

KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDE OF SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN ENUGU TO SCHOOL BASED SEX EDUCATION.

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To assess the knowledge and attitude to sex education among secondary school teachers in Enugu.

Materials and Methods: A cross sectional study of 300 teachers drawn from nine randomly selected secondary schools in Enugu metropolis was carried out. Pre-tested self administered structured questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection.

Results: Three hundred teachers, 215 females and 85 males were interviewed. The mean age of the teachers was 38.1 ± 7.5 years. Sixty-nine (23.0%) had adequate knowledge of sex education and 282 (94.0%) approved the inclusion of sex education into the school curriculum. The commonest reason for disapproval of sex education was fear that it would lead to promiscuity amongst the students. Educational status and marital status of the teachers were significant determinants of positive attitude to sex education $p < 0.05$. The most appropriate age to introduce sex education according to the teachers is 11-15 years. Two hundred and thirty eight (79.3%) respondents were of the opinion that teachers needed to be trained to provide sex education to students and 244 (81.3%) admitted that sex education was not in the school curriculum.

Conclusion: Secondary school teachers are in support of provision of sex education to students. However they need training and skills on how to present sex information in a positive manner to achieve the desired goal. There is need to include sex education in the school curriculum.

Key Words: Sex education, knowledge, attitudes, teachers.

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INTRODUCTION

Sex education is a lifelong process of acquiring information and forming attitudes, beliefs and values. It encompasses sexual development, reproductive health, interpersonal relationships, affection, intimacy, body image and gender roles¹. Sex education seeks to assist young people in developing a positive view of sexuality, provides them with information and skills about taking care of their sexual health and helps them make sound decision regarding their reproductive health.

According to research findings^{2,4}, well conducted sex education programmes help delay the age of sexual debut in adolescents and encouraged the correct and consistent use of STD preventive measures in teenagers already sexually active. Teachers have been identified as important agents of sex education for young people^{5,6}. School based sexuality education complements and augments sexuality education children receive from home¹. The school environment also offers young people the opportunity of learning from their teachers who

may be more informed and open to discuss sexuality issues than parents. This study hopes to assess the perception of teachers on sex education with the view of determining the deterrents to effective school based sex education programmes. The results should inform policy makers on possible ways of enhancing teachers' involvement in sex education programmes.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This cross-sectional study was carried out in Enugu Metropolis between April to July in 2002. As at January 2000 the total number of government secondary schools in Enugu metropolis stood at twenty eight and the number of teachers were One thousand six hundred and eight. Sample size determination was done using a standard formula $(pq/q/SE)^2$ where p = prevalence, $q = 100 - p$ and SE = sampling error tolerated⁷. Therefore using a prevalence of 67% from a previous study⁶ and sampling error of 5%, minimum sample size required was 89. A total of three hundred and thirty teachers drawn from nine randomly selected schools out of the twenty eight registered secondary schools in Enugu metropolis were then studied. Approval was sought from the principals of the schools and verbal

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consent obtained from the teachers before recruiting them into the study. Teachers who were present on the days the schools were visited were interviewed till the number required from each school was recruited. Pre- tested structured questionnaires were the instrument of data collection and these were self administered.

The questionnaires had two sections which contained information on bio-data, knowledge and attitude of the teachers towards sex education as well as their involvement in the conduct of sex education.

Medical students trained for the survey assisted in the distribution of the questionnaires. Data was analyzed using EPI-Info version 2002 statistical programme. The Chi-square test was done and statistical significance was considered present when p value was less than 0.05.

RESULTS

This is based on the three hundred questionnaires that were filled and returned out of the three hundred and thirty that were distributed. The response rate was 91%. The age range of the teachers was 25-60 years with a mean of 38.17.5 years. Two hundred and fifteen (71.7%) of the teachers were females and 85 (28.3%) were males. Educational level of the teachers revealed that 111 (37.0%) of them had Diplomas/University degrees while 189 (63.0%) others had post graduate qualification. Two hundred and twenty five (75.0%) teachers were currently married, 57 (19.0%) were single, 13 (4.3%) widowed while 5 (1.7%) were divorced.

Two hundred and ninety nine (99.7%) teachers surveyed were Christians of different denominations while one teacher did not state her religion. One hundred and sixty one (53.7%) were arts teachers while 139 (46.3%) were science teachers. Two hundred and ninety seven (99.0%) teachers had heard about sex education and their sources of information on sex education are shown in Table 1. Majority (27.2%) of them received information on sex education from academic training. Only 69 (23.0%) teachers had adequate knowledge of sex education. Table 2 shows the relationship between the socio-demographic characteristics of the teachers and their knowledge of sex education. Males, Science teachers and teachers who had post graduate qualification had better knowledge of sex education than other teachers. However, this finding was not statistically significant (p>0.05). The attitude of the teachers to sex education of their students was varied with 289 (96.3%) teachers approving the provision of sex education to students and eleven (3.7%) of them being opposed to it. Two hundred and eighty two teachers (94.0%) approved the incorporation of

sex education into the school curriculum. The commonest reasons for disapproval of provision of sex education to students are the belief that it encourages promiscuity (39.1%), it is indecent (34.8%) and that it is not related to academics (26.1%). Table 3 shows the relationship between sociodemographic variables of the teachers and approval to include sex education in the school curriculum. Teachers who were married and who had post graduate qualification were more in support of inclusion of sex education into school curriculum than their counterparts. This finding was statistically significant p < 0.05. The perception of the teachers on the most appropriate person to give sex education is shown in Table 4. Parents and teachers were the most identified groups. The most appropriate age to begin sex education according to the teachers was 11-15 years by 215 (71.7%) teachers, 6-10 years by 58 (19.3%) teachers, 16 years and above by 22 (7.3%) while 3 (1.0%) teachers stated 1-5 years. Majority 189 (64.3%) of the teachers were of the opinion that opposite sexes should be taught together while 105 (35.7%) were against this. The components of sex education approved by the teachers are shown in Table 5. Most (51.6%) of the teachers prefer abstinence based sex education.

One hundred and forty six (48.7%) of the teachers claimed they have ever given some form of sex education to their students. One hundred and eighty (60.0%) teachers felt they were equipped to teach sex education and 238 (79.3%) were of the opinion that teachers need to be trained to provide sex education to their students. Also 56 (18.7%) teachers claimed that sex education is included in the school curriculum.

Table 1: Sources of information on sex education stated by the 300 respondents

Source	Number	Percentage
Academic training	124	27.2
Media	116	25.4
Mother	89	19.5
Friends	70	15.4
Church	40	8.8
Father	17	3.7
Total	456	100.0

Table 2: The comparison of the socio-demographic characteristics and adequate knowledge of sex education amongst the 300 respondents.

Socio-demographic variables	Number studied	Number with adequate knowledge	Percentage	Statistical significance
Sex				
Female	215	43	20.0	Chi square 3.86 p=0.05 DF1 NS
Male	85	26	30.6	
Educational status				
Diploma/University	111	20	18.0	Chi square 2.47 p=0.11 DF 1 NS
Post Graduate	189	49	25.9	
Marital Status				
Single	57	13	22.8	Chi square 2.76 p=0.25 DF 2 NS
Currently married	225	49	21.8	
Divorced/widowed	18	7	38.9	
Subject taught				
Arts	161	33	20.5	Chi square 1.23 p=0.26 DF 1 NS
Science	139	36	25.9	

*NS=Not significant

**DF = degree of freedom

Table 3: The relationship between socio-demographic characteristics and approval to include sex education into school curriculum amongst the 300 teachers surveyed

Socio-demographic variables	Number studied	Number with positive attitude	Percentage	Statistical significance
Sex				
Female	215	201	93.5	Yates corrected Chi square 0.10 p=0.75 DF1 NS
Male	85	81	95.3	
Educational status				
Post Secondary	111	101	91.0	Chi square 62.31 p=0.00 DF 1 significant
Post Graduate	189	181	95.8	
Marital Status				
Single	57	50	87.7	Yates corrected Chi square 10 DF 2 p=0.006 significant
Currently married	225	217	96.4	
Divorced/widowed	18	15	83.3	

Table 4: The opinion of teachers on the most appropriate person to give sex education.

Person	Number	Percentage
Parents	179	48.9
Teachers	112	30.6
Health workers	51	13.9
Church	23	6.3
Peer group	1	0.3
Total	366	100.0

Table 5: The components of sex education approved by the teachers

Components	Number	Percentage
Counseling on how to maintain responsible social relations between the opposite sexes without having sex (abstinence)	116	51.6%
Knowledge and functions of sexual organs of the body	72	32.0%
Knowledge and use of contraceptive methods	37	16.4%
Total	225	100.0%

DISCUSSION

Sex education programme may be the only opportunity of providing accurate information to young people about reproductive health. School based sexuality education complements and augments the sexuality education children receive from their families, religious and community groups. Awareness of sex education was high amongst the teachers but only 69 (23.0%) had adequate knowledge of the subject. This underscores the need to empower this important group so they can play the much expected role of providing sex education to young people. Majority (96.3%) of the teachers approved the teaching of sex education in school. Olukoya et al reported an approval rate of (71.6%) which is comparable, in their study amongst teachers in Lagos, Kaduna and Calabar states of Nigeria⁸. Parents (48.9%), and teachers (30.6%) were identified as the most appropriate individuals to provide sex information to young people according to, the study. This finding is consistent with results from other studies^{5,6,8,9}. However it has been reported that many parents do not and are unable to provide their children with adequate sex education^{9,10}. Thus, teachers remain indispensable in this regard. The teachers who opposed to sex education in school did so out of the belief that it encourages promiscuity, is indecent and unwholesome. Adebajo and Bamgbala¹¹ reported similar findings as barriers to sex education of young people in Lagos. However several studies^{2,3,4,12} have proven that well conducted sex education, delays the age of sexual debut, enables young people avoid risky sexual behaviors and improves negotiation skills of teenagers as regards to sex. Fears that sex education programmes encourage or increase sexual activity appear to be unfounded according to research finding¹². Majority of the teachers identified the most appropriate age to begin sex education as 11-15 years. Other studies^{5,8} also corroborate this finding. The World Health Organization (W.H.O.) however holds a contrary

view. Since sexual debut begins well before 12 years, W.H.O suggests that sex education should begin well before this age so as to provide the growing child the necessary information needed to make informed decisions¹². Most (64.3%) of the teachers feel both sexes should be taught together. Sattler¹³ recommended that the decision on this should be dependent on the topic under consideration. According to him, most topics could be taught together while intimate facts and delicate personal adjustments be reserved for private discussions. On the scope of sex education, majority of the teachers were in favor of abstinence based sex education. Daroch et al¹⁴ has similarly reported preference for abstinence based sex education amongst sexuality education teachers.

Even though 48.7% of teachers claimed they had ever taught sex education to their students, 79.3% were of the opinion that teachers needed to be trained to provide sex education to their students. The need for teachers to be properly trained and empowered with knowledge and skills on how to present sex education in a comfortable, sensitive and positive way that will enhance young people's personal, social and emotional development has also been reported by Whiteside⁹. Fifty-six (18.7%) teachers claimed that sex education is included in the school curriculum. Briggs in Port Harcourt South Eastern Nigeria reported a low value of 29.6% sex education content of the school curriculum¹⁵. Effective school based sex education would require a standardized and uniform curriculum with due regard to cultural, ethnic and religious diversity of Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

The study shows an overwhelming support for the provision of sex education to secondary school students by their teachers. There is need to formulate a standard sex education curriculum for use by secondary schools in Nigeria. Teachers need to be equipped with communication skills so they can

present sex information in a positive manner to these young ones.

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