

# Efficacy of behaviour contracts in decreasing inappropriate behaviour of Male and Female Secondary School Adolescents with permissive Attitude towards Premarital Sex

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**Abstract:** This study investigated the effect of behaviour contracts in decreasing inappropriate behaviour of secondary school adolescents with permissive attitude towards premarital sex. The design for the study is quasi-experimental, non-randomised pre-test and post-test, control group research. The sample comprised 64 students purposively selected from a population of 260 students. A standardised instrument “Premarital Sexual Permissiveness Scale (PSPS)” was used for data collection. The internal consistency reliability coefficient for the instrument is 0.73. Data was collected through direct delivery of the instrument to the respondents. Mean scores were used to answer the research questions, while the null hypotheses were tested using Analysis of Co-variance (ANCOVA). The norm of the instrument guided the decision. The finding of the study revealed among others that contracting technique is effective in reducing adolescents’ permissive attitude towards premarital sex. The findings further revealed that the differences in the effect of Behaviour Contracts on male and female secondary school adolescents with permissive attitude towards premarital sex are not significant. Based on the findings and implications of the study, it was recommended that Guidance Counsellors should adopt the use of the techniques in counselling and therapy among secondary school students to modify their permissive attitude towards premarital sex.

**Keywords:** Adolescents, permissive Attitude, behaviour contracts, technique, premarital sex

## I. INTRODUCTION

Outside of marriage sex was considered immoral and prohibited in traditional Nigerian society, and people prefer not to publicly share their thoughts and views on love, sex, and marriage. As a result, there seems to be a rigid moral precept that dictated the code of ethics. Individual members' social behaviours were regulated by an existing moral code. Furthermore, the possibility that social penalties such as songs of scorn and humiliation commonly meted out at marriage to brides who lose their virginity before the wedding night may have caused most girls ten to avoid premarital sexual encounters. However, as formerly perceived, the sexual revolution is no longer limited to the Western world; in essence, it seems to have been one of the most startling aspects of Nigeria's sociocultural milieu. Today, sex is glorified and commercialised, and all kinds of behaviours,

such as nudity, homosexuality, premarital sex, and so on, seem to have become the norm.

Adolescent in the context of this study is a child, either male or female within the age group of 13 to 19 years and schooling in secondary school. The adolescents’ behaviour towards sex is determined to a large extent by the way they think or feel about sex hence their attitude towards sex is one of fantasy and exhilaration. Attitude according to Hornby (2015) means the way one thinks and feels about somebody or something. Therefore, attitude towards premarital sex in the context of this study thus refers to a positive or negative evaluations or feeling for or against any activity that is related to sex before marriage. Going by this definition, sex refers to the emotions or behaviours that arise as a result of the need to satisfy sexual desire.

In the context of this research, an adolescent is a girl, either male or female, between the ages of 13 and 19 who is enrolled in secondary school. Adolescents' attitudes toward sex are influenced to a significant degree by how they think or feel about sex, because their attitude toward sex is that of imagination and exhilaration. According to Hornby (2015), attitude is the way one thinks and feels about someone or something. As a result, in the context of this research, attitude toward premarital sex refers to positive or negative evaluations or feelings for or toward any behaviour linked to sex before marriage.

According to Adegoke (2014) and Wells and Twege (2015), teenage perceptions of premarital sex have changed over time, and recognition of premarital sex as natural has become more evident. The current condition in which premarital sex is freely performed compares with the conventional Nigerian social custom in which premarital sex was considered as sordid and prohibited, and sex was reserved exclusively for the married. As a result, it was popular in most Nigerian societies at the time for unmarried people to refrain from sexual activities before their wedding night (Egbunugha, 2005). This was accomplished, however, by social penalties such as songs of scorn and humiliation usually meted to girls whose loss of virginity was discovered at marriage night.

However, such social penalties do not seem to be unattainable in modern years, when the period of prolonged abstinence before marriage seems to be steadily fading, leaving room for a more permissive sexual society that accepts premarital sex as normal. As a result, there is a growing concern, inquiry, and fascination in premarital sexual practises among today's teenagers. For example, studies (Adegoke, 2013; Alarape, Olapegba, & Chowwen, 2008) have shown that the incidence of premarital sexual activities among adolescents and young adults in Nigeria is quite high, and the continuous increase in the behaviour is quite disturbing. This is due to the fact that such unwholesome behaviour endangers the lives of children by leading them to heightened sexual health threats, and can lead to a variety of psychological, academic, and reproductive health issues.

As Ayodele et al. (2012) observed, some of these issues include HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), early motherhood, unintended pregnancy, forced abortion, maternal mortality, and other reproductive morbidity. According to Rena (2016), the above health threats or problems can have a significant impact on the adolescent's physical growth as well as academic achievement. As a result, if the issue of premarital sex is left unaddressed or unattended to, it has the potential to have a far-reaching impact on the lives of youths, especially those in secondary schools. So far, school guidance counsellors have used a variety of counselling techniques to address topics relating to pre-marital sexual activities in classrooms. Despite the efforts made so far, the issue seems to have continued. The effectiveness of the behavioural therapy approaches used to treat problematic behaviours may be the cause.

A behaviour contract is a tool used in classrooms to help track and change students' behaviour. According to Simonsen, Fairbanks, Briesch, Myers, and Sugai (2008), it entails the instructor and the student having a written text that defines the target behaviour, a fixed criterion for performing the target behaviour, and the outcome applicable to the student upon achieving the criterion. As a result, as a lease, it specifies the individual counselee's behavioural responsibilities in fulfilling the contract's terms, as well as the counsellor's obligations after the client has fulfilled the deal.

Additionally, behaviour contracts provide a list of particular student behaviours that are to be expanded and unacceptable behaviours that are to be decreased (intervention central, 2011). That also covers the adults' reinforcers or acts as certain behaviours occur. The contract also provides a clause that explains the minimum requirements under which the student can receive a "reward" for demonstrating acceptable behaviour, which can take the form of a badge, privilege, special activity, or another reinforcer decided upon by the student. (Cooper Heron, & Heward, 2007).

This technique, known as a behaviour contract, is commonly used in classrooms in the Western world and is recognised as a constructive goal-oriented tool for motivating behavioural

improvement. The approach has been shown to be beneficial for individual or small groups of students with various behavioural difficulties (Cutrell, 2010; Dodge, Nizzi, Pitt, & Rudolph, 2007, Hawkins et al., 2011), as well as reliable and effective in eliciting more appropriate school and home behaviours in students.

Behaviour Contract, as depicted in literature, is a technique that has been seen to be effective in the treatment of many forms of socially undesirable behaviour, including attribution behaviour, aggression, depression, anxiety, unhappiness, low self-concept, and low self-esteem (Egger, Springer, & Gooding, 2015; Selfridge, 2014), so these techniques will likely be effective i. This research is being conducted on the basis of these assertions to explore the impact of behaviour contracting strategy on high school adolescents' attitudes toward premarital sex.

#### *Statement of the Problem*

Premarital sex is a problem that many teens face today all over the world. Young people seem to have elevated their views on sex to the point that the occurrence of pre-marital sex among students is now a major societal issue both within and outside of Nigeria. For example, there seems to be a high prevalence of premarital sexual indulgence among secondary school teenagers in Onitsha North Local Government Area, which could be associated with a variety of sexual health risks. Adolescents' involvement in premarital sexual activities can be the result of an unhealthy lifestyle, which leads them to a variety of sexual health problems such as sexually transmitted infections (STIs), unintended pregnancy, forced abortion, and other reproductive morbidity.

While much research has been conducted, such efforts have mostly focused on identifying the triggers, outcomes, attitudes of teenagers, and factors affecting their sexual engagements. However, neither of these clinical projects is directed toward a treatment strategy to explore coping approaches that could assist counsellors and psychiatrists in dealing with teenagers who have such an unhealthy outlook toward premarital intercourse. As a result, the aim of this study is to look into the impact of the Behaviour Contracting strategy on the attitudes of secondary school teenagers toward premarital sex in Onitsha North Local Government Area, Anambra State.

#### *Purpose of the Study*

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of behaviour contracts in decreasing inappropriate behaviour of Secondary School Adolescents with permissive Attitude towards Premarital Sex:

1. The effect of behaviour contract technique on secondary school adolescent's attitude to premarital sex.
2. Differences in the effect of behaviour contract technique on male and female secondary school adolescent's attitude towards premarital sex.

### *Significance of the Study*

This research would be useful to school counsellors because it will provide them with an effective method for dealing with the academic and health risks that these sexually active teens face. They may do this by using their depth of expertise and experience, as well as appropriate counselling approaches as assisting practitioners, to influence certain students' attitudes in a more constructive direction. It would also help counsellors realise the importance of organising frequent or occasional client and community counselling sessions. They want to use such a meeting as a medium for better educating these students on issues of sexuality and its associated problems.

### *Research Questions*

The following research questions guided the study.

1. What is the effect of Behaviour Contracts on secondary school adolescents' attitude towards premarital sex when compared with those exposed to conventional counselling?
2. What is the difference in the effect of Behaviour Contracts on male and female secondary school adolescents' attitude towards premarital sex using their post-test scores?

### *Hypotheses*

The following null hypotheses were stated and tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. There was no significant difference in the effect of Behaviour Contracts on secondary school adolescents with who received treatment using behaviour contracting and those exposed to conventional counselling.
2. There was no significant difference in mean post-test scores of male and female adolescents who received treatment using behaviour contracting and those in the control group.

## II. METHOD

### *Research Design*

This study is a non-randomized pre-test, post-test, control group quasi-experimental research, involving two treatment conditions (Experimental and Control group) on students' attitude towards premarital sex.

### *Research Setting:*

The research was carried out in the Onitsha North local government area of Anambra State, Nigeria. Many young people in this region, particularly adolescents in secondary schools who were unsupervised, seemed to take more responsibility for their own sexual standards of conduct, to the point that more girls and boys now embrace premarital coitus once there is an emotional involvement with the partner, with or without a potential commitment to marriage. There have

also been instances where girls became pregnant after getting married and had to drop out of school. With such a condition in the region, an analysis of this kind is needed to decide the best treatment solution to resolve the problem.

### *Participants:*

The sample of the study comprised 64 students selected from a population of 260 students. The population comprised all the students identified with permissive attitude towards premarital sex.

### *Instrument Data Collection for:*

The Premarital Sexual Permissiveness Scale was used to measure high school students' attitudes toward premarital sex (PSPS). Reiss invented the instrument in 1967. The original PSP questionnaire was based on one used in a study conducted by Reiss (1960) at an Iowa college in the United States. Ojedokun used the same instrument in Nigeria (2009). This scale assesses an individual's level of premarital sexual permissiveness. It enables accurate placement of a respondent on the cumulative, low to high, permissiveness scale. The measure consisted of 12-items on a five-point scale asking about the person's approval of kissing, petting, and intemperance.

### *Experimental Procedure*

The researcher gained permission from the school administration to continue with the study by submitting a consent letter to the school administration. The experimental training sessions were then held at the two schools selected for the research. The researcher, with the help of school guidance counsellors, implemented an eight-week preparation programme for both the treatment and control groups. The treatment sessions took place in the school's counselling centres. The day and time for each group's preparation is set and adhered to during the treatment.

Each training session lasted 45 minutes and was held during the counselling times allotted by the schools. For the next eight weeks, each of the groups underwent training. PSPS was re-administered to all patients in both the trial and control groups after eight weeks of therapy. The post-test scores were registered and labelled. The post-test scores, as well as the previously elicited pre-test scores, were then compiled and statistically analysed.

### *Control of Extraneous Variables:*

Measures were placed in place to monitor the potential influence of extraneous variables such as participant attitude, position, prejudice, process, and time of day, which if not well monitored might contaminate the sample and potentially interfere with the results.

### *Method of Data Analysis:*

The completed instruments were scored following the scoring instructions provided in the instrument's manual. Responses to the 12 individual items were summed to create an overall

score for the scale. Scores on the 12-item scale ranged from 12-60. Scores that are above the norm 30.0 were seen as indicative of having a positive attitude towards premarital sex. The scores were collated and analysed using SPSS version 23. Research questions were answered using the mean while the null hypotheses were tested using the Analysis of Co-variance (ANCOVA).

III. RESULTS

The data analysed are presented as follows:

Research Question 1

What is the effect of Behaviour Contracts on secondary school adolescents’ attitude towards premarital sex when compared with those exposed to conventional counselling?

Table 1: Pre-test and Post-test attitude towards premarital sex mean scores of adolescents treated with Behaviour Contracts and those treated with conventional counselling (Norm= 29.50)

Variables	N	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Reduced Mean	Remark
Behaviour Contracting Tehnique	34	41.74	24.59	17.15	Effective
Control	30	43.33	38.37	4.96	

Table 1 revealed that the adolescents with permissive attitude towards premarital sex, who were treated with Behaviour Contracts, had pre-test mean score of 41.74 and post-test mean score of 24.59 with reduced mean 17.15 in their permissive attitude, while those in the control group who received conventional counselling had pre-test mean score of 43.33 and post-test mean score of 38.37 with reduced mean 4.96. Therefore, with post-test mean score of 24.59 which is below the norm of 29.50, Behaviour Contracts is effective in reducing adolescents’ permissive attitude towards premarital sex.

Research Question 2

What is the difference in the effect of Behaviour Contracts on male and female secondary school adolescents’ attitude towards premarital sex?

Table 2: Pre-test and Post-test attitude towards premarital sex mean scores of male and female adolescents treated with Behaviour Contracts and those treated with conventional counselling.

Variables	N	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Reduced Mean	Remark
Male	44	43.74	30.41	13.33	
Female	20	42.33	32.15	10.18	

Table 2 revealed that the male adolescents with permissive attitude towards premarital sex, who were treated with Behaviour Contracts, had pre-test mean score of 43.74 and

post-test mean score of 30.41 with reduced mean 13.33 in their permissive attitude, while the female adolescents who were treated with Behaviour Contracts had pre-test mean score of 42.33 and post-test mean score of 32.15 with reduced mean 10.18. Therefore, with reduced mean score of 13.33 for male which is above the reduced mean score of 10.18 for female, Behaviour Contracts was more effective in decreasing male and female adolescents’ permissive attitude towards premarital sex.

Testing the Null Hypotheses

Null Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference in the effect of Behaviour Contracts on secondary school adolescents’ attitude towards premarital sex when compared to those who received treatment using conventional counselling.

Table 3: ANCOVA on the attitude towards premarital sex post-test mean scores of adolescents treated with Behaviour Contracts and those who received conventional counselling

Variables	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	Cal . F	Pvalue	Decision
Corrected Model	2941.014	2	1470.507			
Intercept	183.848	1	183.848			
Pretest	2.556	1	2.556			
Treatment_Group	2127.638	1	2127.638	94.332	.000	S
Error	1375.846	61	22.555			
Total	65635.000	64				
Corrected Total	4316.859	63				

P<0.05

Table 3 shows that at 0.05 level of significance, 1df numerator and 63df denominator, the calculated F is 94.332 with Pvalue of 0.000 which is less than the stipulated .05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. So, the effect of Behaviour Contracts on secondary school adolescents with permissive attitude towards premarital sex is significant.

Null Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference in mean post-test scores of male and female adolescents who received treatment using Behaviour Contracts and those in the control group.



**Table 4:** ANCOVA on the Attitude towards Premarital Sex Post-Test Mean Scores of Male and Female Adolescents Treated With Behaviour Contracts

Variables	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	Cal. F	Pvalue	Decision
Corrected Model	840.703	2	420.351			
Intercept	115.612	1	115.612			
Pretest	799.030	1	799.030			
Gender	27.327	1	27.327	.480	.491	NS
Error	3476.157	61	56.986			
Total	65635.000	64				
Corrected Total	4316.859	63				

P>0.05

In table 4, it was observed that at 0.05 level of significance, 1df numerator and 63df denominator, the calculated F is 0.480 with Pvalue of 0.491 which is Greater than the stipulated .05 level of significance. Therefore, this fifth null hypothesis is accepted. Thus, the difference in the effect of Behaviour Contracts on male and female secondary school adolescents with permissive attitude towards premarital sex is not significant.

#### IV. DISCUSSION

Findings of this study were discussed as follows:

##### Effect of Behaviour Contracts in Decreasing Inappropriate Behaviour of Secondary School Adolescents with Permissive Attitude towards Premarital Sex

Findings of the study revealed that Behaviour Contracts was effective in reducing adolescents’ permissive attitude towards premarital sex. This shows that the technique when applied in treatment was able to reduce the permissive attitude of the secondary school adolescents. The finding equally revealed that the effect of Behaviour Contracts on secondary school adolescents with permissive attitude towards premarital sex is significant. This means that the effect of the treatment using the technique is weighty and substantial. This finding agrees with Cutrell (2010) and Dodge, Nizzi, Pitt, and Rudolph (2007) whose study highlighted the effectiveness of behavioural contract in decreasing inappropriate behaviour of students and improving students’ responsibility.

Dodge, et al. also noted that using a behavioural contract with a student is that it provides explicit expectations, structure, consistency, routine, and organization for everyone involved, including the teachers, students, administrators, and parents. In doing this, the expectations and responsibilities for both the student and adults are clear, and the process of negotiation can be beneficial to the insight of the student about his or her behaviour.

More so, Selfridge (2014) examination of the effects of behaviour contract in the elementary general education classroom suggests that the behaviour contract was successfully implemented to increase a desired behaviour (engagement) with students in the general education classroom. The possible reason for this finding is that behaviour contracting can be a very powerful tool for motivating struggling learners to apply a skill or knowledge that they already possess but otherwise fail to use. In the same way, students are confronted with peer pressure and some fall into promiscuous behaviour without even at first, recognizing just how far they have fallen. The finding of this study thus suggests that Behaviour contracting can make a difference in the experience that students have in their classrooms. A decrease in the permissive attitude towards the inappropriate behaviours could allow the students learn more in their education classroom because more of their time will be focused on academic work.

Another important possible reason for this finding could also be attributed to the consistent daily contact that the resource Counsellors had with each participant. Throughout the study, the students developed a stronger relationship with the resource counsellor. It was noticed that the students began visiting the resource counsellor throughout the day to check in with her and tell her of their positive behaviours in the classroom. They obviously felt a connection to her, which may have also contributed to the decrease in problem behaviours.

##### Differences in the Effect of Behaviour Contracts in Decreasing Inappropriate Behaviour of Secondary School male and female Adolescents with Permissive Attitude towards Premarital Sex

Findings of this study also revealed that the difference in the effect of Behaviour Contracts on male and female secondary school adolescents with permissive attitude towards premarital sex is not significant. This simply shows that the male and female experience of the training programme using the Behaviour Contracts did not produce meaningful difference in its effects. Both male and female responded in a similar manner. The possible reason for this finding is that Behaviour Contracting can be used as a flexible tool for managing a highly individualized program or for one student in a specific situation. Going by such notion, one would understand that male and female would probably respond to the training programme as an individual and not as male or female.

Although it has been suggested that men and women are likely to hold different psychological contracts (Freese & Schalk, 1996; Scandura & Lankau, 1997), their response to the treatment programme in this study did not seem to reflect that notion. The reason possibly could be because the treatment was not gender-based. The goal was to discuss the root cause for the behaviour and alternative reactions that the student can make to have reduced permissive attitude towards premarital sex. The student and the Guidance Counsellor establishes the alternative attitude that could lead to alternative behaviours and also the consequences that they will face for not following through with these behaviours, which are then written down in the form of a contract.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that:

Behaviour Contractive technique has significant effect on secondary school adolescents' permissive attitude towards premarital sex. Therefore, the technique could be used by the school Guidance Counsellors in administering therapy to adolescents identified with such permissive attitude towards pre-marital sex.

## VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Counsellors and therapists should adopt the use of the Behaviour Contracts in counselling and therapy among secondary school students to modify their permissive attitude towards premarital sex.
2. The school teachers should collaborate with the school Guidance Counsellor in identifying the "at risk" students and making appropriate referral to the Guidance Counsellor for assistance.

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