

## ABSTRACT

This exploratory study arose from concern about the still considerable numbers of teenage pregnancies and the increasing incidence of teenagers infected with sexually transmitted diseases in general, and the deadly Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) in particular. The research was designed to explore the effects of selected home and school variables on the sexual knowledge, beliefs and practices of a sample of fifth form adolescent boys and girls. The sample comprised 140 students drawn from four different kinds of secondary schools. Descriptive statistics, Pearson product-moment correlations, Scheffe's post hoc tests and a case study were employed to answer the following questions:

Question 1: How much do fifth formers actually know about essential aspects of human reproduction, sexually transmitted diseases and contraception?

The entire sample had only an average grasp of basic concepts. Significant differences were not found for boys and girls, the sexually active and the inactive, different types of schools or denominational groups.

Question 2: What sexual ethics and beliefs have they developed by their fifth form year?

Beliefs about a wide range of sexual matters were expressed. There were significant differences in the degree of altruism which characterised these beliefs among boys and girls, the different kinds of schools and the sexually active and inactive.

Question 3: Is there a discrepancy between adolescents' knowledge, attitudes and practical use of contraceptives?

The awareness of different kinds of contraceptives was high, with all students acknowledging awareness of a mean of 7 methods. Only 36 percent knew which contraceptives were most effective however. The attitude to the use of contraceptives was positive, with 71 percent believing that a sexually active person should use a method. Actual use of contraceptives was fairly high, with 27 of the 34 sexually active students using a method. However, only 3 methods were used: the condom, the pill and the ineffective withdrawal method.

Question 4: What factors are most strongly related to adolescents' sexual knowledge, beliefs and practices?

Religiosity, Socio-economic status, Attitude to Family Life Education, Attitude to the School Environment and

Knowledge were all significantly related to Beliefs, while Religiosity, Attitude to Family Life Education and Beliefs were all significantly related to knowledge. Variables significantly associated with sexual practices were Gender, Religiosity, Attitude to Family Life Education, Attitude to the School Environment and Sexual Beliefs.

Based on these findings, educational implications and recommendations were suggested. including one calling for further research into sources of dissatisfaction among boys towards the Family Life Education programme in schools and another requesting investigation of more effective ways of training family life educators and guidance counsellors.