

FORMS AND PREVALENCE OF PREMARITAL SEXUAL PRACTICES AMONG ADOLESCENT SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN MAYO-BELWA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF ADAMAWA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Adolescence is a transitional stage in human development that occurs at puberty into adulthood. Contemporarily, is marked with early social and sexual exposures that result to health, psycho-social, and economic problems. An alarming number of adolescents are actively involved in premarital sexual practices, which negatively results to reproductive health challenges. This study determined the forms and prevalence premarital sexual practices among secondary school students in Mayo-Belwa L.G.A, Adamawa State, Nigeria. Quantitative and qualitative method of data collection was adopted for the achievement of the study objectives. Quantitatively, through self-administration of 400 semi-structured and pre-tested questionnaires, a multi-stage sampling technique was used in selecting study participants, and data were analyzed descriptively. Qualitative data was generated through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) among 106 purposively selected participants and analyzed thematically. Among the 395 returned responses' during questionnaire survey, more than a half 206 (52.2%) were females and 189 (47.8%) were males. The prevalence of premarital sexual intercourse had an alarming rate of 273 (69.1%), as 187 (47.3%) had been exposed for about 1–2 times, as 86 (21.8%) had three or more times. 41 (10.4%) had anal sex, 76 (19.2%) had had oral sex, and 305 (77.2%) had ever masturbated. Among the 206 female respondents, 18.0% had practiced genital rubbing. Conclusively, the prevalence of sexual intercourse and masturbation practices are high; couple with other forms of sexual practices. Therefore, the study recommends that there should be sensitization to inculcate abstinence and chastity, provide adolescents with the right decision making skills, and with reproductive health education.

Keywords: Adolescents, Premarital Sex, Prevalence, Sexual Practice, Students

Introduction

Globally, adolescent population is becoming more socially and sexually active much earlier than ever before World Health Organization (WHO) (WHO, 2018), of which Nigeria is not an exception, as many are victims of premarital sexual practices (Viatonu & Oladipupo, 2014). Adolescence is the period of human growth and development that occurs after childhood in to adulthood from 10–19 years of age (WHO, 2015). However, adolescence are not just teenagers but include 10-24 year-olds opined African Population and Health Research Center Policy brief (APHRCPb, 2013; Sowole, 2015). It comprises of a three developmental stages: Early (10–14 years); Middle (15-17 years); and Late adolescence and young adults (18–24 years) (Kar et al., 2015). These adolescents are in a state of rapid physical and psychological change, with curiosity and urge to experience new phenomena, but often unprepared for these sudden changes (WHO, 2018; Elekeh et al., 2021). Similarly, they are exposed to different circumstances like fears, worries, or being confused, sexual desires and feelings of identification, others include earlier onset of puberty, and later age of marriage (Anene et al., 2017).

Contemporarily, urbanization and global communication technology has transformed human sexual attitudes, behaviours and practices (Anene et al., 2017; Benson, 2021) among the young people in the twenty-first century, particularly the adolescents. Perhaps this has explained why adolescence period has thus been described as a period of “storm and stress” (Chihurumnanya et al., 2016). Risky sexual behaviours range from non-coital relationships to premarital early sexual debut, unprotected sexual intercourse and multiple sexual partners putting themselves at high risk of health, economic, psychological and social related problems (Babatunde, 2019).

Premarital sex is a voluntary sexual intercourse among the unmarried persons (Anene et al., 2017). Abdissa et al. (2017) opined that premarital sex is any sexual activity with an opposite sex or with same sex partner prior to marriage. However, many young people see sex as a fun and not a problem to them, especially those who think that they are sexually matured and view it as a response to a natural stimulus (WHO, 2018). Some learn sexual practices in the internet, interactions in their social environment. Adolescents’ premarital sexual practices and behaviours may involve the acts of masturbation and same sex sexual practices (Hagisso & Handiso, 2019). Premarital sexual practices is taboo in almost every human society that regards marriage as the legitimate requirement for sexual permissiveness, and is forbidden especially among adolescents who are considered vulnerable to health-related problems as a result of early sexual practices, (Ajiboye et al., 2014).

Studies in Sub-Saharan Africa have documented high and increasing premarital sexual practices among young people, ranging from 27.6% to 66.6% in Nigeria and 53.9% to nearly 70% in Ethiopia (Chihurumnanya et al. 2016; Anene et al. 2017; Abdissa et al. 2017; Hagisso & Handiso, 2019). Adolescents from different background can influence each other behaviours in different ways either positively or negatively. For instance living in multi-ethnic community, being a migrant, refugees, young offenders, living among people who are Lesbians, Gay, Bisexuals, Trans-gender, and Quire (LGBTQIA+) may influenced others and may likely pose a greater health challenges, including stigma, social exclusion, discrimination and rejection (WHO, 2021). Premarital sexual activities tend to be prevalent among adolescents in secondary school which often leads to teenage pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases and may further leads to dropping out of school. This trend is worrisome and of great concern because it may negatively affect adolescents’ educational, vocational and psycho-social well-being. Our educational facilities do not have guidance and counselors and sex education is not in the school curriculum.

There have been frequent and increasing cases of teenage pregnancy, abortions, unsafe abortions that jeopardizes the psycho-social life of many adolescents. Forceful early marriages, unmarried young people giving birth out of wedlock, self-withdrawal from schools, and exam malpractices are some of the situations among this young population. And there has never been any pro-active intervention to enlighten the youth about their reproductive health, even the available health facilities, adolescents find it difficult have access to it regarding their reproductive health issues.

Statement of the Problem

Out of the global human population of 8 billion, over 3 billion are younger than 25 years of age, 42% of the entire world population, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA, 2022). More than 1.2 billion of these young people are adolescents (WHO, 2021). Nearly 70% of the adolescents' population resides in developing countries. Their attitudes to sexual health continue to change in ways that potentially put their health generally at risk. Similarly, the environment in which young people are growing up places a greater pressure on sex (WHO, 2018). Majority of Nigerian populations are below 25 years of age (63.3%) and about 22.5% between the ages of 10-19 years as at 2014 (Cortez et al., 2016). As many as 20% to 50% of adolescents have initiated and remain sexually active, with the age of first sexual intercourse between 14-18 years across the geographical zones, Demographic and Health Survey data (DHS, 2013) as cited in (Odimegwu & Somefun, 2017). About 20% of teenagers conceive during their first sexual exposure and fifty percent within the first six months of sexual intercourse. The national adolescent fertility rate is 122 births per 1,000 women aged 15–19 years. North-west alone account as high as 171 births per 1000 women aged 15-19 years. With a yearly abortion rate of 25 abortions/1000 women, where more than a quarter of which are adolescents, resulting from unintended pregnancies (WHO, 2014; Odimegwu & Somefun, 2017). These problems mostly occurred as a result of premarital sexual activities among the youthful population.

There have been empirical studies, investigating different components of premarital sex in sub-Saharan Africa and precisely Nigeria, one among it was conducted by Odimegwu and Somefun, (2017) were a Multivariate analysis using a Cox proportional hazard regression model was used to determine the risk factors for early sexual activity among young people (15–24). Results revealed that the median age at first sexual activity was 16 years for females and 17 years for males. A higher number of males (81%) had multiple sexual partners compared to females (35%). The study focused mainly on factors and failed to examine the forms and prevalence of the sexual activities. While Oluwatoyin & Modupe, (2014) investigation on Risky Sexual Behaviours among Secondary School Students in Ibadan North Local Government Area of Oyo State. A simple random sampling technique, semi-structured, self-administered questionnaire used in data collection. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used in comparison. The study revealed that, the majority of the respondents were involved in unprotected sexual intercourse, 85 (45.1%); early sexual debutants, 103 (30.0%). A study determined the Prevalence and Risk Factors of Early Sexual Debut among Secondary School Students. A semi-structured, self-administered questionnaire method used in collect data. Descriptive statistics and Bi-variate analysis involving the use of Chi-square, odd ratio at 95% confidence interval were employed. The study revealed that more than two-thirds, 40 (67.8%) had early sexual debut. The prevalence of early sexual debut was about 11%. The mean age of sexual debut was 13 years; the mean age for early sexual debutants was 11 years. The study concluded that high prevalence of early sexual exposure among the students was worrisome and intervention needed to reduce the devastating effects. However, the research studies highlighted above focused mainly on factors influencing premarital sexual intercourse and its prevalence among adolescents (Odimegwu &

Somefun, 2017; Oluwatoyin & Modupe, 2014). Also observed that the above studies were mainly quantitative, but a study of this nature need a mixed methodology. Geographically, an attempt has not been made to conduct research on premarital sex among adolescents in Mayo-Belwa Local Government Area, Adamawa State of North-East Nigeria. This is the gap in knowledge that this study intends to fill, which leads to the following research questions:-

- i. What is the prevalence of premarital sexual practices among adolescent students in the study area?
- ii. What are the forms of premarital sexual practices among adolescent students in the study area?

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim is to examine the forms and prevalence of premarital sexual practices among adolescent secondary school students in Mayo-Belwa Local Government Area of Adamawa State, Nigeria. The specific objectives were to:

- i. examine the prevalence of premarital sexual practices among the adolescent students in the study area
- ii. identify the forms of premarital sexual practices among the adolescent students in the study area

Materials and Methods

The sample frame of the study is the entire secondary schools students' population in the study area of 13,339, where 6,190 are male and 7,149 female, Secondary Schools students' enrolment records (2022). A descriptive research design survey that adopted both quantitative and qualitative approach of data collection, the determination of sample size was both purposive and simple random sampling technique used in wards selection; the twelve wards in the council area where represented by six wards. The six selected sample wards had students population of 7,401 comprising of 3,518 males and 3,883 females. Yamane (1967) sample size technique was adopted at 5% sampling error assumptions (95% degree of confidence interval), hence, reaching a sample size of 400 participants and 106 FGDs and IDIs participants. The subsequent sample size was determined in stages using simple proportionate Stratified Random Sampling (SRS); because the sample frame and sample population is stratified based on sex, wards, and school sections (junior and senior secondary).

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) was conducted in each co-educational sampled schools, all had twenty male and female FGD participants each, with a total of forty (40) discussants, holds in two sessions, with eight (8) discussants per session and was gender based sessions. Nine (9) FGDs conducted with a total of seventy-two (72) FGD participants, comprising of thirty-two (32) boys and forty (40) girls. While In-Depth Interview (IDI) participants were obtained from the FGDs, who were ready and willing to give more information required for the success of the research. Four (4) interviewees from all the co-educational schools, and two from the single gender (girls) school, where FGDs were conducted, which composed of sixteen (16) boys and eighteen (18) girls, with a total of thirty-four (34).

Letter of introduction was collected from the Initiating Principal and this was submitted to the principals of each school. Official permission was obtained from the authority of the schools used for the study. The aim of the study was explained to the respondents and consent was obtained. Respondents were informed that participation was voluntary and confidentiality was emphasized. The face and content validity of the instrument was ensured by comparing its items with previous similar studies and by matching them with stated objectives, and set research questions and objectives. Besides copies of the prepared questionnaire was made available to the

project supervisor for vetting, review, critiquing, necessary amendment and corrections. A test-retest was carried out among a sampled of 40 adolescents in secondary schools different from the sampled schools and it yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.82. This research work did not receive any grant. The researcher declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding this study. Selection of all valid questionnaires and data therein, encodes it into a computer system and analysis was done descriptively. Responses from FGDs and IDIs were analyzed and transcribe in to thematic content using N Vivo II Pro Software in coding and analyzing.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of the respondents in the study area

| Variables | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------|------------|----------------|
| Sex | | |
| Male | 189 | 47.8 |
| Female | 206 | 52.2 |
| Age Group | | |
| 10-12 | 96 | 24.3 |
| 13-15 | 42 | 10.6 |
| 16-18 | 88 | 22.3 |
| 19-21 | 95 | 24.1 |
| 22-24 | 74 | 18.7 |
| Class | | |
| JSS3 | 87 | 22.0 |
| SS1 | 124 | 31.4 |
| SS2 | 93 | 23.5 |
| SS3 | 91 | 23.0 |
| Nature of School | | |
| Public | 360 | 91.1 |
| Private | 35 | 8.9 |
| Location | | |
| Urban | 141 | 35.7 |
| Rural | 254 | 64.3 |
| Total | 395 | 100.0 |

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Sex is a variable that identify human as being a male or a female, boy or girl and either being a man or a woman, having differences in physiological and biological features regarding reproductive organs, chromosomes, and hormones (Becker et al., 2022). A total of 189 (47.8%) were male as majority of 206 (52.2%) were females, this is in conformity with a study carried in Ebonyi State, where the least respondents were male 154(39.3%) and 238(60.7%) were females

(Chihurumnanya *et al.*, 2016). Age: Age confers human maturity and ability to make decisive decisions about life and sexuality. Ninety-six (24.3%) were between the ages of 10-12 years, while 42 (10.6%) were between 13-15 years old, as 88 (22.3%) were of 16-18 years old. Nearly a quarter 95 (24.1%) are between ages of 19-21 years. Meanwhile, respondents between the ages of 10-12 years old and that of 19-21 years old had almost same proportion rate of 24.3% and 24.1% respectively. Less than one-quarter 74 (18.7%) were between the age group of 22-24 years. Chihurumnanya *et al.* (2016) study carry out in Ebonyo State, considered only the adolescents of 12-23 years old. A class of study is a system where students are group base on the same year of admission in to the school and are taught together to acquire knowledge, skills, moral values and attain other academic responsibilities uniformly. The least proportion of 87 (22.0%) were from JSS3. While SSS 1 had the highest proportion of participants of 124 (31.4%), as 93 (23.5%) were from SSS 2 and 91 (23.0%) were from SSS 3. The study differs with that of Chihurumnanya *et al.* where among the 392 respondents that participated in the study, 161 (41.1%) were from SSS 1, more than a half 228 (58.0%) were from SSS 2, while only a few 3 (0.8%) were from SSS 3 (Chihurumnanya *et al.*, 2016). At onset of every academic session, many students are admitted in to JSS 1 and SSS 1, however, as academic sessions continues the number of students' began to reduce, possibly as a result of withdrawal either due to academic challenges faced by students or self-withdrawals due to socio-economic problems. As sexual features of this adolescent student's pops up, some begins to initiate sexual intimacy and this may pose challenges towards their academic continuity and leaving studies is inevitably. Nature of School: School is generally a place where learners are taught. A combination of qualities that make certain schools different from others, for instance community schools, Government owned schools are different from private schools. 360 (91.1%) respondents were from Public Schools, while the least 35 (8.9%) were from private schools. This is not in conformity with the studies carried by Anene *et al.* where out of the 955 study participants, nearly a half respondents 426 (44.6%) and more than a half 529 (55.4%) attends private schools and public secondary schools respectively (Anene *et al.*, 2017). This posited that the area had a competitive number of private schools with that of public schools, the residents most have value education as legacy for their children, and may see private school a lucrative business, taking chances of the rapid population growth in the area. Location/Place of resident: a geographical area with low population density, small settlements and engages more in primary means of production are refers to as rural areas to include hamlets and villages. Human settlements with high population density with infrastructure of built environment, where secondary and tertiary means of economic activities are mostly engaged are termed urban. A least of 141(35.7%) respondents were from urban area, while 254 (64.3%) were rural residents. However, a study carried out among 955 participants, where urban areas had higher proportion of 53.9% as against rural areas 46.7% (Anene *et al.*, 2017).

Table 2 presents the forms and prevalence of sexual practices in the study area

Table 2 Forms and prevalence of sexual practices among respondents in the Area, 2023

| Form of Sexual Practice | Frequency | Percent |
|---------------------------------|------------|--------------|
| Had Sexual Intercourse | | |
| 1- 2 times | 187 | 47.3 |
| 3 + times | 86 | 21.8 |
| Never Had | 122 | 30.9 |
| Had Anal sex | | |
| 1 - 2 times | 26 | 6.6 |
| 3 + times | 15 | 3.8 |
| Never Had | 354 | 89.6 |
| Had Oral Sex | | |
| 1 - 2 times | 47 | 11.9 |
| 3 + times | 29 | 7.3 |
| Never Had | 319 | 80.8 |
| Ever had Masturbated | | |
| 1- 2 times | 194 | 49.1 |
| 3 + times | 111 | 28.1 |
| Never Had | 90 | 22.8 |
| Total | 395 | 100.0 |
| Ever Had Genital Rubbing | | |
| 1-2 times | 20 | 9.7 |
| 3 + times | 17 | 8.3 |
| Never Had | 169 | 82.0 |
| Total | 206 | 100.0 |

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Sexual Intercourse: The prevalence of premarital sex among the respondents shows that 187(47.3%) reported sexual intercourse between 1-2 times, while 86(21.8%) had sexual intercourse between three and more times. This study indicates that, out of the 395 respondents who participated in the study, 273 (69.1%) had had premarital sexual intercourse. However, nearly forty percent 122(30.9%) reported that they had never indulge in sexual intercourse. The prevalence of premarital sexual intercourse among the respondents is in conformity with the studies conducted in Anambra State, South-East Nigeria, with a prevalence rate of 66.6% (Anene et al., 2017). However, another study reported lower prevalence of 27.6% among 392 respondents (Chihurumnanya et al., 2016). A17 year old SS S 2 female FGD participant said:

“Sir is no longer a new thing that you see our age mates, classmates, roommates, and the unmarried are in serious relationships, having boyfriends, girlfriends”.

Another SS2 female participant, a 19 year old added

“Many of us here are in boyfriends/girlfriends relationship, and are practicing sexual intercourse”.

Anal Sex: The penetration of penile-anus intercourse, may likely result to release of semen by a sexual partner, this may similarly pave way for transfer of infections and diseases among partners, despite the fact that naturally anal intercourse cannot result to pregnancy. A prevalence rate of 26 (6.6%) reported of having had 1–2 times, while 15(3.8%) said they had indulge in anal sexual practice of three or more times and three-quarter 354 (89.6%) never had anal sex. Meanwhile, a total of a quarter (10.4%) confessed of having had anal sexual practice prior to the survey. But three-quarter 354(89.6%) never experience anal sexual intercourse.

Oral Sex: More than a tenth percent 47 (11.9%) acknowledged that they had had oral sexual practice 1– 2 times, while 29 (7.3%) had such sexual practice three or more times. Therefore, a total of 19.3% confessed of having had oral sexual practices prior to the survey. However, three-quarter 319(80.8%) of the respondents reported that they had never experienced oral sex. In Osogbo, Osun State, oral sex contributed 13.3% of the sexual preferences of the sexually active adolescents (Durowade et al., 2017).

Masturbation: Distribution of respondents that had ever had masturbation prior to the survey, indicates that nearly a half 194(49.1%), reported of having had masturbated 1 - 2 times. While 111 (28.1%) had practiced it at least three times as against 90 (22.8%) the least proportion that had never before. This shows that three-quarter 305 (77.2%) of the study participants ever had practiced or indulged in masturbation. This findings is in line with that of Bourne et al. conducted in Caribbean State of Jamaica during Covid-19, the findings indicates that (380) 76.8% of the respondents being sexually active, almost third-fifth 296(59.9%) had practice masturbation (Bourne et al., 2021). This similarly confirmed to what a twenty-one year old male SSS 1 Interviewee who said:

“Some students engage in other sexual practices like touching and playing with self-genital organs, when they desire sex to ease sexual urge”.

Eighteen (18) year old SSS 2 male FGD discussant added:

“Playing with sexual organ is one of the sexual activities that have been on practiced among some students and non-students here, genital robbing, mutual fingering among girls, and touching of genital organ among boys.

Genital to Genital Sexual Practice among Females: Out of the total 206 female students, who responded during the questionnaire survey, three-quarter (82%) had never practice female-with-female genital rubbing, as against the sum least proportion 37 (18%) that had practiced it either 1 - 2 times 20(9.7%), and three and more times 17(8.3%). A nineteen year old, female JSS 3 FGD participant revealed that

“There are other sexual practices which have been on practiced among girls. They do address themselves as daughter or mother. Fingering each other genital organs, having sex with each other, just as opposite sex partners do. Some torches the self-genital organ for sexual desires and satisfaction (Masturbation)”.

This statement is in conformity which showed 37 (18.0%) of dry humping practices among female in the study area. Such sexual behavior or practices is so rare if not even never then, as it is culturally forbidden. This may possibly be the influences of unmonitored used of technological gadgets like cell phones. While, majority of the discussants agree that kissing, hugging, sending and receiving partners’ naked pictures through phone/texting are all forms of sexual practices as its satisfy sexual urged in absence of intercourse. Table 2 is in conformity with what FGD participant ascertained that

“Sexual intercourse is more common among those in to opposite sex relationship. Some do practice other sexual acts. For instance penis to mouth (Oral), penis to anus (anal), liking of partners’ sexual parts or genital organs”

Said 22 year old SSS 3 male participant. During IDI with head boy and head girl of a certain public school; when asked, which sexual practice is more rampant among adolescent students? The head boy responded:

“Yes; many of our students here have boyfriends or girlfriends relationship within and outside this environment; Sexual intercourse is most common, then lesbian among hostel mates, self-masturbation, oral sex, anal sex in that order”

Conclusion

This study identifies forms of premarital sexual practices and its prevalence among the adolescent secondary school students of Mayo-Belwa L.G.A, Adamawa State North-east Nigeria. The study concludes that an overwhelming number of adolescents’ students are involved in different forms of sexual practices like the sexual intercourse, masturbation, oral sex, anal sex, and genital rubbing with a less than quarter among female adolescent students. The study also concludes that a notable number of adolescents involved in premarital sexual intercourse of about two-third and masturbation with very high prevalence of three-quarter rate. The study recommends school-based comprehensive sexuality education to minimize the risky sexual practices and promote safe sexual behaviours among secondary school adolescents in Mayo-Belwa L.G.A, of Adamawa State.

Recommendations

1. There is an urgent need for sensitization to enlighten adolescents’ students to reduce risks of engaging in to premarital sexual practices. Stakeholders too should be sensitized about adolescents’ sexuality, so that they can be more informed and involved in inculcating them right.
2. Comprehensive sexuality education, incorporating cultural and religious teachings, is hereby recommended in promoting healthy decision-making skills among adolescence age population.

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