

The cultural, social and attitudinal context of male sexual behaviour in urban south-west Nigeria*



I.O. Orubuloye,^a John C. Caldwell^b and Pat Caldwell^b

^a Ondo State University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria

^b Health Transition Centre, NCEPH, Australian National University

Abstract

From 1989 onward a research program based at Ondo State University, Nigeria, investigated the social and behavioural context of the sexually transmitted disease and AIDS epidemics (Orubuloye et al. 1994). Between 1989 and 1993 the researchers reached the conclusion that premarital and extramarital sexual activities were on a sufficient scale in Ondo State to maintain an STD epidemic and possibly to maintain an AIDS epidemic. The reason for caution with regard to AIDS arose from an awareness of the current relatively low seroprevalence levels in Nigeria and the demonstration by the program that much of the premarital and extramarital sexual activity was not with prostitutes but diffused more widely. The researchers also concluded that the economic returns to young women from commercial sex were so substantial and the current and later social sanctions so weak that no government intervention was likely to reduce the inflow of recruits to the occupation sufficiently to stem the STD epidemic or reduce the risk of a major AIDS epidemic. Clearly something would be achieved by a program aimed at increasing the practice of safe sex, especially the use of condoms, by everyone participating in sexual networking, particularly prostitution. There was little evidence that specific planned intervention was already achieving much, although some evidence that government and media AIDS publicity was raising the level of condom use in prostitution. There also seemed to be a need for STD education and curative interventions on a much greater scale. Nevertheless, until the achievement of decisive biomedical breakthroughs to halt the AIDS epidemic, the research increasingly suggested that the best chance of halting the AIDS epidemic and mitigating the impact of STDs was a change in male sexual behaviour.

There was much confusion and ignorance about how difficult such a change would prove to be, and whether long-term or short-term changes were under way and in what direction. Researchers had raised the issue of the role of sexual behaviour in sub-Saharan African societies, but much of the focus had been on female sexuality (Goody 1976; Caldwell, Caldwell and Quiggin 1989). AIDS researchers had necessarily become concerned with male, as well as female, behaviour. Reporting on Ghana, they had written:

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Traditionally, a man in Ghana has unlimited sexual freedom both in and out of marriage while a woman is expected to stick to only one partner at a time... This is in keeping with a situation in which a man can be the husband of several wives, but a woman is a wife to only one man (Anarfi and Awusabo-Asare 1993: 30).

With reference to the predominance of males in migration streams, Anarfi (1993: 47) wrote: 'This, coupled with the repetitive and overpowering nature of the sexual appetite in males, creates the conditions for prostitution'. It seems plausible that the existence of a high level of polygyny inevitably implies — and is justified by — the doctrine that males, by their nature, need more than one woman. This is not a trivial argument in West Africa where usually 40-50 per cent of currently married women are in polygynous marriages (Lesthaeghe, Kaufmann and Meekers 1989: 276). In Ondo State, where the research reported here was carried out, the level is 46 per cent for all women, 62 per cent for those 45-49 years of age, implying that most women are in polygamous marriage at some stage of their lives, and 40 per cent even in urban areas (Demographic and Health Surveys 1989: 12).

Yet there has been almost no systematic study of African societal attitudes to male sexuality to ascertain traditional mores or how they have changed with the advent of Islam and Christianity. The classical anthropologists shied away from studying African belief systems and attitudes towards male sexuality, sometimes implying that it was an improper interest, but more often appearing to feel that the situation amounted to men doing what they wanted to do in a fairly relaxed society in sexual terms, with both sexes driven by little more than physiology. Little attention was given to the social and attitudinal context or the belief system. Evans-Pritchard (1974: 10) wrote about a collection of narratives which he had made among the Azande people:

I must add that I cannot be held responsible for the sexual content in some of the texts. The relationship between men and women is often in part a physical one; and in any case I did not elicit the texts — love-making is a major Zande interest, from one point of view or another, almost an obsession it appears to some.

Clearly there is a need not only to come to grips with the magnitude of male sexuality, but, more importantly, to place it in the context of society's norms. The Ondo State research program has given a quantified dimension to the former during the last few years (Orubuloye et al. 1991, 1992), showing that, in the course of a year, over half of monogamously married men and more than a third of polygynously married men had participated in extramarital sexual relations, and that three-quarters of single males had engaged in sexual activities (Orubuloye et al. 1991: 70). Perhaps too little emphasis was given to the fact that nearly half of the monogamously married men and a higher proportion of the polygamously married men had confined their sexual activities to marriage. This suggested that both male and female attitudes to male sexuality should be investigated with a view to establishing the constraints that did exist.

The pilot research project

As a prelude to planning a larger project, covering both urban and rural populations, and using both survey and anthropological methodology, a pilot study was carried out in late 1993 in Ado-Ekiti, a town of 150,000 inhabitants and the headquarters of the Ekiti District of Ondo State, Nigeria.

The research program had earlier undertaken detailed mapping of Ado-Ekiti and drew from a stratified sampling framework a representative sample of Yoruba dwellings in which all males and females over 18 years of age were interviewed, aiming at a sample of 500 males

and 500 females. Interviewers administered a questionnaire which included questions which allowed lengthy answers for subsequent study and office coding. The limiting of the research to the Yoruba ethnic group, the indigenous people of Ondo State, was in an effort to understand a single and dominant culture in what was a cultural investigation. Around 88 per cent of Ondo State's population is still Yoruba (Demographic and Health Surveys 1989: 6), as is 93 per cent of that of Ado-Ekiti (Orubuloye et al. 1991:62).

The survey actually interviewed 503 males and 502 females and all subsequent analysis refers to these 1,005 people. Because of some non-Yoruba persons living in the selected dwellings only 97.6 per cent of the respondents were, in fact, Yoruba. Similarly, somewhat fewer 18-19-year-olds were included than had been anticipated. In all other respects the sample conformed with what was anticipated from other data sources. This preliminary report concentrates on the male respondents, and the following were their characteristics. Just over three-quarters were 20-49 years of age and their median age was 37 years. Because Ado-Ekiti is an administrative town and educational centre, one-quarter of the men worked in clerical, administrative and professional occupations, 36 per cent were traders, business men and artisans and 13 per cent were farmers with land beyond the town boundaries. One-ninth had no education, one-quarter primary schooling only, and the rest had experienced at least some secondary schooling. The religious breakdown was 79 per cent Christian, 17 per cent Muslim and 4 per cent traditional African religion, the latter, where it survives, being identified with rural rather than urban life. One-third of the men were single and, among the married ones, 44 per cent were polygynously married, a relatively high level of polygyny but one recorded in Ado-Ekiti in a previous study (Caldwell et al. 1992: 226). In terms of whether commercial sex was likely to be reported, it might be noted that 11.3 per cent of the female respondents reported working in bars and hotels and 5.6 per cent would not be averse to their daughters working in commercial sex providing that it was lucrative.

The questionnaires for men and women were different but contained some common or similar questions. The focus was on male non-marital sexual activity and the reasons given for it. Among married persons an examination was carried out of the extent to which husbands believed their wives were aware of this activity and the actual level of awareness among wives. The extent of protest by wives was ascertained. Finally, parental, especial maternal control, of adolescent sons' sexual activities was investigated.

Is one woman sufficient for a man?

Table 1 provides a selection of responses to this question, from different parts of the interview. Much of the society is certainly no longer convinced that monogamy in sexual life is impossible for men. Over half of men and four-fifths of monogamously married men believe it is possible. Among women the proportion reaches two-thirds, and even a substantial minority of polygynously married women share this view. They may not be wrong, for work in Ibadan suggested that husbands became more sexually interested in their own wives, and more reluctant to substitute sexual activity with other women while their wives were abstaining, when their wives were more educated and more 'modern' in a range of ways, including their jobs (Caldwell and Caldwell 1981: 87; 1987: 244). Admittedly when wives are asked about their own specific case, the number sure that the husband could keep himself to one woman dropped to 42 per cent. In this response the gradient of responses was steep in keeping with the findings from the earlier research, with trust in the husband or in the respondent's ability to retain his interest rising from 21 per cent among the illiterate to 57 per cent among wives with some secondary education, and from 19 per cent among farming wives to 35 per cent among traders and 59 per cent among white-collar workers.

Table 1
The sufficiency to a man of one woman, male and female responses

Question	To whom addressed	Responses	Percentage of all responses
Is one woman sufficient for a man?	Males		
	all	Yes	59
	single	Yes	61
	monogamously married	Yes	81
	polygynously married	Yes	15
Is one woman sufficient for a man over a lifetime?	Males		
	all	Yes	55
	Christians	Yes	68
	Muslims	Yes	23
	traditional religion	Yes	11
Is one woman sufficient for a man?	Females		
	all	Yes	63
	monogamously married	Yes	76
	polygynously married	Yes	41
Do you think your husband could be satisfied with just you for a lifetime?	Wives	Yes	42

In fact, the society is divided with very little common ground: around half of both males and females (varying by the form of the question) arguing that man is by nature polygynous and the rest, often seeking support from what they regard as the Christian viewpoint, denying it. The differentials in response were striking, with the right to more than one wife being embedded in Islam and traditional religion. It should be noted that Christians and Muslims exhibited similar majorities in their view that this male need did not sanction extramarital sexuality.

The belief that one woman is sexually sufficient for a man is more strongly held in modernizing society. Among males it was held by 35 per cent of farmers (all with urban residence), 43 per cent of artisans and 66 per cent of white-collar workers. It was held by 46 per cent of the illiterate but 60 per cent of those who had been to school, with such a small gradient among the latter that it seemed as if the main factor was identification with any schooling. Among females the gradients were both steeper and continual with 33 per cent of farmers, 55 per cent of traders and 78 per cent of office workers believing men could confine themselves to one woman. The figures increased linearly with education, from 41 per cent among those who had never been to school to 69 per cent who had at least some secondary schooling and 83 per cent with tertiary education. There were no significant differences by age, possibly an indication that attitudes are not changing rapidly.

Table 2 demonstrates men's reasons for believing that they could or could not be content with one woman.

Table 2
Reasons that men can or cannot be satisfied with one woman

		Male respondents	
		% answering this way	% of all respondents
Why men can be satisfied:	God's way, dignity, control of appetites	34	19
	So as not to injure marriage	30	17
	Health risks of non-marital sex	22	13
	More economical to stay with one woman	9	5
	Not stated	5	3
Why they cannot be satisfied:	Polygynous by nature	80	32
	Both men and women polygynous by nature	5	2
	Wife often sexually unavailable	8	3
	Not stated	7	3
	No response to original question (in Table 1)		3

The main argument for sexual exclusiveness is that it is a moral, settled way of life. The first two categories were largely argued in religious terms with little difference between Christians and Muslims. Nearly all conversions have taken place this century. Conversions to Christianity were largely to a fundamentalist mission type, and Muslim missionizing has largely been modelled on the Christian experience. Fear of the health consequences of multi-partnered relationships plays only a minor role. The argument for wider sexual networking is that it is unavoidable: men are that way by nature. Those putting this argument did not do so in opposition to Christianity - although they sometimes did so in opposition to how Europeans interpreted their religion - but rather as introducing an additional biological truth. The argument that Yoruba wives are often unavailable for sex because of culturally prescribed periods of abstinence was made less often than anticipated (Caldwell and Caldwell 1977; Page and Lesthaeghe 1981), possibly because these periods are shortening. Nevertheless, this is surprising because, as women become older, both sexual activity and co-residence often cease in Yoruba marriages. The proportion of marriages so affected may be gauged by the fact that the 1990 Nigerian Demographic and Health Survey recorded that 19 per cent of Southwest Nigeria's households are female-headed (p.12), and by the time women are in their forties almost one-fifth are having no sexual activity (p.64).

Are men biologically different in their needs?

Nearly half of all male respondents and over a third of female respondents believed that men would or could not give up seeking other women. We tested this further by asking direct questions on this point.

Table 3
Men's physical need for more than one woman, male respondents

Question	Response	Male respondents (%)	Female respondents (%)
Do men have a need for more than one woman?	Yes	41	37
Do you personally have such a need?	Yes	37	
Are males biologically different from women in their need for different sexual partners?	Yes	46	

The affirmative answers for males being different and being biologically driven declined from 61 per cent among illiterate men to 33 per cent with post-secondary education, and there is a similar gradient from farming to the socio-economically higher urban positions. The declines were even steeper among women, from 59 per cent among illiterates to 17 per cent of those with post-secondary education, and from 67 per cent among farmers to 22 per cent of clerical workers.

Those believing men were biologically driven divided into two equal halves: those who believed that the fundamental force was men's strong sexual urges and the need for their immediate satiation, and those who felt less strongly about the overwhelming need for sexual activity but believed they were driven by a need for a variety of partners. Among those who denied that sexual networking arose from biological causes, all said in one way or another that Yoruba society encouraged male sexual adventurism and placed few sanctions upon it, so that men just used the licence provided to them to enjoy themselves.

The male respondents' sexual behaviour

The 334 married male respondents were asked when they had last had extramarital sexual relations. Somewhat unexpectedly in view of the previous responses, not a majority but only one-third stated that they had not. However, for many it was not a regular event and only 39 per cent had done so in the current year and 20 per cent in the current week. Believing that male sexual networking was inevitable and having extra partners were highly correlated. Nevertheless, there was not the same socio-economic correlation with behaviour as with attitudes. The fact of having extramarital relations was not significantly related to education and only marginally to occupation with white-collar workers having indulged only slightly less than farmers or traders. The more educated and economically better-off are more likely to speak against sexual networking but not more likely to refrain from it. They may also have more opportunity and be in a position to afford it.

Those who had experienced extramarital sex were asked about the most recent episode. It is clear that much of this sexual activity was unsafe. Although only a few identified the female partner as having been a prostitute or stated that they had gone to a brothel, hotel or bar for sex, 48 per cent of the encounters were with women who were either prostitutes or unknown to the men, or could not be properly identified, and 43 per cent involved some payment at the time. Only one-third of the men used a condom at that encounter, but two-thirds felt fairly safe; 32 per cent were apprehensive of catching a disease. Those who felt safe usually gave as their reason that they knew the woman not to be promiscuous and to be selective with her partners; although previous research in the project has shown that men know far less about their non-marital female partners' other relationships than most believe (Orubuloye et al. 1992: 346-347). A few explained that they regularly took antibiotics or had medical checkups.

These men were asked two further questions: what had led to the sexual episode, and what had been their subsequent primary reaction to it? In terms of the first question, six per cent said that the wife was away, one per cent that she was abstaining from sex, and five per cent that they were with a group of friends and went along with them. But all the rest spoke of sudden desires or urges, mostly alone although sometimes after drinking. Afterwards, 54 per cent felt happy and stronger, 25 per cent were sad and guilty, and 20 per cent were chiefly concerned that they might have been infected by an STD or HIV/AIDS.

Further questions focused on those men who believed that they were at some health risk from their extramarital sexual relations. Only one-fifth even now fear AIDS. Everyone fears STDs, although, with few exceptions, only gonorrhoea was specified. Most claimed that because of recent publicity or their own fears (or perhaps just because they are growing older), they are taking greater precautions than used to be the case. Among this group, 55 per cent use condoms more often, 24 per cent have more frequent medical check-ups, ten per cent take more antibiotics, and eight per cent more herbal medicine. Only four per cent have changed the pattern of their sexual behaviour. It might be noted that national and international programs have made it much easier and cheaper to obtain condoms than was the case even three or four years ago (Caldwell et al. 1992: 224-225).

Only one-eighth of the male respondents admitted to frequenting brothels, bars and hotels. Of this group, 73 per cent said that their decisions on the last visit were affected by having too much to drink, and 63 per cent that they were afterwards afraid of the health consequences of the sexual relations that had followed, although half said they had used condoms. Over half went to the brothel, hotel or bar on the spur of the moment, and only a quarter had set out with that specifically in mind.

The role of wives

There is evidence that the Nigerian system of extramarital sexual relations operates as it does, not so much because almost half the society thinks that the male need for sexual diversity is uncontrollable, but because a much larger proportion of society believes that wives have no right to comment upon, or even take note of, husbands' absences at night, or the fact that they are probably involved in sexual activities (Caldwell and Caldwell 1981: 86-88; Orubuloye et al. 1992: 348-349). In a study of Ondo Town, nine-tenths of those husbands conducting extramarital sexual relationships said that their wives knew nothing about it even though in the majority of instances these actions were discussed with relatives or friends. The research concluded:

Even though wives' ignorance of their husbands' extramarital relations is largely ritual and pretence, the fact is that they do not inquire about nor often discuss these matters with their husbands (Orubuloye et al. 1992: 349).

In research two decades earlier in Ibadan, it was found that women so strongly adhered to this stance that the great majority refused to tell interviewers whether they suspected any particular women or who the women were (Caldwell and Caldwell 1981: 87).

This situation has not changed, as is shown in Tables 4 and 5, where the focus is on male beliefs about their wives' suspicions and on male reporting of their wives' interventions. As subsequently noted, a much higher proportion of wives are actually aware of what is going on, but, as reported in the following section, husbands and wives agree that the latter rarely intervene. It is this which allows husbands to believe, or at least keep up the pretence that they believe, that their wives do not know of their extramarital adventures and hence are not disturbed by them.

Table 4
Wife's awareness and reaction to the extramarital sexual relations of husbands (N = 220)

Question	Response	Percentage of subcategory	Percentage of all husbands who had extramarital sex
Is your wife aware of your extramarital sexual activities?	YES		14
	NO		70
	Don't know		16
If aware, has she said anything? (N = 30)	YES	40	5
	NO	47	6
	No response	13	2
What did she say? (N = 12)	Immoral, disloyal	42	2
	Lack of self-control	17	1
	Danger of infection	8	0.5
	Don't know	33	2

Few wives say anything, and fewer still raise the issue of the risk of disease to their husbands and themselves. The use of the filter question about awareness of specific activities may well have reduced the levels of reported reactions by wives. To counter this, a wider question was asked later in the interview to ascertain whether male respondents could recall their wives ever having raised the question of their extramarital sexual activities. The responses appear in Table 5.

The striking point about both tables is how little control wives have over their husband's extramarital sexual activities and how rarely they try to exert any control. Even Table 5 shows that, of those wives whose husbands do engage in extramarital sexual activities, fewer than one-fifth have ever said a word about it. Furthermore, in only one-fifth of these cases (4 per cent of the total) did the husband promise to restrict his sexual activities to marriage, although a slightly greater number decided to be more careful about avoiding sexually transmitted diseases. Clearly wives play little part either in controlling their husbands' extramarital sexuality or in inducing the practice of safe sex. What is more surprising is that there is very little gradient by education or occupation in the responses. Educated wives working in offices, with the ability to support themselves fully, are hardly any more likely than farmers' or labourers' wives to make a complaint. To do so would be to strike at the heart of the family and social system.

Wives are, not unexpectedly, more aware of the situation than husbands say. Even by the highest count, only 19 per cent of sexually straying husbands report themselves as having been given reason to think their wives suspected. In contrast, 70 per cent of such wives reported their suspicions to interviewers in the special circumstances of a research interview, and the actual proportion harbouring suspicions is undoubtedly higher still. The majority of the more traditional wives just take it for granted. Those believing their husbands to be having outside sex declined with education: 60 per cent for those without schooling, 47 per cent with primary schooling, and 15 per cent with secondary schooling or more. Similarly there was a decline from 67 per cent for farming women to 48 per cent for traders and 13 per cent for white-collar workers. It might be noted that these are far steeper declines by socio-economic status than the facts warranted, and the inevitable conclusion is that higher-socio-economic-status wives delude themselves to a greater extent or are forced to a greater extent

to preserve their marriages by denying the truth even to interviewers. Interestingly, only seven per cent of the wives of straying husbands believe their spouses ever go to prostitutes. Both wives and husbands share the difficulty of defining prostitution.

Table 5
Discussions about husband's extramarital sexual activities (N = 220)

Question	Response	Percentage of subcategory	Percentage of all husbands who had extramarital sex
Has your wife ever said anything about your extramarital sexual activities?	YES		19
What did she say? (N = 41)	Immoral, disloyal	22	4
	Lack of self-control	12	2
	Danger of disease	49	9
	No response	17	4
What was your reply? (N = 41)	Not wife's business	27	5
	Society allows it	5	1
	Knows how to avoid disease	24	4
	Will not in the future	20	4
	No response/said nothing	24	5
Did your wife's complaints influence you? (N = 41)	YES	46	9
	NO	44	8
	No response	10	2
If YES, in what way? (N = 19)	Practised extramarital sex more safely	63	6
	No response	37	3

Wives' and husbands' rights

Table 6 reports on how all men, not merely those engaged in extramarital sexual activities, interpret the sexual rights of wives and husbands.

Almost half of all men believe that husbands do have a right to extramarital sex. Even many who do not, believe that good wives should not enter this sphere. There are two

arguments for this. The first is the traditional cultural or natural right of men to express their essentially polygynous nature. The second, and more unexpected, is a kind of moral argument for the double standard. Proper women or good women do not notice sexuality, even their husbands' extramarital sexuality. Indeed, traditionally the proper woman was not supposed to demonstrate much sexual excitement within marriage either.

Table 6
Wives' and husbands' rights

Question	Response	Percentage of subcategory	Percentage of all husbands who had extramarital sex
Male respondents (N = 502)			
Does a wife have a right to disapprove of her husband's extramarital sexual activities?	YES		24
	NO		64
	No response		12
	If YES, why? (N = 120)	Marriage gives this right	32
	She must try to maintain the marriage	19	5
	She must try to reduce the risk of STDs and AIDS	36	9
	No response	13	2
If NO, why not? (N = 321)	If women judge these matters, they might believe they too have rights to extramarital sexuality	33	21
	Unseemly, immoral, against God's commandment for a woman to notice these matters	21	13
	Husband's right as head of the household	17	11
	No response	29	18

Table continued next page

Table 6 continued
Wives' and husbands' rights

Question	Response	Percentage of subcategory	Percentage of all husbands who had extramarital sex
Do husbands have a right to have sex with other women without their wives interfering?	YES		46
	NO		45
	No response/Don't know		9
If YES, why? (N = 233)	Natural right, cultural right, marital right	99	45
	No response	1	1
If NO, why not? (N = 226)	Wife's marital right	9	4
	Wife's duty to try to maintain marriage	42	19
	So she and her husband can avoid disease	22	10
	Not stated, don't know	27	12
Female respondents (N = 483)			
Does a wife have the right to disapprove of her husband's extramarital sexual activities?	YES		27
	NO		73
	No response		-
Does a husband have a right to extramarital affairs without his wife interfering?	YES		48
	NO		52
	No response		-

It is clear that neither men nor women see the rights of the sexes as complementary. Only a quarter of both men and women believe that women have a right to disapprove of their husbands' behaviour. But nearly half of each sex believe that husbands have no right to get away with extramarital sex without some trouble or disapproval. This may seem to be contradictory but it is not. What is meant is that the decision-making and the self-constraint should lie with the husband. He is the head of the household and he should control himself.

The belief that a wife has the right to disapprove of her husband's sexual activities rises among males with education and socio-economic status but, surprisingly, does not do so among women. Similarly, the belief that a husband has a right to extramarital sexual adventures without interference falls among men as education rises, while, though the direction is similar among women, the gradient is much less steep. Educated women are much more realistic than educated men about the price of maintaining a marriage.

Parents' rights and sons

The research program discovered that there are generational rights as well as gender ones. Society allows mothers to try to exert more control over sons than it allows wives to exert over husbands, although as Table 7 shows, with even less impact. Earlier research (Orubuloye et al. 1991: 70) had shown higher levels of non-marital sexuality among single than married males and it appears that this is more condoned by society, thus undermining parental attempts at control. Both research projects showed similar levels of sexual activity among single males.

Table 7
Parental control of the sexual activity of their adolescent sons, female respondents (N = 98)

Question	Response	Percentage of responses in subcategory	Percentage of all respondents with adolescent sons
Do you think your son is sexually active? (N = 98)	YES		80
	NO		18
	Don't know		2
Do you say anything to him? (N = 78)	YES	76	60
	NO	24	20
Does his father say anything to him? (N = 78)	YES	69	55
	NO	17	13
	Don't know	24	5
Does your son take any notice? (N = 78)	YES	64	38
	NO	8	5
	No response	28	17
Do you think he ever goes to prostitutes? (N = 78)	YES	12	7
	NO	88	53
Do you ask your son about what he does when he goes out? (N = 98)	YES		74
	NO		22
	No response		4
Do you think a mother should try to control her son's sexual activities? (N = 98)	YES		74
	NO		26
Can you do this? (N = 98)	YES		70
	NO		30

Table 7 confirms that most adolescent sons are sexually active and that the majority of parents attempt some kind of control. This may not be very effective, but it may limit some of the risks taken. Indeed, few mothers believe their sons go to prostitutes. This may be self-delusion but it is true that most of the males frequenting hotels and bars seem to be older men. Ondo Town research suggested that most boys start their sexual activities with girls of their

own age (Orubuloye et al. 1992: 345-346). The attempt to control their sons' sexual activities rises steeply with mothers' education and occupation.

Discussion

Urban, Yoruba society, as represented by Ado-Ekiti, is not a simple case of all men believing that they have unbridled sexual rights both inside and outside marriage and the whole society supporting that view. There is not universal agreement that men's polygynous tendencies, in the sense of one woman inevitably failing to satisfy a man's biological needs, are fundamentally biologically driven and ungovernable.

Certainly in contemporary Ado-Ekiti society, marriages are dichotomized. Possibly up to two-thirds of husbands have been unfaithful to their wives at some time but the proportion who regularly go to other women for sex is probably no more than two-fifths. The proportions are higher among young adult single men, probably well over three-quarters engage in fairly regular non-marital sexual activity. Mothers may be apprehensive but the society does not feel strongly on the matter because marriages are not being endangered.

But there is a substantial proportion of the community, probably a majority, among whom husbands believe that sex should be confined to marriage and follow that advice most of the time. Whatever may have been the original situation and the beliefs upon which they were based, the rationale behind the modern belief in confining sex to marriage is drawn from the world religions to which 95 per cent of Nigerians and 98 per cent of the population of Ondo State now adhere, and in Ondo State primarily to Christianity which is followed by 85 per cent of the population (Demographic and Health Surveys 1992: 19; 1989: 6). The case put for fidelity is partly that an ordered and moral society should have a stable family, but the heart of the case is that this is God's will and, in particular, that adultery is forbidden. Muslim responses were almost indistinguishable from those of Christians.

In contrast, there is the strongly held view, particularly by those males who frequently seek sex outside marriage, that African culture has always recognized the male need for, and right to, multipartnered sex, and that polygynous marriage is only one aspect of societal acceptance of this point. They do not reject Christianity but they do reject what they regard as a specifically Westernized interpretation of Christianity on this point. Nevertheless, they also appeal to the age-old recognized rights of African men in this domain.

In spite of a widespread belief that extramarital sexuality is increasing with time and is associated with urbanization, commercialization and all things 'modern', this is a far too simplistic interpretation. As this research has shown, the more educated and those higher up the modern occupational scale are more likely to believe in keeping sex within marriage. Admittedly, as yet the behaviour of many does not follow their expressed beliefs. It is in the most modernized sector of society that men have most regretted the unavailability of their own wives for sexual relations during the postpartum abstinence period, and where that period has been most reduced. This is not merely adherence to doctrine, but also the fact that men find educated, well-dressed, lively women more attractive. Some, of course, find additional partners of this type among single, young women who are characterized by the highest educational levels. Furthermore, those who believe in a form of Christianity more adapted to Africa in this regard get very little support from the preaching of Christian leaders, even from the African independent churches which generally do not condone male extramarital sexual relations (Orubuloye et al. 1993a: 123-125).

The weak link in the social control of male extramarital sexual activity is not only the belief system about such relations, but also the continuing powerful belief that women should not even be aware of most male activity, sexual or otherwise, and should not enter into male affairs. Most of the community believe in only a very limited form of companionate marriage, and an insightful study of Yoruba society characterized it as having separate female and male

worlds, rarely intersecting (Marshall 1970). The separate strong links that wives and husbands retain with their own families of origin buttress this system. In the present research it was found that even in marriages where both husband and wife agree that sex should be kept within marriage, wives rarely feel that they can take note of any philandering by their husbands, let alone protest. This confirmed the findings of previous research on this matter.

As yet, there is little evidence that anxiety about the health dangers inherent in husbands' extramarital sexual activities is of central importance in either the wives' or the husbands' own attitudes to these relationships. There are several reasons. One is a widespread belief that STDs, usually thought of principally as gonorrhoea, can strike even when care is taken; and there is little fear of what is a common complaint. Another reason is a high level of ignorance, especially among women, of STD symptoms and whether their spouses are infected (Orubuloye et al. 1993b: 867). Finally, although the government's AIDS messages have been heard by most people, they are unlikely to do much to change behaviour unless there is a significance outbreak of the disease in the Ekiti District, which is not the case.

Parents do not have the same inhibitions in attempting to control their children's behaviour as wives have with regard to their husbands. Most feel it a duty in the case of daughters and have strong backing from society (Orubuloye et al. 1993a: 99). They also have few inhibitions in trying to limit their dependent sons' sexual activities. That they usually fail is explained by the fact that society does not support them very strongly, believing that such activities do not endanger family life.

The research has confirmed other research in finding that, in spite of all these modifications of the picture of unlimited sexual networking, the levels that do exist are quite sufficient to support an AIDS epidemic if other factors also favour such an outbreak. What, then, do these findings support in terms of potential preventive interventions?

There is no doubt that the society still believes strongly that male sexuality is very largely a matter for men themselves. Any campaign to reduce male extramarital sexuality will have to convince men that it is dangerous and unnecessary. In terms of danger, there will be a need if the Nigerian AIDS epidemic intensifies to get the message across about the numbers infected, the significance of the latency period, and the danger of sexual networking. Because far more women are engaged in some form of transactional sex than are usually thought of as prostitutes, men are disturbingly sanguine about their extramarital relations with women they know slightly, and most underestimate the number of other partners these women have (Orubuloye et al. 1992: 348-349).

The likelihood of condom use is increasing but there are two problems. The first is that in institutional commercial sex the increase in use has mostly been the achievement of the prostitutes themselves. The managers of brothels, hotels and bars have been largely inactive in pressing the women and their clientele to use condoms and in providing them (Orubuloye et al. 1994: 113). And there is not much evidence of government pressure on the management to undertake these activities, in spite of the evidence from Thailand that it is probably the most effective way of quickly intervening in the transmission of HIV/AIDS. In Nigeria the most difficult task will be to persuade men to use condoms in non-institutional extramarital sexual relations, since many women 'friends' would be insulted by their use. The necessary condoms are now available in sufficient numbers in Ado-Ekiti and this is to the credit of everyone concerned in the operation.

It will be more difficult to convince many men that they do not have an unquenchable need for multiple female partners. The government and the media can do something in combating the idea that the confinement of sex within marriage and the practice of sexual monogamy is un-African.

In the longer run one way of attempting to limit men's sexual activities to marriage is probably the emergence of a stronger belief by wives that their husbands' extramarital sexual activities are their business too and that they have to intervene to save their health and their

marriage. This is still regarded by most of the community as un-African. Just how difficult this attitude will be to change is demonstrated by the fact that the most educated and highest socio-economic groups hardly differed from the least educated or the poorest in their attitudes and behaviour in this regard. The most effective intervention here would probably be an attempt to change women's attitudes through women's groups, the media and the schools.

Finally, there is the problem of greater family control over the sexual activities of adolescent sons. Parents try to exert control and society supports them. The stumbling block is that society does not deeply disapprove of premarital sexuality. Interventions here will probably have to emphasize STDs and, if the epidemic spreads, AIDS.

There is already substantial support in the Ado-Ekiti community for such interventions to strengthen wives' rights, and government programs may well achieve a worthwhile degree of success. Nevertheless, such success will be most easily achieved in the towns, for this study showed that even farmers living in the town are far less likely to believe that male confinement of sexual relations to marriage is a real possibility. The next segment of this research will show whether this view is typical of rural populations.

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