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Premarital Sexuality, Gender Relations and Unplanned Pregnancies in Ouagadougou

Introduction: context and theoretical framework

Young people in sub-Saharan Africa, as elsewhere in the developing world, are more and more often sexually active before marriage (Wellings et al., 2006). This phenomenon is linked to a rise in the age of marriage and to an increasing gap between the age at first sexual intercourse, which is stable or slightly rising, and age at first union (Gupta and Mahy, 2003; Mensch et al., 2006; Delaunay and Guillaume, 2007). In Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso, median age at first union is 20.0 years for women and over 30 years for men, compared with 17.6 years for women and 25.4 years for men in rural areas, and median age at first sexual intercourse is 18.6 years for women and 20.0 for men in Ouagadougou, versus 17.4 and 20.9 years, respectively, in rural areas (INSD and ORC Macro, 2004). Data from the 2003 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) indicate that, in Ouagadougou, 25% of single women aged 15-24 had had sexual intercourse during the previous year, versus 19% in rural areas; for men, the figures are 52% and 26%, respectively. Premarital sexual activity is frequent, especially in urban areas, among the most educated and socially advantaged young people.

Premarital sexuality has become more common among young Africans in the context of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Over the last two decades, many of the

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interventions designed to promote risk-free sexual behaviour have targeted this particular population group. Survey data show that while use of condoms has risen over the period, young Africans who engage in sexual intercourse are still insufficiently protected (Cleland and Ali, 2006; Hindin and Fatusi, 2009). A neighbourhood survey conducted by the Population Observatory of Ouagadougou in 2010 shows that among unmarried women who need family planning (they have had intercourse, are not pregnant and do not want to have children over the next two years), 23% use a modern method (either condoms or birth control pills) and 62% use a natural method, mainly periodic abstinence, often called the “rhythm method” (Rossier and Ortiz, 2011). The low rate of modern contraceptive use results in a high rate of clandestine abortion among young women (Shah et al., 2004). A recent study estimated a clandestine abortion rate of 25 per 1,000 among women aged 15–49 in Burkina Faso (Sedgh et al., 2011). This practice is more common in urban areas and mainly concerns young women: in Ouagadougou, 74% of women who have an abortion are unmarried at the time and 82% do not yet have children.

Premarital sexuality in Africa has been the subject of many studies since the early 1990s, and interest in the subject has been reinforced by evidence that young people engage in sexual relations without adequate protection. The first studies showed that adolescents are turning away from traditional values which condemn sexual relations before marriage in most African societies (Sawadogo, 1993; Bardem and Gobatto, 1995; Ouédraogo, 1996; Ouédraogo et al., 2006).⁽²⁾ These changes in representations are attributed to a weakening of the elders’ authority over young people and the spread of Western values, linked to urbanization which is often cited as a factor in the rise of extramarital sexuality (Kobiane and Yaro, 1996). Other studies covering the same time period point to the gradual abandonment of arranged marriage (Beldsoe and Pison, 1994).

More recent studies stress that these developments do not constitute a break with the past; new attitudes follow tradition in certain respects. For example, “free” choice of a spouse is perceived in terms of norms and family aspirations, and family approval remains fundamental to the marriage process (Attané, 2007). In Ouagadougou, as in other African cities, traditional and Western ways of life coexist, rather than constituting two distinct contradictory social realities (Calvès, 2007; Mazzocchi, 2007). Because of their rapid growth and the rural exodus, cities in Africa are populated to a large extent by people born in rural areas: in the suburban neighbourhoods studied by the Population Observatory of Ouagadougou, 52% of residents over 15 years of age were born in rural areas (Rossier et al., 2011).

(2) In some cultural groups, girls were traditionally encouraged to have premarital relations in order to prove their fecundity by getting pregnant before being given away in marriage by the family. Behaviour in terms of premarital sexuality and fertility is different in these groups (Rwenge, 2003).

Ever since the first studies of premarital sexuality, researchers have noted that young women sometimes grant sexual favours in return for material advantages (CERPOD, 1996; Kuate-Defo, 1998; Calvès, 1999; Silberschmidt and Rasch, 2001; Poulin, 2007). Female strategies for finding a husband have also attracted researchers' attention. Several studies show that young women seek out asymmetrical relationships in terms of age and income, and then expose themselves more or less consciously to the risk of an "unwanted" pregnancy which may lead to marriage (Görge et al., 1998; Calvès, 1999; Silberschmidt and Rasch, 2001; Luke, 2005). Poulin (2007) and Attané (2009) view the exchange of sexual favours for material advantages as a routine component of relations between the two sexes, rather than as a transaction.

This research on "new" forms of female premarital sexuality, while of interest, does not encompass all the forms of premarital sexuality that have emerged. In particular, it overlooks the spread of the romantic ideal and the persistence of the practice of premarital abstinence. Little attention is paid to men's motivations. Finally, the links between risk prevention and the various forms of premarital sexuality are not addressed.

Other studies have focused, not on motivations for sexual relations just before marriage, but on the positive relation between the degree of equality between partners and sexual risk prevention. These studies show that girls who enter unequal relationships (age differences, income inequalities) have little bargaining power in negotiations on the timing of sexual relations or on risk prevention (Langen, 2005; Wolff et al., 2000; Bozon and Hertrich, 2004; Rwenge, 2003; Luke, 2005; Brook et al., 2006). However, these studies do not examine the mechanisms that lead young men to ignore prevention and young women to accept unprotected relations outside of marriage.

Anthropologists working on HIV in eastern and southern Africa have focused on this question, examining divergence between female and male interests with regard to premarital sexual relations. They looked at men's and women's motivations in engaging in premarital sex and at how their interests conflict with the need for prevention. These studies have revealed major differences in young men's and young women's expectations (Wight et al., 2006). Young women are obliged to view their sexuality in the context of marriage: brides are supposed to be virgins and, once married, are expected to be faithful; their worth depends on their ability to marry and to produce children (Harrison, 2008; Mankayi, 2008). On the other hand, young men must prove their virility by having relations with multiple partners, both before and after marriage (Simbayi et al., 2005; Dählback et al., 2006). The gender gap in social expectations has a strong impact on prevention behaviour. Individuals who are preoccupied with establishing their (fragile) identities, especially when they are young, are ready to neglect prevention in order to prove themselves, either as young women by hastening marriage, or as young

men by demonstrating their virility (Sorrell and Raffaelli, 2005; Reddy and Dunne, 2007; Simpson, 2007).

The purpose of this analysis is to understand the occurrence of unplanned pregnancies among unmarried young people in Ouagadougou by showing how difficulties with contraception are linked to socially constructed motivations for premarital sexual relations that differ for men and for women. Looking beyond the differences between the two sexes, we also examine how gender inequality contributes to risk-taking.

We proceed in several stages. First of all, we identify the types of premarital sexual practices which exist today in Ouagadougou among adolescent girls and boys. By analysing the way individuals see their own sexuality and their social characteristics, we identify common rationales underpinning premarital sexuality. Secondly, we show how these rationales may lead some individuals to avoid pregnancy at all costs and others to pay little heed to pregnancy prevention. Unplanned pregnancies may occur when one partner adopts more than one rationale at the same time and/or when the two partners have different rationales (Bajos and Ferrand, 2002). Finally, we describe the asymmetry of male and female motivations for having sexual relations, its influence on negotiations about the choice of prevention method, and the negative consequences of premarital pregnancy for women.

I. Methods

We use data gathered during a multisite research project designed to analyse the potential role of emergency contraception in Africa, presented in the introduction to this special feature. The 50 women and 27 men interviewed in Ouagadougou were contacted using the “snowball” sampling method via various entry points (health centres or interviewers’ social circles). The sample was divided into three age groups: 18-24, 25-30 and 31-35. A fourth age category (36-40) was added for men. Three levels of education were identified: none to mid-primary, mid-primary to mid secondary, mid-secondary and higher.⁽³⁾ Individuals were classified as either married or single (Table 1). Interviews were conducted by five research assistants with sociology degrees from the University of Ouagadougou. Three pilot studies preceded data collection, which began in September 2005 and ended in January 2007. Most interviews were conducted in French, some in Mooré, the most widely spoken language in Ouagadougou.

(3) In the context of this survey, individuals with a few years of primary school education often resemble those without any schooling; similarly, those with a few years of secondary school education resemble those who have completed primary school. These categories, used in Table 1, were applied to constitute our sample. In the text of this article, our usage is more conventional: the level indicated is the highest reached by the individual; e.g. an individual’s educational level is labelled “secondary school” regardless of how many years were actually spent in secondary education.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the men and women surveyed (numbers)

Marital status	Level of education	Age group							
		18-24		25-30		31-35		36-40	
		M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Single	None to mid-primary	1	4	1	3	1		1	
	Mid-primary to mid-secondary	1	5	1	2	1	1		
	Mid-secondary or higher	1	4	3	2		1	2	
Married	None to mid-primary		7	2	3	2	4	1	
	Mid-primary to mid-secondary	1	3	1	3	1	2	1	
	Mid-secondary or higher	1	1	1	2	1	2	2	
TOTAL	50 women 27 men	5	24	9	15	6	11	7	

Source: ECAF Survey, 2006-2007, Ouagadougou.

Interviews in Mooré were translated into French by the research assistants at the time of transcription. All the names have been changed.

The interviews were semi-structured. Respondents were invited to talk about different aspects of their sexuality: emotional ties, marriages, children and contraception. All pregnancies or induced abortions mentioned by respondents were explored in detail. Respondents were asked for their opinions on marriage, sexuality, gender differences and abortion. Interviews lasted between one and four hours. Respondents undoubtedly presented their experiences in such a way as to conform to social expectations, by hiding, modifying or rationalizing certain aspects of their lives. However, the length of the interviews and the details elicited in respondents' accounts of their experiences made it possible to check the consistency of information provided and to partly control for social desirability bias.

Each respondent's interview was condensed into a portrait of a few pages, and their experience with contraception was summed up in a table. Respondents' lives were divided into "relational episodes" corresponding to different partners. If more than one type of contraception was reported for a single relationship, a series of "contraceptive episodes" was constructed for that relationship. The following information was noted for each contraceptive episode: partners' attitudes towards having a child, negotiations between partners regarding contraception, method of contraception used, difficulties in using contraception, occurrences of risk-taking with regard to sexually transmitted infections (STI) and pregnancy, occurrences of pregnancy and the respondent's description of the pregnancy (unplanned, etc.) and its outcome.

This study deals only with relationships preceding entry into a union. Entry into a union is defined here as the beginning of cohabitation or as a wedding ceremony of any kind (traditional, religious, civil). We did not include respondents' sexual debut or the first occurrences of sexual intercourse within a relationship (except with casual partners), because these first experiences pose particular problems for prevention (Sawadogo and Rossier, 2011). In a context where formal sexual education is practically non-existent and where parents repeatedly tell young women to abstain from sex while making no comment on the matter to young men, and where young people themselves do not often feel concerned by contraception, young people begin their sexual life in a state of complete ignorance, or, at best, with very sketchy knowledge of prevention. As the lack of sexual education in this context is strongly linked to the persistence of an ideal of female virginity, young women are more penalized in this situation than young men.

II. Results

1. Young women's premarital sexual relations: perceptions and practices

The premarital sexual practices of the young women in our sample are classified in four categories: abstinence; sexual relations just before marriage; sexual relations in a stable relationship with a view to future marriage; sexual relations outside of a stable relationship. To characterize the rationales that underlie these practices, we look at young women's perceptions of premarital sexuality, how they rationalize their practices, and also their social position and context of socialization.

Abstinence or minimal premarital sexuality

Although premarital sexual relations have become more common in African cities, many of the young women in our sample were virgins when they married. With few exceptions, these women had little education, had grown up in villages, were Muslims, and their marriages were arranged when they were young. These young women disapprove of sexual relations before marriage. They evoke the notion of honour in defence of abstinence. The words used by Jénébou (age 32, married, 3 children, primary education) illustrate this attitude. Jénébou had sexual intercourse for the first time on her wedding night, at the age of 16. When she got up in the morning, she saw with horror that her clothing was stained with blood. She was told that the blood was a sign of her honourable conduct.

I was afraid. An old woman was with me... She said that was how it was, that the white cloth that they tied on me, they will take it to show that I'm a good girl, that while I was with my family I didn't go off with other men...

Q: What is a “good girl”?

A: It means that I respect my parents. It means that I am good, that I haven’t dishonoured my family name.

Most of the young women in our sample share these views. Those who have had sexual relations before marriage claim that they would have preferred abstinence. Some refer to their religion (Christianity, Islam) when speaking of virginity, but most say that abstinence is rooted in tradition, as indicated by the many references to “the old times,” “custom,” or “here in Africa” which punctuate their discourse on the question.

I didn’t think I would go out with someone and have sexual relations [before marriage]... I told him [my first boyfriend] that it would be better if we waited until we were married to have sex. He told me... you know how men are today... If you want to live like in the old times, it’s difficult to find someone who’s willing to go out with you without having sexual relations, it’s difficult.

Roxane (age 21, single, no children, primary education).

The attitude of today’s parents when they discuss sexuality with their daughters is in keeping with tradition. The young women in our interviews reported that their parents simply warned against premarital pregnancy and recommended abstinence.

My mum always spoke about that. She said “if you get pregnant, it’ll kill your dad, it’ll kill your mum [laughter] and you yourself. If you’re not careful you’ll die too, so you shouldn’t look for a boy, you understand?” With the way she was talking I said, “I understand, I understand”.

Martine (age 22, single, no children, secondary education).

Some young women (medium educated, born in towns, often from very devout families, usually Christian or Muslim) manage to reach a compromise between the ideal of virginity and the demands of a boyfriend by practicing a sort of minimal sexuality, that is, by limiting the frequency of sexual relations (and taking care not to get pregnant in order to preserve the appearance of virginity). For example, Micheline has had intercourse with her current boyfriend twice over the five years of their relationship. She says:

If I consent right away when he wants to make love, he’ll leave me easily... That’s why I didn’t want to. I tell myself that when I get married, then it’ll be OK. But if I give myself too much, if anyone can have me easily, win me easily, they’ll all leave me.

Micheline (age 23, single, no children, primary education).

These more educated young women who abstain (or engage in minimal sexuality) feel that they are improving their chances of finding and keeping a desirable mate (they put off suitors who are not in earnest). They think that

their behaviour will encourage the partner to follow through with a (civil and/or religious) wedding ceremony.

Sexual relations with a view to immediate marriage

Some young women (often those with little or no education, born in villages) practice a kind of premarital sexuality which is in keeping with the tradition of abstinence, even if it deviates in form. They have sexual intercourse for the first time outside marriage, but with a view to immediate marriage. Since the desire to get pregnant and to marry colours this first sexual experience, it is an immediate forerunner to marriage, in the girl's mind at least, and becomes "almost marital". A wedding is only a question of time. The example of Jalimatou (age 30, divorced, 4 children, primary education) is typical. Jalimatou had sexual intercourse for the first time at age 18. She was not protected by a condom, and it resulted in pregnancy (he said he loved her and would marry her). When called before her parents, the boyfriend admitted he was the father and said he was ready to assume his responsibilities. With the agreement of her parents, she went to live in her partner's home until she gave birth. The couple had a traditional wedding.

A variation on this type of sexual practice is found among girls with more education, born in urban areas to families that are less well off or have problems. They are also willing to have unprotected sexual relations and to get pregnant on condition that a wedding follows quickly. Like the girls from rural areas described above, these girls attach little importance to emotional attachment in the choice of a spouse. However, unlike girls from rural areas, the girls from towns who are ready to marry quickly attach importance to the economic situation of their future husbands. They have relations only with men of sufficient wealth. The discourse of Magalie (age 27, single, one child, secondary education, from a broken home) illustrates this attitude. Magalie claims to have consented to sexual intercourse with the man her family wants her to marry, not out of affection for him ("It's not that I had any feelings for him, huh"), but because "he's someone who paid for my schooling". Because he spent a large sum of money for her, everyone, including Magalie herself – although she has some reservations – considers this man to be a good future husband. Her family pressured her to have sexual relations with him, encouraging her to sleep over at his home (he lives and works in another town).

These respondents describe the pregnancies that occur in this context as "unplanned" or "accidental." They use such terms because they were not sure that they would get pregnant and because, in such a setting, they are not supposed to say that they want to get pregnant without being married. "Unplanned but accepted" or "not really unplanned" or "on the sly" seem more appropriate descriptions for a pregnancy in such circumstances.

*Sexual relations in a stable relationship,
without immediate plans for marriage*

Other young women who are from middle class or more wealthy families (often born in urban areas, with a higher level of education) engage in sexual relations without plans for an immediate marriage. Although these women also idealize abstinence before marriage, they engage in sexual relations out of love, as Mireille explains when speaking of Miguel, her first and only sexual partner.

In the past, I refused to have sex with lots of boys. I had to refuse. I've always been good at that. But if I gave in to Miguel, it was much more out of love.

Mireille (age 21, student, single, no children, higher education).

Their sexual debut is often presented as a failure (in relation to the ideal of abstinence), but a necessary failure (in relation to the ideal of a marriage based on love).

These days, when a boy goes out with girl, even before marriage, he wants to know you. He wants to have relations with you. So... but if you're attached to this person, to your man, you must give in because if you want to get married because [refusing to have sexual relations] can lead to separation.

Marion (age 20, single, no children, secondary education).

Marriage seems far off to these young women. They want to postpone marriage and pregnancy in order to complete their education, which is very important to them. They are well informed and generally use contraception (periodic abstinence at the very least). But despite their social advantages, these women remain vulnerable with respect to their boyfriend. By giving in to him, their "moral capital" is eroded. Maina's story shows that if the relationship is broken off, the girl will be accused of being an "easy lay."

You've loved, you've decided together to go out together until you get married... Sooner or later you'll do it before you get married... And if, God forbid, you don't succeed in getting married... You didn't do it because you wanted to find out what it was like, but you did it in hopes that you would stay together.

Maina (age 27, married, two children, secondary education).

Even in these relatively egalitarian relationships, women are at a disadvantage because they are more anxious than men to make the relationship last in order to protect their "honour". This desire sometimes leads them to make concessions in the couple, including concessions concerning birth control. Some young women who possess a great deal of social or personal capital (beauty, for example) are able to resist such pressures in their love relationships, but such examples are rare in our survey sample. These women have no qualms about breaking off with a boyfriend who does not suit them, and manage to impose their point of view within the couple.

Sexual relations outside a stable relationship

Some of the young women in our sample have sexual relations with partners who they do not plan to marry. These women condemn premarital relations while having more than one partner. Some trade their favours (usually sexual but not always) for money, gifts or other advantages, as in the case of Marion.

Now I go out with men to get money from them. That's all.

Q: How many men?

A: There are... four, four... We call each other up now and then. We go out for a drink. They suggest we sleep together...

Q: Do they give you a lot of money?

A: Yes, often, yes. Often 20,000 [30€], 30,000 [46€].

Marion (age 20, single, no children, secondary education).

These young women invoke economic need to rationalize their behaviour. However, most of them still live with their parents, who give them room and board and who are usually fairly well off. Nonetheless, these girls want to be able to spend more, and they are friends with other girls who show them how to proceed (Malicka, Jalila, Marion). They go out occasionally (or sometimes more regularly, but without plans for the future) with men who have money so that they can buy the consumer goods they want. Since their behaviour conflicts with their own ideals, they arrange to keep their activities secret (by avoiding pregnancy), refusing any relations with casual partners who do not want to use condoms, and taking care to protect themselves from sexual risks.

Some young women have sexual relations without plans for marriage but without seeking material advantages, out of a desire for sexual pleasure or out of curiosity, or in order to fill an emotional void (Aida, Magalie, Madeleine, etc.). Generally, such encounters remain isolated incidents in the lives of these young women; however, some with atypical profiles may repeat the experience. For example, Magalie, who is quoted above, has a clandestine love affair with a man whom she finds more attractive than her official fiancé. These young women are aware of the risks they face and plan to use condoms, but contraception ultimately depends on their male partner's position, since prevention is far from the minds of those who engage in this type of sexual relationship.

2. Young men's premarital sexual relations: perceptions and practices

We use the same categories as for young women to describe young men's premarital sexual practices, in order to compare the two groups. However, the content and the relative importance of the different categories are extremely different for men, as are their perceptions of these practices. Furthermore, young men often engage in more than one type of premarital sexuality (a steady girlfriend plus casual relations), which is rarely the case for young women.

Abstinence or minimal premarital sexuality

Four young men in our sample (Patanema, Pierre, Paul, Padoul) practiced abstinence or a form of “minimal” sexuality before marriage. All four are from modest social backgrounds, but their level of education varies. They all have strong convictions, of religious or other origin. Patanema (age 27, single, no children, primary education) is not married, has not had sexual relations and does not plan to before marriage. He is very pious (his religion is Islam) and rationalizes his behaviour with religious texts. He used to have a girlfriend with whom he had a platonic relationship, while waiting for his financial situation to improve so that they could marry. They split up when she got pregnant by another man. Pierre (age 32, married, 2 children, higher education) had sexual intercourse just once before meeting his wife. He is also devout (he studied in a seminary and planned to become a priest), and he says that he regrets this “mistake”. A third young man (Paul, age 23, married, one child, higher education) was determined to succeed in his studies and had no sexual relations before meeting the woman who (quickly) became his wife. Previously, he had had a seven-year platonic relationship with a girl with whom he finally broke up. He was obsessed with his studies and did not think about going any further with her. He explains: “I can tell you that up until then, the idea of having sexual relations didn’t cross my mind; I was interested in my studies...; that wasn’t part of my plans”. The case of Padoul (age 26, single, no children, secondary education) is similar. After a disappointing first romantic experience, he abstained from sexual relations with a girl he met more recently, out of a desire to first improve his financial situation.

Other young men (Adrien, Poula, Patrice), all from modest backgrounds but with varied levels of education, practice abstinence or minimal sexuality with an official girlfriend, while having sexual relations with other partners behind her back. These young men have a dual vision of premarital sex and of women: on the one hand, there are serious women who are virgins or who have few partners and who are potential spouses (though it is important to avoid getting them pregnant before marriage in order to preserve appearances); on the other hand, there are easy women you can have a good time with, and whom you do not marry. This duality emerges clearly in Adrien’s discourse:

You want to know if, for example, I go out with other girls to make up for the lack of sexual relations [with my girlfriend]? If that’s the question, the answer is yes. I go out with other girls, but I sincerely love my girlfriend... [He describes one of his casual relationships.] I was going out with her, but she wasn’t serious, I didn’t like her mentality. She had a lot of boyfriends here and there. So I couldn’t go out with a girl like that.

Adrien (age 25, single, no children, higher education).

These boys recommend avoiding regular intercourse with an official girlfriend, so that she remains respectable in their eyes and doesn’t become “tainted”, while seeking sexual satisfaction through casual relationships.

[Concerning sex with a steady girlfriend] Only, you shouldn't take advantage, not take advantage. If you take advantage, it becomes something vulgar in your own eyes. There won't be much respect left, and the affection you had for her will disappear. You see? Since you tell yourself that, yes, she is "cheap", since she gave in to me easily, she will give in to others. So, if you have that idea, you tend to leave certain girls.

Poula (age 40, single, no children, secondary education).

Sexual relations with a view to immediate marriage

Some young men (Moumouni, Moussa, Madi, Ambroise) with a low or medium level of education, a manual trade or a job in the informal business sector, engage in sexual relations while envisaging an immediate marriage, or at least entertaining the possibility. The idea of having a child is present in these relationships from the start. Most of these men have had numerous casual sexual partners before meeting the girl they want to marry. Generally, by that time, they have a stable job and feel ready to marry. Moctar (age 34, married, 2 children, primary education, tailor) illustrates this pattern. He began to court his future wife when she came to his workshop to sew an outfit. They had sexual intercourse for the first time two months after this initial meeting; she was a virgin. They did not use a condom, either on the first occasion or subsequently. As Moctar says, "We didn't think about it because we loved each other". The couple got married six months later.

These men do not feel that marriage should be based on emotional bonds, even though they use the vocabulary of love to describe their relationships with their wives. They do not need to prolong the period of premarital courtship since marriage is seen as an arrangement that suits both parties rather than as the formalization of a strong love relationship.

Sexual relations in a stable relationship, without immediate plans for marriage

Some of the men surveyed (Marcellin, Mamadou, Phassane, Matthieu, Mohamed, Marius, Pamoussa), with a medium or higher level of education and working for the most part in the service sector, have a very different outlook on premarital relations. These men, like those who practice abstinence and unlike all the others, do not have casual sexual relations before marriage. Most have had a limited number of steady girlfriends, always with a view to finding a life partner. They view premarital sex positively, as a way to get to know and choose a future wife. For example, Phassane (age 33, married, 2 children, secondary education, a visual artist) thinks that premarital sex is necessary today and that a husband and a wife should choose one another by knowing each other. He himself had several girlfriends before meeting his wife. Each time he broke off the relationship when he realized that the girl did not suit him (for example, she was just a sexual opportunist).

Two men who also have a medium or higher level of education (Moustapha, Paouni) have strong emotional bonds with steady girlfriends in the expectation of marriage, while going out secretly with many casual acquaintances. Although young men may exhibit a dual attitude towards women – casual sex in secret while remaining abstinent with a steady girlfriend – this practice becomes difficult if they have a strong emotional bond and frequent sexual relations with the steady girlfriend. The two stances cannot be reconciled and duplicity is difficult to hide over the long term. The official girlfriend often ends up discovering the truth.

In relationships with no immediate expectations of marriage, men want to avoid pregnancy at all costs, so that both members of the couple, especially the woman, can pursue their education and begin a professional career. For example, Mohamed (age 38, married, no children, high school teacher) is waiting for his young wife to finish her training as a seamstress before having a child.

Sexual relations outside a stable relationship

Most of the 27 young men surveyed (also) had casual sexual relations. As stated above, the only exceptions are (more educated) young men who feel that couple relationships should be based on love and those (with strong moral convictions) who practice abstinence. Sexual relations outside a stable relationship can be described as “casual” in that the young man will often not see his partner again once the act is accomplished. However, this type of relationship can also take place in a more stable setting, although the young man has not the slightest intention of prolonging the relationship through marriage.

Men who engage in casual sexual relations focus purely on their own desires, and say that sexual pleasure is their goal. The woman is perceived as an object of pleasure, that may be bought or obtained through duplicity, as the remarks of Poula and of Paouni clearly show.

I was called “the occasional man”, because my close friends knew that if I courted a girl, it was just for pleasure... So I can't count how many girls I've been with...

Q: But how do you manage to end your relationship with a girl after only a few days?

A: Yes, yes, you see, above all you must be a “sweet talker”... I can call you, chat with you and then tell you that you really are the ideal woman, that I want you to be my steady girlfriend, and then, try to lie.

Poula (age 40, single, no children, secondary education, unemployed)

They're girls that I meet here and there, when I would see a girl with a geometric figure... you see what I mean, curved shapes that are a bit sharp, I would throw myself at her and then attack, just to satisfy my curiosity and

get pleasure, sexual pleasure and I would make a catch like that, I would bring the girl to a friend's place or a hotel that rents rooms by the hour... But often women love good food and so I spend what is necessary... girls like to eat fish, chicken, beer, they want 2,000F (3€), 5,000F (8€) to spend here and there... We don't make any long term plans, I give you immediate satisfaction, whatever you want,... It's like a service, like a service.

Paouni (age 26, single, no children, student).

The words of these connoisseurs of casual sexual relations reveal a lack of consideration for their partners: girls are “game” (Adrien) to be “caught”. In a society where unmarried girls are supposed to respect morality and practice sexual restraint, men consider their partners to be “cheap” girls who do not deserve respect.

This attitude towards sexuality and towards women is close to the mindset of men who commit rape. Adrien, for example, admits that he forced his first girlfriend to have sexual relations with him the first time. This strategy was recommended to him by his male friends who systematically use force the first time with girls because a (good) girl never consents to sexual intercourse. Even if men rarely say that they have used force, many of the young women surveyed report instances of rape, especially at the start of their sexual life (Sawadogo and Rossier, 2011).

Sexual pleasure (including pleasure obtained through rape) is not the only objective of young men. A large number of conquests is a sign of virility, at least in some social settings (where people have little education and are not particularly devout). Thus, a double standard emerges: premarital sex is prized for men and condemned for women. Adrien's interview illustrates this attitude.

We men can go out with several girlfriends and people will notice... but they won't say that you're shameless. But if a girl goes out with several boyfriends, people everywhere will say “that one has no shame” and everyone will want to be with her [have casual sex with her] and nobody will want to marry her... And over time, ... she'll get older... and by the time she's thirty she won't have a husband. But we boys, we go out with a lot of women and we find that normal. It shows your power, how do you say that, it shows that you have a lot of vigour [laughs].

The importance of premarital sex as proof of virility emerges in the pressures sometimes placed on boys to have sexual intercourse for the first time.

Q: The first time you had sexual intercourse, did you use a condom?

Malick: No, no, we didn't use a condom. In fact, even me, I wasn't prepared [to have relations the first time]. A friend of mine influenced me and, since we are all men, we didn't want... so if I say no, he might think that I'm not a man, you know. I didn't have the courage [to resist the pressure from my friend] so it happened like that [I had relations without a condom].

Malick (age 22, single, no children, higher education).

So one day she [my mother] told me to come, she wanted to see me. I went

and she asked me if I knew that I wasn't a man [I was impotent], I must tell her, she was going to go tell my father, they would go get products [sexual stimulants]... If one day I can bring her a girl and tell her that she's my girl [my girlfriend], she'll be very pleased. So I was obliged to look for a girl... Anyway I was very pleased with my first relationship because my mother was happy because she found out that I was a man.

Michel (age 27, married, no children, secondary education).

Since men focus on themselves (their virility and their search for pleasure) in this type of premarital sexual relationship, their attitude towards prevention centres on how they feel about their own need for protection. Their concern is the risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), since they are not personally concerned by the risk of pregnancy. Two contrasting attitudes predominate in this area. Some young men (often well-educated) feel that they should protect themselves from STIs and from HIV/AIDS by systematically using a condom, which also eliminates the worry of a possible pregnancy (and a demand for marriage). Other young men (often with a lower level of education) think that they can protect themselves from STIs by choosing their partners (not using condoms with girls who seem serious, but doing so with girls who seem to be loose). A typical example is Moustapha, who had three sexual partners. He used a condom with one who was "loose" (he thinks she is a nymphomaniac). He did not use a condom with a second girl from "a good family," whom he had seduced while working as her tutor in her home. Finally, he used a condom with his steady girlfriend because she insisted on it. These men feel that avoiding pregnancy is women's responsibility and accuse their partners of acting on purpose if they get pregnant after unprotected sex. For example, Madi denied any responsibility when his first girlfriend got pregnant, since contraception is "women's business". Such attitudes (choosing partners according to whether or not they might carry STIs, dismissing contraception as the partner's problem) suit these young men, who often prefer to have sex without a condom. Indeed, in our survey, many young men – and young women as well – say that condoms diminish sexual pleasure. This might be due to insufficient use of lubricants, which are very expensive for many young people. Since sexual pleasure is the main goal of young men in casual relationships, it seems logical that they would seek to maximize such pleasure by avoiding the use of condoms whenever possible.

3. Ambivalence towards marriage

A given individual may engage in premarital sexual relations while having ambivalent attitudes. This happens frequently in Ouagadougou, where the processes leading to union are evolving and where several models of behaviour coexist. Young people are sometimes not sure what status to confer on a relationship that is just beginning. For example, Ambroise (age 28, married, two children, secondary education, electrician) began his sex life by a series

of “casual” encounters. He seemed intent on a “casual” relationship when he first went out with the girl who was to become his wife. When she got pregnant, he initially sought to avoid responsibility. The couple broke up and then became reconciled after she gave birth. They finally moved in together. Similarly, Aida (age 20, single, no children, university student) is hesitant about the status of her relationship with a young man she met on campus when her steady boyfriend was away. She does not know if she should consider him as a potential husband or simply a lover who is filling in a gap.

The attitude towards marriage may change over the course of a relationship. Sometimes men want to make a commitment at the beginning of a relationship and later change their minds, while continuing to have sexual relations with the girlfriend. For example, Rovanne (age 32, single, one child, higher education, unemployed) has been going out for ten years with her first and only sexual partner. At the beginning, the couple concealed their relationship, as the boyfriend's family disapproved the match. Finally, the couple ended up having unprotected intercourse, perhaps to precipitate a marriage. When Rovanne got pregnant, her boyfriend told his family, who categorically opposed the union. He went along with their wishes, but without breaking up with Rovanne, whom he no longer intends to marry.

Finally, it is not always easy for young men or for young women to discern the moment when a relationship “without immediate plans for marriage” changes into a relationship “with a view to immediate marriage”. The desire to hasten entry into a union is often not expressed. For example, Pamoussa does not clearly admit that he was in a hurry to marry his girlfriend. She was in no rush to enter married life since she had an earlier negative experience of life in a couple, and a first child. Pamoussa's desire for marriage is expressed mainly in his insistence on using a method of contraception that is unreliable and atypical in this context (withdrawal), in his desire for a child expressed at the time, and in his adoption of his girlfriend's first child (a rare practice in this context).

Individuals may have sexual relations before marriage while subscribing simultaneously or successively to different rationales. For example, Pamoussa wanted to postpone marriage because that was what his girlfriend wanted, while he secretly wished to start a family right away. In such a context, pregnancies that are labelled “unwanted” are frequent. Such ambivalence is found especially among individuals in long term premarital relationships, where emotional commitment plays a large role, or among individuals who marry late. In other words, ambiguity is most prevalent among middle or upper class individuals. Among poorer people and those with little education, marriage still often occurs rapidly at a young age (as soon as the man has sufficient income), and emotional ties have little importance in the choice of a spouse. These relationships, which are close to arranged marriages, evoke less hesitation among the individuals who engage in them.

4. Conflicting male and female rationales in attitudes towards premarital sexual relations

While hesitation between two conflicting attitudes on the part of one partner is a major cause of pregnancies perceived as “unwanted”, contradictions between the two partners’ attitudes is another cause in our survey sample. These two processes often go together, as in the examples cited above. The situations observed in our survey are summed up in Table 2, which matches female and male rationales with respect to premarital sexuality. The table also shows prevention practices that correspond to each combination of rationales.

Protection is strongest (Category C in Table 2) when one partner is determined to avoid pregnancy. For example, when the man wants to marry his girlfriend but also wants to postpone the marriage, or when the man is involved in a casual relationship but wants to protect himself from HIV by systematically using a condom. In these cases, the man proposes a condom or other contraception and imposes its use if necessary. Similarly, when a young woman knowingly engages in relations in return for material advantages, without plans for the future, she proposes the use of a condom and will not engage in intercourse if the man refuses. We are not referring here to prostitution, which makes women more vulnerable, but to middle class women who exchange sexual favours for material gains.

Table 2. Rationales of each partner (man and woman) with respect to a premarital sexual relationship and contraceptive practices (level of protection)

Man \ Woman	Marriage an immediate prospect	Marriage a distant prospect	Casual relations: the man takes responsibility for risk prevention	Casual relations: the man leaves risk protection up to the woman
Marriage an immediate prospect	A	C	C	A
Marriage a distant prospect	B	C	C	B
Casual relations: the woman takes responsibility for risk prevention	C	C	C	C
Casual relations: the woman pays little attention to risk protection	A	C	C	A
A : Unprotected sexual relations. B : Sexual relations that are sometimes protected and sometimes not. C : Protected sexual relations. <i>Source</i> : ECAF survey, 2006-2007.				

On the other hand, unlike their male counterparts, young women who want to postpone marriage, who tend to be those with a high level of social capital, do not always succeed in imposing protection during sexual intercourse. Difficulties emerge if the partner refuses to use a condom, either because he

wants to get married or because he views the relationship as casual and wants to enhance his own pleasure (Category B, Table 2). Nicole's case illustrates this pattern. Her boyfriend insisted on being introduced to her parents. Judging from the promise he made to her parents, Nicole considered him a "serious" partner and consented to intercourse. He always used a condom, but when he refused to do so on days when she was not fecund, she reluctantly accepted. She did not know if he was HIV-positive, but she was afraid of losing him. She nonetheless managed with great difficulty to refuse unprotected relations on days when she was fecund; once, by fleeing from his home in the middle of the night. She finally broke up with him and considers the relationship as a terrible failure.

When the two partners neglect prevention for different reasons, their attitudes are often asymmetrical. In such cases, sexual relations are rarely protected (Category A, Table 2). The case of Jassana (age 21, married, no children, no education) is typical. She had sexual intercourse for the first time on a New Year's Eve, consenting to have sex without a condom because her partner promised that he would marry her. In fact, he vanished when she announced that she had become pregnant following their unique sexual encounter.

I asked him, "Did you protect yourself?" He said that it made no difference whether he protected himself or not. I said it did make a difference... If you don't protect yourself and a pregnancy results, you can say that you're not the father. At that point he said that if there is a pregnancy, he'll be there, that he wouldn't... that he would accept [marriage]. He said that, and that's why I consented.

In the end, if a pregnancy occurs, whether it leads to a union or not depends on the man's desires. Indeed, in almost all the cases observed in our sample, a premarital pregnancy results in a union if the man has immediate marriage in mind when intercourse occurs, or if the man consents to marry the young woman, whatever her own wishes. Janta's case is an illustration. She married the young man who raped her, at the instigation of the families, because he consented to marriage. Young women with enough money may resort to abortion, which gives them more choice. They may do so without informing the partner of the pregnancy, or against his will. In Aida's case, for example, after contraception failed in a steady relationship with prospects for marriage in the distant future, she did not want to get married right away, and terminated the pregnancy without consulting her boyfriend. On the other hand, a pregnancy never leads to a union, at least in our sample, if the man does not want to make a commitment, as in the case of Jassana cited above, even if both families and the girl insist on regularizing the situation through marriage. In such cases, an abortion may resolve the woman's problem and allow her to carry on with her life, and she is often helped to this end by her partner or her family. Some young women, isolated and abandoned by their partner, cannot afford an

abortion. Or they may insist on carrying the pregnancy to term in hopes that their partner will eventually consent to marriage. In such cases, they must assume the adverse consequences of giving birth to a child that the father does not want.

Conclusion

Our analyses point to pronounced inequalities between the two sexes and across social classes regarding prevention of unwanted pregnancies. In Ouagadougou, as more generally in eastern and southern Africa (Wight et al., 2006; Harrison, 2008; Mankayi, 2008; Simbayi et al., 2005; Sorrell and Raffaelli, 2005; Dählback et al., 2006; Reddy and Dunne, 2007; Simpson, 2007), these inequalities are founded in the existence of contrasting social norms for the two sexes – a gendered double standard – in relation to premarital sexuality. These norms have a strong impact on pregnancy prevention. Young women are expected to remain sexually abstinent outside marriage and to procreate within marriage; when they do have sexual relations, therefore, they are expected to desire a child. Young men are expected to prove their virility by having sexual relations before marriage, and to leave contraception up to their female partners. Only men or women from the higher social classes can free themselves from such expectations. They often prefer marriage to be based on strong emotional attachment. They have stable premarital relationships, and they want to avoid pregnancy. These preferences are shaped by the central role of education in the lives of young people from more advantaged backgrounds, including young women.

Gender inequality influences pregnancy prevention in three ways. Firstly, uneducated young women are eager to marry in order to acquire social status. They are often naive about sexuality because they are uninformed, and they are accustomed to marriages that are arranged quickly between families or by the partners. Hence, they are easy prey for “sweet talking” young men who want to have a good time. Secondly, a young woman who enters into a long term premarital relationship finds it difficult to stand up to a partner who demands unprotected sex. The woman wants the relationship to lead to marriage. For women, having more than one premarital partner is strongly disapproved of in this context. Finally, if a premarital pregnancy occurs (that may or may not be anticipated and desired by one or both partners), subsequent events depend almost entirely on the man. If he wants to marry the girl, he will usually succeed with the help of family pressure to “regularize” the situation, even if the girl has other ambitions. If he refuses to recognize his responsibility in the pregnancy, it is practically impossible for the girl or her family to force him to marry. Young men may also be vulnerable however; unable to construct a strong social identity in a context of high unemployment, they may see multiple sexual conquests as a means to assert their manhood.

Individuals from the middle or wealthy classes adopt attitudes towards premarital sex that provide better protection against the risk of pregnancy, either in steady relationships where marriage is postponed or in protected casual relations. Note that premarital abstinence is a notable exception; it remains fairly widespread and provides effective protection to girls growing up in rural areas or in religious families. If contraception fails and a pregnancy occurs, individuals from wealthier classes have easier access to safe abortions. In any case, women who have a higher social and personal capital are better able to avoid the negative consequences of gender inequality, and the men with more resources more easily escape the trap of the sexual double standard.

Our results shed new light on the findings of studies that focus on certain aspects of premarital sexuality, such as the exchange of sexual favours for material gain (CERPOD, 1996; Kuate-Defo, 1998; Calvès, 1999; Silberschmidt and Rasch, 2001; Poulin, 2007; Görgen et al., 1993; Bozon and Hertrich, 2004; Rwenge, 2003; Maticka-Tyndale et al., 2005) or the strategies of young women who try to provoke marriage by getting pregnant (Görgen et al., 1998; Calvès, 1999; Silberschmidt and Rasch, 2001; Luke, 2005). We show that men also sometimes try to provoke marriage through pregnancy. Furthermore, attitudes towards premarital sex that are close to tradition, i.e. premarital abstinence or sexual relations with the prospect of an immediate marriage, continue to prevail among many young city dwellers. Finally, a more western approach to finding a spouse, centred on affection, also prevails among a non-negligible share of the population. However, our study shows that individuals generally have several different references and make compromises in order to adhere to them simultaneously. Our results converge with those of researchers that point to multiple cultural references among young African city-dwellers today (Mazzocchi, 2007; Calvès, 2007; Poulin, 2007; Attané, 2009).

We have not considered risk-taking in the context of individual life histories, the sequencing of different types of premarital sexuality or the phenomenon of apprenticeship (Sawadogo and Rossier, 2011). More specifically, we have not studied sexual initiation. Although many young people have protected sexual relations, their favorite methods remain condoms and periodic abstinence, which they learn about from their friends. Since, in most cases, their friends are hardly better informed than themselves, their contraception often fails. We know that in Africa in general, and in Burkina Faso in particular, the fear of hormonal birth control methods is linked to the predominant role of reproduction in shaping women's identity. A study of premarital female and male sexuality is not sufficient in itself to cover all aspects of the link between gender inequality and prevention of unwanted pregnancies in this population.

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**Clémentine ROSSIER, Nathalie SAWADOGO, André SOUBEIGA, the ECAF team •
Premarital Sexuality, Gender Relations and Unplanned Pregnancies in
Ouagadougou**

Premarital sexual relations are becoming more common in Africa, a trend which is especially prevalent in urban settings. Although unmarried youth increasingly use condoms, many studies highlight considerable unmet contraceptive needs in this population subgroup. This article is based on qualitative data gathered in 2006 and 2007 in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, through 77 in-depth interviews with young women and men conducted for the Emergency Contraception in Africa (ECAf) survey. The authors show how unequal gender relations lead to unplanned premarital pregnancies. As in the past, young women's sexual activity before marriage is marked by a quest for morality and marriage, even if marriage is postponed. Male premarital sexual activity is often characterized by the positive value attached to multiple partners and to men's pleasure. These contrasting rationales for premarital sex can lead individuals either to seek ways of avoiding pregnancy at all costs or to neglect prevention. Unplanned pregnancies occur when one of the two partners adheres to more than one rationale and/or when the two partners adhere to different rationales. In the latter case, the asymmetry between men's and women's motivations weakens women's bargaining power over the use of condoms.

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SEXUALITÉS PRÉNUPTIALES, RAPPORTS DE GENRE ET GROSSESSES NON PRÉVUES À OUAGADOUGOU**

La sexualité prémaritale se généralise sur le continent africain, et cette tendance est plus accentuée dans les villes. Bien que l'utilisation du préservatif ait progressé chez les jeunes non mariés, de nombreuses études montrent que les besoins contraceptifs non satisfaits restent importants dans ce sous-groupe de la population. À partir de données qualitatives collectées en 2006 et 2007 à Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso (77 entretiens approfondis avec des jeunes femmes et hommes, enquête *Emergency Contraception in Africa* – ECAF), cet article montre comment un système de genre inégalitaire contribue à la survenue de grossesses non prévues avant le mariage. L'activité sexuelle prénuptiale des jeunes femmes reste marquée par la recherche de moralité et de mariage (un mariage plus ou moins différé); l'activité sexuelle prénuptiale masculine est souvent caractérisée par une valorisation du multi-partenariat et du plaisir masculin. Les logiques qui sous-tendent l'activité sexuelle prénuptiale peuvent amener les individus à vouloir éviter une grossesse à tout prix, ou au contraire, à reléguer la prévention au second plan. Les grossesses non prévues surviennent quand un des partenaires se situe simultanément dans plusieurs logiques à la fois et/ou quand les deux partenaires sont dans des logiques différentes; dans ce dernier cas, l'asymétrie des motivations des hommes et des femmes place ces dernières en position de vulnérabilité dans la négociation du préservatif.

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SEXUALIDADES PRENUPCIALES, RELACIONES DE GÉNERO Y EMBARAZOS INVOLUNTARIOS EN
OUAGADOUGOU**

La sexualidad prenupcial se generaliza en el continente africano, y esta tendencia se acentúa en las ciudades. Aunque la utilización del preservativo haya progresado entre los jóvenes no casados, numerosos estudios muestran que las necesidades no satisfechas en materia de contracepción son todavía importantes en este sector de la población. A partir de datos colectados durante 2006 y 2007 en Ouagadougou, Burkina-Faso (77 entrevistas en profundidad de mujeres y hombres jóvenes, encuesta *Emergency Contraception Africa* – ECAF), este artículo muestra cómo un sistema de género desigual contribuye al advenimiento de embarazos no previstos antes del matrimonio. La actividad sexual prenupcial de las mujeres jóvenes está todavía caracterizada por la búsqueda de moralidad y de matrimonio (un matrimonio más o menos diferido); la actividad sexual prenupcial masculina lo está por una valorización del multi-partenariado y por el placer. Las lógicas que subtienden la actividad sexual prenupcial pueden conducir los individuos a querer evitar un embarazo cueste lo que cueste o, al contrario, a relegar la prevención a un segundo plano. Los embarazos no previstos ocurren cuando un miembro de la pareja se sitúa simultáneamente en varias lógicas o/y cuando los dos miembros se sitúan en lógicas diferentes; en este último caso, la asimetría de las motivaciones de los hombres y de las mujeres coloca a éstas en posición de vulnerabilidad en la negociación sobre el uso del preservativo.

Key words: premarital sexuality, youth, Burkina Faso, unmet contraceptive needs, gender relations, union formation.

Translated by Lucy apRoberts.