



# **The Extent of Premarital Sex Practices among Secondary Schools Adolescents in Local Government Area of Ebonyi State, South Eastern Nigeria**

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## **Authors' contributions**

*This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. Authors COA, ENOO, LNOA, ANE, JNN, PII, IMO and FSN conceived and commissioned the study. Authors COA and FSN performed the literature search and screened for the selected studies, extracted the data and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Authors ENOO, COA, ANE, PII, FSN and JNN, IMO and LNOA, supervised all aspects of the study. All the authors have read and agreed to the final manuscript.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

**Aims:** This study aimed at determining the extent of premarital sex practices among secondary school adolescents in Ikwo Local Government Area of Ebonyi State. Its objectives were to reveal

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the extent at which secondary school students engage in premarital sex in the area and how such practices can propel risky behaviors among them.

**Study Design:** The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study.

**Methodology:** Multi-stage sampling procedure was used to select 844 secondary school adolescents for the study. Information was retrieved from the field through questionnaire administration. Means and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while the chi-square statistical tool was used in testing the null hypotheses in the study.

**Results:** The result showed that the premarital sex in the study was at low extent with the grand mean score  $\bar{x}=2.26$ . However, the result indicated that 16% of the students engage in penetrative virginal sex, anal sex, oral sex and masturbation whereas 84% of the students do not.

**Recommendation:** The study recommended among others that: All the head teachers and principals should play an active role by coming up with awareness program through seminar, rallies with strong guidance on dangers associated with premarital sex. Also, parents should always discuss sex education with their children to be adequately informed with the right information about sex and the behaviour to adopt as they grow to puberty period to avoid engaging in premarital sexual practice at this early stage.

*Keywords: Premarital Sex; consequences; extent of practices; adolescents; Ebonyi State.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a crucial stage in life that is characterized by curiosity and adventures. This stage serves as a threshold for biological, physical, psychological and social developments which are accompanied by either positive or negative behaviours depending on the environment that the child is raised [1]. Negative behaviours associated with adolescent's development include among others premarital sex. Pre-marital sex is sexual activity practiced by persons who are unmarried and it has been considered taboo in several African cultures and sin in numerous religions. In another word, premarital sex is the penetrative vaginal intercourse performed between persons of the opposite sex before formal marriage [2,3]. Tauli posited that premarital sex is having sexual relations before marriage [4]. WHO observed that the intensity of involvement of premarital sexual activities ranges from nonsexual relationship to early sexual debut, unprotected sexual intercourse, and multiple sexual partners and prostitution [5]. Sexual activities among adolescents have been reported to be increasing worldwide. Several studies in Sub-Saharan Africa have also documented high and increasing premarital sexual activities among adolescents [6]. Younger people often face with strong social, peer and cultural pressure to engage in premarital sex [6]. As a result of this, significant numbers of adolescents are involved in premarital sexual activities at an early age [7]. University students as young adult populations are reportedly at higher risk for HIV infection than the general population. Al-Naggar & Al-Jashamy

[8] explore the perceptions of undergraduate university students towards sexual transmitted diseases (STDs).

Today the difference between love and sex seems to disappear with most young lovers ending up exploring each other's physique and ultimately unprotected sexual intercourse results [9]. The rise in premarital sex in Africa especially in Nigerian, Ebonyi State inclusive, has resulted in a sexual revolution that came within western culture [10]. Premarital sexual exposure is an issue of health concern in many parts of South-Eastern Nigeria, especially in Ikwo in Ebonyi State where the present study is conducted. Sex, in the past was regarded as sacred and limited to adult males and females within marriage [11]. In Nigeria especially in Ebonyi, the topic sex is still considered a taboo between parents and children. Hence discussing sex is regarded as cultural taboos which hinder young people in many developing countries including Nigeria to discuss sexual matters explicitly with their parents [12]. However, most information on sex for adolescents comes from peers of the same sex who may themselves lack adequate information or are incorrectly informed. Most secondary school adolescents learned the important topic of sex education in negative manners, rather than having proper sex education at home and or in schools [13]. The negative manners are from their peer pressures especially from their classmate, schoolmate and other peers who lured them into sexual talks, unlicensed erotic video films, pornography, Sexual Solicitation and sexting unguided. This predisposes them to sexual promiscuity and the

desire for economic gain. As a result of this, significant numbers of the students are involved in premarital sexual activities at an early age [14,7]. Another source which adolescents are negatively informed about sex is from social media. Social media offer a unique environment for secondary school adolescents to engage in a courtship style that is driven by pre-marital sexual intercourse [15].

Several studies have been carried out on what influences students dating pattern in the schools [16,17]. These studies indicate that young men and women are more frequently engaging in casual sex or what is known as 'hooking up' through some of these phenomenal media including internet websites such as Facebook, Myspace, Twitter, Flicker, WhatsApp, 2go and other social networking or social media and sharing sites, as well as blogs videos games, mobile telephones and Global Positioning System (GPS) devices [18]. These devices currently serve as easy, quick and reliable sources of information for dating and other sexual activities which sometimes misinform them. It helps the students to interact and decide on where and when to meet for sexual purposes. Taffa et al. [7] observed that young people have limited knowledge about sexual and reproductive health and know little about the natural process of puberty. This lack of knowledge about reproductive health makes secondary school adolescents to engage in premarital sexual activities which may have grave consequences.

The consequences of premarital sex for both male and female adolescents were found to have deleterious effects on them. The boys are exposed to early fatherhood with the burden of providing for the mother and the unplanned child. Female adolescents can experience unprotected sex, unplanned and unwanted pregnancy, unsafe abortion that can lead to infertility or even death in extreme cases. Other consequences include morbidity from complications of Vesicovaginal fistula (VVF), sexually transmitted infections (STIs), Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) infections, dangers of dropping out of school, early and unplanned marriage which can lead to lifelong unhappiness [19]. The fetus is prone to be delivered preterm, small for date and risk of prenatal death among others [19-21]. Nearly 70% of premature deaths among adults can be linked to behaviors that were initiated during the adolescence period [22].

In the current study, adolescents are secondary school students between the ages of 10 to 19

years [23-26]. This period of adolescence is categorized by WHO and UNICEF [26] into three stages namely early adolescence, mid-adolescence and late adolescence. Early adolescence is a child between the ages 10 to 13 years which is characterized by growth with sexual maturation. Mid adolescence is a person between the ages 14 to 15 years which is characterized by the development of stronger sense of identity. Also late adolescence is the persons between ages 16 to 19 years and is characterized by the development of adult form [27]. This WHO and UNICEF categorization of adolescent's age range of 10 to 19 years was used to elicit information for the present study. Swaid [28] asserted that adolescents within these age bracket are almost always a social experience and learned behaviour. Swaid, maintained that this behavior has been found to lead to the trying out of new experiences such as sex [28]. Carmona and Stewart [29] posited that adolescents at this stage reject conventionality and traditional authority figure in an effort to establish their own independence. This rejection predisposes a good number of adolescents into engaging in risky behaviours such as sexual activities with dire consequences to the adolescent's health.

Several adolescents in South East Nigeria especially secondary school adolescents in Ikwo LGA., Ebonyi State are naïve to the consequences of premarital sex because of misconceptions about sexuality. Hence they initiate early sexual debut and continued to seek abortion with unqualified physicians where unsafe methods are used [30]. To make matter worst, there is no sex education subject in their secondary school curriculum where the causes and consequences of premarital sex could be taught [31]. Hence significant numbers of adolescents may be involved in premarital sexual activities at an early age which predisposes them to the risk of unintended pregnancy, abortion and STIs.

Though the extent of premarital sex is not well established in Nigeria, there is considerable evidence from the literature, papers and magazines that premarital sex may exist among secondary school students in both the rural and urban areas of Nigeria [32-37]. It is from the above observations that the present study set to determine the extent of premarital sex among secondary school adolescents in Ikwo Local Government Area of Ebonyi State. Although previous studies have been conducted on premarital sex yet, most of the studies were

conducted in other locations [9,11,13,15]. Not necessarily in secondary schools in Ebonyi State, Nigeria where the present study is conducted. The present study, therefore, examines the extent of sexual activities among secondary schools' adolescents in Ikwo Local Government Area of Ebonyi State.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

A descriptive survey research design was carried between January-March 2020 to determine the extent of premarital sexual practices among secondary school adolescents in Ikwo Local Government Area, Ebonyi State. Ikwo LGA., is the largest Local Government Area among the thirteen (13) Federal Local Government Areas in Ebonyi State. Ikwo Noyo people can be found in the south-eastern part of Nigeria in the west African sub-region. It is bounded to the east and south by the Cross River, west by the Ezza south Local government area and north by the Abakaliki Local Government Area Ebonyi State. However, the tertiary institutions located in the area such as Ikwo College of education and Federal university Ndufu-Alike Ikwo has made the community filled with young people. Consequently, being an area clustered with tertiary institution, common experience has shown that social vices such as pornography, sexual harassment and diverse forms of risky sexual activities may be frequently observed among secondary school adolescent in the area. Hence adolescents are very adventurous and have the zeal to experiment at all times which among others have necessitated this study in this location.

Study population consists of twenty-two state-owned government secondary schools in Ikwo Local Government Area with 16876 students for the 2019/2020 academic session, 7565 were male and 9311 were female [38].

The inclusion criteria were based on public secondary school adolescents, unmarried students and who were available at the time of the study and consented were included, while exclusion criteria were private secondary schools in the area, none regular and those in public secondary schools who were absent, seriously ill at the time of data collection, and those who were present but not willing to participate were all excluded in the study.

A sample of 844 adolescents was used for the study. This constitutes five per cent of the entire

population of the Government-owned secondary schools in Ikwo LGA., Ebonyi State. This sample was adjudged representative of the population based on the suggestions by other studies which stipulated that if the population runs into thousands, like the present study, two to five (2-5%) of the population should be deemed appropriate for the study. The sample was selected through the use of multi-stage sampling procedure. The first stage involved the use of purposive sampling technique to select eleven (11) secondary schools out of 22 secondary schools. The second stage involved the use of simple random sampling technique of balloting without replacement to draw (77) students from each of the senior secondary school classes. The rationale (restriction of sample selection to senior secondary school is justified by the fact that premarital sex were more prevalent among this category of students. Finally, simple random sampling technique of balloting without replacement was used to select (26) students in each of the streams of the sampled classes in all the eleven (11) selected secondary schools constituting a total of 77 students in each school. At the end of the sampling procedures, eight hundred and forty-four (844) secondary senior secondary school adolescents were drawn and used for the study.

A letter of introduction duly signed was collected from the Head of Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki seeking permission to conduct a research on Extent of pre-marital sex practices among secondary school adolescents in Ikwo Local Government Area Ebonyi State. This was presented to the principals of the Eleven (11) selected secondary schools in Ikwo Local Government Area Ebonyi State. The letter gave the researcher an access to the students to administer a total of 844 copies of questionnaire personally to the respondents for completion in their respective schools. The procedure for the completion of the questionnaire was explained to the respondents by the researcher.

The completed copies of the (EPSAQ) were collected and cross checked for completeness of information and responses. All statistical analysis was done using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) batch system version 20. The data was analyzed on an item-by-item basis to indicate the mean responses of various categories of respondents such as age and gender, for the purpose of description and for answering the research questions. The results were illustrated using tables. The postulated null

hypotheses of no statistical significant different on the Extent of pre- marital sex practices among secondary school students were tested at .05 level of significance at the appropriate degree of freedom using the necessary statistical tools, such as chi- square.

### 3. RESULTS

The data in Table 1 shows the extent of premarital sex among secondary school adolescents in Ikwo LGA, Ebonyi State. The result in the table indicated a grand mean value of 2.26 implying that the respondents 'occasionally' have premarital sex. While the standard deviation result shows a grand value of 0.01, implying that there is no variation in the students' responses with respect to involvement in premarital sex.

The result in Table 2 shows the types of premarital sexual activities secondary school adolescents engage in Ikwo LGA, Ebonyi State. The result indicated a grand frequency and percentage values of 125 (16%) for respondents with "Yes" option implying that they do engage in premarital sex (such as Penetrative vaginal sex, Anal sex, Oral sex and Masturbation), while respondents with "No" option have grand frequency and percentage values of 640 (84%) implies that majority of the students' opted for "No" that they do not engage in any of the types of premarital sex as listed in the Table 2.

The data in Table 3 shows the differences in the extent of premarital sex among secondary school adolescents in Ikwo LGA, Ebonyi State by age. The result in the table gave a grand mean value of 2.14 and 2.32 respectively implying that the respondents within the age range of 14 – 16 years and 17 – 19 years "occasionally" have premarital sex in the study area while respondents within the age range of 10 – 13 years, and 20 and above reportedly have a grand mean value of 2.53 and 2.55 respectively implying that the respondents had premarital sex "often" in the area.

The data in Table 4 shows the differences in the extent of premarital sex among secondary school

adolescents in Ikwo LGA, Ebonyi State by gender. The result in the table gave a grand mean value of 2.19 for male respondents implying that the respondents occasionally have premarital sex in the study area. While the standard deviation result gave a grand value of 0.00 implying that there is no variation in the responses of male students' in the study area concerning the involvement in premarital sex. In the same vein, female students have a grand mean value of 2.33 implying that they occasionally involve in premarital sex while their standard deviation result gave a grand value of 0.01 implying that there is no variation in the responses of female students concerning the involvement in premarital sex in the study area.

Table 5 shows that the probability value (i.e. significant value) is 0.459 and it is greater than the level of significance of 0.05. Thus, it means that the earlier stated null hypothesis will be accepted (i.e. to be upheld). Therefore, the extent of pre-marital sex among the students is not dependent on age.

Table 6 above shows that the probability value (i.e. significant value) which is 0.179 and it is greater than the level of significance of 0.05. Thus, it means that the earlier stated null hypothesis will be accepted (i.e. to be upheld). Therefore, extent of pre-marital sex among the students is not dependent on gender.

### 4. DISCUSSION

The findings revealed that the extent of premarital sex practices among secondary school adolescents in Ikwo Local Government Area of Ebonyi State is low. The finding is in line with the study of Taffa, Sundby, Holm-Hansen, and Gunner [7], who reported in his study that the extent of premarital sex among adolescents is low. The findings however contradict the study who observed that premarital sex among secondary and preparatory school adolescents is high [39]. It also disagree with the study by Teferra, Erena, Kebede [22], who reported that several studies in sub-Saharan Africa indicated an upsurge in premarital sex among adolescents.

**Table 1. Extent of premarital sex among secondary school adolescents in Ikwo LGA**

S/N	Item statement	Mean $\bar{x}$	Decision	Standard deviation
1	I enjoy having sex	2.27	Low Extent	1.29
2	I have sex when I feel the urge	2.26	Low Extent	1.29
3	I engage in penetrative sex	2.26	Low Extent	1.31
	Grand Mean and STD	2.26	Low Extent	0.01

Key: very low Extent(rarely) = 0.00-1.49, Low Extent (occasionally) =1.50-2.49, Great Extent(often)=2.50-3.49, Very great Extent(always)= 3.50 and above

**Table 2. Types of premarital sex secondary school adolescents engage in Ikwo LGA**

S/N	Types of premarital sex	Yes	No
4	Penetrative virginal sex	138(18%)	627(82%)
5	Anal sex	116(15%)	651(85%)
6	Oral sex	132(17%)	632(83%)
7	Masturbation	113(15%)	651(85%)
	Grand Frequency/Percentage	125(16%)	640(84%)

**Table 3. Differences in the extent of premarital sex among adolescents by age**

S/N	Item statement	10-13years $\bar{x}$	14-16years $\bar{x}$	17-19years $\bar{x}$	20 and Above $\bar{x}$
8	I enjoy having sex	2.55	2.18	2.31	2.67
9	I have sex when I feel the urge	2.65	2.13	2.32	2.42
10	I engage in penetrative sex	2.39	2.13	2.34	2.58
	Grand Mean and STD	2.53	2.14	2.32	2.55

**Table 4. Differences in the extent of premarital sex among adolescents by gender**

S/N	Item statement	Male		Female	
		$\bar{x}$	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD
11	I enjoy having sex	2.15	1.25	2.36	1.32
12	I have sex when I feel the urge	2.25	1.26	2.27	1.31
13	I engage in penetrative sex	2.18	1.26	2.37	1.33
	Grand Mean and STD	2.19	0.00	2.33	0.01

*Hypothesis 1: Extent of pre-marital sex among the students is not dependent on age*

**Table 5. Summary of the chi-square analysis on extent of premarital sex among secondary school adolescents by age chi- square summary table**

Categories	Pearson chi-square value	Df	Asymp. sig. (2-sided)	Decision
10-13years 14-16years	36.216 <sup>a</sup>	36	0.459	NS
17-19years 20 and Above				

\* = Significant at 0.05 level; Hypothesis 2: Extent of pre-marital sex among the students is not dependent on gender

**Table 6. Summary of the chi-square analysis on the extent of premarital sex among secondary school adolescents by gender chi- square summary table**

Categories	Pearson chi-square value	Df	Asymp. sig. (2-sided)	Decision
Male	30.176 <sup>a</sup>	24	0.179	NS
Female				

\* = Significant at 0.05 level

The study also observed that those that practice premarital sex either engage in penetrative virginal sex, anal sex, oral sex and masturbation, and this is in line with studies who noted that premarital sex such as penetrative vaginal intercourse are performed by secondary school adolescents before formal marriage [2,3]. It is also agrees with the studies who observed that there are numerous sexual behaviours that can make the youth susceptible to practicing premarital sex. Such as masturbation (the manual stimulation of one's own genital for sexual pleasure among others [40-43].

The findings indicated that respondents within the age range of 14 – 16 years and 17 – 19 years “occasionally” have premarital sex while those within the age range of 10 – 13 years, and 20 and above ‘often’ practice premarital sex. The findings are in consonance with study by The study conducted in Nekemte which showed that among those adolescents who had premarital sex, the majority (57.2%) had their first sexual intercourse between the ages of 15 and 17 years [44]. It is also in line with the study by Ahanhanzo, et al. [45] who reported that the secondary school adolescents had sex before

the age of 15 years. The current study is also in consonance with the survey carried out by WHO [46], in African countries which indicated that most young people become sexually active at about the age of 10-13 years. That 56% of them, aged 15 years and above practice regular unprotected premarital sex leading to unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortion, sexually transmitted illnesses including HIV infections and other social consequences such as school dropout and early marriage [46].

The findings also indicated that both male and female engage in premarital sex with the grand mean value for male  $\bar{x} = 2.19$  and female  $\bar{x} = 2.33$  respectively. The findings disagree with the findings of the study by Dawud [47] who indicated that the proportion of sexually active of male respondents was higher with 110 (49.5%) than that of females 19 (23.8). It also contradicts the study carried out in Addis Ababa by Eshetu et al. [48] which show that the proportion of premarital sexual practice was 39.8% for males and 5.6% for females. This agreement and disagreement with reference to the findings in this study, serves as an eye opener to all parents, guardians and adults to seriously checkmate and sharpen their parenting skills. Also to always discuss sex education with their children to be adequately informed with the right information about sex and the behaviour to adopt as they grow to puberty period in order to avoid engaging in premarital sexual practice at the early stage.

The finding of the null hypothesis 1 shows that the extent of premarital sex among the secondary school adolescents does not differ by age as the overall p-value of 0.459 is greater than .05 level of significance. This means that there was no significant difference in the extent of premarital sex among secondary school adolescents by age. The finding is in agreement with the findings of several studies by Westney et al. [49], Morris et al. [50], Billy et al. [51], Udry [52] and Zelnik et al. [53] who observed that early pubertal development (e.g., age at menarche for girls, level of pubertal development for boys) is associated with early initiation of sexual activity.

The finding of the null-hypothesis 2 also indicated that the extent of pre-marital sex among the students is not dependent on gender as the probability value of 0.179 is greater than 0.05 level of significance. This finding is in contrary to the findings of Medora and Surton [54] who observed that the rate of permissiveness differs in males and females.

They however observed that the attitudes and actual indulgence of the males in premarital sex are higher than those of the females [54].

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study indicated that secondary school students in Ikwo LGA, Ebonyi State engage in premarital sex although in a low extent. The study further revealed that those that practice premarital sex either engage in penetrative vaginal sex, anal sex, oral sex and masturbation. The study also disclosed that the students engage in these premarital sex practices due to ignorance of the risk factors and lack of sex education in the school curriculum. The study recommended that: The Ministry of Education (Federal and State) must as a matter of urgency add to their curricular sex education for both the primary and secondary schools, along with lectures, rallies, seminars and film shows for the Nigerian adolescents especially students in Ikwo, Ebonyi state on the adverse effects of premarital sexual practices. Parents should always discuss sex education with their children to be adequately informed with the right information about sex and the behaviour to adopt as they grow to puberty period in order to avoid engaging in premarital sexual practice at this early stage.

## CONSENT

Written informed consent was obtained from the students who participated in this study.

## ETHICAL APPROVAL

An approval letter was sought for and collected from the principals of the Eleven (11) selected secondary schools in Ikwo Local Government Area Ebonyi State. This letter gave an investigator an access to administer the instrument for data collection to the secondary school adolescents in Ikwo LGA., Ebonyi State.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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