

Unmarried adolescents in Nigeria have become more sexually active over the past decade. Data are available from Nigeria's 1990 National Demographic and Health Survey for 1678 unmarried female adolescents aged 15-19 years. 1104 of these young women were unmarried at the time of the survey. 26.4% of the unmarried women were sexually active at the time of the survey, 67.5% of whom had unprotected coitus. Analysis of the survey data found that adolescents became 1.5 times more likely to be sexually active as they moved from one age to another. Adolescents with an average knowledge of contraception were twelve times more likely to be sexually active than those with no knowledge. The author notes with regard to this finding that engaging in sexual intercourse is more likely to encourage a search for information on contraceptives rather than the reverse. Women with average knowledge had a lower probability of contraceptive use than those with a low level of knowledge. Knowledge of contraceptives is a necessary but not sufficient condition for use, especially given the experimental and sporadic sex lives of growing adolescents. Friends were the preferred source of information on contraceptive use. Finally, educational status, residence, and region were found to be only indirectly associated with sexual intercourse. In the interest of developing positive attitudes among adolescents toward contraceptive use, the author recommends educating parents through the mass media and at Parents Teachers Association meetings on the realities of adolescence and the need to provide their children with information on sexuality, having health educators to work with teachers in schools to develop curricula and skills to convey family life and sex education to children and adolescents, recruiting and training adolescent peer educators on family life and sex education, and establishing adolescent units within existing family planning clinics across the country. A strong commitment to program success is needed from the government and health workers.