

ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

Factors Associated with Sexual Abstinence among Adolescents in Four Sub-Saharan African Countries

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Abstract

Drawing on nationally representative data collected from Burkina Faso, Ghanaian, Malawian, and Ugandan adolescents, this study examines differences among four groups of never married, 15-19 year olds: primary abstainers (sexually inexperienced), secondary abstainers (last sex more than 12 months prior to the survey), recent abstainers (sexually active in last year but not in the last 3 months), and sexually active (had sexual intercourse in the last 3 months). The percentage of primary abstinent adolescents ranged from 42% (Malawian males) to 85% (Ghanaian males). In general, a greater proportion of females than males were primary abstainers. Primary abstainers were younger than sexually experienced adolescents. Current involvement in a romantic relationship was a significant predictor of sexual status with primary abstainers being the least likely to be romantically involved. Overall, findings suggest that adolescents' gender, prior sexual experiences and contextual circumstances, such as romantic partnerships, should be considered when designing abstinence promotion programs.

Keywords: Adolescents, Sexual abstinence, Sexual activity, Sub-Saharan Africa

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