

Social Environments, Sexual Networking and Adolescents' Heterosexual Relationship In Lagos Metropolis

Dr Bola O. Makinde

*Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education,
University of Lagos, Akoka - Yaba, Lagos.*

Abstract

This study investigated adolescents' social environments, different strategies manipulated for sexual networking and the effect on adolescents' heterosexual relationship in Lagos metropolis. The total sample for the study comprised 80 male and female adolescents randomly selected from two mixed secondary schools. A researcher-made questionnaire on adolescent's sexual-networking was administered to elicit responses from the participants. The data obtained were analysed using the student's t-test to determine the differences between the variables. The findings revealed that sexual networking had a significant effect on adolescents' heterosexual relationship. It further showed that the social environment which is highly proliferated by the markers of modernity and civilization also had a significant effect on adolescents' hetero social relationship. The results of this study point to the need for Guidance Counsellors as well as Marital Counsellors to screen and guide adolescents' general information networking to reduce the prevalence of sexual experimentation. Results also indicated the need for the Government to expand the existing curriculum of sexuality education in the secondary schools.

Keywords: Social Environment; Sexual Networking; Heterosexual Relationships; Sexual Experimentation.

Introduction

Up till the 1980s, many parts of the country maximised the benefits of the typical traditional society wherein almost all the adults participated in bringing up the children, irrespective of familial relationship. Oftentimes, the adults around engaged in unsolicited monitoring of the conversations, gestures and interpersonal relationship among the adolescents using fables, folklores and superstitious beliefs to integrate the cultural values that would promote total abstinence and fidelity. During that period, the incident of adolescents' hetero social and heterosexual relationship was easy to manipulate as the record of offenders was apparently usually small. Naturally, the fear of making the adults angry coupled with limited exposure to the obnoxious technological adjuncts of today made adolescent's mentoring easy. In addition, back at home, the majority of the parents had and spared time to guide the adolescents in each area of development be it social, emotional and cultural.

Beyond the 1980s till date however, the society has witnessed tremendous changes socially, vocationally, emotionally and technologically. These changes have no doubt affected adolescents' attitude toward hetero social behaviours as well as heterosexual relationship. Ariyo (2004) lamented on the increased incidence of adolescent sexual behaviour as well as the decreased age at the first intercourse especially for the girls. The magnitude of the present day hetero social behaviour can be traceable to several factors ranging from the developmental increase in height, size and weight to the high libido, lopsidedness in societal values, modern technology and career orientation of the parents.

Characteristically, the adolescents are under pressure from all sides; in fact, they are in a period of storm and stress. The physical changes in them, the loyalty to their peer group, the desire to have all their physical, financial, emotional and mental needs met give them enough pressure in addition to their susceptibility to sexual experimentation in the midst of adults who are not totally the best role models in the society.

Of special importance is the way and manner with which the adolescents show great loyalty to their peers. Notable among these is their method of passing information to one another. Needless to say however that any information passed in this manner is taken hook line and sinker. Ojo (2006) described the dissemination of information by the adolescents like that of a syndicate as they use 'slangs', coded words, text messages and many others many of which the adults cannot decode, decipher or understand.

It is noteworthy to underscore the secrecy surrounding the whole subject of sex. This has been in place since the creation of Adam and Eve. Most parents do not help matters as they shy away from their duty to provide sexuality education to their adolescents or worse still, give them faulty information. Hence, the adolescents try at all costs to help themselves out by spreading the available information about sexual behaviours to their peers.

Statement of the Problem

During adolescence, the main focus of the adolescents should be on their educational and vocational development. In the Nigerian context, engaging in other irrelevant issues such as getting pregnant while in school automatically means dropping out of school. To avoid this, it stands to reason that many adolescents should be well equipped with precautionary measures to prevent unwanted pregnancies or to abort same if they occur.

Problems occur when the adolescents feel freer with their peers, trust the credulity of the information gathered from them and regard their parents as 'old school/old fashioned'. What is worrisome is that the adolescents are impatient and hasty in decision-making. They do not want to delay 'enjoyment' and 'sexual enjoyment' is no exception. They do all sorts of things to get information across as if there is no other time than now to do so. As soon as they get hold of such information, they look for opportunities to divulge them or at least let the people around them get wind of the acquisition.

It is equally disturbing to note the adolescents' attitude towards virginity and total abstinence. The devastating effect of HIV/AIDS is not dreadful enough to scare the adolescents; it has led to the alarming rate at which the adolescents plunge into sexual relationship at such a tender age. This is why this study investigated the various styles and avenues through which adolescents spread sexual information among peers and the possible consequences.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in the aim to make available the outcome of the study for parents, teachers, guidance counsellors and the adults generally to rise up to the task of dealing with sexual networking to reduce the prevalence of sexual indiscipline among adolescents and youth.

Purpose of the Study

The following are the objectives of this study:

1. To investigate the methods used for networking.
2. To identify the media and the esoteric language used.
3. To assess the acceptance or otherwise of the sexual information passed.
4. To investigate the effect of networking on adolescents' sexual behaviours.

Hypotheses

Three null hypotheses were formulated and tested in this study.

1. There will be no significant difference in the hetero social behaviour of adolescents who are sexually networked and those who are not.
2. There will be no significant difference in the prevalence of heterosexual relationship of adolescents who are networked and those who are not.
3. There will be no significant gender difference in the prevalence of sexual networking among adolescents.

Review of Relevant Literature

Social Environment

The term 'social environment' has been defined in different ways ranging from the composition of the people that make up the environment to their value systems, the media-both print and electronic and the entire infrastructure which the entire populace manipulate to keep life going. Campbell et al (2005) described a social environment as that consisting of people who have the capacity to interact and manifest a degree of vulnerability to the variable under discussion.

Morrison (2004) described adolescents' social environment as that bedevilled with an increased rate of non-commercial premarital sex, an act which daily fuels the risk of HIV/AIDS epidemic. Abe (1996) described the present day Nigeria as one that has been engulfed by various acts of indiscipline among which are alcoholism, stealing, rudeness among others with a great emphasis on sexual indiscipline.

Judging from the socio-cultural lopsidedness in the society, the magnitude of the rot witnessed is therefore not surprising as the adolescent interacts daily with the good, the bad and the ugly of it all.

Sexual Networking

Sexual networking according to Cooksey (2002) refers to the various attempts made by the adolescents to initiate their age groups to sexual activities. Such sexual initiation includes adolescent friendship, teenage dating relationships and experimentation. Zhao et al (2005) lamented on the odds of sexual networking as they may not only predict early sexual intercourse but may also take place outside dating or steady relationships without the knowledge of or the use of the condom.

Tomoloju (2004) described the moral twist in adolescent networking through the print and electronic media that show pornographic pictures, blue films, immoral home videos, adverts, uncensored television programmes like the one showed in 'THE GLAMOUR GIRLS' and the lukewarm attitude of the government to commercial sex hawkers whom the adolescents see daily.

Ariyo (2004) blamed the preponderance of adolescents' heterosexual behaviour on the attraction that manifests from their changes in outlook the implications of which result in social sophistication, interests in sex, love and social awareness. Orubuloye (1991) noted that most female premarital and extramarital sexual activities are on the increase but with a higher level among men than women especially in the urban centres.

The adolescents desire freedom but research has shown that they lack the wherewithal to do without the parents' guidance. They create a separate world for themselves using slangs, coded language, facial expressions, body language and other means that can only be understood by their peer group. Paradoxically, Makinde (2004) described some adolescents as struggling to adjust within intact families with present but not available fathers. In dysfunctional families however, the adolescents suffer neglect and apparent betrayal from their parents who seldom provide for their needs hence they run to their age groups for solace. The newly found comfort and acceptance among the peers have status elevating effect on the adolescents.

Methodology

Design

This study adopted an investigative survey design utilising the simple random sampling technique to select eighty (80) adolescents from two randomly selected secondary schools in Kosofe local government area of Lagos metropolis. Kosofe area was chosen for this study because of the peculiar social environments; apart from the secondary schools therein, there are large market areas and big motor park/garages spotting the local government area.

Instrument

A 20-item researcher made questionnaire titled 'ADONETWORK' was designed using four point Likert scale technique to elicit responses from the subjects. The instrument was divided into three sections: section A contained the biographic data on age, class, social environment especially the availability of some economic structures like eateries, garage, market places and many others. Section B contained items used to gather data on adolescent networking; such items sought for responses on medium used to pass information to their friends and peers; section C contained items that would gather information on whether or not they engage in hetero sexual relationship as a result of the information provided by their peers. Indices of sexual networking were reduced to measurable quantity and variables.

Positive items were scored simply as 'strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree with 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively while the negative items were scored in reverse order. A sample of the items used include the following;

- I do not like to relate with friends of the opposite sex.
- I listen to sex matters on the radio.
- Kissing with my friend of the opposite sex is enough to avoid pregnancy.

Participants

The sample size for this study consists of eighty (80) male and female SS2 students in Kosofe local government area of Lagos. The choice of the study area was based on the social environment of Ketu area which comprises artisans, civil servants, traders and sociological markers of development like cyber cafes, eateries and small hotels. SS2 class was chosen to ensure informed responses to the instrument. All the participants were adolescents between 16 and 19years.

Method of Data Collection

The researcher personally went to the adolescents to distribute the instrument using the occasion of the end of the session social gathering in the study area selected. The researcher waited and collected the questionnaire when they finished.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics was employed to collate data which were later subjected to the students' t-test statistical technique to determine differences between the variables. All the null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Hypothesis one states that there will be no significant difference in hetero social behaviour of adolescents who are networked and those who are not. The hypothesis was tested using t-test for independent samples and the results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Differences between the hetero social behaviours of adolescents due to sexual networking

Group	n	x	sd	df	tcal	tcrit
Those networked	40	10.32	1.82	78	16.01	2.0
Those not networked	40	3.86	1.78			

Subjects mean scores were analysed ($x=10.32$ and 3.86) with a standard deviation of 1.82 and 1.78 respectively. The result was (t-calculated= 16.01 at 0.05 level of significance. This showed that there is a significant difference between the hetero social behaviour of adolescents who are networked and those who are not.

Table 2: Differences in the prevalence of heterosexual relationship due to sexual networking

Group	n	x	sd	df	tcal	tcrit
Those networked	40	10.50	1.45	78	10.60	2.00
Those not networked.	40	6.45	1.93			

This hypothesis states that there would be no significant difference between the prevalence of heterosexual relationship of adolescents who are sexually networked and those who are not. From the table, results showed the critical value or 2.00 is less than the calculated value of 10.60 at 0.05 level of significance. This shows that the hypothesis was rejected.

Table 3: Gender difference in adolescent networking

Group	n	x	sd	df	tcal	tcrit
Male	40	9.98	1.89	78	5.64	2.00
Female	40	7.58	1.92			

This result shows that the hypothesis stating that there would be no gender difference in the prevalence of sexual networking among the adolescents was rejected. The mean for the males was 9.98 with the standard deviation of 1.89 while that of the females were $x=7.58$ and $sd=1.92$ respectively. The calculated t-value was 5.64 as against the table value of 2.00

at 0.05 level of significance. This showed that males engage in more sexual networking than the females.

Discussion

The results of the findings showed that hypothesis one was rejected. This implies that the adolescents that were networked engaged in more hetero social activities than those that were not networked. In hypothesis two, the findings revealed that the prevalence of heterosexual relationship was higher among those who were networked as they engaged in friendship and dating more than those who were not networked. Also in hypothesis three, findings showed that networking was more prevalent among the male adolescents than the females

The results revealed that the psycho-social impact of modernity has brought some obnoxious changes to the sanctity attached to friendship, dating and hetero social relationships. The unlimited attention devoted to career by parents, the over indulgence and over exposure of the adolescents to home videos, cell phones, DSTV stations and the cyber cafes have introduced the adolescents to various avenues of passing social and sexual information. Many parents abandon their responsibilities and spend longer hours of the day chasing material wealth. They do not take time off to discuss with the adolescents the danger in premarital sex, the sexually transmitted diseases like HIV/AIDS, syphilis and gonorrhoea as well as the consequences of premarital sex like abortion, infertility, dropping out of school, single parenting, death and many others.

A major finding of this study is the erroneous modelling of some adult habits like the use body language, whistling, facial expressions, the use of cell phones, text messages, chatting on the internet in addition to the traditional love letter writing and exchange of cards and gifts. This corroborated the earlier findings of Cooksey et al (2002) and Zhao et al (2005) in their analyses of the extensive sexual networking of adolescents who are exposed to unbridled social freedom with little knowledge of the sexually transmitted diseases.

The cluster of the ages of the participants around 17 is symbolic as it marks the beginning of adolescents' need for financial freedom, identity and status. That the female adolescents fall prey to the networking strategies of their male counterparts is in line with Ekanem et al (2005) who posited that school-girls, female hawkers and market women within and outside motor parks were found to be trapped in a strongly woven sexual network of the drivers and the artisans who brandish money daily as their baits.

The study further revealed that beyond the classroom chatterings among the female adolescents about their 'toasters' and would-be lovers who are doing runs for them, their male counterparts busy themselves quietly but strategically about how to capture their 'prey' and perform experiment on them.

Recommendations

The federal government should provide more hands to engage in the monitoring teams that would watch over the proliferation of the dirty methods of sexual networking with a view to safeguarding the adolescents from social contamination. Government should provide more facilities for counsellors for e-mentoring so that all avenues would be utilized to meet the social, emotional and psychological needs of the adolescents. This is essential as many adolescents who claim to be knowledgeable about sexual information receive such through peers, print and electronic media. Government should also provide funds for group guidance and counselling to discuss the pros and cons of friendship, hetero social relationship and enlighten parents on the need to make themselves available to their adolescents for dialogues on many social issues.

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