

**STUDENTS ATTITUDE TOWARDS SEX EDUCATION AMONG SENIOR
SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN BEKWARRA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF
CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT: *Morality of the young is of perennial concern to educators throughout the world. As a numerous studies have been conducted and various suggestions have been made in order to educate the young people about their sexual functioning. The study was conducted specifically to find out about attitude towards sex education and their opinions on various sexual issues that are incumbent on development to adulthood sexuality. It was also to establish the need for sex education in schools. A simple random research design was used with a sample size for the study being 200 comprising respondents selected from form two students in eight senior secondary schools in Bekwarra LGA of Cross River State. The schools were obtained from a stratified, purposive and random sampling. The research revealed a number of findings in respect of the about the sexual issues involved in their growth to adulthood. These findings which have significant implications are summarized below. Respondents were overwhelmingly in support of the view that sex education should be introduced in the senior high school curriculum. It was also evident that sex education can be improved in the Senior secondary schools by establishing counseling centers and also by forming virgin clubs in the schools.*

KEY WORDS: sex education, secondary schools, learner, student attitude

INTRODUCTION

According to WHO, Sexuality is a central aspect of being human throughout life and encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviour, practices, and relationships. While sexuality can include all of these dimensions, not all of them are always experienced or expressed. Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, ethical,

legal, historical, religious and spiritual factors (WHO, 2006). Collins (2008), argued that sexuality education encompasses education about all aspects of sexuality including information about family planning, reproduction, body image, sexual orientation, sexual pleasure, values, decision making, communication, dating, relationships, sexually transmitted infections and how to avoid them, control methods. the situation of teenage pregnancy is at an alarming rate as a result of the following factors perceived to be the causes which include curiosity of the adolescence to find out what sex is like, peer group influence, mass media influence while the effects include school dropout, inadequate care for the child born by teenage mother, health problems etc. Effiom and Stella (2019).

Adolescents sexuality has become an issue of controversy between the family, school and the church with each of the agents pointing accusing fingers at each other. Durojaiye (1972), Essen (1994) in their studies revealed that the introduction of sex education in the school curriculum is as a result of parents' refusal to give their adolescents the sexual information they require to help them function well in the society. Parents on their part believe that adolescents' moral decadence is an after effect of what they learn from school either through peer influences or from their teachers who are meant to act as role models. They explained that since adolescents spend more time at school than they do at home, the teaching of moral and ethical values should be effectively thought at school rather than teach sex education. Ofohia, 1991; Omoegun, 2008; Rodriguez, 2001; Ogunjimi, 2009) in their studies also revealed the sexual permissiveness is the result of the technological development experienced within the society. Without any shadow of doubt, education is very important and essential for human beings.

Education shapes human being's lives in positive ways. Education is a human right that should be bestowed on human being exclusively by reason of being human. Therefore, there is a strong link between education and development as was propounded before by many theorists and researchers, the establishment of education is a key in index of development above and beyond this, it is well known that schooling increases productivity, health and reduces negative features of life like child labour as well as empowerment. Effiom, B. E; Undiyaundeye, F. A & Akpama, E. G. (2021).

This school of thought holds the media and entertainment industry responsible for adolescents' moral decadence. Effiom and Ejue (1998), Walker (2004), Akpan (1974), Zabin&Kiragu (1998) and Omoegun (1998), in their various studies affirmed that the consequences of adolescents' permissiveness towards sex are enormous. The consequences range from unwanted pregnancy, illegitimate children; contact sexually transmitted diseases. These researchers affirm that many adolescents meet their untimely death through abortion or AIDS. Some adolescents end up having problems with their reproductive organs as a result of either wrong intake of drugs to forestall premarital pregnancy or contacted STD without timely intervention treatment. factors include absence of parental care and guidance, peer pressure, ignorance on the part of the teenager on sex related issues, financial hardship, low level of education, cultural and religious beliefs, sexual assault and many more. Effiom & Stella (2019).

Esu (1990) & Isangedighi (1990) noted that the teaching of sex education to adolescents has continued to pose as a problem in Nigeria because both literate and illiterate parents share the same cultural and religious beliefs. Both Christian and Islamic religion as well as Cross River State culture forbids the teaching of sexually related matters to adolescents who are not married. These agents; the church and the home believe that it is better for adolescents not to know anything about sex before marriage. Adolescents should not practice what they know nothing about. This study attempted to define sex education; explained the rationale for the introduction of sex education by students and in the school system. Most importantly, the study investigated perception of the introduction of sex education in senior secondary Schools in the Bekwarra Local Government Area of Cross River state.

Adolescence can be described as the period between the latter stage of childhood and early stage of adulthood (HFG, 2004). The World Health Organization (WHO, 2008) suggested adolescence to be a period between the ages 10 and 19 years or the second decade of life. Adolescents, therefore, refer to boys and girls who fall within this age. Sex education is a lifelong process of building a strong foundation for one's sexual health. It includes the course of developing attitudes, beliefs and values and acquiring information, motivation, skills and critical awareness to enhance one's sexual health and avoid negative sexual consequences. Sex education involves more than sexual development and reproductive health; it encompasses interpersonal relationships, affection, intimacy, body image, values and gender roles. Education on sexuality can come from a wide range of sources including home, school, peers, media and religious institutions. Of major importance is the sex education that takes place in the home.

Parents are a child's first source of sexual health learning. Daily occurrences in the home provide opportunities for discussions on sexuality, making parents the primary sex educators of their children (SIECUS 2001). This important role begins in infancy and as children go through each stage of growth and development, parents can provide the vital education and guidance that is needed to make healthy sexual choices.

Research has identified highly effective sex education relation to human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) prevention programs that affects behaviour that achieves positive health impacts. Despite the important role sex education plays in the adolescent life, for many parents all over Africa, one of the challenges in child upbringing is answering a child's question about sex (Kiragu, 2001). Equally, a lot of children find it uncomfortable having a conversation about sex education because the subject is a taboo in most homes. Indeed, students have traditionally not seen the forefront of sexual socialization. The study therefore seeks to investigate students' perception about sex education.

The concept of sex education and its introduction in junior secondary schools has witnessed much controversies and misconception by many teachers, parents, the society and students. The concept of sex education which is sometimes called sexuality education or sex and relationship education attracts a plethora of definitions from different people. According to Frimpong (2010), sex education is "the systematic attempt to promote the healthy awareness in the individual on matters of his/her sexual development, functioning, behavior and attitudes through direct teaching". Similarly, the Sexuality Information and Education

Council of the United States (SIECUS) in Njoku (2008), sees sex education as “a planned process of education that fosters the acquisition of factual information, the formation of positive attitudes, beliefs and values as well as the development of skills to cope with the biological, psychological, socio- cultural, and spiritual aspects of human sexuality’.

From these definitions, it can be deduced that sex education is a deliberate, planned and organized learning experience in the aspect of human sexuality which is intended to equip young people with the requisite skills and adequate knowledge which will enable them to develop positive attitude on sex related issues as well as to take rational decisions in line with societal expectations. It is important to note that sex education was not just incorporated into social studies for knowledge acquisition but to help young people develop attitudes, values, goals and practices that are based on sound knowledge which will enable them to express their sexual and mating impulses in a manner that is socially and ethically acceptable as well as personally satisfying (Abdu 2006 and Okafor in Bozimo and Ikwumelu, 1999).

The concept of sex education in Nigerian schools is not a new concept in Nigeria. Adepoju (2005) and Abdu (2006) postulated that traditional form of sex education and family life education has been in existence where kinship systems, age grade and coming – of – age ceremonies or initiation ceremonies where the youths were tutored about manhood and womanhood. It was purely biological and cultural, while various methods of contraceptives were just kept at the domain of married people and kept secret. Many young people were kept in the dark as they were not importuned to be properly educated on family life and sex education because their training was on “dos and don’t.

Traditionally, sex education was to be given to every child and adolescents by his/her immediate family but these practice has been eroded by the influence of modernization, western civilization, and collapsing family life; thereby leaving the young ones at the mercy of the wider society and other socializing agents who may not give accurate information that can assist the young ones in their transition to adulthood. This vacuum in the life of adolescents is what the school needed to fill through the teaching of sex education in social studies.

The recognition of the above gap as well as the risk in adolescents reproductive health who are prone to unplanned sex, unwanted pregnancy, unsafe abortion, sexual coercion, sexual violence, sexually transmitted infections (STI) and even Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) owing to lack of information or misinformation about the implications of their reproductive behavior and health risks especially from under-age sexual practices and other anti-social practices prompted the Federal government of Nigeria through the National Council on Education (NCE) to incorporate sexuality education into the national school curriculum in 1999 (Onwuzobe and Ekanem, 2009). This became necessary in order to prepare adolescents for their adult roles in line with acceptable societal standard, and to also empower young people to have greater control over their sexuality and reproductive life to their own benefit both socially and economically. It is also a means of safeguarding or protecting the youths against the consequences of sexual ignorance as well as preparing them for responsible life (Njoku, 2008).

Since the family which is the primary agent of socialization where sex education ought to be taught seems not to help the adolescents in this regard, as issues that have to do with sexuality is oftentimes not discussed with them, owing to the belief that keeping them in perpetual ignorance about their sexuality will prevent them from immoral behavior (Abdu, 2006), many adolescents have resorted to confiding in their friends and school mates who often mislead them knowingly or unknowingly (Udemezue, 2011). Apart from their friends, they also source for information from the internet, television, pornographic films and materials which often mislead them and cause more havoc and confusion.

In Nigeria, many studies have been conducted since the introduction of family life and sex education into the school curriculum to ascertain its acceptability and people's perception of it. Within the area of study, a study conducted by Omale (2011) revealed that sex education was actually part of the school curriculum, and that the teachers actually teach it even though the aspect of contraception and social skills were not taught in the area. This study is significant in that it intends to unravel the perception of students towards sex education in the area. Since the status of family life and sex education in the area as well as teachers perception about the content of family life and sex education has been researched into, this present study is therefore tailored towards ascertaining the perception of students who are the major beneficiaries of sex education in the area.

Statement of the problem

The fact that our moral values and ethical orientation have assumed a downward trend is disturbing and calls for an urgent intervention. This issue variously been discussed by different bodies and scholars in Nigeria while the government on its own part, has established various bodies to our ethical orientation. All these attempts, however seem not to provide the adequate panacea to our degrading sexual problems, our society, is still enveloped in dirty immoral developments while our schools are fast becoming fertile grounds to unholy and disgraceful sexual behaviours.

Mdoukonam (2007) in agreement, had with this spade of development noted that moral decadence was fast becoming a social problem in Nigeria as our youths are fast deviating from he accepted standards or norms and that such vices a dishonesty, stealing, lying, premarital sexual activities, drug abuse and other several immoral acts, seems very prevalent in our society. He tagged the present period in a period of moral crisis' which holds danger for the country. The damaging sexual reports about students in the territory and institutions are discouraging and capable of eroding people's confidence in our educational system. Hence, it is in view of this problem therefore, that this research was set out to investigate attitudes towards sex education in Bekwarra Local Government Area of Cross River State

Research Hypothesis

The following research null hypothesis were formulated and used for the study

1. H01: Students attitudes towards premarital sex education is not statistically significant
2. H02: Students attitudes towards sexually transmitted disease not statistically significance
3. H03: Female attitudes towards unwanted pregnancies does not show any significant relationship with the male students

H04: There is no significant differences between male and female attitudes towards sex education.

Presentation of Findings

Table 1: The perceptions of the student's attitudes and knowledge about sex education

Students' knowledge and perception on sexuality practices	SA	A	U	D	SD	TOTAL (100%)
1. Sex education is not given enough emphasis in schools	12 (24%)	31 (62%)	-	3 (6%)	4 (8%)	50 (100%)
2. Are you always satisfied with the sex education given?	2 (4%)	12 (24%)	6 (12%)	14 (28%)	16 (32%)	50 (100%)
3. Have you learnt more about sex education	17 (34%)	13 (26%)	1 (2%)	14 (28%)	5 (10%)	50 (100%)
4. Have you ever discussed sex with your parents, brothers/sisters	4 (8%)	3 (6%)	4 (8%)	23 (46%)	16 (32%)	50 (100%)
5. Sex education is an important aspect of one's life	24 (48%)	23 (46%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)	50 (100%)
6. Sex education is not a waste of time	17 (34%)	18 (36%)	1 (2%)	7 (14%)	7 (14%)	50 (100%)
7. Sex education is overemphasized in the community	8 (16%)	8 (16%)	2 (4%)	14 (28%)	18 (36%)	50 (100%)
8. Parents should not be involved in sexuality education	7 (14%)	7 (14%)	5 (10%)	12 (24%)	19 (38%)	50 (100%)
9. Sex education helps students make informed decisions about sexual behaviour	21 (42%)	15 (30%)	1 (2%)	7 (14%)	6 (12%)	50 (100%)

Table 2: Knowledge of students on contraceptives

STATEMENT	SA	A	U	D	SD	TOTAL
1. Boys are responsible for using contraception	17 (34%)	3 (6%)	3 (6%)	13 (26%)	14 (28%)	50 (100%)
2. Girls are responsible for using contraception	14 (28%)	13 (26%)	3 (6%)	2 (4%)	18 (36%)	50 (100%)
3. Both boys and girls are responsible for using contraception	12 (24%)	14 (28%)	1 (2%)	11 (22%)	12 (24%)	50 (100%)
4. Is good for students carrying condoms	16 (32%)	14 (28%)	6 (12%)	2 (4%)	12 (24%)	50 (100%)
5. Having sex as students brings about crisis pregnancies	23 (46%)	17 (34%)	4 (8%)	4 (8%)	2 (4%)	50 (100%)
6. Do you think that you have enough knowledge about contraceptives	3 (6%)	2 (4%)	6 (12%)	24 (48%)	15 (30%)	50 (100%)
7. It is easy to get contraceptives?	3 (6%)	13 (26%)	18 (36%)	2 (4%)	14 (28%)	50 (100%)
8. You feel happy when going to a doctor, nurse, or pharmacy	7 (14%)	1 (2%)	11 (22%)	17 (34%)	14 (28%)	50 (100%)

DISCUSSION

From Table 2 it is expressed by majority of the respondents that they do not know about contraceptives and hence they would find it difficult to get it. This is in consistent with a research conducted by the World Health Organization (2010) who recommended that sexual education programs include lessons on safer sexual behavior, along with abstinence, rather

than just abstinence should be given to students. According to the American Foundation for AIDS Research (2005) abstinence programs are taught more in the junior high schools in Bekwarra LGA of Cross River State, Nigeria because “no highly effective sex education or HIV prevention education program is eligible for funding because mandates prohibit educating youth about the benefits of condoms and contraception.” Despite this statement, contraceptive use has been shown to lower the rate of pregnancies among teens. It seems important for young people to learn about contraceptives if they decide to engage in sexual behavior because that would help them avoid unintended pregnancies and STDs.

Also Hacker (2000) postulated that teens who choose abstinence want adults to support their decision to refrain from unwanted pregnancies and hence all stakeholders who matters in sex education should educate students on sexuality issues.

The respondents also expressed that contraceptives are used by both girls and boys. This conclusion is consistent with a research conducted by Entonu&Agwale., (2007) who postulated that adolescent males and females who have had sexual intercourse use condoms in their maiden sexual encounter. In addition, consistent contraceptive was used by both males and females respectively with reference to their current relationships. Again from table 4 majority of the respondent indicated that is not good to have sex by students and they would be worried about getting pregnant / impregnating somebody because getting pregnant or impregnated by somebody brings about many problems This is consistent with a study conducted in Bekwarra LGA of Cross River State, Nigeria by Bekwarra LGA of Cross River State, Nigeria Kumi-Kyereme et al, (2000), show that young people are reluctant to discuss sexuality with their parents since they tend to prefer to discuss these issues with their friends, because they feel shy, and also because they may fear physical punishment for discussing sexuality . The fear of physical punishment or blame was even said to deter reporting to parents that unwanted sex had occurred. Various reasons have been advanced for its existence but the basic problem is the persist-ency and the geometric progression of its expansion despite all the efforts that has been made by both government, schools, religious organizations and non – governmental organizations at resolving some identified factors leading to this canker worm in Bekwarra L.G.A Of Cross River State, Nigeria. Effiom & Stella (2019).

Summary

In order to achieve this objective, the study made use of descriptive survey research design by way of administering research questionnaire. The data collected was subjected to statistical analyses so that valid deduction could be made out of it. The first and second objectives was to determine the attitudes and perception of students towards sex education and at the end of the study, majority of the students agreed sexuality education is not given enough emphasis in senior secondary schools of Bekwarra LGA of Cross River State, Nigeria.

Also majority of the students pointed out that they are not satisfied with the sex education given to them at school. Moreover the students agreed that they have learnt more about sex education through their friends (peers)

In addition the students indicated both parents and teachers do not discussed sex education with them and hence it becomes difficult for them to make informed decisions regarding sexual behaviour. They also expressed that sex education is not overemphasized in the community. Also the students expressed that sex education is very important in one's life and hence is not waste of time to study it by students. Furthermore the respondents agreed that parents and teachers must be involved in sex education so that they help students to make informed decisions about sexual behavior. The study found differences in the views and perceptions of students towards sex education. The third objective was to determine the challenges students faced in assessing information on sex education. The study found that the students lack information on the following :

1. lack knowledge on sexual relationships and their outcomes to life of a student
2. To concentrate on studies rather than involving in sexual relationships
3. The right and appropriate time for healthy reproduction
4. The advantages and disadvantages of sexual relationships at their teen ages
5. Parents do not give support to their children in time they face sexual related problems

All the above views was expressed by students that they are not given information on by parents, teachers, churches and family members and hence it has been a challenge for students to get a lot of information about sex education in order to make an informed decisions about sexuality.

The third objective was to determine the nature of sex education information needed by students

The study found that majority of students in junior high schools in Bekwarra LGA of Cross River State, Nigeria they do not know about contraceptives and hence they would find it difficult to get it. This is in consistent with a research conducted by the World Health Organization (2010) who recommended that sexual education programs include lessons on safer sexual behavior, along with abstinence, rather than just abstinence should be given to students.

According to the American Foundation for AIDS Research (2005) abstinence programs are taught more in the junior high schools in Bekwarra LGA of Cross River State, Nigeria because "no highly effective sex education or HIV prevention education program is eligible for funding because mandates prohibit educating youth about the benefits of condoms and contraception." Despite this statement, contraceptive use has been shown to lower the rate of pregnancies among teens. It seems important for young people to learn about contraceptives if they decide to engage in sexual behavior because that would help them avoid unintended pregnancies and STDs.

Also Hacker (2000) postulated that teens who choose abstinence want adults to support their decision to refrain from unwanted pregnancies and hence all stakeholders who matters in sex education should educate students on sexuality issues. The respondents also expressed that contraceptives are used by both girls and boys. This conclusion is consistent with a research conducted by Entonu & Agwale., (2007) who postulated that adolescent males and females

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The study also found that is not good to have sex by students and they would be worried about getting pregnant / impregnating somebody because getting pregnant or impregnated by somebody brings about many problems This is consistent with a study conducted in Bekwarra LGA of Cross River State, Nigeria by Bekwarra LGA of Cross River State, Nigeria by Kumi-Kyereme et al, (2000), show that young people are reluctant to discuss sexuality with their parents since they tend to prefer to discuss these issues with their friends, because they feel shy, and also because they may fear physical punishment for discussing sexuality . The fear of physical punishment or blame was even said to deter reporting to parents that unwanted sex had occurred.

CONCLUSIONS

Following from the findings and conclusions of this study, the researcher strongly recommends that the government of Bekwarra LGA of Cross River State, Nigeria, through the Ministry of Education and the Bekwarra LGA of Cross River State, Nigeria Education Service should adjust to the demands of contemporary times and introduce guidance and counseling as imperatives in the education of Bekwarra LGA of Cross River State, Nigeria students especially at the basic school level. Guidance and Counseling units at the various schools should also be well-staffed with people who know what the field is about.

The study conclude from the finding that junior high school students lack knowledge about sex education. Given that, most students are not given parental and teachers'' guidance, they may face difficulties and problems in making sexual decisions due to ignorance, and this may result to conflicts between adolescents and adults on sexual matters. Therefore, the Ministry of Education has to devise some purposive initiatives to train competent teachers to provide sex education as a standalone subject and not incorporating it in academic subjects. Life skills education, counseling skills, and sexual reproductive health education should be given due importance in schools so as to help students. Special sex education programmes are needed in schools so as to familiarize sex and sexuality matters and neutralize the misconceptions and sensitivity held over sex education for students.

Lastly with all the cultural restrictions on public discussions of sexual matters, there is a need for people to change their attitudes towards students'' sexual relationships. These can be achieved only through the provision of effective sex education that caters for all community members in the society. School curriculum for all levels of education (primary, junior and secondary schools as well as teachers'' colleges or universities) in Bekwarra LGA of Cross River State, Nigeria. should include sex education. Community outreach seminars and projects on sex and health education need to be designed and implemented to help achieve this. This can help teachers, parents and the community at large the necessary knowledge and skills to do away with the challenges of sex and sexuality matters encountered by students.

One of the main conclusions that can be drawn from the review of relevant literature is that abstinence plus curriculum s should be the preferred route for schools who wish to provide effective sexuality education with a solid research base. However, there are many roadblocks to this approach, including financial incentives for abstinence only programs and pressure from parents and community members to provide abstinence only education. Students also favor non-conventional teaching techniques, which many teachers may not feel comfortable with, or perceive barriers to providing.

Recommendations

The following are recommendations for schools wishing to provide quality sexuality education as well as for further research:

1. The study recommends that schools provide training for teachers who will be providing sexuality education instruction so teachers have adequate knowledge to draw from without relying too much on instructional materials, as well as addressing their own feelings of embarrassment.
2. The study further recommends that schools engage in some form of evaluation of their sexuality education program. This does not have to be a formal investigation. Students can be asked through informal in-class surveys or other means of providing feedback regarding the instruction they have received. This would allow schools to make changes to make their programs more responsive to the needs of students.
3. It is recommended that schools develop ways to include parents and perhaps the community in providing sexuality education to students. Communication between parents and children regarding sexuality is very important, yet both parents and children often feel uncomfortable discussing the topic with each other. Information for both students and parents regarding communicating about sexuality can be very beneficial to both groups. The community can be included in providing sexuality education by bringing in guest speakers and providing information about local resources available to students. .

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