

Factors associated with early sexual debut among Ghanaian women from the Manya – Krobo district, - Ghana, 2011

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Introduction

The dipo, a Krobo puberty initiation rite practiced annually among an estimated 2,000 Ghanaian females ages 2 – 20, is a cultural rite of passage into womanhood that is intended to promote abstinence from sexual activity until marriage . A key requirement for participation in the ritual includes virginal status of candidates.

Objectives

Study objectives included the following:

- To examine the risk of early sexual debut among dipo-initiated Krobo females versus uninitiated Krobo females.
- To assess Manya - Krobo societal opinions regarding the sexual health outcomes of initiates and existing modifications of the rite.

Material and Methods

Utilizing a retrospective cohort study design, we surveyed 306 unwed Krobo females from Agormanya ages 13 – 20.

We employed Cox proportional hazard regressions assessing the effects of model covariates upon sexual debut and age at sexual debut.

Qualitative analysis included nine interviews conducted among Manya-Krobo district community members who either supported or opposed the dipo.

Responses were analyzed using Dedoose QDA software to determine patterns in attitudes and opinions regarding initiates' sexual behaviors and to identify current ceremonial changes.

Results

Dipo initiated participants had a 1.8 increased hazard rate of early sexual debut as compared to uninitiated participants after adjusting for covariates, however, results were not statistically significant (aHR: 1.8, 95% C.I: 0.8 – 4.0).

Qualitative data indicated some dipo opponents believe dipo participation promotes promiscuity and teen pregnancy while select supporters asserted the rite protects participants from these outcomes. Key ceremonial changes included a reduction in age eligibility and length of dipo preparatory period.

Variable Name	Parameter Estimate	Hazard Ratio (Confidence Interval)	Wald Pr> Chi - Square
Dipo Participation	0.6	1.83 (0.8 – 4.0)	0.13
Currently in School	0.2	1.25 (0.9 – 2.7)	0.58
Low SES vs. High SES	.8	2.26 (0.6 – 9.0)	0.25
Moderate SES vs. High SES	.1	1.11 (0.3 – 4.2)	0.87
Adult discussed Abstinence from sex	-0.4	0.49 (0.2 – 2.2)	0.65
Adult discussed birth control	-0.2	0.80 (0.4 – 1.7)	0.54
Mother in Household	0.4	1.46 (0.7 – 2.9)	0.30
Father in Household	-0.5	0.64 (0.3 – 1.5)	0.30

Results

Qualitative Interviews

Modernizations to Ceremony

- Age eligibility for dipo participation has lowered in recent years
- Reduction in preparatory period

Health Outcomes of Initiates

- Dipo offers protections against certain negative sexual outcomes (early sexual debut and unwanted pregnancies)
- Dipo encourages promiscuity among female youth

Conclusions

These study findings do not offer conclusive evidence that participation in the dipo increases the risk of early sexual debut among initiated versus uninitiated Krobo females. Study findings suggest the reduction in age of dipo eligibility may increase the likelihood of sexual debut following the ceremony. Participants who received the rite as toddlers had a greater length of time between the dipo and adulthood to become sexually active post-initiation than females who were initiated during their late teens/early twenties.

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