

A Description of Sweethearting in The Bahamas

William J. Fielding 0000-0001-5433-9673

Terry Campbell 0000-0002-4125-7879

University of The Bahamas

Shamel Y. Rolle-Sands 0000-0002-3415-2569

Public Hospitals Authority

doi: 10.15362/ijbs.v31i2.641

Abstract

This study provides insights on sweethearting in The Bahamas using data from an internet-based survey. A total of 10,393 persons entered the survey, of which 6,714 were retained for analysis based on eligibility criteria. The results reveal several important patterns: (a) both males and females, regardless of marital status, reported involvement in sweethearting relationships; (b) married respondents were more likely to report having a single sexual partner compared to unmarried respondents, but a notable proportion reported multiple partners; (c) males tended to report higher numbers of current intimate partners and were more likely to perceive their sweetheart as a better sexual partner than their primary partner; (d) sweethearting relationships often involved financial exchange, with females more likely to receive money and gifts than males; (e) emotional needs were a significant motivator, with many respondents indicating that their sweetheart made them feel “needed”; (f) both male and female respondents reported instances of sexual abuse within sweethearting relationships—both as victims and perpetrators; (g) condom use was inconsistent, heightening risks related to STIs, particularly among those with multiple concurrent partners; and (h) some respondents expressed a desire to marry or have children with their sweetheart, although these intentions were less common among married individuals. The implications of these findings are discussed in the Bahamian context.

Introduction

Sweethearting, having more than one sexual partner at a time (Emery, 2013), has been described as a national pastime in The Bahamas (Storr, 2009), and the more sensational aspects of sweethearting (Davis, 2025a) or allegations involving persons in positions of trust (Maycock, 2015) are considered newsworthy. Yet despite regular articles in the media on sweethearting (see Burrows, 2014; Gibson, 2018), there has

been limited systematic research on the topic in The Bahamas. Observations on Bahamian sexual behaviour and attitudes in classic local literature in the 1970s, such as those from McCartney (1971, 1976) and Tertullien (1976), were derived largely from clinical settings and experiences within the community, rather than larger-scale population studies. One academic study by Grant (1999) found that both Bahamian males and females engage in sweethearting and described several detrimental

consequences arising from these relationships. In a review of transactional sex in the Caribbean, sweethearting was included due to its transactional nature (usually financial support), and so sweethearting might be viewed as a form of prostitution in some instances (Kempadoo, 2009).

More recent research has provided new insights into the psychosocial impacts of sweethearting in The Bahamas. Fielding and Ballance (2023a) highlighted the association between sweethearting and psychological and physiological abuse. Additionally, work by Rolle-Sands et al. (2026a, 2026b) indicate mental health challenges (for example emotional dependency) among both married and single persons engaged in sweethearting. As Bahamians start having sex with multiple partners from an early age, this early exposure to multiple sexual partners may normalise sweethearting behaviour later in life. Rodgers and Rolle (1997) reported 62% of sexually active school children (mean age 15.9 years) had multiple partnerships in the previous six months, and Kim et al. (2024) reported that, among sexually active students in The Bahamas, 25% of boys and 5% of girls reported having multiple sexual partners while still in high school, which demonstrates the early initiation to having multiple short-term sexual partners. Furthermore, Fielding and Moxey-Adderley (2026) highlighted how aggression and interpersonal abuse within relationships are related to having multiple partners. So, early initiation in having multiple partners may be ultimately associated with increased aggression in adulthood.

This paper uses data collected by Rolle-Sands et al. (2026a) to describe the practice of sweethearting in The Bahamas at the end of the first quarter of the 21st century. Contrasting earlier studies that focused primarily on the negative aspects of sweethearting (Grant, 1999), this paper

describes both the perceived benefits and documented risks associated with sweethearting. While some international literature, such as Munsch (2015), has examined the benefits of infidelity in contexts such as the United States, this paper addresses a gap in the research by offering a culturally contextualised exploration specific to The Bahamas.

Methods

This paper reports on data collected by Rolle-Sands et al. (2026a), who conducted a large-scale internet-based survey which included 6,714 adults residing in The Bahamas. Rolle-Sands et al. (2026a, 2026b) explored the association between emotional dependency and sweethearting. A full description of the methodology is provided by Rolle-Sands et al. (2026a). The target population was individuals aged 18 and over who were currently (in the last six months) involved in at least one intimate relationship. Data collected included various aspects of sweethearting, such as sexual behaviour, emotional engagement, financial exchanges, and health outcomes. The sampling method was non-probabilistic, and participants could omit any question(s); hence, results should be treated with caution if applied to the wider population. Ethical approval was obtained from the University of The Bahamas' Institutional Review Board.

Results and Discussion

A total of 10,393 persons entered the survey (Rolle-Sands et al., 2026a), of which 6,714 were retained for this analysis based on eligibility criteria. Participants could skip/omit any question(s); thus, 6,714 represents the maximum sample size. The *Other* classification for sex of participant was provided for respondents who did not consider themselves to be male or female.

Table 1 gives the distribution of the ages of

the respondents by sex. In keeping with other internet-based studies, more females than males participated, and younger people were oversampled. Consequently, data on the older age groups can be expected to be least reliable. Further, only a small number of persons in the teenage group participated in the study. So, again, the data from this group should be viewed with caution.

The distribution of the marital status among males and females was broadly similar (Table 2). Only a small number of respondents identified their sex as other ($n = 19$); therefore, findings related to the marital status within this group should be interpreted with caution.

Table 1
Age Group of Respondents by Sex, Percentages Within Sex

Respondent age group	Sex of respondent			Overall
	Male	Female	Other	
18-19	5.2%	5.2%	26.3%	5.3%
20-29	39%	39.7%	15.8%	39.4%
30-39	27.6%	27.8%	15.8%	27.7%
40-49	13.9%	14.8%	36.8%	14.6%
50-59	9.5%	9.2%		9.2%
60 or over	4.9%	3.3%	5.3%	3.7%
<i>N</i>	1,752	4,933	19	6,704

Table 2
Marital Status by Sex, Percentages Within Sex

Marital Status	Sex of respondent			Overall
	Male	Female	Other	
Never married	50.9%	51.1%	47.4%	51%
Currently married	31.4%	30.8%	26.3%	31%
Common law relationship	9.3%	9.8%		9.6%
Divorced	4.5%	3.4%		3.7%
Separated	2.2%	3%		2.8%
Widowed	.9%	1%	10.5%	1%
Legally separated	.8%	.8%	15.8%	.9%
<i>N</i>	1,747	4,915	19	6,681

For clarity in interpreting the data, respondents were categorised into two groups: those who were never married, and those currently married or in a marriage-like relationship (i.e., common-law unions). To aid recall, and to account for the dynamic nature of sexual relationships, the study further focused on respondents who, at the

time of the survey, reported having at least one intimate partner. Emphasis was placed on respondents who had engaged in sexual relations with more than one current partner within the previous six months.

The other sex group demonstrated the largest observed difference between married and

single groups with respect to having multiple partners; however, given the limited sample size, this finding should be interpreted with caution. It is important to note that both males and females, regardless of marital status, reported current engagement in unfaithful

behaviour (Table 3). Due to the small number of respondents identifying their sex as *Other*, this group was omitted from subsequent analyses to ensure the reliability and stability of the reported results.

Table 3
Percentage of Respondents Having Currently One Partner

Sex of respondent	Married or common law	Never married	Overall
Male	80.1%	58.7%	68.4%
Female	90.2%	76.9%	83%
Other	100%	12.5%	36.4%
Overall	87.6%	72.8%	79.2%

Infidelity, defined in this study as engaging in sexual relations with one or more persons outside of the primary relationship within the last six months, was not confined to persons of any particular age group or marital status. While single respondents were less likely than married respondents to report having only one current sexual partner, infidelity was observed across both groups. The prevalence of infidelity decreased with age, a pattern consistent with prior findings linking higher rates of infidelity to a higher sex drive in younger men compared to women and a

general decline in sex drive with aging (Wieczorek et al., 2022).

Additionally, males were more likely than females to report unfaithfulness (Table 4). Given that the average household size in The Bahamas is approximately 3.3 persons (Bahamas National Statistical Institute, 2024), it is evident that having multiple sexual partners may have broader social implications, potentially affecting not only the individuals involved but also family members and household stability.

Table 4
Percentage of Respondents with a Single Partner in the Last Six Months

Respondent age group	Married or common law		Never married	
	Husbands	Wives	Men	Women
18-19	77.8%	78%	61.1%	77.6%
20-29	77%	84.9%	61.8%	76.1%
30-39	75%	90.8%	54.9%	77.6%
40-49	84.7%	93.1%	36.1%	76.7%
50-59	83%	91.2%	62.5%	91.7%
60 or over	90.5%	90.3%	66.7%	77.8%
Overall	80.1%	90.2%	58.7%	77%

Among respondents who reported having more than one partner in the previous six months, the median number of current sexual

partners, beyond their usual partner, was the same across age groups and sex, namely one partner. This stability may suggest that the

behaviour of maintaining multiple intimate partners may be established relatively early in adult life and persist as a normative relationship pattern over time. Observations from both government (Bahamas Ministry of Health, 2019) and non-government research (Fielding & Ballance, 2022), noted that, males reported a greater number of sexual partners compared to females. Our data which only referred to the previous six months may suggest that the number of multi-partnerships in a particular 6-month period is similar for both males and females. What is unknown is the length of time for which partnerships endure. Overall, of 300 married (or common law relationships) persons having more than one partner in the previous six months, 72.3% considered at

least one of them to be a sweetheart. In the case of 761 single persons, 60.1% of males and 67.8% of females considered at least one of them to be a sweetheart (Fisher's exact test, $p = .034$).

As shown in Table 5, both male and female respondents who reported having multiple partners tended to have only one sweetheart in the previous six months. more than one sweetheart. The similar median number of sweethearts reported by males and females suggests that, although, overall, men were more likely than women to have multiple intimate partners, within each marital status group, the number of sweethearts reported was comparable between sexes.

Table 5

Median Number of Partners Regarded as Sweethearts (Those Having More Than One Partner)

Respondent age group	Married or Common Law		Never married	
	Husband	Wife	Male	Female
18-19	4	1	2	1
20-29	1	1	1	1
30-39	1	1	1	1
40-49	1	1	1	1
50-59	1	1	1	1
60 and over	0	0	0	1
Overall	1	1	1	1

Table 6 illustrates the proportion of respondents, particularly married persons, engaged in sweethearting relationships who reported having children with their primary partner. These findings suggest that sweethearting relationships may have implications that extend beyond the immediate participants, potentially influencing the next generation. Along the lines of Rustan (2020), we can conjecture that children who become aware of a parent's or guardian's sweethearting behaviour may view such actions as normative, thus

increasing the likelihood of intergenerational transmission of these relationship patterns. This raises important questions regarding the mechanisms through which sweethearting may be perpetuated across generations in The Bahamas. Media commentary, such as that from *The Tribune* ("Sweethearting", 2013), has highlighted the potential role religious institutions and women themselves in challenging and breaking the intergenerational acceptance of sweethearting.

Table 6
Percentage of Men and Women Having Children with Their Primary Partner

Number of current partners	Married or common law		Never married	
	Husband	Wife	Male	Female
One	59.8%	67.8%	10.2%	16.8%
More than one	56.3%	42.3%	10.6%	9.8%

As shown in Table 7, the age dynamics between respondents and their sweethearts varied by sex. Among male respondents, as their age increased, there was a corresponding tendency for their sweetheart to be drawn from a younger age group. In contrast, younger females were more likely to partner with older males. Extreme examples of such age-disparate relationships, and their potential for abuse, are reflected in media reports of female sexual exploitation by older men in The Bahamas (Bailey, 2025). Overall, 4.2% of sweethearts were aged 19 or

younger; this figure was higher among male respondents (7%) compared to female respondents (2.4%). As highlighted by Görden et al. (1998), the pairing of younger women with older men carries significant public health implications, particularly in the transmission of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Further, older men are more likely than younger men to be carriers of STIs, and, when combined with the limited use of condoms (as discussed below), this age-gap dynamic substantially increases the risk of spreading infections.

Table 7
Age Group Age of Their Sweetheart Relative to the Age of the Respondent (Younger, Same or Older)
(Percentages Within Respondent Age Group)

Respondent Age group	Married or common law						Never married					
	Husband			Wife			Male			Female		
	Age group of sweetheart			Age group of sweetheart			Age group of sweetheart			Age group of sweetheart		
	Younger	Same	Older	Younger	Same	Older	Younger	Same	Older	Younger	Same	Older
18-19						100	47.4		52.6	33.3	66.7	
20-29	13	60	26.1		35.1	62.2	7.8	77.8	13.3	2	64	34
30-39	34.3	62.9	2.9	17.6	32.4	47.1	62	34	4	26.5	42.6	27.9
40-49	66.7	33.3		52.9	23.5	23.5	84.7	7.7	7.7	52.9	23.5	23.5
50-59	100			13	87		100			50	50	
60 or over	80	20		33.3	33.3					100		

Sexual intercourse was a central component of infidelity for many respondents, and for some, it was explicitly identified as a primary benefit of the relationship. For example, female Participant A stated that the main benefit of the relationship was “SEX!!!”. Overall, the reported frequency of sexual intercourse with the primary sweetheart was typically not more than twice a week (Table 8). It should be noted, however, that the medians reported for the youngest and oldest age groups are based on relatively small sample sizes (approximately 30 observations each), warranting cautious interpretations.

Importantly, the reported frequency of sexual activity pertains only to the respondent’s primary sweetheart, or, in cases where no primary sweetheart was identified, the sweetheart with whom the respondent most recently engaged in sexual activity. Thus, the overall frequency of sexual encounters (in the last seven days) across all partners may be

higher than the frequencies reported in Table 8. The study did not collect data on the frequency of sexual intercourse with respondents’ primary partners (spouses or long-term partners), limiting direct comparisons of frequency of intercourse with primary and other partners. However, assuming a baseline of twice weekly encounters with sweethearts, sweethearting may effectively double the frequency of sexual activity for some respondents (Yabiku & Gager, 2009). Despite this, the data suggests that frequency of sexual intercourse may not be the primary mechanism by which sweethearting relationships are maintained. Although the frequency of sexual encounters with sweethearts was generally consistent, various barriers to sexual encounters were identified, as detailed in Table 9. These barriers may influence both the sustainability of sweethearting relationships and the emotional dynamics between partners.

Table 8
Median Frequency of Sex With Sweetheart in the Previous Seven Days

Respondent age group	Married or common law		Never married	
	Husband	Wife	Male	Female
18-19	> 7	4	2	1
20-29	2	1	1	1
30-39	2	1	1	1
40-49	1	1	1	0
50-59	1	>7	2	0
60 or over	.5	1.5		0
Overall	1	2	2	1

Table 9 shows that fewer than half of the sexual encounters between sweethearts occurred in either participant’s homes. This pattern may reflect issues of privacy or the need for secrecy. Females were more likely than males to have sexual encounters in the sweetheart’s home. The relatively frequent selection of “nowhere in particular” as a

location suggests that encounters are often flexible or spontaneous rather than pre-planned. “Other” locations cited included beaches and, in some cases, public places, where the thrill may heighten the experience. For instance, male Participant B explained, “Everywhere. I like public places tho, cuming in her while” [fast-food chain],

“calling saying our order ready & we juicing in the bathroom” (fast-food chain name omitted by authors). The relatively common use of hotel rooms for sweethearting may reflect the tourism-based economy of The Bahamas, where some workers may have easy access to such spaces.

Table 10 provides indicative sample sizes for each classification of age and marital status

in Tables 11-22. It is important to note that in Tables 11-22, some values are based on relatively small numbers of observations and should be interpreted with caution. While the number of responses vary across Tables 11-22, the data for men in married or common-law relationships are considered the least reliable due to the smaller sample size.

Table 9

Usual Place of Sexual Encounters with Sweetheart (Percentages Within Sex and Marital Status)

Usual place of sexual encounters	Married or common law		Never married	
	Husband	Wife	Male	Female
Nowhere in particular, wherever we can	37.6%	20.5%	28.7%	23.9%
At my home	27.1%	9.4%	14.9%	14.7%
At my sweetheart's home	19.4%	32.3%	33.3%	41.8%
An hotel or similar	8.8%	31.5%	20.7%	15.7%
Other location	7.1%	6.3%	2.3%	3.9%

Table 10

Indicative Number of Responses for Each Sex, Age Group and Marital Status in Tables 11 to 22

Respondent age group	Married/Common law		Never married		N
	Husband	Wife	Male	Female	
18-19	1	6	19	18	44
20-29	23	35	86	198	342
30-39	35	36	49	68	188
40-49	10	27	13	17	67
50-59	15	23	3	4	45
60 or over	3	2		1	6
N	87	129	170	306	692

It can be anticipated that sexual intercourse may result in children, whether planned or unplanned. While traditional expectations often associate childbearing with marriage, this is not necessarily the case in other types of relationships. Consequently, the outcomes of maintaining multiple sexual partners can be long lasting and multifaceted, with implications that extend beyond the immediate relationships. In the context of

The Bahamas, such patterns and their broader social impacts have been described by Strachan (2013). Tables 11 and 12 illustrate that irrespective of age or marital status, children are likely to be affected by the behaviours of their parent(s). Moreover, the actions and relationship patterns modelled by parents may set normative expectations for behaviour as these children transition into adulthood.

Table 11

Percentage of Participants in Sweethearting Relations who had Children from Other Relationships (Not With Their Usual Partner) (Percentages Within Age Group, Marital Status and Sex)

Having children from any other relationship	Married or common law		Never married	
	Husband	Wife	Male	Female
Respondent age group				
18-19	0	50%	15.8%	11.1%
20-29	27.3%	22.9%	25.6%	15.2%
30-39	51.4%	50%	28.6%	42.6%
40-49	30%	51.7%	33.3%	75%
50-59	66.7%	87%	33.3%	33.3%
60 or over	50%	50%		100%
Overall	44.8%	49.6%	26%	24.8%

Table 12

Percentage of Respondents With Sweethearts Having Children With Their Sweetheart (Percentages Within Age Group, Marital Status and Sex)

Have children with sweetheart	Married or common law		Never married	
	Husband	Wife	Male	Female
Respondent age group				
18-19	0	16.7%	5.3%	0
20-29	4.3%	2.8%	3.5%	4%
30-39	14.3%	11.8%	4.1%	7.4%
40-49	20%	11.1%	8.3%	0
50-59	6.7%	8.7%	0	0
60 or over	25.0%	0		0
Overall	11.4%	7%	4.1%	4.2%

Parenthood within sweethearting relationships was more common among married males compared to their unmarried counterparts, suggesting that sweethearting can contribute to the formation of blended families and potentially increase the risk of family conflict, which may be detrimental to the children (Craft et al., 2021), as reported in the Bahamian media (Davis, 2025b). Overall, respondents who were married and engaged in sweethearting were generally more likely to report having children than single respondents. The underlying reason for this pattern remains unclear and warrants further investigation in future research.

It is generally assumed that adults enter consenting sexual relationships because they perceive some immediate or future benefit. Table 13 illustrates that females, more so than males, were likely to receive monetary gifts from their sweetheart. This pattern was even more pronounced among single females compared to their married counterparts. The significance of such financial support was articulated by a married female respondent with two partners: Participant C stated, "There is no need for me to work", suggesting that she may receive substantial support from her sweetheart(s).

Table 13
Percentage of Respondents in Sweethearting Relationships Receiving Money (Percentages Within Age Group, Marital Status and Sex)

Sweetheart gives me money to live on	Married or common law		Never married	
	Husband	Wife	Male	Female
Respondent age group				
18-19	0	16.7%	33.3%	16.7%
20-29	17.4%	44.4%	20%	43.2%
30-39	14.7%	50%	18.4%	64.7%
40-49	0	26.9%	15.5%	76.5%
50-59	0	69.6%	0	0
60 or over	0	0		0
Overall	10.6%	44.9%	20.2%	47.6%

In addition to monetary support, sweethearts may also receive gifts. As shown in Table 14, females were more likely than males to receive gifts from their sweethearts. If gifts function as a form of gratitude or strategy to

sustain the relationship, this might suggest that male sweethearts are more motivated to invest in maintaining the relationship through material means.

Table 14
Percentage of Respondents in Sweethearting Relationships Receiving Non-Monetary Gifts (Percentages Within Age Group, Marital Status and Sex)

Sweetheart gives respondent gifts (not money)	Married or common law		Never married	
	Husband	Wife	Male	Female
Respondent age group				
18-19	0	50%	61.1%	22.2%
20-29	34.8%	58.3%	41.4%	50.3%
30-39	41.2%	55.9%	37.5%	61.8%
40-49	20%	34.6%	30.8%	47.1%
50-59	21.4%	73.9%	0	0
60 or over	66.7%	50%		0
Overall	34.1%	50%	40.8%	50.2%

Sweethearts also reported receiving financial support for the upkeep of their children, with females more likely than males to receive such support. The responses in Tables 12 and 15 were significantly correlated ($r_s = .41$ for males and $.31$ for females, both $p < .001$). This association suggests that the financial support provided may often be intended for

children resulting directly from the sweethearting relationship.

Overall, female respondents were more likely than males to report that their sweetheart was a better lover than their primary partner (Table 16). This finding is illustrated by qualitative responses, such as that of female

Participant D, who described her sexual encounter as providing “a guaranteed orgasm” and male Participant E, who characterised his experience with his sweetheart as “awesome sex”. Notably, reports of superior sex with a sweetheart were more common among wives than husbands, suggesting that married respondents may be

experiencing unmet sexual needs within their primary relationships. This observation may reflect the broader dynamics within marital sexual relationships where, as Fielding et al., (2023) noted, wives may be expected to acquiesce to their husband’s sexual requests, sometimes with little regard to their own sexual satisfaction.

Table 15
Percentage of Respondents in Sweethearting Relationships Who Received Money for Upkeep of Children (Percentages Within Age Group, Marital Status and Sex)

Pays for the upkeep of my children	Married or common law		Never married	
	Husband	Wife	Male	Female
Respondent age group				
18-19	0	33.3%	31.6%	0
20-29	17.4%	22.9%	4.8%	12.3%
30-39	14.7%	15.2%	4.1%	29.4%
40-49	0	24%	7.7%	47.1%
50-59	0	68.2%	0	0
60 or over	0	0		0
Overall	10.6%	29.3%	7.7%	17.2%

Table 16
Percentage of Respondents Indicating That Their Sweetheart was a Better Lover Than Their Usual Partner (Percentages Within Age Group, Marital Status and Sex)

Sweetheart is a better lover than usual partner	Married or common law		Never married	
	Husband	Wife	Male	Female
Respondent age group				
18-19	100%	33.3%	63.2%	33.3%
20-29	26.1%	42.9%	37.2%	45.5%
30-39	38.2%	57.6%	36.7%	61.8%
40-49	50%	61.5%	46.2%	64.7%
50-59	50%	65.2%	33.3%	50%
60 or over	50%	33.3%		0
Overall	39.5%	54%	40.6%	49.4%

Actions that may signify a long-term commitment to sweethearts, such as the intention to marry (Table 17) or having a child together (Table 18), were relatively uncommon compared to the figures reported in Table 16. Among respondents who were already married, there was limited expressed

interest in formalising their relationship with a sweetheart, a trend that was similarly reflected among never married respondents. These findings suggest that sweethearting relationships are typically not viewed as pathways to long-term partnerships or as substitutes for existing primary relationships.

Instead, sweethearting appears to be driven by immediate personal benefits, such as financial support, sexual gratification, or emotional validation, rather than aspirations for future permanence.

Nonetheless, the fact that some married respondents expressed a desire to marry their sweetheart points to the disruptive potential of such relationships within formal unions. This aligns with national statistics indicating

that approximately 13% of divorces in The Bahamas are granted because of marital infidelity (Brennen, 2024). It is important to note, however, that the persistence of a marriage despite acknowledged infidelity has been documented in legal proceedings (Forbes (née Arangil vs. Forbes and Brooks, 2011), highlighting the complex and varied responses to marital infidelity within Bahamian marriages.

Table 17

Percentage of Respondents Indicating That They Hoped to Marry Their Sweetheart (Percentages Within Age Group, Marital Status and Sex)

Respondent age group	Respond hopes to marry sweetheart		Married or common law		Never married	
	Husband	Wife	Male	Female	Male	Female
18-19	0	16.7%	21.1%	16.7%		
20-29	13%	19.4%	10.6%	16.1%		
30-39	11.8%	9.1%	4.1%	13.2%		
40-49	0	20.8%	7.7%	17.6%		
50-59	7.1%	52.2%	0	0		
60 or over	0	0		0		
Overall	9.4%	22.6%	9.5%	15.3%		

Table 18

Percentage of Respondents Indicating That They Wanted to Have a Baby With Their Sweetheart (Percentages Within Age Group, Marital Status and Sex)

Respondent age group	Respondent wanting to have a baby with their sweetheart		Married or common law		Never married	
	Husband	Wife	Male	Female	Male	Female
18-19	0	16.7%	31.6%	5.6%		
20-29	21.7%	16.7%	16.5%	19.6%		
30-39	14.7%	12.1%	4.1%	17.6%		
40-49	10%	16%	30.8%	23.5%		
50-59	21.4%	34.8%	0	0		
60 or over	0	0		0		
Overall	16.5%	18.4%	15.4%	18.2%		

It is noteworthy that the percentages reported in Tables 16 and 19 represent the highest among the group of perceived advantages associated with sweethearting for both males

and females, regardless of marital status. These findings suggest that emotional support, particularly “Feeling needed”, and enhanced sexual experiences are among the

most cited benefits of engaging in sweethearting. Furthermore, respondents' statements that their sweetheart made them feel needed were positively correlated with reports of improved sexual experiences (Table 19), with a Spearman's correlation coefficient of $r_s = .27$, $p < .001$. This

relationship implies that emotional deficits within the primary relationship may be a significant factor motivating individuals to seek intimacy and fulfilment through sweethearting.

Table 19

Percentage of Respondents Indicating That Their Sweetheart Made Them Feel Needed (Percentages Within Age Group, Marital Status and Sex)

Sweetheart makes respondent feel needed	Married or common law		Never married	
	Husband	Wife	Male	Female
Respondent age group				
18-19	0	50%	47.4%	55.6%
20-29	52.2%	51.4%	47.1%	62.1%
30-39	58.8%	58.8%	61.2%	66.2%
40-49	50%	61.5%	53.8%	64.7%
50-59	57.1%	69.6%	0	50%
60 or over	100%	50%		100%
Overall	56.5%	58.7%	50.9%	62.7%

While sexual intercourse may result in pregnancies, whether planned or unplanned, it also carries significant risk of transmitting STIs, particularly when individuals engage with multiple partners. Among the 273 male respondents, 29.3% reported consistent condom use, while among the 469 females, the corresponding figure was 23.9%. These figures contrast with the 75.8% condom usage rate reported among individuals with multiple partners (Bahamas Ministry of Health, 2015). The results partially align with the findings of Godinho et al. (2024), who suggested that consistent condom use may indicate a degree of emotional or relational commitment within sexual partnerships. However, in the context of sweethearting, where multiple concurrent partnerships occur, such commitment appears limited. Consequently, most respondents involved in sweethearting were at a heightened risk of contracting or transmitting STIs. Notably, males who did not use condoms reported a

median of 2 sweethearts, while the corresponding figure for females was 1 sweethearts, underscoring the extent of sexual network overlap.

Sexual abuse, another risk factor, was also observed within sweethearting relationships (Table 20). Males were more likely than females to report having engaged in non-consensual sex with their sweetheart, effectively perpetrating sexual assault. However, it is important to note that females also engaged in forced sexual activities against their partner's will, illustrating that sexual victimisation within sweethearting relationships may be more complex than typically depicted. For example, Bahamian media portrayals often frame females exclusively as victims of intimate partner violence; however, our findings reveal a more nuanced reality in which both males and females can be perpetrators and victims, and such violence is associated with enduring mental and physical problems (Moschella,

2020). Moreover, the narrow focus in public discourse neglects wider consequences of sexual abuse within households, particularly its detrimental impact on children, both

within the home environment and in broader social contexts, such as schools (Johnson, 2016).

Table 20

Victimisers: Percentage of Those in Sweethearting Relationships Having Sex Against Their Sweetheart's Will (Yes, Not Sure, Probably Yes) (Percentages Within Age Group, Marital Status and Sex)

Respondent had sex against their sweetheart's will, respondent as abuser	Married or common law		Never married	
	Husbands	Wives	Male	Female
Respondent age group				
18-19	16.7%	16.7%	16.7%	5.6%
20-29	22.2%	13.9%	15.7%	7.6%
30-39	8.8%	8.8%	7.6%	4.5%
40-49	14.8%	14.8%	18.8%	6.3%
50-59	65.2%	13%	0	0
60 and over	0	0		0
Overall	24.2%	12.5%	14%	6.6%

Although male respondents reported instances of non-consensual sex, female respondents were more likely to report having sex against their will. Additionally, the overall prevalence of wives being sexually abused by their sweethearts (Table 21) exceeds the rates of sexual abuse reported

within formal marriage (Moxey-Adderley & Fielding, 2024). This finding suggests that despite the benefits associated with sweethearting relationships, such arrangements can involve serious risks, including the sexual abuse of men and women.

Table 21

Victims: Percentage of those in Sweethearting Relationships Having Sex Against Their Will (Yes, Not Sure, Probably Yes) (Percentages Within Age Group, Marital Status and Sex)

Respondent had sex with sweetheart against their will, Respondent as victim	Married or common law		Never married	
	Husband	Wife	Male	Female
Respondent age group				
18-19	100%	16.7%	0	16.7%
20-29	17.4%	22.2%	14.5%	15.7%
30-39	15.2%	8.8%	10.2%	7.6%
40-49	0	14.8%	9.1%	18.8%
50-59	0	65.2%	0	0
60 and over	0	0		0
Overall	11.9%	24.2%	10.9%	14%

Respondents who reported engaging in sex against their sweetheart's will also reported having sex more frequently than those who

did not (Table 22). This pattern may suggest that some respondents are repeat abusers, with partners disregarding their sweetheart's

lack of consent. In this action, female respondents appeared to initiate non-consensual sexual encounters more often than male respondents, challenging conventional assumptions about gender dynamics in sexual aggression (Grøntvedt, et al, 2015).

Regarding experiences of victimisation, the disparity in sexual frequency between abused and non-abused females was less

pronounced. However, abused women reported engaging in sexual activity more frequently than their unabused counterparts, indicating that elevated frequency of sex may be a component of the broader pattern of abuse. Future research is needed to explore whether victims of non-consensual sex experience repeated violations over time and to better understand the psychological and relational factors that may contribute to ongoing victimisation.

Table 22

Median Frequency (in the last seven days) of Sexual Intercourse With Sweetheart by Sex of Respondent and Consenting to Sex

	Male	Female
Respondent had sex against sweetheart's will (Respondent abuser)	2	4
Respondent did not have sex against sweetheart's will	1	1
Sweetheart had sex with respondent's against will (Respondent abused)	2	3
Sweetheart did not have sex against respondent's will	2	1

Implications of the Results

While infidelity can be defined in various nuanced ways (Rokach & Chan, 2023), in the Bahamian context, it is understood to revolve around having a sexual relationship with a second partner when the partner in a current relationship expects the sexual relationship to be exclusive. Sweethearting may be associated with the infidelity of married persons, but it may also occur in “steady” relationships between single persons. Additionally, having multiple partners can be viewed as infidelity if one or both partners expect that the relationship should be exclusive. Consequently, the results from the study distinguished between married and single respondents.

The results confirm the findings from Grant (1999) that both men and women in The Bahamas engage in sweethearting. Beyond this, there are nuances arising from such relationships which show that they are more complex than the idea that men have

sweethearts for sexual gratification and women are sweethearts to obtain money. While the data does support these statements, the data also indicate that sweethearting relationships can provide emotional support and supplement perceived deficiencies in established relationships. This raises the question as to what are the emotional and sexual deficits within a marriage or an on-going relationship between two single people that result in a partner forming another relationship(s)? Although this has been explored in other communities (Rokach & Chan, 2023), this would be a topic for further research in the context of The Bahamas at the end of the first quarter of this century, beyond anecdotal cases reported in the media (for example, Noel, 2018).

Kim et al (2024) found that about 25% of sexually active schoolboys in the Bahamas had multiple partners; this compares with the 20% of married men in this study who currently had multiple partners. As Rokach and Chan (2023) noted, the practice of

infidelity prior to marriage can be continued after marriage. If we hypothesize that unfaithful adults emerge from those who had multiple partners at school, it would be useful to determine if or how boys in The Bahamas learn to be unfaithful to a sexual partner at an early age.

What is apparent is that sweethearting is not commonly perceived by participants as leading to establishing a permanent relationship. However, despite this, children can be conceived as a result of sweethearting. This has implications for marriages and for the children born to single mothers, particularly teenage mothers. Further, teen mothers do not typically enjoy a similar economic lifestyle as women who have children later in life (Fielding, 2018), so sweetheart relationships involving younger women may have long-term consequences of concern. Although some women received money from their sweethearts to support their children, further research would be required to determine the level of the “child support” and if it is sufficient and persists to cover the cost of raising the child(ren). Further, as this assistance is voluntary, how regular is it, and does it continue beyond the duration of the sweethearting relationship?

In addition, respondents who engaged in sweethearting tended to have multiple sweethearts and did not always use a condom. Such behaviours may also contribute to the 12.1% of persons who have sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) (Ministry of Health, 2019). Further, the children of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) positive mothers can be born with HIV (Global AIDS Monitoring, 2019). In the light of this study, it can be appreciated that sweethearting can contribute to this public health concern. These results highlight the public health issues associated with sweethearting and demonstrate that such activities can have a cost to the nation for

treating persons with STDs.

This study found a higher level of sexual abuse of married women in sweethearting relationships than reported by Fielding et al. (2023) in married relationships. This suggests that a sweethearting relationship for women is no safer than marriage in terms of non-consensual sex. However, notwithstanding the higher risk for women, it should be noted that both men and women are subject to sexual abuse in sweethearting relationships. This is important as men are less likely than women to seek help because of their abuse (Fielding & Ballance, 2023b). The observation that females were more likely than males to have sex in their sweetheart’s home, rather than their own or a neutral space, may put them at risk of abuse, as the sexual encounter occurs in a space controlled by their sweetheart.

A result which may require further investigation is that women who sexually abused their sweethearts (had sex against their sweetheart’s will) had more frequent sex than women who were not abusers (Table 23). We might initially conjecture that such women are using sex (against their partner’s will) to extract money or some similar benefit for themselves. However, on the other hand, and consistent with Apt and Hulbert (1993), we also found that abused women had more frequent sex than unabused women. If each of these sexual encounters are abusive, then this might suggest that some women are repeatedly abused within sweethearting relationships. Fielding and Ballance (2023a) found that single women were more likely than married women to have been raped by their long-term partner, a finding apparently repeated here with sweethearts. These findings provide possible areas that would benefit from further study.

We should note that the information in this study was self-reported, and the sampling method was non-probabilistic, and so the

results may be subject to biases which may not necessarily make the results applicable to the wider Bahamian population. However, where the findings from this study can be triangulated with other data, they are in broad agreement with them. The study's results help to show that despite the publicised negative aspects of sweethearting, for those

who participate in such relationships, there are both potential benefits as well as risks, some of which may extend beyond the sweethearts. As such, the data provide insights about the motivation(s) driving sweethearting and the associated consequences of sweethearting.

References

- Apt, C., & Hulbert, D. F. (1993). The sexuality of women in physically abusive marriages: A comparative study. *Journal of Family Violence*, 8(1), 57–69. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00986993>
- Bahamas Ministry of Health. (2015). *Global AIDS response progress reporting: Country report 2015*. https://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/JC2702_GARPR2015guidelines_en.pdf
- Bahamas Ministry of Health. (2019). *The Bahamas STEPS survey 2019: Fact sheet*. <https://original-ufdc.uflib.ufl.edu/AA00083290/00001>
- Bahamas National Statistical Institute. (2024). *2022 census of populational and housing: Final results*. <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/aa00113601/00001>
- Bailey, P. (2025, January 31). Man accused of abducting and attempting to rape 16-year-old girl. *The Tribune*. <https://www.tribune242.com/news/2025/jan/31/man-accused-of-abducting-and-attempting-to-rape-16-year-old-girl/?news>
- Brennen, B. H. (2024, October 24). *The Bahamas marriage, divorce, and live births statistics* [Weblog]. Sounds of Encouragement. <https://www.soundsencouragement.org/stats2000.htm>
- Burrows, N. (2014, September 30). Coleloquial: The cheating Bahamian husband - whose fault is it really? *The Tribune*. <https://www.tribune242.com/news/2014/sep/30/coleloquial-cheating-bahamian-husband-whose-fault-/>
- Craft, A. L., Perry-Jenkins, M., & Newkirk, K. (2021). The implications of early marital conflict for children's development. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 30(1), 292–310. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-020-01871-6>
- Davis, A. (2025a, June 24). Cop convicted of plot to kill love rival. *The Nassau Guardian*. https://www.thenassauguardian.com/news/cop-convicted-of-plot-to-kill-love-rival/article_9c6c4014-b796-4f9a-bc69-a0c33b89438f.html
- Davis, A. (2025b, June 20). Mother, stepdad accused of molesting teen girl. *The Nassau Guardian*. https://www.thenassauguardian.com/news/mother-stepdad-accused-of-molesting-teen-girl/article_99a4dfda-4dd1-406f-8031-59c559398a97.html

- Emery, R. E. (Ed.). (2013). *Cultural sociology of divorce: An encyclopedia* (Vol. 3, pp. 110-120). Sage.
- Fielding, W. J. (2018, April 23). *Socio-economic attributes of teen mothers in The Bahamas*. ResearchGate. <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.34516.50561>
- Fielding, W. J., & Ballance, V. C. (2022). A preliminary study on unwanted sexual intercourse within long-term relationships in The Bahamas. *International Journal of Bahamian Studies*, 28, 67–82. <https://doi.org/10.15362/ijbs.v28i0.461>
- Fielding, W. J., & Ballance, V. C. F. (2023a). Behaviours associated with male “sweethearting” (infidelity) in heterosexual relationships in The Bahamas. *International Journal of Bahamian Studies*, 29(2), 46–56. <https://doi.org/10.15362/ijbs.v29i2.521>
- Fielding W. J., & Ballance, V. C. (2023b). Sexual and psychological abuse of men in heterosexual relationships in The Bahamas. *International Journal of Bahamian Studies*, 29(2), 57–74. <https://doi.org/10.15362/ijbs.v29i2.537>
- Fielding, W. J., Ballance, V. C. F., & Hall-Campbell Dean, N. (2023). In The Bahamas “She must give it up”: Sexual abuse of women in heterosexual relationships by their intimate partners. *International Journal of Bahamian Studies*, 29(2), 15–32. <https://doi.org/10.15362/ijbs.v29i2.495>
- Fielding, W.J., & Moxey-Adderley, T. E. (2026). Description of intimate partnerships in The Bahamas and their association with adult aggression and other experiences. *International Journal of Bahamian Studies*, 31(2), 31-48. <https://doi.org/10.15362/ijbs.v31i2.635>
- Forbes (nee Arangil) vs. Forbes and Brooks, Fam/Div/Fp00039 Bahamas. (2011). <https://bs.vlex.com/vid/forbes-nee-arangil-v-792948221>
- Gibson, J. (2018, July 3). In the aftermath of 'sweethearting': The dos and don'ts following the discovery of betrayal. *The Tribune*. <https://www.tribune242.com/news/2018/jul/03/in-the-aftermath-of-sweethearting-the-dos-and/>
- Global AIDS Monitoring. (2019). *Country progress report – Bahamas (the)*. UNAIDS. https://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/country/documents/BHS_2019_countryreport.pdf
- Godinho, C. A., Pereira, C. R., Pegado, A., Luz, R., & Alvarez, M. J. (2024). Condom use across casual and committed relationships: The role of relationship characteristics. *PloS One*, 19(7), e0304952. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0304952>
- Görge, R., Yansané, M. L., Marx, M., & Millimounou, D. (1998). Sexual behavior and attitudes among unmarried urban youths in Guinea. *International Family Planning Perspectives*, 24(2), 65–71. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2991927>
- Grant, M. T. (1999). *Sweethearting: A study of infidelity among married males and females in the Commonwealth of The Bahamas* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Clark Atlanta University]. https://radar.auctr.edu/islandora/object/cau.td%3A1999_grant_mishelle_t

- Grøntvedt, T. V., Kennair, L. E., & Mehmetoglu, M. (2015). Factors predicting the probability of initiating sexual intercourse by context and sex. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, 56(5): 516–26. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sjop.12215>.
- Johnson, P. (2016). Violence in school. In W. J. Fielding, V. C. F. Ballance, & I. G. Strachan (Eds.), *Violence in The Bahamas* (pp. 113–133). University of The Bahamas.
- Kempadoo, K. (2009). *Prostitution, sex work and transactional sex in the English, Dutch and French speaking Caribbean. A literature review of definitions, laws and research*. PANCAP/CARICOM. https://pancap.org/pw/pcc/media/pancap_document/ProstitutionSex-Work-Transactional-Sex-Literature-Review-Sept-4-2009.pdf
- Kim, D., Guo, Y., Wang, A., Fahey, N., Rosa, V., Deveaux, C., Taylor, M., & Deveaux, L. (2024). Effect of multi-level social risk factors on developmental trajectories of sexual risk behaviors among Bahamian middle-to-late adolescents. *Health Psychology and Behavioral Medicine*, 12(1), 2397470. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21642850.2024.2397470>
- Maycock, D. (2015, May 21). Pastor accused of sex with teen. *The Tribune*. <https://www.tribune242.com/news/2015/may/21/pastor-accused-sex-teen/>
- McCartney, T. (1971). *Neuroses in the sun*. Executive Printers.
- McCartney, T. (1976). *Bahamian sexuality*. Timpaul.
- Moschella, M. (2020). *The long-term effects of sexual assault on romantic relationships: A qualitative study*. [Master's Theses and Capstones, University of New Hampshire Scholars' Repository]. <https://scholars.unh.edu/thesis/1390>
- Moxey-Adderley, T. E., & Fielding, W. J. (2024). Aggression and its correlates in the Bahamian community with a focus on corporal punishment. *International Journal of Bahamian Studies*, 30, 15–32. <https://doi.org/10.15362/ijbs.v30i1.557>
- Munsch, C. L. (2015). Her support, his support: Money, masculinity, and marital infidelity. *American Sociological Review*, 80(3), 469–495. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122415579989>
- Noel, G. (2018, October 17). Sweethearting in The Bahamas. *Eyewitness News*. <https://ewnews.com/sweethearting-in-the-bahamas/>
- Rodgers, A. Y., & Rolle, C. C. M. (1997). Bahamian adolescents: A survey of their knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about AIDS. *College Forum: The Research Journal of the College of the Bahamas*, 9, 2–9. <https://doi.org/10.15362/ijbs.v9i0.26>
- Rokach, A., & Chan, S. H. (2023). Love and infidelity: Causes and consequences. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 20(5), 3904. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20053904>
- Rolle-Sands, S. Y., Campbell, T., & Fielding, W. J. (2026a). Emotional dependency and sweethearting in The Bahamas (I): Marital infidelity. *International Journal of Bahamian Studies*, 31(2), 49-60. <https://doi.org/10.15362/ijbs.v31i2.633>

- Rolle-Sands, S. Y., Campbell, T., & Fielding, W. J. (2026a). Emotional dependency and sweethearting in The Bahamas (II): Sexual promiscuity among unmarried persons. *International Journal of Bahamian Studies*, 31(2), 61-70. <https://doi.org/10.15362/ijbs.v31i2.643>
- Rustan, E. (2020). Stimulation of child's sexual imitation behavior through neurolinguistic programming. *Jurnal Konseling dan Pendidikan*, 8(2), 61–66. <https://doi.org/10.29210/136300>
- Storr, V. H. (2009). B' Rabby as a “True-True Bahamian”: Rabbyism as Bahamian ethos and worldview in The Bahamas’ folk tradition and the works of Strachan and Glington-Meicholas. *Journal of Caribbean Literatures*, 6(1), 125–146. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40986304>
- Strachan, I. G. (2013). *I's man: Manhood in The Bahamas* [Video]. Marble Head Films. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UunVToSyHMU>
- Sweethearting: On the way out? (2013, April 8). *The Tribune*. <https://www.tribune242.com/news/2013/apr/08/sweethearting-way-out/>
- Tertullien, M. C. (1976). *Psychologically speaking: Attitudes and cultural patterns in The Bahamas*. Star Publishing.
- Wieczorek, L. L., Chivers, M., Koehn, M. A., DeBruine, L. M., & Jones, B. C. (2022). Age effects on women’s and men’s dyadic and solitary sexual desire. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 51(8), 3765–3789. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-022-02375-8>
- Yabiku, S. T., & Gager, C. T. (2009). Sexual frequency and the stability of marital and cohabiting unions. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 71(4), 983–1000. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2009.00648.x>