

BEHAVIOURAL VARIATIONS TOWARDS PREMARITAL SEX AMONG STUDENTS AND ITS EFFECT ON THEIR ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

HELEN CHIBUNDU ASITA, Ph. D

Department of Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counseling,
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt,
Rivers State.

Abstract

The paper examined the behavioural variations towards premarital sex among students and its effect on their academic performance. The paper found that individuals, family and peer characteristics had the main effects on premarital sex. Despite strong religious, social and cultural taboos, university students in Nigeria are not only involved in premarital sex but also in risky sexual behavior. Young people are exposed to health hazards due to their sexual behavior; hence sex education should be provided. School or university-based sexuality education could benefit even out-of-school youths, because their partners often are students. The qualitative research method was adopted in the course of writing this paper. From the findings of the paper, it was revealed that gender, age group, marital status and knowledge of premarital sex are factors that contribute to behavioural differences in premarital sex among university students. The paper recommended for parents to be included in eradicating premarital sex among student if not for anything but for the sake of the student's health as parents are the most powerful socializing agents in the lives of young people.

Keywords: Pre-marital sex, students and academic performance

Introduction

The foundation of any society is the youth. Students of tertiary institutions form part of this group and have the human right to exercise their sexuality. According to (Awoke, Mekonnen,&Daniel2016) neglecting

the sexual and reproductive health of youths leads to high social and economic crisis. Premarital sexual activities among youths now appear to be a reality that cannot be ignored. Sexual activities among undergraduate students have been reported to be increasing worldwide. Several studies in Sub-Saharan Africa have documented high and increasing premarital sexual activities among undergraduates (Okonkwo & Eze, 2011).

Fikadu and Fikadu (2010) opined that throughout the human history and in almost every society and culture across the globe, there exists the mutual sexual attraction between sexes, which takes its peak during adolescence. It has its own potential risks in the form of social, demographic, economic and health implications. Currently, in many societies, undergraduates, unmarried, single youths are sexually more active than what is commonly realized. Undergraduates also maintain sexual relationships, even though cultural and religious values do not permit this. In developing countries where higher education is dramatically expanding, it is important to understand the force that influences youth education and how these forces interlink to the universities (Dennis, Peter & Peter 2012). Globally, sexuality and sexual behaviors are of great concern with the age group of 15 - 24 years (Alamrew, 2013).

Concept of Premarital Sex

According to (Finer, 2013), premarital sex is sexual activity practiced by people who are unmarried. Historically, premarital sex was considered a moral issue which was taboo in many cultures and considered a sin by a number of religions.

Allen (2009) described premarital sex as sexual relations between two people prior to marrying each other. The term is also referred to as fornication especially by different religious groups, which had negative connotations. Ahrold and Meston (2010) highlighted that premarital sex refers to any sexual relations a person has prior to marriage and removing the emphasis on the relationship of the people involved. This definition included any sex between individuals whether they intend to get married on a further date or the sexual relation is between people who are uninterested in getting married to each other.

Baumeister and Mendoza (2011) cited alternative terms for premarital sex, including non-marital sex (which overlaps with adultery), youthful sex, adolescent sex, and young-adult sex. Treffers (2013) noted that among undergraduate students, engaging in premarital sex is tied to a lot of factors which include family background, environmental factors, peer pressure, level of sex education and a lot other factors which may vary from one society to another. Despite the vigorous campaign against indiscriminate sexual activities as well as the cultural and religious values attached to sex after marriage, people particularly youths, have continued to intensify their interest in sexual activities; premarital sexual intercourse is common and appears to be on the rise in all regions of the world (Boyd, 2000).

Contributory Factors that Influence Premarital Sex among Students

According to Adewale (2010), contributory factors to premarital sex among undergraduate students include:

Pressure: Pressure from parents, friends, peer group, lecturer, boss, future partners. Some men mount pressure physically on female undergraduate students while some female undergraduate students mount pressure on men by dressing to seduce men.

Curiosity: Many undergraduate students have engaged themselves in premarital sex as a result of curiosity. This comes in form of searching for reality; they are not satisfied with what they are being told concerning sex, they want to experience it themselves.

Electronic media: Television, film, radio and video has contributed to the high rate of premarital sex among undergraduate students. What these undergraduate students watch on screen to a very large extent determine their behaviour and character. Greed for money, wealth and position is another cause of premarital sex. According to (Broman, 2007) drug use and demographic factors also influence premarital sex.

Ling (2009) also identified other contributory factors to premarital sex among undergraduate students to include indiscipline, wrong association, ignorance, wrong information, bad parenting, idleness, loneliness and broken homes. Family factors such as the relationship between the parents and adolescents in the area of care, protection and parenting style cannot be

ignored in the study of premarital sex. Family is the first socializing agents that a child comes in contact with, and it goes a long way in defining and determining what the child will be (Moore, Miller, Sugland, Morrison, Giles & Blumenthal 2004).

According to (Mensch, Clark & Anith, 2006), often the variables that are exogenous such as age, pubertal status, school location, living arrangements, measure of friction between the respondents' mother, and father are more influencing.

Problems Associated with Premarital Sex among Students

Nnachi (2013) identified problems associated with premarital sex among undergraduate students to include: Unplanned pregnancy, poor academic achievement, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). An estimated 357 million new infections occur every year with one of 4 STIs: chlamydia, gonorrhoea, syphilis and trichomoniasis (WHO, 2013) and emotional problems arising from feeling of gossip, fear of the unknown and feeling of insecurity.

Behavioural Variations towards Premarital Sex Behaviours among Students

Sexual activity is easily initiated when young people are still physically, emotionally, and cognitively developing while living away from home without family monitoring (Regassa, Chala, & Adeba., 2016; Yip, Zhang, Lam, Lam, Lee, Chan & Fan., 2013). Sexual behavior is limited to marriage. This taboo on sex is particularly more rigid for young women who are traditionally expected to maintain virgin until their first marriage and even to prove their virginity as a part of the marriage ceremony. There are legal and religious punishments in some parts of Nigeria on sexual behaviors out of married life. However, due to new circumstances, higher age at first marriage, more contact with the opposite sex in the society, greater exposure to the worldwide ideas about sex, premarital relationships are becoming more inevitable (Esna-Ashari, 2005).

The school environment provides a setting for sexual interaction between students. Gender, age group, marital status and knowledge of

premarital sex are factors that contribute to attitudinal differences in premarital sex among university students (Thi, Tra & Pham., 2015). There are gender differences in the sexual behaviour of adolescents. Girls are more likely than boys to report pressures from parents and peers to abstain from sex and to mention moral concerns and/or fear of pregnancy or STIs as motivations for postponing sexual initiation while boys are often encouraged by peers or male relatives (including fathers) to have sex to prove their “manhood” (Rani, Figueroa & Ainsle., 2003). Research suggests that males and females express their sexuality differently as they behave differently when engaging in high-risk sexual practices. Males tend to receive more permissiveness from society for premarital sexual activity than females. Men report an earlier age of first sexual intercourse and a higher number of casual sexual partners than women (Petersen and Hyde, 2010). Men are more inclined to engage in sexual practices outside of committed relationships and exhibit less caution concerning the quantity and quality of their sexual partners (Baumeister & Mendoza 2001). A school environment that promotes interactions between different sexes may influence in-school adolescents’ sexual behaviour.

Effects of Premarital Sex on Student’s Academic Performance

The effect of premarital sex on academic performance is too vague because the impact differs from student to student and how the affected student deals with being sexually active. There is however a general consensus that suggest that majority of students who indulge in premarital sex are likely to miss classes, spend more time with boy/man friend more than they would have spent with their books. Also (Schvaneveldt, Miller & Lee 2001) argued that, when greater energy and interest are invested in sexual activity; the drive for academic performance is likely to diminish and that early initiation of sexual intercourse correlates with poor academic performance.

When greater energy and interest were invested in sexual activity the drive for academic performance are likely to diminish; sexually active students may become preoccupied with the present sexual activity (Timothy, 2010), then long term academic goals may have diminished importance; and students premarital sexual behaviours are inherently short term and

unstable therefore, the collapse of intimacy relationships is likely to result in emotional torment and depression, which in turn, affect individual's academic performance and eventually dropouts (Miyakabo, 2013). According to (Stephen & Stephen, 2016), unplanned or premarital pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDs, poor academic performance are typical problems students engaging in sexual activity are likely to encounter.

Conclusion

It is believed that university students are assets of a nation and potential agents to address the gap in the past and on whom the future national development and the entire generation is based. This group of society is on the way of transforming to adulthood with great ambition. Unless appropriate age and institution targeted interventions exist, certain behaviors and acts of the students can place them at greater risk of STI including HIV and unwanted pregnancy. Constant presentation and portrayal of sex outside marriage as normal every day event by the media seems to be a motivational factor to young adults and even adolescent, thereby placing the consequences behinds.

Recommendations

Based on the findings above, the seminar paper recommends as follows:

- 1) It is important to include parents in intervention for student's health as parents are the most powerful socializing agents in the lives of young people, bonding, warmth, closeness and cohesion with family reduce premarital sexual behavior.
- 2) Religions institution should re-strategize on how to instill morality in the youths so that chastity will be maintained.
- 3) The Guidance Counsellors should look for emergency strategies by which the attitudes of university students and even the adult members in the society towards premarital sex can best be changed or amended.

References

- Adewale, S. (2010). *Causes of premarital sex*. Retrieved from http://bisiadewale.com/2010/12/causes_of_premarital_Sex.
- Alamrew, Z., Bedimo, M. & Azage, M. (2013). Risky Sexual Practices and Associated Factors for HIV/AIDS Infection among Private College Students in Bahir Dar City, Northwest Ethiopia. *International Scholarly Research Notices*. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1155/2013/763051>.
- Allen, C. (2009). Peer pressure and teen sex. *Psychology Today*, April, 2009.
- Ahrold, T. K. & Meston, C. M. (2010). Ethnic differences in sexual attitudes of U.S. college students: gender, acculturation, and religiosity factors. *Arch Sex Behaviour*, 39(1), 190–202.
- Awoke, D., Mekonnen, A., Daniel, M. & Fantahun, B. (2016). Risky Sexual Behaviour and Associated Factors among Students of Debre Tabor University, Northwest Ethiopia: A Cross-Sectional Study. *Ethiopia Journal of Health Development*, 30, 11-18.
- Baumeister, R. F. & Mendoza, J.P. (2011). Cultural variations in the sexual marketplace: Gender equality correlates with more sexual activity. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 151(3), 350–60.
- Baumeister, R.P., Catanese, K.R. & Vohs, K.D. (2001). Is there a gender difference in strength of sex drive? Theoretical views, conceptual distinctions and review of relevance evidence. *Personal Soc Psychol Rev*.5:242–73.
- Boyd, A. (2000). *The World's Youth*. Washington D.C: Population Reference Bureau.

- Broman, C. L. (2007). Sexual Risk Behaviour Among Black Adolescents. *Journal of African American Studies*, 11(3), 180-188.
- Dennis, M., Peter, W., Marion, M. & Peter, N. (2012). Sexual Risky Behaviors among the Youth in Kenya. *Medicine Science*, 1, 177-187. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.5455/medscience.2012.01.8019>.
- Esna-Ashari, F. (2005). *Differences in attitudes towards premarital sex: The impact of some demographic and socio-economic factors in a sample of Shiraz City Youth*. Retrieved from <https://iussp2005.princeton.edu/papers/51241>.
- Fikadu, A. & Fikadu, K. (2010). Creating a better future for Ethiopian youth. A Conference on ARH at the David and Lucile Packard Foundation. Bahir Dar, Ethiopia.
- Finer, L. B. (2013). Trends in premarital sex in the United States, 1964–2013. *Public Health Report*, 77, 91-96.
- Ling, P. (2009). Sex and the automobile in the Jazz Age. *History Today*, 39(11), 76-9.
- Mensch, B.S., Clark, W.H. & Anih, D.N. (2006). Premarital sex in Vietnam: Is the current concern with adolescent reproductive health warranted? A paper presented at the Annual General Meeting of the Population Association of American, Atlanta, 9-11th May.
- Miyakabo B. P. (2013). Attitudes and views of teachers towards students sexual relationship in secondary schools in Tanzania. *Academic Research International*, 4(1), 232-241.
- Moore, K.A. Miller, B. C., Sugland, B.W., Morrison, O.R., Giles, D. A & Blumenthal, C. (2004). Beginning too soon: Adolescent sexual behavior, pregnancy and parenthood. *A review of research and interactions*.

- Nnachi, R. O. (2003). Causes, consequences and control of behaviour problems among Nigerian children, in Nnachi, R. O. and Ezeh P.S.E (eds.). (2003). *The behaviour problems of the Nigerian Child*. Awka: The Nigerian Society for Educational Psychologists (NISEP).
- Okonkwo, R. & Eze, I. (2010). Attitude of Nigerian adolescents to premarital sexual behavior: Implications for sex education. *Journal of Counselling*, 1(1), 21-26.
- Petersen, J.L. & Hyde, J.S. (2010). A meta-analytic review of research on gender differences in sexuality, 1993-2007. *Psychol Bull.* 136:21–38.
- Rani, M., Figueroa, M.E. & Ainsle, R. (2003). The psychosocial context of young adult sexual behavior in Nicaragua: Looking through the gender lens. *Int Fam Plan Perspect.* 29:174–81.
- Regassa, T., Chala, D. & Adebaba, E. (2016). Premarital sex in the last twelve months and its predictors among students of Wollega University, Ethiopia. *Ethiopian Journal of Health Sciences*, 26(4):351.
- Schvaneveldt, P. L., Miller, P. C. & Lee, T. R. (2001). Academic goals, achievement and age at first sexual intercourse; longitudinal and bidirectional influences. *Adolescent*, 36(144), 767-788.
- Stephen E. M. & Stephen, E. A. (2016). Perceived factors influencing premarital sexual practice among university students in Niger-Delta University, Bayelsa State, Nigeria. *Canadian Social Science*, 12(11), 79-88.
- Thi, H., Tra, L. & Pham, N.Q.L. (2015b). Current status and some factors related to the sexual behavior of student in PhuTho Medical College. *Journal of Public Health*, 34:49-56.

- Timothy, M. (2010). The influence of sexual relationship on the performance in secondary school students and university students in Dares Salam, Tanzania: The case of Kinondoni district. Dares Salaam; University of Dares Salam. Unpublished M. A Dissertation.
- Treffers, P. E. (2013). Teenage pregnancy, a worldwide problem. *Ned Tijdschr Geneesk* in Dutch and Flemish. 147(47), 2320–5.
- WHO (2013). Sex and youth-misperceptions and risks. *Progress in Reproductive Health Research* 53(1). Retrieved from <http://www.Who.Int/reproductivehealth/hrp/progress/53/news/53/1.en.html>.
- Yip, P. S., Zhang, H., Lam, T.H., Lam, K.F., Lee, A.M., Chan, J. & Fan, S. (2013). Sex knowledge, attitudes, and high-risk sexual behaviors among unmarried youth in Hong Kong. *BMC Public Health*, 13(1):691.