

# Parents' and Teachers' Communication About HIV and Sex in Relation to the Timing of Sexual Initiation Among Young Adolescents in Tanzania

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## Abstract

**Aims:** Early sexual debut is associated with increased HIV risk among young adolescents in sub-Saharan Africa. Our study examines parents' and teachers' communication about sexual matters in relation to the timing of sexual initiation among students aged 12-14 years old in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

**Methods:** Virgin primary school students were followed prospectively for 6 months to assess sexual initiation. Socio-demographic, psychosocial, and behavioural factors were assessed with a structured questionnaire. Univariate and multivariate logistic regression analyses were performed.

**Results:** Of 2477 adolescents, 26.9% of students reported communicating about HIV and sex with parents and 35.6% communicated with teachers. Communication with teachers about HIV and sex was associated with delayed sexual initiation among adolescents after adjusting for potential confounding factors (OR=0.59, 95%CI=0.40-0.89, p=0.01). However, parental communication was not associated with the timing of sexual initiation. The perception that most peers are sexually active was a significant predictor of early sexual debut (test for linear trend, p=0.002). Students who do not live with a biological mother were marginally more likely to initiate sex compared to those who live with a biological mother (OR=1.39, 95%CI=0.97-1.99, p=0.08).

**Conclusions:** Teachers can play an effective role in discussing HIV and sex with young adolescents. Our study highlights the necessity of responsible adults discussing sexual matters with young adolescents in sub-Saharan Africa. More research is required to better understand the role of parental communication about sexual matters and strategies for improving the quality of parental communication.