

Sexual Behaviour of Young People in Etche Local Government Area, Rivers State

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Abstract

Young people in recent times are sexually active than presumed. This study investigated the sexual behaviour of young people in Etche Local Government Area, Rivers State. A cross-sectional descriptive survey design was adopted with a population comprising of 351,200 young people in Etche. The multi-stage sampling procedure was adopted to select a sample size of 400. Data was collected using a semi-structured questionnaire with a reliability coefficient of 0.71. Data collected was analyzed with the aid of Statistical Product for Service Solution (SPSS V-25) using mean, t-test and Pearson Correlation at level of significance of 0.05. The result showed that, the sexual behaviour of youths in Etche Local Government Area were: being around the opposite sex ($\bar{X} = 2.95 \pm 1.23$), keeping a boy or girl friend ($\bar{X} = 2.77 \pm 0.23$), and attracted by sexy clothes ($\bar{X} = 2.63 \pm 1.33$). The result of the study showed that there was a significant difference between the perception of male and female youths on sexual behavior in Etche LGA as $p < 0.05$ ($t\text{-cal} = 2.22$, $df = 391$, $p = 0.02$). It was concluded that, young people in Etche Local Government Area had risky sexual behaviours with the more prevalent sexual behaviours as being around the opposite sex, keeping a boy or girl friend, and attracted by sexy clothes. It was recommended among others that, youth friendly organizations should organize intervention programmes for youths in order to align their sexual behaviours with healthy practices.

Keywords: Behaviour, Etche, Sexual, Young People

Introduction

Young people in recent times are sexually active than presumed even in societies like Nigeria where cultural values glorify premarital sex, young people maintain sexual relationships which makes it imperative to give attention to their sexual behaviour. According to Brain et al., (2016), sexual behaviour is the manner in which humans experience and express their sexuality which is to a large extent a function of the inherited sexual response pattern. More than a quarter of the world population is between the age of 10-24 years, with 86% living in less developed countries of the world including Nigeria. These young people are tomorrow's parents, the reproductive and sexual health decisions they make today may affect the health and wellbeing of their communities and countries in centuries to come.

Public health officials and educators have a longstanding interest in youth sexual behaviour (Okonko et al, 2012). Sexual behaviours include perhaps the most private of acts, yet they are inherent to one of society's major public health challenges, risky sexual behaviour leads to the acquisition and transmission of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). It also refers to how people experience and express themselves as sexual beings and the range of sexual activities that people engage in, including vaginal, oral, anal intercourse and other sexual acts (Maonga et al., 2019). The most affected segment of the population by STI's is the youths. High risk sexual behaviour has been identified as the major risk factor for STIs among young people. Their incomplete social, emotional and psychological development cause them to experiment with risky behaviour, often with little awareness of the dangers associated with them.

These high risk sexual behaviours include unprotected intercourse, multiple sexual partner, a sexual partner with unknown sexual history or high risk sexual practices, mouth-genital contact, early sexual activity, homosexuality etc. one of the concern is the fact that youths do not perceive their high risk status in spite of indulging in these unsafe sexual practices (Kabir et al, 2014). The society harbor youths within the age bracket generally known to be associated with tendency to explore nature particularly sexuality. Many youths therefore engage in sex with partners, including much older ones from within or outside their community whether from peer pressure, fun, obtain advantages or commercial purposes to make ends meet particularly in the light of the heavy burden of poverty prevalent in developing countries such as Nigeria. Most of these sexual activities occur unprotected, rendering the young person vulnerable to the ravages of unsafe sex such as unwanted pregnancy and various types of sexually transmitted infections with their untoward immediate and long term consequences (Thairu et al., 2015, Nwadike et al., 2015).

However, determinants of behavioral risk factors among youth encompass a range of influences from individual social, and environmental factors that can impact young people's decision-making processes and health behaviors. Understanding these determinants is crucial for developing effective interventions and policies to promote healthy behaviors and reduce risk among youth. One of the primary determinants of behavioral risk factors among youth is individual characteristics such as age, gender, and biological factors. For instance, young people may engage in risky behaviors during adolescence due to developmental changes and a desire for experimentation. Additionally, mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression, can contribute to risky behaviors such as substance use or unsafe sexual practices (Klein et al., 2022).

Peer pressure and the influence of social networks play a significant role in shaping the behaviors of youths. Adolescents may adopt risky behaviors, such as smoking or drinking, to fit in with their peers or gain acceptance. Positive peer influence can also be beneficial, as youth who associate with peers engaging in healthy behaviors are more likely to adopt similar habits (Smith et al., 2023). Furthermore, family structure and relationships can impact youth behaviors. Youths from families with a history of substance abuse or other risky behaviors may be more likely to engage in similar behaviors themselves. Conversely, supportive family environments with open communication can provide protective factors against risky behaviors (Liu & Chen, 2022).

Socioeconomic status (SES) can influence access to resources and opportunities for youths. Those from lower SES backgrounds may face barriers to accessing education, healthcare, and recreational activities, which can contribute to higher rates of risky behaviors. Additionally, economic stress can lead to negative coping mechanisms, such as substance use and other risky behaviors like sexual exploits. Socioeconomic status can impact youths' exposure to behavioral risk factors. Youth from lower-income backgrounds may have limited access to healthcare, nutritious foods, and safe recreational spaces, contributing to unhealthy behaviors. More so, they may face higher stress levels due to financial instability, which can lead to substance abuse as a coping mechanism (Gomez & Sanchez, 2023). Also, access to information play a vital role in shaping youths' understanding of risky behaviors and their consequences. Inadequate sex education, for example, can lead to a lack of knowledge about safe sexual practices, increasing the risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unintended pregnancies (McMahon et al., 2023). Conversely, comprehensive health information can empower young people to make informed decisions.

The influence of media and technology cannot be overlooked as a determinants of behavioral risk factors among youths. Social media, television, and online platforms can shape perceptions and behaviors by exposing young people to risky behaviors such as drug use, violence, and unsafe sexual practices. The portrayal of these behaviors as glamorous or desirable can encourage youths to engage in similar activities. Moreover, targeted advertising can influence youths' decisions, particularly in areas such as alcohol and tobacco. Understanding sexual behavior is crucial for addressing public health challenges related to sexually transmitted infections (STIs), unintended pregnancies, and sexual violence. Research informs the development of evidence-based interventions aimed at promoting sexual health, such as comprehensive sex education programs, access to contraceptives, and STI prevention strategies (Akers et al., 2020).

The possibility of engaging in harmful sexual practices made possible by technology presents serious ethical and legal challenges for those navigating virtual worlds. Using knowledge from the centre between disability legal theory and anti-eliminationism, anti-subordination, and autonomy (Moore et al., 2020), a thorough comprehension of the intricate relationship arising from sexual practices between individual choice, social norms, and the effects on people with disabilities is revealed. Additionally, investigating the creative computer-assisted intervention created for people moving from homelessness to housing (Chan-Osilla et al., 2016) illustrates how technology may be used to address high-risk behaviors and encourage positive outcomes in a range of vulnerable populations.

Young people often engage in sexual experimentation and are often times ignorant of the risk associated with it. Sexual intercourse with multiple partners particularly when unprotected is indeed a risky behaviour that places the individual at increased danger of sexually transmitted infections. This is even more glaring for youths in the communities characterized to have a high rate of sexual activity with relatively low knowledge of the preventive measures and condom usage. The researcher being a clinician in the STI's clinic, noted that most clients that visit the clinic were mostly young males and females from various communities and higher institutions in Rivers State. The researcher therefore decided to investigate sexual behaviour of young people in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State. The following research questions were answered:

1. What are the sexual behaviours of youth in Etche Local Government Area?
2. What are the factors that predispose youth of Etche local government Area to STI's?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

H₁: There is no significant difference between the perception of male and female youth on sexual behavior of youths in Etche local Government Area

H₂: There is no significant difference between the male and female youth on the factors that predispose youth to STI's in Etche local Government Area.

Methodology

The study adopted a cross-sectional descriptive survey design. The population for the study comprised of youths from Etche local government Area. The youths of Etche LGA, has a reference population of 351,200 as projected by Rivers State ministry of youth development in 2020 and city population in 2022. The inclusion criteria were: individuals between the ages of 15 to 35 years as recognized by United Nation Population Fund (UNFPA, 2012); individuals who reside in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State and individuals who provided informed consent to participate in the study. The exclusion criteria were: individuals who are below 15 years of age or above 35yrs, individuals who do not reside in Etche Local Government Area, and individuals who cannot read and write.

The sample size for this research was 400. This was determined by adopting the Andrew Fisher's method of sample size determination as described by Sin-Ho, 2014 shown thus: $ss = Z^2 \times p \times (1 - p) / c^2$. Where; ss is the sample size; Z is the Z-score corresponding to confidence level (Confidence level of 95% is usually 1.96); p is the proportion of the population with the characteristic or preference (usually 0.5 for unknown population). It is also the standard deviation and c is the confidence Interval expressed as decimal (0.05 for $\pm 5\%$). Multi stage Sampling procedure was adopted firstly, stratified sampling technique was employed using the 19 wards in Etche LGA as a stratum hence 21 respondents will be selected from each ward. Secondly, simple random without replacement was used to select the respondents from the wards.

The instrument for the study consisted of an informed consent form, debriefing form and semi structured questionnaire on sexual behaviour and knowledge of prevention of sexually transmitted infections which will be structured according to the objectives of the study. The questionnaire will be divided into two (2) major sections, Section A will comprise of the personal data of the

respondents while section B will be made up of closed ended questions from sexual Behaviour and knowledge of prevention of Sexually Transmitted infection. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire. The copies of questionnaires completed were collected, coded and analyzed using statistical product and service solution (SPSS version 25). Descriptive statistics of standard deviation and mean were used to analyze the research questions and inferential statistics of t-test was used to test Hypotheses at level of significance of 0.05.

Ethical consideration

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Research Ethics committee of the University of Port Harcourt. The participants were given sufficient information about the study and their right to withdraw at any time. The personal information of the participants was kept confidential and used only for the purpose of the study and participants were assured that their identities will not be revealed in the study.

Results

The results of the study are shown below:

Table 1: Percentage distribution showing socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents (N = 393)

Socio-demographic characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
15-19	148	37.7
20-24	209	53.2
25-29	36	9.2
Marital status		
Married	195	49.6
Single	198	50.4
Educational level		
Primary	78	19.8
Secondary	148	37.7
Tertiary	136	34.6
Others	31	7.9
Religion		
Christianity	347	88.3
Islamic	16	4.1
Traditional African religion	30	7.6
Occupation		
Student	104	26.5
Employed	102	26.0
Unemployed	187	47.6

Table 1 presents the percentage distribution showing socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. The result showed that more than half 209(53.2%) were aged 20-24 years, about half 198(50.4%) were single, more 148(37.7%) had secondary education, majority 347(88.3%) were Christians while more 187(47.6%) were unemployed.

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation showing sexual behaviour of youths in Etche Local Government Area

SN	Items	\bar{X}	SD	Remark
1	Like being around the opposite sex	2.95	1.23	Agree
2	Keeping a boy or girl friend	2.77	0.98	Agree
3	Attracted by sexy clothes	2.63	1.33	Agree
4	Loss of virginity does not mean promiscuity	2.21	1.04	Disagree
5	Keeps condom around all the time	1.97	1.10	Disagree
6	There is nothing wrong in having unprotected sex with someone's fiancé or fiancée	1.90	1.06	Disagree
7	Always used condom during sex with partner	1.89	1.00	Disagree
8	Finds it difficult to control sexual urge	1.77	0.98	Disagree
9	Keeping more than one sex partner is encouraged to avoid disappointment and heart break	1.68	0.76	Disagree
10	There is nothing wrong in having sex with same sex	1.48	0.81	Disagree
	Grand mean	2.02	1.03	Disagree

Criterion mean = 2.50. Guide: 0 - 1.49 = strongly disagree (SD); 1.50 - 2.49 = disagree (D); 2.50 - 3.49 = agree (A); 3.50 - 4.00 = strongly agree (SA)

Table 2 revealed the mean and standard deviation showing sexual behaviour of youths in Etche. The result showed that the respondents like being around the opposite sex ($\bar{X} = 2.95 \pm 1.23$), keeping a boy or girl friend ($\bar{X} = 2.77 \pm 0.98$), and attracted by sexy clothes ($\bar{X} = 2.63 \pm 1.33$). Thus the sexual behaviour of youths in Etche Local Government Area were: being around the opposite sex, keeping a boy or girl friend, and attracted by sexy clothes.

Table 3: Pearson Correlations analysis showing relationship between sexual behaviours and level of knowledge of STI's

Variables		Knowledge	Sexual behaviour	Remark
Knowledge	Pearson correlation	1	0.58	Moderate relationship
	Sig.		0.00*	
	N	393	393	
Sexual behaviour	Pearson correlation	0.58	1	Moderate relationship
	Sig.	0.00*		
	N	393	393	

Guide: 0.00-0.19 = very low, 0.20-0.39 = low, 0.40-0.59 = moderate, 0.60-0.79 = high and 0.80 above is very high relationship

Table 3 showed the Pearson Correlation analysis of relationship between sexual behaviour and knowledge of STI's. The result revealed a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.58$ indicating a moderate positive relationship and $p < 0.05$ indicate a significant relationship. Thus, the relationship between sexual behaviour and knowledge of STI's was moderate and significant.

Table 4: t-test result showing the significant difference between the perception of male and female youths on sexual behavior of youths in Etche local Government Area

Category	N	Mean	SD	df	t-cal	p-value	Decision
Male	250	1.98	0.54	391	2.22	0.02	H ₀ Rejected
Female	143	2.09	0.36				

*Significant; $p < 0.05$

Table 4 showed the t-test summary of the significant difference between the perception of male and female youths on sexual behavior. The result of the study showed that there was a significant difference between the perception of male and female youths on sexual behavior in Etche LGA as $p < 0.05$ (t-cal = 2.22, df = 391, $p = 0.02$). Therefore, the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant difference between the perception of male and female youths on sexual behavior of youths in Etche Local Government Area was rejected.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study are discussed below:

The finding of the study showed that the sexual behaviour of youths in Etche Local Government Area were: being around the opposite sex, keeping a boy or girl friend, and attracted by sexy clothes. The finding of this study is not surprising because the last four decades have witnessed an unprecedented effort in both human and financial resources devoted to the need to know the risk involve in unprotected sex and other sexual risk behaviour. This finding is not surprising given the high level of exposure of young people to the social media and the possibility of peer influence. The finding of this study corroborates that of Boladale et al. (2015) whose study in Nigeria on sexual orientation and quality of life which showed that more of the respondents who were young people were sexually active and keep boy or girl friend. The finding of this study is in divergence with that of Dutt and Manjula (2017) whose study on sexual behaviors among youths in India showed that the indulgence in sexual behaviour among the respondents was low. It was also found that less than 10% of them indulge in unsafe sexual practices such as indulging in sexual activity with more than one partner and engage in sexual intercourse with commercial sex workers.

The result showed that the factors that predispose youths of Etche were: use of condom which they felt does not make sex enjoyable ($\bar{X} = 2.76 \pm 1.13$), lack of knowledge ($\bar{X} = 2.73 \pm 1.06$), and early initiation of sexual intercourse. The finding of this study is also in keeping with that of Ndongmo et al. (2017) which showed that more of the respondents used condom during sexual intercourse. The finding of this study is also in line with that of Boamah (2012) whose study on sexual behaviour among adolescents in Ghana showed that majority of the respondents used condom during sexual intercourse.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that, young people from Etche Local Government Area had risky sexual behaviours with the more prevalent sexual behaviours as being around the opposite sex, keeping a boy or girl friend, and attracted by sexy clothes.

Recommendations

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

1. Youth friendly organizations should organize intervention programmes for youths in order to align their sexual behaviours with healthy practices.
2. Young people should make conscious effort to adopt good sexual behaviours so that their health and wellbeing will not be jeopardized.
3. Health educators should not relent in their effort to provide age-appropriate sexuality education and awareness for young people.
4. Policy makers should make policies that will ensure the adoption of healthy sexual behaviours among young people.
5. Young people should not allow any peer influence or social media influence that will make them to have a defiance in their sexual behaviours.

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