

Adolescents' Perception Management and Attitudes towards Sex Education in Secondary Schools of Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined adolescents' perception management and attitudes towards sex education in secondary schools in Cross River State, Nigeria. The study was guided by three null hypotheses that were formulated. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. Purposive sampling technique was employed by the researchers in selecting a sample of 1,080 students from a population of 98,915 secondary school students distributed across 271 public secondary schools in Cross River State. Adolescents Perception Management and Attitudes towards Sex Education Questionnaire (APMATSEQ) was used as an instrument for data collection. The null hypotheses were all tested at .05 level of significance using Pearson product moment correlation and multiple regression analyses. Findings from the study revealed that adolescents' counseling and sensitization are significantly related to their attitudes towards sex education respectively and jointly; both variables accounted for 50.3 percent ($R^2 = .503$, Adj. $R^2 = .502$) of the total variance of adolescents' attitudes towards sex education. Findings also revealed that adolescents' counselling and sensitization have a significant composite influence ($F = 544.924$, $p < .05$) on their attitudes towards sex education, with adolescents' counselling being the highest predictor ($\beta = .499$, $t = 19.392$), followed by adolescents' sensitization ($\beta = .299$, $t = 11.632$). Based on the findings, it was recommended amongst others that; professional counselors should be employed by the government to enable secondary schools to have at least three counselors per school in order for schools to effectively manage students' perception.

Keywords: Adolescents, Perception management, Sex education, Adolescents' Perception, Sensitization, Counselling, Attitudes.

Introduction

Adolescence can be described as the period between the later stage of childhood and early stage of adulthood (Health foundations of Ghana, 2004). The World Health Organization (WHO) described adolescence to be the period between the ages of 10 and 17 years or simply, the second decade of life. Adolescents, therefore, refers to boys and girls who fall within the age range specified above. This period is often characterized by rapid development in individuals within this age bracket. Their sex organs also witness rapid growth and development. It is also in this phase of child development that the desire to have sex sets in, as many youths learn from their peers who are already exposed. Thus, it is a very good stage where sexuality education must be introduced.

Sex education simply refers to the systematic attempt to promote health awareness in the individual on matters of their sound development, functioning, and attitude through direct teaching. Sex is a topic which most people would not like to talk about. The Nigerian parents or caregivers believe that; the child will grow to know by natural instincts sex-related issues. They do not see sex and its related ideas as things that should be taught to children. It is often seen in many Nigerian societies as a taboo for children to learn or talk about sex. In the home, it is seen as "wrong" for a child to be present when parents are discussing issues about sex. Consequently, the adolescent child is kept away from sight. Any inquisitive child who ventures to ask questions about sex is morally branded "a bad child," and may even be punished.

As earlier stated, many homes consider discussion of sexual issues as a taboo. In view of this, most parents find it too difficult, awkward and uncomfortable to discuss sex-related issues with their children. Children are condemned when they mention a word referring to some sexual organs or activities. Even the hands of babies are hurt when even they fondle with their sex organs. Due to this, throughout adolescence, many youths in the country learn about sex and sexuality in a variety of ways, in most cases devoid of factual and empirical information and in secrecy (Ndu, 2000).

The major issue is that; when adolescents learn about sex in the wrong ways, it goes a long way to influence the attitudes they will exhibit. As noted by Olubayo-Fatiregun (2012), knowledge and attitude about sex are so vital that people seek it from whatever sources that are available whether good or bad.

When accurate information is not available, people will ignorantly accept misinformation for truth. This is especially noticeable among youths who learn from peers they perceive to be more experienced. The failure of adults to explain sex-related issues openly with young people have several unfortunate consequences such as abortion, harlotry, poor academic performance, unwanted pregnancies, to mention but a few.

Sexual education for adolescents remains a controversial issue in Nigeria and a taboo in many communities. There is a wide-spread fear even amongst the educated parents that discussing sexual issues might stimulate children's sexual interest. Moronkola and Idris (2000) opined that parents are not forthcoming as expected to act as primary sexuality educators for their children. Educational institutions also provide little or no sexuality education for young people and as such, young children are left to the equally uninformed peers as their primary source of information on sex-related issues.

Many factors could be attributed for this laxity including the general belief that sex education will encourage promiscuity among adolescents. With the absence of information from the right or expected sources, these boys/girls may seek information from their peers, films, internet, and mass media. These negative information adolescents receive or view, might drive the adolescents to imitate and put into practice whatever they watch, see, hear or read from other sources. These encourage risky sexual behavior which has serious consequences of unwanted pregnancy, abortion, early marriage, parenthood and contacting Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs). Adolescents are the critical group of people in the society and thus, need protection from the dangers and implication of risky sexual behaviors through early and accurate information on sexual issues. This is very necessary if adolescents are to live and have a successful growth in adulthood (Olubayo-Fatiregun, 2012).

From the foregoing, there is a need to revisit the rationale for sex education so as to re-examine the essence of sex education. According to Bordhan (2014), the primary goal of sex education is the promotion of sexual and reproductive health. He noted that there is a pressing need to raise the levels of information among young people (adolescents) who are embarking on a sexually active life. It can help to prevent physical, psychological, marital and social problems related to sexuality. Sex education would help students to develop a positive attitude towards sex when their queries are satisfied honestly and scientifically. Adolescents have so many myths about their organic development systems, bodily changes, hormonal effects on the reproductive system, chronological maturity and its physiological impacts. When they become anxious, stressful and over pressurized and nobody is there to help, guide and/or to explain different facts of boy-girl relationship to cope with her/his felt sexual urges (Orji & Esimai, 2005), it might result in several unacceptable behaviors like rape, masturbation, and so on.

It is much required to teach adolescents about healthy and positive sexual situations as well as life skills. However, arguments are often raised on what, when and how the message of sex education should be communicated to adolescents. Before taking any step towards sex education among the various parties, it is most essential to study the attitude of teachers, parents, and adolescents towards sex education so that their attitude may be changed if required. It is important to have a positive attitude towards sex education in the school curriculum so that parents and teachers may feel comfortable to impart such education and adolescents can learn about sexuality without hesitation (Bordhan, 2014). It was based on the needs to exhibit positive attitudes towards sex education by adolescents as established by the literature presented above, that provoked the researchers' curiosity to carry out an empirical investigation to determine whether adolescents' perception management have any relationship with their attitudes towards sex education.

Adolescents perception management refers to techniques that are used to shape and enlighten the mindset of adolescents towards certain phenomena they have a negative feeling towards. According to the U.S. Department of defense (2001), perception management is a propaganda technique that involves carefully altering the perceptions of a target audience to suit the objectives of the sponsor. According to one author, deception and disinformation are important ingredients of perception management; getting the target audience to believe whatever the sponsor wants them to believe regardless of the truth or validity of the information being promoted is the rationale behind perception management (Goldman, 2004). This paper focused on counseling and sensitization as adolescents' perception management approaches.

Counseling is a professional activity that utilizes an interpersonal relationship to enable people to develop self-understanding and to make changes in their lives. It involves two people – the counselor and the counselee. The counselor provides help by guiding the client to solve his problems, while the counselee is the one who has the observed problem that needs to be solved. Ajidahun (2013) posits that; sex counseling

is necessary for the development of adolescents. It should be seen as part of the formal education that every child needs to survive in society. To prevent a young adult from ignorance, they need to be told about issues surrounding their growth and developments. This will reduce the number of embarrassments they will receive when they begin to experience developmental changes. Apart from this, the knowledge of sex counseling will help young adults to differentiate fables from realities.

Sensitization simply refers to those strategies employed in ensuring that information concerning a new trend is communicated to usually a large audience, and repeated from time to time. Sensitization is a non-associative learning process in which repeated administration of a stimulus results in the progressive amplification of a response (Shuttleworth, 2010). Kalinga (2010) used the ex-post facto design to determine sources of sex education and its influence on secondary school adolescents' sexual behavior. The study established that the main sources of sex education were peers and mass media. Parents and school were rated among the lowest with sources of sex education.

Several studies have attempted to address the issue of adolescents' attitude towards sex education from various perspective. Many studies have attempted to highlight the role of counselors in promoting sex education awareness; others have examined a comparative analysis of parents and teachers' perception with respect to the teaching of sex education in schools. However, this study is different from existing studies because the focus of this study was on adolescents' perception and how this influence their attitudes towards sex education. Earlier studies were considered quite relevant because they constituted a basis upon which this study was directed. Within the context of Cross River State, there seem to be limited or no study available that have assessed adolescents' perception management and their attitudes towards sex education, with a specific focus on adolescents' counseling and sensitization as variables. It is an attempt to bridge this gap that made conducting this study imminent.

Statement of the problem

The high rate of sexual abuse among adolescents in Cross River State secondary schools shows that many adolescents are not aware of the health implications of their sexual attitudes. This has not only resulted into unwanted pregnancies, but it has also contributed to a high degree of teenage parenthood, illegitimate children, feeling of shame, emotional instability, school drop-out, to mention but a few. In some cases, abortion is attempted or committed leading to bloodshed and sometimes premature death of adolescents. The primary cause of these lamentable circumstances may simply be because adults who are in the position to instruct the youth appear not to be doing so. A growing proportion of youths not only initiates sexual intercourse at early ages but also engage in multiple sexual partners for lack of information and education; hence, a high incidence of illegally induced abortions. Parents, who ought to communicate values about sexual behavior to their teaming population of adolescent, shy away due to several opinion and beliefs.

Related researches were conducted in time past with a view of addressing this issue. Several findings have been uncovered, while recommendations have also been made in these studies. These recommendations do not seem to have been followed. The government spends large budgetary allocations on health annually as a means of improving the livelihoods of citizens. These funds have met bottlenecks of increased death rates with adolescents constituting a significant proportion of this event. Abortion and other sex-related issues such as HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases have emotionally destabilized many adolescents in secondary schools with some even losing their lives through suicide.

It was based on these emerging issues and the persistent problem that prompted the researchers to investigate whether adolescents' perception management have any influence on their attitudes towards sex education. Thus, the problem of this study put in question form is: how does adolescents' perception management influence their attitudes towards sex education? An attempt to provide an answer to this question made this study germane.

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of this study was to examine adolescents' perception management and their attitudes towards sex education in secondary schools of Cross River State, Nigeria. Specifically, this study investigated:

- i. the relationship between adolescents' counseling and their attitudes towards sex education in secondary schools;

- ii. the relationship between adolescents' sensitization and their attitudes towards sex education in secondary schools;
- iii. the composite influence of adolescents' counseling and sensitization on their attitudes towards sex education in secondary schools.

Statement of hypotheses

The null hypotheses below were formulated and tested in the course of the study.

- i. Adolescents' counseling has no significant relationship with their attitudes towards sex education in secondary schools.
- ii. There is no significant relationship between adolescents' sensitization and their attitudes towards sex education in secondary schools.
- iii. Adolescents' counseling and sensitization have no composite influence on their attitudes towards sex education in secondary schools.

Methods

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. Survey design according to Ali (2006) is a descriptive study which seeks or uses the sample data in an investigation to document, describe and explain what is in existence or non-existence on the present status of phenomena being investigated. The population of this study comprised 98,915 secondary school students distributed across 271 public secondary schools in Cross River State. Simple random sampling technique was adopted in selecting a sampling frame of 54 public secondary schools representing 20 percent selection from the available schools. Purposive sampling technique was also employed by the researchers in selecting 20 students from each school in the sampling frame. This resulted in an overall sample of 1,080 students.

Adolescents Perception Management and Attitudes Towards Sex Education Questionnaire (APMATSEQ) was used as an instrument for data collection. It was a 24-items instrument designed by the researchers and was divided into four sections. Section A was designed to collect the respondent's personal data such as sex, age, and class. Section B – D comprised eight-items respectively that were presented on revised four-points Likert-scale. Section B measured adolescents counseling (items 1 – 8), section C measured adolescents' sensitization (items 9 – 16), section D measured adolescents' attitudes towards sex education (items 17 – 24)

Test-retest method was used to determine the reliability estimate of the instrument. A trial test was carried out using 30 students from three public secondary schools in Calabar South Local Government Area who were not part of the study's sample. After two weeks interval, the same respondents were again given the same questionnaires to complete. The scores for both sets of administrations were correlated using Pearson product moment correlation and the analysis yielded reliability values of 0.78, 0.87, and 0.88 respectively for the three variables of this study. By implication, the instrument was internally consistent for measurement.

The questionnaires were administered to the sampled schools respectively by the researchers. Upon completion, the questionnaires were retrieved without any loss. This represented a 100 percent return rate. The data obtained were coded accordingly using person-by-item matrix. Each response was converted to its assigned numeric value. Descriptive statistics was employed in data analysis, while the null hypotheses were all tested at .05 level of significance using Pearson product moment correlation and multiple regression analysis where applicable. The result of the analysis is presented in the following section.

Results and discussion

Hypothesis one (H_0)

Adolescents' counseling has no significant relationship with their attitudes towards sex education in secondary schools. The results from the analysis of data using Pearson product moment correlation statistical technique is presented in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1

Results showing the relationship between adolescents' counseling and their attitudes towards sex education in secondary schools (n = 1,080)

Variables	Mean	SD	r. cal.	Sig.
Adolescents' counseling	19.99	7.266	.664**	.000
Attitude towards sex education	20.05	7.123		

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level; df = 1,078

The results from the analysis of data as presented in Table 1 revealed that there was a moderate positive correlation ($r = .664$) between adolescents' counseling and their attitudes towards sex education. The p-value .000 is less than .05 level of significance at 1,078 degrees of freedom. Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that; adolescents' counseling has a significant relationship with their attitudes towards sex education in secondary schools in Cross River state. Thus, the r-value of .664 obtained was not due by chance.

Hypothesis one (H₀₂)

There is no significant relationship between adolescents' sensitization and their attitudes towards sex education in secondary schools. The result of the from the analysis of data using Pearson product moment correlation statistics is summarized in Table 2.

TABLE 2

Summary of Pearson correlation showing the relationship between adolescents' sensitization and their attitudes towards sex education in secondary schools (n = 1,080).

Variables	Mean	SD	r. cal.	Sig.
Adolescents' sensitization	19.84	7.164	.574**	.000
Attitude towards sex education	20.05	7.123		

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level; df = 1,078

It was revealed in Table 2 that the p-value (.000) is less than .05 level of significance at 1,078 degrees of freedom. Thus, the null hypothesis formulated earlier was rejected while the alternate hypothesis was upheld. This implies that; there is a significant relationship between adolescents' sensitization and their attitudes towards sex education in secondary schools in Cross River State. The results further established that; there was a moderate relationship ($r = .574$) between adolescents' sensitization and their attitudes towards sex education.

Hypothesis one (H₀₃)

Adolescents' counseling and sensitization have no composite influence on their attitudes towards sex education in secondary schools. The result from the analysis of data using multiple regression statistics is presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3

Multiple regression results summary is showing the composite and relative influence of adolescents' counseling and sensitization on their attitudes towards sex education in secondary schools (n = 1,080).

Model	R	R ²	Adj. R ²	SE
1	.709 ^a	.503	.502	5.026
	SS	df	MS	F
Regression	27534.035	2	13767.017	544.924
Residual	27209.462	1077	25.264	
Total	54743.496	1079		
	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients		
	B	SE	Beta	t.
(Constant)	4.367	.503	—	8.673
Adolescents' counselling	.489	.025	.499	19.392
Adolescents' sensitization	.298	.026	.299	11.632

The results presented in Table 3 showed that adolescents' counseling and sensitization have multiple joint correlations ($R = .709$) that is moderate and positive. Both variables could be held accountable for 50.3 percent ($R^2 = .503$, Adj. $R^2 = .502$) of the total variance of adolescents' attitudes towards sex education, with the remaining 49.7 percent due to other variables not included in this study. The results also indicated that the p-value .000 is less than .05 alpha level ($F = 544.924$, $p < .05$). With this result, the null hypothesis was rejected, and the conclusion is that; adolescents' counseling and sensitization have a composite influence on their attitudes towards sex education in secondary schools in Cross River State. Thus, the R and R^2 values obtained were not due by chance.

A cursory look at the relative contributions (coefficients), shows that the p-values for both variables (adolescents' counseling and adolescents' sensitization) are all less than .05 level of significance respectively. Therefore, both variables are statistically significant in predicting adolescents' attitude towards sex education respectively. However, adolescents' counselling was the highest predictor of adolescents' attitudes towards sex education ($\beta = .499$, $t = 19.392$), followed by adolescents' sensitization ($\beta = .299$, $t = 11.632$).

Discussion of results

This study established that adolescents' counseling has a significant relationship with their attitudes towards sex education in secondary schools in Cross River state. This finding implies that an improvement in the counseling of adolescents will improve their attitudes towards sex education. The reason behind this may be because, sex counseling is necessary for the development of adolescents (Ajidahun, 2013). It should be seen as part of the formal education that every child needs to survive in society. The knowledge of sex counseling will help young adults to differentiate fables from realities (Ajidahun, 2013).

The second finding of this study established that; there is a significant relationship between adolescents' sensitization and their attitudes towards sex education in secondary schools. It was observed that adolescents in secondary schools in Cross River State have negative attitudes towards sex education. However, the findings of this study imply that where there is adolescents' sensitization on sex-education, their attitude towards it will improve but not necessarily in the same proportion. It was not within the scope of this study to show how much increase in adolescents' sensitization will lead to what number of increases in their attitudes towards sex education. This finding agrees with Kalinga (2010) whose study revealed that the main sources of sex education were peers and the mass media. Parents and school were rated among the lowest with sources of sex education. This shows that many students may have gotten wrong information from peers and consequently, are unaware about sex-related issues.

This study also established that adolescents' counseling and sensitization have a composite influence on their attitudes towards sex education in secondary schools in Cross River State. Both variables could be held accountable for 50.3 percent of the total variance of their attitudes towards sex education, with the remaining 49.7 percent due to other variables not included in this study. By implication, when these two approaches of students' perception management are jointly used, it will contribute to a significant increase in students' attitudes towards sex education. Both variables are statistically significant in predicting students' attitude towards sex education respectively. However, adolescents' counseling was the highest predictor of students' attitudes towards sex education. Counseling may have had the most influence on adolescents' attitudes towards sex education because of its ability also to resolve sex-related issues that must have already occurred, and which may have put adolescents in emotional distress. The same cannot be said of sensitization which can only be used to provide awareness but may not be effective in addressing issues that some adolescents are facing. Sensitization may have also had a lower influence in relation to counseling because it (sensitization) is also embedded within counseling as it is impossible or impracticable to counsel adolescents without sensitizing them.

Conclusion

Adolescents' perception management in terms of counseling and sensitizations have a significant influence and relationship with their attitudes towards sex education. Adolescents with adequate sensitization and counseling on sex-related matters will demonstrate favorable attitudes towards sex education than those without proper sensitization and/or counseling. Adolescents' counseling and sensitization contribute 50.3 percent to the variance of their attitudes towards sex education. Jointly using both approaches, will contribute to a significant increase in students' attitudes towards sex education.

Between the two variables, adolescents' counseling is the highest predictor of students' attitudes towards sex education.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of this study:

- i. Professional counselors should be employed by the government to enable secondary schools to have at least three counselors per school for effectiveness to be guaranteed. This will enable students with sexual, psychological and psycho-social problems to be adequately catered for.
- ii. Sensitization for adolescents in secondary schools as well as parents should be organized and sustained through continued seminars from time to time.
- iii. Health, as well as experts, should be provided to secondary schools in order to assist adolescents for health checks, and treatment of sexually transmitted infections/disease.
- iv. Sex education should also be integrated into the formal school curriculum at the secondary level of education in order to provide a platform for teachers to communicate the right ideas to students as it concerns sexuality.
- v. Adolescents' sensitization and counseling should be jointly used by secondary school managers as perception management techniques in order to pass vital education to adolescents on sex matters and to help those who are emotionally displaced through misinformation by peers.

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