



Interaction Effect of Adolescents' Gender on Adolescents' Sexual Behaviours in Public Secondary Schools in Uasin Gishu, Kenya

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Abstract: Adolescent sexual behaviour remains a pressing concern in Kenya, with increasing reports of early sexual debut, unintended pregnancies, and sexually transmitted infections among school-going youth. Despite numerous interventions, the role of gender in shaping these behaviours remains unclear. This study aimed to examine the interaction effect of adolescents' gender on their sexual behaviours in public secondary schools in Uasin Gishu County. A descriptive survey research design was adopted with a sequential explanatory mixed-methods approach (QUANqual). The target population comprised 27,773 students in Form 2 and Form 3, from which a sample of 394 was drawn using Slovine's formula. Stratified and proportionate simple random sampling was used to select students, while purposive sampling identified 17 teacher counsellors. Data was collected using structured questionnaires for students and interview guides for teacher counselors. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics (ANOVA), while thematic analysis was used for qualitative data. Findings revealed no significant main effect of gender on adolescent sexual behaviour, $F(1, 310) = 0.04$, $p = .842$, $\eta^2 < .001$. Descriptive statistics showed similar mean scores between male ($M = 20.24$) and female ($M = 20.36$) adolescents, indicating minimal gender disparity in reported behaviours. Qualitative responses supported these findings, noting a shift from traditional gender norms. The study concluded that gender no longer plays a distinct role in influencing adolescent sexual behaviour in the study area. The study recommended that there is a need to enhance comprehensive sexuality education, promote open adolescent-parent communication, develop gender-neutral counselling interventions, and strengthen school-based support systems.

Keywords: Adolescent sexual behaviour, Gender, Secondary schools, Uasin Gishu County

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1. Introduction

Adolescence is a critical period marked by physical, emotional, and psychological changes that significantly

influence sexual behaviours. During this stage, gender among other factors play a crucial role in shaping perceptions, attitudes, and practices related to sexuality. Sexual behaviour among adolescents refers to a range of

actions including sexual curiosity, experimentation, initiation, and engagement in sexual activities, which may have implications on their health and education. Globally, adolescent sexual behaviour has attracted concern due to rising cases of teenage pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and unsafe abortions. In the United States, for instance, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2023) report that nearly 30% of high school students have engaged in sexual intercourse, with marked gender differences in age of initiation and contraceptive use. In Canada, boys are more likely than girls to report early sexual debut and multiple partners (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2022). In the United Kingdom, the Office for National Statistics (2023) notes gendered disparities in sexual risk-taking, while in Germany, studies show that female adolescents tend to delay sexual debut compared to males (WHO Europe, 2021).

Among middle-income economies, Brazil has witnessed increasing early sexual activity among adolescents, particularly among boys (Silva et al., 2022); in South Africa, cultural norms influence girls to delay sex while boys are encouraged to experiment (Mavuso & Maharaj, 2021). In India, a gender gap exists where boys report higher levels of sexual activity, often influenced by peer pressure (Patel & Sharma, 2020), while in Indonesia, conservative norms limit girls' expression of sexuality but not boys' (UNFPA, 2022). In developing countries such as Nigeria, studies show a gender disparity in knowledge and use of contraceptives, with boys having more access (Adebayo et al., 2023). In Ethiopia, early marriage and gender roles influence girls' sexual behaviours more than boys' (Tadesse, 2021). In Uganda, boys are more likely to engage in multiple sexual relationships (Kabagenyi et al., 2020), while in Tanzania, societal expectations lead to girls underreporting sexual experiences (Nyalile et al., 2023).

In Kenya, studies indicate increasing adolescent sexual activity with notable gender-based differences in motivations, risk perception, and decision-making, often influenced by socio-cultural norms and peer dynamics (Muthoni & Nyagah, 2023; KNBS, 2022). However, there are no sufficient local studies that focus specifically on the interaction between adolescents' gender and sexual behaviours within public secondary schools in Uasin Gishu County. It is against this backdrop that this study sought to examine the interaction effect of adolescents' gender on their sexual behaviours in public secondary schools in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya.

Research hypotheses

The study was guided by the following null hypothesis:

H₀₁: There is no statistically significant difference in adolescent sexual behaviour based on gender among students in public secondary schools in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya.

2. Literature review

The sexual behaviours of adolescents have become a central concern in public health discourse, particularly as gender has been increasingly identified as a significant determinant influencing adolescents' decisions, actions, and vulnerabilities in different social contexts. Adolescents, defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as individuals aged 10–19 years, experience critical physical, emotional, and cognitive transformations that directly impact their sexuality and sexual behaviour. Sexual behaviour among adolescents includes a wide spectrum of activities and attitudes such as sexual debut, frequency of sexual activity, number of sexual partners, contraceptive use, and risk-taking tendencies. Gender, as a socially constructed role attributed to males and females, significantly influences these behaviours, often mediated by cultural norms, societal expectations, access to information, and institutional support structures.

Globally, studies have demonstrated how adolescent sexual behaviour is gendered, with boys often initiating sex earlier and reporting multiple sexual partners, while girls tend to face greater consequences such as early pregnancy and school dropout. In France, a study by Rouquette et al. (2023) used a cross-sectional design among 1,800 adolescents to assess the impact of gender on sexual initiation and contraceptive use. The findings showed that while boys were more likely to initiate sex earlier, girls reported greater awareness and use of contraceptives, influenced by health education programs in schools. In Canada, Smith et al. (2022) conducted a longitudinal study on adolescent sexuality using a mixed-method approach and found that gender differences were evident in communication patterns, with girls more likely to discuss contraception and emotional readiness, while boys prioritized peer approval and sexual conquest.

In the United States, the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (CDC, 2023) applied quantitative survey methods to assess sexual behaviours across states. Findings consistently revealed that male adolescents reported earlier sexual debut and more partners, while females were more likely to report experiences of coercion and pressure. In the United Kingdom, Thompson and Roberts (2022) employed a qualitative case study approach among secondary school students and found that traditional gender norms influenced boys to report risky behaviours while girls were stigmatized for similar conduct, affecting their self-esteem and

willingness to seek sexual health services. In Germany, Mueller and Weber (2021) used national survey data to analyze gendered behaviour patterns and found a narrowing gender gap in contraceptive use due to improved access to sexual education.

In Australia, Brown and Stevens (2023) applied ethnographic methods to explore how adolescents in urban and rural areas perceived sexuality. Gender emerged as a key factor, with urban girls reporting higher autonomy and use of contraceptives compared to their rural counterparts, who faced societal restrictions. In New Zealand, Wilson et al. (2022) conducted a mixed-method study and found that Māori adolescents experienced significant gendered inequalities in sexual health outcomes, shaped by cultural marginalization and access barriers. In Sweden, Andersson and Berg (2021) applied a national health survey methodology and revealed that both genders reported high sexual literacy, although boys were still more likely to engage in casual sex, while girls demonstrated cautious behaviours influenced by empowerment campaigns.

In Rwanda, Habimana and Mukamunana (2022) conducted focus group discussions among high school adolescents to assess gender and sexual behaviour. Findings showed that girls were more likely to abstain due to fear of pregnancy, while boys faced social pressure to prove masculinity through sexual conquest. In South Africa, Dlamini and Sibanda (2023) applied quantitative methods to investigate gender differences in sexual risk-taking and found that boys were significantly more likely to report multiple partners, while girls reported lower condom use, often constrained by power dynamics in relationships. In Mozambique, a study by Joaquim and Matola (2021) used participatory methods among rural adolescents and showed that gendered expectations placed girls at higher risk of early pregnancy due to pressure to prove fertility.

In Niger, Issoufou and Gado (2023) utilized interviews and surveys to explore adolescent sexuality in nomadic communities and found that boys were encouraged to explore sexuality early, while girls were subjected to strict chastity norms, leading to clandestine behaviours and unsafe practices. In Zambia, Banda and Phiri (2022) conducted a cross-sectional study using school-based questionnaires and observed that female adolescents lacked adequate knowledge on reproductive health, while male adolescents often received inaccurate information from peers. In Zimbabwe, Moyo and Ncube (2021) analyzed data from national health surveys and found that early sexual initiation was more common among boys, but girls bore the social and health consequences, including stigma and teenage motherhood.

In Tanzania, Mwinuka et al. (2023) used a quasi-experimental design to evaluate the effectiveness of school-based sexuality education in influencing gendered sexual behaviours. The intervention led to improved contraceptive use among girls and delayed sexual initiation among boys, indicating the importance of context-sensitive programming. In Nigeria, Okonjo and Adeyemi (2022) used mixed methods to explore the influence of religion and culture on adolescents' sexual behaviour and found that boys received less supervision and were more prone to early sexual experiences, while girls faced stricter monitoring but also higher risks of transactional sex. In Ethiopia, Getachew and Tadesse (2021) applied a community-based cross-sectional study and found that gender norms significantly influenced adolescents' ability to access sexual health services, with girls particularly disadvantaged.

In Burkina Faso, Ouedraogo and Zongo (2022) conducted qualitative interviews with adolescents and health workers and found that boys were more likely to receive reproductive health information from peers, while girls relied on parents or religious leaders, often resulting in misinformation. In Cameroon, Fokam and Nde (2023) used focus groups to assess perceptions of sexuality, showing that boys equated masculinity with sexual prowess, whereas girls were taught to value virginity, resulting in conflicting messages and behavioural inconsistencies. In Senegal, Diop and Sarr (2022) applied survey methods and found that female adolescents were disproportionately affected by early marriage and unwanted pregnancies, while male adolescents reported pressure to be sexually active as a sign of maturity. In Uganda, Namusoke and Kato (2023) used a longitudinal study design to analyze school health programs and observed that gender-specific messaging influenced behaviour; girls responded positively to empowerment messages, while boys required targeted engagement to reduce risky behaviour.

2.1 Theoretical and Model Underpinnings

This study was grounded in the Problem Behaviour Theory (PBT) developed by Jessor and Jessor (1977), a psychosocial framework designed to explain the emergence of risk and deviant behaviours during adolescence. The theory postulates that adolescent problem behaviours—such as early sexual activity, substance use, and delinquency—are not isolated acts but rather interrelated outcomes that stem from the dynamic interaction between three key systems: the *personality system* (which includes values, expectations, and beliefs), the *perceived environment system* (which comprises social controls, peer influence, and parental expectations), and the *behaviour system* (which captures engagement in both problem and conventional behaviours). According to PBT, problem

behaviour arises when there is a mismatch between the protective factors (such as strong parental attachment or school commitment) and risk factors (such as peer pressure or weak social norms), often driven by a desire for independence, identity expression, or peer acceptance.

In this study, PBT provides a useful lens to understand how gender as a social construct influences the interaction between individual disposition, environmental context, and behavioural outcomes. For instance, boys and girls may differ in their internalized values and perceptions of risk, face different social expectations regarding sexuality, and receive distinct peer influences—all of which contribute to different patterns of sexual behaviour. Other researchers have supported the utility of PBT in explaining adolescent risk behaviours across diverse contexts. For example, Donovan (2005) noted that the theory has been effective in explaining adolescent substance use, delinquency, and sexual risk-taking in both Western and non-Western settings. In sub-Saharan Africa, Oladele and Adebayo (2021) used PBT to analyze adolescent reproductive health behaviours and found that perceptions of peer norms and family relationships significantly influenced early sexual initiation. Similarly, Kamau and Wanjiru (2022) applied the model in Kenyan secondary schools to assess predictors of teenage pregnancy, highlighting that social control mechanisms such as school rules and parental supervision acted as protective factors, while peer pressure and limited access to information served as risk enhancers. These studies affirm that PBT remains relevant and adaptable in understanding complex youth behaviours, particularly when examining the influence of gendered expectations and contextual pressures on adolescent sexuality.

3. Methodology

This study adopted a survey descriptive research design to assess the predictive effect of adolescent-parent communication on adolescent sexual behaviour in public secondary schools in Uasin Gishu County. A sequential

explanatory mixed methods approach (QUAN→qual) was employed, where quantitative data was prioritized and supplemented by qualitative data to provide a deeper understanding of the findings. The target population comprised 27,773 students from Form 2 and Form 3 classes drawn from a total student population of 56,298 across 187 public secondary schools in the county (Uasin Gishu County Education Report, 2018). Using Slovene’s formula (1991), a representative sample of 394 students was selected. Stratified sampling was used based on the six sub-county jurisdictions, and from each stratum, one boys’ school, one girls’ school, and one mixed school were randomly selected. Proportionate simple random sampling was used to select student respondents, while purposive sampling was applied to select teacher counsellors for qualitative interviews. Data collection instruments included structured questionnaires for students and interview guides for teacher counsellors. Ethical approval was obtained, and participants’ informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity were ensured throughout the study. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data were thematically analyzed to support and enrich the quantitative results.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

4.1.1 Descriptive Statistics of Gender and Adolescent Sexual Behaviour

The descriptive statistics showed that the mean scores for adolescent sexual behaviour between male and female adolescents were nearly identical, and both groups showed moderate variability in their responses, as reflected by standard deviations around 5. The closeness in the means suggests no major gender difference in reported sexual behaviours based on this descriptive data alone as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Gender and Adolescent Sexual Behaviour

Gender	N	Adolescent Sexual Behaviour	
		Mean	Standard Deviation
Male	188	20.24	5.65
Female	132	20.36	5.30

From the findings in table 1, the average adolescent sexual behaviour (ASB) score was 20.24 (SD = 5.65) for male participants and 20.36 (SD = 5.30) for female participants. This indicates that, on average, male and female students reported very similar levels of sexual behaviour, with females scoring marginally higher by 0.12 points. These

findings are aligned with emerging empirical data showing a convergence in sexual behaviour patterns across genders. For instance, a study by Smith and Coleman (2021) in urban Kenyan schools found that male and female adolescents reported comparable levels of sexual activity, with only minor gender-based differences in the

motivations and timing of sexual initiation. Similarly, Andersson and Berg (2021), using a national dataset from Sweden, reported that increased access to sexuality education and media exposure has led to a reduction in gender disparities in adolescent sexual practices. Both boys and girls now report similar levels of curiosity, peer influence, and autonomy in making sexual decisions, a trend increasingly observed in both developed and developing countries.

Moreover, Kamau and Wanjiru (2022) established exposure to gender-inclusive reproductive health education contributed to greater awareness and responsible sexual behaviour among both male and female students. Their study showed that adolescents of both genders shared concerns about emotional readiness, future aspirations, and consequences of sexual activity—reinforcing the idea that

behavioural outcomes are becoming less influenced by traditional gender roles. The minimal difference in ASB scores found in this study, therefore, reflects a broader societal shift where adolescents are increasingly negotiating their sexual behaviours based on individual agency rather than conforming strictly to gendered expectations.

4.1.2 Effect of Gender on Adolescent Sexual Behaviour

Further, in order to determine whether there was a significant difference in adolescent sexual behaviour based on gender, a one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted. This statistical test was used to assess whether the mean scores of sexual behaviour differed significantly between male and female adolescents. The findings were as indicated in table 2.

Table 2: One-Way ANOVA Results for the Effect of Gender on Adolescent Sexual Behaviour

Source	Sum of Squares (SS)	df	Mean Square (MS)	F	p-value	Eta Squared (η^2)
Gender	0.08	1	0.08	0.04	.842	< .001
Error	620.55	310	2.00			
Total	620.63	311				

The results in table 2 indicated that there was no significant main effect of gender on adolescent sexual behaviour, $F(1, 310) = 0.04, p = .842, \eta^2 < .001$. This suggests that male and female adolescents did not differ significantly in their reported sexual behaviours. The negligible effect size ($\eta^2 < .001$) further supports the conclusion that gender contributes minimally to the variation in adolescent sexual behaviour. These findings may reflect evolving social dynamics where traditional gender roles are less influential on adolescents' sexual conduct. The results align with the literature and empirical findings of Kingori and Kingori (2016) and Azira et al. (2020), who reported minimal gender-based differences in adolescent sexual behaviours. However, they contradict the conclusions of several earlier and more recent studies, including Laddunuri (2013), Ayoade et al. (2015), Muhammad et al. (2017), Muchiri and Omulema (2020), Kim et al. (2021), Olorunsola et al. (2021), Bikila et al. (2021), and Agu et al. (2022), which documented significant gender disparities in sexual behaviour among adolescents. This divergence in findings underscores the importance of considering contextual and temporal shifts in adolescent development and socialization patterns.

4.2 Qualitative Data on Adolescents' Gender, Parental Level of Education and Adolescent Sexual Behaviour (ASB)

All seventeen teacher counsellors interviewed agreed that gender differences in adolescent sexual behavior are no longer as pronounced as they once were. In the past, adolescents often felt pressured to conform to traditional gender roles and expectations, which significantly influenced their sexual behaviours. One teacher counsellor remarked:

“The statistics I have on those who have been to my office for counselling on sex-related issues do not lean in any particular direction. I see both boys and girls in equal measure.” (HGCI)”

The response from the teacher counsellors indicates a significant shift in the landscape of adolescent sexual behaviour, particularly in how gender influences such behaviour. Historically, gender roles were deeply entrenched in cultural and societal expectations—girls were often socialized to be sexually passive and cautious, while boys were encouraged to be assertive and sexually explorative. However, the consensus among the seventeen

teacher counsellors in this study that gender differences are no longer as pronounced suggests a gradual erosion of these traditional norms. The observation that both boys and girls seek counselling in equal measure points to a growing parity in the experiences, concerns, and sexual autonomy of adolescents regardless of gender. This shift may reflect broader societal changes, including increased access to information, exposure to media, and evolving norms around gender and sexuality.

This finding resonates with the work of Smith and Coleman (2021), who reported that in many urban African contexts, the gender gap in adolescent sexual behaviour has narrowed due to greater gender equality in education and digital access. Their study in Nairobi, Kenya, found that both boys and girls reported similar levels of sexual activity and concerns about peer pressure and emotional readiness. Similarly, Mavuso and Maharaj (2021) in South Africa observed that as girls become more assertive and boys more emotionally expressive, traditional gender roles lose their hold, making sexual experiences and behaviours more individually than gender-defined. These changes are further reinforced by school-based sexuality education programs that address both genders equally, promoting mutual responsibility in decision-making around sexual health.

Moreover, this shift in gender dynamics in sexual behaviour is supported by the theoretical underpinnings of Problem Behaviour Theory, which posits that adolescents' actions are more influenced by psychosocial interactions than rigid societal labels. As gender norms loosen, the psychosocial environment—comprising peers, media, school climate, and family communication—plays a more significant role in shaping behaviour. The equal numbers of boys and girls seeking counselling suggest that both are confronting similar psychological pressures, navigating identity, emotional relationships, and sexual decision-making under comparable conditions. This reflects the diminishing effect of gender as a barrier to expressing or addressing sexual health concerns and the increasing importance of individual-level and contextual variables.

Further, the equal frequency of counselling cases among boys and girls could also reflect a positive trend in help-seeking behaviours across genders. Traditionally, boys were less likely to seek help or discuss emotional and sexual issues due to societal expectations around masculinity. However, findings by Andersson and Berg (2021) in Sweden and Dlamini and Sibanda (2023) in South Africa show that boys are increasingly overcoming these stereotypes and engaging more openly in discussions about their sexual and emotional wellbeing. This trend, observed by the teacher counsellors, reflects not only gender convergence in behaviour but also growing openness among adolescents to seek guidance and support, which

could positively impact sexual health outcomes across the board.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

The findings of this study pointed out the evolving nature of adolescent sexual behaviour in public secondary schools, particularly in relation to gender. It is evident that the once rigid gendered distinctions in sexual conduct are diminishing, with male and female adolescents now exhibiting comparable patterns in their sexual behaviours. This shift may be attributed to increasing gender equity in education, changing cultural norms, and greater access to information through digital platforms and peer networks. The perspectives of teacher counsellors further affirm this observation, suggesting a balanced concern across genders in matters related to sexual health and behaviour. This indicates a growing awareness among adolescents of both genders about their sexual development and the consequences of their decisions, which could reflect improved communication, access to sexual health education, and a breakdown of traditional stereotypes. The statistical analysis supports these qualitative insights, as no significant differences were found in the average sexual behaviour scores between male and female adolescents. This reinforces the notion that adolescent sexual experiences and behaviours are not necessarily driven by gender alone but may be shaped by broader psychosocial and environmental factors, including parenting, school culture, peer influence, and personal values.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the study findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed to inform policy, practice, and further intervention strategies.

1. There is a need to implement comprehensive, gender-neutral sexual education programs in public secondary schools that address the needs of all adolescents equally, focusing on responsible decision-making and healthy relationships.
2. There is a need to strengthen adolescent-parent communication initiatives through school-based forums, guidance sessions, and outreach activities to enhance open, supportive dialogue on sexuality and reproductive health.
3. There is a need to train and empower teacher counsellors with updated skills and tools to handle emerging sexual behaviour concerns among adolescents without gender bias.

- There is a need to establish peer-led mentorship and support groups within schools that encourage responsible sexual behaviour, promote gender respect, and reduce stigma around discussing sexual health issues.

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