

**EXPERIMENTAL RESEARCH
ON SEXUAL NETWORKING
IN THE EKITI DISTRICT OF NIGERIA**

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REASONS FOR THE RESEARCH

The AIDS epidemic in East, Middle and Southern Africa has raised the possibility that the disease will spread to Nigeria. Because the degree of sexual networking influences the level of the disease, it was considered wise to start experimental research work to determine the degree and nature of sexual networking in South-West Nigeria.

Subsequent to the completion of the phase of the research work reported here, the Nigerian Minister of Health, Professor Olikoye Ransome-Kuti, announced on March 14, 1990 that 21 deaths from AIDS have now occurred in Nigeria, and that blood taken from 68,355 persons (certainly not representative of the country as a whole) has yielded 308 seropositive cases (i.e. with HIV virus which leads to AIDS) or 0.45 per cent. No case of AIDS has yet been reported in Ekiti.

The Ekiti district is the northernmost part of Ondo State, and constitutes the northeast corner of the region inhabited by Yoruba people. It is approximately 150 miles in a direct line, and 200 miles by road, northeast of Lagos. It is mostly hilly with its granitic hills providing some spectacular scenery. Like the rest of Yorubaland, it is highly urbanized, with a range of towns with 30-150 thousand inhabitants and many large villages with five thousand or more people. Historically, it was a rather isolated part of Nigeria's old Western Region (actually the southwest), but, in spite of this - or possibly because of it - educational levels have been raised remarkably in the last two generations and education is a considerable industry of the area. The area is drier than most of the Yoruba country and lies near the northern limit of the oil palm. Cocoa has long been an important cash crop, and, with Nigeria's ban on the import of rice and wheat, hill rice has recently become important. The staple foods are yam, cassava (manioc), rice, plantains and cowpeas. The towns are typically Yoruba, with rusty corrugated iron roofs, earthen walls being increasingly replaced by concrete, and slab wooden doors.

The purpose of the research was not solely to acquire substantive findings. There has been considerable doubt whether such research was possible and whether meaningful results could be obtained. The problem is sensitivity about the personal nature of the enquiry into matters which are essentially private and which are frequently misstated or not disclosed in close relationships in order to avoid trouble or hurt. Some of the misgivings and some of the difficulties are those which attended early research on fertility control. That research ultimately proved possible and secured usable data, partly perhaps because the research itself convinced the world that questions of this type should be honestly answered.

METHODOLOGY

Two separate but related experiments were carried out. The first, which is the main focus of this paper, was the intensive small-scale approach. The second was a more anthropological in-depth approach to various subgroups in the main survey, such as married women in rural areas, and additionally to more specialized groups shown by the survey to be of specific importance. One example was prostitutes in the main town of the district, Ado-Ekiti.

The small-scale survey was limited to 400 persons in order to use the trained research staff more effectively and because this number seemed appropriate for an experimental pilot investigation. Two localities were chosen: Ado-Ekiti, a centre with around 100,000 population, the administrative, educational and commercial hub of the area, henceforth referred to as the urban population; and two villages within 25 kilometres, designated the rural population. Blocks were randomly sampled in both areas and further samples were drawn and houses listed in these blocks. Interviews were undertaken until quotas of 100 males 17-50 years of age and 100 females 15-45 years of age were interviewed in each area. In order not to arouse undue suspicion both spouses in a marriage were not interviewed. The following analysis is, therefore, based on 400 interviews carried out in late 1989 and early 1990.

FINDINGS WITH REGARD TO THE APPROACH

The survey was much more successful than had at first been anticipated. The key to success lay in the use of a small number of obviously skilled and discreet interviewers who succeeded in convincing respondents that the information was needed and was absolutely confidential and would never be divulged. The chief investigator assisted in this process by approaching a range of persons with different kinds of influence in order to deliver the same message.

There are several related problems in the area of gaining confidence. The first is the need for secrecy which is much greater when interviewing females than males. Ekiti is not the Middle East and there is no danger to females' lives or families' futures from such leakages, but personal relations could be badly upset and further research rendered impossible. The second problem - also encountered in the early period of family planning surveys - is that many people in the surveyed area have to be convinced that this is really serious research and that there are valid reasons for investigating this area of behaviour. The problem was that some respondents already felt that religious, community and political leaders might wish to take legislative or other measures to change sexual behaviour and that their responses would be used to further a purpose with which they did not fully agree. Finally, there were a few who feared that the research might have been established, or at least could be used, for blackmailing. All these problems can be reduced by skilled and sympathetic interviewers establishing proper rapport. They can also be reduced by the principal investigators establishing a similar rapport with the community as a whole, although this has to be done without creating too much publicity and too much awareness of what is going on when interviewers approach each respondent. In this investigation these problems were overcome largely by two decisions: first, that the community approaches would be restricted to confidential discussions with a few selected influential persons, unless experience proved that a broader approach was necessary; second, only a few respondents were interviewed in each block and those over only a few days.

Our judgment is that this approach proved satisfactory and that the findings can be trusted. The fact that only two respondents claimed to have heard of local people affected by AIDS, in a situation where most people have heard of the epidemic, but where it appears to have claimed no local victims as yet, is reassuring as to the credibility of the respondents and their lack of suggestibility.

The evidence on the core data, that on sexual networking, produces a pattern that is internally consistent throughout the interviews. A plausible relationship appears in the data between the numbers of different sexual partners reported for different retrospective periods (see Table 5). In rural areas male reporting is clearly more complete than female reporting. The discrepancy cannot be explained by the additional margin of sexual activities reported by males as having occurred outside the village, for instance with prostitutes or others in the town. Interestingly, and unexpectedly, the same discrepancy between the sexes was not found in the urban study. Clearly, urban females have less to lose from disclosure.

The central methodological finding is, then, that, at least for rural areas and probably in some places for the whole population, male responses are more trustworthy than female responses for the levels of sexual activity. Certainly, men are easier to interview because these matters are regarded more openly and even as a matter of pride. Nevertheless, the society does not seem to be characterized by such *machismo* as would lead to exaggerated reports of sexual prowess. A similar conclusion that surveys focusing on males would be both socially more acceptable and more likely to be rewarded by greater accuracy in reporting was reached in the United States with regard to surveying cohabitation during the 1970s in the general community in contrast to surveying college campuses where most earlier work on the subject had been undertaken.

Two caveats should be made. The first is that the understatement of sexual networking by rural females does not mean that the rest of their explanatory material is equally deficient. On the contrary most of it appears to have been given as earnestly, or with greater scrupulousness, than that presented by males, partly because women necessarily take these things more seriously. As we shall see, in rural areas they have strong reasons for doing so. The second reservation is with regard to sexual relations with prostitutes. That men understate their relations with prostitutes by describing them as friends is clear, at least in Ado-Ekiti, from the statistics gathered from the specialized study of prostitution to be reported separately. In one sense the men are right, because much of this more commercialized sex is not as specialized or set apart from general community life as in the West, and there may often be a degree of friendship or longer-term relations. It is often also associated with a wider range of entertainment. Nevertheless, this qualification goes only a small way to explain the rural margin between male and female responses. One reason is that most rural married males do not go to town very often.

SURVEY FINDINGS

The population

The characteristics of the surveyed population are summarized in Table 1. It is basically a Yoruba society. It is strongly Christian, largely Protestant with a very visible and strong minority of African syncretic churches, although there is a Moslem business community in the town. High fertility, with birth rates near 50 per thousand and completed family size over six live births per woman, has ensured a young population, although the lower average age in the town also reflects immigration of young people from the rural areas. Ado-Ekiti and its immediate hinterland are noted for high educational levels and this is borne out by the table. Nevertheless, males are more educated than females and townspeople than those in the countryside. One reflection of this high level of education is the substantial amount of employment outside farming and trading, although, for many of the otherwise employed respondents, these are secondary occupations. All wives, indeed nearly all women, do a great deal of housework and food preparation, but to do nothing else is regarded as being virtually unemployed. The high levels of female employment are reflected in the typical separate budgets, which also means a high level of responsibility for their own support and that of their children as well as meeting obligations to their own families of origin.

Table 1: Characteristics of the Surveyed Population

		RURAL		URBAN	
		Males	Females	Males	Females
Ethnicity:	Yoruba (%)	95	91	93	94
Age:	Median (in years)	33	33	28	27
Religion:	Christian (%)	83	81	73	80
	Moslem (%)	8	9	22	19
	Traditional (%)	7	5	1	0
Education:	not more than primary school (%)	37	57	5	20
Primary Occupation:	farming (%)	30	24	7	1
	trading (%)	7	30	19	30
	artisan/semi-skilled (%)	17	15	16	22
	other occupation (%)	34	17	29	24
	student (%)	6	6	14	13
	housewife/no employment (%)	6	8	15	10
Married women with separate earnings and separate budgets (%)		-	87	-	67

Table 2 presents relevant demographic information. Given the youthfulness of the population, the number of children born to them already indicates ultimate fertility close to seven births per woman. There is no suggestion here of Nigerian fertility decline. The proportion of children already dead suggests a rural life expectancy significantly under 50 years and an infant mortality rate as high as 125 per thousand births; in the urban area, dotted with doctor's surgeries and private and public health clinics, life expectancy may now be 55 years and infant mortality around 85.

Of women currently married, over 30 per cent in the rural area and almost 30 per cent in the town are in polygynous marriages. These proportions also indicate little change; even the lower figure for the urban population can be explained by the younger age of the women and the greater economic problems, and fewer rewards, offered to men by polygyny in the town compared with farming areas. The real change in marriage is the steeply rising proportion of unions blessed by neither traditional nor more recent church or civil rites. This is largely a function of the collapse of arranged marriage, for in some ways, the traditional ceremony makes little sense if the elders were not involved in selecting the partner. However, it also means that there are not the same pressures on daughters-in-law to prevent them from sexually straying. The district is typically West African with one quarter of women's children fostered out. In the town, women send their pre-school children back to grandparents or aunts in the country for care but also receive other children to board while at school in town.

Table 2: The Demography of the Surveyed Population

	RURAL		URBAN	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Children ever born (to women who had given birth):	-	4.4	-	3.1
Proportion dead (%)		22		17
Marital Status:				
monogamous (%)	56	44	42	32
polygynous (%)	28	32	9	17
single/no regular union (%)	16	13	41	38
separated (%)	-	1	7	9
widowed (%)	-	7	1	4
Marriage type (current unions) (%):				
traditional only	49	43	27	21
Christian/Civil (usually in addition to traditional marriage)	18	19	40	41
free/de facto	33	38	33	38
Child fostering (women with children):				
own children with respondent	-	3.5	-	2.4
own children fostered out	-	1.1	-	1.3
other children fostered in	-	0.5	-	1.1
balance of children in household	-	2.9	-	2.2

One other measure of the African family was attempted, and that could be described as one of conjugality. In the rural area around 60 per cent of wives now eat with their husbands, although that does not necessarily mean that they sit down together; 70 per cent sleep in the same room although only 40 per cent sleep in the same bed; and a similar proportion ever go out together. Unexpectedly, for each of these measures, the proportion was only about two-thirds as high in the town. This may be a measure of greater male mobility and extra-familial interests in the town, and certainly provides no evidence that urbanization promotes Western conjugal life styles. There is, however, the possibility that urban women are imposing stricter standards, and mean eating regularly together or sleeping all night or usually in the same bed.

The wider African family can be all-embracing, but the conjugal relationship can have, for women, a high degree of insecurity. Even the fostering is evidence of the strength of the extended family and the relative weakness of the nuclear family. The two tables taken together provide a picture of a marriage which is frequently polygynous, or, which, at any time, may become polygynous. This is the main explanation for the separate earnings and budgets. These give women a certain freedom, as do the increasing proportion of free marriages and the ability to remain separated without remarrying, but they add up to a situation which can often be insecure and uncertain even in rural areas. The marriage, partly because of the weak spousal link, often aggravated by a large age difference and the existence of other wives, can also be lonely. These observations are basic to an understanding of the rest of the paper.

Premarital sexual relations

Africa is not obsessed with female premarital or extramarital sexuality, although traditional Yoruba society did aim to control it. The culture's primary focus, instead, has been on fertility and child survival.

The survey came back to the question of premarital female virginity several times, but the essence of the findings is captured in Table 3.

Table 3: The Importance of Female Virginity at First Marriage

	Response	RURAL		URBAN	
		Male %	Female %	Male %	Female %
1. (a) Should a woman be a virgin at marriage?	YES	33	42	28	42
(b) Does it really matter?	YES	28	31	24	18
2. Is it necessary today for a woman to be a virgin at marriage?	YES	25	26	10	16
3. (a) Was your wife (or were you) a virgin at marriage?	YES	25	40	35	31
(b) Estimate of women virgin at marriage from questions on premarital sexual relations (see Table 4)		-	36	-	21
4. Do you want your daughter to be a virgin at marriage?	YES	34	37	17	21

Question 1(a) was a general moral question, but the level of approbation quickly dropped once a reference was made to reality. Later in the interview, when the issue was raised again but linked this time to social change, the proportions feeling the need for marital virginity fell further, especially in the town where signs of change are everywhere apparent. The fraction of the population that really feels strongly on the matter appears to be no more than one-quarter in rural areas and little more than half that level in the towns. The level is higher with age and among Moslems. It is also somewhat influenced by strongly held Christian beliefs.

Between 30 and 40 per cent of wives are reported as having been virgins at the time of marriage both in rural and urban areas (a significant fraction of the latter were in villages when they married).

However, these figures are higher than those that can be deduced from later questions on premarital sexual relations, especially in the urban area. It is possible that some women discounted relations with their future husbands. Many of this group did not feel particularly strongly about virginity and explained the fact as accident, youth, unwillingness to let pregnancy interfere with education or fear of venereal disease. There is a belief that traditional morality demanded premarital virginity and that families that protected their daughters were more respected. However, the majority believe that today

this supplies only a guiding principle which may be modified by circumstance, and there is some suspicion that this might always have been the case. Indeed, one quarter of respondents believe that marriage has always been facilitated by the proof of fertility.

A more positive attitude to premarital sexual activities was easily secured by turning the previous questions, asking why they did not engage in them. A few rural respondents and over 10 per cent of urban respondents said that they did not believe there were any persons who did not. However, most males said that such members of their sex were antisocial, shy, timid, afraid of sex, impotent, sick, afraid of their parents, and, occasionally, afraid of disease. The female responses about members of their own sex were surprisingly similar to those of the males. There was an even greater emphasis by urban females that it was antisocial to refuse sex. This sentiment also emerges in the in-depth studies. Girls often do not particularly want to have sexual relations, but feel that it would be a rebuff to refuse a boy-friend. Indeed, boys play on this by saying 'prove to me that you love me'.

Respondents reported a median age at first sexual relations around 17 years, slightly higher than that reported to the 1988 Ondo State (which includes Ekiti) Demographic and Health Survey. Somewhat surprisingly there were no differentials by sex, although urban respondents reported an age one year younger than rural respondents. This doubtless arises from young urban people's greater exposure to sexual behaviour through the mass media and less hidden sexuality than in rural areas. Apart from those females who reported themselves as virgins at marriage, nearly all said that they had sex first with a friend, although a few stated that it was under duress or to please an employer or a teacher. Among males 5 per cent said their first relationship was with a prostitute, and 7 per cent of rural respondents with wives of relatives, usually the young wife of a father or older brother. The great majority said they did it for fun, enjoyment, curiosity or because others did it. Boys usually took the initiative and sometimes girls were reluctant. One-eighth of the girls, but few boys, first had sex to show their love and in the hope of marriage. Most explained the circumstance as finding themselves together, but around one-fifth referred specifically to the circumstances of being at a party (these were sometimes at clubs or drinking places).

Table 4 reports respondents' statements as to their number of different sexual partners before marriage.

Table 4: Number of Sexual Partners Reported before First Marriage (Ever Married Respondents)

No. of Partners	RURAL		URBAN	
	Male %	Female %	Male %	Female %
None	9	36	12	21
1	6	12	2	9
2	6	10	3	9
3	11	8	15	16
4	8	11	3	12
5 - 9	16	8	31	23
10 or more	31	13	5	1
Too many to remember	13	2	19	6
Refused to answer	-	-	10	3

Premarital chastity is no longer particularly important in the towns, as indeed was insisted in many in-depth interviews by both men and women. Most would also insist, and it appears highly probable, that most of the urban refusals hid at least some sexual experience. There is less certainty about the experience of the women and we should probably cautiously assume that around one-third of rural women and one-quarter of urban ones were virgins at marriage (although the proportion falls among younger women). The real significance of the table lies not so much in the fact of widespread premarital sexual relations as in the high proportions having large numbers of partners. Urban males appear to average over 10.

As with the first sexual experience, nearly all males and most females explained these liaisons in terms of enjoyment of life. But 16 per cent of rural females and 21 per cent of urban females having premarital sex said that it was primarily for the material returns, predominantly gifts in the country and money in town. Both to continue to live in the town and to stay at school, girls often need 'sugar daddies', considerably older men whom they rarely marry.

Extramarital sexual relations

It is especially in the area of extramarital relations that male evidence is much more reliable than female evidence. It is assumed that all monogamous men and most polygynous men must have other sexual outlets than their wives, especially monogamous men during the two to three years of culturally prescribed female sexual abstinence during each pregnancy and its postpartum period. If these other women are single, then the men may be pursuing the legitimate activity of seeking another wife. In the case of married women the society in theory bans extramarital relations, and a significant number of husbands either have wives who do not wish to stray, or succeed in compelling them not to do so. In practice, what the society most strongly demands is that women should be discreet, and even secretive, and that they should not flaunt their activities and bring their husbands into ridicule.

Certainly, they should not cause these liaisons to be sung about in *Ajagbo* (*Irunde* or *charivari*) festivals at his door. In return for observing these decencies neither the community, nor commonly the husband, seeks to ferret out the truth. The problem about sexual networking surveys is that they do seek to ferret out the truth, and, in addition, women may well feel that co-operation with the researchers is a breach of the obligation of discretion.

We will not yet seek to estimate the incidence of extramarital sexual activity, but will attempt that later from data on all recent sexual activity. This provides an indirect method, acceptable to the respondents, if not completely satisfactory to the social scientists, for assessing extramarital sexual activity. We will note here that about half of all men and two-thirds of all women support the general moral proposition that the married should confine their sexual activities within marriage. Nevertheless, men put forward many justifications of extramarital sex dominated almost equally by the case for it during and after wives' pregnancies and by the need to have fun and assuage men's sexual urges at other times. Some add the need for sex when their wives are away. Rural women give as the single most important case the need for financial assistance. However, some put the case for discreet dalliance, and others their needs when their husbands are away for long periods or when they are the younger wives in polygynous marriages. In urban areas, half of all female justifications are in terms of enjoyment. Nevertheless, revenge on a straying or absent husband, and material assistance with gifts and money are also important. The female case against straying in both rural and urban areas is predominantly that it might strain or break the marriage, although one-quarter of all those opposed to extramarital relations see a greater danger in venereal disease.

The extent of sexual networking

The core of the research was the attempt to measure the total extent of sexual networking. The findings are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5: Different Sexual Partners for Various Periods

		No.	RURAL		URBAN	
			Male %	Female %	Male %	Female %
(a)	Period					
	(i) 'Current'	0	8	11	3	4
		1	29	51	37	51
		2	25	25	29	32
		3	14	6	13	8
		4-5	11	5	13	5
		6+	13	2	5	-
	(ii) During previous week	0	28	31	18	9
		1	31	53	36	45
		2	25	12	25	35
		3	7	1	10	10
		4-5	7	3	11	1
		6+	2	-	-	-
	(iii) During previous month	0	21	24	14	8
		1	31	50	32	43
		2	20	15	26	38
		3	12	5	12	9
		4-5	11	4	10	1
		6+	5	2	6	-
	(iv) During previous year	0	6	13	5	6
		1	29	57	31	46
		2	18	8	23	33
		3	15	11	14	8
		4-5	15	3	11	6
		6+	17	8	16	1
	(v) During their lifetimes	0	2	3	-	2
		1	4	22	6	11
		2	7	12	3	8
		3	3	8	4	4
		4-5	11	20	5	12
		6-9	25	13	11	28
		10-19	17	14	36	24
		20+	5	1	5	2
		Too many to remember	26	7	30	9
(b)	Persons with three or more partners					
	(i) 'Current'		38	13	31	13
	(ii) Previous week		16	4	21	11
	(iii) Previous month		28	11	28	11
	(iv) Previous year		47	22	41	15
	(v) Lifetime		87	63	91	79

The table establishes several points. The first is that 'current' or continuing relationships do not necessarily have to be cemented by sexual relations each week, or even each month, to be regarded as a relationship with some permanence. The second is that the respondents provided information about a great deal of sexual networking. Three-fifths of all men and two-fifths of all women are currently having sex with more than one partner, and one-third of men and one-eighth of women with more than two partners. These figures could just be explained by the proportions not currently married and the proportions single, provided that these groups were exceedingly sexually active, but clearly this is unlikely to be the full explanation.

Two points need emphasis. The first is that the level of sexual networking, whether within or outside marriage, is so high that the society is dangerously exposed to sexually transmitted disease. The second is that, for each sex, there is an astonishing similarity between rural and urban populations in the level of multiple partners. In the case of men, a greater proportion of those multiple relations occur within marriage in rural than urban areas because of the much higher levels of polygyny there.

The identification of partners in sexual networking

The most important analytical endeavour of the project was the attempt to identify partners in sexual activity. In order to achieve a controlled (a kind of cross-sectional) view, the examination for each person was focused on the most recent sexual act; thus it greatly understates total sexual networking. For instance, if a man has regular sex with his wife, even though he also has relations with a dozen different girl friends during the course of the year, the chances are that he will appear in the following tables solely as having sex with his spouse.

The term 'prostitute' is employed in Table 6 simply to show how few men thought of their casual affairs, often with unknown girls, and usually at some cost in rewards, as being with prostitutes. Meetings occur readily on buses, in stores, or while walking along the road. There is a spectrum of acquaintance from lifelong friends to first-time meetings deliberately provoked by girls in bars. The categorization clearly is meaningless and is not employed again in this paper.

Tables 6-8 present a composite picture of extensive sexual networking. Table 7 shows that the majority of sexual relations is outside marriage and 35 per cent could be regarded as 'adultery', although, once again, this is an inappropriate term in the society, especially where men are concerned.

Table 6: Partners of Respondents in the Most Recent Sexual Activity by Marital Status of Respondent and Partner (393 respondents^a)

Survey Area	Partner's type of union	Respondent's type of union				Row Totals
		monogamous	polygynous	separated/ widowed	single	
(a) Rural Males	Spouse	24	18			42
	Friend:					
	Married	6	3		1	10
	Separated/ widowed	2	3			5
	Single	22	5		13	40
	Prostitute	1				1
	No sex	2	-		-	2
	Column totals	57	29		14	
(b) Rural Females	Spouse	38	19			57
	Friend:					
	Married	2	7	2	2	13
	Single	4			10	14
	Relative:					
	Married	2				2
	Single	1	1	1		2
No sex		3	2		5	
Refused to answer	-	-	-	1	1	
	Column totals	44	32	3	15	
(c) Urban Males	Spouse	15	5			20
	Friend:					
	Married	3				3
	Separated/ widowed	3		1	3	7
	Single	22	3	6	32	63
	Prostitute	2			1	3
	No sex				1	1
Refused to answer	1	-	-	1	1	
	Column totals	46	8	7	38	
(d) Urban Females	Spouse	23	10			33
	Friend:					
	Married	8	7	5	10	30
	Separated/ widowed	3			1	4
	Single	2	2		25	29
	No sex		1		1	2
	Refused to answer	1	1	-	-	2
	Column totals	37	21	5	37	

Note: Excludes 7 respondents for whom there are incomplete data.

**Table 7: Summary Table of Most Recent Sexual Relations by Marital Status^a
(378 respondents)^b**

	Percentage
Between spouses	40
Between unmarried persons	25
Between one married and one unmarried person	20
Between two married persons who are not spouses	15

Note: ^a Unmarried persons include single, separated, divorced, widowed and prostitutes.

^b No sex and refusal to answer excluded.

The tables suggest that the extent of sexual networking in the society is the product of two institutions: polygyny, with its unusually weak spousal emotional and often economic relations, and usually a substantial age difference between husband and younger wives; and the practice of female sexual abstinence during pregnancy and for periods which may reach two years or even longer after the birth. The latter phenomenon means that, in a society where women have six or seven births, they are available for sexual relations with their husbands for less than half the whole reproductive span. The following are the chief observations that can be made on the tables.

1. Monogamous males tend to have a much greater need for outside women than polygynous males. Even in rural areas 56 per cent of the most recent sexual relations by monogamous males was outside their marriages, while in the urban area the proportion rose to 67 per cent. In rural areas, three-quarters of this need was met by single girls, not necessarily all living there, while most of the balance were married women. In the urban area, almost four-fifths was met by single girls, with most of the balance coming from separated or divorced women who are more numerous in the towns.

The explanation for the sexual behaviour of monogamous men is partly the long periods of sexual abstinence practised by wives, but partly also that in a polygynous society there is a clear message that men need more than one woman. The effect on sexual networking is fairly great because, as Table 9 shows, monogamous males tend to be younger and to have a greater range of different sexual partners than polygynous males.

2. Polygynous males are likely to turn to their other wives when one is sexually abstaining. When they do feel like sexual variety, they are probably more likely to acquire another wife. For their outside sex, single women are much less important, possibly because the men are older, know mostly women who have long since married, and go to the town less often.

Table 8: Distribution of Most Recent Sexual Partners by Respondent's and Partner's Marital Status (378 respondents)^a

Survey Area	Partner's type of union		Respondent's type of union		Separated/ widowed	Single ^b
			monogamous	polygynous		
			%	%	%	%
(a) Rural males:	Spouse		44	62		
	Friend:	married	11	10		1
		separated/ widowed	4	10		
		single	41	18		93
	Totals	100	100			100
(b) Rural females:	Spouse		86	66		
	Friend:	married	5	24	67	11
		separated/ widowed	-			
		single	9			83
	Relative:	married		7		
	single		3	33		
Totals		100	100	100	100	
(c) Urban males:	Spouse		33	63		
	Friend:	married	7	7	17	8
		separated/ widowed	7	-	-	-
		single	53	37	83	92
	Totals		100	100	100	100
(d) Urban females:	Spouse		64	53		
	Friend:	married	22	37	100	28
		separated/ widowed	8			3
		single	6	10		69
	Totals		100	100	100	100

Note: ^a Excludes no sex, and refusal to respond.

^b Includes prostitutes.

3. Among females, it is above all polygyny that gives rise to sexual instability and consequently to networking. In rural areas polygynous wives are two-and-a-half times as likely to seek outside partners as are monogamous wives, while in the urban area they are one-and-a-half times as likely to do so. Essentially, it is the younger wives who feel themselves to be in a different generation from their husbands who are most likely to stray. In addition, in the economically segmented polygynous family they are often seeking some additional material support.

4. Polygynous wives usually have their extramarital relations with married men. However, in rural areas it is not infrequent for this relation to be with the husband's younger brother or sometimes son, who, in these cases, is usually single. The husband actually prefers this to outside relations because any children will indisputably be those of the lineage. These are clearly very old mechanisms for facilitating the working of polygyny and have little to do with recent changes. Indeed, change is almost certainly reducing this level of intrafamily sexual relations.

5. There is no gender symmetry in the choice of partners outside the marriage. Married men choose mostly single girls, and married partners made up only 28 per cent of their extramarital relations. Married women mostly find married men, and other partners made up only 31 per cent of their most recent sexual relations. This is mathematically possible because husbands have more outside affairs than wives and a considerable proportion of their needs is met by a relatively small number of girls who are highly sexually active. The pattern also exists because women have other needs than men. The men are mostly seeking the pleasure of a sexual experience, and, far from expecting economic gain, usually find that it costs something (often to the annoyance of their wives). The women are frequently seeking longer-term relationships which might provide friendship, some material help, and sometimes some protection. Not infrequently they resume relations with men they knew before their husbands - sometimes men who had gone away - and whom they felt to have some claim on them arising from prior contact.

6. The total effect of these different needs on the demand by both the married and single for sexual partners other than spouses is, by marital status, quite marked. To meet the needs of men outside marriage the society had to produce women of whom 75 per cent were single, 18 per cent married and 8 per cent separated and widowed. To meet the needs of women the society had to produce men, 48 per cent of whom were single, 48 per cent married and 4 per cent separated or widowed. Separated women do not appear to play the dominant role that literature sometimes suggests. This may have been a defect of the survey approach, because most men reported, and presumably believed, that their casual sexual partners were mostly single girls. The in-depth study of 'prostitutes' suggests that quite a high proportion of this group were in fact separated wives, some of them separated because they had not been able to bear children but most because they had been deserted and had children to support.

7. In every marital status, sexual networking is greater in the urban than rural area.

The final point gives some support for the widely held view that urbanization and social change have been powerful forces in increasing sexual networking. Nevertheless, the probability that a substantial degree of sexual networking has always existed in rural society is suggested by two findings. The first is that polygyny and long postpartum sexual abstinence are fundamental causes of the networking. Both are age-old, and postpartum sexual abstinence has in the past been of greater duration than at present. The other is the accepted relationship between younger polygynous wives and their husbands' relatives, which has every appearance of living on as an ancient survival.

Table 9: Minimum estimates of sexual networking by age and marital status over the preceding year

ERRATUM

Table 9: Minimum estimates of sexual networking by age and marital status over the preceding year

		Monogamous	Polygynous	Separated	Widowed	Single
(a) Numerical distribution of respondents by sex and age						
males:	under 35 years	59	10	5	1	57
	35 years and over	39	27	2	0	0
females:	under 35 years	50	22	8	1	51
	35 years and over	26	27	5	10	0
(b) Minimum estimate of percentage of persons in each group involved in sexual networking during previous year^a						
rural:	males (%)	55	36	-	-	75
	females (%)	27	38	(25)	(29)	73
urban:	males (%)	60	47	(57)	(0)	74
	females (%)	41	35	(78)	(0)	65

during previous year, for polygynous males, one-quarter of respondents with 2-3 partners and all respondents with more than three partners. Fewer than 10 cases denoted by including figures in brackets.

Table 9 demonstrates that monogamous men tend to be younger than polygynous men, 60 per cent of the former being under 35 years of age, compared with only 27 per cent of the latter. Perhaps for that reason, they have more extramarital partners than polygynists; they actually average a higher number of different partners in spite of the start gained by polygynous men in the form of additional wives. However, neither group competes in terms of sexual networking with single men.

The table also demonstrates that in rural areas, polygynously married women are more likely to have additional partners than monogamously married ones. Neither group competes in either rural or urban areas with single women or, in urban areas, with separated women.

It is noteworthy that nearly all monogamous males whose wives were sexually abstaining gave that as their reason for their latest extramarital relationship. This underscores the fact that no husband feels obliged to remain continent during his wife's mandatory abstinence. High - but not equally high - levels of extramarital relationships by husbands whose wives are not abstaining show that this is not the sole reason for such relationships.

Table 10: The reason for the most recent extramarital sexual relation

	RURAL		URBAN	
	Male %	Female %	Male %	Female %
Enjoyment, fun	50	33	49	60
Long-term relations, usually with economic implications	9	34	12	14
Gifts, money	-	17	-	4
Necessary: separated/divorced	1	5	5	8
wife pregnant or experiencing postpartum sexual abstinence	30	-	26	-
No reason given	10	11	7	14

Sexual relationships are also a form of recreation. Indeed, sex is usually held to be good for a person. What is interesting is that more women now feel this way or are ready to recognize it in themselves and to state it. There is widespread agreement that there has been something of a female sexual revolution during the last two decades and that it has proceeded furthest in the towns. This is in spite of the fact that all the female rural respondents and nearly all the urban ones had experienced clitoridectomy.

The severity of the operation has been declining for decades and hardly any women believe that it destroys sexual pleasure, although 32 per cent of urban women now believe, doubtless because of the global debate raised by the women's movement, that it is meant to reduce female sexuality (not all disapprove of that aim), and 59 per cent are not having their daughters circumcised. Nearly all rural women believe, as did the whole society in the past, that the reason for clitoridectomy is to preserve the life of children in that infants touched by the tip of the clitoris during birth will certainly die. This is why women have insisted on the operation for their daughters over the millennia and why daughters have been thankful it has been done.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the table is its demonstration that sexual networking is also economic networking. Indeed, the survey may have understated this point, as it emerged increasingly clearly from continued discussions in the in-depth research. Even the explanation by the separated women that they needed continuing sexual relations is largely a statement that they need some degree of attachment to men. The employment of sexual relations to provide greater material security for themselves and their children is largely a female necessity, particularly in rural areas where such answers formed almost two-thirds of the responses provided.

There also is evidence that sexual networking in rural areas is almost certainly ancient. Economic explanations were provided in greatest numbers by polygynously married women and disproportionately by higher-order wives. The younger wives of much older men are treated well in the first flush of marriage, but, as time proceeds, neither they nor their children maintain the same importance as the senior wife and the first son, and they receive fewer family resources for subsistence or for the clothing, schooling and health of the children. Furthermore, as the husbands age, these older men make an ever-smaller input into farming. They are not as enthusiastic about sexual

relations, while many are not overly worried if their younger wives stray, especially if sexual networking is also economic networking, provided that it is not flaunted and no suggestion is made of the patriarch's sexual inadequacy. Indeed, in order to prosper, the family may need these additional inputs from the wives' boy-friends (or 'concubines', as the long-term extramarital partners of both sexes are termed in local English). There is a Yoruba proverb which says that the children of big, successful men with many wives are characterized by a wondrous range of physical types. There is also a moral imperative to see the children survive, grow and continue at school. The 1973 Changing African Family Project's Nigerian program, which was focused on the Yoruba southwest of the country, sought to find out whether there were situations which cried aloud for family planning, and respondents were told of a large family where the husband had several wives and many children, all in rags and clearly underfed, and were asked their reaction. Few respondents advocated family planning, but many said that the wives had only themselves to blame for not getting out to work harder at farming or trading and finding boy-friends who would help.

HIGH-RISK SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR

It is well known that sexual networking can provide additional economic security while posing health risks.

The society has always known that the minimization of these risks was achieved by having few, long-known partners, who themselves were sexually careful and selective: in other words, something close to polyandry and polygyny, but both inside and outside marriage.

Only one-fifth of males and one-tenth of females defend having sex with persons previously unknown, almost solely on the grounds of fun and excitement. The case against was overwhelmingly that disease, and even death, followed from such a lifestyle. One-quarter added that it was also immoral or indecent, and a few, almost solely rural women, said that it was against tradition.

Nearly everyone has heard of venereal disease. One third of urban respondents of both sexes and of rural males report having been treated for a sexually transmitted disease, although the figure drops to only 13 per cent for rural females. The urban figures agree with estimates made by physicians in Ado-Ekiti, and are compatible with estimates of up to 10 per cent currently infected in other Nigerian urban centres. It is possible that many rural females suffer from sexually transmitted infections, but are never treated for them. Both the media and government warnings have made the population aware that sexual networking may impose, at some stage, a danger of being infected with AIDS. As yet there have been no official reports of either AIDS or HIV infection in the area. One of the tests of the reliability of the survey data was that no rural respondents were sufficiently suggestible, or desirous of exciting the interviewers or making fun of them, as to say that they had known of anyone with AIDS, and only two urban respondents believed that they had.

The people are surprisingly modern and secular in their knowledge of and attitudes to both venereal disease and AIDS.

They know that venereal disease is transmitted by sexual relations and that the danger increases in the more transient and commercial relationships. Only one person in ten in the villages and one in twenty in the towns believes that it is a divine or supernatural punishment. There is greater confusion over other forms of contact with 30 per cent of rural respondents and 18 per cent of urban ones believing that transmission may be possible through kissing. Understandably, there was debate about whether venereal disease could be transmitted by blood transfusion, in circumstances where no publication has provided an answer to either this question or to whether blood is screened for this reason.

Around 60 per cent of the rural population and 90 per cent of urban residents are already reasonably well informed about AIDS and are aware of the dangers imposed by having multiple sexual partners, especially in transient and commercial relationships. Most know that blood transfusion may pose a danger.

The real danger may arise from the population's faith in treatment. Nearly 90 per cent of the urban population and 75 per cent of the rural population believe that modern medicine can cure any form of venereal disease. However, 20 per cent of the former and 40 per cent of the latter believe that traditional medicine can also effect such cures, and nearly everyone has confidence in one system or the other. The real problems are four. First, many villagers seek to cure venereal disease only with the help of traditional healers. Second, although the message about the danger of AIDS and its methods of transmission have been successfully imparted to the majority of the population, the necessary supplementary information about the powerlessness of either modern or traditional medicine to provide any hope of survival has not been understood by a substantial minority of the population. Third, very few people, not even bar girls, believe that condoms could be used in adequate sexual relations, and many believe they are as dangerous as AIDS. Fourth, many believe that they are in no danger from AIDS if they ensure that they do not have sexual relations with Europeans.

THE TOTAL PICTURE

The extent of sexual networking has undoubtedly increased, but its origins lie deep in rural society. Almost the central institution of that society was polygyny with men hoping to acquire more than one wife as they grew older and consequently to father a large number of children. Such an achievement was a sign of success and in turn it led to further success. The wives and children provided a substantial agricultural workforce and their number supported the claim to be able to farm more of the lineage land. A comfortable and powerful old age was ensured.

However, it was only possible for the existing number of women in the community to provide multiple wives for the older men if the younger men refrained from marrying until their late twenties, ten or more years after their sisters had done so. The implicit contract between old and young men was that the latter could lead active sexual lives while still unmarried. In rural society, where girls married very early and were usually remarried shortly after widowhood, this frequently meant that men had surreptitious access to other men's wives. These were likely to be the wives of polygynous men, who were less likely to feel affronted than monogamous men and often had fairly tenuous relationships with their younger wives.

Another institution also had a major impact. Because of the very high mortality, the attempt was made to protect children by achieving long intervals between births through the mechanism of postpartum female sexual abstinence. Because of this requirement, and also pressure to abstain for most of the pregnancy, Yoruba wives were available for marital sex for little more than one-third of their reproductive span. In these circumstances, too, society recognized the right of men to find other sexual outlets.

There is little doubt that the polygynous atmosphere of the society provided encouragement for both single men and those with abstaining wives to feel attracted to the idea of multiple partners even if only sequentially.

The real question centres on the origin of the female partners, especially before commercial sex became available in the towns and when girls were married shortly after puberty. Deserted women, especially when the marriage break-up arose from the failure to bear a child, and a handful of widows remaining unmarried, provided part of the answer. Inevitably, much of the answer had to be married women. This was made possible by the insecure position of many women, especially those with much older

husbands, often enfeebled, and wives in large polygynous families. Often, they felt they needed the additional security, especially economic help, that a younger man could give.

The society accepted such sexual networking. What it did not accept, and is shocked about in the contemporary world, is the failure to hide such relationships. In this sense, nearly all respondents agreed that there is now more sexual freedom than there was in the past. Most people said the change arose from 'civilization', or economic and social transformation together with urbanization, or family planning and abortion, and almost as many referred also to the greater freedom to discuss sex and contraception. Only in rural areas did any significant number blame a breakdown in family control.

Two-thirds of the rural population and half those in the towns believed that contemporary youth were going too far in terms of sexual freedom. Most, however, believed that these trends were inevitable as traditional rural society passed away.

There are, of course, constraints as well as encouragements to sexual networking. There are three major constraints which are placed first by approximately equal numbers of people. The first is religion, by which is usually meant the stricter interpretations of Christianity or Islam. Some young people are undoubtedly affected by the strong religious morality with regard to sexuality which their families and especially their parents hold. The second is a fear of venereal disease. This is stronger in rural areas, not because the danger of transmission is greater there, but because the people are less confident of successful treatment than are those in the town; undoubtedly they do have greater difficulty in getting early treatment. The third constraint is the fear of pregnancy which is held least by urban women who now feel that it is something they can control. AIDS is not yet a constraint of this magnitude, but some groups, particularly urban women, are beginning to be apprehensive. Half the urban population claimed that it is now a factor in making them somewhat more careful about the number of partners they have, particularly in terms of the other sexual activities of those partners.

Given the evidence of this paper, one might expect the extent of sexual networking to decline as the proportion of polygynous marriages falls and as the period of postpartum sexual abstinence shortens. In fact, this is unlikely to happen as any change in this regard will be overwhelmed by the impact of other social changes. Levels of polygyny are currently higher and the duration of postpartum sexual abstinence longer in West Africa than in the rest of sub-Saharan Africa. Consequently, it is possible that the level of sexual networking, at least as measured by the proportion of female participants, is higher. As yet, West Africa has largely been spared from AIDS. Perhaps the explanation is that sexual activity is more diffused and concentrated to a lesser extent on a small proportion of women with a very large number of different partners. Perhaps part of the explanation among the Yoruba is that all males are circumcised, as is the typical West African pattern.

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