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Interconnections Of Changing Gender Role, Socialisation And Youth Sexual Behaviour In Nigeria: Youth's View

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Liche C. Isingo-Ahannihe

Abstract

This paper presents a preliminary result in an ongoing study on the interface of the changes in gender roles and the socialisation process in the family and the impact on youth's sexual behaviour. Five Focus Group Discussions were organized among youths aged 12-24. Data were content analysed. The analysis reveals that women are increasingly taking on roles that were traditionally regarded as male roles. As a result, the socialisation of children, which used to be mainly the responsibility of women (themselves) in the family, is suffering neglect and this is having serious implications for youth's sexual behaviour. Therefore, it is imperative to promote sound sex education in the society using alternative media such as schools, religious centres and electronic news channels.

1.0 Introduction

Sex division of labour has been an integral aspect of the African family. Men are generally expected to act as the bread winners of the family, while women take care of household chores and take responsibility for the socialisation of children, especially in the areas of inculcating societal values and norms into children in order to shape their behaviour (Adepoju and Mbugwa 1997). However, in the last few decades in Africa, gender roles have witnessed significant transformations such

as men do not only work outside the home but they are increasingly involved in occupations that are highly demanding, which was male domain (Adepoju et al. 2002). What are the effects of this change on socialisation processes in the family? Could the changes occurring in gender roles in the family explain the high prevalence of pre-marital sex and risky sexual behaviour among youths?

Youths are generally characterized by risky behaviour. Early sexual initiation and pre-marital sex are very grave components of risk-taking behaviour, common among young persons (Nzioka 2004). Pre-marital sexual activity among youths in sub-Saharan Africa is about the highest in the developing world – 29 percent, while it is 24 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean, and negligible in Asia (Zidar et al. 2003). In surveys conducted in various parts of the region, it is reported that about 50 percent or more of adolescents interviewed had had sexual intercourse (Karim et al. 2003, Kofi et al. 2003 and Singh et al. 2000). In Nigeria, the 2003 National Demographic and Health Survey put the prevalence of sexual initiation among adolescents (aged 15-19) at 20 to 40 percent (National Population Commission (NPC) 2004). Exposure to premarital sex in the country is positively related with age, from less than 10 percent up to age 15 to 77 percent at age 24 (Isingo-Ahannihe 2004).

The devastating effects of this pattern of behaviour on their sexual and reproductive health underscore its gravity. The Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) as well as Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) constitute dreadful consequences of illicit sexual activity among young people. In the first place, heterosexual intercourse is considered the major means of transmitting HIV and STIs (Matte et al. 2004 and Kiragu 2001). The fact that contraceptive prevalence among this population is very low compounds the problem (Mbugua 2004, Karim et al. 2003, Mbizvo et al. 2003 and NPC 2000); such that over 70 percent of infections are likely through unprotected heterosexual intercourse

(Gordon and Crehan 2000). Other consequences of youths' sexual behaviour such as unwanted pregnancy, abortion, premature childbearing and parenting make the problem a societal burden that demands solution.

Youth's indulgence in risk-taking behaviour is considered in relation to "the break in the link with society suffered at this stage and risk-taking is an attempt to rediscover and assert their place in the society" (Le Breton 2004: 3). The predominance of premarital sex and risky sexual life among young persons has been explained in terms of curiosity or the desire to gain experience (Rani, Figueroa and Ainsle 2003 and Isiugo-Abanihe 1994); some other studies have also identified peer pressure, promise of marriage and quest for material gain (Mbugua 2004, Otoide, Oransaye and Okonofua 2001 and Rwenge 2003). Abraham and Kumar (1999) posit that the strongest predictors of youth sexual behaviour are knowledge about sexually-related issues, attitudes toward sex, and levels of interaction and exposure to erotic materials.

Only a few studies have examined the effects of family level variables on the sexual behaviour of young persons and even among the few, the coast is not yet clear. Some studies have reported the existence of significant relationship between parental monitoring and the sexual life of young people (The Alan Guttmacher Institute 2003, Le Breton 2004 and Rwenge 2000). On the other hand some research findings have indicated that family related variables are not significant factors in the sexual behaviour of youths (Abraham and Kumar 1999). Mbugua (2004) shows that there is no clear pattern of the effect of such variables because, while parental monitoring is significantly negatively related to risky sexual behaviour among females, it is not statistically significant among males. Obviously, the limited literature available lacks agreement on the effect of family level variables on the sexual behaviour of youths. It is therefore imperative to examine the role of parents in shaping the sexual behaviour of their offspring. Against this background, this study is an exploratory attempt, at examining the implications of the changes taking place in gender roles in the family in

the study population for socialization and consequent high rate of premarital sex and risky sexual activities among young people.

Data and Method

The study was carried out in Badagry Township of south-western Nigeria. Badagry is an ancient boarder town popular for her association with slavery and the site of the first story building in Nigeria. The town consists of eight major streets that are generally referred to as Quarters. Badagry Township is more of a sub-urban settlement harbouring mainly the Ogu (Egun-speaking people) and migrants from other parts of the country and other countries. Based on the 1991 census, the population of the Township was projected to 34,307.

Qualitative research method was adopted to explore the relationship between changing gender role and socialisation and the effects on youth's sexual health behaviour. Five Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were organized in the study location; three among males and two among their female counterparts. Participants were purposefully chosen. The FGD were limited to five because the study was meant to be a pilot exploratory exercise and the study location is largely a homogenous community, in terms of socio-economic characteristics. Basic descriptions of the participants of the FGDs are presented in table 1. The author was the facilitator of the discussions, while a field assistant acted as the note taker and all the discussions were tape recorded. Series of leading and probing questions were raised, while participants were constantly encouraged to share not only their own experiences but that of other youths in the community.

The analysis was handled mechanically in order to get a good grasp of the underlying interconnections about the subject matter. The taped version of the raw data was transcribed and compared with the notes to generate comprehensive data. From a thorough survey through the data, main categories were identified. Elements of the data were coded and grouped under the categories. The main points of consensus among the participants were summarised, while divergent views were

noted. Critical observation of the relationships between and among the categories informs the result and discussion presented in the next sections. Striking expressions were selected during data transformation and are presented to demonstrate evidence.

Table 1: Characteristics of Participants of FGDs

Group number	Participants	Average age	Sex	Highest Educational Attainment
1	6	23	Male	OND
2	7	20	Male	SSCE
3	6	23	Female	OND
4	6	15	Male	SSCE
5	7	20	Female	SSCE

OND- Ordinary National Diploma

SSCE- Senior School Certificate of Education

3.0 Result

The preliminary findings of the interconnections of changing gender roles, socialization and youth sexual behaviour are presented in three sub-sections.

3.1 Gender and Socialisation

The participants were of the opinion that men are no longer the sole breadwinners in the family; rather both husbands and wives are involved in the search for livelihood. Both men and women now pick up formal employment or engage in time taking businesses, which take them away from home quite often. It was a consensus among the participants of the FGD that women are increasingly playing active economic roles away from home. This implies women play multiple roles in the home, some

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... in the family Youth's View

women work away from home and at the same time it is expected of them to take charge of household chores of which the socialisation of children is crucial. Some striking expressions from the FGD are quoted below to buttress this point:

It is no longer only men that now work away from home, mothers are increasingly working away from home. The demands of household needs now propel women to struggle outside in order to contribute directly to household budget (a female youth).

Providing for the needs of the family is now the duty of both men and women in the family. As a result little or no time is now devoted to children (a male youth).

In the last few decades it has been observed that women are increasingly taking up roles traditionally reserved for men such as taking up formal employment, which take them away from home. However, men count it a set back to take up the traditional roles of women (Munguti *et al.* 2002). Effective socialisation of young people in the family is likely suffering neglect as a consequence of this development. The outcry of the majority of the FGDs' participants is that owing to economic hardships prevailing in the country, both parents work away from home, while young people are left without proper guidance and monitoring. The views of some participants in the group discussions are given below to support these issues:

Generally, mothers are the ones responsible for the shaping of the lives of young children. Although fathers contribute to the process, but mothers cover 90 percent of the socialisation

duties in the family. Fathers do not have time for children; they abandon them to their mothers (a female participant).

Mothers are no longer effective agents of socialisation; they work away from home to ensure the needs of the family are met. So, they do not give enough time to children to inculcate good values and norms into them (a female youth).

Women who work within or around the home are likely to create time for their children but these days most mothers are engrossed in their work, even if their work place/ business are around the home, they do not give quality time to caring for the welfare of their children (a male participant).

The love of money which is in vogue in our society take parents away from home and makes it impossible for them to give quality time to young people. So, socialisation which is a cardinal responsibility expected of the family is now being neglected in most homes (a male youth).

Some mothers work away from home but yet create time for the whole process of socializing their children. The majority is however very busy away from home, undermining their duties as care givers to the members of the family (a female participant).

2. Socialisation and Youth Sexual Behaviour

The main proposition of the study was to examine the relationship between household socialisation and youth sexual behaviour. In the Focus Group Discussions, some participants opined that parental care in terms of inculcating societal values guiding sexual activities do not event on the nature of sexual behaviour they adopt. That whether parents create time for their children or not, whether they monitor them or not, children who would want to indulge in risky sexual behaviour will still go ahead.

It was also opined by some participants that if parents take time to inculcate societal values and norms on sex into children when they are young, the probability that such children would not indulge in illicit sexual behaviour later in life is high. It was a consensus among participants that because parents consider sex sacred, it is an abomination to discuss it with young people. They based their argument on the wrong notion that discussing sex has the tendency to promote sexual experimentation among young people. Hence, household socialisation process lacks the major ingredient that can impact positively on the sexual life of young people. The following are some of the expressions extracted from the FGD to drive home this discourse.

Mothers who spent quality time in shaping their children when they are young make indelible impact on their life that tends to influence their sexual life all through life (a female youth).

Parents do not talk to young people about sexual education because it is their belief that doing so may have negative effect on their sexual life (a male youth).

Most parents do not really educate their children sexually. They only put fear into them about the

possibility of pregnancy immediately there is contact between opposite sex. When young people try it once and discover pregnancy does not occur, they go very deep (a male participant).

Some parents do not discuss sex with their children because of the fear that young persons are likely to experiment it, so they make it look sacred, that it should not be talked about (a female youth).

Parents' avoidance of their children's sexual education is another key factor that exposes them to other sources of negative information about sex (a female participant)

3.3 Context of Youth sexual behaviour

Contrary to the proposition that changes in gender roles in the family is responsible for the prevalence of risky sexual practices among young persons, it is apparent from previous sections that the interaction between gender roles and household socialisation cannot wholly explain youth sexual behaviour. In fact some participants were of the opinion that other forces are exacting stronger influence on young people than parental influence. Therefore, in this section, an attempt is made at identifying from the data, the factors that are really shaping youth sexual behaviour in the study area.

In the focus group discussions, it was a consensus that a fundamental factor underlying the risky sexual behaviour prevalent among youths nowadays, is the failure of the society to uphold traditional sexual values and norms. The group participants opined that the society is gradually accepting sexual looseness characterizing the

which of nowadays; that most of the risky sexual behaviour that were not practiced in the secret are done openly today without any fear of being rebuked or corrected. The indifference of the older generation in the society about premarital sex, for instance, suggests societal approval, which is crucial to the promotion of such practices in the society. This is in contrast to what was obtainable in the past, where such practices attracted sanctions not only from parents but even other elderly members of the society.

In fact, according to the FGD, the elderly, who should be role models, encourage unhealthy sexual practices among the youth by offering money to lure young boys and girls into pre-marital sex. The respondents chorused "Aristo" as a common practice wherein an elderly person maintain sexual relationship with young opposite sex (youth). The basis for luring young persons into such relationship is a promise of monetary or material gain. Since sex is the major goal of the older sexual partners, which is more often done unprotected, young people are exposed to reproductive health hazards. Their disadvantaged position in terms of poverty makes it difficult for them to resist. It was also a common view among the participants that some parents encourage their wards to engage in risky sexual practices for monetary and material gain; especially single mothers, who mount pressure on their young girls to go into unhealthy sex for the said benefits. So, those who are supposed to be custodians of sound sexual values are promoting societal sexual ills. The expressions given below demonstrate the perceptions of the respondents on this problem.

The indifference of some parents and the society indicates that sexual looseness has gained societal acceptance and this is promoting risky sexual practices among young persons (a male participant).

The practice of "Aristo" is gaining popularity; this is an important way of exacerbating risky sexual practices among youths. The older generation who are supposed to be role models lure young boys and girls into sex at the risk of reproductive health hazards (a male youth).

Pre-marital sex is now very common among youths and they do it openly unlike in the past when such things were done secretly (a female participant).

As a result of the high level of poverty in the society, many parents cannot afford the modern taste of most young people and young persons go for assistance from men or women who often give the condition of having sex with them. Even boys are enticed into sex by older women (single parents and widows) for monetary gain (a male youth).

Adults who run after young girls push them into casual sex. Because of the desire for the monetary gain often offered by such adults most youths disregard the risk of HIV/AIDS and STIs (a male participant).

Some parents (especially mothers) push (at times help to lure) their young daughters into having sex with older men, especially politicians and rich men (a female youth).

Some mothers encourage their young children to engage in organized prostitution because of the monetary and material gain (a male youth).

Three other crucial factors that were commonly acknowledged among the participants in the FGDs that are variously interconnected with youth sexual behaviour are peer influence, cultural globalization and internet resources. In all the group discussions, the role of peer influence in shaping the sexual behaviour of young persons was identified in various forms: it is the source of sexual information, which is generally negatively oriented; it is among peer group that sexual partners are negotiated to experiment pre-marital sex; virgins are scorned to initiate pre-mature sex. Electronic and print media have removed cultural boundaries in the present global village - cultural globalization. It was a consensus among participants that the influence of western cultural practices on the Nigerian society is exacting strong negative impact on youth sexual life. In all the discussions, the current sexual liberalization prevailing in the country was attributed to western cultural influence. The internet has turned to a sexual market, where youth explore various risky sexual practices and learn latest unhealthy sexual innovations. Some other factors influencing youth's sexual behaviour identified by the participants include the fact that children spend more time in schools than they spend with their parents and most children pick up bad sexual habit from schools, especially from boarding houses. Sexy films, through which risky sexual practices are learnt; pornographic materials, emotional television programs and electronic family planning advertisements are among others. Given below are direct quotations from the FGDs to illustrate these positions.

Peer influence is an important determinant in shaping youth sexual characteristics. Most of us got involved in risky sexual life through the pressure of friends. Some of us got initiated into

pre-marital sex forcefully by our friends (a male participant).

Peer pressure is a significant factor in sexual life style of young persons. Male friends' pressure is a very strong factor in the involvement of young girls in pre-marital sex. Male friends mount pressure on us until we give in and once you taste it, it is very difficult to stop having sex (a female participant).

Some parents do not have time to educate their children on their sexual life, so they depend on their peer group members where they are taught how to indulge in pre-marital sex (a female participant)

It is not parents having more time, western culture is having stronger influence on young people's sexual behaviour than parental influence (a female youth)

We youth get a lot of sexual related information through blue films, television and various sex sensitizing websites on the internet (a male participant)

Parents cannot really stop sex among young people because nowadays children spend more time outside the home (a male participant)

Advert messages on condom tend to promoting pre-marital sexual activities among young people (a male participant)

Blue films, pornographic materials and the internet have turned sex to a very common thing among youths nowadays. Casual sex is now a norm, there is no big deal there (a female youth).

4.0 Discussion

Until recently, sex division of labour has been an integral aspect of life in African family. Men were the main breadwinners, while women were saddled with domestic responsibilities; an important component of the domestic responsibilities of women is caring for family members (Adepoju and Mbugwa 1997). Men as breadwinners could work away from home; if women would work at all they engaged in activities that could be carried out within or around the home. Women were encouraged to concentrate on household chores and the socialisation and monitoring of young children. Basically, women are traditionally saddled with the duty of inculcating values and norms into children. In the last few decades this division of labour in the family in terms of gender roles has virtually disappeared in the country. Women educational attainment in Nigeria has soared over the years; consequently gender inequality in formal employment has drastically declined in the country.

The economic hardship prevailing in the country is gradually making it a norm for women to make substantial contribution to household budget in order to cater adequately for family needs. Thus women are increasingly taking up roles that were traditionally the domain of men. Nevertheless, female dominated responsibilities in the family such as household chores, socialisation of children and

childbearing are rarely shared by men. In other words, while women are taking up formally male roles it is likely that men find it derogatory to share roles that were traditionally recognized as female domain (Munguti et al. 2002). By extension it is expected of women to play multiple roles in the family. Obviously, since women are the significant agents of socialisation in the family and they have to carry out multiple roles in the family, they cannot provide adequate time to care in terms of socialisation and monitoring of young children. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that men "spend less time at home and thus difficult to be effectively involved in the socialisation process.

It is insightful to note that even though women don't have sufficient time to care for young people in terms of socializing them and monitoring their sexual life, it is not the sole factor responsible for the ubiquity of pre-marital sex and risky sexual behaviour among youths in the cotemporary Nigerian society. That it is possible for both parents to really socialize their children and consistently monitor them and yet such children could be victims of the consequences of pre-marital sex and risky sexual behaviour. Thus this result is in partial agreement with the reports of some earlier studies that family level variables are not significantly related to the sexual behaviour of youths (Abraham and Kumar 1999; Mbugua 2004). The support of this result for the earlier findings is partial because it was made clear that in the context of African society, sex is considered as a sacred issue and it should not be discussed with young persons to prevent them from experimenting sex prematurely. As a result the main ingredient that should make socialisation an important factor in shaping youths' sexual life is lacking. In other words, if sex education is given adequate attention in the family, it is very likely that family level variables such as socialisation and child monitoring are likely to become crucial in shaping young people sexual behaviour.

Although the result indicated, there are other agents of socialisation that are exacting stronger influence on youth sexual behaviour in the contemporary Nigerian society. It is important to note

that the neglect of sex education to young persons at the level of the family is likely to condition them to seek information about sex from other sources (Jegede and Odumosu 2003). And this other sources in most cases supply negative information, which triggers sexual emotions and consequently promote risky sexual practices among young people. In essence the level of pre-marital sex and risky sexual practices among youths is a function of the interconnections between the neglect of sex education in the family and other factors; such as peer group influence, the diffusion of western liberal sexual culture, subtle approval of the society and bad models from older generation, internet resources and pornographic materials; Abraham and Kumar (1999) had identified some of these factors in a study conducted in Mumbai city, India. So, a sound comprehension of the interconnections between socialisation and other factors influencing youth sexual practices is imperative to the explanation of sexual behaviour among young people.

Finally, although this is a purely exploratory study that has yielded quite insightful results, the results and explanations should be taken with some cautions. Just like any other qualitative methods, FGD participants are not representative of the study population owing to the sampling procedure usually adopted and so generalisation could be misleading. Quantitative study is ongoing to further examine the interconnections.

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