



# Parental abusiveness experienced in childhood and premarital sexual permissiveness during adolescence

Karifala Marah, Antony Fute<sup>\*</sup>, Mohamed Oubibi, Binghai Sun, Amani Abisai Lyanga, Njaratiana Mario Arthur Velo, Jocelyne Zafitsara, Joseph David Madasi

College of Teacher Education, Zhejiang Normal University, Zhejiang, PR China

## ARTICLE INFO

### Keywords:

Parental abusiveness  
Adolescent  
Sexual permissiveness  
Dual-parents family  
Single-parents family

## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** This study compared the experiences of parental abusiveness in childhood and sexual permissiveness in adolescence between adolescents raised by dual parents and those raised by single parents.

**Method:** The sampling process involved obtaining the sample size (N = 1037) based on statistical power calculations and the resources available, resulting in representativeness. The sampling frame consisted of students from different backgrounds (single-parent and two-parent families). A stratified random sampling helped to enhance the reliability and validity of the findings while minimizing potential biases. An online survey was used to collect data from the sampled students. An independent sample *t*-test analysis was done by using SPSS software and PROCESS macro of the SPSS to test the hypotheses.

**Results:** A significant and positive correlation was found between parental abusiveness and sexual permissiveness. There was also a significant mean difference in parental abusiveness experience and sexual permissiveness between adolescents from different family types. In addition, the average sexual permissiveness for males was higher than that of female adolescents from the same type of families.

**Conclusion:** Childhood life significantly influences adolescents' characters throughout their entire life.

## 1. Introduction

Parental abusiveness is an aspect of a general domestic violence which can be perpetrated by one family member towards the other (i.e., parent to children). Domestic violence generally refers to violence and any other abuse occurring in a domestic setting [1]. The term is well known and often used when describing the violence between the married couple (intimate partners), or former partners and spouses, committed by one against the other [2]. Notwithstanding, domestic violence in its broader sense may also involve violence against children or the elderly in varied forms like verbal, physical, sexual, emotional, and economic abuse. Rape, acid throwing, beating, choking, and female genital mutilation are forms of physical violence or abuse that may result in several problems, including death [3]. With the development of science and technology, domestic violence may also involve one person or group of people hacking, monitoring, and controlling the other person or group within the family [4,5].

Although domestic violence has attracted enough attention among researchers, most have focused on married or dating couples [1,

<sup>\*</sup> Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [antonyfute@yahoo.com](mailto:antonyfute@yahoo.com) (A. Fute).

3,6]. Domestic violence against children is one of the most negligible phenomena, especially in developing countries. Children may psychologically or mentally get affected by domestic violence in three ways; (i) exposure to a situation where one parent abuses the other, (ii) when parents directly abuse them, and (iii) when abused by other children. In addition, less is known about the family environment, which mitigates parents' abusive behaviour toward their children, and the effect of parental abusiveness experienced among children in their later life of adolescence. This study explores family types (i.e., dual and single parenting) in relation to perceived abusiveness experience during childhood and sexual permissiveness in adolescent life. It explicitly compares parental abusiveness experience and sexual permissiveness among children from dual-parent families and those from single-parent families.

## 2. Literature review and hypotheses formulation

### 2.1. Literature review

Sexual permissiveness is a bi-dimensional construct that involves attitudes and behaviours toward sex [7]. It is defined as condoning casual sex (legitimizing or justifying) that may lead to partaking in sex with multiple partners [8,9]. Adolescents with higher attitudes and permissive behaviours about sex are more likely to initiate sex conversations [10]. Theories and research on sexual permissive attitudes and behaviours among adolescents remain contradictory. Those who rely on differential socialization theory maintain that men and women vary in permissiveness [11,12], while others have suggested new cohort-wide values that discount male/female variation (difference) [13]. According to the new cohort-wide values, permissiveness varies by degree of involvement in courtship processes [14,15].

Higher sexual attitudes and behaviours may also be influenced by several factors, including sexual activity level after reaching maturity [16]. However, although most adolescents and other adults today are sexually active [17], there is variation in sexual permissiveness among them [13,18]. Other studies show that parent-child emotional attachment during a young age predicts the variation of sexual attitudes and behaviours among young adults (adolescents) [19]. Studies have also indicated that when other variables are controlled, early parent-child attachment affects girls and boys differently [20]. Notwithstanding, a securely attached girl has a lower socio-sexual behaviour score than an insecurely bound girl [21]. Males are most likely to initiate sexual conversation and sexual intercourse and are more sexually permissive than females [21].

Attachment theory highlights the significance of the parent-child relationship, suggesting that it provides children with a model that will be used to interact with others later in life [22]. Growing up with nurturing and caring caregivers develops an optimistic and trusting model of relationships with others [23]. In contrast, growing up with harsh, abusive, and rejecting parents develops a hostile and distrusting model of relationship, which further increases the probability of approaching other people suspiciously for fear of being abused and rejected [8]. A troubled relationship with parents promotes an emotionally uninvolved approach to relationship with other people (i.e., romantic partner) during adolescence, in which sex is considered a casual enjoyment, not the expression of intimacy and love [24]. Individuals growing up in this unfriendly family environment consider sex as "no big deal." They are more likely to be more sexually permissive and may respond with sexual coercion and frustration when their partners refuse their advances [25]. Generally, studies have demonstrated that either the experience of parental abuse or lack of parental trust and support leads to sexual permissiveness (attitudes and behaviours), which further increases the probability of engaging in sexual coercion when one's advances are denied [26].

A significant relationship between being exposed to physical violence from parents at home and experiencing difficulties in later life has been studied [27]. Young adults raised in a positive family environment are likelier to have healthy romantic relationships [28]. Parenting environment are strongly connected with adolescents' early sexual initiation and unsafe sex [29]. Adolescents from authoritative mothers for example are less likely to initiate sex early compared to adolescents from other types of families. In addition, the prevalence of sexual permissiveness in adolescence varies remarkably between girls and boys and across different cultures [29]. Other studies have indicated the moderating role of adolescents' self-esteem in the relationship between parental abusiveness and sexual permissiveness at a later age [30]. Single parents have been reported to experience levels of emotional distress differently at different times of their single-parenthood, which may further trigger abusive behaviours, and finally triggering adolescents' sexual permissiveness [31]. Maternal abusiveness and paternal abusiveness behaviours have a varied effect on children's later romantic relationships [32]. Childhood sexual abuse significantly correlates with sexual permissiveness among middle school students [33].

Generally, past studies have contributed so much toward understanding parent-child relationship and the subsequent effects of varied forms of such relationship on children's later life of adolescence. However, there are few important questions which remain unanswered by literature. Do children from dual-parent families and single-parent families experience the same level of parental abusiveness? Does sexual permissiveness vary among adolescents from dual-parent families and that from single-parent families? Is there any difference in parental abusiveness experience and sexual permissiveness among adolescents from single-father families and that from single-mother families? Does sexual permissiveness differ across gender? This study explores family types (i.e., dual and single parenting) in relation to perceived abusiveness experience during childhood and sexual permissiveness in adolescent life [34]. It explicitly compares parental abusiveness experience and sexual permissiveness among children from dual-parent families and those from single-parent families.

### 2.2. Hypotheses to be tested

- (1) There is a difference in parental abusiveness experience between children from dual-parent families and those from single-parent families

- (2) There is a difference in sexual permissiveness between children from dual-parent families and those from single-parent families
- (3) There is a difference in parental abusiveness experience and sexual permissiveness between children from single-father families and those from single-mother families
- (4) Sexual permissiveness is different between male and female adolescents from single fathers

### 3. Methods

#### 3.1. Procedure

The study was approved by University's ethics committee (protocol code 20210069) on 2021.04.01 and followed the World Medical Association Declaration of Helsinki. All the participants were informed about the study's objective before voluntary participation. All the participants were university students in Tanzania above 18 years of age. Informed consent was obtained from all the participants, and no compensation was given to them for participating in this study. Based on the previous reports about Tanzania's demography, families in the country are predominantly dually parenting [35]. The questionnaire was first distributed to adolescents who had the experience of living with single parents during their childhood (618), whose number would later help to determine the sample size of adolescents from dual parents (444). The response rate was high (97.7%), while 25 responses did not qualify to be included in the final analysis.

#### 3.2. Sampling procedure

The sampling process for this study involved careful considerations of sample size, sampling frame, and sampling method. The sample size was determined based on statistical power calculations and the resources available for data collection, resulting in a representative sample of participants. The sampling frame consisted of individuals from different backgrounds, including both single-parent and two-parent families, within a specific geographic area. To ensure the selection of participants was unbiased, a probability sampling method, such as stratified random sampling, was employed. This method involved dividing the population into distinct strata based on relevant characteristics and then randomly selecting participants from each stratum. By employing a systematic and rigorous sampling approach, the study aimed to enhance the reliability and validity of its findings while minimizing potential biases in the sample composition.

#### 3.3. Measurement instruments

##### 3.3.1. Parental abusiveness

The experience of parental abusiveness was measured by using Conflict Tactic Scale (CTS), which was developed by Straus and colleagues in 1980. The scale has six items in statement form, describing parents' behaviour during the adolescents' childhood. By using CTS, respondents were asked to report how often during their childhood their parents behaved in the way stated (i.e., 'Slapped me with their hand'), and their responses were rated by using a 4-point Likert scale from 1 (never) to 4 (often). The Cronbach's alpha for the Conflict Tactics Scale in this study was high ( $\alpha = 0.94$ ), indicating higher reliability.

##### 3.3.2. Sexual permissiveness

Sexual permissiveness is a bi-dimensional construct with six items measuring attitudes and behaviours adopted from Reiss and Lee (1988). *Sexual permissive attitude* as a sub-construct was measured using the Sexually Permissive Attitudes Scale (SPAS). Respondents were asked to report their level of agreement with the items (i.e., 'Oral sex is accepted on a first date) by using a 4-point Likert scale which ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). The sub-construct has 4 items, and the Cronbach's alpha for this study was high ( $\alpha = 0.86$ ), indicating higher reliability.

*Sexual permissive behaviour* as another sub-construct was measured by using the Sexually Permissive Behaviour Scale (SPBS) with two items; (i) With how many partners have you had premarital sexual intercourse, and (ii) How old were you at the age of your first experience with sexual intercourse. Respondents rated themselves with the first item on a 5-point scale from 1 (none) to 5 (six or more). The second item was also rated from 1 to 5 (1 = 12 or younger, 2 = 13–14 years, 3 = 15–17 years, 4 = 18 or older, 5 = never have experienced sexual intercourse). The latter item was reverse coded. The Cronbach's alpha for SPBS in this study was high ( $\alpha = 0.89$ ), indicating higher reliability.

### 4. Results

#### 4.1. Participants

A total sample of 1037 college students (66.2% female, 33.8% male) from two universities in Tanzania participated in this study. Most were undergraduate students (97.9%), and the remaining proportion comprised non-degree students (certificate and diploma students). All the participants had 18 years of age and above (Mage = 20.5, SDage = 0.645) and had lived in dual-parent families (41.6%) and single-parent families (58.4) in their childhood. Among the adolescents from single-parent families (totalling 606), 52.9% lived with their mothers only (single mothers), and 47.1% lived with their fathers only (single fathers). Table 1 shows the frequency more clearly.

#### 4.2. Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlation

The descriptive analysis of the variables in this study indicated that skewness and kurtosis values fell within an acceptable range of normal distribution (skewness range =  $-0.567$  and  $1.816$ ; kurtosis range =  $-1.995$  and  $1.134$ ). The main variables' mean scores were above the average level;  $M = 2.341$ ,  $SD = 0.490$  and  $M = 2.349$ ,  $SD = 0.754$  for sexual permissiveness and parental abusiveness respectively. Parents' education levels differed by gender, as the mother's highest education was 6 (master's level), while the father's highest education level was 7 (doctorate). Students' college grades ranged from 1 (non-degree program) to 6 (Ph.D. program). [Table 2](#) shows more descriptive information for all the variables.

#### 4.3. Bivariate correlations among the variables

The bivariate correlations of the variables indicated a positive and significant correlation between college students' age and sexual permissiveness ( $r = 0.330$ ,  $p < .01$ ), college grade and sexual permissiveness ( $r = 0.425$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and sexual permissiveness with parental abusiveness ( $r = 0.343$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The analysis also showed negative and significant correlations between father's education and college students' sexual permissiveness ( $r = -0.477$ ,  $p < .01$ ), mothers' education and students' sexual permissiveness ( $r = -0.187$ ,  $p < .01$ ), fathers' education and parental abusiveness ( $r = -0.255$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and mothers' education with parental abusiveness ( $r = -0.331$ ,  $p < .01$ ). [Table 3](#) below shows all the correlation results in detail.

#### 4.4. Hypothesis testing

[Table 4](#) shows the group statistics between college students raised by two different family types (dual and single parents) on parental abusiveness experience during their childhood and their sexual permissiveness during adulthood. The mean scores of parental abusiveness experience ( $M = 2.525$ ,  $SD = 0.673$ ) and sexual permissiveness ( $M = 2.406$ ,  $SD = 0.453$ ) among adolescents raised by single parents were higher than that of adolescents raised by dual parents ( $M = 2.102$ ,  $SD = 0.791$ ) and ( $M = 2.250$ ,  $SD = 0.525$  respectively). The independent sample *t*-test was also conducted to test the hypothesis and establish whether the mean differences obtained were by chance in our sample or existed in the population.

#### 4.5. Results from the independent sample *t*-test on parental abusiveness experience and sexual permissiveness between adolescents from dual and single parents

The *t*-test analysis results showed that equal variances were not assumed for both, parental abusiveness ( $f = 50.425$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and sexual permissiveness ( $f = 16.716$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Supporting the first and second hypotheses (H1 & H2), the *t*-test results indicated a significant mean difference of parental abusiveness experience ( $t(830.102) = -9.014$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and sexual permissiveness ( $t(838.025) = -4.980$ ,  $p < .001$ ) between adolescents from dual parents, and those from single parents. The average parental abusiveness experience for adolescents from dual parents was .4228 less than the average for adolescents from single parents. The average sexual permissiveness among adolescents from dual parents was .1558 less than the average for sexual permissiveness among adolescents from single parents. [Table 5](#) shows the results clearly. All the results were significantly below the level of chosen significance (95% of confidence interval).

#### 4.6. The differences between adolescents from single mothers and single fathers on parental abusiveness experience and sexual permissiveness

[Table 6](#) shows the group statistics between adolescents from single mothers and fathers on parental abusiveness experience in their

**Table 1**  
Descriptive statistics for participants ( $n = 1037$ ).

	Groups	Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	686	66.2
	Female	351	33.8
			Total = 100
Age (years)	18–20	863	83.2
	21–22	174	16.7
			Total = 100
College grade	Non-degree	21	2.1
	First-year degree	97	9.5
	Second-year degree	204	20.0
	Third-year degree	700	68.5
			Total = 100
Family type	Dual parents	431	41.6
	Single mother	321	31.0
	Single father	285	27.5
			Total = 100

**Table 2**  
Descriptive statistics for variables.

	Family type	Gender	Age	Mother's Education	Father's Education	College grade	Sexual permissiveness	Parent abusiveness
Mean	2.94	1.52	2.21	2.28	3.07	3.62	2.341	2.349
Std. Deviation	1.216	.500	.574	.735	1.847	1.086	.490	.754
Skewness	-.567	-.082	1.322	1.816	.956	.668	.074	-.365
Kurtosis	-1.325	-1.995	1.134	.537	-.205	.831	-.830	-.899

5

**Table 3**  
Correlation among variables.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Age	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Gender	–.063 <sup>a</sup>	1	–	–	–	–	–	–
College grade	.522 <sup>a</sup>	.206 <sup>a</sup>	1	–	–	–	–	–
Father’s Education	–.154 <sup>a</sup>	.525 <sup>a</sup>	–.293 <sup>a</sup>	1	–	–	–	–
Mother’s Education	–.284 <sup>a</sup>	.333 <sup>a</sup>	–.143 <sup>a</sup>	.541 <sup>a</sup>	1	–	–	–
Family type	–.024	.198 <sup>a</sup>	.089 <sup>a</sup>	.170 <sup>a</sup>	–.132 <sup>a</sup>	1	–	–
Sexual permissiveness	.330 <sup>a</sup>	–.359 <sup>a</sup>	.425 <sup>a</sup>	–.477 <sup>a</sup>	–.187 <sup>a</sup>	–.311 <sup>a</sup>	1	–
Parent abusiveness	.052 <sup>b</sup>	.052 <sup>b</sup>	.241 <sup>a</sup>	–.255 <sup>a</sup>	–.331 <sup>a</sup>	.110 <sup>a</sup>	.343 <sup>a</sup>	1

<sup>a</sup> Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

<sup>b</sup> Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**Table 4**  
Group statistics on parental abusiveness and sexual permissiveness between adolescents from dual and single parents.

Variable	Family type during your childhood	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Abusive parents	Dual parenting	431	2.1017	.79145
	Single parent	606	2.5246	.67314
Sexual permissiveness	Dual parenting	431	2.2498	.52546
	Single parent	606	2.4056	.45282

**Table 5**  
T-test results for differences in parental abusiveness experience and sexual permissiveness between adolescents from dual parents and single parents.

		Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
AP	Equal variances assumed	50.425	.000	–9.262	1035	.000	–.42289	.04566
	Equal variances not assumed			–9.014	830.102	.000	–.42289	.04692
SP	Equal variances assumed	16.716	.000	–5.105	1035	.000	–.15580	.03052
	Equal variances not assumed			–4.980	838.025	.000	–.15580	.03129

childhood and sexual permissiveness during adolescence. The mean scores of parent’s abusiveness (M = 2.8158, SD = 0.9216) and sexual permissiveness (M = 2.7105, SD = 0.13093) among adolescents raised by single fathers were higher than that of those who were raised by single mothers (M = 2.2660, SD = 0.84056 and M = 2.1349, SD = 0.46489 respectively). The independent sample t-test was conducted to test the hypothesis and establish whether the mean differences obtained were by chance in our sample or existed in the population.

**4.7. Results from the independent sample t-test on parental abusiveness experience and sexual permissiveness between adolescents from single fathers and those from single mothers**

Testing our third and fourth hypotheses (H3 & H4), the t-test analysis results showed a significant mean difference between adolescents raised by single fathers and those raised by single mothers on parental abusiveness experience during their childhood ((t (328.657) = –11.639, p < .001), and sexual their permissiveness in their adulthood (t (376.344) = –21.255, p < .001). As Table 7 indicates, the average parental abusiveness experience for children raised by single mothers was 0.54975 less than the average means scores for adolescents raised by single fathers. The average sexual permissiveness among children raised by single mothers was 0.57564 less than that of adolescents raised by single fathers. All the results were significantly below the chosen significance level (95% significance level).

**Table 6**  
Group statistics between adolescents from single mothers and those from single fathers on parental abusiveness and sexual permissiveness.

Variable	Family type during childhood	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Abusive parents	Single mother	321	2.2660	.84056
	Single father	285	2.8158	.09216
Sexual permissiveness	Single mother	321	2.1349	.46489
	Single father	285	2.7105	.13093

**Table 7**

T-test results for differences in parental abusiveness experience and sexual permissiveness between adolescents from single fathers and those from single mothers.

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df.	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
AP	Equal variances assumed	856.498	.000	-10.982	604	.000	-.54975	.05006
	Equal variances not assumed			-11.639	328.657	.000	-.54975	.04723
SP	Equal variances assumed	250.732	.000	-20.202	604	.000	-.57564	.02849
	Equal variances not assumed			-21.255	376.344	.000	-.57564	.02708

#### 4.8. Differences in sexual permissiveness across gender groups

Table 8 shows the group statistics analysis conducted between male and female adolescents from single fathers' families. The results showed that males' mean score of sexual permissiveness ( $M = 2.5335$ ,  $SD = 0.44497$ ) was higher than that of female adolescents ( $M = 1.9643$ ,  $SD = 0.32961$ ). The independent sample *t*-test was further conducted to test the hypotheses and establish whether the differences existed in the population.

#### 4.9. T-test results for differences in sexual permissiveness between male and female adolescents from single fathers' family

Testing the fifth hypothesis (H5), a *t*-test analysis was done, and the results supported the proposition by showing a significant difference between male and female adolescents from single fathers' families in sexual permissiveness ( $t(904.992) = 23.275$ ,  $p < .001$ ). As indicated in Table 9, the average sexual permissiveness for males was 0.56924 higher than that of female adolescents from the same type of families (single fathers). All the results in this section were significantly below the level of chosen significance (95% of confidence interval).

## 5. Discussion

Despite its psychological, social, and economic consequences, domestic violence is still understudied in developing countries. The findings from this study awaken more scholars and add to the existing literature about domestic violence perpetrated by parents to their children, adolescents and youths, and shows how urgency the subject is to the millennials. By using enough samples of university students, the results have indicated that adolescents and youth who were raised by single-parents in their childhood were more prevalent to domestic abuse compared to their counterpart. The experience of parental abusiveness in their childhood has also been reflected to their sexual attitudes and behaviours (sexual permissiveness) during adolescence. Adolescents from single-parent families have reported higher sexual permissiveness compared to those from duo parent families. In the course of all these challenges experienced at home, gender comparison analysis of adolescents and youths from a sub-group of single-parent-raised adolescents has revealed that girls/women are more affected compared to boys/men.

Childhood experience of abuse has several implications to adolescence life of the victims. Psychological and social challenges like poor self-esteem, relationship difficulties, shame, anxiety, and guilty result from childhood experience of abuse. This study particularly is consistent with several existing studies which suggest the relationship between childhood experience of abuse (i.e., sexual abuse) and pre-marital sexual permissiveness (PSP). Specifically, adolescents who had experienced sexual abuse in their childhood are more subjected to premarital sex compared to those who did not experience. In regards to gender, the discussion is still open because some studies still indicate that girls/women have less experience of PSP compared to boys/men, while other indicate the other way.

As suggested by Herrera (2017), the biggest challenge faced by children in most societies is lack of alternative people to tell their experiences of parental. Parents who are expected to safeguard their children against any harmful environment are increasingly becoming perpetrators of such abuse. In our study specifically which involved college students from two universities in Tanzania, the mean score for parental abusiveness experienced in childhood was above the average. It indicates that many adolescents have experienced domestic violence perpetrated by their parents. As suggested by other studies as well [36,37], negative parental attributions like harshness and abusiveness affect children's later life (i.e., socialization, academics and marriage). In this study particularly, the experience of parental abusiveness during students' childhood had a positive and significant correlation with their sexual permissiveness during adolescence.

Effective parenting from dual parents is essential in guaranteeing a better future for children. Notwithstanding, because of several factors (i.e., deaths and divorces), single parenting has become a common phenomenon. Literature suggests that dual parenting and

**Table 8**

Group statistics on sexual permissiveness between male and female adolescents from single fathers.

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Sexual permissiveness	Male	686	2.5335	.44497
	Female	351	1.9643	.32961



**Table 9**

T-test results for differences in parental abusiveness experience and sexual permissiveness between male adolescents and female adolescents from single fathers' family.

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
SP	Equal variances assumed	20.183	.000	21.176	1035	.000	.56924	.02688
	Equal variances not assumed			23.275	904.992	.000	.56924	.02446

single parenting have different repercussions on children's mental health [37]. Apart from economic difficulties [38], children from single-parent families highly experience parental abusiveness compared to dual-parent families. Although the recent studies have been reporting husbands' abusive behaviours towards their wives, this study have identified the essentialities of considering the effect of males' abusiveness beyond their wives. From the results of this study, when fathers have the opportunity to raise their children independently (single parenting), they exhibit more abusive behaviours toward their children than single mothers do.

Students' mean scores of parental abusiveness during childhood and sexual permissiveness during adolescence are below average. The scores indicate the persistence of domestic violence in developing societies, and that children continue to be abused in their own families (in their homes). Notwithstanding, although children from single fathers have reported higher experience of being abused during their childhood compared to those from single-mother or dual parents, male adolescents are the most vulnerable to sexual permissiveness when raised by their single fathers. This suggests a call for government, families, and civil and social organizations to consider the effect of divorce and bearing out of wedlock on children's future. The problem of early pregnancy and the rise of sexually transmitted diseases among adolescents need to be looked in the angle of their childhood life.

Studies have addressed the problem of sexual permissiveness among adolescents [39] and its subsequent effect on individuals and society in general. However, for a long time, the blame has been attributed to the victims for failing to control their bodies properly. It is imperative to consider the influence of families and parents specifically on their children's sexual permissiveness during adolescence. Literature suggests that early parenting determines children's social life, academic engagement at school, discipline, and future orientation. Adolescents' sexual permissiveness is among the negative attributes that lead to unexpected pregnancies and trigger the spread of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Intervening to the situation by providing college students with sexuality and reproductive health education can be one of the most appropriate ways of reducing the effect of early parental abusiveness experience.

Parents' education level has a significant influence on domestic violence against children. In this study, parents' education level significantly correlated negatively with parental abusiveness experience among adolescents. The higher the parents' education, the lower the children experience parental abuse. The lower the children experience parental abusiveness in their childhood, the lower they become sexually permissive during adolescence. It is suggested that parental abusiveness results from ignorance of the possible consequences of such behaviours to children's later life. The positive and significant correlation between students' college grade and their sexual permissiveness can be explained by two factors; their chronological age growth (biological maturity), and their increasing experience of peer pressure.

One of the limitations in this study is its generalizability of the findings. The generalizability of the findings from this study should be interpreted with caution. While the research provides valuable insights into the relationship between family structure, parental abuse, and its impact on children's outcomes, it is essential to acknowledge that the study's scope and context may limit the generalizability of the findings to a broader population. Factors such as cultural variations, socio-economic differences, and regional-specific dynamics can influence the dynamics within families and the prevalence of abuse. Therefore, it is recommended that future research incorporates diverse samples from various cultural backgrounds and geographical locations to enhance the generalizability of findings and ensure a more comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between family structure, parental abuse, and its consequences on children's well-being.

### 5.1. Limitations and suggestions for further studies

This study reports the quantitative information regarding parental abusiveness experience during childhood and sexual permissiveness in adolescence among college students. Under normal circumstances, some children live with single parent (i.e., because of divorce) but always have the opportunity to meet with the second parent at least four times a year. In contrast, some children live with their single parents (i.e., because of the death of one parent), and they never have the opportunity to meet their second parents. The effect of single parenthood on children from these two distinct single-parent families may not be the same, but in this study, single parenthood was considered as a whole. Students from single-parent families reported higher parental abusiveness experience compared to those who come from dual-parent families. Students from single-parent families reported higher sexual permissiveness compared to those from dual parents. However, the mechanisms through which single parenting influence abusiveness and sexual permissiveness remains unanswered.

Some younger children live with other relatives apart from their biological parents. Future studies must consider comparing abusiveness experiences between children who live with their biological parents and those who live with other relatives. Alternatively, a comparison of abusiveness experienced in single-parent families (i.e., single fathers) can be compared with that experienced by other relatives (not biological parents). In doing so, policymakers and legal organs can be in a position to secure children by making sure that they live in an environment where comfort is more guaranteed.



## 6. Conclusion

Based on our research findings and the existing literature, we strongly recommend dual-parenting as the optimal approach to ensure the mental and social well-being of children. Studies indicate that adolescents and young individuals raised in single-parent households are more likely to encounter higher levels of parental abuse compared to those raised in two-parent families. Furthermore, it has been observed that those who experienced parental abuse during their childhood are at an increased risk of engaging in sexually permissive behaviours. Moreover, it is crucial to connect the results of this study with existing research, which suggests that sexually permissive students or those involved in early pre-marital sexual activities tend to perform poorly academically. Overall, adolescents who have experienced sexual abuse during childhood face a heightened risk of encountering other issues such as early pregnancy and HIV/AIDS infection, due to their sexual permissiveness during adolescence.

Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that our current social systems have made significant strides in mitigating the risks of early childhood abuse. In cases of marriage dissolution, many families now prioritize the arrangement where children reside with their mothers. This approach is a positive step towards reducing the likelihood of child abuse, as children from single-mother households tend to be less vulnerable to abuse compared to those from single-father households. However, in addition to relying on existing supportive social systems, society as a whole, including policymakers, families, and other social institutions, bears a collective responsibility to decrease the number of divorces and ensure that children are raised by both parents within a family structure.

In educational settings, children hailing from two-parent families consistently demonstrate higher academic performance compared to their counterparts from different family structures, including single-parent families. Single parenting brings about a range of psychological and socio-economic challenges. It is worth noting that instances of parental abuse towards children often go unreported, with many families, particularly step-parent and single-parent households, being perpetrators of domestic violence against children. The impact of such abuse can be devastating, as it can severely hinder a child's future prospects during their formative years. Sexual permissiveness, primarily observed in adolescents from single-parent families, especially male adolescents with single fathers, is a behaviour linked to a host of other issues such as early and unplanned pregnancies and the heightened risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases. It is crucial for society as a whole to actively encourage reporting of any abuse experienced within families while also providing protection and support to those who bravely come forward to report parental abuse.

## Funding

This work received no funding.

## Compliance with ethical standards

The study was performed in accordance with the ethical standards laid down in the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki and its later amendments. The ethics approval was granted by the Ethics Committee of Zhejiang Normal University's College of Teacher Education (Protocol code: 20210069) approved in 2021.04.01.

## Informed consent statement

The study involved adult (human) participants. The informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in this study. The consent form stated the purpose of the study, and that participation in a particular study was voluntary without any financial compensation to the subjects.

## Data availability statement

Any data that support the findings of this study are included within the article.

## Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

## Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e18101>.

## References

- [1] D. de Souza Santos, E.A. Bittencourt, A.C. de Moraes Malinverni, J.B. Kisberi, S. de França Vilaça, E.S.M. Iwamura, Domestic violence against women during the Covid-19 pandemic: a scoping review, *Jul, For. Sci. Int. Reports* 5 (2022), 100276, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fisir.2022.100276>.

- [2] X. Gu, H. Li, L. Peng, The anti-domestic violence law and women's welfare: evidence from a natural experiment in China, *J. Econ. Behav. Organ.* 202 (Oct. 2022) 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jebo.2022.07.028>.
- [3] A.R. Miller, C. Segal, M.K. Spencer, Effects of COVID-19 shutdowns on domestic violence in US cities, *J. Urban Econ.* (Aug. 2022), 103476, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jue.2022.103476>.
- [4] P.M. Hellevik, Teenagers' personal accounts of experiences with digital intimate partner violence and abuse, *Comput. Hum. Behav.* 92 (Mar. 2019) 178–187, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2018.11.019>.
- [5] M. Wallenius, R.-L. Punamäki, Digital game violence and direct aggression in adolescence: a longitudinal study of the roles of sex, age, and parent-child communication, *J. Appl. Dev. Psychol.* 29 (4) (Jul. 2008) 286–294, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appdev.2008.04.010>.
- [6] S. Jansen, et al., A Clustered Randomized Controlled Trial to Assess whether Living Peace Intervention (LPint) Reduces Domestic Violence and its Consequences Among Families of Targeted Men in Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC): Design and Methods, *Eval. Program Plann.*, Aug. 2022, 102154, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2022.102154>.
- [7] G. Leri, D.J. DelPriore, Understanding variation in women's sexual attitudes and behavior across sexual orientations: evaluating three hypotheses, *Pers. Individ. Differ.* 173 (Apr. 2021), 110629, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2021.110629>.
- [8] L.G. Simons, C.H. Burt, R.L. Simons, A test of explanations for the effect of harsh parenting on the perpetration of dating violence and sexual coercion among college males, *Violence Vict.* 23 (1) (2008) 66–82, <https://doi.org/10.1891/0886-6708.23.1.66>.
- [9] S.M. Coyne, et al., Contributions of mainstream sexual media exposure to sexual attitudes, perceived peer norms, and sexual behavior: a meta-analysis, *J. Adolesc. Health* 64 (4) (Apr. 2019) 430–436, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2018.11.016>.
- [10] S. De Guzman, V. Dee, Socio-demographic factors, sexual attitudes, sexual self-efficacy, and sexual satisfaction on sexual health-seeking behaviors: a structural equation model, *J. Sex. Med.* 19 (5) (May 2022) 152, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsxm.2022.03.351>.
- [11] D.R. Johnson, A differential association theory of socialization to commercialist career paths in science, *Sci. Technol. Hum. Val.* 45 (3) (May 2020) 381–404, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0162243919854514>.
- [12] P.J. Wright, L. Vangeel, Pornography, permissiveness, and sex differences: an evaluation of social learning and evolutionary explanations, *Pers. Individ. Differ.* 143 (Jun. 2019) 128–138, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2019.02.019>.
- [13] U. Martyniuk, A. Stulhofer, A longitudinal exploration of the relationship between pornography use and sexual permissiveness in female and male adolescents, *J. Adolesc.* 69 (1) (Dec. 2018) 80–87, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2018.09.006>.
- [14] M.R. Laner, R.H. Laner, C.E. Palmer, Permissive attitudes toward sexual behaviors: a clarification of theoretical explanations, *J. Sex. Res.* 14 (3) (Aug. 1978) 137–144, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224497809551003>.
- [15] M. Irfan, N.H.N. Hussain, N.M. Noor, M. Mohamed, S.B. Ismail, Sexual abstinence and associated factors among young and middle-aged men: a systematic review, *J. Sex. Med.* 17 (3) (Mar. 2020) 412–430, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsxm.2019.12.003>.
- [16] L. Mínguez-Alarcón, et al., Urinary phthalate metabolite concentrations during four windows spanning puberty (prepuberty through sexual maturity) and association with semen quality among young Russian men, *Int. J. Hyg Environ. Health* 243 (Jun. 2022), 113977, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijheh.2022.113977>.
- [17] C. Garnett, L. Pollack, F. Rodriguez, R. Renteria, M. Puffer, K.P. Tebb, The association between nonbarrier contraceptive use and condom use among sexually active latina adolescents, *J. Adolesc. Health* 68 (5) (May 2021) 985–990, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2020.07.044>.
- [18] D.M. Ndasi, K. Adusei-Asante, M. Grobbelaar, A.V.V. Ha, V. Fannam Nunfam, Assessing Sexual Attitudes Among Adult Men: A Descriptive Survey in Kenya, " *Sexologies*, Jun, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sexol.2022.04.003>.
- [19] S. Sprecher, Attachment style and sexual permissiveness: the moderating role of gender, *Pers. Individ. Differ.* 55 (4) (Aug. 2013) 428–432, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2013.04.005>.
- [20] F. Shen, K. Soloski, Y. Liu, Adolescent parental attachment and intimate relationship in adulthood: an investigation of contextual factors and long-term outcomes of child sexual abuse, *Child. Youth Serv. Rev.* 122 (Mar. 2021), 105869, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105869>.
- [21] X. Zuo, C. Lou, E. Gao, Y. Cheng, H. Niu, L.S. Zabin, Gender differences in adolescent premarital sexual permissiveness in three Asian cities: effects of gender-role attitudes, *J. Adolesc. Health* 50 (3) (Mar. 2012), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2011.12.001>. S18–S25.
- [22] R. Yang, L. Zhang, X. Wu, Q. Fu, Q. Bao, Caregivers' mind-mindedness and rural left-behind young children's insecure attachment: the moderated mediation model of theory of mind and family status, *Child Abuse Negl.* 124 (Feb. 2022), 105472, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2021.105472>.
- [23] A.Z. Fute, X. Wan, Alternative education paths for pregnant girls and young mothers in Tanzania, *Sex Gen. Policy* 4 (1) (2021) 8–23, <https://doi.org/10.1002/sgp2.12026>.
- [24] A.D. Cherniak, M. Mikulincer, P.R. Shaver, P. Granqvist, Attachment theory and religion, *Curr. Opin. Psychol.* 40 (Aug. 2021) 126–130, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2020.08.020>.
- [25] B.M. Mathes, K.R. Timpano, A.M. Raines, N.B. Schmidt, Attachment theory and hoarding disorder: a review and theoretical integration, *Behav. Res. Ther.* 125 (Feb. 2020), 103549, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.brat.2019.103549>.
- [26] A. Fute, B. Sun, M. Oubibi, Assessing teaching compassion, work engagement and compassion fatigue among teachers during the pandemic, *Psychol. Res. Behav. Manag.* 15 (Sep. 2022) 2561–2571, <https://doi.org/10.2147/PRBM.S383292>.
- [27] H. Richardson, J.A. Kloess, A. Patel, J. Farr, How do young people who have experienced parental intimate partner abuse make sense of romantic relationships? A qualitative analysis, *Child Abuse Negl.* 113 (Mar. 2021), 104942, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2021.104942>.
- [28] M. Xia, G.M. Fosco, M.A. Lippold, M.E. Feinberg, A developmental perspective on young adult romantic relationships: examining family and individual factors in adolescence, *J. Youth Adolesc.* 47 (7) (2018) 1499–1516, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-018-0815-8>. Jul.
- [29] L.F. Reis, P.J. Surkan, J.Y. Valente, M.H.S.M. Bertolla, Z.M. Sanchez, Factors associated with early sexual initiation and unsafe sex in adolescents: substance use and parenting style, *J. Adolesc.* 79 (1) (Feb. 2020) 128–135, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2019.12.015>.
- [30] A. Fute, X. Wan, M. Oubibi, J.B. Bulugu, Adult literacy education and reduction of poverty in Tanzania: a review of policies and their implementation, *J. Educ.* (Feb. 2022), 002205742210752, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00220574221075204>.
- [31] J.A. Ray, J.-K. Choi, A.P. Jackson, Adverse childhood experiences and behavior problems among poor Black children: nonresident father involvement and single mothers' parenting stress, *Child Abuse Negl.* 121 (Nov. 2021), 105264, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2021.105264>.
- [32] K.E. Jahng, Maternal abusive parenting and young South Korean adolescents' problematic smartphone use: the moderating effects of time spent hanging out with peers and trusting peer relationships, *Child. Youth Serv. Rev.* 98 (Mar. 2019) 96–104, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.12.028>.
- [33] Z. Rong, et al., Relationship between childhood sexual abuse and attitudes toward premarital sexual permissiveness among middle school students in Luzhou, China, *BMC Publ. Health* 22 (1) (Dec. 2022) 71, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-12490-1>.
- [34] M. Oubibi, Y. Zhou, A. Oubibi, A. Fute, A. Saleem, The challenges and opportunities for developing the use of data and artificial intelligence (AI) in north africa: case of Morocco, in: S. Motahhir, B. Mossoufi (Eds.), " *Digital Technologies And Applications*, Springer, Worsaw, 2022, pp. 80–90, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-02447-4\\_9](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-02447-4_9).
- [35] URT, *Basic Demographic and Socio-Economic Profile of Tanzania*, " Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 2014.
- [36] M. Beckerman, S.R. van Berkel, J. Mesman, L.R.A. Alink, The role of negative parental attributions in the associations between daily stressors, maltreatment history, and harsh and abusive discipline, *Child Abuse Negl.* 64 (Feb. 2017) 109–116, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2016.12.015>.
- [37] Y. Yamaoka, et al., Abusive and positive parenting behavior in Japan during the COVID-19 pandemic under the state of emergency, *Child Abuse Negl.* 120 (Oct. 2021), 105212, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2021.105212>.
- [38] B. Alvarado, R. del Carmen Vilchez, Single, divorced, or separated? Factors that impact the lives of women who are heads of household in Lima, Peru, *Sage Open* 5 (4) (Oct. 2015) 1–9, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244015611713>.
- [39] A.A. Abdullahi, N.T. Abdulquadi, New media and adolescents' sexual behaviour in sub-sahara africa: linking theories to realities, *Sage Open* 8 (4) (2018) 1–11, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244018804606>.