Internal Migration and Sexual Initiation among Never Married Nigerian Youths

Background to the Study

The increased sexual activity of youths in developing countries is explained as a logical consequence of rising age at marriage, increased schooling rates, the falling age at puberty, the penetration of Western mass media and entertainment, increasingly common ideas about individualism, and the erosion of traditional social controls (NCRIM, 2005; Bongaarts & Cohen, 1998). In sub-Saharan Africa, however, there is a dearth of nationwide research that connects increased youth migration to their reproductive behavior. But evidence from other places, particularly the United States, has underscored the linkages between youth geographical mobility, problematic sexual behaviors, and health outcomes (Evans, 1987; Stack, 1994; Landsdale & Oropesa, 2001). Central to this linkage are the social disruptions which characterize migration and the relationships between migration and behavioral change for migrants and non-migrants. In particular, studies on the impact of social control factors on youth sexual involvements, such as religious systems (Beck et al. 1991; Davidson & Leslie, 1977), socioeconomic class position, and family bonds (Miller & Moore, 1990; Clayton & Bokemeier, 1980), have identified migration as an index of weakened social control, which can fracture bonds of integration at family and community levels (Stack, 1994).

Further, population migration has become a central theme in the discussion of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and a few but growing body of studies, mostly in Eastern and Southern Africa, have recognized geographic mobility as one of the main facilitating conditions for HIV transmission (Lurie, 2004; Brockerhoff & Biddlecom, 1999; Fontanet & Piot, 1994). Moreover, the massive migration of young and unmarried adults from

presumably conservative rural environments to more sexually permissive African cities in recent years, has been suggested as partly responsible for the much higher AIDS seroprevalence levels observed in urban than rural areas (UN, 1994:8). The dynamics of transmission becomes more complex as frequent movements between cities, towns and the home villages remain the norm for many urban migrants in the region (Andersson, 2001; Geschiere & Gugler 1998; Smith, 1999). This pattern of circulation complicates the direction of the influence of migration in both urban and rural areas, with migrants associated with higher propensity of sexual practices that elevate their risk of acquiring HIV/AIDS (Caldwell et al. 1997; Lurie et al. 1997).

Building on the foregoing backdrop, this paper examines the linkages between the internal migration of young people in Nigeria and their propensity to early sexual initiation. The significance of understanding these linkages in Nigeria is premised on her demographic profile of unprecedented growth of young people, their high rate of migration to urban and economic centers in search of livelihood opportunities in the context of persistent poverty, the fast pace of socio-cultural and economic changes unleashed by globalization, and the recent policy and program attention being focused on youths in the wake of the devastating effects of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the region (NRCIM, 2005; Isiugo-Abanihe & Oyediran, 2004; UN-HABITAT, 2003; APHRC, 2002; Brockerhoff & Brenan, 1998).

DATA AND METHODS

The analysis utilized data on 2,602 Nigerian youths aged 15-24 from the 2003 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey. The survey followed a probability unbiased sample of

eligible respondents within all regular households in the entire country. Male and female questionnaires used for the two surveys asked respondents about their age at first sex. Responses of those who have initiated sex relative to those who did not were determined. To account for exposure time and censored cases, the data set was further restructured following the event history framework, into person-year format, in which each youth contributes one record each year he/she is exposed to the risk of sexual initiation. The retrospective nature of the survey enables the observation period for sexual initiation from ages 10 - 24. The periods before sexual initiation is interpreted as survival time until sex is initiated. Youths are right censored if they never initiated sex throughout the observation period or if they got married before sexual initiation. Adolescents that initiated sex and got married in the same year are censored a year prior to both events. The outcome variable is treated as a series of dummies at each age and coded 1 if the event occurs at a given age and 0 if otherwise. The series of data management operations yielded 21, 913 person years that were analyzed for premarital sexual initiation.

The key independent variable is migration status, was defined using questions on childhood place of residence before age 12, current place of residence, duration of stay in current residence, and type of previous and current places of residence (rural or urban; city, town or countryside). Other predictors examined include: years of exposure to risk of sexual initiation, gender, education, religion, living arrangements, household SES, place of childhood residence, and ethnic origin.

The analysis of data employs descriptive statistics and discrete-time hazard regression models. The discrete-time hazard for interval t is the probability of an event during interval t, given that no event has occurred in a previous interval, i.e. $h_{t1} = \Pr(y_{ti=1}/y_{si} = 0,$

s<t), which is the usual response probability for a binary variable. The event indicator is analyzed using appropriate models for binary responses, specified as a logit model: Logit $(h_{ti}) = \log (h_{ti/1} - h_{ti}) = \alpha (t) + \beta' X_{ti,}$ where the covariates $X_{ti,}$ may be fixed or time-varying and $\alpha(t)$ is some function of *t,* which is the baseline logit-hazard. The form of $\alpha(t)$ is approximately linear, and the linear function fitted is of the form: $\alpha(t) = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 t$, including *t* as an explanatory variable in the model. This parameterisation leads to a piecewise-constant hazards model where the hazard is assumed constant within each category of the independent variables. A coefficient β is interpreted as the effect of a 1-unit change in a covariate *x* on the log-odds of an event in interval *t*.

Preliminary findings and conclusions

- ❖ Migrant youths generally show stronger association than non-migrants, and urban-urban migrants show the strongest independent association to early sexual initiation. These outcomes underscore that loss of social capital and exposure to sexually lenient urban environment increases youth's propensity to sexual involvement.
- ❖ The findings suggest that youth migration is however, family-based and not *sine-qua-non* to independent living or the loss of social capital. Thus the role of migration on youth's sexual engagement is greatly minimized following the structure of migrant households.
- ❖ The role of migration in youth's sexual engagement is mediated by other significant covariates: years of exposure to the risk of sexual initiation, gender, ethnic origin, education, early transition to independent living and formal sector employment.
- ❖ Years of exposure do not pose a monotonic risk to sexual initiation, rather the risk peaks at ages 19-20 and continually decreases to lower propensities until the end of the observation period.
- ❖ Ethnic origin highlights the cultural dimension to youth's sexual initiation, with youths in the volatile Niger-Delta and culturally conflicting Middle-Belt most likely to initiate early sexual intercourse.
- ❖ These preliminary findings highlight among other issues the complex contextual nuances that influence sexual behavior among youths within groups in one country and the challenge of addressing limited livelihood opportunities that fuel distress youth migration, particularly to urban destinations.