

# Rape and Sexual Coercion, Age at Sexual Initiation and Age-Differences between partners among women in Colombia

Theresa M. Fedor, PhD  
University of Houston, Houston, Texas, USA  
tmfedoramador@uh.edu

## INTRODUCTION

Women whose first sexual experience (sexual initiation) occurs at very young ages are much more likely to be at higher risk of teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, interpersonal violence, and negative mental health outcomes (Elo, King, and Furstenberg 1999; Jones and Ferguson 2009; Meier, Erickson, and McLaughlin 2016; Morrison-Beedy, Xia, and Passmore 2013; Rosenbaum et al. 2016; Ryan et al. 2008). Additionally, the reason that some women have sex for the first time at such a young age could very well be related to coercion or even rape, and even more so with an older partner (Elo, King, and Furstenberg 1999). Previous research has found that when teenage girls have sexual partners who are more than four years older, they are twice as likely to report that they were raped or that sexual activity with their older partner was not voluntary (Elo, King and Furstenberg 1999). Furthermore, when sexual initiation occurs at very young ages, below 15 years old, these encounters were also more likely to be reported as rape or not voluntary (Elo, King and Furstenberg 1999). Older male sexual partners to teenage girls is a risk factor for many potential negative outcomes, due to gender-based power imbalances within the relationship that are exacerbated by age differences (Landry and Forrest 1995; Morrison-Beedy, Xia, and Passmore 2013; Rosenbaum et al. 2016; Simon et al. 2014; WHO 2014; WHO 2011). Teenage girls with older male sexual partners potentially have less bargaining power within relationships meaning that they lack sufficient control over condom use or even the decision to have sex or not at all (Connell 1987; Elo, King, and Furstenberg 1999; Landry and Forrest 1995; Rosenbaum et al 2016). As in most of the world, significant gender inequality exists in Colombia, making an examination of gender and power related characteristics of relationships important for understanding factors which contribute to negative health outcomes.

In Colombia, the average age at sexual initiation has been decreasing drastically over time (Daniels 2015; DHS 2011; Flórez et al. 2004). Furthermore, in Colombia there is currently a much larger proportion of younger teenage girls with significantly older partners as compared to older teenage girls (Fedor 2018, *manuscript under review*). However, the relationship between sexual coercion, age at sexual initiation and age differences between partners in Colombia has not yet been explored. This study aims to fill this gap by investigating the specific relationship between sexual coercion, age differences between partners and women's age at sexual initiation. Furthermore, the role that rape and sexual coercion play in contributing to young women's risk of teenage fertility, sexually transmitted infections, interpersonal violence, and mental health outcomes will be explored through the use of interaction terms between sexual coercion, age at sexual initiation and age differences between partners.

## DATA AND METHODS

Data from the 2015 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) for Colombia were used to examine sexual coercion, age at sexual initiation and age differences between sexual partners. The sample was restricted to women between 20-24 years of age at the time of the survey (n=5,251). Only women up to age 24 were asked about the age of their partner at sexual initiation in the 2015 Colombian DHS, defining the upper bound. The lower bound of 20 years of age was chosen in order to ensure equal exposure time to the potential of having experienced sexual initiation and/or sexual coercion at young ages (a.k.a. during teenage years). 88% of 20-24 year old women in the sample experienced sexual initiation before 20 years of age, meaning that this restriction still yields a fairly representative sample of 20-24 year old Colombian women in 2015.

The main variables used in the current version of the analysis are (1) whether women had ever been forced to have sex or perform a sexual act, (2) the age difference between women and their sexual partners at first sexual intercourse, and (3) women's age at sexual initiation. In the completed analysis, an additional series of outcome variables will also be used to assess the association between sexual coercion, especially at young ages and/or with an older male partner, with outcomes such as teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, interpersonal violence, and negative mental health outcomes (*details and results forthcoming*). Both the age difference between women and their sexual partners and women's age at sexual initiation are initially measured as categorical variables in order to capture any potential deviations from linearity in their association with the experience of sexual coercion.

Sociodemographic control variables in the analysis included: region, wealth quintile, marital status at first birth, condom use at sexual initiation, age at the time of the survey and whether the woman visited a health facility in the last 12 months. Only the variables for age difference, woman's age at sexual initiation, marital status at first birth, and condom use at sexual initiation were measured at the time of sexual initiation or first birth. The remaining variables reflect characteristics of women's lives at the time of the survey (region, wealth quintile, whether the woman visited a health facility in the last 12 months, and whether she has ever been forced to perform sexual acts). Although measurements of the remaining variables during teenage years would be ideal, there are often strong associations between these factors during teenage years and later in life.

Two-way tables are shown in table 1 between sexual coercion, age at sexual initiation and age differences between partners. Table 2 provides results for logistic regression models predicting the odds of having experienced sexual coercion according to age differences between partners and age at sexual initiation. The final version of this paper will also include additional tables assessing the combined role of these factors on negative health outcomes.

## INITIAL RESULTS

Tables 1 and 2 below show initial descriptive results which confirm the association between sexual coercion, younger age at sexual initiation and older male partners. The younger a woman is at sexual initiation, the more likely she is to have a significantly older male partner. Furthermore, the younger a woman is at sexual initiation, the more likely she is to have been forced at one point in her life to have sex or perform a sexual act. Future additional analyses

will link these findings to the risk of adverse sexual and reproductive health outcomes as well as mental health outcomes.

**Table 1. Ever forced to have sex or perform a sexual act, age difference between partners at sexual initiation and age at sexual initiation (women age 20-24, DHS Colombia 2015)**

<b>Panel A:</b>				
	<b>Age at sexual initiation:</b>			
	<b>14 or younger</b>	<b>15 or 16 years old</b>	<b>17, 18 or 19 years old</b>	<b>20 years or older</b>
<b>Age of male partner:</b>				
younger, 0 or 1 years older	9.1	21.6	35.9	41.3
2-3 years older	20.2	31.2	23.9	18.8
4-5 years older	21.9	17.9	15.1	15.8
6-7 years older	17.1	10.8	10.1	7.9
8 or more years older	31.7	18.5	15.0	16.3
Sample size	1,076	1,978	1,957	240
Pearson $\chi^2(12) = 433.9, p < 0.000$				
<b>Panel B:</b>				
	<b>Ever forced to have sex or perform sexual acts</b>			
	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>		
<b>Age of male partner:</b>				
younger, 0 or 1 years older	26.0	15.5		
2-3 years older	25.7	24.9		
4-5 years older	17.5	18.4		
6-7 years older	11.7	11.9		
8 or more years older	19.1	29.4		
Sample size	4,897	354		
Pearson $\chi^2(4) = 32.1, p < 0.000$				
<b>Panel C:</b>				
	<b>Ever forced to have sex or perform sexual acts</b>			
	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>		
<b>Age at sexual initiation:</b>				
14 or younger	19.2	37.9		
15 or 16 years old	37.6	38.7		
17, 18, or 19 years old	38.5	20.9		
20 years or older	4.7	2.5		
Sample size	4,897	354		
Pearson $\chi^2(12) = 86.6, p < 0.000$				

**Table 2. Logistic regression models of factors associated with having ever been forced to have sex or perform a sexual act (women age 20-24, DHS Colombia 2015)**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Age difference between woman and partner at sexual initiation (male younger, zero or one year older)				
2-3 years older	1.614** (0.285)	1.318 (0.237)	1.512* (0.270)	1.323 (0.239)
4-5 years older	1.749** (0.330)	1.303 (0.252)	1.545* (0.295)	1.281 (0.250)
6-7 years older	1.697* (0.358)	1.210 (0.263)	1.489+ (0.319)	1.194 (0.261)
8 or more years older	2.570** (0.443)	1.767** (0.318)	2.133** (0.378)	1.679** (0.308)
Age at sexual initiation (13 yrs old)				
14 yrs old		0.750 (0.140)		0.748 (0.142)
15 yrs old		0.498** (0.090)		0.543** (0.101)
16 yrs old		0.459** (0.087)		0.521** (0.102)
17 yrs old		0.335** (0.071)		0.408** (0.090)
18 yrs old		0.230** (0.057)		0.299** (0.077)
19 yrs old		0.166** (0.064)		0.221** (0.087)
20 yrs old or older		0.265** (0.098)		0.366** (0.140)
Sample size	5,251	5,251	5,239	5,239
-2 Log Likelihood	-1280	-1246	-1239	-1220
Pseudo R-squared	0.0124	0.0392	0.0420	0.0567

Notes: Reference categories in parentheses. Standard errors in parentheses. Models three and four also control for the following: region, wealth quintile, marital status, children, age, condom use at sexual initiation and whether or not the woman visited a health facility in the last 12 months. \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05, + p<0.1

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