

## **The role of the environment in the sexual activity of school students in Tororo and Pallisa districts of Uganda \***



**Jeremiahs M. Twa-Twa**

*Uganda Medical and Dental Practitioners Council, P.O. Box 16115, Wandegaya, Uganda*

### **Abstract**

Several models of adolescent sexual activity have previously been published and most of them suggest two basic components, biological and sociological. This article highlights important environmental factors in shaping the sexual behaviour of the school-going youth in Uganda. Students in education levels Senior 1 to 6 participated in the study. Information was collected from self-response structured questionnaires, focus-group discussions, and discussions with teachers. Student respondents were randomly selected.

The study found that 65 per cent of male and 32 per cent of the female unmarried secondary school students had sexual experience. Of the sexually active youth, 49 per cent of the males and 25 per cent of the females had multiple sexual partners. Four main environmental factors appear to be important in shaping school students' sexual activity in Uganda today: parental care, peer influence, economic factors and AIDS education. Some elements accelerate and others suppress sexual activity.

Sexual activity of young people aged 10-24 years is a subject of greater concern to Uganda today than ever before. Its nature and magnitude need to be clearly understood. Uganda like the rest of Africa is undergoing modernization and socio-economic transformation, processes which have direct and indirect effects on sexual activity patterns. Another important factor is the rate of transmission of the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) in this age group. Available epidemiological data show that ten per cent of the Ugandan population is infected with HIV with peak prevalence among those aged 15-29 (STD/AIDS Control Programme 1990). As HIV has an average incubation period of five years in sub-Saharan Africa, it is possible to extrapolate the peak age at infection to be 10-24 years.

This implies a demographic catastrophe since the clinical consequences of HIV, commonly known as Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS), have no cure yet. Since the school students represent economic, social and political security for families, ethnic groups and the nation, their infection with HIV and subsequent mortality spells doom for Uganda and many other sub-Saharan areas.

Several studies in Uganda show a high rate of sexual activity among school students (Kisekka 1976; Bagarukayo et al. 1993; Twa-Twa 1995), including homosexuality. They are not married and are most unlikely to stick to one sexual partner faithfully, nor are they likely to abstain from sex until marriage. Furthermore, in Uganda, as elsewhere in Africa,

---

\* This study was funded by a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation to the Institute of Statistics and Applied Economics, Makerere University. I am thankful to the reviewers for suggestions and comments made on a draft of this article; and to Mrs M. Nyombi for her secretarial services.

condom use promotion among school students is constrained by traditional cultures and religion. Because for adults and children to discuss sex has been a taboo for most cultures, schoolchildren who are sexually active engage in unsafe sex with disastrous consequences. Evidence includes the high prevalence of pregnancy and induced abortion among schoolgirls and the reported high rates of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and HIV among the age group 15-29 years (STD/AIDS Control Programme 1990; Twa-Twa 1995).

Government reaction to school student sexual activity and HIV/AIDS has taken several forms. There has been a full-fledged STD/HIV/AIDS Control Programme since 1987 and it is one of the best in the world. A key strategy of the program includes an extensive health education campaign to inform the public about the mode of transmission of HIV and ways of avoiding it. A School Health Education Project for primary and secondary schools, begun in 1987, covers AIDS-related topics (Owor 1992).

### **Conceptual framework**

Several models of adolescent sexual activity have been previously published. Most of them suggest two basic components, biological and sociological models (Udry 1986; Hofferth and Hayes 1987). The biological models are based on the effects of hormones, especially androgens (Bancroft and Skakkebaek 1978). On the other hand, the sociological models propose that libido or sexual motivation is generated by social processes and that hormones play the single role of producing pubertal developmental which signals readiness for sexual intercourse (Hofferth and Hayes 1987).

The conceptual framework of this paper is a sociological model adapted from that of Petersen and Taylor (1980) and that of Hofferth and Hayes (1987). The model assumes the importance of the bio-physiological component of sexuality, 'anatomical growth and physiological development', and concentrates on the role of social environment in adolescent sexual activity.

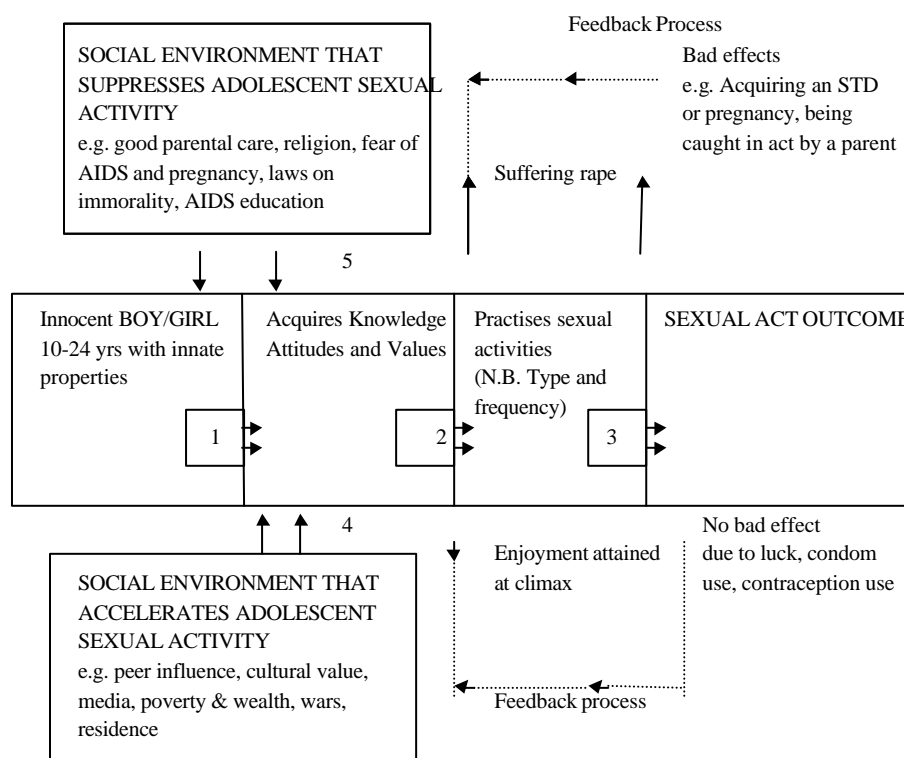
From Figure 1 it can be seen that the central axis of the sociological model is the individual with his or her innate bio-physiological properties namely genes, sex, age, hormones, primary and secondary sex characteristics. In this model these are assumed and their role in sexuality is kept in the background as constant factors since their investigation was not the domain of this study.

As the individual grows, motor and bio-physiological maturation takes place and sex hormones prepare for social factors to act. Once the first sexual act takes place, usually at about puberty, the individual is primed towards a sex wanting and learning threshold which is maximized by the social environment.

The social environment plays an important role in adolescent sexuality through socialization, verbal and sign communication, modelling, sanctioning and internalization of norms and values. From the model, the social environment has two main opposed forces: one component accelerates sexual activity while the other suppresses or reduces it.

The factors which accelerate sexual activity work through a reward phenomenon of beauty or physical attractiveness, pleasure from orgasm, material gains, the need to pass examinations, get jobs, or merely survive (as may be the case with children from poor homes who rent rooms on their own in trading centres near their schools). This reward phenomenon is exploited by the social environment in the form of friendship networks (peer influence) and persons with money, the so-called 'sugar-daddies' and 'sugar-mummies'.

**Figure 1**  
**The sociological model of adolescent sexual behaviour**



- Process 1: Acquisition of sexual knowledge, attitudes and values  
 Process 2: Initiation of sexual behaviour and practices; and subsequent maintenance of sexual practices  
 Process 3: Development of consequences such as HIV/STDs, pregnancy, or no consequences. This also provides a feedback within the individual (6 and 7) to give in or not to society's demands for sex.  
 Process 4: Feedback mechanism through social factors that accelerate adolescent sexuality.  
 Process 5: Feedback mechanism through social factors that reduce or suppress adolescent sexual activity.

Source: Twa-Twa (1994)

Other factors that accelerate sexual activity include type of residence, displacement or mobility, wars, work, and culture as a people's way of life, their norms, and beliefs about sex. Also, the forces of modernization have augmented the sociological component of adolescent sex through good nutrition, good clothing, perfumes, videos, dances, pornography, beauty contests and peer-group modelling which have improved the physical appearance and sexual imagination. In addition, there are feedback factors which accelerate sexual activity, such as previous successful sexual experience without bad consequences, and perhaps condom use and the use of contraception. The role of condoms and contraception in accelerating sexual activity is not clear and needs to be studied. These accelerating factors of the model predominate over the suppressing factors during adolescence.

The factors that work to suppress student sexual activity include good parental care, religion, fear of pregnancy and STDs, government policies and laws on immorality, and knowledge acquired through STD/AIDS control programs.

Religion has done a lot to tame human society. The teaching of the sixth commandment, 'Thou shalt not commit adultery', has a positive value in reducing premarital and extramarital sexual activity. Similarly, good parental care with correct child upbringing and assertiveness have a positive value in reducing adolescent sexual activity. Children who grow up with responsible parents are less likely to manifest excesses in sexual behaviour than those who lack responsible parents. Government policies on sexual immorality, and STD/AIDS control programs supplement good parental care and religious moral teachings.

### **Study design**

This is a cross-sectional study, about sexual behaviour of youth attending secondary schools in the Tororo and Pallisa districts of Uganda. A combination of structured precoded questionnaires and unstructured interviews was used. The structured interviews included focus-group discussions with male and female students as well as discussions with head-teachers. The data were analysed by descriptive and logistic regression methods.

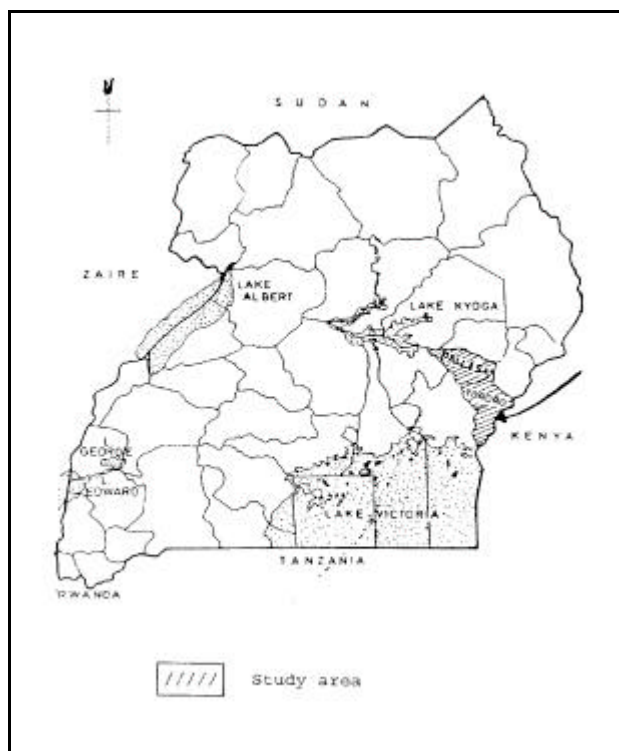
The sample consisted of 720 students drawn from secondary schools in the Tororo and Pallisa districts of Eastern Uganda (see Figure 2). A total of 670 respondents answered structured questionnaires and 50 participated in focus-group discussions. Fourteen secondary schools participated. The sample was stratified by sex of students.

### **Results and discussion**

#### ***Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample***

The data presented were collected from 720 secondary-school students in Tororo and Pallisa districts of Eastern Uganda in 1993 (see Figure 2). The 1991 Population and Housing Census shows that the area is multi-ethnic with a total population of 913,230 and annual population growth rate of 2.9 per cent. Of the total population, about 70 per cent are Bantu-speaking and 30 per cent are Nilotics; 45 per cent are Protestants, 34 per cent Catholics and 15 per cent Muslims. The area has an overall sex ratio of 96. Table 1 shows that 6.2 per cent of those aged 10-24 years are enrolled in senior secondary, 20.3 per cent in primary 4 to 7 and 73.5 per cent are not at school. The school enrolment sex ratio is in favour of males with increasing level of education. Only 31 per cent of the 10-24 year age group in secondary schools are females.

**Figure 2**  
Map of Uganda showing Tororo and Pallisa districts



**Table 1**  
Percentage aged 10-24 years enrolled at primary and secondary education levels

Education level	Males %	Females %	Total %
Enrolled in Secondary	8.9	3.8	6.2
Enrolled in Primary 4-7	24.9	16.2	20.3
Not at school	66.2	80.0	73.5
Total population aged 10-24 years (N)	142,481	150,793	293,274

Source: The Republic of Uganda Population and Housing Census 1991.

Table 2 shows the social and demographic characteristics of the sample made up of 48 per cent males and 52 per cent females with a mean age of 16.8 for males and 15.5 for females. Most of the female students (78%) had already passed menarche with a mean age at menarche of 14.4 years. The majority (62%) were Bantu speaking; 76 per cent had their origin in Tororo-Pallisa district and 24 per cent came from elsewhere in Uganda. There were more girls (31%) who came from other districts than boys (16%). The distribution of the sample by religion was close to the district figures reported in the 1991 population census: 52 per cent were Protestants, 36 per cent Catholics and 12 per cent Muslims.

**Table 2**  
**Social and demographic characteristics of the sample**

Variable	Males (N= 322)	Females (N= 348)	Total (N= 670)
Age group	%	%	%
10-14	13.4	21.6	17.5
15-19	70.1	67.2	68.6
20-24	16.5	11.2	13.8
Education			
P5-P7	-	-	-
S1-S2	49.4	48.6	49.0
S3-S4	41.6	43.6	42.7
S5-S6	9.0	7.8	8.3
Religion			
Catholics	36.9	35.7	36.0
Protestants	53.0	52.3	52.0
Muslims	10.1	12.0	12.0
Ethnic group			
Bantu	65.7	59.2	62.5
Non-Bantu	34.3	40.8	37.5
Origin			
Tororo/Pallisa	83.3	68.7	75.6
Elsewhere	16.7	31.3	24.4

### Age-sex differentials

Table 3 shows sexual experience of students by sex and age. The rates of those who ever had sexual intercourse and those having two or more sexual partners were higher among male than female students and increase with age. The logistic regression in Table 4 shows that males were more likely to have had sexual intercourse. These findings are in agreement with the findings of previous studies based on school students and general adolescent studies in Africa (Bleek 1976; Kisekka 1976; Sekadde-Kigundu et al. 1991; Agyei and Epema 1992; Konde-Lule 1993).

The male-female differential in sexual activity is difficult to explain but previous studies have attempted to explain it through both biological and social concepts. While it is generally agreed that both interest in and practice of sex among males are hormonally influenced, in females the social environment appears to play a more significant role (Hofferth and Hayes 1987).

Several reasons can explain this observation in our sample. First, the boys were generally older than the girls. Secondly, more boys than girls were smokers and consumed alcohol, factors which have been found to have a bearing on sexual activity. Thirdly, peer influence may be stronger in males than females because of a male-dominated society where it is the male who is supposed to initiate love or sex. It is the males who will normally look for conquests to satisfy their ego. Furthermore, boys are more free than girls to live on their own early; and most likely to experiment with sex. Another explanation is that girls who get intensely involved in early sex drop out of school through marriage, pregnancy or death as a consequence of sexual activity and are therefore not represented in this sample.

**Table 3**  
Sexual experience of students by age and sex

Sexual experience	Male Students				Female Students			
	11-14	15-19	20-24	All	11-14	15-19	20-24	All
N	43	250	49	322	75	239	34	348
Ever masturbated	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Yes	5	14	31	18	6	12	20	12
No response	14	16	12	15	28	13	27	17
Ever had sexual intercourse								
Yes	47	55	91	6	16	27	71	32
No response	7	8	4		13	6	17	9
Sexually active last 3 months								
Yes	40	43	42	42	46	29	30	31
No response	15	12	7	12	13	20	22	28
Number of sex partners (1992)								
Only one	43	44	59	51	75	79	69	75
Two plus	57	56	41	49	25	21	31	25
Condom use in recent sex								
Yes	15	20	21	20	9	24	28	2
No response	5	4	7	5	64	14	22	21

**Table 4**  
Results of the Logistic Regression model applied to variable 'ever had sexual intercourse'

Variable	B	Wald	Df	Sig	R	exp(B)
S	3.6689	13.1360	1	0.0003	0.2628	39.2079
P	-2.6441	10.0502	1	0.0015	-0.2234	0.0711
V	2.6441	9.9255	1	0.0016	0.2217	8.6196
Constant	-1.9369	4.5934	1	0.0321		

Note: Reference categories which were coded '0' in this logistic regression are: sex (female), took precautions about AIDS, and did not visit boy/girlfriend.

S = Sex (male), P = Precautions taken about AIDS, V = Visited boy/girlfriend last holidays.

The logistic regression model in Table 4 shows that the most significant predictor variables for having ever had sexual intercourse are sex, visited boy or girlfriend last holidays, precautions taken about AIDS. Male students were more likely to have had sexual intercourse than female students. Similarly students who visited boy or girlfriends last holidays were more likely to have had sexual intercourse than those who did not visit them. On the other hand, students who reported that they had taken precautions about AIDS were less likely to have ever had sexual intercourse which if true is an encouraging finding.

#### **Initiation of sexual activity**

Table 5 shows initiation of sexual activity among students. Among girls, the earliest reported age for initiation of sexual intercourse was eight years, but the mean age for first sexual intercourse was 16.1 years for boys and 16.6 years for girls. Other adolescent sexuality and fertility studies conducted in the region among the general public have found the mean

age of first sexual intercourse to be around 15.1 years (Agyei et al. 1992). This finding therefore means that going to school may help to delay sexual activity.

**Table 5**  
**Age range and mean ages of first sexual activity among students**

Sexual Activity	Age range	Mean Age		
	All sexes	Males	Females	All
Masturbation	11-22	15.4	14.3	15.3
Kissing	8-23	15.8	15.9	14.7
Embrace	8-23	16.2	15.8	15.7
Sexual intercourse	7-23	16.1	16.6	15.8

The focus-group discussions show that the first sexual act usually involves a slightly older male, and both male and female partners are usually familiar with each other. They are usually sons and daughters of family friends or live in the same environment such as neighbourhood or school. This can be illustrated by the following extracts from focus-group discussions with the students.

**Student B1:** My first sexual intercourse was with a girl called [G100] in 1986 when I was 14 years old and in Primary Five. [G100] was in Primary Four in the same school.

**Student B2:** I first had sexual intercourse in 1990 when I was 17, in Senior One with a young village girl who was staying in our neighbourhood with her sister. I have since had two more girlfriends in 1992: one village girl and one student. Unfortunately, I have lost contact with both of them. My last sexual intercourse was in March 1992.

**Student G1:** I first had sex when I was 15 in Senior 2, with [B101] who was by then (1991) in Senior 6. [B101]'s parents were friends with my parents and we used to meet often. His sisters were my friends.

**Student G2:** My first sexual intercourse was with a student pilot. I stay near the flying school and I used to go and watch planes in holidays. This student pilot approached me and said '[G2], you have not yet replied to my letter'. I was surprised how he knew me. He continued to talk to me on several occasions until he finally convinced me and we fixed an appointment for 1/4/93 to have sexual intercourse. He was a nice guy so I went with him.

## Peer influence

Table 6 shows the degree to which students in this area are involved in smoking, alcohol consumption and addictive drugs. The rates of these social vices were generally higher among boys than girls but increased with age and educational level for both sexes. The rates of smoking and alcohol consumption were high among those students who reported that they had one or more friends, a fact which suggests peer influence.

The figures for the above three vices may be high because of peer influence but possibly also for cultural reasons. In the study area alcohol is readily available in homes and generally accepted by society as part of the adult diet. The habit-forming drugs are locally grown in some homes and used as therapy for some conditions.

However, one interesting finding about these vices is that among the boys who had one or more friends 75 per cent had had sexual intercourse compared to 50 per cent who reportedly had no immediate friend. Similarly, 47 per cent of the girls with one or more friends had had sexual intercourse compared to 20 per cent who reportedly had no friends.



**Table 6**  
**Percentages of various social vices by sex**

	Male students		Female students	
<b>Own social vice</b>	N	%	N	%
Ever drank alcohol	313	21.4	314	15.6
Ever smoked	203	9.3	277	3.2
Ever used drugs	306	2.6	303	2.0
<b>Friends' social vice</b>				
Friends smoke	(322)	80	(348)	88
Friends drink alcohol	(322)	70	(348)	84

Further analysis of the data using logistic regression as shown in Tables 4, 7 and 8 show that sex, age, number of friends, and number of friends who take alcohol are among the most important predictor variables of having ever had sexual intercourse and having ever had multiple sex partners. This suggests that the peer factor is one of the major environmental issues in school student sexual behaviour. Peer influence takes various forms such as sex and age associations, and doing the same things together like going to dances, videos and church groups.

Peer group influence on various teenage activities such as smoking, drinking alcohol and sex has been widely reported. Some studies have found a high correlation between the individual's own behaviour and the perceived behaviour of the best friend of the same sex, and between the individual's own attitudes and the perceived attitudes of the best same-sex friend both for males and females (Hofferth and Hayes 1987).

**Table 7**  
**Results of logistic regression applied to variable 'two or more sexual partners'**

Variable	B	Wald	Df	Sig	R	exp(B)
FAL	3.2012	6.6684	1	0.0098	-0.3183	24.5623
V	5.8036	4.1966	1	0.0405	0.2184	331.4941
M	0.9756	4.5973	1	0.0320	0.2374	2.6527
Constant	-7.0239	5.4247	1	0.0199		

Notes: Reference categories which were coded as '0' in this logistic regression are: friend does not take alcohol, did not visit boy/girlfriend, not yet reached menarche. FAL = Friends take alcohol, V = Visited boy/girlfriend, M = Reached menarche.

### ***The role of parents and guardians***

Fifteen per cent of the females and 14.8 per cent of the male students had lost one or both natural parents while about two per cent of the students said that they did not know one or both natural parents. Over 70 per cent of the students had both of their parents living together while at least ten per cent had parents who were separated or divorced.

To explore the influence of parents on the young people's behaviour, the respondent was asked to name the parent or relative with whom he or she lived. Sixty per cent of the boys lived with both natural parents, 12 per cent with mother mostly, eight per cent with father mostly, and 20 per cent with other relatives. Among the girls, 60 per cent lived with both natural parents, 12 per cent with mother mostly, seven per cent with father mostly and 21 per cent with other relatives.

**Table 8**  
**Results of Logistic Regression Model of predictors of ever having sexual partners**

Variable	B	Wald	Df	Sig	R	exp (B)
Sex (male)	1.0764	7.3438	1	0.0067	0.1359	2.9341
Age	0.1784	6.3138	1	0.0119	0.1222	1.1953
Anal sex	0.4269	4.4245	1	0.0354	0.0916	1.5325
Friends	1.4565	7.9398	1	0.0048	0.1433	4.2908
Friends and alcohol	0.7956	4.1241	1	0.0423	0.0857	2.2158
Kissing	0.8086	4.8118	1	0.0283	0.0986	2.2448
Teachers	1.4479	5.3773	1	0.0204	0.1081	4.2543
Constant	-6.7169	26.9678	1	0.0000		

Reference categories which were coded as '0' in this logistic regression are: Sex (Female), Had no friends, Friends do not take alcohol, Never kissed, Never been asked for sex by teachers. Age was left continuous.

Considering both day and boarding schools, the study showed that 53 per cent of the students' sexual intercourse occurs during the school term. However, among boarding-school students 90 per cent of sexual intercourse occurs during holidays and ten per cent while at school. About half (49%) of these students' sexual intercourse occurs between 2 and 6 p.m., 38 per cent at night, and 13 per cent over the 24-hours period. During some of this time the responsible parents or adults are away from home, at work or visiting friends or at funerals. However, some of the sexual activity also occurs while these adults are at home in the same house sleeping, unaware of what is happening to their daughters and sons. At times, some adults in the household know of the young people's plans to have sexual relations; some even get involved in students' sexual activity as in the case of sex with brother's wife or sister's husband. The following quotations from focus-group discussions help to emphasize the role of parents or guardians.

**Student B1:** I had the recent sexual intercourse at my brothers's house. My brother was away but his wife was around and she knew about my adventures. We had sex at 8 p.m.

**Student B3:** We had our first sexual intercourse at her parents' house at about 6 p.m. when her parents had gone for Christmas group celebrations. I have since been very successful at sexual relations. I currently have three girl-friends: one shopkeeper and two students. I have sexual intercourse every weekend.

**Student B4:** I had this sexual intercourse at the girl's parents' house at night between 9 p.m. and 7 a.m. The girl's parents had gone to attend a burial. The girl was alone with just her young brothers.

**Student G3:** [B117] was staying with his father in the same house but different rooms. We first had sex one afternoon between 3 p.m. and 5 p.m. when his parents had gone to work. He was at home with his elder brothers and younger sisters, my agemates and friends. We have since met and dated many times.

**Student G4:** One holiday I gave in and we fixed an appointment when my father had gone to Kampala. The stepmother was around in the house with me. [B209] came at 10 p.m., knocked at the window as was agreed to collect me. I rose slowly, stealthily locked my bedroom and sitting room in that order and left together with Joseph for his place. Once at [B209]'s place, he looked after me properly. He saw me off at 6 a.m. I once again stealthily went back, opened the door entrance to the sitting room and then to my own room. My stepmother did not notice anything.

### ***The role of the school environment***

Students spend nearly 70 per cent of their active time at school with their fellow students and teachers. This study investigated the effect of the school environment on the sexual behaviour of students: discussions were held with head teachers. Generally the head teachers were of the opinion that sexual activity of school students is a major problem and they laid part of the blame on the living environment of some students during their school years.

**Head teacher A:** Adolescent sexuality is a big problem for school children both boys and girls, but more so for girls. The biggest number of girls do not get to senior four because of sex-related problems, mainly pregnancy and marriage. Among the girls, we have about ten per cent whom we suspect have given birth to a child or secured an abortion and about five per cent of the boys might be married. Girls have been seen fighting over boyfriends or man friends.

Head teachers were also of the opinion that besides the students themselves and the business community, there are occasional instances of student-teacher sexual relationships. However, once this is noticed disciplinary measures are taken immediately.

**Head teacher B:** As regards teacher-student sexual relations, it is rare but occasionally it does occur. Most commonly it is between untrained teachers or the newly-qualified. These are usually young and most of them have not grasped the teaching regulations.

**Head teacher C:** Very few teachers have a habit of befriending students. But when it occurs, it can be bad. Recently one teacher has been discovered to have impregnated five girls between 1990 and 1993. The School Management Board took action and sent him off. One female teacher who was also married to one member of staff used to go with male students. Their marriage almost went on the rocks. Anyway, they have since got a transfer and have left.

From the discussions with head-teachers, and as is shown in Table 9, the school environment plays a significant role in student sexual behaviour. Over 40 per cent of male students and 35 per cent of female students draw their sexual partners mainly from among fellow students and some have sexual relations with their teachers. The school environment appears to provide early and easy contacts with the opposite sex. Boys and girls meet freely and as they play or engage in various school activities they use them also for sexual activity.

Type of school attended was also found to influence sexual behaviour of school students. Logistic regression in Table 10 shows that the youth in boarding schools (both girls and boys) were more likely to have two or more sexual partners than their counterparts in boarding-day schools or day schools. This effect of boarding school is probably a peer group factor since other peer-group behaviour such as smoking and alcohol consumption was also most frequent among boarding school pupils. This effect may also be due to the quality of boarding schools. The quality of most of the boarding schools in this area is poor in terms of sexual security of the students. They have no fences and their location allows free interaction with the general public at any time. However, this feature may also reflect parental weaknesses in controlling the children when they are on holidays. Most parents tend to give a lot of freedom to children especially after starting secondary school. Focus-group discussions showed that about 90 per cent of intercourse involving boarding school pupils takes place during holidays.

**Table 9**  
**Percentages of persons who asked female and male students for sex in last 30 days (Multiple responses allowed)**

Type of person	Male students	Female students
	322	348
Fellow students	44.1	34.3
Shopkeepers	4.7	12.1
Teachers	2.4	6.3
Health workers	2.4	5.8
Friends' lovers	6.8	5.0
Parent's friends	2.7	4.3
Taxi drivers	0.0	5.0
Sister's husband	0.0	3.5
Brother's wife	7.5	0.0
Police/Army	2.7	5.3
Religious leaders	2.0	2.0
Brother/sister	2.7	2.0
Others	21.4	14.4
No response	29.2	36.8

Note: In multiple responses the total percentages do not add to 100.

**Table 10**  
**Results of the Logistic Regression Model as a predictor of two or more sexual partners**

Variable	B	Wald	Df	Sig	R	exp (B)
Boarding School	0.8228	5.8939	1	0.0152	0.1085	2.2905
Sex (male)	1.4856	15.2423	1	0.0001	0.2001	4.4176
Smoking	0.4458	5.0007	1	0.0253	0.0953	2.7101
Ever use FP	1.4020	9.8118	1	0.0017	0.1537	4.0635
Class size	-0.6633	4.4125	1	0.0357	0.0854	0.5152
Constant	-2.7220	45.2338	1	0.0000		

Reference categories which were coded as '0' in this logistic regression are: Day school, sex (female) same-sex friend never smoked, same-sex friend never used FP, and class size less than 30 students.

### ***Economic factors***

The economic factor in the sexual activity of school pupils was tested by asking female students what sort of persons had asked them for sex or love in the last 30 days. A similar question for boys was what sort of persons they had approached or asked for sex or love in the last 30 days. The students were also asked the work status and approximate age of their sexual partners.

Whereas the male students had mainly their fellow students (58%) and four per cent of their sexual partners were in salaried jobs, the female students had 21 per cent of their sexual partners as salaried workers and 53 per cent were of unknown work status. This finding strongly supports an economic motive for sex by the female students. Probably this is for getting favours such as passing exams, getting jobs and other gifts from 'sugar daddies'.

Other members of society such as shopkeepers and health workers appear to be involved, most likely because of poverty and ignorance of both parents and students. Furthermore, in some cases where the parents of the young people have a low income, it was observed that

their daughters had some type of sexual relationship which involved money. The distance of the school from home also made some contribution towards school youth sexual practices. School students tended to be more sexually active in cases where the schools are distant, requiring long journeys. Similarly, in cases where the schools are beyond walking distance, forcing the students to periodically migrate to areas close to the school, a higher incidence of sexual activities was observed.

The information that parents' friends, sisters' husbands, brothers' wives as well as friends' lovers and fiancées were reported to be involved in student sexual activity could be related to circumstantial opportunity and possibly economic reasons.

The economic factor in the students' sexual behaviour was emphasized by a number of head-teachers:

**Head teacher B:** I think one of the factors contributing to the problem is that some students, both girls and boys, rent rooms in the trading centre. What do you expect of adolescents in such settings where they are out of parental supervision or some other authority?

**Head teacher C:** It is believed that the shopkeepers, and business fellows influence the sexual behaviour of the girls. Among other causes, poverty and long-distance commuting between home and school also have some influence. Many girls and boys travel five miles or more to reach school. Nobody can explain what happens between school and home. If the parents are from the low income bracket, in order to compensate for the low income, girls are more likely to have sexual interactions with businessmen. Here the rice harvest season is the worst. Girls mostly disappear in second school term. That is when the rice business is booming.

### ***Family structure***

This study also found that adolescents who had their parents alive and living together had lower rates of ever having had sexual intercourse than those of whom the natural parents were separated, one or both had died or nothing was known. Several studies have reported that family structure has an important influence on sexual behaviour. The reasons advanced by Hofferth and Hayes (1987) include socio-economic status of parents, parents' age, parents' sexual experience as teenagers, common experience such as socio-economic status, marital status of biological parents, and family structure and composition.

### ***Culture and religion***

The study area is populated by tribal cultures that are pronatalist. The people are Bantu or Nilotic, and Christianity and Islam are the major religions. Religion and tribe were not major predictors of sexual behaviour among the students. Studies by Hofferth and Hayes (1987) also show no association of premarital or extramarital sex with religious affiliations when other factors are controlled for, except devoutness.

### **Conclusions and policy implications**

This paper demonstrates four social-environmental factors that are currently important in shaping school students' sexual activity in Uganda: parental care, peer influence, economic factors and STD/AIDS education. Most of the students' sexual activities occurred when parents were away or when the students were staying with relatives. Also, although the numbers were small, generally orphans and children living with single parents were more likely to engage in sexual activities. This emphasizes the important role of natural parents in the development of children and youth. In light of this, where possible children should grow

up under the care of their natural parents, and orphans should be looked after in families with sound marital relationships. Parents should be aware that whenever they are away, their youngsters are likely to engage in sexual intercourse, so there is a need for parent-child communication on sexual issues.

A significant portion of student sexual activity is in student networks. Furthermore students who reported having friends who take alcohol were more likely to engage in sexual activity and to have multiple sexual partners than those who did not. This finding highlights the role of peer influence in school students' sexual behaviour. Friendship between adolescents should not be taken for granted. Parents and all those in charge of students should take a keen interest in their children's friends, particularly in regard to habits like smoking, alcohol and addictive drug consumption as well as early signs of sexual activity. STD/AIDS and family life education programs targeting students should be intensified to help them develop responsible sexual behaviour.

Higher proportions of female than male students had sexual partners in salaried jobs. Student-teacher sexual relationships and sexual relationships with well-off men in the community were reported. Students tended to be more sexually active in cases where schools were far off, requiring students to travel long distances, or to periodically migrate to areas close to the school. These issues demonstrate the role played by economic factors in student sexual behaviour. Poverty alleviation programs should be accelerated to help parents afford to look after the needs of their growing children. Government and communities should have schools evenly distributed so that they are easily accessible to shorten distances or reduce periodic migration by students.

Lastly, students who reported that they had taken precaution about AIDS are less likely to have ever had sexual intercourse, which if true is an encouraging finding. This may imply that intervention programs aimed at prevention of STD/AIDS could subsequently reduce irresponsible sexual behaviour and should therefore be intensified.

## References

- Agyei, W.K.A. and E.J. Epema. 1992. Sexual behaviour and contraception use among 15-24 year olds in Uganda. *International Family Planning Perspectives* 18,1:13-17.
- Bagarukayo, H., D. Shuey, B. Babishangire and K. Johnson. 1993. An operational study relating to sexuality and AIDS prevention among primary school students in Kabale District of Uganda. *Africa Medical Research Foundation*, April.
- Bancroft, J. and N. Skakkebaek. 1978. Androgens and human sexual behaviour. *CIBA Foundation Symposium* 62 (New Series), *Excerpta Medica*:209-226.
- Bleek, W. 1976. *Sexual Relationships and Birth Control in Ghana. A Case Study of a Rural Town*. Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam.
- Caldwell, J.C., P. Caldwell and P. Quiggin. 1989. The social context of AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Population and Development Review* 15,2:185-234.
- Hofferth, S.L. and C.D. Hayes. 1987. *Risking the Future. Adolescent Sexuality, Pregnancy and Childbearing*. Washington DC: National Academy Press.
- Kisekka, M. N. 1976. Sexual attitudes and behaviour among students in Uganda. *Journal of Sex Research* 12,2:104-116.

- Konde-Lule, J. K. 1993. The social and demographic impact of AIDS in a rural Ugandan community: results of a 5-year follow-up study 1987-1992. Paper presented at Population Association of Uganda Annual Conference, Kampala, 21 January.
- Petersen, A. and B. Taylor. 1980. The biological approach to adolescence: biological change and psychological adaptation. In *Handbook of Adolescent Psychology*, ed. J. Adelson. New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- Sekadde-Kigundu, B.O. Nyunya, R.K. Kamau, N.G. Thangana, S.B.O. Ojwang and J.M. Nyagero. 1991. Sexuality and the use of male condom among male university students. Paper presented at Seminar on Male Fertility and Condom Acceptability Research in Sub-Saharan Africa, Kampala, 3-7 June.
- STD/AIDS Control Programme. 1990. *HIV/AIDS Surveillance Report Second Quarter 1990*. Entebbe: Ministry of Health.
- Twa-Twa, Jeremiahs Mutwalante. 1995. Levels and trends of sexual activity among primary and secondary school pupils in Tororo and Pallisa Districts of Uganda - 1981-1992. M.A. Dissertation, Makerere University, Kampala.
- Udry, J. R. 1986. Biosocial foundations for adolescent female sexuality. *Demography* 23,2:217-226.