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WORKING PAPERS****No. 5, 2007**

Biddlecom, Ann, **Richard Gregory**, **Cynthia B. Lloyd**, and **Barbara S. Mensch**. "Premarital sex and schooling transitions in four sub-Saharan African countries," *Poverty, Gender, and Youth Working Paper* no. 5. New York: Population Council. ([PDF](#))

ABSTRACT

With the spread of formal schooling in sub-Saharan Africa and delays in the age at marriage, a growing proportion of adolescents remain enrolled in school when they "come of age." As a consequence, more and more adolescents have to negotiate sexual maturation and sexual initiation in a context very different from that experienced by earlier generations. Using data from the 2004 National Survey of Adolescents conducted in Burkina Faso, Ghana, Malawi, and Uganda, this paper investigates the timing of two key transitions in adolescence—school exit and premarital sex—among those who remain enrolled in school at the beginning of adolescence (age 12). Discrete-time hazard models show that in general girls are more likely than boys to leave school before completing secondary school and before completing primary school, and, among those completing primary school, are less likely to progress to secondary school, although those girls who complete primary school do so at the same age as or at a younger age than their male peers. Girls appear more vulnerable to dropout once they become sexually mature and once they engage in premarital sex. While girls were found to be less likely than boys, at any given age and controlling for other covariates, to have had premarital sex (except in Ghana), school enrollment and the timing of school entry were not consistent factors explaining gender differences. Thus, the negative consequences for schooling associated with sexual maturation and premarital sex appear to be greater for adolescents in these four countries, especially for girls, than the consequences of leaving school early for the likelihood of premarital sex.

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