



Promoting Healthier Living among Adolescent Girls in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Issues of sexual and reproductive health have remained central to the lives of human beings, specifically as they relate to adolescent girls. The increasing incidences of unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortion and the ravaging effects of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV/AIDS have made it imperative for a strategy or approach that will address the root of these problems. The national school curriculum on sexuality, family life and HIV/AIDS education is an approach aimed at addressing these problems. In 2005 the Cross River State Government of Nigeria adopted the policy and implemented the programme whereby teachers were selected and trained across the three directorates of the state and further empowered with sexuality education materials. Students in Junior Secondary Schools, (JSS I & II classes) were selected across the three directorates of Cross River State (Southern, Central and Northern) to start the programme. The focus of this study, therefore, was to examine the level of knowledge, attitude and practice of both student and teachers participating and those not participating in the sexuality education programme. A questionnaire was developed and administered to both students and teachers. 1230 students and 56 teachers participated in the study. Using a number of statistical methods of analysis (group frequency distribution, independent t – test and simple percentages) the finding revealed interesting outcomes, with specific implications for programme implementation and success in Cross River State. In it we have argued that sexuality education is the “de – approach” and if properly implemented would deal with deal the roots of problems associated with reproductive health and rights of adolescents in the society.

INTRODUCTION

The life and strength of any nation depends to a large extent on the health of her adolescents. Adolescents (boys and girls) provide a store of resources (their youthfulness, energies and their other potentials) that are readily available to be tapped by any nation. Specifically, adolescent girls hold great potentials to contribute maximally to the progress and developmental aspirations of any nation, including Nigeria. The contention is that women, and of course, the girl-child comprise more than half of Nigeria human

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resources and are central to the economic as well as to the social wellbeing of the country, the Nigeria development goals cannot be fully reached without participation (2006 National Population Census, Snyder and Tadesse 1995).

Adolescence is generally a time of personal, physiological, social and emotional development. It encompasses learning about and being conscious of human sexuality issues, including various forms of human relationships. It is also a time for the development of self identity and self-esteem. It is a time of learning about and challenging gender roles and power relations concerning social justice and about life options. For many adolescents, it is a time of severe pressure from peers, the media, poverty and other factors to become sexually active whether they want to or not or like it or not.

Similarly, adolescent girls are increasingly faced with sexual and reproductive health problems, such as unsafe abortions, sexually transmitted Infections (STIs) including HIV/AIDS. Jarell (2005) maintains that in most societies women lack information on sexual and reproductive matters, and others have little or no decision making power, but are still subordinate to men. This realization and other factors have made it imperative to develop a model that combines teaching human sexuality, sexual and reproductive health and rights with personal empowerment skill to create a balanced and powerful approach for addressing gender inequalities. The argument is that pairing the educational lessons with life management and leadership skills along with character building skills gives the girl-child the necessary judgement and decision-making tools to transfer what they have learned to their own lives (Madunagu, 2003).

Sexuality education model has been identified as critical in helping young people with the acquisition of adequate and accurate knowledge, skills and responsible attitudes in order to prevent sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV/AIDS, and promote healthy life styles. This study was therefore concerned with achieving the following objectives:

- (i) To find out the depth of curriculum content of sexuality education in selected schools
- (ii) To examine the extent to which sexuality education has impacted on adolescents' knowledge, attitude and practice (KAP)
- (iii) To examine the extent of information and skills acquired by adolescents on sexual health including the prevention of HIV/AIDS.

Methods and Materials

The study adopted the purposive sampling procedure in selecting 3 mixed schools (school with boys and girls) each were selected from three educational directorates of Cross River State, Nigeria. Schools selected from the three directorates were as follows:

- (a) **Southern Educational Directorate**
 - (i) Government secondary School, Ikot Nakanda
 - (ii) Government Science School, Ikot Edem Odo
 - (iii) Community Secondary School, Ikot Ewa

- (b) **Central Educational Directorate**
 - (i) Velos Secondary School, Ikom
 - (ii) Community Secondary School, Okuni
 - (iii) Community Secondary School, Iyamoyong, Obubra

- (c) **Northern Educational Directorate**
 - (i) Army Day Secondary School, Ogoja
 - (ii) St. Thomas's Teacher Training College, Ogoja
 - (iii) Government Science School, Isibori, Ogoja

From these nine schools, 1230 respondents were selected for the study. The vastness of the study area necessitated the use of three field assistants for questionnaires administration, under the strict supervision of the researchers. The researchers were responsible for identifying the different categories of the respondents. The concern was to gather data that would be representative of the whole population. Both participating and non-participating students and teachers, respectively, made the sample study. Initially, the concern was to administer 400 and 50 questionnaires to student and teachers, respectively, in each educational directorate with a total of 1350 and 75 for students and teachers, respectively. This, however, did not work as at the return of the questionnaires only 1230, and 56 were retrieved from both students and teachers, respectively. Data from different categories of participants (respondents) allowed for comparison and measurement of the variables involved in the study.

Data was collected through structured questionnaire. In developing the instrument (questionnaire), the objectives of the study provided the guiding principles, and the concerned was to evaluate the target population against what the students and teachers know, believe and do since the sexuality curriculum was introduced in their schools.

The questionnaire method is made of both open - and close - ended (structured) questions which had fixed alternatives. The questions with fixed alternative were limited to the section on demographic data, while the open questions were used in others. The questions were designed to measure variables relating to issues of sexuality education, particularly, the areas of Knowledge, attitude and practice (KAP).

Some other questions in the questionnaire were designed to elicit specific responses, and these responses to the statement were scored on a four-point Likert-scale thus:

- 1. Strongly agree
- 2. Agree
- 3. Disagree
- 4. Strongly disagree

The scores from the Likert-scale were computed to give the total level of attitude, using grouped frequency distribution. In addition, a number of other statistical methods of analysis were used. These included simple percentages used for describing demographic data; independent t-test used in testing the

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significant difference in the mean scores of two independent groups (participating and non-participating students and teachers).

FINDINGS

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1: Distribution of participating and non-participating students and teachers by age.

Age	Participating students		Non-participating students	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
10 – 12	118	16.62	88	16.92
13 – 15	216	30.42	220	43.31
16 – 18	232	32.68	186	35.77
19 – 21	144	20.28	26	5
Total	710	100.00	520	100.00

Source: Fieldwork by the authors, 2007.

Table 1 shows the distribution of the ages of students (both participating and non-participating) who took part in the study. It shows that majority of those who participated in the study were between the age range of 13 – 15 and 16 – 18 years with 43.31 per cent and 35.77 per cent respectively. This is attributable to the fact that the sexuality programme was mainly designed for students of junior secondary school (JSS) 1 to 3.

Table 2: Distribution of participating and non-participating teachers by age.

Age	Teachers			
	Participating teachers		Non-participating teachers	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
18 – 27	8	20	2	12.5
28 – 37	12	30	10	62.5
38 – 47	16	40	2	12.5
48 and above	4	10	2	12.5
Total	40	100.00	16	100.00

Source: Fieldwork by the authors, 2007

Table 2 shows the distribution of teachers by age. The distribution indicates that most of the teachers who participated in the programme were within the age range of 28 – 37, represented by 62.5 per cent. Others, were 12.5 for ages 18 – 27, 38 – 47 and 48 and above respectively.

The distribution of students according to their classes in Table 3, shows that 13.85 per cent, 22.88 percent and 18.65 per cent are for Junior Secondary School (JSS) I, II and III respectively, while 16.54 per cent, 12.12 per cent and 15.96 per cent are in Senior Secondary (SS) years I, II and III respectively.

Table 3: Distribution of Students by Class.

Age	Students			
	Participating students (PS)		Non-participating (NPS)	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
JSS I	86	12.11	72	13.85
JSS II	129	18.17	119	22.88
JSS III	150	21.12	97	18.65
SS I	148	20.85	86	16.54
SS II	110	15.49	63	12.12
SS III	87	12.25	83	15.96
Total	710	99.99	520	100.00

Source: Fieldwork by the authors, 2007.

Where:

PS = Participating Students

NPS = Non-participating Students

JSS = Junior Secondary School

SS = Senior Secondary

Table 4: Ways sexuality education is relevant.

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances									
		Test for equality of means									
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2 tailed)	Mean Diff.	Std Error	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
										Lower	Upper
Total	Equal variances assumed	5.749	0.17	-1.946	249	.053	-8.95	4.60	-18.00	.11	
	Equal variances not assumed			4.230	1,228	.001	-8.95	2.13	-13.60	-4.29	

Independent samples Test

* P Z.5, df = 1,228, t-critical = 1.98

Source: Fieldwork by the authors, 2007

Where:

n = no. of respondents

X = Mean

SD = Standard deviation

t = t-critical value

df = degree of freedom

Sign = significance level (2-tailed)

The calculated t-value (t = 1.94) is less than the critical t-value (t = 1.98) at 0.5 alpha level and 1.288 degrees of freedom. The relevance of the findings shows that the difference between the two groups of students in terms of their attitudes on sexuality issues is significant. Similarly, when the attitudes of the students were further tested based on items in the questionnaires with the

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total score, using grouped frequency distribution, the results show that there exist a difference the two groups in the study. Specifically, Table 7 shows that a greater percentage of the respondents (more than 39.89 per cent) agree that it is possible to keep friendship with persons of the opposite sex without necessarily asking for sexual intercourse or relationship. In the same Table 7, a greater percentage of the respondents also agree that there is nothing wrong in discussing sexual matters freely.

Table 7: Overall attitude of students toward sexuality education.

S/N	Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
1	It is possible to keep relationship with the opposite sex without sexual relationship	490 (39.84)	261 (21.22)	116 (9.43)	363 (29.51)	1230
2	Sexuality education encourages me to discuss issues freely with people	510 (41.46)	263 (21.38)	121 (9.84)	336 (27.32)	1230
3	I now know that there is nothing bad in discussing sexuality matters freely	496 (40.33)	264 (21.46)	132 (10.73)	338 (27.48)	1230

Source: Fieldwork by the authors, 2007.

The implication of the results in Table 7 shows that a significance difference exists between those who strongly agree and those who don't, sexuality education it has been argued holds the key for the radical transformation of the lives of adolescent girls and boys against the backdrop of the ravaging pandemic of sexuality transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS. The results show signs that a few students are making positive progress on issues being tested.

Teachers' Knowledge, Attitude and Practice on Issues of Sexuality

Though teachers' involvement in the study was low, (56) against the figure of (75), the findings provide significant data that are necessary for certain conclusion to be made.

Table 8: Independent t-test of significant in knowledge, attitude and practice on sexuality education between participating and non-participating teachers.

Class of Teachers	N	Mean (X)	Std. Dev.	Std. Error Mean
Participating Teachers	40	27.08	14.72	3.00
Non-participating Teachers	16	25.82	18.08	5.45

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	Test for equality of means							
			Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2 tailed)	Mean Diff.	Std Error	Lower	Upper
Total	Equal variances assumed	12.39	2.74	.220	33	.827	1.27	5.76	-10.45	12.98
	Equal variances not assumed			.203	16.340	.841	1.27	6.22	-11.91	14.4

Independent samples Test

Where:
 n = no. of respondents
 X = Mean
 SD = Standard deviation
 t = t-critical value
 df = degree of freedom
 Sign = significance level (2-tailed)

Data subjected to independent t-test of analysis as shown in Table 8, shows that the calculated t-value (t = 3.00) is greater than the critical t-value (t = 1.98) at .05 level and 16.340 degrees of freedom. The implication of the results shows that the participating teachers differ markedly from their non-participating teachers in the area of knowledge, attitude and practice on sexuality issues. The reasons for this is not far fetched, the participating teachers have benefited from a series of training, workshops, seminars and other forms of training organized for them.

Analysis of data on specific items in the questionnaires, also elicited positive responses from participating teachers. For instance, the overall attitude of teachers on sexuality education, data in Table 9 using grouped frequency distribution shows that a greater percentage of teachers (more than 60 percent) disagree with the fact that sexuality education does not seem to help in improving relationship between boys and girls.

Table 9: Overall attitude of teachers toward sexuality education.

S/N	Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
1	Sexuality education does not seem to help improved relationship between boys and girls	8 (14.29)	4 (7.14)	10 (17.86)	34 (60.71)	56
2	Sexuality education tends to make girls very cheeky or insulting	9 (16.07)	3 (5.36)	7 (12.50)	37 (66.07)	56
3	I do not think sexuality education needs a different method of teaching from other subjects	112 (19.64)	3 (5.36)	6 (10.71)	36 (64.29)	56

Source: Fieldwork by the authors, 2007.

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Also, in Table 9, respondents disagree that sexuality education make girls to be very rude or insulting, as a greater percentage of (more than 66 percent) hold this view. The same Table 9, shows that a greater percentage of the teachers (more that 64 percent) disagree with the view that sexuality education does not need a different method of teaching from the other subjects. In other words, to handle the different topics of education, teachers in the programme need additional teaching methodology in addition to their conventional methods of teaching.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study has shown that though the respondents (both students and teachers) exhibited low knowledge on issues of sexuality. This is a strong indication that sexuality education as a radical approach to social change is impacting positively on the lives of adolescent girls and others in the society. These findings confirm the contention of Madunagu (2005) and Madunagu, and Olaniran, (2005) on the importance of sexuality education as a vital tool that could transform the wellbeing of the people (adolescent), the people who are the heart of foundation of African Society.

Sexuality education, respondents have argued, has made them to know so many things that hitherto they had not known. Respondents argued that through sexuality education, they have come to the increasing realization that girls and boys make friends and exchange ideas where the other partner is deficient. Such friendship may not necessarily end up in sexual intercourse and jeopardize one's educational pursuit but breed healthier completion and exchange of ideas, as well as mutual respect and gender equality.

Furthermore, adequate knowledge on issues of sexuality, the study shows, can help in the prevention of sexuality transmitted infections such as gonorrhoea, syphilis, herpes, HIV/AIDS. Sufficient knowledge on issues of sexuality can pregnancy significantly. Sexuality education holds the key to adolescent healthy living.

Sexual health is not just the absence of diseases but the ability of adolescent to have access to information, enjoy safer and pleasurable sex life based on self-esteem and that of mutual respect in sexual relations.

Similarly, findings from the study show that against the rampaging spread of sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS, the only strategy at addressing the root of these problems is sexuality education. The strategy or approach arms the learner with the skills, information and decision-making tools to transfer what they have learned to their lives. Adolescents, Madunagu (2003) argues need accurate information and social and emotional support if they are to absorb and act on the values of gender equality. It has to do with factual information about one's sexuality and this of course has no age limit. Sexuality education is relevant to a girl child even from the day she is born. This is also in agreement El-Gilany, Karima, and Sanaa (2005)

and Madunagu (2007), all who have argued in favour for the inclusion of health education in schools particularly as it relates to menstrual hygiene.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS

The study and its findings provide data for us to make the following conclusions. The findings have revealed that on a general note, student level of knowledge, attitude and practice about human sexuality issues, is low. But on a comparative note, the students, participating in sexuality education improved significantly in the level of knowledge, attitude and practice in sexuality issues. The understanding here is that sexuality education if seriously pursued could help transform the knowledge, attitude and practice of our adolescents towards healthier live styles.

The study has also revealed that the level of knowledge, attitude and practice exhibited by the participating teachers is significantly higher, when compared to their non-participating counterparts. The factors responsible for these differences are the number of teachers engaged in the programme.

Finally, the study revealed that there is a strong positive correlation between sexuality education and improved healthier live styles of adolescents. This therefore calls for serious attention from individuals, NGOs and governments at all levels (Local, State and Federal), towards sexuality education in the society. However, for the effective implementation and success of sexuality education programme, we must have an in-built structure of monitoring and evaluation of the curriculum content, knowledge, attitude, practice and programme implementation against set objectives.

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