

Potency of Religious Influence on Sexual Infidelity among Women and Men in Union in Ghana and Nigeria

Onipede Wusu, PhD

Department of Sociology, Lagos State University, Ojo

Onipede.wusu@lasu.edu.ng, onipedewusu@yahoo.com; +234 8025750341

Introduction

There is a growing reality that both men and women engage in sexual unfaithfulness in marriage at similar rates (Finchman & May, 2017). The fact that sexual infidelity in marriage is a critical gateway through which couples import sexually transmitted infections (STI), including HIV and it is significantly related to marital instability underscores the need to determine the predictors (de Walque & Kline, 2011; Finchman & May, 2017). Previous studies have indicated that religious involvement and values are likely to prevent or reduce occurrence of marital sexual infidelity (Dollahite & Lambert, 2007; Jeanfreau & Mong, 2018). Religiosity and prayers have also been reported to improve marital quality, and consequently reduce the likelihood of sexual infidelity in marriage (Jackman, 2015; Rayesh & Kalantar, 2018).

Ghana and Nigeria are religious countries and a vast majority of their populations are Christians, Muslims and Traditionalists (National Population Commission [Nigeria] & ICF International, 2019; Ghana Statistical Services, Ghana Health Services, & ICF International, 2015). However, little is known about religious influence on marital sexual infidelity in Ghana and Nigeria. Hence, this study analysed nationally representative data sets in both countries to examine the potency of the influence of religious affiliation on the occurrence of sexual infidelity in marriage, comparing the situations in Ghana and Nigeria.

Data and Methods

This study involved analysis of the latest available standard Demographic and Health Survey data sets in Ghana (GDHS 2014) and Nigeria (NDHS 2018). The analysis involved 5456 women and 2302 men in Ghana and 28,888 women and 8018 men in Nigeria who were currently married. Religious affiliation, which is the study's independent variable was recoded into four categories, namely Catholic Christians, other Christians, Muslims and Traditionalists/others). Sexual infidelity indicator was derived from var 767A (relationship with most recent sex partner) and was recoded 'No = 0' (with spouse) and 'Yes = 1' (with all others). Data analysis deployed the SPSS software to conduct three levels of analysis: univariate (highlighted the distribution of the respondents by independent, dependent and all other variables used as confounding factors; it also considered the percentage of those who engaged in sexual infidelity and used condom in the most recent sexual intercourse in various religious groups), bivariate (tested association between religious affiliation and marital sexual infidelity using the Chi-square and logistic regression (unadjusted) techniques) and multivariate (used the logistic regression technique to test the influence of religious affiliation on marital sexual infidelity while adjusting for the confounding variables).

Results

Traditionalists/others constituted the majority of male and female respondents in Ghana, while most of the respondents in Nigeria were Muslims (Table 1—not shown here). The data analysis has shown that higher proportion of women than men in Ghana and nearly same proportions in Nigeria, engaged in sexual infidelity. The gender differences appeared closing up. Table 2 suggests that religious affiliation was only sustainably significantly associated with sexual

infidelity in Nigeria ($p < 0.001$). Higher proportion of Traditionalists/others followed by other Christians reported involvement in sexual infidelity among women and followed by Catholic Christians among men. Male and female Muslims reported the least proportion involved in marital sexual infidelity.

Table 2: Percentage distribution of women and men by religion and marital sexual infidelity in Ghana and Nigeria, GDHS 2014 and NDHS 2018

Religion	Sexual infidelity			
	Women (N=5456)		Men (N=2302)	
Ghana	No	Yes	No	Yes
Catholic Christians	70.3(542)	29.7(229)	78.9(251)	21.1(67)
Other Christians	61.1(22)	38.9(14)	78.6(11)	21.4(3)
Muslims	72.8(193)	27.2(72)	82.6(100)	17.4(21)
Traditionalists & Others	72.6(3184)	27.4(1200)	79.9(1477)	20.1(372)
<i>Pearson Chi-square</i>	4.1		0.8	
Nigeria	Women (N=28888)		Men (N=8018)	
Catholic Christians	88.8 (2339)	11.2(294)	90.5(852)	9.5(89)
Other Christians	86.7(8353)	13.3(1276)	90.7(2761)	9.3(282)
Muslims	96.0(15745)	4.0(651)	97.4(3847)	2.6(103)
Traditionalists & Others	86.1(198)	13.9(32)	84.5(71)	15.5(13)
<i>Pearson Chi-square</i>	785.9***		169.5***	

***Significant at $P < 0.001$

In the unadjusted logistic regression analysis, Muslim women exhibited higher odds of reporting sexual infidelity in Ghana but their female ($p < 0.001$) and male ($p < 0.01$) counterparts in Nigeria were less likely to report sexual infidelity, compared to Catholic Christians (Table 3). After adjusting for the confounding factors (Table 4), however, religious affiliation did not significantly predict marital infidelity in Ghana. In contrast, in Nigeria, Other Christians (females) indicated higher odds of reporting sexual infidelity experience while their Muslim counterparts were less likely to report such experience relative Catholic Christians ($p < 0.001$). Also, male Muslims were less likely to report involvement in marital sexual infidelity compared to Catholic Christians ($p < 0.001$). In Ghana, other variables that significantly predicted marital infidelity include age, currently working, wealth status and living together and in Nigeria, such factors include education, currently working, place of residence, wealth status and living together.

Table 3: Unadjusted odds ratios (with 95% CI) of the association between religion and sexual infidelity among women and men in union in Ghana and Nigeria, GDHS 2014 and NDHS 2018

Characteristics	Ghana		Nigeria	
	Women)	Men	Women	Men
Religion				
Catholic Christians (r)	-	-	-	-
Other Christians	1.4(0.8-2.3)	1.3(0.6-2.7)	1.0(0.9-1.1)	0.9(0.8-1.0)
Muslims	1.3(1.0-1.5)*	0.9(0.7-1.3)	0.4(0.3-0.4) ***	0.9(0.8-1.0)**
Traditionalists & Others	0.9(0.8-1.0)	1.0(0.8-1.1)	0.9(0.7-1.1)	0.7(0.5-1.0)

*Significant at $P < 0.05$; **Significant at $P < 0.01$; ***Significant at $P < 0.001$

To demonstrate the vulnerability of the study samples to STI/HIV in Ghana and Nigeria, the proportion of those who engaged in sexual infidelity who used condom in the most recent sexual intercourse was examined in both countries. Table 5 reveals that among women, between 0% (Other Christians) and 5.6% (Muslims) in Ghana and between 6.7% (Other Christians) and 14.3% (Traditionalists/Others) in Nigeria reported they used condom in their

last intercourse. Conversely, among their male counterparts, between 0% (Other Christians and Muslims) and 19.4% (Catholic Christians) in Ghana and between 25% (Traditionalists/Others) and 54% (Other Christians) reported use of condom in their last sexual intercourse.

Table 4: Adjusted odds ratios (with 95% CI) of the association between religion and sexual infidelity among women and men in union in Ghana and Nigeria, GDHS 2014 and NDHS 2018

Characteristics	Ghana		Nigeria	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Religion				
Catholic Christians (r)	-	-	-	-
Other Christians	1.7(0.9-3.6)	1.2(0.3-4.5)	1.3(1.1-1.5)***	1.0(0.8-1.3)
Muslims	0.9(0.7-1.3)	0.7(0.4-1.2)	0.4(0.3-0.5)***	0.3(0.2-0.5)***
Traditionalists & Others	1.0(0.8-1.1)	1.0(0.7-1.3)	1.4(1.0-2.2)	1.7(0.9-3.4)
Age	1.0(1.0-1.0)***	1.0(0.7-1.5)***	1.0(1.0-1.0)	1.0(1.0-1.0)
Education				
None (r)	-	-	-	-
Primary	1.1(0.9-1.3)	1.1(0.7-1.5)	1.4(1.3-1.7)***	2.0(1.4-2.9)***
Secondary and Higher	1.1(0.9-1.3)	1.3(1.0-1.8)	1.1(0.9-1.2)	1.4(1.0-2.1)
Currently Working				
No (r)	-	-	-	-
Yes	0.8(0.7-0.9)**	0.5(0.2-1.2)	1.0(1.0-1.0)	0.3(0.2-0.4)***
Place of Residence				
Urban (r)	-	-	-	-
Rural	1.0(0.9-1.2)	1.0(0.8-1.3)	1.3(1.2-1.5)***	0.8(0.6-1.0)*
Age at first marriage/cohabitation	1.0(1.0-1.0)	1.0(1.0-1.0)	1.0(-1.0-1.0)	1.0(1.0-1.0)
Wealth Index (factor score)	1.0(1.0-1.0)**	1.0(1.0-1.0)	1.0(1.0-1.0)**	1.0(1.0-1.0)
Living Together with Partner				
No (r)	-	-	-	-
Yes	0.4(0.3-0.5)***	1.7(1.0-3.5)***	0.4(0.3-0.4)***	6.5(5.2-6.2)***
Omnibus Test	298.5***	137.9***	1168.4***	441.9***

Discussion and Conclusion

The data analysis has shown that higher proportion of women than men in Ghana and nearly same proportions in Nigeria engaged in sexual infidelity. The gender differences appeared closing up, which agrees with the report of an earlier study (Finchman & May, 2017). Religious affiliation significantly predicted marital sexual infidelity mainly in Nigeria and partially in Ghana. Thus, religious affiliation's influence on sexual infidelity was potent mainly in Nigeria. In both countries, Muslims were less likely to report marital sexual infidelity compared to Catholic and other Christians. The observed association between religious and marital sexual infidelity in the two countries was similar to the report of earlier studies that suggested that religious involvement is significantly related to marital sexual infidelity prevention (Dollahite & Lambert, 2007; Jeanfreau & Mong, 2018). A plausible explanation is the varied degree of liberality between Islam and Christianity: Islam is likely more restrictive than other religious affiliations with respect to marital infidelity.

Although bivariate association between religion and sexual infidelity was not significant in Ghana, the proportions of the sample elements who engaged in infidelity was higher in Ghana than Nigeria. Unfortunately, condom use in Ghana samples was lower in all religious groups compared to Nigerian samples. Thus, the risk of STIs was higher in Ghana than Nigeria among those who engaged in sexual infidelity. The findings suggest that

prevalence of marital sexual infidelity was higher among Catholic Christians than Muslims. Also, protection deployment was higher in Nigeria than Ghana, and better among men than women in both countries. Social campaigns aimed at preventing venerable diseases should be more intensive in Ghana and much more among women in both countries.

Table 5: Percentage distribution of women and men who engaged in sexual infidelity by religion and condom use in Ghana and Nigeria, GDHS 2014 and NDHS 2018

<i>Ghana</i>	Catholic Christians	Other Christians	Muslims	Traditionalists and Others
Women	4.3 (n=116)	0 (n=14)	5.6(n=54)	2.7(n=771)
Men	19.4 (n=52)	0 (n=3)	0 (n=21)	12.1 (280)
<i>Nigeria</i>				
Women	11.9 (n=67)	6.7 (n=655)	8.1 (n=111)	14.3 (n=14)
Men	53.2 (n=47)	54.1 (n=181)	50.0 (n=52)	25.0 (n=8)

References

- de Walque, D., & Kline, R. (2011). Variations in condom use by type of partner in 13 subSaharan African countries. *Studies in Family Planning*, 42(1), 1-10.
- Dollahite, D. C. and Lambert, N. M. (2007). Forsaking all others: How religious involvement promotes marital fidelity in Christians, Jewish and Muslim Couples. *Review of Religious Research*, 48(3), 290-307.
- Finchman, F. D. and May, R. W.. (2017). Infidelity in romantic relationships. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 13: 70-74.
- Ghana Statistical Service (GSS), Ghana Health Service (GHS), and ICF International. (2015). *Ghana demographic and health survey 2014*. Rockville, Maryland, USA: GSS, GHS, & ICF International.
- Jackman, M. (2015). Understanding the cheating heart: What determines infidelity intentions? *Sexuality & Culture*, 19: 72-84.
- Jeanfreau, M. M. and Mong, M. (2018). Barriers to marital infidelity. *Marriage & Family Review*, 55(1): 23-37.
- National Population Commission [Nigeria], and ICF International. (2019). *Nigeria demographic and health survey 2018*. Abuja, Nigeria and Rockville, Maryland, USA: NPC & ICF International.
- Rayesh, N. and Kalantar, S. M. (2018). The role of praying for the spouse and satisfaction of marriage in reducing infidelity. *Mental Health, Religion and Culture*, 21(1): 65-76. DOI: 10.1080/136746.2018.1447555