

# Influence of Religion on Adolescent Sexual Attitudes and Behaviour among Nigerian University Students: Affiliation or Commitment?

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## ABSTRACT

Religion plays a significant role in the life of individuals in any society. Its role as a moral builder has been variously acknowledged. This study examines the role of religion in adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviour in Nigeria. The study was conducted in two national universities in Nigeria with student population of more than 40,000. The institutions are located in the eastern and western parts of the country. Data for the study were collected from a representative sample of students resident in the universities. A total of 1,870 students were successfully interviewed but because of the age restriction for adolescents, information from 1,153 campus-based adolescents aged 10–24 years was analysed. Logistic regression model was used to do the analysis both at the adjusted and unadjusted levels. Findings are consistent with existing literature. There is a strong relationship between religiosity and adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviour, although religious commitment is more important than religious affiliation in affecting adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviours. This paper calls for further investigation to be able to disentangle the relationship between religiosity and adolescent sexuality, especially with the use of longitudinal data. Since religion affects the sexual lifestyles of adolescents, religious leaders can do a lot by mobilising their members towards supporting HIV/AIDS prevention initiatives in the country. (Afr J Reprod Health 2005; 9[2]: 125-140)

## RÉSUMÉ

La religion joue un rôle important dans la vie des individus dans n'importe quelle société. Son rôle en tant que galvanisateur de la morale a été bien reconnu de plusieurs manières. Cette étude examine le rôle de la religion par rapport aux attitudes et aux comportements sexuels de l'adolescent au Nigéria. L'étude a été menée au sein de deux universités fédérales nigérianes ayant une population étudiante de plus de 40,000. Les institutions se trouvent dans les régions est et ouest du pays. Les données ont été recueillies à partir d'un échantillon représentatif des étudiants domiciliés dans les universités. Au total, 1870 étudiants ont été interviewés avec succès, mais à cause de la limitation d'âge concernant les adolescents, les renseignements recueillis auprès des 1153 adolescents qui habitent sur le campus et qui sont âgés de 10 à 24 ans, ont été analysés. Nous avons fait l'analyse aux niveaux de l'adaptation et non-adaptation à l'aide du modèle de la régression logistique. Les résultats sont compatibles avec la documentation courante. Il existe un rapport étroit entre la religiosité et les attitudes et comportements sexuels de l'adolescent, bien que l'engagement religieux soit plus important que l'affiliation religieuse quand il s'agit de l'influence sur les attitudes et comportements sexuels de l'adolescent. Cet article préconise des études plus poussées pour pouvoir démêler le rapport entre la religiosité et la sexualité de l'adolescent, surtout quand on se sert des données longitudinales. Puisque la religion influe sur le mode de vie sexuelle des adolescents, les leaders religieux peuvent contribuer énormément tout en mobilisant leurs fidèles pour soutenir les initiatives de la prévention du VIH/SIDA dans le pays. (Rev Afr Santé Reprod 2005; 9[2]: 125-140)

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KEY WORDS: Adolescent, religiosity, affiliation, sexuality, HIV/AIDS

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## Introduction

### Background

Since the issue of adolescent sexuality attracted the first international attention at the Bucharest Conference on Population in 1974, various studies have emerged on aspects of adolescent sexual behaviour.<sup>1,2</sup> An examination of the characteristics of adolescent sexual behaviour shows that there are differences by gender and socio-economic status, with males found to be sexually involved at younger ages than females.<sup>3</sup> Other studies examined the role of schooling on adolescent sexual behaviour, and argued that in-school teenagers are more likely to exert autonomy in deciding to engage in sexual relationships.<sup>4,5</sup> The role of the family as a socialisation agent has also been examined. Meekers found that in general the social control exercised by community elders over the fertility and sexuality of young women has become weak due to modernisation and westernisation.<sup>6</sup>

### Nigerian Studies

The Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey of 1999 reported that the median age at first sexual intercourse for girls is just over 16 years. By age 18 and 20, 63% and approximately 80% respectively have experienced sexual intercourse. The second phase of the survey published in 1999 reported that half of the female respondents had sexual intercourse by age 18; about one-quarter had sex before age 15. One interesting aspect of the report is that men are exposed to sexual intercourse later than women. The median age at first sexual intercourse among men is 20, compared to 18 for women.<sup>7,8</sup> Other studies have identified the influence of a number of individual and family factors on adolescent sexual behaviour such as individual psychosocial factors of age at first intercourse, self-esteem and gender of adolescents.<sup>9</sup> Adolescents are also influenced by their peers and family members.<sup>3,10,11</sup> In Nigeria, these factors have guided the design of studies on adolescent sexuality.<sup>3,12</sup>

### Religion and Sexuality

One factor that has not been given adequate attention is the role of religion in adolescent sexuality. Although several studies have shown a correlation between adolescent sexual behaviour and religious commitment,<sup>13</sup> no serious attempt to confirm the underlying mechanism through which religion affects sexual behaviour exists in Nigeria. Because religious values are the source of moral proscriptions for many individuals, the teachings of the churches are likely to play a role in the formation of individual attitudes, values and decisions. The extent to which religion influences individual attitudes and behaviour, however, depends on the specific doctrines and policies of the churches and on the degree of integration and commitment of individuals to their particular religious institutions.<sup>13,14</sup>

The Christian religious groups have strong opposition against premarital sex, although such opposition is more radical among the pentecostal and evangelical religious movements. While the latter can sanction their members by excommunication, the former can tolerate the offending members with the hope that they will turn a new leaf.<sup>14-16</sup> This differential institutional commitment to premarital sexual abstinence leads to the expectation that individual Catholics and evangelical Protestants would be less accepting of premarital sex than non-fundamentalist Protestants. Those with no religious affiliation would be most likely to accept and engage in premarital intercourse.

Since most religious groups discourage premarital sex, the degree of commitment to religious organisations may be more important as a determinant of premarital sex attitudes and behaviour than religious affiliation. Individuals who attend religious services may receive more frequent religious messages against premarital sex. Their greater religious commitment may also make them more likely to accept the teachings of their religious institutions concerning premarital sex. Thus, individuals who attend religious services

frequently and who value religion in their lives are probably more likely than others to develop sexual attitudes and behaviour that are consistent with their religious doctrines. As a result young people who are active in religious groups would either have a greater commitment towards sexual abstinence before marriage or would place greater emphasis on maturity in sexual relationships than would young people less active in religious institutions.<sup>13,17</sup>

Involvement in religious institutions would also enhance the chances of young people making friends with peers who have restrictive attitudes towards premarital sex. Young people who are active in religion would have increased contact with adults who might be influential in leading them to delay sexual involvement. The religious commitment of individuals can be influenced by their values and behaviour concerning family and personal issues. Individuals with attitudes inconsistent with the teachings of their religious institutions can resolve such discrepancies through a number of mechanisms, including making redefinitions of the group's position on a subject or modifying their positions to be more in tune with that of the faith. In neither of these cases would there be any necessary impact on the individual's religious commitment.

These theoretical considerations lead to the expectation of reciprocal causal influences between religious commitment and adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviour. However, this causal relationship is not pursued in this analysis because the study never collected information on those issues. Attendance at religious services or programmes and religious importance are likely to produce less permissive attitudes and less engagement in premarital sex, while the acceptance of premarital sex is likely to reduce religious commitment and participation. Both of these mechanisms would lead to a negative correlation between religious involvement and premarital sex.<sup>13</sup> It was concluded that religious belief or practice is the most important factor in a decision to de-

lay sexual intercourse at age 20 by young adolescents in New Zealand.<sup>17</sup> In the United States, greater religiosity is associated with non-initiation of sexual intercourse among genders.<sup>18</sup>

In a review of similar studies done in the United States of America, one study found that religiosity didn't predict frequency of intercourse, but more frequent intercourse was correlated with adolescents' decreased religiosity.<sup>19</sup> Zelnik and others have earlier on showed that higher religiosity predicted later initiation of, and less frequent, intercourse. In other studies where only one item about religion was included, findings show that Catholics and protestant females initiate sexual intercourse later than their counterparts; frequent attendance at religious services was associated with more conservative sexual attitudes and less frequent sexual intercourse.<sup>20</sup> Findings on the relationship between the importance of religion and adolescent sexuality is inconclusive.<sup>21-23</sup>

Pathways through which religious beliefs and practices could affect decision-making about sex have been noted. Young people who grow up in religious households may accept rules proscribing sexual behaviour outside marriage. Some emphasise the importance of commitment, respect and trust before entering sexual relationships. Religion could also provide a sense of meaning in life, which in turn leads to considered decision-making. Religious groups help young people to develop morally and spiritually by transmitting the teachings and observances of their faith. Most faith-based organisations explicitly address the issue of adolescent sexuality within the context of faith through sex and abstinence education, parent-child communication.<sup>24</sup>

Does religious commitment affect adolescent sexual behaviour in Nigeria? Because religious values are the source of moral proscriptions for many individuals, the teachings of the groups are likely to play a role in the formation of individual attitudes, values and decisions. This study examines the role of religion on adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviour in two Nigerian univer-

sity communities. This is unique, as it comes at a time when there is a debate on whether the religious groups have any role to play in the current HIV/AIDS prevention drive in Nigeria.

## Methodology

The data for this study was obtained from a campus-based study of adolescent sexual behaviour in two representative tertiary institutions in Nigeria. These institutions are the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, in the eastern part of Nigeria and Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, in the west. The data were obtained through a self-administered questionnaire across the various faculties and departments in the two universities. Data collection was coordinated in each faculty by a course coordinator, lecturer or professor who had earlier been contacted. The aims and objectives of the study were properly explained to them. Forty copies of the questionnaire were handed over to all the coordinators who willingly agreed to coordinate the data collection exercise.

In each department, the purpose of the study was explained and the consent of the students to participate obtained freely. A simple random method was used to select a sample of 40 students among those who agreed to participate. Those who agreed to participate were then arranged in such a way as to maintain confidentiality and anonymity in their responses. The students, who formed the respondents, were not coerced. Anyone who did not agree to be administered was not compelled to do so. Ethical clearance was obtained from respective heads of departments of selected courses. For example, for the questionnaires to be administered in an economics class, the permission of the head of economics department was sought. A total sample of 1,870 students were interviewed, but for selecting only adolescents between 10 and 24 years of age, the sample size for this analysis was reduced to 1153 adolescents.

Religious affiliation was ascertained by asking the students about the religious groups they

belonged to. To measure religiosity, they were asked how often they attended religious services – several times a week, once a week, a few times a month, once a month, or less than once a month. The importance of religion in the life of the respondents was ascertained by asking them how important religion is to them. The responses were categorised as very important, somewhat important, or not important.

Attitudes about appropriateness of sexual activity before marriage (premarital sex) were ascertained by asking respondents to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following statements:

- Sexual intercourse should be only in marriage.
- Premarital sex may take place within a steady relationship but only when there is a commitment to marriage.
- I hold the view that sexual intercourse may take place within a steady relationship without a definite commitment to marriage.

Response categories for the above statements were “strongly agree”, “agree”, “disagree” and “strongly disagree”. Respondents were further asked if they had ever had sexual intercourse. The following questions were asked: “How many regular sex partners do you have?” “Have you had sex with anyone else other than your regular partner?” Further questions were asked on the number of such partners and practice of safer sex.

## Analytical Model and Variable Measurement

Analysis of the data was at three levels: univariate (using frequency), bivariate (cross-tabulations) and multivariate (logistic regression). A logistic regression model is used to examine the determinants of the likelihood that campus-based adolescents who are religious as defined in this study will be sexually active. There were five dependent variables in this analysis and, thus, five models were

estimated using the religious factors as the independent variables. Sexual debut was measured by whether the respondent had initiated sexual intercourse or not; current sexual behaviour was defined as having had sex in the two months preceding the survey, a period long enough to yield robust sample for the analysis. A shorter period of one week or two would have given a small sample size. Sexual attitudes were examined by the respondent's approval of the following common opinions:

1. Sexual intercourse should only take place within marriage (defined as conservative attitude or opinion to adolescent sex).
2. Sexual intercourse should (may) take place within a steady relationship but only when there is a commitment to marriage (defined as moderated attitude or opinion on adolescent sex).
3. Sexual intercourse may take place within a steady relationship without a definite commitment to marriage (defined as radical attitude or opinion on adolescent sex).

Conservative attitudes mean that a respondent strongly supports the view that sexual intercourse should only be within marriage. The moderated attitude or opinion implies that the respondents would support adolescent sexual activity only under a condition, that is, there is a marriage commitment. The Nigerian society does not frown at two betrothed individuals having sexual intercourse. The radical attitude is the type that believes that adolescent sex should take place, with or without betrothal or irrespective of religious doctrines.

Religiosity was defined in four different ways, namely, religious affiliation, which is commonly found in literature; attendance at religious services; value of religion; and religious practices. Religious affiliation was divided into four categories, namely, orthodox Christianity, Pentecostal Christianity, Islamic religion and others (unclassified). Attendance at religious services was

divided into three categories, namely, never, less than once in a month and several times in a month. Value of religion was categorised as "not important", "somewhat important" and "very important". Religious practices included attending religious programme frequently, daily reading of the bible/devotional book, devotional daily prayer, preaching the bible, tracts distribution and caring about what God thinks of one.

The study expected that those who had experienced sexual intercourse were likely to have radical opinion of premarital sex and were likely to be engaged in current sexual activity. Sexual debut and attitudes to adolescent sexuality were also included in some of the models where relevant. Sexual debut was included in the models estimating predictors of sexual attitudes and current sexual behaviour, for it was believed that initiation of sex would affect responses to the questions on sexual attitudes. Sexual attitudes are also likely to affect current sexual behaviour.

Regressions were estimated, controlling for the gender of respondents and their religious characteristics. Each of the models was adjusted using backward selection strategy. Only the adjusted results are presented. This was done to identify critical religious variables of influence. The major research questions being explored were: "Will religiosity have differential effect on adolescent sexuality controlling for gender of respondents?" "What aspect of religiosity has more influence on adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviour in this community?"

## Results

### Profile of Respondents

The respondents were mainly from the orthodox Christian religious groups, made up of the Roman Catholic, Anglican, Baptist, Presbyterian and Methodist. The average age of the students was 21 years, with an age range of 18–24 years. Most of them were from the urban areas and were living on campus at the time of interview.

The respondents reported that they came from average income-earning families, i.e., the not so rich families. Family economic background was measured at three categories: rich, average and poor. About one-fifth of the students came from each of the thirteen faculties in the universities. Majority of the students were drawn from the third and fourth year (about a quarter each), while one-third came from the Faculty of Social Sciences (table excluded).

### Religious Affiliation, Value, Attendance and Practices

Table 2 shows that more than two-thirds of the students attended religious services several times in a week and 88% indicated that religion is very important to them. About seven out of every ten students attended religious services regularly and had devotional daily prayers. More than half of them read their religious books (Bible or Koran) daily, 47% preached, while 40% indicated that they evangelised by distributing religious

leaflets. Nevertheless, there may be overlaps here, but it illustrates the religious fervour among the students. There is a high intensity of religious activity in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

### Premarital Sexual Attitudes and Behaviour

Table 3 shows that four-tenth of the students had had sex, 50% of the male and 34.5% of the female students had initiated sex. Boys initiated sex earlier than the girls (17 years for boys and 19 years for girls). This is in line with existing literature, although the Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey of 1999 reported that males initiate sex later than women by two years. Majority of the respondents reported that they had regular sexual partners for three months before the survey, with 71% of the females indicating same, more than the males. The female students had more regular sexual partners than the boys. This is interesting to note because the girls keep some of the men who could meet their financial needs while still keeping another for social outing. About one-

Table 2 Percentage Distribution of Respondents' Religious Affiliation, Attendance, Value and Practices, Nigeria

	Male	Female	Total
Religious attendance			
Never	2.1	1.9	2.0
A few times a month	17.7	8.3	12.8
Once a week	18.5	19.3	18.9
Several times a week	61.7	67.4	66.3
Importance of religion in life			
Not important	2.6	3.3	3.0
Somewhat important	9.6	5.1	7.3
Very important	87.0	89.5	88.3
Religious preferences			
Attend church regularly*	67.7	87.2	78.0
Read Bible daily*	49.0	67.6	58.8
Devote time to pray daily*	69.3	86.9	78.6
Preach the bible*	39.1	53.4	46.6
Distribute religious tracts*	36.5	43.1	40.0
Cares about what God thinks of me*	84.6	94.2	89.7

\* Significant at 95%

fifth had had sex with non-regular sex partners, especially the males. Condom was used by 36% of the sexually active students; one-third across the sexes.

Most of the students agreed that sexual intercourse should only take place in marriage (75% for males and 89% for females). One-third of them agreed that premarital adolescent sex could be allowed in a steady relationship if there is a commitment to marriage. Premarital adolescent sexual act, irrespective of marital status, was strongly approved by 74% of the respon-

dents. Sexual intercourse is to strengthen relationship (71%), to have children (70%) and to develop loving relationship (35%).

Examination of the ability of the students to initiate risk reduction showed that half of the females (more than the boys) claimed to have refused sexual intercourse with their sexual partner. One-third of the respondents, irrespective of the gender, claimed that they could refuse sex if their partner refuses to use condom, while 42% said they wouldn't use condoms with an intimate partner.

Table 3 Percentage Distribution of Campus Adolescents' Sexuality and Attitudes to Premarital Sexual Behaviour, Nigeria

Sexual attitude	Male	Female	Total
Sexual activity			
Ever had sexual contact	50.3	33.5	41.4
Mean age at first sex	17.0	19.0	17.7
Ever had regular sex partners?	59.6	70.6	64.1
Mean number of regular sex partners	1.0	1.8	1.5
Sex with non-regular partners	22.0	17.0	19.8
Mean number of non-regular sex mates	1.9	1.0	1.5
Used condoms	36.6	35.3	36.0
Had sex in the preceding two months	18.5	11.9	15.1
Sex only in marriage: conservative			
% agreed/approved	75.2	88.8	82.5
% disapproved	24.4	11.2	17.5
Sex only in marriage commitment: moderated opinion			
% disagreed/disapproved	68.8	68.2	68.5
% agreed/approved	31.2	31.8	31.5
Sex irrespective of commitment: radical			
% disagreed	36.9	15.8	25.8
% agreed	63.1	84.2	74.2
Purpose of sexual intercourse			
To strengthen relationship	69.3	73.2	71.4
To have children	67.3	72.5	70.1
To develop loving relationship	38.3	32.9	35.4
Perceptions of risk reduction			
Tell a partner I do not want sex	44.2	52.5	48.6
Can refuse sex if no condoms	30.2	32.4	31.4
Cannot use condom with an intimate partner	46.6	38.2	42.2
Sexual behaviour			
Had regular sex partner	59.6	70.6	64.1
Had sex with non-regular partner	51.3	17.3	36.4

## Religiosity and Sexual Behaviour

Table 4 shows that the religious variables are associated with initiation of sexual activity. It indicates that across the various religious factors, initiation of sexual activity was higher than current sexual behaviour with clear-cut differential in gender. The differences are statistically significant. More of the male students in the various religious categories had initiated sex, reported been currently sexually active, and had more sexual partners than female respondents.

## Religiosity and Sexual Attitudes

Clearly, religiosity correlates with sexual attitudes when gender is controlled. Those students who

reported being religious supported conservative attitude to sexual intercourse (that adolescent sexual intercourse should only be in marriage); were less likely to support both moderated and radical opinion to sex (any form of premarital sexual activity not based on legal marriage).

## Multivariate Analyses of Relationship between Religiosity, Sexual Attitudes and Adolescent Sexual Behaviour

Predictors of sexual initiation/debut in total sample

Examination of the combined samples indicates that those who belonged to the Pentecostal religious groups were two times more likely to have

Table 4 Distribution of Respondents' Sexual Initiation and Current Sexual Behaviour by Religiosity Controlling for Sex, Nigeria

	Sexual initiation		Sexual behaviour		Mean number of sexual partners		
	Male	Female	Current sexual activity	Male	Female	Male	Female
Religious affiliation							
Orthodox Christianity	48.9	35.3	16.9	12.1	1.7	1.1	
Pentecostal	50.0	40.5	6.5	11.9	1.6	1.1	
Islam	55.5	46.2	20.0	15.4	1.1	1.0	
Others	33.3	25.0	31.6	23.1	1.0	1.0	
Frequency at religious programs							
Never	50.0	28.6	16.7	15.4	2.0	1.0	
< 1 time per month	84.9	44.6	34.3	23.6	1.8	1.0	
Several times a week	55.6	55.1	8.65	9.4	2.6	1.4	
Value of religion							
Not important	66.7	35.7	25.0	13.6	2.3	1.0	
Somewhat important	74.3	57.1	42.5	36.7	2.2	1.2	
Very important	47.3	29.8	14.5	11.6	1.7	1.0	
Religious practices*							
Attends religious programmes frequently	47.5	30.0	13.3	10.9	1.7	1.0	
Reads Bible daily	43.0	29.8	10.4	6.5	1.4	1.0	
Devotional prayer daily	47.3	29.8	13.8	11.0	1.7	1.0	
Preaches the Bible	40.5	21.0	6.4	5.1	1.2	1.0	
Distributes tracts	38.4	19.3	9.3	6.6	1.5	1.0	
Care about what God thinks of me	53.4	33.6	17.2	13.0	1.8	1.0	

\* Significant at 95%



experienced sexual debut, while those from the Islamic religion were six times more likely to approve that sexual intercourse should only take place within marriage, relative to the reference category of orthodox Christianity. Although other variables were in the expected direction, they are insignificant.

However, attending religious services regularly, daily devotional prayer, evangelisation through preaching and distribution of religious leaflets or tracts, affected the initiation of sexual debut. Respondents who did not attend religious services regularly or involved in evangelical programmes were less likely to support adolescent sexual intercourse only in marriage.

The pattern of relationship between religious practices and approval of premarital sexual intercourse only if there is a marriage commitment is contrary to expectation. For instance, while those who did pray daily were less likely to approve of premarital sex except in marriage commitment, respondents who did not preach or distribute tracts were 2.5 and 1.6 times respectively more likely to have radical and moderate attitudes to sexual issues. Sexual debut negatively influenced respondents' support for sex only within marriage. Those who had ever had sexual intercourse were more likely to support premarital sex whether there is a marriage commitment or not.

Table 5 Percentage Distribution of Respondents' Religiosity by Sexual Attitudes Controlling for Sex, Nigeria

	Conservative attitude to sexual intercourse		Moderate attitude to sexual intercourse		Radical attitude to adolescent sex	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Attendance at religious services						
Never	63.5	70.0	62.5	60.0	71.4	83.9
Once a month	86.4	78.1	81.4	87.9	91.7	22.9
Few times a month	48.3	33.3	44.0	69.2	33.3	21.4
Once a week	39.6	21.1	38.7	49.2	38.6	25.0
Several times a week	74.1	70.0	25.1	25.1	14.4	5.4
Importance of religion						
Not important	70.5	54.5	33.3	100.0	33.3	14.3
Somewhat important	71.9	83.3	12.1	87.5	45.6	37.5
Very important	66.2	67.2	35.3	70.7	28.9	26.7
Religiosity						
Attends church regularly	73.5	87.9	28.6	31.1	20.5	10.2
Reads bible daily	82.6	92.5	24.1	24.4	11.6	5.8
Devotes time to pray daily	73.3	87.6	70.4	68.7	79.6	90.7
Preaches the Bible	86.2	93.1	80.0	83.6	90.4	96.7
Distributes tracts	85.0	94.9	76.7	86.9	89.4	98.2
Cares about what God thinks about me	67.6	85.0	68.5	67.2	74.4	88.3
Religious affiliation						
Christianity	24.1	13.2	27.8	32.2	59.8	75.8
Islam	23.4	10.2	38.3	38.5	56.3	69.2
Pentecostals	18.5	11.7	33.3	28.6	88.9	80.6
Others	33.3	21.4	9.1	100.0	—	100.0

## Predictors of sexual debut or initiation among male respondents

When adjusted with other factors, religious practice of tracts distribution or evangelisation became the only significant factor. Additional predictive variable was students' attitude to sexual issues. Those who strongly approved sexual activity only within marriage (conservative) were 75% less likely to engage in current sexual activity. On the other hand those who approved of sexual activity in a steady relationship with the promise of marriage (moderate) and those who approved of premarital sex irrespective of commitment to marriage (radical) were more likely to have engaged in sexual activity two months preceding the survey. Thus, respondents who had

moderate and radical views on adolescent sexuality were more likely to have initiated sex.

## Predictors of conservative attitudes to adolescents' premarital sex among male respondents

For the males, the unadjusted factors that affected male conservative attitudes to sexual activity included being an evangelical or Pentecostal Christian and all the religious practices, as those who engaged in them were more likely to be conservative in their opinion about sex. Those who had had sexual intercourse were less likely to support the view that sexual intercourse should be only in marriage. When adjusted, the critical factors were Islamic religion, practice of attending religious services regularly and sexual debut.

Table 6 Adjusted Logistic Odd Ratios for the Total Sample Predicting Sexual Debut, Attitudes to Premarital Sexuality and Current Sexual Behaviour of Campus-Based Adolescents in Nigeria

Religiosity variables	Outcome variables				
	Sexual initiation	Conservative attitude	Moderate attitude	Radical attitude	Current sexual behaviour
<b>Religious affiliation</b>					
Orthodox Christianity	RC	RC	RC	RC	RC
Pentecostal Christianity	2.1*	1.7	1.6	1.1	1.4
Islam	0.65	6.0*	1.5	0.72	1.50
Others	1.3	0.79	0.86	0.62	3.6
<b>Religious practices</b>					
Attends religious services regularly	1.9*	0.27*	0.68	0.93	1.2
Reads Bible daily	1.1	0.70	1.3	1.6	0.61
Devotes time to pray daily	1.9*	0.63	0.52*	0.87	0.67
Preaches the bible	1.8*	0.54*	2.5*	3.1*	1.56
Distributes tracts	1.9*	0.63	1.6*	1.2	3.1*
Sexual debut	–	0.27*	3.1*	7.1*	–
<b>Sexual attitudes</b>					
Conservative attitude	NA	NA	NA	NA	0.27*
Moderate attitude	NA	NA	NA	NA	2.2*
Radical attitude	NA	NA	NA	NA	2.7*
Chi-squared	129.3	256.9	151.7	199.9	71.6
p value	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

NA – Not applicable

### Predictors of moderate attitude to adolescent premarital sex among male respondents

For those with moderate attitude and opinion, the predictive factors were religious affiliation, attendance at religious services, frequency of services, religious practices and sexual debut. Those who did not attend religious services frequently were more likely to support sexual inter-course in a steady relationship with commitment to marriage.

### Predictors of radical attitude to adolescent premarital sex among male respondents

Religious affiliation and practices, and sexual debut were the unadjusted factors predicting respondents' attitudes to premarital sexual activity and sexual debut. When adjusted the factors were

religious practice of Bible reading, preaching and sexual debut. Those who were not religious were likely to support adolescent premarital sexual intercourse.

Predictors of current sexual activity for the male students included religious practices and sexual debut. When adjusted, the significant factors were value of religion to the individual, religious practice of evangelisation and sexual attitudes.

### Female Campus-Based Adolescents

#### Predictors of sexual debut

The adjusted predictors are Pentecostal Christianity, religious value as very important and religious practices of attending church regularly, praying and reading the Bible daily and tracts distribution.

Table 7 Predictors of Sexual Debut, Current Sexual Behaviour and Attitudes towards Sexual Intercourse in Male Adolescents in Nigerian University Campuses (adjusted OR at 95% CI)

Religious variables	Sexual Debut	Conservative attitude	Moderated attitude	Radical attitude	Current sexual behaviour
Religious affiliation					
Orthodox Christian groups	RC	RC	RC	RC	RC
Pentecostal/Evangelicals	1.6	3.9	2.0	0.97	1.37
Islam	0.91	3.6*	1.32	0.76	1.50
Others	1.76	0.5	0.89	0.17	3.61
Frequency of attendance at religious services					
Never	RC	RC	RC	RC	RC
Once a month	0.65	0.47	0.19*	1.2	1.5
Religious practices					
Attends service regularly	1.5	0.44	1.9	1.3	1.2
Reads the bible daily	1.14	0.56	1.2	2.9*	0.60
Daily devotional prayer	1.7	0.63	0.65	.5	0.67
Preaches daily	1.30	0.57	2.7*	2.9*	1.56
Distributes tracts	1.8*	0.66	0.82	0.79	3.1*
Sexual debut	NA	0.29*	1.84*	7.4*	7.1*
Attitudes to sexual act					
Conservative	NA	NA	NA	NA	0.25*
Moderated	NA	NA	NA	NA	2.2*
Radical	NA-	NA	NA	NA	2.7*

NA = not applicable; \*Significant variables

## Predictors of conservative attitude to adolescent sexual activity

The unadjusted factors for the female respondents are religious affiliation (Islamic and others) – these are less likely to have conservative opinion support that is relative to the reference category – the orthodox Christian groups. Those female students who engaged in religious practices and sexual debut were also less likely to be conservative. The adjusted factors include religious value, religious practice (attendance) and sexual debut.

## Predictors of moderate attitudes to adolescent sexual intercourse

The factors predicting adolescents' support for sexual activity in a steady relationship only when there is a marital commitment are religious value, two of the religious practices and sexual debut. When adjusted with other factors, the significant ones remain religious affiliation, value, practice and sexual debut. These all indicate that those who do not carry out those religious functions are less likely to support that adolescent should

Table 8 Predictors of Sexual Debut, Current Sexual Behaviour and Attitudes towards Sexual Intercourse in Female Adolescents (AOR 95%; CI 95%) in Nigerian University Campuses

Religious variables	Sexual debut	Conservative opinion	Moderate opinion	Radical opinion	Current sexual behaviour
Religious affiliation					
Orthodox Christian groups	RC	RC	RC	RC	RC
Islamic group	2.2*	0.83	1.5	1.4	3.4*
Pentecostals	0.39	5.4*	2.2	0.96	0.95
Others	0.75	-	5.1*	1.5	8.3*
Frequency of attendance at religious services					
Never	RC	RC	RC	RC	RC
Once a month	0.81	1.3	0.37	0.73	1.69
Value of religion					
Not important	RC	RC	RC	RC	RC
Somewhat important	1.1	6.3*	0.22	0.88	1.3
Very important	3.4*	NS	0.22*	0.88	1.3
Religious practices					
Attend service regularly	3.3*	0.064*	0.25*	.32*	2.7
Read the bible daily	1.03	0.92	1.5	1.1	2.9*
Devotion prayer daily	2.1*	0.64	0.49	1.6	1.7
Preach daily	2.2*	0.64	2.4*	3.1*	0.81
Distribute tracts	2.9*	0.44	2.9*	1.7	0.75
Sexual debut	NA	0.29*	7.5*	7.1*	7.2*
Attitudes to sexual act					
Approves sex only in marriage	NA	NA	NA	NA	0.33*
Approve sex in a marital commitment	NA	NA	NA	NA	1.9*
Approve premarital sex	NA	NA	NA	NA	2.8*
Chi-squared	79.02	115.4	166.9	94.2	62.21
p <	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

NA = Not applicable \*Significant

only have sexual intercourse if there is a commitment to marriage. Those students who had had sex were less likely to support the conditionality attached to it.

Predictors of female students' current sexual activity include religious affiliation, practices, sexual debut and sexual attitudes. When adjusted the factors that remain significant are religious affiliation, religious practice of Bible reading and sexual attitudes.

## Discussion and Conclusions

This analysis is consistent with expectations based on earlier studies and claims that pointed to the fact that religion affects positively adolescent sexuality and attitudes.<sup>13-19</sup> Campus-based adolescents in this study who were affiliated to some religious groups on the campus and engaged in some religious practices had less likelihood of initiating sexual intercourse, and having moderate opinion on adolescent sexual activity. The study also revealed that some aspects of religiosity affect sexual attitudes and behaviour more than the other. Religious practices had more important effect than religious affiliation.

This finding is pertinent, as it once again illustrates the powerful effect of religion, which is more evident of religious doctrines, and beliefs are lived out. Thus, religious practices of attending religious services frequently, daily exercises of bible reading and prayer, evangelisation measured by preaching and distribution of religious leaflets and tracts, are critical religious indicators that affect adolescent sexual debut, attitudes to premarital sexual activity, and engagement in current sexual behaviour.

The impact of religiosity was also noticed when we examined the effect of sexual initiation on sexual attitudes and current sexual behaviour. The study reveals that those who had engaged in premarital sexual debut were more likely to support premarital sexual intercourse irrespective of marital status. However, in current sexual behaviour, sexual attitudes and religious practice

of tracts distribution became the more critical factors than sexual debut. It also revealed that the religious practice of evangelisation, those sexual "debuters" were less likely to support premarital sex, a finding that is believed to be an index of the new change in lifestyle of respondents. It is expected that a student who changes his/her religion from orthodox to the new Pentecostal fundamentalist movements will adopt a new lifestyle commensurate with the teachings and doctrines of the new religion. The holy writs admonish this.

The reported sexual initiation by members of the Pentecostal groups may have been before their new religion or could be a problem of mixed multitude, for it is not out of place to have some of the students who are not seriously committed to their new religion. These are often regarded as 'wolf in sheep's clothing'. With the new religion, the initial sexual "debuters" will not support adolescent premarital sexual activity. All religions teach against premarital sexual intercourse. They encourage delay in sexual activity. This analysis has also shown that religious practice is a more important factor than religious affiliation in affecting adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviour in Nigeria, at least in these university communities.

The effect of religious practice does not depend so much on religious affiliation. This tends to show that one can be in any religious group provided s/he carries out the teachings and doctrines of the holy writs, s/he can be regarded as religious. This indicates strongly that participation and commitment to religious beliefs and practices rather than affiliation is more important in determining sexual attitudes and behaviour. All the major religions are opposed to the expression of sexuality outside marriage among young people to serve as a deterrent to the adoption of permissive attitudes and to prevent sexual activity. At the same time, all of the major groups are apparently sufficiently negative towards premarital sexuality, that young people of all religions who come to accept premarital

tal sex adjust their relationships with their religious organisations.<sup>13</sup> Regardless of gender, the impact of religion was noticeable in all the relationships. Thus, both the male and female adolescents in these university communities with no religious affiliation, with no religious practice, had higher rates of sexual activity and radical attitudes to premarital sexuality.

If religiosity can prevent adolescents from premarital sexual activity, it has a great implication for the current HIV/AIDS prevention activities in Nigeria. It has an important meaning for religious leaders and policymakers in Nigeria. For religious leaders, their present silence and non-involvement in HIV/AIDS prevention in Nigeria is dangerous. Religion is a powerful tool with which to address both the HIV and AIDS prevention. It plays central and integrating role in the social and cultural life of the people than the health workers. The voice of religious leaders is highly respected because of the moral authority they command. Green has observed that the role of religious organisations in some countries contributed to the current stabilisation of HIV/AIDS prevalence rate in those countries.<sup>25</sup> Policymakers should make conscientious efforts to mobilise religious leaders in this current drive. Religious leaders in their different corners are involved in various exciting innovative programmes that influence the life and health of their followers, and yet little is known about the effectiveness of these programmes on adolescents' attitudes and behaviour in relation to sex.<sup>26-28</sup>

Despite the evidence provided in this paper, research in this area is weak, particularly due to its lack of a strong theoretical base, lack of longitudinal studies as well as the challenge of applying experimental designs to religion and faith. This makes it difficult to fully differentiate the effect of religiosity on sexual behaviour from the effect of sexual behaviour on religiosity and/or the effect of other factors affecting both religiosity

and sexual behaviour. Because sexual behaviour will likely affect religiosity, as much as vice versa, this relationship can only be captured with a longitudinal survey design where participants are surveyed at various points in time.

There is need to include the role of ethnicity, parental characteristics, peer influence and community factors in future studies so that there will be a proper understanding of the complexity of the relationship between religiosity and sexuality. This paper could not control for the effect of region because of the small sample size from one of the regions. There is value in further exploring the connections between religion and adolescent sexual behaviour because of the great potential for faith-based organisations to reduce risky sexual behaviour through its emphasis on abstinence and fidelity. Nigeria and other countries ravaged by HIV/AIDS pandemic should pursue this course of action. Experiences in Uganda through the True Love Waits activities and Zambia via "Abstinence Ile Che" have lent credence that this line of approach will impact more on HIV/AIDS prevention than otherwise thought.<sup>30,31</sup>

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