

SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON SEX EDUCATION AND RISKY SEXUAL BEHAVIOURS IN BENUE STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated senior secondary school students' perceptions on sex education and risky sexual behaviour in Benue State. The area of study was Katsina-Ala Educational Zone. Two research questions were raised and two hypotheses formulated for the study. The study adopted descriptive survey research design. The population of the study consisted of all secondary schools students in the educational zone. Simple random sampling was used in drawing a sample of 300 students. A structured questionnaire developed by the researchers titled Sex Education among Secondary Schools Questionnaire (SESSQ) and validated by experts with a reliability coefficient of 0.81 was used for data collection. Based on the data obtained and analyzed using mean scores for answering the research questions while t-test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 alpha. The study revealed that many students have negative perceptions on attitude towards sex education, and that there was high prevalence of risky sexual behaviours among urban students. The researchers recommended among

others that management of secondary schools as well as policy planners should mount aggressive awareness campaigns on sexuality and sex education to change the perceptions of students as well as reduce the incidences of risky sexual behaviours among secondary schools students.

Keywords: Perceptions, Secondary School Students, Sex Education, Risky Sexual Behaviours, Benue State.

Background to the Study

There is a great deal of confusion about sexuality and sex among adolescents and even some adults. Many people think sexuality means sexual intercourse while some people also think you are not a sexual being and do not have sexual feelings until you actually start having sexual intercourse (Kost, Henshaw, & Carlin, 2010). The sexuality of an individual entails the sexual behaviour; contraceptive-behaviour, pregnancy history, health practices and the sexual knowledge of that individual. In almost every society, pre-marital sexual relationship is regarded as a taboo, while open discussion on sex and sexuality are often suppressed. Consequently, adolescent has to struggle to ensure that his or her behaviour is not at variance with the norms, values and ideational framework of the society in which he or she exists. Aselon,, (2020) notes that since taboos are imposed on sexual matters by culture and religion, secondary school students find it difficult to express their sexual affection or curiosities to their parents. This creates some problems among adolescents as far as understanding sexual matters are concerned.

Adolescents and young adults in particular have been found to be the group at the highest risk for negative health consequences related to sexual risk-taking behaviour, including STIs like for example chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), and the occurrence of unintended pregnancies (Aselon, 2020). Most of these negative health consequences emanate from improper or inadequate sexuality and sex information accessible to the victims at one time or the other in their inquisitive and adventurous lives. Aselon argues that the key markers and indicators of risky sexual behaviour (RSB) include an early age of sexual initiation, inadequate contraception use, promiscuous behaviour and sexual contact with an unknown partner. All these RSBs portend great danger for the victims whose tender lives are susceptible to damaging effects of social mistakes which also pose a great threat to their educational, social, religious, economical and cultural yearnings and aspirations. Shore and Shunu (2017) found out that there is high prevalence of RSBs in the urban areas than the rural areas owing to rapid and devastating urbanization and liberalization prominent in urban areas.

Adolescence is the onset of puberty and the emergence of sexuality which is now considered a normative aspect of development, and is usually equated with danger where adolescents have a proclivity towards experimenting even with their lives. More recent research in the field of adolescent sexuality has addressed not only the physiological processes but also the psychological processes involved in the development of a sexual identity (Udemezue, 2011, Aselon, 2020). This trend has led to an increase in research on the formation of a sexual selfhood in adolescence. For instance, a study by Kalioyu (2018) found that adolescents who sought to increase their self-esteem through sex were also less consistent condom users than those motivated by other reasons, such as desire. Risky sexual behavior is often reported as a

negative emotional experience by women, and is associated with lower psychological wellbeing.

In most countries of the world, evidence indicates that children are entering puberty earlier than decades ago, probably because of improved nutrition although other factors may also be at play (Centre for Diseases Control (2010). Thus, girls today have, on average, their first menstrual period (menarche) earlier than their mothers did and the onset of sperm development in boys is also occurring earlier than in the lives of their fathers. All those changes imply that the period from puberty to the entry into marriage or the formation of a stable union has been increasing in many countries. Moreover, those changes have occurred at the same time as societal norms regarding the practice of sex before marriage have become less stringent and access to effective modern methods of contraception has increased. Consequently, Maonga, Gondwe & Machira (2018) found out that more young people are having sex before they marry and more young people are having several partners before marriage and young women are at higher risk of experiencing unintended premarital pregnancy and both young women and young men are at higher risk of contracting a sexually transmitted infection (STI), including the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).

These outcomes have major negative impacts not only on the lives of the young people concerned, but also in terms of societal costs and should therefore be prevented. As the world becomes more interconnected than ever before, young people the world over are requesting credible and accessible information on sexuality and reproductive health. Shaibu (2020) observes that adolescent want to have their many questions and concerns about sexuality addressed. They need information not only about physiology and a better understanding of the norms that society has set for sexual behaviour, but they also need to acquire the skills necessary to develop healthy relationships and engage in responsible decision-making about sex, especially during adolescence when their emotional development accelerates (Shaibu, 2020).

Sex education is one of the most controversial and politicized aspects of the school curriculum. It engages adults with distinct cultural, religious, political and economic agendas in heated and acrimonious debates in which student voices are largely unheard. Religious fundamentalist coalitions have had considerable success in creating a climate in which even moderate approaches to sex education can appear radical. To them mentioning sex or sex matters is generally regarded as taboo. Parents, teachers and religious leaders are reluctant to discuss even the simplest aspects of the subject with youth. Sule, Akor, Toluhi, Suleima., Akpihi and Ali (2015) argue that teens and adolescents will be curious and they will search for information. If they have nowhere or no reliable sources to go to they will go to more available and unreliable sources. According to Derby, Assefa, Mekonnen and Biadglegne (2018), information regarding sex and sexuality is no longer a preserve of a chosen few. It is evident that young people get (doctored or edited or even incorrect) information about sex and sexuality from a wide range of sources including each other, through the media including advertising, television and magazines as well as leaflets, books and websites (such as www.avert.org) which are intended to be sources of information about sex and sexuality. Some of this will be accurate and some inaccurate. In the views of Odimegwu and Somefun (2017), sex education therefore should include finding out what young people already know, adding to their existing knowledge and correcting

misinformation, because without correct information, young people can put themselves at greater risk.

Sex education is the totality of influences which help boys and girls to understand the part sex plays in life and to recognize its physical, moral, spiritual and social dimensions. Sex refers to one's reproductive system and gender behaviour as male and female. It is gender with the biology, anatomy, and physiology. Omale (2015) observe that neglecting the youth sexual and reproductive health may lead to negative perceptions on the topic culminating into high social and economic costs, both immediately and in the future. Thus, the country's future economic, social, and political progress and stability depends on how well the sexual and reproductive health need of this group is addressed based on their perceptions.

Secondary school students are exposed to a variety of risky sexual behaviours such as early sexual initiation, experiencing, multiple sexual partners, unprotected sex, having sexual intercourse with the same sex, the use of substances like alcohol or drugs and involved in sex, having sex with older age partners and non-regular partners such as commercial sex workers (CSW) owing largely to flawed sex education strategies and improper perceptions by the victims (Udemezue, 2011). Kost, Henshaw and Carlin (2010) found out that male students are more exposed to sexuality and sex education programmes compared to their female counterpart. This was attributed to the out-going nature of male than the more highly guided females.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria today is witnessing, an alarming rate of increase in problems associated with adolescent sexual development and manifestations. Among these problems are sexual perversions or risky behaviours like multiple sex partners, unprotected sex, homosexuality, lesbianism, rape, prostitution and sexual harassment. Incidences of unintended pregnancies that call for induced abortion, high mortality rate among girls, premature pregnancy resulting in Vesico Virginal Fistula (VVF) are some of the effects of the indulgence in the aforementioned risky sex behaviours. Personal discussion with students has revealed that many teenagers in senior secondary schools had confessed to having sexual intercourse before the age of 12 years. Risky sexual behaviours have been observed together with a number of other behaviours including delinquency, substance use, and other indices of sexual activity in general. The researchers speculate that all these anomalies stem from faulty perceptions of senior secondary schools students on sexuality and sex education leading to the prevalence of risky sexual behaviours among them. The problems of this study is to find out the perceptions of secondary schools students in Benue State on sex education as well as the prevalence of risky sexual behaviours among them.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this was to find out:

1. The perceptions of senior secondary school students on sex education.
2. The prevalence of risky sexual behaviours among senior secondary school students.

Research questions

1. What are the perceptions of senior secondary school students on sex education?

2. What is the prevalence of risky sexual behaviours among senior secondary school students?

Research hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in the perceptions of male and female senior secondary school students on sex education.
2. There is no significant difference in the prevalence of risky sexual behaviours among urban-based and rural-based senior secondary school students.

Methodology

The design adopted for this study was descriptive survey design. The area of the study was Katsina-Ala educational zone where you can find the secondary schools. The educational zone comprises Ikurav-Tiev, Tongov and Shitile socio-cultural segments as well as the township which is culturally diverse. The population of the study was all the 7,382 secondary school students from the twenty-five secondary schools in the educational zone. A sample of 300 senior secondary school students was drawn through simple random sampling technique. A structured questionnaire developed by the researchers titled Sex Education among Secondary Schools Questionnaire (SESSQ) was used for data collection. The questionnaire consists of two (2) clusters named Section I and II. Both clusters had ten (10) items each totaling twenty (20) items. Section I contains items which elicits information on the perceptions of secondary schools students on sex education while Section II elicits information on the prevalence of risky sexual behaviours among secondary school students. The instrument was validated by experts in Measurement and Evaluation as well as Science Education. A trial test on 50 secondary schools students outside the sample yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.81.

A four point modified rating scale was used to establish the disparity in the respondents' opinions. Thus, Strongly Agree (SA) =4; Agree (A) =3; Disagree (D) =2; Strongly Disagree (SD) =1 were used by respondents to respond to each item in Cluster I while Frequently (F)=4; Seldom (S)=3; Once (O)=2; Never(N)=1 were used by respondents to respond to Cluster II. A total of 300 copies of the instruments were administered on the respondents by the researchers. The descriptive statistics of Mean Scores were used to answer the research questions. A cut-off point of 2.50 was used for decision making. A Mean Score of 2.50 and above was accepted while a Mean Score of less than 2.50 was not accepted. The t-test statistics was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Presentation of Results

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions senior secondary school students on sex education?

Table 1: Perceptions of secondary school students on sex education

S/ N	ITEM DESCRIPTION	N	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{x}$	Decision
1	Sex education is different from teaching how to engage in sexual intercourse.	300	162	119	8	1	2.71	Accepted

2	School-based sex education would increase the rate of premarital sexual activities.	300	65	49	47	371	2.12	Rejected
3	Sex education is unclean and should not be taught at home, church, school or anywhere else.	300	28	41	69	162	1.60	Rejected
4	Teaching sex education will increase contraceptive use among secondary school students	300	11	22	70	314	1.45	Rejected
5	Teaching sex education in schools will decrease number of sexual partners among secondary school students.	300	168	116	5	11	2.64	Accepted
6	Teaching sex education will encourage sexual immorality among secondary school students.	300	162	64	33	41	2.73	Accepted
7	Students already have adequate information on sex education hence no need for teaching sex education programs in secondary schools.	300	64	23	79	134	1.83	Rejected
8	The main function of school sex education is to equip the students with correct information about sex and sexual behaviours.	300	200	82	6	12	3.62	Accepted
9	Sex education should be taught in single-sex (girls only or boys) only and not mixed-sex classes (girls and boys) together.	300	44	93	132	31	2.43	Rejected
10	Contraceptives use should be taught as part of sex education program.	300	163	122	13	2	2.65	Accepted
Cluster							2.64	Accepted

Table 1 shows that items 1, 5, 6, 8, and 10 had a Mean Score above 2.50. This indicates that respondents accepted those items while the rest of the items with a Mean Score below 2.50 were rejected by the respondents. The Cluster Mean Score was 2.64. This shows that senior secondary schools students have different perceptions on sex education most of which could be adduced to be negative.

Ho1. There is no significant difference in the opinions of male and female senior secondary school students towards sex education.

Table 2: t-test analysis of the difference in the opinion of male and female senior secondary school students towards sex education

Source of Variance	N	x	σ	df	t-cal	P-value	Level of Sig.	decision
Male	158	3.06	1.33	298	64.743	0.00	0.05	Ho
Female	142	2.30	1.72					rejected

(P-value=0.00; P=<0.05; Ho rejected).

Table 2 shows t-test value of 64.743 at 298 df, P=<0.05 and Ho rejected. This result reveals that the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the opinions of male and female senior secondary school students towards sex education is rejected. This implies that male and female students differed significantly in their opinions concerning the inclusion of sex education in the normal school programmes.

Research Question 2: What is the prevalence of risky sexual behaviours among senior secondary school students?

Data related to the above research question is presented on Table 3 overleaf.

Table 3: Prevalence of risky sexual behaviour among senior secondary school students

S/N	ITEM DESCRIPTION	N	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{x}$	Decision
1.	I have just one sex partner at a time.	300	94	49	3	154	1.71	Rejected
2.	Sometimes I engage in sexual activities more than four times a week.	300	98	114	5	83	3.10	Accepted
3.	I have had sex with an unknown partner.	300	61	22	70	147	1.71	Rejected
4.	I have had sexual intercourse with someone I knew for less than one week.	300	85	141	73	1	3.61	Accepted
5.	Sometimes I engage in oral sex	300	142	94	23	41	2.74	Accepted
6.	I had my first sexual experience before the age of sixteen.	300	274	22	2	2	3.71	Accepted
7.	I had on several occasions taken sex-enhancement substances.	300	98	122	24	56	3.59	Accepted
8.	I have never engaged in same-sex sexual behaviour (homosexuality or lesbianism)	300	211	43	23	23	1.89	Rejected
9.	I have had sexual relationship with the opposite sex by force (rape)	300	165	65	12	58	2.51	Accepted
10.	I engage in masturbation or genital stimulation.	300	184	97	3	16	3.62	Accepted
Cluster							2.82	Accepted

Table 3 shows that respondents rejected items 1, 3 and 8 as some the RSBs they have never indulged in. The cluster mean score of 2.82 shows a high prevalence of RSBs among senior secondary schools students.

Ho2. There is no significant difference in the prevalence of risky sexual behaviours among urban-based and rural-based senior secondary school students.

Table 4: t-test on the difference in the prevalence of risky sexual behaviours among urban-based and rural-based senior secondary school students

Source of Variance	N	$\bar{x}$	σ	df	t-cal	P-value	Level of Significance.	Decision
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Urban-based students	162	3.98	1.72	298	214.02	0.00	0.05	Ho rejected
Rural-based students	138	2.08	1.28					

(P-value=0.00; P<0.05; Ho rejected).

Table 4 shows t-test value of 214.02 at 298 df, P=00<0.05 and Ho rejected. This result reveals that the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the prevalence of risky sexual behaviours between urban-based and rural-based senior secondary school students is rejected. The implication of this result is that, the prevalence of risky sexual behaviours between urban-based and rural-based secondary school students is different.

Discussion of Findings

The first finding of this study revealed a difference in the perceptions of male and female senior secondary schools students on sex education. While the male perceived the need for mounting sex education programmes in secondary schools, their female counterparts perceived otherwise. This result agrees with Kost, Henshaw and Carlin (2010) who found out that male students were more exposed to and receptive of sex education programmes than their female counterpart. The result of this study can be accepted because male students seem to be more accessible to diverse media of information on a variety of issues than their female counterparts.

The second finding of this study revealed that there is a high prevalence of risky sexual behaviours among urban-based senior secondary schools students as compared to their rural counterparts. This result agree with Shore and Shunu (2017) who found out that urban-based secondary schools students engaged more in RSBs than their rural-based counterparts. This result is accepted in the study area giving the fact that effect of urbanization and modernization has impacted negatively on cultural values and societal norms giving birth to unprecedented immorality and a high degree of catastrophic prodigality among secondary schools students.

Conclusion

The study has found out that secondary schools students have different and almost negative perceptions on sex education. The source of variance is found to emanate from the female students. Also there is high prevalence of risky sexual behaviours among secondary schools students in the urban areas. All these findings call for proactive intervention programmes to eradicate the scourge of sexual immorality and RSBs found among secondary schools students.

Recommendations

Based on the findings above, the researchers hereby recommend that:

- i. Adequate sex and sexuality education should be provided to senior secondary schools students most especially the female ones so as to change their perceptions on the sex and sexuality which will give rise to healthy sexual behaviours.

- ii. Policy planners and management of senior secondary schools in urban areas should as matter of urgency mount aggressive awareness campaigns on the dangers of RSBs in order to reduce the prevalence of RBSs among the students.

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