

Influence of Socio-Economic Status on Attitudes towards Premarital Sex (PMS) Among Secondary School Students in Western Kenya: Case Study of Bungoma County, Kenya

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Abstract

A neighbourhood lacking descent environment in qualitative terms is paying a hidden cost. The study examined The need to predict and design preventive measures against HIV/AIDS has provided the valuable impetus for sexual behaviour and intervention studies in the last few decades. Previous research on young peoples' premarital sexual (PMS) activity has shown a wide spectrum of factors that facilitate premarital sexual activity. However, Poverty or economic depravity in particular, has been strongly linked to premarital sexual activity among young people especially girls. This study examined the premarital sexual attitudes and behaviour of secondary school students in relation to socio-economic background of their families in the larger Bungoma district, Kenya. Purposive and systematic random sampling methods were used to select the study area and the 284 respondents, respectively for the study. EPI INFO Version 6 computer software was used for data analysis. Results revealed that girls were more sexually experienced than boys of the same age and academic level. Further analysis showed that gender influenced the attitude of the youth towards PMS. Although the general attitude of the youth towards premarital sex (PMS) was favourable (generally favoured delayed initiation of sexual activities), the expressed attitude was however inconsistent with the behaviour as a large proportion (52%) of the youth had had experience with PMS. These incongruities in expressed attitudes and behaviour were more obvious when attitudes towards PMS were regressed against family socio-economic background.

Keywords: attitudes, Kenya, premarital sex, socio-economic background, students.

INTRODUCTION

The need to predict and design preventive measures against HIV/AIDS has provided the valuable impetus for sexual behaviour and intervention studies in the last few decades. Previous research on young peoples' premarital sexuality activity shows a wide spectrum of factors that facilitate premarital sexual activity. These include the degree of parental influence in terms of monitoring and control or supervision and disciplining, peer influence, individual religiosity and religious affiliation, household structure or living arrangement, environmental factors, gender norms, media influence, drug use and demographic factors (Broman 2007; Buhi and Goodson 2007; Biddlecom et al. 2008).

Poverty or economic depravity in particular, has also been strongly linked to premarital sexual activity among young people especially among girls. In several studies, it has been speculated that girls who are inadequately provided for in terms of basic needs are often exposed to the temptation of seeking financial rewards from young and older men for sexual favours in return (Madise et al 2007;

Biddlecom et al. 2008). In these studies, the effect of household wealth on females as compared to boys was statistically significant. This stands to suggest that while residence in wealthy families may insulate girls from the temptations of receiving financial favours from sexual partners in return for sex, the same may not necessarily be the case for boys.

However, given the circumstances under which PMS may occur, these past studies may not clearly account for the attitude of the youth towards PMS. For instance, 20% of all young girls interviewed in Kisumu, Kenya, and Ndola, Zambia, said their first early sexual encounters involved physical force (Glynn *et al.*, 2001). Similarly, around 25% of 15–24-year-old girls in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa said they had been 'tricked' or 'persuaded' into their first sexual experience (Manzini, 2001). This raises the pertinent question as to whether this is driven by attitude or the observed behavior among the youth, is inconsistent with the attitudes towards premarital sex among the youth.

This study therefore examined the premarital sexual attitudes and behaviour of secondary school students

in relation to socio-economic background of their families. This is based on the hypothesis that individuals from wealthy background will be more likely than less wealthy individuals to engage in premarital sex. This is because wealthier individuals can afford subsequent costs that would be associated with their sexual acts.

METHODOLOGY

The study area and Data collection

A cross sectional study was conducted in the larger Bungoma District, Kenya between April and May, 2006. Purposive sampling was used to select the study district while systematic random sampling method was used to select the respondents. Primary and secondary data sources were utilized. The primary data were obtained in a survey from a sample of 284 students in selected secondary schools, using self-administrated structured questionnaires due to sensitive nature of the study. Two stages of random interspersed by one purposive sampling techniques were used. At the first stage 12 out of 138 Secondary schools in Bungoma county were selected randomly. Then at the second stage, 10%, according to Kerlinger (1983), of form three students were randomly selected and self-administered questionnaires were provided. .

Secondary data were obtained from governments' publications, journals, Statistical abstracts, as well as publications from private institutions. Verbal informed consent was obtained from the participants before they were enrolled in the study. Students were given clear options on whether to participate or not. It was also made clear that they could refuse to answer any questions during the interview and terminate the interview at any time they desire. Insignificant number of students refused to participate in the study. Confidentiality of information was ensured by removing personal identifiers from questionnaire. The names of the schools were coded and it was not possible for anyone outside the research team to trace reported incidents of sexual behavior. In these ways, respondents were protected against any possible adverse repercussions of the study.

DATA ANALYSIS

Bivariate techniques were applied to identify the factors associated with the likelihood of having premarital sexual intercourse. Chi-square test was used to test for significant association between the variables. Of the 284 students surveyed, 170 were locals (residents of Bungoma Districts). These local students formed the sampling frame for the parents. They were requested to provide physical address details that could facilitate visits to their parents. The addresses were later scrutinized and 52 accessible were visited by the researcher to evaluate their socio-economic status. The study also included head teachers and guidance & counselling (G&C) teachers,

from the selected secondary schools, parents and faith-based organisations' leaders. Visible household possessions and combined monthly income was used to derive the household index which was used to objectively classify the households into three socio-economic classes of high, medium and low.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Classification of household economic status

Assets	Status	score	Av. scores	No. of household
Housing	permanent	10	13	-
	Semi permanent	5		
	Grass thatched	2.5		
Media gadgets	Television	10	12	-
	Radio	5		
	Video/DVD	10		
Combined income	>20,000	10	10	-
	10,000-20,000	5		
	<10,000	2.5		
Classification*	High	40-60	35	4
	Medium	20-39		16
	Low	10-19		32

* Was based on the household index which was derived by the total scores each household obtained.

As shown in table 1, the households classified as high, medium and low economic status were 4, 16 and 32, respectively. From the table, the overall socio-economic status of the sampled households was medium with a score of 35. Such households are considered to have moderate access to information (print and electronic) and fairly interactive lifestyles. The proportion of high and medium class households (38.5%) was considered high enough to exert considerable influence on the rest and would determine the direction of development including approaches to sexuality.

Factors influencing PMS

Analysis for association between key student environmental characteristics and premarital sex (PMS) by chi square (Table 2), revealed that girls were more sexually experienced ($\chi^2 = 12.7$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.0004$) than boys of the same age and academic level (form three). As stated earlier, girls seem to initiate sexual activity much earlier than boys and probably are approached by experienced older males. Analysis also indicated that romance more often ended up in sex which may be the major reason for romantic relationship.

It was further found that household economic status had significant ($\chi^2 = 7.95$, $df = 1$, $P = 0.005$) effect on experience with PMS. It was shown that youth from high and middle class households were more likely to engage in PMS as compared to the low class households. This is contrary to the beliefs that the youth from poor families are likely to engage in PMS, for favours. This may be due to higher exposure/access to modern lifestyles in high and

middle class households, which may guarantee access to information through media, increased association and less control by parents who may be busy elsewhere. They may also be tempted to engage in PMS to meet their basic needs should they miss from their parents. Youth from low household income tend to suffer from inferiority complex and are not fully exposed to modern facilities such as TVs and videos and are likely to keep off from factors leading them to PMS. Boys in such families rarely approach girls for friendship until later in life. Girls in such families are usually reserved and in most cases enticed/forced into sex by older men who tend to take advantage of their status. This finding is in agreement with Cofie (2010) who found out that adolescents who come from rich households are significantly more likely to have premarital sex and multiple sexual partners than counterparts from the poor households. He attributed this to higher exposure to all forms of media.

Table 2: Chi square analysis for association between gender, romance and household economic status and experience with PMS

Gender	Experienced	un experienced	Total
Girls	89	53	142
Boys	59	83	142
Total	148	136	284
$\chi^2 = 12.7, df = 1, p = 0.0004$			
Romantic	102	60	162
Non romantic	46	76	122
Total	148	136	284
$\chi^2 = 17.96, df = 1, p = 0.00003$			
HM	19	7	26
Low	9	17	26
Total	28	24	52
$\chi^2 = 7.95, df = 1, p = 0.005$			

HM = High and medium class households.

A chi-square (χ^2) test was used to test if there was any significant influence of gender, religion, school type, household economic status and parents and teachers' attitudes on the attitude of the youth towards PMS. In this study, PMS was considered a vice and any factor (statement/question) supporting PMS was considered negative while any factor that discouraged it was considered positive. Therefore, favourable attitude meant not in favour of PMS while unfavourable attitude encompassed feelings that encouraged PMS.

The attitude categorized by school type and gender is presented in table 3. Chi square (χ^2) analysis showed that gender had an influence on the attitude of the youth towards PMS. Girls were more associated with unfavourable attitude ($\chi^2 = 4.78, df = 2, p = 0.0092$) than boys. Although the results indicated that girls held unfavourable attitude towards PMS, it is likely that their responses to the attitude items were personalised and tended to be emotionally guided. School type had influence on the attitudes of the youth towards PMS ($\chi^2 = 61.69, df = 4, p < 0.001$). The analysis indicated that girls only and boys' only schools negatively influenced the youth more than

other types of schools. It is likely that peer influence (time to discuss) is limited in mixed schools compared to either girl or boy schools. It is also possible that mixed schools provide experiences that develop favourable attitudes in the youth.

Table 3: Influence of gender and type of school on the attitude of the youth towards PMS when subjected to chi-square (χ^2) analysis.

Category		Favourable	Neutral	Unfavourable
Gender	Female	61	23	58
	Male	79	17	46
	$\chi^2 = 4.78, df = 2, p = 0.0092$			
School type	Girl	13	8	48
	Boy	14	5	39
	Mixed	93	27	37
	$\chi^2 = 61.69, df = 4, p < 0.001$			

Of the 52 students who were assessed for their household status, 4 were from the high socio economic status and 3 (75%) of them had unfavourable attitude compared to 9 (40.9%) of the 22 students from the middle class status households. Because the sample size for the high socio-economic class households was less than 5, it was combined with the middle class households before it was subjected to the chi square (χ^2) analysis to compare with the low class households.

Chi square (χ^2) analysis as shown in table 4 indicated that household socio-economic status had a significant ($p = 0.022$) influence on the development of unfavourable attitude of the students towards PMS. This finding also explains partially the outcome that school type has an influence on the attitude of the students towards PMS. The high and medium households tend to take their students to single gender established schools.

Table 4: Influence of household economic status on the attitudes of the students towards PMS when subjected to chi-square (χ^2) analysis

	Favourable	Unfavourable	Total
H/M	16	10	26
Low	23	3	26
Total	39	13	52
$\chi^2 = 5.25, df = 1, p = 0.022$			

HM = High and medium class households

The present study revealed that girls, besides being more experienced, generally held unfavourable attitude towards PMS compared to boys of the same age and academic level. The results of this study may partly explain the fact that girls perform poorly compared to boys in national examinations (KNEC, 2007). Traditionally, boys are considered as eventual bread winners. This belief perpetuates complacency and relaxation among girls and could contribute to a

don't care attitude among the girls. Some have been heard saying that they will use the face to capture responsible husbands (Personal observation). Equally important was the finding that the youth from high and medium class households had unfavourable attitudes towards PMS probably due to high exposure to information through media since this type of household could afford the media facilities such as TVs, videos, radios, computers among others. This may imply that the youth from such households may be involved more in PMS than what is reported in other studies. This is most likely due to the fact that youth from the high/medium households not only engage in PMS more than the youth from the poor household, but also can afford contraceptives, secure prompt and secrete pregnancy termination or medical services should PMS end up in either pregnancy or Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI). These actions leave the poor households to appear more involved and vulnerable than the rich households. This finding is therefore, contrary to other study findings that point to poverty as the root cause of PMS among the youth (Madise *et al*, 2007, Zulu *et al*, 2002). Most of the parents from the high and medium class households could also be busy with other activities and would generally have little time to discuss sexuality with their youth. Instead such parents would acquire facilities such as TVs and videos which effectively take up their positions as virtual parents.

CONCLUSIONS

Poverty or economic depravity was strongly linked to pre-marital sexual activity among young people especially girls. Girls were sexually more experienced than boys of the same age and academic level possibly due to the fact that girls seem to initiate sexual activity much earlier than boys and are probably approached by experienced older males. Youth from high and middle class households were more likely to engage in PMS as compared to low class households due to high exposure/access to modern lifestyles, while those from low class households tend to suffer from inferiority complex and are not fully exposed to modern facilities such TVS and Videos. The study also established that wealthy or high/medium household socio-economic status, gender and school type have a negative influence on the attitudes of the youth towards PMS due to high exposure to information through the media. Therefore the wealthy people are the ones who drive the PMS among the youth. Girls, besides being more experienced, generally held unfavourable attitude towards PMS compared to boys of the same age and academic level.

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