



PEER SEXUAL BEHAVIOURS, AS CORRELATE OF SECONDARY SCHOOL ADOLESCENTS' SEXUAL RISKY BEHAVIOURS IN ANAMBRA STATE

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ABSTRACT

Adolescence is an important developmental period when they get involved in sexual activities with their peers, which have the tendency to expose the parties involved to risky sexual behaviours. This study investigated peer sexual behaviours as a correlate of secondary school adolescents' sexually risky behaviours in Anambra State. One research question guided the study, while one null hypothesis was formulated and tested at the 0.05 level of significance. The design for the study was correlational survey research. The sample comprised 1,200 students drawn from a population of 19,048 SS2 adolescents in public secondary schools. A standard instrument, the "Adolescent Sexual Behaviour Index," developed by Hansen, Paskett, and Carter (1999), was used for data collection. The internal consistency reliability coefficient for the instrument was 0.86. Data was collected through direct delivery of the instrument to the respondents and analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The research question was answered using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficients, while the null hypothesis was tested using a t-test for significant correlation. The findings of the study revealed that there is a low positive relationship between sexual behaviour and sexual risk behaviours among public secondary school students in Anambra State. The findings further revealed that the relationship existing between peer sexual behaviour and sexual risk behaviours of secondary school adolescents in Anambra State is significant. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that school management set up school health programmes that can help young people adopt lifelong sexual behaviours that support their health and well-being, including behaviours that can reduce their risk for HIV and other STDs.

KEYWORDS: *peer, sexual behaviours, sexual risky behaviours, adolescents, correlate*

1. INTRODUCTION

Adolescents' engaging in risky sexual activities in schools has become a source of concern to many stakeholders in education. It has become a concern because adolescents who participate in risky sexual behaviors could be at risk for sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV. It is also more of a concern because adolescence is a period of life in which the adolescents tend to witness a lot of physical changes to their bodies, their mental and psychological attitudes, as well as their relationships in society, which seem to make them raise issues about their personalities and how they could fit into the ever-changing world around them.

Adolescence is a period of life with specific health and developmental needs and rights (Babatunde, 2019). Desale, Argaw, and Yalew (2016) noted that it is also a time to develop knowledge and skills, learn to manage emotions and relationships, and acquire attributes and abilities that will be important for enjoying the adolescent years and assuming adult roles. In the context of this study, adolescence is

described as a period during which these young people are expected to undergo major physical, emotional, and social developments, with a significant impact on their sexual and reproductive health behaviors.

According to Laddunuri (2013), sexual behavior is any activity that occurs alone or in a group that causes sexual arousal. Sexual behavior encompasses all actions and reactions related to pleasure seeking. In the view of Envuladu (2016), it also includes actions such as kissing, hugging, and erotic touch, among others, that one considers sexual. These could also include things people do with others like kissing, erotic touch, intercourse, oral sex, anal sex, and manual sexual stimulation.

Sexual behaviors could be healthy or risky. Risky sexual behaviors, as Ali (2017) noted, are any sexual activities that increase the risk of contracting the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), or becoming pregnant. Risky sexual behaviors, according to



Omeje, Ekueme, and Omeje (2013), also include early sexual debut, unprotected sexual activity, inconsistent use of condoms, high-risk partners (injection drug users), survival sex (sex in exchange for money, drugs, food, or shelter), or sex with a partner who has other partners or more than one partner at a time.

Adolescent sexual risk behaviour is defined as any activity that increases the likelihood that an adolescent engaging in sexual activity with another adolescent infected with a sexually transmitted infection will become infected, become pregnant, or cause a partner to become pregnant (Dimbuene, Emina, and Sankoh, 2014). It refers to all those actions, whether online or offline, that put adolescents at risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), unplanned pregnancy, and being in a sexual relationship before they are mature enough to know what makes a healthy relationship. Some of the factors noted to contribute to sexual risk behaviours among adolescents include smoking, alcohol, drug abuse, joblessness, family instability, age, and puberty. On the other hand, adolescents who reported no substance use were found to be the least likely to engage in sexual risk-taking (Potard, Courtois, and Rusch, 2018). Therefore, in this study, risky sexual behaviour is defined as behaviours, whether online or offline, that put adolescents at risk for STIs, unintended pregnancies, and having sex before they are old enough to understand what constitutes a good relationship.

Adolescents' proneness to risky sexual behaviours increases their likelihood of being vulnerable to reproductive health problems like sexually transmitted infections (STIs), unintended pregnancy, and abortion. Globally, as UNICEF (2017) noted, 2.1 million adolescents aged 10–19 years were living with HIV, which is mostly due to risky sexual behaviours compared to older adults. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2017) noted that sexually active adolescents aged 15–19 years seem more at risk of acquiring STDs for a combination of factors like behavioural and cultural reasons. In south-eastern Nigeria alone, 17% of adolescents have STIs and HIV, while 32% have had unsafe abortions (Udigwe, Adogu, and Nwabuez, 2014). Usually at this stage, many changes are experienced concomitantly by these adolescents, including physical maturation, a drive for independence, increased salience of social and peer interactions, and brain development (Blakemore, 20018; Casey, Getz, and Galvan, 2018; and Casey and Hare, 2018). Moreover, sexual behaviours during adolescence may offer social rewards, thus providing greater opportunity for risky sexual behaviour.

Peer sexual behaviours are the sexual practises and activities commonly engaged in among members of a peer group (Agan et al., 2015). There is a diverse array of activities that could be classified as sexual behaviour among adolescents in Nigerian society. These activities include masturbation, oral-genital stimulation, penile-vaginal intercourse, and anal stimulation or anal intercourse. Such sexual behaviours may also include activities to arouse the sexual interest of others or attract partners, such as watching pornography, participating in sexual talks or sex chats on social media, dating, or courtship.

Peer sexual behaviour can be seen as healthy or unhealthy. Healthy sexual behaviours are overt behavioural patterns, actions, and habits that individuals take that affect their health positively and enable them to achieve some developmental tasks in the course of their sexual development. Such actions also help them develop healthy relationships with the opposite sex. Unhealthy behaviours, on the other hand, are overt behavioural patterns, actions, and habits that individuals take that affect their health and general wellness negatively. Such behaviours, whether healthy or unhealthy, may be heavily influenced by peer attitudes towards sexual behaviour.

According to the findings of Asrese and Mekonnen's (2018) study, embedding within higher sexual practice-approving norm networks was found to be more likely to lead to risky sexual behaviours. Similarly, a study that sought to assess correlates of sexual risk behaviours among adolescents reported that alcohol use, sexual activities, and pressure from peers were associated with multiple sexual risk behaviours. Therefore, these adolescents, if not properly monitored and guided, may be negatively influenced to engage in more risky sexual behaviours, which could be destructive and harmful to their lives. This is a problem that needs to be addressed, which has given rise to this research.

Statement of the Problem

Adolescents' exposure to and engagement in risky sexual behaviors presents a social and public health problem (Srahbzu and Tirfeneh, 2020; Teva, Paz, and Buella-Casal, 2016). Adolescents who engage in risky sexual practices may face problems with school dropouts, the potential need for unsafe abortions due to unintended pregnancy, and increased exposure to STIs, including HIV and AIDS. Asrese and Mekonnen (2018) noted that many adolescents are engaging in sexual intercourse in exchange for money or gifts, which is increasing the risk of acquiring STIs. Furthermore, the use of alcohol and drugs among these adolescents, which leads to risky sexual behavior, has caused considerable public concern.

In Anambra State, the situation has become even more worrisome, especially as it has to do with adolescents in secondary schools. In an effort to address the problem, schools, churches, and some concerned organizations have organized seminars and workshops geared towards addressing it, yet the problem has persisted. Scholarly research efforts have also been made. However, most of these studies were conducted outside of Nigeria. Few of the studies done in Nigeria were done outside Anambra State, and none known to this researcher have investigated peer sexual behavior as a correlate of adolescents' sexual risky behavior in Anambra State. The researcher is thus motivated to carry out this study in order to bridge the identified gap in the literature by investigating peer sexual behavior as a correlate of adolescents' sexually risky behaviour in Anambra State, Nigeria.

2. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to investigate peer sexual behaviour as correlate of adolescents' sexual risky behaviour



in Anambra State. Specifically, the study sought to investigate.

Research Question

The following research question was posed to guide study.

1. Relationship between peer sexual behaviour and sexual risky behaviours of secondary school adolescents in Anambra State.

Hypothesis

1. The relationship between peer sexual behaviour and sexual risk behaviours of secondary school adolescents in Anambra State is not significantly.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted using a correlational research design. The design was used because it sought to establish the relationship that exists between variables; peer sexual behaviour and sexual risky behaviour of secondary school adolescents in Anambra State.

4. SAMPLING DESIGN

A total of 1,200 adolescents drawn from a population of 19,048 SS2 adolescents in public secondary schools in Anambra State made up the sample for this study. In selecting the sample for the study, A multi-stage sampling approach was used.

Two research instruments were used in this study to elicit information from secondary school adolescents. The instruments include the Adolescent Sexual Behavior Index (ASBI) developed by Hansen, Paskett, and Carter (1999) and the Sexual Risk Behavior Scale (SRBS) developed by Fino,

Jaspal, Lopes, Wignall, and Bloxsom (2021) but adapted for this study.

The Adolescent Sexual Behaviour Index was developed by Hansen, Paskett, and Carter (1999), but was modified by the researcher to suit the purpose of this study. It is a measure that will be used to index the spectrum of sexual behaviors typical of adolescents within the past 12 months. It is a 14-item instrument with "yes" or "no" response options.

The Sexual Risk Behavior Scale (SRBS) was developed by Fino, Jaspal, Lopes, Wignall, and Bloxsom (2021) but adapted for this study. The SRBS focuses on key sexual risk behaviors among students and contains seven items with four response options of "Never," "Rarely," "Sometimes," and "Always."

5. STATISTICAL DESIGN

All the participants in the study were administered the two research instruments through a direct delivery approach. The data collected for the research questions were analyzed using the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (Pearson *r*), while a t-test for significant correlation was used to test the null hypothesis.

6. RESULTS

In this section, the data collected from the field for this study were analysed and the summaries presented in tables and charts to highlight the findings as follows:

Research Question 1: What is the relationship existing between peer sexual behaviour and sexual risk behaviours of secondary school adolescents in Anambra State?

Table 1: Pearson r on the relationship between peer sexual behaviour and sexual risk behaviours

Variables	N	Peer sexual behaviour	Sexual risk behaviours	Remarks
Peer sexual behaviour	1079	1.00	0.197	Low positive relationship
Sexual risk behaviours	1079	0.197	1.00	

The Pearson's correlation coefficient (*r*) in Table 1 is 0.197. This shows that there is a low positive relationship between sexual behaviour and sexual risk behaviours among public secondary school students in Anambra State.

Testing the Null Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Peer sexual behaviour and sexual risk behaviours of secondary school adolescents in Anambra State is not significantly related

Table 2: Test of Significance of Relationship between Peer sexual behaviour and sexual risk behaviours of secondary school adolescents

Variable	Cal. r	df	Cal. t	P-value	Remark
Peer sexual behaviour	0.197	1077	6.181	0.000	*S

*Significant



Table 2 indicates that at the 0.05 level of significance and 1077 df, the calculated $t = 6.181$ with a P value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05, the first null hypothesis is rejected. The relationship existing between peer sexual behaviour and sexual risk behaviours of secondary school adolescents in Anambra State is significant.

7. DISCUSSIONS

The results from the field of study are discussed:

Findings of the study revealed that there is a low positive relationship between sexual behaviour and sexual risk behaviours among public secondary school students in Anambra State. This shows that any increase in the sexual behaviour of secondary school students will lead to a commensurate increase in the students' sexual risk behaviours. The findings further revealed that the relationship existing between peer sexual behaviour and sexual risk behaviours of secondary school adolescents in Anambra State is significant. This shows that, though the strength of the existing relationship between peer sexual behaviour and sexual risk behaviours of secondary school students is low, it is still statistically considerable. The findings are in agreement with those of previous studies such as Udigwe, Adogu, and Nwabueze (2014); Pengpid and Peltzer (2015); and Chi, Yu, and Winter (2012).

Pengpid and Peltzer (2015) observed that alcohol use, school truancy, older age, and sexual activities were associated with multiple sexual risk behaviours among the study population. On the other hand, Udigwe, Adogu, and Nwabueze (2014) indicated that sexual behaviour where there is incorrect knowledge of the fertile period, low risk perception of HIV, premarital sex, and use of condoms among the respondents were all significantly correlated with an increased chance to engage in risky sexual behaviour.

Among all the factors identified as predicting university students' sexual behaviours, Chi, Yu, and Winter (2012) revealed that having romantic relationship experience had the strongest explanatory power for both males and females. The reason for these findings could be attributed to the notion that dating, especially a steady romantic relationship, is a prominent factor associated with sexual behaviours. Having a boyfriend or girlfriend may increase the opportunity for engaging in intimate and pre-coital behaviours, such as kissing and fondling, which may be followed by sex.

Furthermore, having a boyfriend or girlfriend may expose a student to a new set of friends, who may share more permissive norms about sex; studies such as van de Bongardt, Reitz, Sandfort, and Dekovic (2015) revealed that sexual risk norms among peers (peer sexual behaviour) may play only a small role in adolescents' engagement in risky sexual behaviour. The study thus demonstrated that adolescents whose peer norms encourage sexual activity have an increased likelihood of being sexually active and of being exposed to sexually risky behaviours. The findings have also shown that regardless of the country in which the studies were conducted, the findings suggest that perceptions of peer sexual behaviour are an important correlate of adolescents' sexual risk behaviour across cultures. Notwithstanding this similarity between countries, the outcome seems to have supported the

researcher's expectations of the possible correlation between peer sexual behaviour and adolescent sexual risk behaviours.

8. IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Based on the findings of the study, it was observed that the findings have implications for health education and prevention strategies that aim to promote adolescents' sexual health.

Understanding how adolescents' behavioural goals and choices relate to different peer norms, such as sexual behaviours and pressure to have sex, which correspond with their possible exposure to sexual risk behaviours, is essential to effectively fostering healthy adolescent development.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. School management should set up school health programmes that can help young people adopt lifelong attitudes and sexual behaviours that support their health and well-being, including behaviours that can reduce their risk for HIV and other STDs.
2. The government should endeavour to ensure that resources are directed at various sexual risk behaviour prevention strategies. These include sex education starting in primary school, health counselling facilities at all levels of educational institutions, from primary to tertiary.
3. The school management should initiate prevention programs aimed at widening adolescents' aspirations for the future, increasing social and interpersonal skills, and involving them in more school and community activities may reduce their participation in a variety of deviant activities.

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