



Mediation analysis of Pre-marital Sexual behaviour in Nigeria: The direct and indirect effects of peer pressure, socioeconomic status, and parent-child relationship

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Abstract

In recent times, there has been a conspicuous increase in the mortality rate among adolescents due to sexually transmitted diseases (STD), unwanted pregnancy, abortion, induced pregnancy and related issues. This disastrous situation is traceable to adolescents' engagement in premarital sexual behaviour. This motivated an examination of the direct and indirect effect of peer pressure, socioeconomic status, and parent-child relationship on adolescents' pre-marital sexual behaviour through mediation analysis.

The study adopted a correlational design. A sample of three hundred (male- 132 and female- 168) adolescents was randomly sampled from the secondary schools in Ibadan North Local Government Area of Oyo State. Data was collected

using reliable instrument (Premarital sexual behaviour Scale $\alpha=0.87$; Parental-child Relationship Scale $\alpha =0.77$; Socioeconomic Status Scale $\alpha =0.73$; Peer influence Scale $\alpha = 0.75$). Three research questions were raised and tested at a 0.05 level of significance using Pearson's product-moment correlation and multiple regression analysis.

It was discovered that parent-child relationship ($\beta = -0.038$), peer pressure ($\beta = 0.042$) and socioeconomic status ($\beta = 0.008$) had significant direct effect on adolescent pre-marital sexual behaviour. By implication, a unit increase in the standard deviation of the parent-child relationship will reduce adolescent pre-marital sexual behaviour by 3.8%. While an increase in the standard deviation of peer pressure and socio-economic



status will increase adolescent engagement in pre-marital sexual behaviour by 4.2% and 0.8% respectively. This indicates that the effect of the parent-child relationship in reducing premarital sexual behaviour by 3.8% ($\beta = -0.038$) is threatened by socio-economic status ($\beta = 0.008$) which had the capacity of increasing adolescents engagement in premarital sexual behaviour by 0.8%.

Among others it was recommended that parents should build a healthy relationship with adolescents to be able to monitor and guide them against premarital sexual behaviour, Adolescents are enjoined to avoid peers who are not willing to positive contributions to their life. School administrators and policymakers are enjoined to intensify the teaching of sex education in secondary schools in order to acquaint adolescents with the danger of premarital sexual behaviour.

Keywords:Peer pressure, Socio-economic status, Parent-child relationship Adolescents, Pre-marital sexual behaviour.

I. INTRODUCTION

Adolescents' engagement and exposure to sexual activities before marriage is often referred to as premarital sexual behaviour. In its simplest form, premarital sexual behaviours refer to sexual activities perpetrated before marriage. Such behaviours include, but are not limited to, kissing, hugging, romancing, and fondling of the genitals, oral sex, and sexual intercourse. Premarital sexual behaviours have become a subject of attention among scholars and researchers in recent decades. Khalesi, Simbar, and Azin, (2017) reported that the number of young adults engaging in premarital sexual behaviours has increased 63% in the last 20 years. Also, UNICEF, (2021) submitted that premarital sexual activities among young adults are high and increasing in Africa in which Nigeria is one of them. This heightened adolescent sexuality may be caused by several factors, including bodily changes, sexual hormones, social forces, and rehearsal for adult gender roles (Bhana, 2016). Late adolescence (15-19 years) is particularly important as sexual debut and experimentation often take place during this period (Olson, & García-Moreno, 2017). This may be well placed if one considers the fact that premarital sexual behaviours such as kissing, fondling, oral sex, and sexual intercourse could be associated with teen pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV and AIDS, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in young especially, the undergraduates (Bhana, 2016; Khalesi, Simbar, & Azin, 2017).

UNICEF, (2021) found in a health survey of sexually experienced teens that over 13% of women and over 27% of men reported exchanging money gifts or favour for sex; this could be as a result of the high incidence of poverty in the country. The same report indicates that over 16% of teenage females reported first sexual intercourse by age 15. For women within the age bracket of 20 to 24, 49.4% reported sex for the first time at age 18. Among teenage males, 8.3% reported first sex at age 15, while 36.3% of those within the age bracket of 20 to 24 indicated having sex for the first time. The resultant effects of early sexual activities, especially among the females most often than not is induced abortion and dropping out of school, because most of them are not ready for pregnancy. Teferra, Erena, and Kebede, (2015) in a study found that more than 600,000 Nigerian women obtain abortions each year, and that one-third of this population were adolescents. The study also indicated that up to 80% of Nigerian patients with abortion-related complications were adolescents.

Unlike in the last decade, when the culture of premarital sexual behaviours used to be taboo in Nigeria, present-day youths have abandoned this valued tradition for the inglorious culture of premarital sexual activities (Idang, Ojong, Chiotu, Duke, & Victoria, 2015). The Nigerian culture highly frowns at premarital sexual behaviours, especially among the females (Ghaffari, et al. 2016), because they are more prone to negative consequences of premarital sexual behaviours such as gynaecological problems, unwanted pregnancies as well as STIs than the males; females are, therefore, expected to keep their virginity until they get married. Most of the studies conducted on premarital sexual behaviours in Nigeria often consider variables like age, environment peer influence, family structure and parenting style. Nevertheless, considering the rate of economic change in Nigeria, virtually every citizen of the country is in financial distress and serious agitation for a friendlier financial climate in the country. This has created a new perception of the situation, parents do not have time for their children, teachers' lessons are becoming shorter because they want to catch up with other tasks that will create additional income since the one from the government is not sure. This situation in the country demands a re-examination of some social factors as they impact adolescent premarital sexual behaviour.

Adolescence is the most important period of human life and society's success in various fields of life depends a lot on how this group has been shaped and it is the focus of this study. Adolescence



is a period of transition during which change in group belongingness from childhood to adulthood takes place and creates a gap in an individual that contribute to the uncertainty of behaviour, and it is characterized by introduction into risk behaviours like violence, unprotected sexual intercourse, and drunk driving (Ossai, Eze, Elechi, Elohi, & Umeobieri, 2019).

Peer pressure can be referring to a friend's cohesion or initiation into engaging in a particular behaviour. It can also be conceptualised as a series of behaviours adolescents are coerced to engage in due to friends, age mates or playmates. It could be said, however, that adolescents who have more satisfying relationships with their mothers and perceive maternal disapproval of sexual behaviour delay the initiation of sexual behaviour. There is an agreement that the most important person who influences a decision about sexual debut depends on the stage of adolescence: parents' norms are more important in early adolescence, but their influence declines with age; then peer norms become more important in later stages such as middle and late adolescence (Salih, Metaferia, Reda, & Biadgilign, 2015). Literature has emphasized that adolescents' knowledge about sex is not from parents but peers' groups. They learn the important topic of sex education in negative manners (Secondary Education Board, 2019). Daba, (2016) argued that in most societies adolescents learn to become adults by observing, imitating and interacting with the grown-ups around them. In other words, adolescents today are socialized more within the confines of their peers than with adults (Bhana, 2016) going a long way in determining the type of sexual behaviour they exhibit.

Peer groups are an important influence throughout young adults' life, but they are more critical during their developmental years of adolescence. There is often controversy about the influence of a peer group versus parental influence, particularly during adolescence. The power of the peer group becomes more important when the family relationships are not close or supportive. If the parents are largely unavailable, the children may turn to their peer group for emotional support.

The parent-child relationship typically refers to parental warmth, love, support, parent-child closeness, and child attachment to parent (Rahmani, et al. 2016). It can also be conceptualised as a communal friendship between parent and their wards. It creates a world whereby adolescents' become confident in discussing their private issues with their parents (Eshetu, Zakus, & Kebede, 2021). A healthy parent-child relationship makes

adolescents develop confidence and trust in their parents' decisions and guidance on sexual issues and another significant aspect of their life. Mehroolhassani and colleagues (2020) noted that adolescents who enjoyed a good relationship with their parents often display well-developed social skills and emotional regulation, lively and pleasant dispositions, and self-confidence about their ability to master tasks. However, adolescents with low parent-child relationships are often anxious, withdrawn, unhappy, frustrated. However, Mehroolhassani and colleagues noted that a healthy parent-child relationship provides a better chance for adolescents to perform well in school and are less likely to engage in antisocial behaviour. Observation has shown that parents who refuse to get close to their children, would give room for peers and other environmental factors. Similarly, parents are afraid of answering sexually related questions when asked by their adolescent children (Horowitz, & Bedford, 2017). Failure to answer sexually related questions makes adolescents attracted to outsiders. Parents are expected to facilitate the socialization of their children to parental values and guidance. Evidence from longitudinal and cross-sectional studies indicates that parental connectedness constitutes a protective factor against early sexual initiation, unwanted pregnancy or birth, and at-risk sexual activity in adolescence (Matswetu, Humhandara, & Hujaya, 2018).

Parental socio-economic status is considered a mediating factor in this study. It can be described as a combination of the parent's various social stratifications such as; prestigious career, social class, residential area, and financial capacity. When discussing socio-economic status in an adolescent related study, it is often referred to as parents or family socioeconomic status. This can be predetermined by the livelihood of families, the satisfaction of female adolescent needs, and healthy living. Poverty or economic depravity, in particular, has also been strongly linked to premarital sexual activity among young people, especially among girls. In several studies, it has been speculated that girls who are inadequately provided for in terms of basic needs are often exposed to the temptation of seeking financial rewards from young and older men for a sexual favour in return (Terfe, Jibril, & Laddunuri, 2016; Daba, 2016).

Catering for female adolescents might be very challenging because their well-being is associated with financial maintenance. It is often reported that the effect of household wealth on females as compared to boys was statistically significant. This stands to suggest that while



residents in wealthy families may insulate girls from the temptations of receiving financial favour from sexual partners in return for sex, the same may not necessarily be the case for boys.

However, given the circumstances under which premarital sex may occur, these past studies might not account for the attitude of the youth towards premarital sex. For instance, 20% of all young girls interviewed in Kisumu, Kenya, and Ndola, Zambia, said their first early sexual encounters involved physical force (Regassa, Chala, & Adebaba, 2016). Similarly, around 25% of 15–24-year-old girls in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa said they had been ‘tricked’ or ‘persuaded’ into their first sexual experience (Behulu, Anteneh, & Aynalem, 2017). This raises the pertinent question as to whether this is driven by attitude or the observed behaviour among the youth, is inconsistent with the attitudes towards premarital sex among the youth. Therefore, the sexual behaviour of adolescents must be studied to proffer solutions towards improving or enhancing the sexual behaviour of Nigerian youths, having observed the gap of inconsistency among studies on factors predisposing pre-marital sexual behaviour among adolescents.

Purpose of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to investigate the direct and indirect effect of peer pressure, socioeconomic status, and parent-child relationship on adolescents’ pre-marital sexual behaviour. Specifically, it;

1. Investigated the relationship between peer pressure, socio-economic status, parent-child relationship and adolescent pre-marital sexual behaviour in Oyo State
2. Estimated pathways indicating direct and indirect effects of social variables on adolescent pre-marital sexual behaviour in Oyo State

Research Questions

The following were answered in this study

1. What is the relationship existing between peer pressure, socio-economic status, parent-child relationship and adolescent pre-marital sexual behaviour in Oyo State?
2. What are the significant pathways indicating direct and indirect effects of social variables on

adolescent pre-marital sexual behaviour in Oyo State?

II. METHODOLOGY

Design

The study adopted a correlational design. This design is appropriate because the researcher intends to find the relationship between variables under study as well as the mediating effect of an identified variable on the criterion measure. More importantly, the variables under investigation were not manipulated by the researcher.

Population

The population for this study consists of all senior secondary school adolescents in Ibadan North Local Government Area of Oyo state. Ibadan North local government area is the largest local government area in Oyo state. The L.G.A has about 26 secondary schools within its geographical coverage.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

Multistage sampling was adopted for this study. The first stage involves a random selection of 15 secondary schools from the entire population. The second stage involved the selection of 20 adolescent students from the senior secondary school students (SS2). On the whole, a sample of three hundred (300) adolescent students was randomly selected. This was used as a representative of the population.

Research Instrument

A questionnaire was used for data collection because of the literacy level of the study population. The adaptation was made after an extensive review of the literature. The scale was piloted a week before the real administration to certify that the scales are fit and does not have ambiguous items. The questionnaire was divided into six sections. The sections are A, B, C, D, and E.

Premarital sexual behaviour Scale (PSBS)

A 10-item premarital sexual behaviour scale was developed by Basen-Engquist, Masse, Coyle, Parcel, and Banspach, (1999). It measures sexual activities adolescents are involved in. A sample of the items reads; “Light petting is okay for me before marriage if I am engaged to be married,” “Light petting is okay for me before marriage with a sex worker”. It is rated on a 4-point response format, ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 4= strongly agree. A high score on the scale indicates high premarital sexual behaviour while a low score



indicates low premarital sexual behaviour. It recorded Cronbach alpha = 0.87.

Parental-child Relationship Scale (PRS)

10-item Parent-child relationship Scale was adapted from Small and Kerns (1993). It measures the adolescent experience of the parent-child relationship. Samples of the items read 1) "my parent(s) know where I am after school"; 2) "If I am going to be home late, I am expected to call my parent(s) to let them know". Students choose from out of five possible responses ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree. Cronbach's alpha for the 10-item scale was .84. The scale has been shown to have construct validity as evidenced by Dix's (2001) review of the scale: "The Parent-child relationship Scale has been used in at least three studies involving nearly 6,000 adolescents...higher levels of parental guidance have been related to lower levels of adolescent risk-taking and sexual activity. The scale recorded a reliability coefficient of 0.77 using Cronbach alpha.

Socio-economic Status Scale (SES)

Socio-economic was measured by Socio-Economic Status Scale {SES} developed by Salami (2000). It was developed to measure the educational, occupational and social status if the parents of the adolescents. The items in the scale requested for personal data of the participants also. These items include parents' occupation {10 marks}, parents' level of education {12 marks}, parents' residence {5marks}, parents' possession of necessary and luxury items {29 marks} giving the total maximum score of 56.

All these were summarised to indicate the respondent's family socioeconomic background as being high or low. The highest score obtainable is 56, while the least is 6. The test-retest reliability of the scale when administered among 100 secondary school students in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria was 0.73 with an interval of three weeks. This instrument was validated by correlating the scores of 60 secondary school students on the SES scale with their scores on the Socio-Economic Status Scale by Ipaye {1977}. The correlation obtained between their scores on two instruments was 0.64. This is an indication of the fairly high construct validity of the present instrument.

Peer influence Scale (PIS)

A 9-item peer influence scale was used to measure the peer group influence. It was adapted from Howard (2004). It measures the degree of peer influence in the decision of adolescents. It is rated on a 3-point response format, ranging from 1= disagree to 3= agree. High scores implied positive peer group influence from the positive direction or negative peer group influence from the negative direction. Cronbach alpha value reported by the author was 0.75.

Procedure for Data Collection

Copies of the questionnaire were administered to the participants in their various schools. Having obtained permission from the head of their department through the letter of introduction collected from the department of Counselling and human development studies. The participants were adequately briefed on the need to cooperate with the researcher. They were also assured of the confidentiality of their responses. The data collection spread over two weeks, during which about 300 questionnaires were administered, and returned. These were scored and the data obtained were subjected to data analysis.

Method of Data Analysis

The data was collected and analysed with the aid of Pearson product-moment correlation and mediation analysis to test the two research questions at 0.05 significant level. Using the Lavan package on the R studio, afterwards, the result obtained was interpreted.

III. RESULTS

This chapter presents various findings drawn from the study. The following results presented are based on the research questions raised, which the study has sought to answer.

Research Question 1:

What is the relationship between the independent variables (peer pressures, parent-child relationship and parental socio-economic status) and the dependent variable (pre-marital sexual behaviour)?

Table 1: Correlation matrix showing the relationship between study variables.

Variables	Mean	Std.Dev	1	2	3	4
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Premarital sexual behaviour (PSB)	58.16	12.82	1.000			
Parent child relationship (PCR)	43.62	12.09	-.246***	1.000		
Peer Pressure (PP)	47.07	8.40	.417***	-.219**	1.000	
Socio economic status (SES)	46.98	11.44	.407***	.019	.161*	1.000

* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Table 1 reveals the relationship of each independent variable (peer pressures, parent-child relationship and parental socio-economic status) with the dependent variable (pre-marital sexual behaviour); pre-marital sexual behaviour positively correlates with peer pressure ($r = .883, P < 0.01$). But had negative relationship with parental socioeconomic status ($r = -.203, P < 0.01$) and parental-child relationship ($r = -.536, P < 0.01$). This implies that the higher the influence of peer

pressures the higher the engagement of students in pre-marital sexual behaviour. While higher the influence of parent-child relationship and parental socio-economic status the lesser the likelihood of premarital sexual behaviour among adolescents.

Research Question 2: What are the significant pathways indicating direct and indirect effects of social variables on adolescent pre-marital sexual behaviour in Oyo State?

Table 2: Lavan summary showing direct and indirect pathways in the model

Outcome	Determinants	Direct (β)	Causal Effect Indirect (β)	Total (β)	P
PCR	PSB		-0.038		.002
PP	PSB	0.042			.001
PCR	SES		0.004		0.423
PP	SES		0.008		0.023
PCR	PSB			-0.033	0.012
PP	PSB			0.050	0.050

R-squared: PSB- 0.324, SES- 0.029.

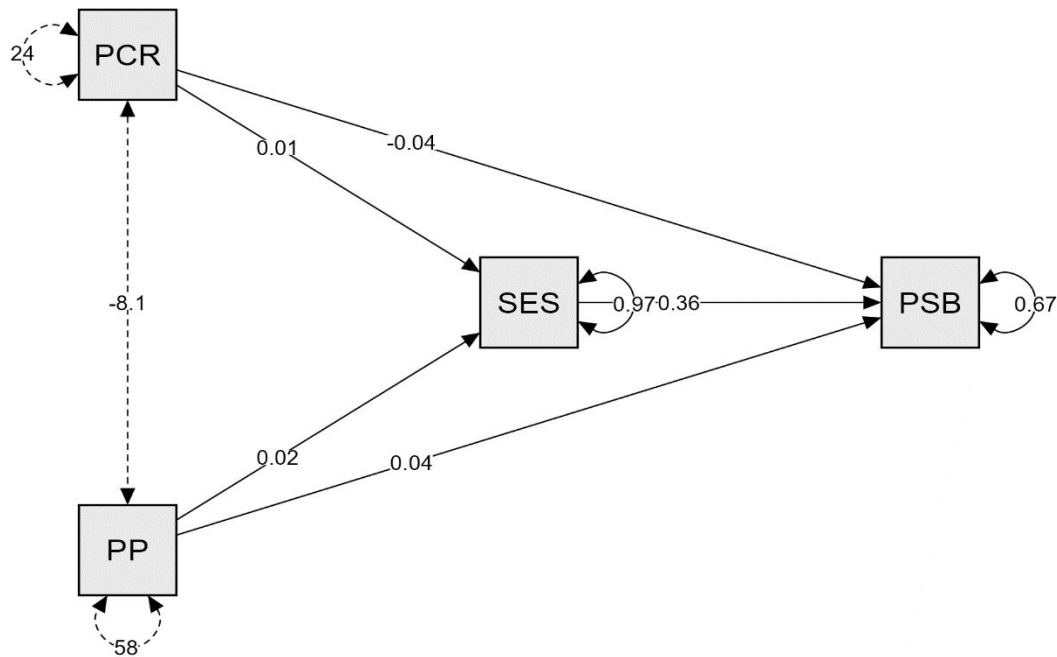


Figure 1: Mediation model of Premarital Sexual Behaviour

Key:PSB: premarital sexual behaviour, SES: Socioeconomic status, PP: Peer pressure, PCR: parent child-relationship

Table 2 reveals that parent-child relationship ($\beta = -0.038$) and peer pressure ($\beta = 0.042$) had significant direct effect on adolescent pre-marital sexual behaviour. By implication, a unit increase in the standard deviation of the parent-child relationship will reduce adolescent pre-marital sexual behaviour by 3.8%. While an increase in the standard deviation of peer pressure will increase adolescent engagement in pre-marital sexual behaviour by 4.2%.

Socio-economic status ($\beta = 0.008$) also recorded a significant direct effect on adolescent pre-marital sexual behaviour. This indicates that an increase in the socio-economic status of parents will increase adolescents' engagement in premarital sexual behaviour by 0.8%. However, parent-child relationship and socio-economic status record a total effect of -3.3% on adolescents' pre-marital sexual behaviour. This indicates that the effect of the parent-child relationship in reducing premarital sexual behaviour by 3.8% ($\beta = -0.038$) is threatened by socio-economic status ($\beta = 0.008$) which had the capacity of increasing adolescents

engagement in premarital sexual behaviour by 0.8%.

IV. Discussion

This study recorded a significant direct effect of the parent-child relationship on adolescents' pre-marital sexual behaviour. It indicated that an increase in a parent-child relationship will reduce their engagement in premarital sexual behaviour by 3.8%. The result aligns with Behulu, Anteneh, and Aynalem, (2017) who found that the presence of the parents was linked to lower rates of pre-marital sexual behaviour, as well as other risky behaviours including drug, alcohol, and tobacco use and emotional distress. Likewise, Olson, and García-Moreno, (2017) reported low discipline is also a risk factor for adolescent girls to experience unwanted sex (which, in turn, is a risk factor for earlier intercourse).

It was also discovered in this study that peer pressure recorded a significant direct effect on adolescent premarital sexual behaviour. By implication, peer pressure will increase adolescents' engagement in premarital sexual behaviour by 4.2%. This result corroborates



Rahmani, et al. (2016) who found that as children make the transition from childhood to adolescence and engage in the process of identity formation, their reliance on parents and siblings as the sole sources of influence and decision-making begins to change. Peer attitudes, norms and behaviour as well as perceptions of norms and behaviour among peers have a significant and consistent impact on adolescent sexual behaviour. This study also shows that when learners believe that their friends are having sex, they were more likely to have sex also. Similarly, Matswetu, Humhandara, and Hujaya. (2018) also confirmed that peer pressure often contributes to adolescents' sexual experimentation. This is a justification that peer influence could make adolescents start exploring various sexual activities.

From the result of this study, socioeconomic status was found to have a significant direct effect on adolescents' pre-marital sexual behaviour. This indicates that the socioeconomic status of parents increases adolescents' engagement in pre-marital sexual behaviour by 0.8%. This result agrees with Daba, (2016) who concluded that these rates were associated with socioeconomic differences of the regions and reflected differences in employment, education, peer models, levels of information on sex and contraception/access to contraception, acceptance and access to abortion and cultural differences. She suggested that teenagers in more affluent suburbs with better education and career prospects were better informed and motivated to use contraception and abortion. Similarly, Ghaffari, and colleagues (2016) in Iran's western suburbs (lower socioeconomic area) found that most pregnancies for the young women in the study occurred early in the relationship, were unplanned and no contraception was used at the time of conception. The young women did not see abortion or adoption as an alternative and accepted their fate (of being a parent).

V. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the direct and indirect effect of peer pressure, socioeconomic status, and parent-child relationship on adolescents' pre-marital sexual behaviour. It was discovered that peer pressure, parent-child relationship and parental socio-economic status significantly correlated with adolescents' premarital sexual behaviour. More so, it was discovered that parent child-relationship, peer pressure and socio-economic status had a significant direct effect on adolescents' premarital sexual behaviour. By implication, increased

influence of peer pressure and parental socioeconomic status will increase the likelihood for adolescent engagement in premarital sexual behaviour. While the increased influence of the parent-child relationship will reduce the tendency of adolescent engagement in pre-marital sexual behaviour.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings drawn from this study the following were the recommended

- I. Parents are encouraged to develop a healthy relationship with the adolescents by spending time together to discuss issues of life which can go a long way in helping them to speak their minds.
- II. Parents should endeavour to keep track of the friends their children keep and as well guide them in their decision making about issues of life.
- III. Adolescents are encouraged to trust their parents rather than their peers in resolving personal-social matters.
- IV. Adolescents are enjoined to visit the school counsellor on their social-personal issues which they might not be able to discuss with their parents.
- V. Parents are enjoined to make provisions for their children need to restrict them from seeking financial assistance from outsiders which might expose them to pre-marital sexual behaviour or sexual abuse.
- VI. School counsellors should orientate adolescents on the danger of premarital sexual behaviour such as exposure to HIV/AIDS, unwanted pregnancy, and sexually transmitted diseases (STD).

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