COUNSELLING IMPLICATIONS OF SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR OF NIGERIAN UNDERGRADUATES

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Abstract

Within the structure of the university environment in which the students resides to acquire their first degree, this paper analyses the determinants of sexual behaviour of University of Benin undergraduates. Age, gender, willingness to indulge in pre-marital sexual activities, peer influence, desire for money, usage of contraceptive amongst others were investigated. The descriptive survey method was adopted for this study. A questionnaire on some determinants of sexual behaviour was used in gathering information from the respondents. A sample size of three hundred and forty-four undergraduates was used for the study. Data was analysed using percentages. Result showed that most respondents 73.0% willingly indulged in sexual activities and 54.4% had sex for the fun of it. It was also found that there is high usage of contraceptive/condoms, in that 67.6% of the respondents indicated that they made use of contraceptives, while 35.6% of the females indicated that they have had abortions. The result also showed that the age bracket in which undergraduates mostly indulge in sexual activity is within the ages of 15-25 years. It is recommended that, there is the need for government, non-governmental agencies and the general public to be more proactive in addressing issues bothering on adolescents sexual behaviour. Health enlightenment programmes on sex education should be provided in Nigeria universities. Counsellors should introduce behaviour modification therapy in counselling undergraduates who indulge in risky sexual behaviours.

Keywords: Undergraduates, sexual behaviour, adolescents, pre-marital sex.

Introduction

The increase in premarital sex and its consequences has made it to attract global attention. In Nigeria, premarital sex before the advent of Western education was considered an aberration. Nigeria was a colonial territory of Britain, and became independent in 1960. The country is located in the West African sub-Saharan region, it is situated at the extreme inner corner of the gulf of Guinea and is often described as the most populous country in Africa (Eluwa, 1988).

Nigeria is culturally a conservative country in that the issue of premarital sex is still considered an aberration. According to Alo and Akinde (2010), children learn about sex not from parents but through the mass media and peers. They learn the important topic of sex education in negative manners. Alo (2008) reported that premarital cohabitation is a common phenomenon among Nigeria university undergraduates.

Premarital sexual activity is not a recent phenomenon Reports indicate that premarital sex is on the increase in Africa (Zulkiffi and Low, 2007; Alo and Akin, 2010). Finer (2007), reported that premarital sex is not a surprising occurrence in an era when men and women typically marry in their late twenties. In India, Krishmen (2006) reported an increase in premarital sex among youths. Mehemet (2006) reported that in Turkey, mother’s education, age, ethnicity and employment status were among the most important predictors of attitudes of women towards premarital sexual activity. Allen (2003) indicated peer pressure as a significant sexual activity predictor.

Other factors associated with premarital sex include number of siblings, possession of future partners, literacy, urban residents, religion, the breakdown of traditional family system, influence of the mass media, curiosity, peer influence, expectation of gift and money, force, a measure of friction between
respondents parents, living arrangement and school location, incomplete, inadequate and unappreciated feelings, gender, substance use and staying with single parents (Kiragu and Zabin, 1995; Zanel, 1998; Blanc and Way, 1998; Djamba, 2003; Ghuman, Huy and Knodde, 2006; Lee et al., 2006; Ramesh and Tgotsne, 2009).

Undergraduate sexual behaviour has attracted global attention, in that its consequences which include unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions, early childbearing and sexually transmitted diseases have become a major public health concern. Owuamanam (1982), Action Health Incorporated (1996) and Amazigo (1997) reported that early age at sex initiation, high level of premarital sexual activities, risky sexual practices with little or no knowledge about sexual and reproductive health issues is prevalent among the youths. The resultant effects of these practices are high rates of unwanted pregnancies, maternal mortality, sexually transmitted diseases and increasing number of school dropouts. Alika and Egbochuku (2009) found that most adolescent girls dropout of school as a result of pregnancy and early marriage, this could be attributed to inadequate awareness as regards the consequences of their sexual behaviour. It becomes imperative that a study such as this is of vital importance in a developing Nation like Nigeria, where discussion on sexuality and sexuality education is viewed as an aberration.

Inaccessibility of health information and services places these adolescents at risk. Moreover, early marriage, and childbearing limit youths educational and employment opportunities. However, adequate and effective sexuality education programmes can provide the youths with the needed health information and services.

National Population commission (1999), found in a health survey of sexually experienced teens that over 13% of women and over 27% of men reported exchanging money gifts or favours for sex, this could be as a result of high incidence of poverty in the country. The same report indicates that over 16% of teenage females reported first sexual intercourse by age 15. Women within the age bracket of 20 to 24, 49.4% reported sex for the first time at age 18. Among teenage males, 8.3% reported first sex at age 15, while 36.3% of those within the age bracket of 20 to 24 indicated having sex for the first time. The resultant effects of early sexual activities, especially among the females most often than not is induced abortion and drop out from school, because most of them are not ready for pregnancy. Henshaw (1998) in a study found that more than 600,000 Nigerian women obtain abortions each year, and that one-third of this population was adolescents. The study also indicated that up to 80% of Nigerian patients with abortion – related complications were adolescents. Therefore, it is imperative that the sexual behaviour of our adolescents should be studied with a view to proffering solutions towards improving or enhancing the sexual behaviour of Nigerian youths.

Studies have shown that most Nigerian youths are not well informed as regard the use of contraception. Araoye and Fakeye (1998) found that about 36.3% of women knew about a modern method of contraception, while about 50.39% of men knew about a modern method of contraception. This is a disturbing trend in that more effort in terms of sexuality education is needed in order to get our youths well informed and educated as regards the various types of contraception. Araoye and Fakeye (1998) also reported that even when the information is provided, some individuals are reluctant to use contraception. The same study found that among sexually active, single youths, reasons for non use of contraception includes the following: fear of complications (46.7% of males and 48.5% of females) and religious beliefs (12.0% of males and 21.2% females). The study also indicated that 40% of youths believed that condoms would reduce sexual pleasure.

According to the Federal Ministry of Health (2003), poor access to family planning method impacts negatively on the reproductive life style of the youths. The report indicates that among the 15-19 year olds, accessibility of the different family planning methods was found to be within the range of 6% to 19%, and the use of condoms was found to be practiced by a little percentage of 34.4%. Moreover, the Nigeria Demographic Health Survey (1999) reported that as in most parts of the world premarital sex is on the increase in Nigeria, by the age of 19 years, 17% of all Nigeria adolescent have become sexually active and they often do not employ any means of protection the report further.
indicates. This may account for the high level of fertility among Nigerian adolescents ages 15-19 years, with 112 births per 1000 females (NDHS, 1999).

In view of the dangers associated with inadequate sexuality education for the youths, international organisations and governments are of the view that interventions are needed to help adolescents manage their sexual and reproductive lives. At the International Conference on Population and Development (1994), governments resolved that information and healthcare services should be made available to adolescents to help them understand their sexuality and protect them from unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases and subsequent risk of infertility. The policy working paper series No. 12 indicates that, Nigeria is in the early stages of carrying out its new national policy on sexuality and reproductive health education. Globally, school based programmes are an important element of efforts to improve sexual and reproductive health of young people. When school based programmes are provided before and during adolescence, according to Irvin (2000) it can help adolescents understand and manage their sexuality in adulthood, including controlling their fertility and maintaining their own and their partners sexual health and prepare them for parenthood when they will be called upon to guide, support and educate their own children.

Sexual behaviour of our university undergraduates no doubt should be of great importance in that they constitute the future elites of the nation. The risks associated with unhealthy sexual behaviour, their complications, implications and the socio-economic costs demands a greater research attention, urgent and well coordinated solution.

To guide the study, the following research questions were generated.

**Research questions**

1. To what extent will age determine adolescents’ sexual behaviour?
2. Is gender a determining factor in undergraduate sexual behaviour?
3. To what extent would University of Benin undergraduates willingly indulge in sexual activity?
4. To what extent will University of Benin undergraduates be forced to indulge in sexual activities?
5. To what extent would peers, lecturers/teachers, sugar daddy/mummies constitute the sexual partners of University of Benin undergraduates?
6. What is the extent of the usage of condoms/contraceptives among University of Benin undergraduates?
7. To what extent will undergraduate of University of Benin indulge in sexual activities for fun?
8. To what extent will undergraduate students of University of Benin engage in sexual activities to make money?
9. What percentage of University of Benin female undergraduate students have had abortion?

**Methods**

**Research design**
The survey method was adopted for this study.

**Participants**
Participants in the study were 344 undergraduates from the University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria. 85 undergraduates were selected from four faculties of the university i.e. the Faculty of Education, Social Science, Engineering and Medicine. The participants were within the age bracket of 15-35 years with a (mean of 21 years, and a standard deviation of 4.83).

**Measures**
Data collection was done through the aid of a questionnaire containing two sections. Section A tapped personal data while section B elicited information on the variables of study i.e. some determinants of adolescents’ sexual behaviour. The checklist had a reliability coefficient of 0.88.

(a) Procedures: The questionnaires were administered and collected on the spot, with the help of some course lecturers.

(b) Statistics: Simple percentage was used to analyze the data.
Table 1: Determinants of Undergraduates Sexual Behaviour in Percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age of 1st sexual experience</td>
<td>15-20</td>
<td>65.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>28.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>31-35</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender and predisposition to sexual activities</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>42.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>57.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willingly indulges in sexual activity</td>
<td></td>
<td>73.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forced to indulge in sexual activity</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual relations with:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peers</td>
<td></td>
<td>72.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturers</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugar daddies/mummies</td>
<td></td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usage of contraceptives/condoms</td>
<td></td>
<td>67.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>indulge in sexual activities for fun or money</td>
<td></td>
<td>54.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female undergraduates that have had an abortion</td>
<td></td>
<td>35.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The result on the table, showed that the age at which undergraduates mostly indulge in sexual activity is within the ages of 15-20 years, which had 65.3 percent of the respondents, ages 21-30 had 28.5%, 26-30 had 18%, while 31-35 had 7.2% of the respondents. The result also showed that the female are more predisposed to sexual activities at the undergraduate level with 57.5% of females and 42.5% of males. The result revealed that 73.0% of the respondents indicated that they willingly indulged in sexual activities while 7.0% indicated that they were forced to do so.

On the issue of sexual relations with peers, 72.4% of the respondents indicated that they had sexual relations with their peers, while 7.0% indicated sexual relations with their lecturers, while 20.6% indicated having had sexual relations with sugar daddies or mummies (i.e. elderly male/female sex partners). As regards the usage of contraceptives and condoms 67.6% indicated that they made use of contraceptives/condoms. On the question of indulgence in sexual activity for fun or for money, 54.4% indicated that they had sex for fun while 21.6 indicated for money. The result also revealed that 35.6% of the female undergraduates have had abortion.

Discussion

The study revealed that undergraduates predisposition to sexual activities is more prevalent within the age bracket of 15-20 years with 65.3% of the respondents. This finding is in agreement with Owuamanam (1982) who reported high level of premarital sexual activities among youths. The finding of Alo and Akinde (2010) is in agreement with this result, they reported high rate of sexually transmitted infections among 15-24 years old, and an increasing numbers of girls dropping out of school due to unintended pregnancies. The finding is also in agreement with Scott (2006) who reported that globally, most young people have had sex before they attain 19 years of age. In a similar study, Owuamanam (1982) and Amazigo (1997) lamented the visible health and social consequences of adolescents’ sexual behaviour especially with regard to early age at initiation with multiple partners and little or no knowledge about sexual and reproductive health issues. This finding is consistent with National Demographic and health Survey (NDHS, 2003).

On gender more predisposed to premarital sexual activity result show that the females 57.5% as against 42.5% of males indicated that they engaged
in sexual activities. This finding is in agreement with the report of the Nigerian Demographic and Health Survey (1992) which reported that Nigerian girls are more predisposed to early sexual activities when compared to their male counterparts. Similarly Alo and Akinde (2010) in a study reported that women who had secondary education recorded the highest rate of premarital sex. The findings is at variance to that of Egbochuku and Ekanem (2010) who found that the males were more permissive as regards sexual behaviour.

The study also showed that 73% of the respondents affirmed that they willingly engaged in sexual activities while 7% of the respondents indicated that they were forced to engage in sexual activities. The study also revealed that 68.4% of the respondents indicated that they indulged in sexual activities just for fun while 21.6% indicated that they got involved just for the sake of making money, underlying factor being poverty. This could be as a result of modern exposure of the youths to premarital sex and prostitution. As noted by Erusegbefe (2005) one aspect of life in which the decline of traditional values is obvious is in the area of sexuality.

To further buttress the assertion above, Osisioma (1998) lamented that in Nigeria, culture no longer has a grip on the youth because society seems so plagued with decayed moral codes and values and so the sense of right and wrong is eroded. Deng (1983) opined that sexually explicit movies expose young people to adult issues. Poverty has been implicated in early exposure to premarital sex activities in order to make money as a result of their low socio-economic status. This finding is in line with the report of Mehmet (2006) who reported that the level of education, employment status and sex are among the background variably which predisposes women to premarital sex.

Study also showed that 72.4% of the respondents indicated having sexual relations with their peers, while 7% indicated that they had sexual relations with their lecturers, and 20.6% indicated that they had sexual relations with sugar daddies and sugar mummies (elderly men and women). This finding could have been as a result of the overwhelming influence of peer pressure. This is in agreement with Allen (2003) who reported that peer pressure is a significant predictor of sexual activity. Similarly, Egbochuku and Ekanem (2010) reported that peer pressure has a significant influence on the attitude of adolescents’ sexual behaviour.

The study revealed that 67.6% of the respondents indicated that they have used contraceptive/condoms. This could be as a result of enlightenment by the Ministry of Health and other bodies on the use of contraceptive/condoms, so as to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS. This finding is in agreement with the report of Adeboyejo and Onyeonom (2003) who reported that among sexually experienced youths ages 18-24, 72% of males and 81% of females indicated that they have used contraception and that the males were more likely to have used condoms (43%) and females in the rhythm method (31%). The indication of the usage of contraceptives by 67.6% of the respondents, is a sign that the advocacy by the government, non-governmental agencies and concerned organisations in the country is yielding a positive result. This is against the backdrop of low awareness level of the usage of contraception in recent years. Alo and Akinde (2004) reported a very poor contraceptive prevalence in their population of study.

The study also revealed that 35.6% of the female respondents indicated that they have had abortion, this may be due to unprotected sex and ignorance as regards reproductive health issues. Abortion in Nigeria is prohibited except when a woman’s life is threatened. Alo and Akinde (2004) reported that, experts estimate that more than 600,000 Nigerian women obtain abortions each year. They also reported that in a study, one-third of the women seeking abortions were adolescents (Henshaw, 1998). Otoide (2001) reported that hospital based studies showed that up to 80% of Nigerian patients with abortion-related complications were adolescents. Therefore, there is the need for the health delivery system of the nation to carry out more enlightenment on the consequences of abortion and premarital sex.

**Implication for counselling practices**

There is the need for personal-social counselling, in that the finding showed that 54.4% of the respondents indicated that they had sex just for the fun of it while 73% of the respondents indicated that they willingly indulged in sexual activities and 72.4% indicated that they had sexual relations with peers. Behavioural counselling technique could be
adopted in counselling university undergraduates, since one of the assumptions of human personality is that each individual has the potentials to evaluate plan, and modify his/her behaviour. Counselors in higher institutions should be encouraged to identify at risk students and introduce behaviour modification therapy with a view to encouraging undergraduates to desist from risky sexual behaviours. Moreover, the female undergraduates should be counseled and well guided as regards the dangerous effects of abortion.

**Recommendations**

There is the need for government, non-governmental agencies and the general public to be more proactive in addressing the issues of adolescents’ sexuality or reproductive lifestyle in view of the fact that 73% of the respondents indicated that they willingly indulged in sexual activities while 54.4% showed that they engaged in sexual activities for fun. More health awareness programmes on the dangers of pre-marital sex should be made available to undergraduates and adolescents. Since it is within this age (15-20 years) bracket that we have our future generation of leaders. A national bureau for adolescent sexual health should be established in higher institutions in the country, with the main objective of providing counseling and health programmes for undergraduate students.

Efforts should be made to assist indigent students financially, by way of providing scholarships, bursaries, work study programmes for them so as to enhance their socio-economic status, in that some students indulged in pre-marital sexual activities in order to make money for personal survival.

There is the need to organize more enlightenment programmes for undergraduates especially the females in that 35.6% of the female respondents indicated that they have had abortions, the enlightenment programmes will acquaint the female undergraduates of the dangers of abortion. Therefore, urgent attention should be given to the provision of periodic health talks on the dangers of abortions in our universities.

It is recommended that all forms of sexual harassment by the lecturers should be prohibited and backed up by a law. A situation where females are sexually harassed by the lecturers, so as to pass an examination should be condemned in all ramifications. Nigeria as a developing country should be seen to exhibit political commitment to adolescents’ sexuality and reproductive life style, if the country must advance technologically, politically, socially and economically.

**References**


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