

Full Length Research Paper

Influence of family attachment styles on premarital sexuality of secondary school students in Rivers state, Nigeria

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This study is aimed at determining the influence of family attachment style on premarital sexuality of secondary school students in Rivers State, Nigeria. The survey data collected from a sample of 1000 secondary school two (SS2) were used for the study. Face and construct validity using factorial design to determine the factor structure of the instrument Cronbach-Alpha consistency coefficients at 0.73; and test-retest reliability determined as 0.87, so the instrument is considered valid and reliable. The one-way analysis of variance was used in testing the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. The results obtained showed a significant influence between family attachment style and premarital sexuality. The pattern of significant influence of family attachment styles on premarital sexuality is explored using Fisher's least significant difference (LSD) post hoc pair wise multiple comparison analysis. It was recommended among others that parents should encourage the development of a secure and enduring attachment relationship with their children.

Key words: Family attachment, premarital sexuality, peripheral sexual activities, coition, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The challenges to the family, the world over are many and varied. One of such challenges is the increasing rate of premarital sexuality. Sexuality is a physical, psychological and social phenomenon. It is a major motivating factor for our lives. Our sexuality encompasses not only erotic stimulation but also our beliefs and behaviour. It is influenced by our biology, emotions and culture (Katchadourian, 1990). Our sexual behaviour is one obvious manifestation of not only our gender, but of our very essence. Our essence because there is a strong motivation for reproduction in each human. The determinants of sexual motivation and behaviour vary widely, but typically, they include the individual's physiology, learned behaviour and the physical and social environments.

Of the three dimensions of sexuality identified above, namely state of being male or female, sexual behaviour and erotic stimulation, it is erotic stimulation that is

consummated in the coition that constitutes premarital sexuality, that is, the manifestations of all kinds of sexual behaviour that involves boys and girls including erotica, kissing, fondling one another, touching and manipulating sex organs before marriage.

Becoming sexual is an important aspect of development during adolescence. This is because it does not only transform the nature of relationships between adolescents and their peers but also between adolescents and their parents or guardians, teachers and so on. Sex and sexuality may be natural functions, but few natural functions have been influenced so strongly by religious and moral beliefs, cultural traditions, folklore and superstition. For the adolescent, the issues remain incorporating sexuality into a still developing sense of self, the need to resolve questions about sexual values and morals, and coming to terms with the sort of relationship into which the adolescent is prepared (or not prepared) to enter (Katchadourian, 1990).

Premarital sexuality is linked with major health and social problems with associated negative effects on social development (David Satcher, 2001; Esu,

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1982:114). It brings about image depreciation, contracting of sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies, abortion and teen-parenting (Esu, 1982; Isangedighi, 1994). The physical, psychological and financial costs of teenage pregnancy to individuals, families and society are very high. Premarital adolescent pregnancies inhibit rapid economic, social and educational achievement of the teenage parents.

In Nigeria, adolescents, aged 10 - 19 years constitute more than a third of the population (Briggs, 2001), and represent the potential work force of the nation. Thus current investment in this area should yield long term dividend in terms of improvement in human value, survival and development. Attachment as defined by Bowlby (1955) is an affectional ties that one person forms with another, binding them together in space and enduring over time. Attachment styles refer to a close emotional relationship between two or more persons, often characterized by mutual affection and desire to maintain proximity. Attachment styles can be sub-divided into: secure attachment- this is a strong emotional connection with copious doses of warmth, trust and security. Anxious-avoidant manifested by insecure attachments. Ambivalent attachments are characterized by uncertain feelings whether they like the relationship or not. Parental attachment that increases youngster's opportunities to engage in behaviours that enhance the development of a sense of efficacy, personal control and mastery is made up of support and acceptance, disciplinary patterns-control or permissiveness and participation.

The importance of warmth and nurturance for the development of competence and moral behaviour can be traced to the earliest infant-parent attachment relationship. It is at this stage that the group work is laid for what Erikson (1968) described as the "basic trust" without which the active, curious and exploratory behaviour necessary to learn about the self and the external world is dramatically curtailed. The major premise here is that parental acceptance has an enhancing effect upon psychosocial development and parental rejection at the other extreme, presumably results in an impoverished environment and a diminished sense of personal worthiness. Studies have shown an attachment relationship develop from parents and newborn interaction through touch-control, contact-comfort and eye to eye contact (Bowlby, 1955).

PROBLEM

Society has great interest in premarital sexuality since some of our greatest social problems such as abortion, illegitimacy, early marriage, contracting sexually transmitted diseases, denial of marrying a choice husband and dropping out of school are all related to premarital sexuality. According to United Nations (UN)

population report (as cited in Guttmacher, 2006), approximately 46 million abortions were performed worldwide in 1995. Out of this number; about 750,000 Nigerian women have abortions each year. Global Health report 2008 shows an estimate of 220,000 children (ages 0 - 15) that are living with HIV/AIDS by the end of 2007. CEDAW (2008) reveals that female access to education in Nigeria remains low as a result of dropping out of schools because of pregnancies. Secondary school completion rate for girls is 44% while that of boys is 75%.

Hypothesis

We hypothesized that there is no significant influence of family attachment styles on premarital sexuality.

METHODOLOGY

The study utilized the survey research design. Stratified random sampling technique was used in the selection of a sample of 1000 subjects. The criteria for stratification were based on the school type that is girls only, boys only, rural and urban locations. The sample was made up of 490 male and 510 female. They came from various backgrounds, which reflected the socio-economic status of their parents or guardians and their religion. They also came from various ethnic groups. Their age range lay between 14 - 17years.

Instrumentation

This research instrument was constructed by the researchers. It was validated by the experts from the department of Educational Foundation of the University of Calabar. It was constructed to measure variables of the study, which are family attachment styles and premarital sexuality. Face validity has been established for the instrument of this study where all the items in the instrument were subjected to rigorous scrutiny by experts. In addition to face validity, authors looked for the "factorial design" to confirm construct validity. The instrument was pilot tested; the Cronbach Alpha Reliability technique was used to calculate the reliability co-efficient, which is 0.73. This shows the instrument has internal consistency, which is an attestation to the homogeneity of the items in it. Test-retest reliability was determined as 0.87.

Data collection

The instrument was administered personally by the researchers to the subjects in the sampled schools. The questionnaires were administered to the students in their various groups in each of the sampled schools. The purpose of the investigation was briefly explained to them as contained in the questionnaire. The questionnaire was carefully explained to them for proper understanding of what was required of them. The subjects were encouraged to give true and unbiased responses to every item. Assurance was given to respondents for the confidentiality of the information given so as to remove fears of their private life being exposed. The subjects were also told that the exercise was not an examination, therefore, there was neither correct nor wrong answers to the items on the questionnaire. Respondents were prevented from interacting with each other. This was to reduce the misrepresentation of information.

Table 1. Analysis of variance of influence of family attachment styles on students' premarital sexuality.

Sexuality variables	Group (attach styles)	N	M	SD	
Peripheral acts	(Secure)	408	8.35	2.63	
	(Anxious)	311	9.35	3.35	
	(Ambivalent)	274	8.44	3.15	
	Total	993	8.69	3.05	
Coital acts	(Secure)	408	5.17	2.02	
	(Anxious)	311	5.36	2.36	
	(Ambivalent)	274	5.43	2.42	
	Total	993	5.30	2.25	
Overall Sexuality	(Secure)	408	13.61	4.82	
	(Anxious)	311	14.84	5.03	
	(Ambivalent)	274	13.85	4.95	
	Total	993	14.0	4.95	
Sexuality variable	Source of variation	Sum of squares	Df	Mean of square	F
Peripheral acts	Between group	200.28	2	100.14	10.99*
	Within groups	9020.94	990	9.11	
	Total	9221.22	992		
Coital	Between group	12.79	2	6.39	1.27
	Within groups	4986.97	990	5.04	
	Total	4999.76	992		
Overall	Between group	285.85	2	2.93	5.90*
	Within groups	23981.40	990	24.22	
	Total	24267.23	992		

Significant at .05 level, critical 2.990 N = 993.

Data analysis

There is no significant influence of family attachment styles on premarital sexuality. The independent variable in this hypothesis is family attachment styles, while the dependent variable is premarital sexuality (which was considered in its two components of peripheral activities, coital relationships and a total of the two). Students in the sample were categorized into three groups of family attachment style (based on where they scored the highest under the three styles). One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test this hypothesis and the results of the analysis are presented in Table 1. The upper part of Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations for the three groups of students on the premarital sexuality variables. The lower part of the table shows the actual results of the analysis of variance (ANOVA). The table shows that the calculated F- values for peripheral activities (10.99) and for overall sexuality (5.90) are each higher than the critical F- value of 3.00 at 0.05 level of significance with 2 and 990 degrees of freedom. The calculated F- value for coital acts (1.27) is less than the critical F-value. With these results, the null hypothesis is rejected in these two cases of peripheral acts and overall sexuality, and not rejected in the case of coital acts. This implies that there is a significant influence of family attachment styles on students' premarital sexuality in the particular area of peripheral activities and in overall sexuality, and not in the area of coital acts. In order to clearly understand the pattern of the significant influence of family

attachment styles on students' peripheral and overall sexuality, a post hoc pair wise multiple comparisons was carried out using Fisher's least significant different (LSD) analysis. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 2. The results presented in Table 2 show that:

1. For peripheral activities, significant t-values of -4.40 and 3.64 indicate that students with anxious family attachment (with mean = 9.35) are significantly more involved in peripheral acts than the students with both secure family attachment (with mean = 8.35) and those with ambivalent family attachment (with mean = 8.44).

However, the non significant t-value of -0.38 indicates that students with secure family attachment and those with ambivalent family attachment are not significantly different in their peripheral sexual activities.

2. For overall sexuality, the significant t -values of -3.32 and 2.43 indicate that students with anxious family attachment (with mean = 14.84) are significantly more involved in overall premarital sexuality than student with secure family attachment (with mean = 13.61) and those with ambivalent family attachment (with mean = 13.85).

However, the non significant t - value of -0.62 indicates that students with secure family attachment and those with ambivalent family attachment are not significantly different in their overall premarital sexuality.

There are no significant interaction effects of parenting styles and

Table 2. Fisher's LSD multiple comparison analysis of significant effect of family attachment styles on premarital sexuality.

Variable	Groups	Secure (n = 408)	Anxious (n = 311)	Ambivalent (N = 274)
Peripheral Activities	Secure	8.35 ^a	-1.00 ^b	-0.09
	Anxious	-4.40* ^c	9.35	0.91
	Ambivalent	-0.38	3.64*	8.44
MSW = 9.11				
Overall Sexuality	Secure	13.61 ^a	-123b	-0.24
	anxious	-3.32* ^c	14.84	0.99
	Ambivalent	-0.62	2.43*	13.85
MSW = 24.22				

a – Group means are placed along the diagonal, b – Differences in group means are placed above the diagonal, c – Fisher's t – values are placed below the diagonal, * - Significant at .05 level (critical t = 1.96).

Table 3a. Result of 2-way analysis of variance of interaction effect of parenting style and family attachment style on premarital sexuality (peripheral acts).

Source of variation	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F
Corrected model	343.435	8	42.92	94.76
Intercept	70740.510	1	70740.510	7840.77
Parenting style	127.946	2	63.973	7.09
Attachment style	155.813	2	77.906	8.64
Par style by attachment	14.545	4	3.636	0.40 ^{ns}
Error	8877.788	984	9.022	
Total	84171.000	993		
Corrected total	9221.223	992		

^{ns} interaction effect is not significant at 0.05 level (critical F_{4, 984} = 2.38).

family attachment styles on students' premarital sexuality. The independent variables in this hypothesis are two, namely parenting and family attachment styles. The dependent variable is premarital sexuality (which has two and overall components in this study). The statistical analysis technique deployed to test this hypothesis was two way analysis of variance (2-way ANOVA), and the hypothesis was tested on each of the sub-variables of premarital sexuality. The results of the analyses are presented in Tables 3a, b and c. The results of the two-way analysis of variance for the study of interaction effect of parenting style and family attachment style on students' premarital sexuality variables are presented in Tables 3a, b and c. The foci in these analyses were the interaction effect. The results in Table 3A show that the F-value representing the interaction effect of parenting style and family attachment style on premarital sexuality (peripheral acts), which is 0.40, is less than the critical F- value of 2.38 at 0.05 level of significance with 4 and 984 degrees of freedom. With this result, the null hypothesis is not rejected. This implies that there is no significant interaction effect of parenting and family attachment style on students' premarital sexuality. Similar result is obtained for overall sexuality as Table 3c shows a non significant F-value of 2.25 for the interaction of parenting style and family attachment style. Hence the null hypothesis is equally not rejected. There is no interaction effect of parenting style and family attachment style on the overall premarital sexuality.

However, for coital, Table 3b shows an F-value of 5.55 which is higher than the critical F-value of 2.38, and is therefore significant at 0.05 level. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected for coitus. This implies that there is a significant interaction effect of parenting style and family attachment style on students' coital premarital sexuality.

To clearly understand the pattern of this significant interaction effect, the relevant group means are extracted and presented in Table 4 and plotted in Figure 1. Their results presented and plotted in Figure 1 have shown that among students with parenting style 1 (authoritarian), those with family attachment style 2 (anxious), are more involved in coital sexuality than those with attachment styles 1 (secure), and 3 (ambivalent) who are almost at the same level. The same situation obtains among students with parenting style 2 (democratic), except that those with secure attachment style are least involved. However, the situation is reversed among students with parenting style 3 (permissive) where students with ambivalent attachment style are the ones most involved in coition, and the ones with anxious attachment style are the least involved in coition.

DISCUSSION

There is a significant influence of family attachment styles on students' premarital sexuality in the particular areas of peripheral activities and in overall sexuality and not in the area of coital acts. This implies that for peripheral activities, students with anxious family attachment are significantly more involved in peripheral acts than the students with both secure family and ambivalent family attachments. The results also show that students with secure family attachment and those with ambivalent family attachment are not significantly different in their peripheral sexual activities. The results additionally show

Table 3b. Coital.

Source of variation	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F
Corrected model	128.925	8	16.116	3.26
Intercept	26667.461	1	26667.461	5387.33
Parenting style	9.603	2	4.801	0.97
Attachment style	9.151	2	4.575	0.92
Par style by attach style	109.837	4	27.459	5.55*
Error	4870.836	984	4.95	
Total	32926.000	993		
Corrected total	4999.760	992		

* Interaction effect is significant at 0.05 (critical F_{4, 984} = 2.38).

Table 3c. Overall.

Source of variation	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F
Corrected model	618.422	8	77.303	3.22
Intercept	185876.802	1	185876.802	7734.12
Parenting style	136.744	2	68.372	2.85
Attachment style	197.840	2	98.920	4.12
Par style by attachment	215.887	4	53.972	2.25 ^{ns}
Error	23648.831	984	24.033	
Total	220607.000	993		
Corrected total	24267.253	992		

ns interaction effect is not significant at 0.05 (critical F_{4, 984} = 2.38).

Table 4. Group means that show interaction effect of parenting style and family attachment style on coital premarital sexuality.

		Parenting style		
		1	2	3
Attachment style	1	5.16 (150)*	4.84 (166)	5.78 (92)
	2	5.43 (95)	5.77(109)	4.88 (107)
	3	5.20 (122)	5.43 (88)	5.89 (64)

* Numbers in parenthesis group sizes.

that for overall sexuality, students with anxious family attachment are significantly more involved in overall premarital sexuality than students with secure family attachment and those with ambivalent family attachment. The results further show that students with secure family attachment and those with ambivalent family attachment are not significantly different in their overall premarital sexuality.

Bowlby (1955) has shown that an attachment relationship develops from parents and newborn interaction through contact comfort, touch-control and eye to eye contact and that it develops with time. This is also the postulation of Erikson (1968) that parents must provide supportive, nurturing and loving environment so that the child develops basic trust. Freud (1957) equally believes

that the feelings of warmth, trust and security that infants gain from secure attachments set the stage for healthy development later in life. The main theme of their findings is that children can be influenced by the quality of their early attachments for many years to come. The reason being that attachments are often stable over time. These findings of Freud still stand the test of time even after 71 years of his study, and indeed agreed with Bowlby 21 years after Freud made his own. The finding of this study is supporting all the above postulations. A similar finding was recorded in the study of Van Bakel and Riksen-Walraven (2002), where it was found that at home, avoidant and disorganized (ambivalent) infants showed significantly less compliance and significantly more avoidance and negative behaviour than securely

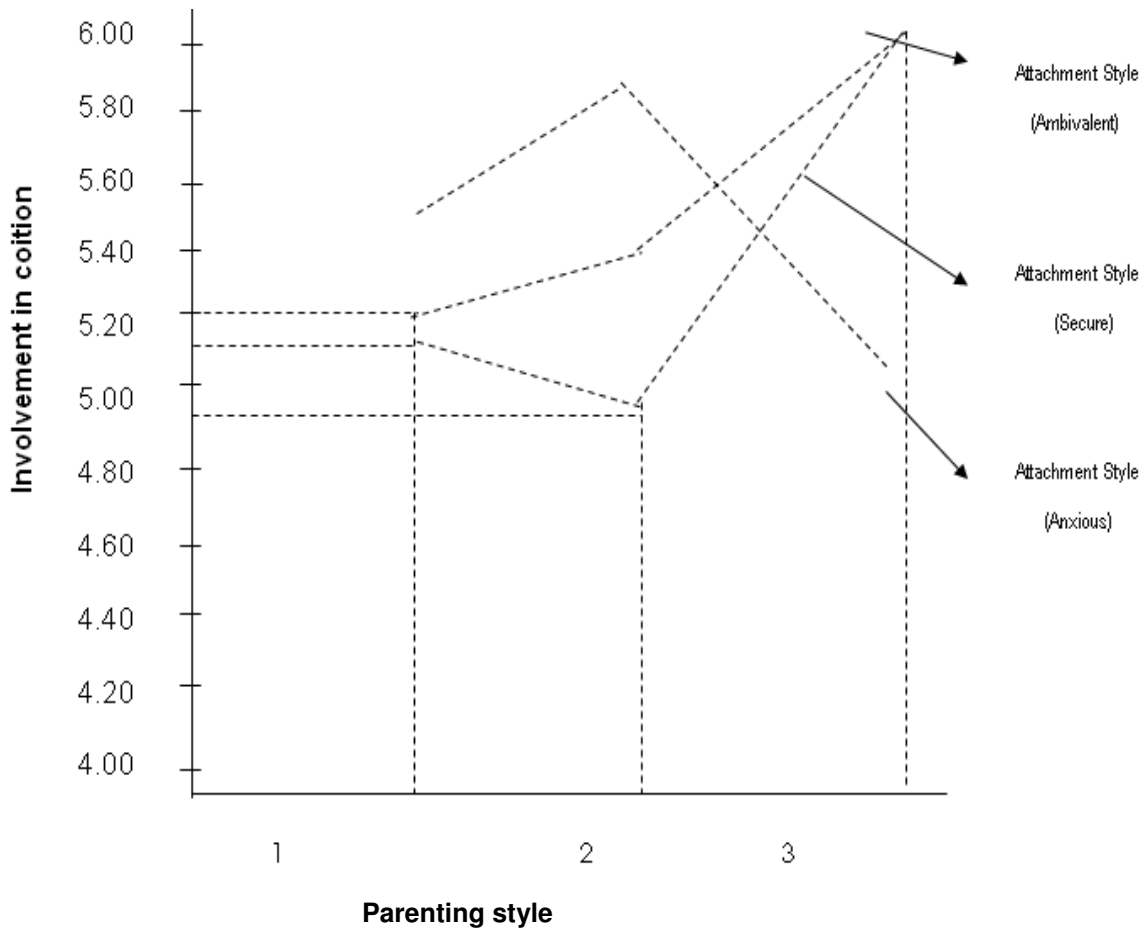


Figure 1. Plot of group means showing interaction effect of parenting style and family attachment style on involvement in coition.

attached children. At the laboratory, avoidant infants were significantly less compliant and more avoidant than secure infants, while disorganized infants distinguished themselves from secure children by significantly lower compliance and significantly higher negativity scores. The resistant infants did not distinguish themselves from the secure infants on any of the four behavioural scales. In yet another study by Woodward, Fergusson and Belsky (2000), it was reported that exposure to parental separation was significantly associated with lower attachment to parents in adolescence and more negative perceptions of maternal and paternal care and protection during childhood. When examined in relation to the developmental timing of first separation, a linear relationship between the age at first separation and later parental attachment and perceived parent-child relations was found. The younger the age of the child at the time of separation, the lower their subsequent parental attachment and the more likely they were to perceive both their mother and father as less caring and more overprotective. No gender differences were found in children's responses to parental separation. Results supported the

importance of early childhood years for the development of a secure and enduring attachment relationship between children and their parents. The findings of this study have extended the origins of current attachment constructs as reviewed by Goldberg, Grusec and Jenkins (1999). They affirmed that whereas Bowlby's original idea focused on a bio-behavioural safety-regulating system as the child's primary protector, current usage often encompasses much more, if not all, of the parent-child relationship. The authors argue that differentiating protection from general responsive or good parenting as this research has done, goes to show how parental protection can help in the socio-emotional development of the adolescent and his subsequent attachments.

Another finding consistent with this present study is that of Soucy and Larose (2000). They reported that above and beyond perceptions of parental attachment and control, perception of a secure relationship with a mentor was predictive of adolescent adjustment. That this relationship was found to be stronger for adolescents who reported having high levels of security in the relationship with their mother and that psychological

control by both parents appeared to be a significant determinant of academic achievement and less involvement in premarital sexuality. One would see the absence of studies contradicting one's finding to be one of the unique conditions of this study. However, the presence of some studies validating my finding is a strong attestation to this study's rigorous research methods. So this study could be replicated easily to other research situations, conditions and areas.

RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

1. Students with anxious family attachment style are significantly more involved in premarital sexuality than the students with both secure family attachment and those with ambivalent family attachment styles. However, students with secure family attachment and those with ambivalent family attachment styles are not significantly different in their involvement in premarital sexuality.
2. Parents should be caring enough to figure out whether their children are tending towards anxious-avoidant attachment style. Children in this mould display more premarital sexuality tendencies. The importance of the early childhood years for the development of a secure and enduring attachment relationship between children and their parents.
3. Parents have the onerous task of broaching the issue of sexuality to their children. If parents warn that the consequences to such a decision may be grave, then such a warning could serve as a bulwark against premarital sexuality of adolescents. High family closeness in the form of robust sibling relationships is encouraged as these serve as frame reference for individual development and functioning.

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