

## Qualitative Assessment of Parent's Roles and Views Towards Secondary School Adolescentsexual Behaviour In Cross River State.

Lilian Eberechukwu Eyam<sup>1</sup>, Eyam Sunday Eyam<sup>2</sup>, Kaka Agbo Ochago<sup>3</sup>,  
Theresa Bassey Cletus<sup>4</sup>

1. Lecture 1 College Of Health Technology, Calabar, Cross River State. Nigeria
2. Consultant Department Of Chemical Pathology, University Of Calabar, Cross State. Nigeria
3. Principal Lecturer College Of Health Technology, Cross River State, Calabar, Nigeria.
4. Lecturer 11 College Of Health Technology, Cross River State, Calabar, Nigeria.

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**Abstract:** Parents play an important role in the activities of their children because they are frequently in contact with these adolescents and they help to shape their behaviour and the social context in which they grow up. They are therefore expected to watch-over their children's sexual activities as well as identify, sieve and package information and services for them. A study to determine the role of parents in adolescents' sexual behaviour in co-educational secondary schools in Cross River State was done. The specific objectives were to determine parents'/adolescents' relationship, the degree to which parents monitor and supervise their adolescents, assess the level at which parents communicate with their adolescents and how much material support parents give to their adolescents. Parents of adolescents in secondary school were used. Two schools were randomly selected and twenty (20) parents from each school were invited. Focus group discussion was administered to each group separately at different location and different times. Data was analysed using group for data analysis method and the result was presented according to group and gender. The results showed that there was a huge gap in communication between the parents and their adolescent children especially when it involved sexuality.

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### I. Introduction

Parental control and regulation (Parent monitoring) has been quite consistently related to adolescent sexual behaviour<sup>10</sup>. Higher levels of parental supervision and control have been associated with a later age of first intercourse for both boys and girls<sup>14</sup>. In addition to parental control in their lives, curfews provides a more specific avenue by which parents may attempt to better supervise their adolescence dating behaviour. Several studies have shown that "adolescents who have sexual behaviour problems come from dysfunctional families<sup>7</sup>. Such families are characterised by difficult parental relationships and problematic parent-child relationships, little affection expressed between parents and children and frequent physical abuse<sup>5</sup>. Adolescents with sexual behavioural problems have often grown up in problematic family circumstances characterised by an authoritarian parenting style, poor relationship between children and parents and family violence<sup>15</sup>. Lack of parental supervision or monitoring is a major issue in adolescent's sexual behaviour<sup>17</sup>. However positive qualities of the family environment would exert a protective, preventive influence on the experiences of an adolescent sexual behaviour"<sup>12</sup>. This study is therefore aimed at assessing parental role in handling adolescent sexual developmental issues.

### II. Materials and Methods

#### Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

The focused group discussion involved two groups of parents. Group one consisted of 8 male parents of students of Government secondary school Ayaebem who were between 40 to 55 years while group two was made up of 10 female parents of students from Government Secondary schools Ikot Effanga 39- 50years. Letter were given to the parents and an informed consent obtained a week before the Focus Group Discussion. The discussion were divided in to four main areas namely; Parents/ adolescents relationship, monitoring and supervision, Communication and material support. The focus group was made up of a moderator, a recorder, a time garget and the study participants.

#### Procedure

Focus group discussion was done in two groups one with female parents in Ikot Effanga Mkpa (Calabar municipality) and the other with male parents Ayaebem (Akamkpa). Letters which were accompanied by informed consent were given to twenty parents through their wards to invite them for the FGD two weeks to the day of the FGD. The parents who presented themselves were given an informed consent which they signed. The first group comprised of eight female parents while the second group was made of 10 male parents. And the topic was 'parent's involvement in adolescent sexual behaviour'. This topic was divided into four sections which included parents/adolescent's relationship, monitoring and supervision, communication, and material support. Each session of the focus group discussion lasted for 60 minutes, 45 minutes of discussion and a tea break of 15 minutes. The FGD took place in a comfortable and confined place in the school environment as suggested by the participants and involved a moderator, a tape recorder and note taker. The place was safe and secured and the comfort of the participants was assured. The discussion was guided by a focus group discussion guide and the moderator.

#### **Analysis of qualitative data (Focus Group Discussion)**

Focus group discussion was analysed using the 'test for grouping' method. Transcription was done for the individual groups of discussants using the notes that were taken in the course of discussion, tape recorder and the videos. These were organised based in groups according to the questions on the topics of discussion and on the focus group discussion guide. The results were presented according to topics with quotations and discussant's gender indicated. Importance and specific findings on each topic were outlined following the focus group discussion guide and implications of the findings were written out.

#### **Pre-test**

Focus group discussion was pretested in a similar community outside the study area in Ikot Uko Ubo in Uyo Local Government Area in Akwa Ibom State. Six parents of adolescents were involved in the discussion. It involved a moderator, tape recorder, video and a note taker. This was used to test for reliability and efficiency of the tape recorder (recording and play-back efficiency) and focus group discussion guide.

### **III. Results**

#### **Qualitative Data of FGD (Group for testing analysis)**

##### **Socio Demographic Characteristics of parents**

The study had two (2) FGDs with discussants made up of ten (10) males and eight (8) females of Government Secondary School Ikot Effanga Mkpa and Government secondary school Ayaebem, respectively. All the respondents were parents or guardians of teenagers in secondary schools and they were between the ages of 40 and 60 years. They all had formal education and their occupation ranged from skilled, unskilled and no jobs. Also present were a moderator, a note taker and a tape recorder.

##### **Parents / Adolescents Relationship**

Parents relationship with their teenagers is an important aspect in adolescents' sexual behaviour because it keeps them connected to the family. Most parents would try to keep that connection no matter how bad the child gets.

In this study majority of the female discussants were of the opinion that both parents should be close to their teenage children irrespective of whether the child is a male or a female a relationship should exist between them. However, some were of the opinion that mothers were always closer to their male children while fathers were always close to their female children before they attained the age of puberty.

While most of the male discussants were of the opinion that sexual behaviour of adolescents concerned the women only few of them had contrary view pointed out that it was not so, and believed that both parties should be actively involved to get good result. "I don't believe that sexual behaviour of the children involves only the mothers, it should involve both parties" (Discussant A, male)

On the aspect of relating with their adolescents children there were diverse ideas. Some agreed that "children were closer to their mothers while others said that it depended on the sex of the child".

Discussant A (male) pointed out that "even though children were closer to their mothers at an early age as they grew older they became more open to both parents". He also added that "girls were closer to their fathers when they were younger". Majority of the participants had difficulty in relating with their adolescent children while a few who related with their children had these to share.

'I always show love to my children and counsel them when they make mistakes and this has made me to be closer to them' (discussant A Female)

"I spent quality time with my family especially during breakfast, lunch and dinner and I made sure I am always available at these times and it has helped me to get closer to my adolescent children" (Discussant B female)

Others were of the opinion that knowing their children's friends and their parents and being interested in what they value may also help you get closer to their children. They were of the opinion that picking and dropping their children before and after church, schools, and getting involved in their social affairs could make one to be closer to one's children. Travelling with their children for holidays was also said to be very important. These, they concluded, "may actually make one to understand the adolescents and unravel some hidden risky behaviours such as sexual behaviour or drug abuse".

"travelling affords me and my children a relaxed atmosphere away from home to talk and share, besides once we are out of home we have to sort ourselves out, we find ourselves doing chores together and this brings us even closer" (Discussant H, female).

"Parents who get connected to their teenager even as a child finds it easy to discuss sensitive topics such as sex" (Discussant C, male).

Discussant F(male) relates with his adolescents by asking them questions about school, church or anything that they are interested in and buying things for them and showing them love. And further pointed out "a child who is not showed love will look for love".

Discussant D (male) emphasized that "relating with their adolescents children should be team work where both parents are involved".

Discussant G (male) was of the opinion that" holding of family meetings from time to time can help one get close to the children.

" I am a polygamist with four wives and many children. The way I make sure my family is together is by holding meetings with them at least three times every year and this has helped me over the years to get closer to my children". I share life experience with my children for instance I have made them to understand that they are all equal and no body is better than the other (Discussant G, male).

Sexual awareness or consciousness is something that occurs immediately after puberty and this affects the child psychologically, socially and otherwise. It is a very sensitive period in the adolescents' life.

The study showed that majority of the discussants knew when their teenagers became sexually aware of themselves. And they got to know this from the child's actions. One of the discussants said "once they became sexually aware one could notice some changes in the way they dress and how they become very conscious of themselves by making sure that everything they did was correct".

"My son started bathing very well and changed his clothes at least twice in a day". (Discussant C, female)

"I noticed that my daughter had reached puberty when she ran to me crying and said that her pant was stained with blood. She could not do anything throughout that day and I observed that from that time she withdrew to herself. (Discussant D, Female).

### **Monitoring and Supervision**

Monitoring and supervising adolescents is very essential in bringing up adolescents to help them grow into a responsible and proper reproductive life. Asking the discussants why and how adolescents should be monitored. Majority of the participants agreed that adolescents should be properly monitored and supervised to reduce or limit the frequency of risky sexual behaviour among this age group. One of the Discussants (male) pointed out that "knowing their wards' friends and even their parents was very important in monitoring their wards".

Some of the discussants monitored their wards regularly while others reported irregular monitoring. Excuses given included pressure from their work, having no time, and having other children to care for.

Discussant C (male) still emphasised "on team work between both parents in this aspect and said where there was no agreement between both parents, monitoring and supervision would become a challenge".

Most of the discussants agreed that parents should be close to the teachers of their wards for effective monitoring at school. Discussant A, recounted an experience he had some time ago with his second daughter

" I am always connected to my children's schools and their teachers and this has helped over the years to be able to monitor and supervise them especially in the academic aspect. One of the teachers that I was close to noticed that my daughter does to return to school after break period. She follows her friends and does not come back to school. He called my attention to it. And when I asked my daughter she could not deny it. So I decided that she should stay at home since she does not want to go to school. I kept her at home for one month. She begged, my wife begged, friends and other relatives came and begged but I refused until after one whole month. I now decided that she should go back to school and she changed" (Discussant A, Male).

This has to do with school connectedness, parents/ teachers relationship and peer group influence, this means that connecting to your child schools and creating a relationship with her teachers can actually help control peer group influence and also make monitoring and supervision of the child even more effective.

"it is very important to monitor and supervise their academic work because a child who is studious may not have time to engage in risky behaviours".( Discussant D, female)

The discussants had varying opinions on how adolescents should be monitored. Most of the discussants agreed that paying the child surprise visits during school hours may help check and expose some of the risky behaviours. A few, however, disagreed and echoed that “this may display lack of trust for the child”.

“We should be very vigilant with our adolescent children” she continued by saying “I returned home once and found a strange pair of slippers in my house and when I asked my daughter, she was hesitant to say. It was my son that said a boy was around. When I tried to find out who it was, it was my neighbour’s son, but why did he have to run when he heard me coming? I asked, and I was told that he was trying to lift my daughter up. I could not go to tell the parents because I knew what the parent would have done to him but I was very stern with my daughter. (Discussant A, female)

She concluded by saying “Adolescents could be very secretive at this time and have to be watched very closely with suspicion but yet don’t try to break the trust”.

Television watching and browsing the internet which is very rampant these days can actually affect the adolescent sexual behaviour.

The discussant agreed that monitoring and supervising the kinds of programmes the teenagers watch on television was also a way of controlling them. However concerning the type of programmes they should watch discussants had varying opinions. Although all of them agreed that they should not watch erotic or pornographic programmes.

Discussant F was of the opinion that “they should not be allowed to watch television at all” while Discussant A pointed out that “they could watch educative programs which would help increase their knowledge and others opined that television watching should be regulated”. Some of the Discussants frowned seriously at parents who buy their children expensive phones and remarked, “These children even use these phone for browsing”.

” I don’t buy phones for my children that are in secondary school, I will always advise them to wait for their time”(Discussant A, Female)

“You will be amazed at what this children use this phones for.”(Discussant E, Female)

The discussants agreed that monitoring adolescents closely would help parents to understand when the children start experiencing changes and when to start teaching them sex education.

A discussant mentioned a very important point that most parents neglect. She stressed, “Know the kinds of errands you send your teenager” She further related an experience she had some time ago

” when my husband was newly transferred to Calabar, I did not follow him immediately, but when eventually I joined him I noticed that there was this girl (about fourteen years) that kept on coming from time to time to ask my husband for money. I later learnt that the mother was alone and they did not have money so since she notice that my husband was alone she was always sending her daughter to come for assistance from my husband” She further concluded that “incidents like this may expose teenagers to grave danger”.

However the discussants were not able to mention the average number of hours the teenagers could spend out of home and the latest hour that they were expected to stay out of the house even when they were asked.

“well it depends on the family and what the child is out for, sometimes it could be church or something very important” (Discussant C, female).

“I am always the last person to enter my house and if you come after I had entered the house then you would have to explain” (Discussant G, male).

#### **4.5.2.3 Communication**

##### **Communicating with teenagers**

Most of the female discussants agreed that there was communication gap between them and their adolescents especially the male children. They also agreed that they had been closer earlier in life but after their adolescents attained puberty the situation changed.

Meanwhile, Discussant F (female), further buttressing on the communication gap with male children was of the opinion that “refraining from using abusive language and also counselling the teenagers with love may help one to communicate better with them”. She recounted that” if however for any reason they are scolded, one (parent) should again call them and explain to them why the action was necessary”.

Discussant G, (female), added that “sharing life experiences especially ones pains and one’s joy with them may help one to communicate easily with them”

All the discussants agreed that showing the adolescents that you want to help them achieve their goals could also make them to come close to you.

Discussant A, (female) was of the opinion that “sending them on useful errands at home and giving them responsible roles to play in the affairs of the family may also help to direct them”.

Most of the male discussants were aware that communicating with their adolescents was very important and so one had to create time to allow easy flow of communication. Communicating positively with their adolescents will help prevent risky behaviour. Most of the Discussant claimed that they knew this but

found it difficult to communicate freely with their adolescents especially on sexual issues. A few of the male discussants pointed out that “it was the business of the mothers especially when it involved the adolescent girls”.

“Discussing sexuality is purely a woman thing especially when it concerns the girls, I was the first to noticed when my daughters started menstruating and I send her to her mother immediately because I couldn't handle it.”(Discussant G, male).

Some discussants agreed that “parents should always answer the questions of their adolescents and give them proper counsel especially when it involved sensitive issues such as sex this may help to improve communication between them.

“Once my son asked me an embarrassing question which I could not answer, he said daddy “what is love? (Discussant C, male)

However, discussing sexuality issues with adolescents, and at times even with adults still remains a problem in our society.

### **Discussing sexuality with adolescents**

Some of the female discussants agreed that discussing sexuality was a very major problem for them. Discussant B, (female) was of the opinion that “her major problem was how to start talking about sex to the children because the occasion hardly arose” but Discussant C (female) opined that “starting sex education early enough with teenagers even as a child helps you to be able to break the barrier any time you needed to”. While Discussant G (Female) was of the opinion that “sex education should start as early as seven (7) years and should be taught in all classes in secondary and primary schools”.

And she had this story to tell the group.

“Once I was at home when I noticed that the children were excited as if something fishy was going-on. I decided to peep. I discovered that small boys around were playing with the girl's private part using stick. I shouted at them and asked them to stop. I however did not bother to tell her parents but early the next morning I heard a very loud scream and when I went to find out it was the little girl. While the dad was trying to bath her, she cried out in pain and the younger brothers told the dad what had happened”.

And concluded that “no matter how young the child is sex education is very important and that the earlier the better to avoid such experimentations”

The other discussants were of the opinion that “using Bible quotation could help one to start sex education easily with one's teenager.

They concluded by saying that introducing sex education at a very early age in the home and in the school was very important.

### **Material Support**

#### **Providing adolescents needs**

Almost all the participants agreed that they tried to meet up with their children's need but most of them did not know what their children owned. The discussants were also against buying expensive things for the adolescents especially phones and advice that only the child's needs should be met and not wants.

The issue of giving allowances to their children was shifted to their fathers.

“I don't have anything to do with allowance I think their father should take care of that, it's all the man's business” (Discussant F, female)

”We try not to give them money especially when they are at home with us”. (Discussant B, female).

Most of the male discussants admitted that providing the adolescents needs was a very important aspect especially when it concerned the girls.

” men should live up to their responsibility of providing for their wards including buying sanitary pads for their adolescents which should not just be a mother's responsibility” (Discussant A , male).

He further added

“I go all out to buy things for my children at times I even come back home with surprise packages for them”. And urged that “it should not just be the woman who does that”.

When asked whether they gave their adolescents monthly or weekly allowances they all replied in the negative but a few of them said it was only when they were away from home especially in boarding schools.

“I provide all their needs but try not give them money especially huge sum to avoid exposing them”. (Discussant C, male)

### **Findings of the FGD**

The findings from this study showed that parents had the knowledge that being connected to their adolescents by spending quality time with them, knowing their friends and the background of the friends they keep had very strong influence on their sexual behaviour. Travelling avails the parents more time alone with their teenagers and may help the parents to unravel some hidden risky behaviours.

Monitoring and supervising their academic work, material possession, the programmes they watch on television and the time spent out of home may help to lead them into a proper and responsible reproductive life. Parent should be vigilant with their adolescent children and know the kind of errands they send them. Effective monitoring requires the parents to have a very close relationship with the adolescent's school and teachers. Answering adolescent questions correctly and giving them good counsel was also seen to be important. There was a huge communication gap when it came to discussing sexuality issues between the parents' and adolescents especially among the men. The major problem was how to break the ice.

#### **IV. Discussion**

##### **Communication**

Parents rarely discussed sexuality with their adolescent children. This agrees with many studies in sub-Saharan Africa whose culture concerning sexuality issues are regarded as a taboo and so parents find it difficult to discuss sex with their adolescents<sup>4,8</sup>. The lack of communication among parents and adolescents in the study also agrees with the study that assessed parents-teachers attitude towards adolescents sexual and reproductive health education and determined their opinion on the need, content and appropriate person to provide necessary information in a school settings. This revealed that majority of the parents do not discuss growth and development with their adolescents and many of them agreed that knowledge on STI/HIV should not be disclosed to their adolescents<sup>11</sup>. This could also have been the reason for the early sexual initiation and high prevalence of sexual intercourse and sexually active adolescents among the secondary school students in the study as noted by<sup>6</sup>, in the study that examined the role of mother-daughter interaction in reducing sexual risk behaviour among urban adolescents. A study also reported that mothers who communicated with their daughters about sexuality issues have daughters who show positive sexual behaviour. This could also have contributed to the poor level of knowledge on STI/HIV, teenage pregnancy and high level of negative perception towards sexual intercourse and abstinence reported in a baseline study. The lack of communication which has to do with inability of parents to discuss sex with their children could be as a result of cultural norms of our society as most African societies in sub Saharan region regards discussion of sex and sexuality issues as a taboo<sup>5,8</sup>.

##### **5.1.7.2 Adolescents/Parents relationship**

The study revealed that parents have good relationships with adolescents as majority of the participants agreed that they spend quality time with their children and are even close to their friends. However with the high prevalence of sexual intercourse reported in the study it does not agree with the study that have showed that adolescents that are close to their parents do not get involved in risky sexual behaviour and are not always influenced by their peers<sup>1</sup>. Parents in the study acknowledged that monitoring and supervising the adolescent help to prevent risky sexual behaviour. This agrees with the study carried out to determine the relationships of parental monitoring and emotional regulations with early adolescent's sexual behaviour which reported that lack of parental monitoring is problematic for both male and female adolescents and lack of supervision time was a risk factor<sup>2</sup>.

Most parents in the study though provided material support to their wards, did not see the need of giving their children weekly or monthly allowances especially when the children resided with them or with a relative. However, the prevalence of risky sexual behaviour was still high. This does not agree with the study which showed that adolescents who received weekly or monthly allowances are more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviour<sup>14</sup>.

#### **V. Conclusion**

Parents in this study have very good relationship with their adolescents and understand the need for material support and the importance of following up with their academic work is very important. The study also revealed that there is communication gap especially in discussing issues bordering around sexuality.

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