

# Factors associated with early sexual debut among senior secondary school students in Okrika Local Government Area, Rivers State, Nigeria.

## ABSTRACT

**Aim:** To determine the factors associated with early sexual debut among senior secondary school students in Okrika Local Government Area, Rivers State, Nigeria.

**Study design:** Descriptive cross-sectional study

**Place and Duration of Study:** Okrika Local Government Area, Rivers State, Nigeria between January 2018 and October 2018.

**Methodology:** Four hundred and twenty (420) senior secondary school students aged 15 – 19 years participated in this study. Data were collected using a semi-structured interviewer-assisted questionnaire. Frequency tables were generated and Chi-square statistic was used to determine the factors associated with an early sexual debut. Logistic regression analysis was used to determine predictors of early sexual debut. The level of significance was set at 5%.

**Results:** The mean age of respondents was  $15.7 \pm 0.8$  years. The mean age at sexual debut and mean age of early sexual debut was  $13.3 \pm 1.4$  years and  $12.2 \pm 1.2$  years respectively. The prevalence of early sexual debut and ever-had sex among the respondents was 46% and 54.8% respectively. There was a statistically significant association between early sexual debut and respondents having ever worked for pay, currently working for pay, marital status of parents, living status of the respondents, father's occupation and respondents' age at first sexual partner. Respondents that had ever worked for pay, currently working for pay and had their first sexual partner at age  $<14$  years were more likely to have engaged in early sex initiation (OR = 4.6; 95% CI = 1.6 – 12.7; P = 0.004, OR = 6.6; 95% CI = 1.9 – 23.7; P = 0.003 and OR = 3.1; 95% CI = 1.3 – 7.2; P = 0.009).

**Conclusion:** The study showed that senior secondary school students having worked for pay, working for pay while still in school, and having a sexual partner at a very young age are danger factors against delaying first sex initiation among adolescents. Therefore, adolescents should be given more attention and support from parents, teachers and significant agencies. Sexuality education and programmes aimed at encouraging adolescents to delay first sex initiation in life should be encouraged. This will help them not to be exposed to early sex initiation.

**Keywords:** Early sexual debut, behavior, Unintended pregnancy, Coeducational secondary school.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria has a growing population of young people, with adolescents constituting an important proportion of the population. About 28% of adolescent in Nigeria are said to be sexually active [1]. Number of findings report sexual debut at earlier age, the median age has been 15 years with adolescents between the ages of 15 to 19 years engaging more in sex [2]. Age at first sexual intercourse is an important indicator of the possibility of unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases among adolescents [1].

Early sexual debut is commonly defined as having had first sexual intercourse at or before age 14 years and is associated with risks to sexual and reproductive health [3]. Early sexual debut among secondary school students is associated with considerable negative health effect and development outcomes [4]. Early sexual debut is associated with increased lifetime prevalence of sexual partners, thereby increasing the risk of exposure to HIV/AIDS, unwanted pregnancy, HPV infection; and thus, increasing the risk of cervical cancer [4]. With the risk of unwanted pregnancy, early initiators of sex could have limitations in achieving their social and vocational futures [4]. In Rivers State, 34.3% of the sexually active girls have intercourse at least once in a week [5]. Also 51% of the sexually initiated girls have been exposed to more than one sexual partner, with 6% sexually exposed to more than 5 sexual partners [5].

In Nigeria, previous studies have validated the observation that sexual activity among unmarried adolescents and young adults is on the rise [6]. Several quantitative studies have identified correlates and determinants of early sex [4]. Age at sexual debut varies from place to place and among different individuals, and is often due to varying factors [7]. There was a high rate of premarital sex amongst secondary school students in Port Harcourt (urban settlement of Rivers State) [8]. This fails to consider if sexual debut of secondary school student is early among senior secondary school students. Globally, early sexual debut among adolescents remains a recurring and a serious public health issue [9]. Since early sexual initiation lengthens the period of exposure to unwanted pregnancies, HIV, and other sexually transmitted infections and youth who begin sexual activity earlier appear more likely to have sex with high-risk partners or multiple partners and are less likely to use condoms [10]. It is then crucial to examine various factors associated with early sexual debut among senior secondary school students in order to obtain an accurate understanding of early sexual debut, timing of sexual debut and its associated factors. In this way, the negative outcomes are prevented. Among Nigerian adolescents aged 15-19 years, a fifth of them were found to have initiated sex (18% males and 22% females) [4]. This study will complement existing literatures and deepen the understanding of early sexual debut by using quantitative data with the main aim to determine the factors associated with early sexual debut among senior secondary school students in Rivers State using a rural local government area.

## **2. MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **2.1 Study Area**

River State was created and constituted one of the earliest states which came into being upon the dissolution of the old regional structure. The state was formed with the split of the Eastern Region of Nigeria. The State has about 243 secondary schools. The secondary schools are concentrated mainly in LGA headquarter towns and in Port Harcourt. The State is referred to as the Treasure Base of the Nation.

### **2.2 Study Population**

The study was conducted among senior secondary school students (SS 1- 2) of public and private schools in Okrika Local Government Area (rural LGA) of Rivers State. SS3 was excluded because they were already out of school before the commencement of the study.

### **2.3 Sampling and Data Collection**

A descriptive cross-sectional study design was used for this study and a multi-stage sampling technique was used to select the study population for this study. The 23 LGAs of Rivers State were identified and stratified into rural and urban with 22 rural and 1 urban LGAs. Among the 22 rural LGAs, one was randomly selected using simple random sampling method. All the senior secondary schools were identified and stratified into public and private

coeducational schools in the selected rural L.G.A. The list of these schools was obtained from the Rivers State Ministry of Education. A simple random sampling method was used to select three schools from each stratum. The total number of students (SS 1 – 2) in the six selected schools was 2460. The number of respondents in each school was determined by proportional allocation. In each selected school, respondents were selected from SS 1 and 2 using the class register of the different arms (A, B and C). A simple random sampling method was used to select the first student. Thereafter, every 6<sup>th</sup> student was recruited using systematic sampling. A sample size of 420 was used.

Data were collected using a semi-structured interviewer-assisted questionnaire. The questionnaire was adapted from the W.H.O. Illustrative Questionnaire for Interview-Surveys with Young People [11]. And Fatusi et al. [4] questionnaire for determining predictors of early sexual initiation among a nationally representative sample of Nigerian adolescents. The questionnaire was in five sections with 74 questions which includes; socio-demographic characteristics, knowledge and perception about early sexual debut, sexual debut, sexuality and sexual behavior, social and health behavior. The questionnaires were completed by the respondents with interviewer assistance in the selected classrooms during the period assigned by the school authority.

## 2.4 Study Variables

The dependent variable was early sexual debut, while independent variables were socio-demographic data and other factors that may be associated with early sexual debut such as age respondents had first sexual experience, respondents having a sexual partner etc.

## 2.5 Data Analysis

Questionnaires were checked for errors and cleaned at the end of each day. Data were entered into the computer and analyzed using SPSS version 20.0. Errors were checked for and corrected. Relevant frequencies, proportions, percentages and means of variables were generated. Cross tabulation was done and Chi square test was used to test associations between variables at 5% level of significance and logistic regression analysis to determine statistically significant predictors of early sexual debut.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Table 1: Distribution of socio-demographic characteristics of respondents (N = 420)**

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Age</b>		
15	218	51.9
16	132	31.4
>16	70	16.7
Mean ( $\pm$ SD)	15.7( $\pm$ 0.8)	
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	222	52.9
Female	198	47.1
<b>Class</b>		
SS 1	267	63.6
SS 2	153	36.4
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
Ijaw	377	89.8
Others	43	10.2
<b>Religion</b>		
Christianity	412	98.1
Others	8	1.9

<b>Marital status</b>		
Single	408	97.1
Separated	12	2.9
<b>Frequency of religious attendance</b>		
Every day	233	55.5
Others	187	44.5

**Table 2: Distribution of socio-demographic characteristics of respondents (N = 420)**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Importance of religion</b>		
Very important	397	94.5
Important	23	5.5
<b>Ever worked for pay</b>		
Yes	132	31.4
No	288	68.6
<b>Age started working for pay (years)</b>		
12- 16	100	23.8
17- 19	32	7.6
<b>Currently work for pay</b>		
Yes	98	23.3
No	322	76.7
<b>Family type</b>		
Polygamy	113	26.9
Monogamy	140	33.3
Kinship fostering	25	6.0
Non-kinship fostering	4	1.0
Double parents	34	8.1
Single parent	72	17.1
Cohabitation	32	7.6
<b>Mother married</b>		
Yes	297	70.7
No	123	29.3
<b>Living status</b>		
Both parents	234	55.7
Single parent (father / mother)	130	31.0
Guardian / others	56	13.3
<b>Reason for not living with Parent (s) presently</b>		
Parent (father) was late	2	0.5
Parent (mother) was late	1	0.2
Both parents are late	21	5.0
No reason	16	3.8
Parents don't have money to train me	16	3.8

**Table 3: Distribution of socio-demographic characteristics of respondents (N = 420)**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Highest education attained by father</b>		
Primary	30	7.1
Secondary	234	55.7
Tertiary	148	35.2
Others	4	1.0
None	4	1.0
<b>Highest education attained by mother</b>		
Primary	63	15.0
Secondary	254	60.5
Tertiary	91	21.7
Others	7	1.7
None	5	1.2
<b>Occupation of mother</b>		
Employed	299	71.2
Self-employed	69	16.4
Unemployed	48	11.4
Not applicable	4	1.0
<b>Occupation of father</b>		
Employed	185	44.0
Self-employed	177	42.1
Unemployed	49	11.7
Not applicable	9	2.1
<b>Occupation of guardian</b>		
Employed	47	11.2
Self-employed	18	4.3
Unemployed	3	0.7
Not applicable	352	83.8
<b>Responsible for school fees</b>		
Father	266	63.3
Mother	96	22.9
Self	5	1.2
Scholarship	11	2.6
Relatives	42	10.0

**Table 4: Respondents knowledge about early sexual debut (N = 420)**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Ever heard the word early sexual debut</b>		
Yes	82	19.5
No	338	80.5
<b>Do you know the meaning</b>		
Yes	46	11.0
No	374	89.0
<b>Right age to be regarded as early sexual debut (years)</b>		
≤14	199	47.4
>14	221	52.6

**Table 5: Respondents' perception about early sexual debut (N = 420)**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Good to initiate sex early in life</b>		
Yes	15	3.6
No	397	94.5
Undecided	8	1.9
<b>Young ones should delay early sex initiation in life</b>		
Yes	318	75.7
No	86	20.5
Undecided	16	3.8
<b>Early sex initiation has health benefit</b>		
Yes	32	7.6
No	347	82.6
Undecided	41	9.8
<b>Early sex initiation has physical benefits</b>		
Yes	69	16.4
No	327	77.9
Undecided	24	5.7
<b>Early sex initiation has socio-economic benefits</b>		
Yes	26	6.2
No	373	88.8
Undecided	21	5.0
<b>Young ones should initiate early sexual intercourse in the family</b>		
Yes	12	2.9
No	407	96.9
Undecided	1	0.2
<b>Young ones should initiate early sexual intercourse in the community</b>		
Yes	9	2.1
No	399	95.0
Undecided	12	2.9

**Table 6: Respondents' perception about early sexual debut (N = 420)**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Young ones should initiate early sexual intercourse in the society</b>		
Yes	1	0.2
No	405	96.4
Undecided	14	3.3
<b>Young ones should initiate early sexual intercourse in the schools</b>		
Yes	0	0.0
No	420	100.0
Undecided	0	0.0

**Table 7: Sexual debut, sexuality and sexual behavior of respondents (N= 420)**

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Ever had sexual partner</b>		
Yes	207	49.3
No	213	50.7
<b>Age at when had first sexual partner (years)</b>		
10	78	18.6
11	12	2.9
12	17	4.0
13	54	12.9
14	46	11.0
Mean ( $\pm$ SD)	11.9 ( $\pm$ 1.6)	

**Table 8: Sexual debut, sexuality and sexual behavior of respondents (N= 420)**

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Reason for having first sexual partner</b>		
To initiate first sexual intercourse	21	5.0
Pressure from friends	110	26.2
Need to get money	1	0.2
Ignorance	53	12.6
Because is the common norm where I live	5	1.2
Others	17	4.0
<b>Relationship with first sexual partner</b>		
Boyfriend	20	4.8
Girlfriend	34	8.1
Brother	8	1.9
Neighbor	64	15.2
Classmate	75	17.9
Father	6	1.4
<b>Ever had sex</b>		
Yes	230	54.8
No	190	45.2
<b>Age at sexual debut (years)</b>		
$\leq$ 14	193	46.0
Mean ( $\pm$ SD) (Early sexual debut)	12.2 ( $\pm$ 1.2)	
> 14	37	8.8
Mean ( $\pm$ SD) (Sexual debut)	13.3 ( $\pm$ 1.4)	
<b>Reason for first sexual intercourse</b>		
I was raped	11	2.6
Feel to give a try	63	15.0
Influence of home videos	58	13.8
Love	58	13.8
Influence of pornographic videos	20	4.8
Influence of social party	17	4.0
Influence of smoking	3	0.7

**Table 9: Distribution of respondents by social and health behavior (N =420)**

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Currently smoking</b>		
No	420	100.0
<b>Alcohol use</b>		
Yes	79	18.8
No	341	81.2
<b>Age at first alcohol use (years)</b>		
12- 16	62	14.8
17- 19	17	4.0

**Table 10: Distribution of respondents by outcome of early sexual debut (n = 193)**

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Female respondents</b>		
<b>Experience after first sexual intercourse</b>		
I was pregnant	8	4.1
Had STI/STD	1	0.5
None	184	95.3
<b>Education affected</b>		
Yes	3	1.6
No	190	98.4
<b>School drop-out</b>		
No	193	100.0
<b>Male respondents</b>		
<b>Experience after first sexual intercourse</b>		
Tested HIV positive	8	4.1
Had STI/STD	25	13.0
None	160	82.9
<b>Education affected</b>		
Yes	6	3.1
No	187	96.9
<b>School drop-out</b>		
Yes	4	2.1
No	189	97.9
<b>Reason for school drop-out</b>		
I have to hustle to take care of first sexual Partner	4	2.1

**Table 11: Association between socio-demographic characteristics and age at sexual debut (n = 230)**

Variable	Age at sexual debut		n	X <sup>2</sup>	P-value
	Yes -early (≤14yrs) n (%)	No – not early (>14yrs) (%)			
<b>Age (years)</b>					

15	100 (82.6)	21 (17.4)	2.243	0.326 <sup>^</sup>
16	53 (81.5)	12 (18.5)		
>16	40 (90.9)	4 (9.1)		
<b>Sex</b>				
Male	129 (87.2)	19 (12.8)	3.246	0.072
Female	64 (78.0)	18 (22.0)		
<b>Class</b>				
SS 1	106 (84.1)	20 (15.9)	0.009	0.923
SS 2	87 (83.7)	17 (16.3)		
<b>Ethnicity</b>				
Ijaw	182 (84.7)	33 (15.3)	-	0.272
Others	11 (73.3)	4 (26.7)		
<b>Religion</b>				
Christianity	192 (84.2)	36 (15.8)	-	0.296
Others	1 (50.0)	1 (50.0)		

\*Significant variable at 5% level of significance

<sup>^</sup>Likelihood Ratio

-Fisher's Exact Test

**Table 12: Association between socio-demographic characteristics and age at sexual debut (n = 230)**

Variable	Age at sexual debut		X <sup>2</sup>	P-value
	Yes (≤14yrs) n (%)	-early No – not early (>14yrs) n (%)		
<b>Marital status</b>				
Single	187 (83.5)	37 (16.5)	-	0.593
Separated	6 (100.0)	0 (0.0)		
<b>Frequency of religious attendance</b>				
Every day	106 (82.8)	22 (17.2)	0.259	0.611
Others	87 (85.3)	15 (14.7)		
<b>Importance of religion</b>				
Very important	178 (84.4)	33 (15.6)	-	0.519
Important	15 (78.9)	4 (21.1)		
<b>Ever worked for pay</b>				
Yes	95 (90.5)	10 (9.5)	6.165	0.013*
No	98 (78.4)	27 (21.6)		
<b>Age started working for pay (years)</b>				
12- 16	70 (87.3)	9 (12.7)	-	0.447
17- 19	25 (96.2)	1 (3.8)		
<b>Currently working for pay</b>				
Yes	79 (95.2)	4 (4.8)	-	0.000*
No	114 (77.6)	33 (22.4)		
<b>Type of work</b>				

Skilled work	41 (93.2)	3 (6.8)	-	0.619
Unskilled work	38 (97.4)	1 (2.6)		
<b>Family type</b>				
Polygamy	51 (91.1)	5 (8.9)	5.281	0.071 <sup>^</sup>
Monogamy	127 (80.4)	31 (19.6)		
Non-kinship/Kinship				
Fostering	15(93.8)	1 (6.3)		

\*Significant variable at 5% level of significance

<sup>^</sup>Likelihood Ratio

-Fisher's Exact Test

**Table 13: Association between socio-demographic characteristics and age at sexual debut (n = 230)**

Variable	Age at sexual debut		X <sup>2</sup>	P- value
	Yes – early (≤14yrs) n (%)	No – not early (>14yrs) n (%)		
<b>Mother married to father</b>				
Yes	128 (80.5)	31 (19.5)	4.437	0.035*
No	65 (91.5)	6 (8.5)		
<b>Living status</b>				
Both parents	99 (78.0)	28 (22.0)	8.238	0.016* <sup>^</sup>
Single parent (father/mother)	62 (92.5)	5 (7.5)		
Guardian / others	32 (88.9)	4 (11.1)		
<b>Highest education attained by father</b>				
<Secondary education	14 (87.5)	2 (12.5)	4.635	0.099 <sup>^</sup>
Secondary	121 (87.7)	17 (12.3)		
Tertiary	58 (76.3)	18 (23.7)		
<b>Highest education attained by mother</b>				
<Secondary education	38 (88.4)	5 (11.6)	1.855	0.396 <sup>^</sup>
Secondary	113 (81.3)	26 (18.7)		
Tertiary	42 (87.5)	6 (12.5)		
<b>Occupation of mother</b>				
Employed	130 (82.3)	28 (17.7)	5.047	0.080 <sup>^</sup>
Self-employed	27 (79.4)	7 (20.6)		
Unemployed	36 (94.7)	2 (5.3)		
<b>Occupation of father</b>				
Employed	103 (88.0)	14 (12.0)	6.944	0.031* <sup>^</sup>
Self-employed	66 (75.9)	21 (24.1)		
Unemployed	24 (92.3)	2 (7.7)		
<b>Responsible for school fees</b>				
Father	119 (80.4)	29 (19.6)	4.190	0.123 <sup>^</sup>
Mother	41 (89.1)	5 (10.9)		
Others	33 (91.7)	3 (8.3)		

\*Significant variable at 5% level of significance

<sup>^</sup>Likelihood Ratio

-Fisher's Exact Test

**Table 14: Association between selected factors and age at sexual debut (n = 230)**

Variable	Age at sexual debut		X <sup>2</sup>	P- value
	Yes – early (≤14yrs) n (%)	No – not early (>14yrs) n (%)		
<b>Do you have a sexual partner</b>				
Yes	118 (77.1)	35 (22.9)	-	0.000*
No	75 (97.4)	2 (2.6)		
<b>Age at first sexual partner</b>				
<14	135 (86.0)	23 (14.0)		
14	58 (69.6)	14 (30.4)	6.576	0.010*
<b>Watch pornographic videos</b>				
Yes	81 (89.0)	10 (11.0)	-	0.101
No	112 (80.6)	27 (19.4)		
<b>Age started watching pornographic videos (years)</b>				
12- 16	63 (85.1)	11 (14.9)	-	0.205
17- 19	13 (100.0)	0 (0.0)		
<b>Alcohol use</b>				
Yes	46 (90.2)	5 (9.8)	1.916	0.166
No	147 (82.1)	32 (17.9)		
<b>Age started drinking Alcohol (years)</b>				
12- 16	30 (85.7)	5 (14.3)	-	0.167
17- 19	16 (100.0)	0 (0.0)		

\*Significant variable at 5% level of significance

^Likelihood Ratio

-Fisher's Exact Test

**Table 15: Predictors of early sexual debut among respondents (n = 193)**

Variable	OR	95% Confidence Interval	P-Value
<b>Sex</b>			
Female	1		
Male	0.5	0.7 – 4.9	0.220
<b>Ever worked for pay</b>			
Yes	4.6	1.6 – 12.7	0.004*
No	1		
<b>Currently working for pay</b>			
Yes	6.6	1.9 – 23.7	0.003*
No	1		
<b>Mother married to father</b>			
Yes	1		
No	0.4	0.1 – 1.1	0.453

<b>Living status</b>			
Both parents	1		
Single parent (father / mother)	0.5	0.2 – 1.6	0.241
Guardian / others	1.7	0.4 – 7.2	0.465
<b>Highest education attained by father</b>			
<Secondary education	1		
Secondary	0.9	0.2 – 4.7	0.908
Tertiary	1.3	0.2 – 7.1	0.746
<b>Age had first sexual partner</b>			
<14	3.1	1.3 - 7.2	0.009*
14	1		

\*Significant variable at 5% level of significance

This study was conducted to determine early sexual debut and associated factors among senior secondary schools in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State providing information on their age at sexual debut.

Early sexual debut is a concern in Nigeria. The finding from this study showed that of those that ever-had sex, 46% have experienced early sexual debut at the age  $\leq 14$  years. This was slightly lower than what was reported by Durowade et al. [12] in Ido-Ekiti, Ekiti State, South-West Nigeria who established that 67.8% of adolescents have experienced early sexual debut. This is similar to what was reported by Nnebue, et al. [13] in Nnewi, Anambra State who found that 68.3% of adolescents have experienced early sexual debut. The same applies to a study by Monisola & Oludare, [14] in Niger State and Oboro & Tabowei, [15] in Delta State. In contrast to these reports, a study done in the United States by Finer, [16] reported lower proportion (7.1%) of adolescents who have experienced early sexual debut. This slight difference in proportion might be as a result of the proportion, personality and age range of adolescents studied.

The mean age at sexual debut in this study was  $13.3 \pm 1.4$  years. This is in accordance with a previous study that reported mean age at first sexual intercourse as  $13.37 \pm 3.66$  years among adolescents in Rivers State [8] and [17][18]. However, this was higher than what was reported by Anochie et al. [19] who reported age at first sexual intercourse among adolescents as 11 years.

Mean age of early sexual debut in this study was  $12.2 \pm 1.2$  years. This was lower than what was reported by Sandford et al. [20] in the US who found that mean age of early sexual debut was 14.6 years among adolescents. The younger adolescents initiate sex the more they would be exposed to multiple sexual partners and unprotected sexual intercourse which could lead to STIs or teenage pregnancy [21]. The effect of this is seen among girls, where teenage pregnancy leads to birth of low weight babies, complications like vesico-vaginal fistula and death [22].

This study also showed that more than half (54.8%) of the adolescents had ever had sex. This is slightly consistent with a study of 410 adolescent of a rural community in Rivers State which reported 62 % adolescents ever had sex [5], 61.1% reported by Aomreore & Alikor, [23] in Port Harcourt, Rivers State and 63% reported by Owolabi et al. [24] in Ilesa, Nigeria. However this proportion is higher than what was reported by Anochie&Ikpeeme [19] in Port Harcourt, Rivers State where 25.7% adolescents had ever had sex, 13% reported by Ajuwon et al. [25], 28.5% reported by Salako et al. [26] and 34% reported by Slap et al. [27] all in Nigeria. This means that more adolescents still engage in sex intercourse before marriage and have poor knowledge about early sexual debut and its associated factors.

The factors that were found to be significantly associated with early sexual debut at bivariate level were socio-demographic characteristics, having a sexual partner and age at first sexual partner. This study found a significant association between respondents ever worked for pay, currently working for pay, age at first sexual partner and early sexual debut at

multivariate level. This may be due to the fact that economic hardship encourages adolescents to become sexually active at an early age for economic reasons [19][28].

A significant association was found between whom respondents live with and early sexual debut, this is similar to study by Aji et al. [28] who reported significant association between person adolescents reside with and early sexual debut. This differs from the report by Alex-Hart et al. [8] who found no association between who adolescents live with and early sexual debut. This study also showed a significant association between respondents' fathers' occupation and early sexual debut. This supports the fact that adolescents with low parental income were more sexually active than those who reported high or medium parental income [29]. However, considering the predictors of early sexual debut in this study, it was deduced that those that had ever worked for pay, were currently working for pay and whose age at first sexual partner was  $\leq 14$  years are more likely to have experienced early sexual debut.

The varying perspectives on the meaning of adolescent sexuality may be associated with early sexual debut among adolescents [30]. Slap et al. [27] suggests that sexual knowledge is higher among young people out of school; sexual experience while still in school may prompt students to acquire sexual knowledge and to move out of school.

The findings from this study showed that 77.9% of the respondents had good knowledge about early sexual debut. Many adolescents have several perceptions in favour of delayed sexual debut: that early sex for boys will cause the penis to be "locked up" inside the woman. Such views were strongly held by both males and females. It was believed that failure to have sexual intercourse early would make one develop pimples, grow fat, become infertile in the future, or could even result in death [6]. However, findings of this study shows that 75.7% of the respondents have good perception about early sexual debut and would encourage delaying early sex initiation in life.

#### ***Limitation of the study***

It was a little bit challenging gaining access to students in some schools due to their tight schedules. Therefore, their free periods and break time were targeted. Also, some students were shy and did not want to participate but since the questionnaire was interviewer administered and efforts were made to administer it privately with interviewer assistance, this gave them the confidence to respond to the questions asked.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

This study has shown that early sexual debut is still prevalent among adolescents, which is still a public health problem. Most of the adolescents still engage in early sexual debut at a younger age with very poor knowledge and perception about early sexual debut. Age at sexual debut was influenced by socio-demographic characteristics, having had a sexual partner and age at first sexual partner of respondents. Factors established from this study to predict early sexual debut were ever worked for pay, currently working for pay and age at first sexual partner. Greater efforts should be put into educating the students on the meaning of early sexual debut in order to avoid misconceptions and prepare them on how to delay early sex initiation as long as possible until marriage.

#### **CONSENT**

All consenting students in each class; SS 1 and 2 of selected schools whose names are fully registered in the class register by the start of academic session and aged 15 – 19 years of age. SS 3 was excluded because they were already out of school before the commencement of this study.

## ETHICAL APPROVAL

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Rivers State Ethical Review Committee. Permission to conduct this study was also obtained from the Commissioner for Education, Rivers State, and this was presented to the principals of the selected schools to allow the students participate in the study.

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