single-mother homes are significantly more likely than teens in never-married single-mother homes to become pregnant (Go, 1993). However, while parental remarriage seems to offer little protection regarding teen sexual activity, a recent study on remarriage's effect on teen pregnancy points in a different direction. It found that young women whose parents remarry after divorce have lower rates of teen pregnancy than do young women in single-parent homes-rates that are similar to those of young women raised by their own married parents. (Centre for Marriage and Families, 2005)

Parent involvement in adolescent television viewing could moderate the relationship between viewing and initiating intercourse. Adolescents who do not discuss television with their parents have higher rates of intercourse compared to those who do discuss television content with their parents. Family communication patterns (concept orientation versus social orientation) seem to influence the way adolescents make inferences and draw connections about sexual media (Moore and Chase-Lansdale, 1999). Teenagers from non-intact families are more likely to be sexually active. There appear to be no significant differences in sexual behavior between adolescents from stepfamilies and those from single-parent families. The similarity of sexual behaviour among these two groups of adolescents suggests that remarriage presents some risks with regard to monitoring adolescent behaviors effectively and transmitting values that deter early sexual relationships. Teenagers from divorced single-mother homes are significantly more likely than teens in never-married single-mother homes to become pregnant (Centre for Marriage and Families, 2005).

### **Research Questions**

The following questions were raised in the study:

1. Will family characteristics influence pre-marital sex among secondary

Schools students in Ojo Local Government Area of Lagos State, Nigeria?

2. Will cultural norms influence pre-marital sex among secondary school students in Ojo Local Government Area of Lagos State, Nigeria?

### **Research Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were tested

1. Family characteristics will not significantly influence pre-marital sex among secondary school students in Ojo Local Government Area of Lagos State, Nigeria.
2. Cultural norms will not significantly influence pre-marital sex among secondary school students in Ojo Local Government Area of Lagos State, Nigeria.

### **Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

The descriptive research design was used for this study. This research design is best used to gather, organize, present and analyze data for the purpose of describing the occurrence of an event or phenomenon within a particular group of people.

#### **Population and Sample**

The population for the study consists of all secondary school students and teachers in Ojo Local Government Area of Lagos State. The sample for the study was made up of five hundred (500) respondents selected from the population. The simple random sampling technique was used to select the sample.

#### **Instrument**

The instrument used for data collection was a self- developed structured questionnaire which has two sections A and B. Section A focused on demographic information while section B was used to collect information on the variables selected for the study. The questionnaire was a closed-ended type designed in line with the modified 4- point Likert Scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Strongly Disagree (SD) and Disagree (D). The instrument was given to senior colleagues in test and measurement in the Faculty of Education, Lagos State University for content and construct validity. The reliability of the instrument was carried out using the test-retest method with Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficients [PPMCC] which yielded 0.76 coefficients, which is an indication that the instrument was suitable and reliable for the study.

**Administration of instrument**

A total of five hundred questionnaires were administered by the researchers with the help of two research assistants. It took the researchers two days to administer to all the respondents. All the administered questionnaires were retrieved same day.

**Data Analysis**

The data collected were analysed using frequency counts, simple percentage for the demographic data while the inferential statistic of chi-square [ $X^2$ ] was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

**Test of Hypotheses**

**Hypothesis 1:** Family characteristics will not significantly influence pre-marital sex among secondary school students in Ojo Local Government Area of Lagos State, Nigeria.

Table 1: Result of Chi-square [ $X^2$ ] analysis on family characteristics and pre-marital sex.

	Total	Percentage	[ $x^2$ ] cal	[ $x^2$ ] table value	Df	LS	Remarks
<b>SA</b>	193	38.6					
<b>A</b>	190	38		7.82	3	0.05	*S
<b>D</b>	73	14.6	144.91				
<b>SD</b>	44	8.8					
<b>Total</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>100</b>					

$X^2$  cal = 144.91,  $x^2$  table = 7.82, df= 3, at 0.05. \*S = Significant

Table 1 shows that the calculated chi-square [ $x^2$ ] of 144.91 was greater than the chi-square [ $x^2$ ] table value of 7.82, with df = 3 at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the hypothesis which states that family characteristics will not significantly influence pre-marital sex among secondary school students in Ojo Local Government Area is hereby rejected, indicating that family characteristics were perceived as influencing pre-marital sex among secondary school students in Ojo Local Government Area.

**Hypothesis 2:** Cultural norms will not significantly influence pre-marital sex among secondary school students in Ojo Local Government Area of Lagos State, Nigeria.

Table 2: Result of Chi- square analysis on Cultural norms and pre-marital sex

	No of responses	Percentage	$X^2$ calculated	$X^2$ table value	Df	LS	Remarks
<b>SA</b>	158	31.6					
<b>A</b>	186	37.2					
<b>D</b>	72	14.4	74.4	7.82	3	0.05	*S
<b>SD</b>	84	16.8					
<b>Total</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>100</b>					

$X^2$  cal = 74.4,  $X^2$  table = 7.82, Df= 3, at 0.05. \*S = Significant

Table II shows that the calculated chi-square [ $X^2$ ] of 74.4 was greater than the chi-square [ $X^2$ ] table value of 7.82, with  $df = 3$  at 0.05 level of significant. Therefore, the hypothesis which states that cultural norms will not significantly influence pre-marital sex among secondary school students in Ojo Local Government Area was rejected. This implies that cultural norms were perceived as influencing pre-marital sex among secondary school students in Ojo Local Government Area.

## Discussion

This study has revealed the influence of some factors (family characteristics and cultural norms) on pre-marital sex among secondary school students in Ojo Local Government Area of Lagos State, Nigeria as hypothesis one which states that family characteristics will not significantly influence pre-marital sex among secondary school students in Ojo Local Government Area was rejected, indicating that family characteristics were perceived as influencing pre-marital sex among secondary school students in Ojo Local Government Area. This finding supports Moore and Chase-Lansdale's (1999) which stated that family communication patterns (concept orientation versus social orientation) seem to influence the way adolescents make inferences and draw connections about sexual media. Centre for Marriage and Families (2005) reported that teenagers from non-intact families are more likely to be sexually active. It was found that teenagers from divorced single-mother homes are significantly more likely than teens in never-married single-mother homes to become pregnant. Moore and Chase-Lansdale (1999) found that parent involvement in adolescent television viewing could moderate the relationship between viewing and initiating intercourse. Adolescents who do not discuss television with their parents have higher rates of intercourse than those who do discuss television content with their parents. Go (1993) reported that adolescents who perceived their parents to frown upon such practices are more likely to restrain from engaging in such behaviours. Moore and Chase-Lansdale (1999) found that parents who held strong traditional views about premarital sex and communicated these to their daughters were the only group able to influence their children's sexual behaviour.

Hypothesis two which states that cultural norms will not significantly influence pre-marital sex among secondary school students in Ojo Local Government Area was also rejected; this implies that cultural norms were perceived as influence of pre-marital sex among secondary school students in Ojo Local Government Area. This finding supports the study of Barone, Ickovic, Ayers, Katz and Voyce (1996) which reported that race/ethnicity and culture have been identified as powerful influences on adolescents' sexual experience. The finding indicates considerable

differences in the acceptability of early sexual experience and motherhood between African-American and white youth. Bledsoe and Cohen (1993) attributed the increase in premarital sexual activity to schooling and employment opportunities available to young men, which give them greater independence from their families and sexual access to young women. It was found among the Kikuyu in Kenya that newly circumcised young men and women were taught how to practice *Ngwiko* (a non-penetrative stimulation of the sexual organs before marriage), which permitted sexual release but reduced the risk of pregnancy. Siedlecky (1996) found that cultural norms and expectations were identified as playing a significant role amongst Lebanese-born women in Sydney, Australia where more than half the study participants were married before the age of 20, with many becoming mothers in their teens.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The purpose of the study was to find out the influence of some family characteristics and cultural norms on pre-marital sex among secondary school students in Ojo Local Government of Lagos State, Nigeria. Findings of the study revealed the influence of these factors (family characteristics and cultural norms) on pre-marital sex among teenagers/adolescents in secondary schools in Ojo Local Government Area of Lagos State, Nigeria.

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that parents should model good sexual behaviours to their children by discussing sexuality education with them. Gone were the days when parents thought that discussing sex-related issues with their children was a taboo. Parents should also discuss the implications of pre-marital sex such as sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and the psycho-social effects of pre-marital sex with their children and advise them to develop interest in issues that promote decent sexual behaviours. Furthermore, parents should avoid imposing on their children any cultural practices that could initiate them into pre-marital sexual acts. On their own part, students should avoid any social/ cultural tendencies or practices that can encourage pre-marital sex.

The scope of the study covered only one Local Government Area of Lagos State, Nigeria. It is imperative to have a larger sample and coverage area before ample generalization can be made.

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