

**PARENTAL MARITAL STATUS AND THEIR PERCEPTION ON THE
TEACHING OF SEXUALITY EDUCATION IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS
IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA**

By

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Abstract

The study investigated parental marital status and their perception on the teaching of sexuality education in public secondary schools in Rivers State. One research question with a corresponding null hypothesis guided the study. The study adopted a correlational research design. The population for the study comprised all the 5,185,400 male and female parents. The study adopted a cluster sampling technique such that the existing three Senatorial Zones of the state were used. There are a total of 23 Local Government Areas (LGAs) in the 3 Senatorial Zones. Rivers South Senatorial Zone has eight LGAs with 2,044,060 population, Rivers West Senatorial Zone has eight LGAs with 1,824,407 population and Rivers East Senatorial Zone has seven LGAs with 1,316,933 population. Two LGAs were chosen from each of the three Senatorial Zones. The sample size of 400 was derived using Taro Yamen's formula. Questionnaire on "Parents' Perception and Sexuality Education in Secondary Schools (QPPSESS)" was used for data collection. Face and content validity were ensured by experts. Temporal stability with the help of test-retest was used to calculate the reliability coefficient and an index of 0.81 was achieved. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research question while the hypothesis was tested at 0.05 Alpha level, using linear regression. It was found, among others, that widowed parents had higher perception on the teaching of sexuality education in public secondary schools in Rivers State. It was recommended, among others, that the classroom teachers who are obliged to handle sex education should not take it as a golden opportunity to molest and assault the students sexually.

Keywords: Parental Marital Status, Teaching of Sexuality Education and Public Secondary Schools

Introduction

Sexuality is considered as all the feelings, sexual thoughts, attitude, experiences, learning, ideas, values, imaginations and behaviours of a person with regard to different relationship between male and female (Action Health Incorporated, AHI, 2013). Sexuality education is therefore all about human sexual anatomy, sexual reproduction, sexual intercourse, reproductive health, emotional relations, reproductive rights and responsibilities, abstinence, contraception, family-planning, body image, sexual orientation, sexual pleasure, values, decision-making, communication, dating and relationships. Improper sexual education has frequently ended some people with Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs). Oporum (2017)

reported that sexuality education is the type of education given in the formal or informal school settings that has the tendency to regulate sexual activities of the participants. The role of sexuality education in the reduction of unwanted pregnancy, transmission of infection, and emotional instability cannot be neglected. It is sacrosanct that some adolescents who have not received any instruction related to sexuality will scamper to be informed from their peers. Unfortunately, the former are mostly misinformed. Correct information provided to adolescents on sexuality helps them make realistic and responsible decisions about sexual behaviours such as dating practices, courtship, mate-selection and sexual roles (Esu in Akpama, 2013).

Sexuality education has all it takes to educate adolescents on the extent of relationship with the opposite partner. Through sexuality education, there are detailed account on the development and understanding of the physical, mental, emotional, economic, social and physiological stages of human relation as they affect male and female relationships. SIECUS (2009) sees sexuality education as a life-long process of acquiring information and forming attitudes, beliefs and values. This encompasses sexual development, reproductive health, interpersonal relationships, affection, intimacy, body image and gender roles. In other words, it seeks to provide teenagers with information on how to handle sex-related issues and make sound decisions.

The main goal of sexuality education is the promotion of sexual health (Action Health Incorporated- AHI, 2013). Sexual health is a state of physical, mental and social wellbeing in relation to sexuality. It requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. Adolescents spend more reasonable time in school and in recent times, parents are not mostly at home to attend to them. Hence, these adolescents are more relaxed in school where they feel they are not being watched closely. They therefore freely engage in various forms of negative and positive activities. These daily occurrences in the school provide opportunities for discussion on sex, thereby making teachers important agents of sexuality education for young people (Aniebue, 2001).

Adam and Korey (2007) observe that marital status encompasses one's current roles, interactions, and transitions into and out of marriage. As such, one's marital status can be described as married, single, divorced, separated or widowed. To a large extent, one's marital status determines his or her approaches and attitudes to social life, including discussions on sexuality with other members of the family. Nwoye in Oniyama (2007:192) defines marriage as "a sacred, permanent contract which is assumed to be enacted when two people exchange their formal consent to live a life of vocation of love." The relationship between husband and wife is for them to live happily together. Collins (2007) however posits that with each passing year, marital commitment seems to become less common. Unhappiness appears to be the norm and many see divorce as a convenient escape route to handle marital conflicts as 'irreconcilable differences' become the reasons for marriage break-ups. Marriage which is a permanent union created by God for companionship between a man and his wife till death separates them, is being treated as a temporary arrangement due to these irreconcilable differences which include sex within the marriage.

Sexual problem as one of the causes of conflicts in marriage has often been neglected especially in African societies. In Nigeria for instance, families abhor sexual misbehaviours. In Euro-American societies, pre-marital sex experiment is freely practiced, while it is viewed with serious disapproval in Nigeria (Avwata, 2005). Such Cultural variations and attitudes towards sex make the Nigerian couple to lack adequate information about sexuality education to enable them enjoy and stabilize their marriage. Collins (2007) states that sex and marriage are closely interwoven; problems in one area invariably influence the other. Sex researchers posit that the greatest causes of sexual problems are misinformation, misconception and taboo (Oniyama, 2007). Oniyama also asserts that the Nigerian society is experiencing a lot of sexual problem due to inadequate information about sex. Going by newspaper reports and

general public opinion, it is the view of the researchers, that inadequate sexuality education may be a major cause of sexual problems within marriages. This problem might have led to deteriorating relationships as it creates suspicion, lack of understanding, resentment and communication breakdown. When there are sexual incompatibilities among couples, there is bound to be an unhealthy and unstable family life (Collins, 2007).

Statement of Problem

From the researchers' observations and their personal experiences, there seems to be an increasing rates of sexual promiscuity and permissiveness; all of which pose a lot of setbacks in the achievement of the noble goals and objectives of secondary education in Rivers State. This negative attitude may be attributed to lack of adequate information on sex and sexual related implication. Students are frequently exposed to sexual immorality by their peers and teachers. Some parents are very much occupied that they spare little or no time to teach their children sex and sex-related issues. Similarly, these parents do not consent for their children to learn such in the school. Presently, the dangers of risky sexual behaviour include among others, premarital sex, early pregnancy, withdrawal from school, teenage deaths through abortion and increased risk of sexually transmitted diseases such as syphilis, herpes, gonorrhoea, hepatitis B and HIV/AIDS.

Some parents often hush their children from being inquisitive on some sexual issues that bother them. It is regularly echoed by many parents that the teaching of these sexual issues in secondary schools violate the innocence of children. For others, the danger in the absence of adequate, valid and reliable information on sexual issues may lead them into engaging in unsafe sexual activities.

In view of the above scenario, it becomes imperative to assess the extent to which parental marital status relates to their perception on the teaching of sexuality education in public secondary schools in Rivers State.

Objective of the Study

From the foregoing, the main objective of the study is to determine the relationship between parents' marital status and their perception on the teaching of sexuality education in public secondary schools in Rivers State.

Research Question: How does parents' marital status relate to their perception on the teaching of sexuality education in public secondary schools in Rivers State?

Hypothesis 1

Based on the stated research question, there is no significant relationship between parental marital status and their perception on the teaching of sexuality education in public secondary schools in Rivers State.

Materials and Methods

The design adopted in this study is an ex-post factor research method. The population for the study comprises all the parents in Rivers State. As at the time of the study, Rivers State's population comprised about 5,185,400 males and females (Nigerianstat.gov.ng, 2016). The study adopted a cluster sampling technique. There is a total of 23 LGAs in the 3 Senatorial Zones.

Two LGAs were selected from each of the three Senatorial Zones. These include Port Harcourt and Ogu/Bolo for Rivers South, Oyiabo and Tai for Rivers East, Akuku Toru and Ahoada East for Rivers West. The sample size of 400 was drawn from the population using Taro Yamen's formula ($n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$) to establish the minimum sample size for the study.

A self-designed questionnaire tagged “Questionnaire on Parents’ Perception and Sexuality Education in Secondary Schools (QPPSESS)” was used for data collection. The questionnaire had two sections (A and B). Section A was designed to extract demographic information on parental marital status which was the basis of comparison for the study. Section B contained 20 items all of which focused on parents’ perception of sexuality education in secondary schools. The responses on section A were utilized in grouping the responses, while the responses on section B were coded, using the Likert type four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA) - 4, Agree (A) - 3, Disagree (D) - 2, and Strongly Disagree (SD) - 1.

The face and content validity of the instrument was ensured by experts in test and measurement. The test-retest method was used to establish temporal stability of the instrument. 20 parents from the research population who were not part of the sample were used for the reliability. The same instrument was administered to the same group within an interval of 2 weeks.. The results obtained were subjected to Pearson Product Moment correlation analysis to obtain the coefficient reliability index of 0.71. The research question was answered, using descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation. The null hypothesis was tested at 0.05 Alpha level, using linear regression statistical method.

Results

Research Question: To what extent does the parents’ marital status influence their perception on the teaching of sexuality education in public secondary schools in Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean score and standard deviation analysis on the influences of marital status on their perception on the teaching of sexuality education in public secondary schools

S/N	Items	Marital status			xx/3	SD	Decision
		Single (N=116)	Married (N=214)	Widowed (N=70)			
1	Sex education should be taught at all levels in secondary schools.	3.58	3.55	3.67	3.58	.78	Accept
2	It is proper to teach sex education to secondary school children at their age.	3.30	3.03	3.70	3.23	.99	Accept
3	Sex education should be taught openly.	3.60	2.72	3.21	3.06	1.05	Accept
4	Sex education should be taught as a separate subject in secondary schools.	3.51	3.19	3.20	3.28	.80	Accept
5	Sexuality education should be the responsibility of the home, hence be shared with every person in the family.	1.68	2.11	1.80	1.93	1.04	Reject
6	My child should be given sexuality education before marriage.	1.42	1.95	1.99	1.80	1.10	Reject
7	Teachers are qualified to teach sexuality education in secondary schools.	3.32	3.41	3.61	3.42	.78	Accept
8	It is the responsibility of the school to teach sex education to the students.	3.46	3.10	3.56	3.29	.89	Accept
9	Teaching of sex education in schools exposes children to be more knowledgeable and responsible regarding sexual matters.	3.29	3.47	3.79	3.48	.80	Accept
10	Teaching of sex education in school reduces the rate of promiscuity in the society.	3.53	3.34	3.36	3.40	.85	Accept
11	Sexual information when given at school violates the innocence of children.	2.34	2.44	2.16	2.37	1.05	Reject
12	As an agent of socialization, it is the role of the secondary schools to equip students with sexuality education.	3.39	3.39	3.39	3.39	.85	Accept
13	Sexuality education is better started in secondary school level when the students are mostly in their adolescent stage.	3.75	3.40	3.47	3.52	.74	Accept

14	Students who are exposed to sexuality education are equipped to make informed sexual decisions.	3.55	3.22	3.49	3.36	.82	Accept
15	Sexuality education is important in secondary school because it helps adolescent to form healthy sexual habit and orientation.	3.33	3.16	3.56	3.28	.83	Accept
16	Sexuality education is better acquired from school than any other source.	3.10	2.89	3.40	3.04	.91	Accept
17	Sexuality education should be fully included in secondary school curriculum.	3.42	3.24	3.17	3.28	.82	Accept
18	I prefer sexuality education to be taught by teachers only and religious leaders.	2.08	2.31	2.36	2.25	1.17	Reject
19	Sexuality education in secondary schools is a pre-requisite for adult life.	3.34	3.25	2.91	3.22	.84	Accept
20	Sexuality education helps students to avoid sexual activities until they are matured enough.	3.51	3.43	3.39	3.44	.76	Accept
Grand Mean		3.13	3.03	3.16	3.08	.89	

Table 1 shows that the widowed parents had higher perception on the teaching of sexuality education in public secondary schools in Rivers State more ($= 3.16$), followed by the single parents ($= 3.13$) and the married parents ($= 3.03$).

H₀₁: There is no significant difference on the extent to which parental marital status influence their perception on the teaching of sexuality education in public secondary schools in Rivers State.

Table 2: Summary of regression and correlation matrix on the relationship between parent marital status and perception on the teaching of sexuality education

Sources of Variation	Sum of Squares	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Df	Mean Square	Fcal	Sig.	Alpha Level	Decision
Regression	.091	.002	.000	-.003	1	.091	.002	.966	0.05	Not Significant
Residual	19571.069				39	49.174				
Total	19571.160				39					

Results in Table 2 revealed a very low relationship between parental marital status and perception on the teaching of sexuality education. It further revealed that the single regression coefficient obtained from the relationship between parental marital status and their perception on the teaching of sexuality education (R) was 0.002, the regression coefficient square (R²) was 0.000, while the adjusted R² was -0.003. Considering the adjusted single regression coefficient which is -0.003, it is deduced that the influence of parental marital status had 0.0% of the variations on perception on the teaching of sexuality education among parents in Rivers State. Also, the table showed that calculated f-value of 0.002 was not significant at 0.966 level which is greater than 0.05, the chosen level of probability. Hence, there is no significant relationship on the extent to which parental marital status influence their perception on the teaching of sexuality education in public secondary schools in Rivers State.

Discussion of Findings

The result depicts that widowed parents had more positive perception towards sexuality education than their counterparts. However, there is no significant relationship on the extent to which parental marital

status influences their perception on the teaching of sexuality education in public secondary schools. Odinakachi (2007) supported these findings when he found that the widowed parents placed close attention to their children's spiritual and moral upbringing, mostly in the areas of sexual relations. The implication of this finding is the reality that the aged widows may not have the opportunity of having children again, when they (widows) lost their children and since they must have also lost their spouses. Also, Collins (2007) states that sex and marriage are closely interwoven, hence any identified problem in one area invariably influences the other. When there is sexual incompatibility among couples, there is bound to be an unhealthy and unstable family life.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that marital difference is not a determinant of parental perception towards sexuality education in Rivers State.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion of the study, it was recommended as follows:

- Educators, health workers, government and religious leaders as well as social workers should extend promulgate door-to-door campaigns on the importance of sex education, in order to reduce the rate of unwanted pregnancy, abortion, infection, population and drop out rate of students from school.
- The social media should be encouraged to take spend more time to make expositions and perspective talks on sex and sexual - related matters, on regular bases.
- Parents should discourage their children from learning about sex and sexual - related issues from their peers.
- The classroom teachers who are obliged to handle sex education should not take it as an opportunity to molest and assault the students sexually.

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