

## Religion of parents and communication on adolescents' sexuality in Southwest Nigeria

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### Abstract

Risky sexual behaviour among adolescents has increased considerably. The situation has resulted in the early sexual debut of the young ones, engagement with multiple partners and adolescent pregnancy among adolescents in Nigeria and the Sub-Saharan in general. This is not unconnected with inadequate and unidirectional, weak and autocratic communication channels about sexuality within the family. Adolescents may seek information about sexuality from distorted, incomplete and unreliable information sources, such as the social media, peers, novels, music and magazines. This behaviour has resulted in gaps in communication, and which have had long-term consequences on their health and wellbeing. This study examined the influence of parent's religion on sexual conversation by parents with their adolescents. A descriptive research design was adopted. Sample size was seven hundred and twenty-one (721) parents of adolescents selected through a multistage sampling technique from three (3) Southwest States in Nigeria. Data were collected using questionnaire. Analyses of data were done using descriptive and inferential statistics. Findings revealed that (16.7%) of parents had poor level of communication on sexuality with their adolescents, (23.1%) parents had an average level of communication on sexuality, while, a good number (60.2%) of parents had good level of communication on sexuality with their adolescents. In addition, the religion of parents significantly influenced discussions on adolescents' sexuality. There is need for parents to give sexual health information to adolescents and communicate with their adolescents on sex-related issues. They need to overcome inhibitions in discussing sex-related matters with their children from childhood.

**Keywords:** Adolescents, Communication on sex-related issues, Parents, Religion, Sex-related matters

### 1. Introduction

Indisputably, adolescents constitute a significant portion of the developing world population, yet many of their sexual and reproductive health (SRH) needs remain unmet (WHO, 2020). Moreover, in Nigeria, not less than 35 million young persons aged 10–19 years and 3% of 15-19 years old are HIV positive and pregnant adolescents are on the increase and at risk of morbidity and mortality owing to complications during pregnancy and childbirth (WHO, 2020). Casual observations have revealed rise in risky sexual behaviour among

adolescents in South West region of Nigeria. Many adolescents have had early sexual intercourse at young ages and not a few have several sexual partners. Many adolescents in the region had their sexual debut between 10 and 16 years old. (Federal Ministry of Health, 2015).

There is overwhelming evidence that family is the chief agent of socialization in the life of adolescents (Santrock, 2005). Therefore, parents' interventions in the lives of their children are vital to their general well being and development. The prevention of adolescents' risky sexual behaviour and their sexual socialization which include their sexual expressions or activities start from the home. Parents, being the first point of children social contact are the first source of sex role learning for their children. The learning process could form a template for future sexual behaviour of adolescents (Mwangangi, 2019). Hence, communication about adolescents' sexuality between parents or caregivers and offspring has been acknowledged by researchers and stakeholders as a mechanism of protection for adolescents' involvement in several sexual activities. However, for developing countries including Nigeria, parent-adolescent sexual conversations seem not to serve this good purpose because such conversations rather tend to be uni-directional, repressive and weak. Children lack freedom of expression in these conversations (Haruna, Hu, Chu, Mellecker, Gabriel & Ndekao, 2018)

Religion appears to be an important socialization factor of children and adolescents. Some parents find sexual discussion with adolescent uncomfortable. Among parents that discuss, a considerable number rather use ethics of their religion to navigate discussion about sexual activities and contraception. The underpinning is that parents who are religious devotees often feel compelled to teach and guard their children against sexual socialization from sex-flooded society and mass media. Observation shows religion is associated with sexual communication between parents and their children on adolescents' sexuality in many ways (Koleic, Landripet, Tafro, Jurkovid, Milas & Stihofner, 2021). It can impart on attitudes and beliefs toward sexual conversation, pornography, premarital sexual activities, contraception, to mention a few. Often, the content, frequency and style of parent-child communication on adolescent sexuality are connected to parents' beliefs and attitudes about sexuality information and the appropriateness of such information for adolescents (Krull, Pearce & Jennings, 2021). Nonetheless, the connectedness of religion and patterns of parent-child communication on sexual issues are largely not documented (Regnerus, 2005).

In view of the sexuality challenge and needs of adolescents, some studies like Quinn and Lewin (Quinn & Lewin, 2019) have focused on the dire need of parents to have interactive communication on sexuality with their children from childhood. It has been observed that while some studies, such as (Mwangangi, 2019) have indicated positive influence of parents' religion on parenting of adolescents on sexuality, they are scanty and inconclusive. Therefore, there is the need to determine the precise mechanism by which parents' religion may influence positive communication on sexual behaviour of adolescents with the result of protecting them against risk-taking sexual behaviour.

Thus, this study investigated the influence of parents' religion on communication between parents and their adolescent children on sexuality in Southwest Nigeria. The following question and hypothesis were raised and formulated to guide the study:

1. What are the levels of parent-adolescents communication on sexuality in Southwest Nigeria?
2. There is no significant association between parents' religion and communication on adolescents' sexuality in South West region of Nigeria.

### **3. Methodology**

The study adopted a descriptive research design. A sample of 721 fathers and mothers in South West region of Nigeria was selected through multi-stage sampling techniques. The inclusion criterion was that the father or mother must have at least an adolescent child or ward. Ekiti, Ondo and Osun State were purposively used in the

South West region of Nigeria because they have the highest percentage of adolescents who were involved in risky sexual activities. (National Population Commission and ICF International, 2014). The study also purposive selected Akure, Osogbo and Ado Ekiti the state capitals of Ondo, Osun and Ekiti State respectively to ensure that the representative sample reflect people of various walks of life, values and beliefs according to the variables of interest of the study. Data collection was done using a self-constructed questionnaire titled “Parents’ Religion and Communication on Adolescents’ Sexuality (PRCAS)”. A validation of the instrument was done using face, content and construct validity. Test re-test reliability method was applied and reliability coefficient of 0.87 was obtained. Administered questionnaire was immediately retrieved after completion from each respondent. Analyses of data were done using frequency count, percentage and Chi square statistical analysis, while the hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance.

#### 4. Results and discussion

##### Descriptive Analysis

What are the levels of parent-adolescent communication on sexuality in Southwest Nigeria?

**Table 1:** Level of parent-adolescents communication on sexuality

Levels of Communication on sexuality	Frequency	Percentage%
Poor	120	16.7
Average	166	23.1
Good	433	60.2
Total	719	100

Table 1 shows that 120 (16.7%) of parents had poor level of communication on sexuality with their adolescents, while 166 (23.1%) parents had average level of communication on sexuality. It also shows that a good number 433 (60.2%) of parents had a good level of communication on sexuality with their adolescents. This implies that majority of the parents had good level of communication on sexuality with their adolescents and a few parents had poor or average communication level on sexual matters with their adolescent children.

**Hypothesis:** There is no significant association between parents’ religion and communication on adolescents’ sexuality in Southwest Nigeria.

**Table 2:** Chi-square Computation of Religion of Parents and Conversation on Adolescents’ Sexuality

Parents Religion	Communication on Adolescents’ Sexuality			$\chi^2$	p- value	Df
	Poor	Good	Total			
Christianity	180(31.2)	397(68.8)	577	6.850*	0.033	718
Islam	30(23.0)	100(77.0)	130			
Traditional	8(66.7)	4(33.3)	12			

P<0.05

Table 2 shows that religion of parents has a significant influence on communication on adolescents’ sexuality ( $\chi^2= 6.850$ ,  $p = 0.033 < 0.05$ ). Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected. The degree of influence is high and positive. This implies that conversations on adolescents’ sexuality is determined by parents’ religion.

## 5. Discussion

The descriptive analysis showed that 120 (16.7%) of the parents had poor level of communication on sexuality with their adolescent, while 166 (23.1%) of the parents had average level of communication on sexuality. It also showed that a good number 433 (60.2%) of parents had good level of communication on sexuality with their adolescents. This implies that majority of the parents had good level of communication on sexuality with their adolescents and a few had poor or average communication with their adolescents on sexuality. This contradicts the finding of Federal Ministry Health. (2015) that revealed that adolescents have little knowledge about sexuality from the family because it is still a taboo subject rarely discussed between parents and children. It is also seen as a way of corrupting the children. Similarly, Obono (2010) earlier reported that the practices of sexual communication among parents and their adolescents tended to be negative. Consequently, adults do not discuss sexual topics with children. The probable explanation for this result could be because parents have come to take cognisance of the devastating effect of adolescents' risky sexual activities and the negative impact of extra family factors, such as peer pressure, internet and social media have on them. Therefore, parents have been challenged to increase discussions on sexual and reproductive health issues with their adolescents.

The hypothesis result revealed that religion of parents had significant influence on communication on adolescents' sexuality. Meaning that religion influence parent-child conversations on adolescent sexuality. The possible explanation is as noted earlier, that religion can impart on attitudes and beliefs toward sexual conversation. As a result, it could mould and pattern such conversations. This compares favourably with the work of Bastien, Kajula and Muhwezi (Bastien, Kajula & Muhwezi, 2011). They found that religious affiliation was a significant variable in matters concerning sexual discussion. But, it disagrees with the work of Mbugua (2010), who reported that religion of parents seem to be less significant in parents-adolescents' conversations.

## 6. Conclusion/Recommendations

The study has demonstrated that many parents' level of communication on adolescents' sexuality with their adolescents is good. Also, parents' religion influence communication on adolescents' sexuality. Interventions particularly at community level should target encouraging parents to uphold the belief that sexual health information should be discussed the more with adolescents. Moreover, stakeholders in adolescent and youth matters should gear efforts toward re-orientating parents to be less inhibitive and have higher comfort level in sex-related discussions with their children from childhood in spite of their religious inclinations.

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