

# **Interrelationships between sexual behaviour, condom use, and first union among youth in sub-Saharan Africa**

*Hantamalala Rafalimanana*  
*United Nations*

---

## **LONG SUMMARY**

### **Introduction**

The recent dramatic spread of HIV/AIDS in many sub-Saharan African populations has showed how important it is to pay close attention to sexual behaviour, especially risky sexual behaviour, rather than just on risky reproductive behaviour. During the past decade, it has been discovered that the percentage of women infected with HIV has increased steadily, and that much of the acceleration in the spread of HIV has occurred among adolescents. In sub-Saharan Africa, the prevalence of HIV among women aged 15 to 24 is 2 to 8 times than among men in the same age-group. Given the increasingly large size of the youth population (i.e., adolescents and young adults), it has become critical to study their sexual behaviours as well as the extent to which these behaviours create risks for acquiring the disease.

### **Objectives**

The main objective of this paper is to document the variety of recent trends in sexual debut and condom use among adolescents and young adults in sub-Saharan African countries, paying particular attention to very early sexual initiation and differences by gender. The role played by socioeconomic factors, including household poverty, education level, and urbanization, in influencing sexual behaviour and condom use will also be analyzed. Finally, the relationship between early intercourse and early union (marriage or cohabitation) will be explored.

### **Data and methods**

The data I use in this study come from the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) for 21 sub-Saharan countries who have conducted two or more surveys since the early 1990s. My analyses focus on the sexual and socioeconomic dynamics of women aged 15 to 24 years old. In surveys where male data have been gathered, I use data from males of the same age to describe differential behaviour by gender. The majority of my analysis relies on reports of age at first sex, characteristics of the partner, number of partners, and condom use at most recent sex from both married and sexually active unmarried young respondents. Descriptive analysis will first be used to describe trends in age at first sex and current use of condom across countries and regions. Then multivariate methods (logistic and survival analysis techniques) will be relied upon to determine the influence of household poverty, education level, and urbanization on the age at first sex. Survival

analysis techniques will also be used to explore the relationship between early sexual initiation and the transition to first union (marriage or cohabitation). The statistical packages that will be relied upon are SPSS (for data manipulation) and STATA (for data analyses).

### **Expected findings**

Preliminary results show that patterns of early intercourse and marriage vary significantly across sub-Saharan Africa. The dominant trend is a decline in the proportion of women aged 15 to 19 who had their first intercourse before age 15, but in the 2000s, this proportion ranges widely from less than 5 per cent to over 25 per cent. Similarly, almost half of the adolescent men report heterosexual intercourse before age 15 in some countries compared to almost none in other countries.

Despite very high levels of early sexual activity and/or HIV/AIDS prevalence in some countries in sub-Saharan Africa, young people often do not protect themselves and their partners against the disease, even if they know how to do so (by using condoms for example). In general, living in a poor household and having a low educational attainment are related to younger age at first sex and lower use of condoms.

In most countries, a significant proportion of adolescent girls are not married or in a union when they have their first sex.