

# Relationship Context of First Sex

## Agency, Consent, and Coercion: Young People's Experiences of First Sex in Ashanti and Northern Regions, Ghana (QRS24)

### An Analysis Brief from The DHS Program

#### Why study the relationship context of young people's first sex?

Despite increased attention on adolescent health programming, little is known about the context of young people's first sexual experience. The types of relationships that young women and men have, how they discuss sex, and if coercion appears in relationships are essential factors in young people's decision about if and when to become sexually active, the experience of first sex, and the meaning it has for their lives. This qualitative study examines these themes through interviews of young people in the Ashanti and Northern Regions of Ghana.

#### What are the key results?

**The majority of young people first have sex in established relationships.** Among the 114 young women and 40 young men interviewed for this study, about four in five respondents had their first sexual experience within an established, intimate relationship. The remaining respondents first had sex with someone they were not in a relationship with at the time. All respondents from the Ashanti Region and all young men from the Northern Region first had sex before marriage, while over half of young women from the Northern Region were married at the time they first had sex. This means that all married respondents were young women from the Northern Region.

About **4 in 5** respondents had their first sexual experience in an established relationship.



**The discussion of sex prior to the time of first sex depends on the relationship type.** People in established relationships would generally discuss sex beforehand and men often initiated the discussion. For those who did not communicate about sex prior to the time of sex, many began discussing sex afterwards. However, for respondents whose first sex was with a non-partner, there was often no discussion about sex at all, either before or after sex.

*Interviewer (I): Did you talk about sex?*

*Respondent (R): The man can talk about it, but lady will not if she wise. But if it is someone who is not wise, they will have sex when they are still in a relationship.*

*I: So did he talk to you about sex?*

*R: Yes.*

*I: After the first time you had sex with him, did he talk about it again?*

*R: Yes after the first time, you know he is now my husband.*

- 20 year old woman, rural area, Northern Region

## Couples generally had more open communication about sex and family planning after first sex.

While communication about sex was often limited before first sex, many respondents reported higher levels of communication about sex and family planning in their relationships afterwards.

**Young people discuss sex with peers around the time of first sex.** Both young men and women generally talked with their peers about sex before first sex, though the types of conversations were very different for women and men. Women reported much more general conversations with their peers, while men were more likely to talk about their own personal experiences.

*Interviewer (I): Okay, around the first time you had sex, did you talk about sex with your friends, like either in general or your experiences?*

*Respondent (R): In general.*

*I: Hmm, you spoke about sex with them.*

*R: In general but not myself, I did this, I did that.*

*I: So what do you think your close friends were doing? Were they also having sex or saying they had sex?*

*R: I am sure they were because their responses showed me that they were.*

*I: So how much of your sexual experience did you share with your friends?*

*R: I do not really share my sexual experience with my friends because they are also mature and they understand.*

- 22 year old woman, urban area, Northern Region

*Interviewer (I): How much of your first sexual experience did you share with your friends?*

*Respondent (R): [Laughs] the experience I had from it?*

*I: Yes or what happened how much of it did you tell your friends?*

*R: I use to tell them.*

*I: The first one that happened, first time?*

*R: You see that I had not done that before so when I did it I told them.*

- 20 year old man, rural area, Ashanti Region



### Qualitative Research Studies

**No. 24 (QRS24)** is a qualitative study embedded within the 2022 Ghana DHS. This study explores themes around young people's first sexual experience in the Ashanti and Northern Regions of Ghana, their relationships with peers and adults, their partner's attributes,

relationship type, and coercion.

**This brief summarizes chapter three of QRS24** and is in a series of five briefs analyzing the findings of QRS24. To learn about other key findings from this study, read:

- [Overview of QRS24](#)
- [Motivation for First Sex](#)
- [Contraceptive Use at First Sex](#)
- [Experiences of Coercion at First Sex](#)

This brief summarizes The DHS Program's Qualitative Research Studies Report 24, by Kerry LD MacQuarrie, Sara Riese, Jeffrey Edmeades, Peter Takyi Peparah, Priscilla Opoku, Nana Akosua Owusu-Ansah, Emmanuel Boateng, Afra Adomako Kwabiah, Martin Wiredu Agyekum, Frank Kyei-Arthur, and Jones Apawu with funding from The United States Agency for International Development through The DHS Program implemented by ICF. For the full report visit: <https://dhsprogram.com/publications/publication-qrs24-qualitative-research-studies.cfm>. For the 2022 Ghana Demographic and Health Survey, visit: <https://dhsprogram.com/publications/publication-fr387-dhs-final-reports.cfm>.