

# **FAMILY TYPE AND ATTITUDE TO SEXUAL PROMISCUITY OF ADOLESCENT STUDENTS IN EKITI STATE, NIGERIA**

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## **Abstract**

The study investigated the influence of family type on adolescents' attitude to sexual promiscuity in Ekiti State, Nigeria. Two family types, polygamous and monogamous families were compared. The study further compared the attitude to sexual promiscuity of male and female adolescents. Four hundred adolescents drawn from secondary schools in Ikere Local Government Area of the State responded to a structured questionnaire to give information on their family type, gender and attitude to sexual promiscuity. A significant difference was found between the attitude to sexual promiscuity of adolescents from the two family types, adolescents from polygamous homes showing more favourable attitude than those from monogamous families ( $t=6.61, p<0.05$ ). There was however, no significant difference in attitude to sexual promiscuity of male and female adolescents.

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**Keywords:** Family type, sexual promiscuity

## **Introduction**

Adolescents can be said to be promiscuous when they have two or more sex partners at the same time, and have sexual intercourse with all of them. Rakesh (1992) has explained that what behaviour that is promiscuous", varies much among different cultures. In some cultural contexts, a woman who copulates with a man or men other than her husband is considered promiscuous, while in another culture a married or unmarried man's extra and pre-marital sexual behaviour may not be considered promiscuous.

Wessi (1996) further said that the words 'womanizer', 'wencher', 'playboy', 'wolf', 'Philanderer', 'stud', 'skirt chaser', 'tomcat' and others refer to a man who (depending on the individual's sexual orientation) has love affairs with women or men he either cannot or will not marry or commit himself to the love affairs. The acts are sexually motivated with slight

emotional connection and attachment. They become eponyms for promiscuous men.

Among the possible causes of promiscuity such as television viewing, pressure from peers, internet, news media that feature sexual films, and modern music, one that stands out prominently is parenting. Parenting is an important component of the family system and it could involve different types. Family type comprises family size, either small or large family, family structure, monogamous or polygamous and either intact or broken.

Social disorganization model revealed the weakening of traditional structures and the slackening of the control by the elders over the younger members of the family. Thus, newly born attitudes are geared more towards personal satisfaction and emotional gratification than towards family responsibility. Indeed, the authority of the African family as the basic social institution has been greatly reduced. In fact, in modern African societies, relationship between parents and the children is different from what they used to be in traditional societies. As the society gets more and more technologically advanced, the individual's education passes more through schooling, television, radio, the press and new ideas which create new attitudes than the family.

Moreover, education of young adolescents, in particular, passes through the school network and no longer prepares them for anything but the roles of actors within the family. In fact, those actors are operating in a new environment in which an individual's success is no longer related to his/her lineage but results in their capacity to assimilate scientific knowledge and innovation (Chui, 1998)

Owing to a constant breakdown of the family unit, there is a decrease in parent/adolescent communication and time sharing which results in lack of sex education within the home. Intra family communication can be associated with adequate knowledge of sexual issues. The family as an institution provides role models for the children. The role of the family in the provision of sex education to the adolescents could not be shelved or set aside as unimportant. However, some families fail in this regard. Cherlin and Nancy (1986) were of the view that sexual activity of single adolescent girls today can be accounted for by rational adaptation and social disorganization of the family.

Lykken (1997) revealed that a family can be monogamous and at the same time broken while a polygamous family may also be intact or broken. A family is said to be intact when both the parents live together to take care, manage and control the home. The adolescent in an intact home is not likely to be promiscuous unlike in a broken home where only one parent cares for the children. Attitudes to promiscuity are likely to differ due to parenting type.

In a broken home, the two parents do not cooperate, only one of the parents takes care of the children. Adolescents in broken homes may be free, attending one party or the other. They are more likely to be exposed to joining bad gangs, to be addicted to drugs and other vices due to lack of proper upbringing. They are likely to receive inadequate affection and love, there may be no proper coordination or direction in the affairs of such family. Adolescents in broken homes are therefore likely to be promiscuous and are likely to have a less serious disposition against promiscuity.

Chao (1994) stated that love as distributed by polygamous homes could be regarded as promiscuous. However, the Nigerian culture which permits polygamy may be regarded as endorsement of promiscuity.

Many parents have difficulty discussing sex with their adolescents and the more difficult it is when parents suspect adolescents of being sexually promiscuous. It seems that society is not much concerned about sexual promiscuity among adolescents. Society seems to be permissive about the sexual activities of adolescents including promiscuous behaviour. Society seems not to be bothered even about the promiscuous life of adolescents. Permissive attitude seems to pervade the society including the adolescent population. High rate of polygamy in the Nigerian society, separation and divorce may provide a fertile ground for promiscuity and permissive attitude to promiscuity.

Promiscuity is a major problem to the individual, his or her partner and to the society. Promiscuity is a clear sign of infidelity; it does not involve expression of love for which sex is designed. It puts the promiscuous adolescent and his partners at serious risk of sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS.

Nigerian society seems to set a double standard of behaviour between the male and female children when sex is concerned. Parents seem to be more permissive to male sexual behavior than to the female. While female children are required to preserve their virginity till marriage and to see sex as dirty and sinful, the males seem to be allowed to be free. The African family seems to believe that men including adolescents are by nature polygamous. This translates to society's attitude to male adolescents' sexual relationship with multiple partners. On the other hand, a female's sexual relationship with more than one person could be equated with prostitution.

It is however not known what fraction of adolescents in the population that is involved in promiscuity. It is equally not empirically known what the attitude of adolescents is towards promiscuity and how such attitude is influenced by the type of family they come from.

The purpose of the study was to determine the extent to which family type influences the adolescents' attitude to sexual promiscuity and the influence of gender on adolescents' attitude to sexual promiscuity.

The following questions are therefore raised:

- What is the attitude of adolescents in Ekiti State secondary schools towards promiscuity?
- Is there any difference in the attitude to sexual promiscuity of adolescents from polygamous homes and that of those from monogamous homes?
- Is there any difference in attitude to sexual promiscuity between male and female adolescents?

**Research Method**

**Subjects**

Four hundred adolescent students drawn from four secondary schools by means of stratified random sampling technique (60 girls and 40 boys from each school) participated in the study.

**Research Instrument**

The instrument used for this research was a structured questionnaire developed by the researchers. The instrument had three sections A,B and C. Section A has seven items which deal with biodata information including family type and size of the family. Data collected on Section B are not relevant to this paper. Section C has 25 items which deal with the respondents’ attitude to promiscuity. Sections B and C have a Likert-type response format of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. The responses are scored as strongly agree 4, agree 3, disagree 2 and strongly disagree 1.

The total maximum score obtainable in section C is 100 while the total minimum score is 25. The instrument was judged as having content validity and capable of measuring attitude to promiscuity. It was also found to be reliable, having a significant test-retest reliability coefficient of 0.85.

**Procedure**

The instrument was personally administered on the subjects by the researchers with the help of the school counsellors

**Results and Discussion**

A high score of between 61 and 100 on the attitude to promiscuity section of the questionnaire was classified as positive attitude to sexual promiscuity while a score of between 25 and 60 indicates negative attitude to promiscuity. Table I presents data on adolescents’ attitude to sexual promiscuity.

**Table 1:** Adolescents’ Attitude to Sexual Promiscuity

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid	Cumulative
Negative	231	57.8	57.8	57.8
Positive	169	42.2	42.2	100
Total	400	100		

The table reveals that 231 (57.8%) of the subjects had negative attitude to promiscuity while 169 out of 400 or 42.2% of the subjects had positive attitude to sexual promiscuity. The results therefore indicate that more adolescent had negative attitude than positive attitude to sexual promiscuity.

**Table 2:** Family Type and Adolescent Attitude to Sexual Promiscuity

	Frequency	Mean	S.D	df	t-cal	t-table
Monogamous	215	59.94	18.24	398	6.61	1.96
Polygamous	185	72.91	20.97			
Total	400					

$P < 0.05$

Table 2 presents data on difference in attitude to sexual promiscuity of adolescents from monogamous families and those from polygamous families. It reveals that adolescents from polygamous families have higher mean score (72.9) than those from monogamous homes (59.9) on attitude to sexual promiscuity. The t-calculated is higher than t-table.

Therefore the difference in attitude to sexual promiscuity of adolescents from monogamous families and those from polygamous families is significant. This implies that adolescents from polygamous homes have more favourable attitude to sexual promiscuity than adolescents from monogamous homes.

To determine if there is a significant difference in attitude to sexual promiscuity of male and female adolescents, the mean scores of male and female subjects on attitude to sexual promiscuity were compared using t-test. Table 3 presents the mean scores and t-value of adolescents on attitude to sexual promiscuity of male and female adolescents. The mean score of male subjects on attitude to sexual promiscuity is 63.93 while the mean score of the female adolescents is 67.4.

**Table 3:** Attitude of Male and Female Adolescents to Sexual Promiscuity.

Group	N	Mean	SD	Df	t- cal	t-table
Male	168	63.93	18.44	398	1.670	1.960
Female	232	67.40	21.91			

$P > 0.05$

The table further shows that the calculated t (t-cal, 1.67) is less than t-table (1.960) at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, there is no significant difference in attitude to sexual promiscuity of male and female adolescents in Ikere Local Government Area of Ekiti State.

That more adolescents had negative attitude than positive attitude to sexual promiscuity could be due to increasing adherence to Christianity which condemns promiscuity and premarital and extra-marital sexual behavior. It is however, contrary to the expectation that modern society that

is becoming more permissive about sexual behavior of adolescents would influence them to have positive attitude towards promiscuity.

The results show that there is a significant difference in attitude to sexual promiscuity of adolescents from monogamous families and polygamous families. This implies that adolescents from polygamous homes have more favourable attitude towards sexual promiscuity than those from monogamous families. This is expected as polygamy in practical sense is promiscuous. This portends serious danger to reproductive health of Nigerian families which are polygamous.

In most families where only female parents take care of children, adolescents in such homes may lack discipline. In most cases where only male parents take care of children, adolescents will lack care of the mother. The assistance they need from their mother most especially at the puberty stage will be lacking. Therefore, adolescents from the single parent family may be more liberal than adolescents from a family with two parents.

The results further show that there is no significant difference in attitude to sexual promiscuity of male and female adolescents. This is contrary to expectation because people believe that male children tend to be more promiscuous than female children. Owuamanam (1982) in a related study agreed that larger percentage of boys were sexually more active than girls and many boys tended to have multiple partners and even dated prostitutes more than females. Traditionally, girls are required to be reserved in sexual matters. They are required to hide their sexual feelings and are not expected to view having multiple partners as normal behaviour. That there is no significant difference in male and female adolescents' attitude to sexual promiscuity in this study could be as a result of changing societal values and attitude to several issues including sexual matters. Modern society values gender equality in every sphere of life. Also both sexes are subject to increased exposure to western education. Females are as free as males to express their views. Preventive measures against diseases are available to both boys and girls. The belief is that they have equal challenges.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

There is no significant difference in attitude to sexual promiscuity of male and female adolescents. There is growing negative attitude to sexual promiscuity among adolescents. More adolescents have negative attitude to sexual promiscuity than those who have positive attitude. Adolescent from polygamous homes have more favourable attitude to sexual promiscuity than those from monogamous families. Male and females adolescents have similar attitude to sexual promiscuity.

The Nigerian polygamous marriage system is an indirect endorsement of sexual promiscuity and should be discouraged. Religious

instruction should be intensified to assist adolescents to develop negative attitude to sexual promiscuity.

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