

PREMARITAL SEXUAL BEHAVIOURS PRACTICES AND ITS HEALTH HAZARDS AMONG STUDENTS OF FEDERAL UNIVERSITY, LOKOJA, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated premarital sexual behaviours practices and its health hazards among students of Federal University, Lokoja (FUL), Nigeria. This study was hinged on three specific objectives which include investigating the practice of premarital sex among students of FUL, determining the factors that predispose students to premarital sexual behaviours among undergraduates, and ascertaining the health hazards of premarital sex on students. This study used the Symbolic interactionism theory to explain the social phenomena studied; and adopted the descriptive survey research design with the two-stage sampling techniques through stratified random sampling techniques as well as the purposive random sampling techniques to reach and elicited responses from the 330 selected samples. Questionnaire and In-Depth Interview were employed as the primary instrument of data collection. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software, while the qualitative data was content analyzed descriptively to support the quantitative aspects of the findings. The findings indicate that 71.8% of FUL students reported ever having sexual activity for fun and other reasons, 54.0% reported inconsistent condom use and multiple sexual partners which indicated that most students engaged in risky sexual behaviours that exposed them to risks of contracting HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections, including deaths arising from abortions of unplanned pregnancies. The study, therefore, recommended, among others, that aggressive sensitization and institutional targeted interventions should be embarked upon to stem certain behaviours are capable of placing FUL students at greater risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections.

Keywords: Behaviour, Hazards, Health, Perception, Premarital-Sex, Students

Introduction

Premarital sex is a sexual act engaged by persons especially youths and students of the opposite sex who are not officially married to each other. It is generally used to refer to young persons who are not yet of marriageable age or between adults who will marry eventually, but who are engaging in sexual activity before marriage (Lucas, 2000; Mensch, Clark, Lloyd & Erulkar, 2003; Ramesh, 2008). Premarital sex exposes young people to teenage pregnancies, unsafe abortions, and sexually transmitted diseases like HIV/AIDS (Anarfi, 1997; Li et al., 2015; Okigbo & Speizer, 2015). Majority of students in the tertiary institutions are single, young adults who easily fall prey to the excitement of being free from home and parental watch, coupled with the liberal nature of campus life that exposes them to high-risk sexual behaviours (UNAIDS, WHO., AIDS Epidemic Updates, 2009; Young, Nam., Hyun., & Eun, 2011). Physiologically, the changes that occur in

reproductive organs in the life of adolescents often serve as a driving force in their quest to experiment with sex. Those who indulge in such acts may change partners frequently that results in having more than one partner at the same period or may most likely engage in unprotected sex. Early sexual exposure increases young people's risk of infection with HIV and other STIs. Also, those who begin early sexual activity are more likely to have high-risk sex or multiple partners and are less likely to use condoms (Tilahun, & Ayale, 2013; Adamu, Samuel., & Ingidashet, 2004).

Satterwhite, Torrone., Meites., et al, (2008), reported that the highest rate of sexually transmitted illness (STIs) worldwide was among young people aged 15-24 years. Active and unprotected sexual activity among youth makes them more vulnerable towards STIs and unplanned pregnancies (Aspy, Vesely., & Oman, 2007). These young people are not using contraceptives like condoms, which implies that they are still exposing themselves to serious illness like AIDS and STIs (Makhaza & Ige, 2014). Unprotected sexual activity results not only in exposing youths to STIs, including HIV/AIDS and unwanted pregnancy for females, which may cause serious health, social, and economic problems (Berhane, Mekonnen., Seyoun., & Gelmon, 2008).

Premarital sexual activity among university undergraduate students has markedly increased recently in Nigeria (Abdullahi & Umar, 2013)., Kogi State and particularly in Lokoja, as the unfettered freedom of students in the university environments predisposes them to HIV and other STIs high-risk behaviours, including unsafe sex and multiple partnerships. Little has been explored about the intensity and causative factors of premarital sexual activity among university students in Kogi State and Lokoja. This study, therefore, intends to fill the gap in knowledge on the premarital sexual behaviours practices and its health hazards among students of Federal University, Lokoja, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The study sought to:

- i. investigate the level of practice of sexual activity among students of Federal University Lokoja.
- ii. determine the factors that predispose undergraduates of Federal University Lokoja to pre-marital sexual behaviours.
- iii. ascertain the health hazards of premarital sex on students of Federal University, Lokoja.

Review of Empirical Literature

Prevalence of premarital sex

Tekletsadik, Shaweno., and Daka carried out a study in 2014 on prevalence, consequences and risk factors associated with premarital sexual acts among female students in Aletawondo high school, Sidama zone in Ethiopia found that among 413 participants, 394 of the respondents were single participants, 78.4% have had premarital sex, 15.3% had an unwanted pregnancy and 82% had terminated their pregnancy (induced abortion).

In a study carried out in the University of Benin by Alika (2012) on counselling implications of premarital sexual behaviours of Nigerian undergraduates revealed that 73.0% of the respondents indulged in sexual activities, 54.4% had sex for the fun of it. It was also found that 67.6% reported low usage of contraceptive/condoms, 35.6% of the females indicated that they have had

abortions. The result also showed that the age bracket in which undergraduates mostly indulge in sexual activity is within ages of 15-25. Similarly, Omoteso (2006) carried out a Study on the Prevalence of Sexual Behaviour of University undergraduate students in South-western Nigeria revealed that 63% have had sexual intercourse at ages 15-25, 54% of the students had steady sexual partners, 43% had sexual intercourse with "just anybody that comes calling".

Perception of premarital sex among students

Farahani and Cleland in a 2015 study carried out on the perception of premarital heterosexual relationships and sexuality among female college students in Tehran revealed that majority (77.5%) of the respondents reported that premarital sex was socially practised among students, while about one third (33.1%) were unsure about the social acceptability of having a boyfriend and dating before marriage. They further revealed that a significant proportion of young people in Tehran have broken with tradition concerning premarital social interaction and romantic friendships, but a few still conform to traditional cultural and religious values regarding abstinence before marriage.

Ogundiran (2012) in a study on undergraduate's knowledge, perception and attitude to premarital sex, using a sample of 244 undergraduates from two South-western universities revealed there was no significant difference in how both male and female undergraduates perceived premarital sex. Undergraduates attitude was negative as 84% agreed that sex was the only way to prove how much they loved their partners, 89.3% were not bothered about contracting any sex-related diseases, 83% of the respondent agreed that they engaged in premarital sex because of financial challenges and 75.8% because they feel intimidated when their friends talk about sex before marriage.

Factors that influence premarital sex

A study carried out in the University of Maiduguri by Abdullahi and Umar (2013) on factors associated with engaging in premarital sexual acts among 318 students revealed that some factors were associated with premarital sexual acts among which economic reasons were the most significant positive factor. This was supported by a study conducted by Aji, et' al, in 2013 on Adolescent Sexual Behaviour and Practices in Nigeria revealed that students engage in unhealthy sexual behaviours due to curiosity, peer influence, pleasure and financial benefit, amongst others.

Okonkwo, Fatusi and Llika (2005) in a study on the perceptions of peers' behaviour regarding sexual health decision making among female undergraduates in Anambra State revealed that three-quarters of the respondents were between ages 15-24. Also, 47.1% of the respondents indicated that they were under peer pressure and influences by friends to engage in premarital sex.

Effects /Health Hazards of Premarital Sex

Young people, especially students, who engage in premarital sexual activities run a high risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV/AIDS, as well as risk damaging their wombs due to unplanned pregnancies and having incessant abortions as the first effect of premarital sex, is the increasing number of young and unmarried girls who are becoming pregnant (Wy, 2009). In light of the above, Choe and Lin (2001) opined that females face more serious consequences of risks associated with pre-marital sex than males.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopted the symbolic interactionism theory to explain the premarital sexual behaviour practices and its health hazards among students of Federal University, Lokoja Nigeria. Symbolic interactionism theory was propounded by George Simmel, Mead., Blummer, and Erwin in 1937. The theory is based on the assumptions that human beings are endowed with the capacity for thought that is shaped by social interaction. In social interaction, people learn the meanings and the symbols that allow them to be able to modify or alter the meanings and symbols that they use in action and interaction based on their interpretation of the situation because people can make these modifications and alterations. After all, in part, due to their ability to interact with themselves, which allows them to examine possible courses of action, assess their relative advantages and disadvantages, and then choose one.

Symbolic interactionists try to analyze society based on the meanings that people ascribe to events, situations and behaviours of people. In essence, society according to symbolic interactionism is thought to be socially constructed through human interaction. The university is a sub-society existing within the larger society, and since the undergraduates tend to define and interact with each other within this sub-society (the university), various behavioural patterns, events and experiences are shared, of which pre-marital sexual perception is one of them. Given this, different prior sexual experiences are exchanged and assimilated, some old experiences discarded in favour of more flexible orientations, while some older ones are reinforced with new experiences.

Methodology

This study used a descriptive survey research design with both quantitative and qualitative techniques. The study population comprised of 1, 016 young students including (males and females) from the age of 15 years and above in Federal University, Lokoja, Nigeria. As regards the sample size and sampling technique, the study utilized Multi-stage sampling techniques. There are three (3) Faculties in the Federal University Lokoja, namely, Faculty of Arts, the Social Sciences, and the Sciences. The first stage involved the selection of ten departments from the three faculties in the study area namely: Faculties of Arts, Social Sciences and the Sciences from which the entire five departments (Biological Science, Chemistry, Computer Science, Geology, and Mathematics) in the faculty of Sciences were selected, while the entire three departments (Economics, Geography and Political science) in the Faculty of Social Sciences and the only two departments (English & Literary Studies and History & International Studies) in the Faculty of Arts were selected via purposive random sampling techniques.

The second stage involved the selection of three Levels of study each from across the selected departments/faculties, that is 400 Level, 300 Level, and 200 Level respectively because these category of students are old in school and would have delved into relationships with each selected level per department allotted eleven (11) respondents per level making a total of Thirty-three (33) respondents per department. The sample size of students in the selected area is three hundred and thirty-three respondents (330), and they were all chosen as the sample for the study using a proportional sampling technique.

Data was generated from the field through a structured questionnaire and In-Depth Interview. Descriptive statistics were used for data analysis using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22, and statistically analyzed using frequency tables and simple percentage to describe the socio-demographic characteristics, and other substantive issues raised in the study,

while the field notes from the interview generated in the course of the fieldwork were summarized, and then content analyzed manually.

Results/Findings

The analysis was carried out in two sections. Section A focused on the analysis of the respondents' socio-demographic characteristics, while section B centred on the study objectives.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Variable	Category	Frequency (330)	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	126	38.2
	Female	204	61.8
Age in years	15-19	209	63.3
	20-24	79	23.9
	25-29	27	8.2
	30 & above	15	4.5
Religion	Christianity	265	80.3
	Islam	64	19.7

Source: Author's Field Survey, 2019

Table 1 above, result indicates that most of the respondents constituting 61.8% were females, the other remaining 38.2% were males. This reveals that more female than male participated in this study because FULokoja had more female students than males and since the females are more vulnerable to the issue under review. The age of the respondents representing 63.3% aged 15-19 years, while the remaining others, 23.9% were aged between 20-24 years, 8.2% were aged 25-29 years, 4.5% were aged 30 years and above respectively. Also, the result revealed that majority of the respondents constituting 80.3% were Christians, while the remaining 19.7% were Muslims.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents on the Perception/Practice/factors of Premarital Sex

Variable	Category	Frequency	%
What is your perception of premarital sex?	Means of tying relationship bond	37	11.2
	Fun catching	139	42.1
	Means to an End (For money and gifts)	102	30.9
Ever indulged in premarital sex?	To experiment and explore	52	15.8
	Yes	237	71.8
If yes, do you use protection	No	93	28/2
	Yes	109	46.0
At what age did you first engaged in premarital sex	No	128	54.0
	15-19	176	74.3
	20-24	29	12.2
	25-29	20	8.4
Why do you engaged in premarital sex?	30 above	12	5.1
	To belong to happening group	25	10.5
	Peer group influence	51	21.5
	Love and affection	122	51.5
	Everyone around does it	20	8.5
	Experience what it feels like	19	8.0

Source: Author's Field Survey, 2019

Table 2 indicates that the perception of premarital sexual activities by the respondents, less than half 42.1% of the respondents saw premarital sexual activities as fun catching, 30.9% reported it either as a means to an end for getting money to attend to their personal needs in school or for receiving gift items, 15.8% saw it as an avenue to experiment and explore for sexual pleasure/gratification, while the remaining 11.2% indicated that they saw premarital sex as a means to tie or initiate relationship bonds.

On whether respondents ever engaged in premarital sex, the majority of the respondents representing 71.8% reported they engaged in premarital sex, while the other remaining 28.2% never engaged in premarital sex. Also, out of the 237 respondents who reported ever indulging in premarital sex, 54.0% of them revealed that they didn't use any means of protection while they engaged in a premarital sexual act, while the remaining 46.0% indicated that they used protection while engaging in the act.

Furthermore, 237 of the respondents who affirmed that they engaged in premarital sex, the majority 74.3% of the entire respondents reported that having first-ever sexual contact ages 15-19, 12.2% of respondents had it at 20-24 years of age, 8.4% at age 25-29 years, while a few others, 5.1% at between 30 years and above. Equally, on the factors/reasons for engaging in premarital sexual acts, 51.5% of the respondents revealed that seeking for love and affection was responsible for their involvement, 10.5% indicated that the desire to belong to the happening groups/cliques on campus, 8.0% of the respondents reported to experience what having sex felt like was their reason for engaging in it, 21.5% reported peer group influence/pressure, while the remaining 8.5% indicated that it solely because every other significant other around them were into premarital sexual activities as their reason. Supporting the findings above: As participants had this to say:

My boyfriend has been all over me, for about a year now, pestering me for it, so I have to do it to prove to him how much I love him [Participant: IDI: Female student].

I started having sex when I was 15 years right from my SS2 in my secondary school days and I enjoy doing it with my guy in school here whenever he wants it., it's fun you know [Participant: IDI: Female student].

Almost all the students that I know have a boyfriend or a girlfriend and of course, they have sex frequently. "Guy, the body needs some juice (sex)". It is a normal thing among students [Participant: IDI: Male student].

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents on the effects/Health hazards of Premarital sex

Variable	Category	Frequency	%
Health Hazards of Premarital sex	Risk of death from abortions	86	26.1
	Contraction of HIV/STIs	170	51.5
	Unwanted Pregnancies	21	6.4
	Damage to reproductive organs	35	10.6
	Depression/Emotional cracks/Suicide	18	5.5

Source: Author's Field Survey, 2019

Table 3 above indicates that majority, 51.5% of the respondents reported various forms of health-associated hazards for engaging in premarital sexual activities. Furthermore, the result shows that

a few others constituting 26.1% reported risk of death from abortions as the health hazard of premarital sexual practices, 10.6% stressed damages to the reproductive organs, 6.4% of the respondents indicated unwanted pregnancies, while the remaining 5.5% of the respondents' depression/emotional breakdown and suicide. Qualitative data from In-Depth Interview supported the findings above: As participants had this to say:

Oga, it is we the ladies/females that suffer it most, imagine, the pains we go through getting an abortion from unwanted or unplanned pregnancy, if you are not so lucky, something will happen to you and you may never be able to birth to a child [Participant: IDI: Female student].

Most of the girls are at the receiving end of it all, treating all manner of sexually transmitted infections now and then coupled with several unsafe abortions here and there [Participant: IDI: Female student]

Discussion of Findings

Premarital sex is a sexual act engaged by persons, especially youths and students who are not officially married to each other. It refers to individuals who are not yet of marriage age or between adults who will marry eventually, but who are engaging in sexual activity (Lucas, 2008; Mensch, Clark, Lloyd & Erulka, 2003; Ramesh, 2008). Satterwhite, Torrone., Meites., et' al, (2008), reported that the highest rate of sexually transmitted illness (STIs) worldwide was among young people aged 15-24 years. These young people are not using contraceptives like condoms, which implies that they are still exposing themselves to serious illness like HIV/AIDS and STIs (Makjaza & Ige, 2014). This study provides quantitative and qualitative insights into premarital sexual behaviours practices and its health hazards among students of Federal University Lokoja, Nigeria. The findings in this study revealed that demographic variable such as age had a significant influence on exposure and involvement in premarital sexual acts.

This study revealed that majority 63.3% of the respondents were aged 15-19 years, 23.9% were between 20-24 years, respectively, representing youths and adolescents who were readily prone to experiment with sex as well as exhibiting different premarital sexual behaviours'. Majority of the respondents were Christians, while a few others were Muslims. Amongst the respondents, a significant number 42.1% reported that indulgence in premarital sexual behaviour was specifically for the fun of it, most of the respondents view premarital sex as a means to an end, that is for monetary and gift items gain, few stressed that they were just experimenting and exploring their sexual drives, while a few others posited that premarital sexual behaviours' were a means to tie relationship bonds in courtships. These findings corroborate studies conducted by (Farahani, and Cleland, 2015; Alika, 2012; Omoteso, 2006). The results also showed that majority of the respondents, 71.8% agreed to have had premarital sexual contact, a few reported that they had sexual contacts. Majority 74.3% had first sexual contact at ages 15-19, a few others had first sexual contact between 20-24 years. These findings corroborated studies by (Alika, 2012; Ogundiran, 2012; Satterwhite, Torrone., Meites et' al, 2008). Equally, these findings, corroborated studies by Makhaza and Ige, 2014, who variously found ages 15-24 in cases of sexually transmitted illness worldwide. Again, results indicated that majority of the respondents 54.0% reported not using any form of protection while indulging in premarital sexual behaviours', while only a few of the respondents stated using condoms and/or contraceptives of any kind each time they engaged in premarital sex.

This study further indicates that majority of the respondents opined that monetary gains 56.1%, a few others revealed peer pressure was the most prevalent factors predisposing students to premarital sexual practices in FULokoja. These corroborated findings from other studies, which showed that premarital sexual behaviours' among students were strongly associated with some factors (Aji, Aji., Ifeadike., Emelumadu., Ugbajaka., Nwabueze., Ebenebe., and Azuike, 2013; Okonkwo, Fatusi., and Llika, 2005; Aggarwal, Sharma., and Chhabra, 2000; Olumuyiwa, and Oladipupo, 2014)., and Abdullahi and Umar (2013), reported that economic reasons were the most significant factor influencing premarital sexual behaviour in young people and students.

Lastly, amongst the respondents, 51.5% stated that they committed unsafe abortions, a few others revealed sustained damage to the womb through incessant and unsafe abortions, as the health hazards witnessed amongst students of FULokoja. These findings support studies by others, that premarital sexual behaviours' have health consequences in the long run (Choe, and Lin, 2001; Wy, 2009; Kaczor, 2002; Rena, 2005; Makatjane, 2002; Satterwhite, Torrone., Meites, et al, 2008; UNICEF, 2008; Aspy, Vesely., & Oman, 2007).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusively, the study revealed that most of FULokoja students engaged in premarital sexual acts. Also, the economic, quest for material gains, as well as peer influences were revealed as factors that led to such acts. Also, some of FULokoja students engaged in sexual intercourse very early and were involved in high-risk sexual practices, such as multiple sexual partners, unprotected sex with fellow students and others.

Based on these findings, the following recommendations were made:

- i. Intensive sensitization and institutional targeted interventions to ensure healthy behavioural change with available services like sharing and giving out of condoms and contraceptives should be encouraged to stem certain behaviours that can expose students to a greater risk of sexually transmitted infections.
- ii. Also, comprehensive sex education should be taught students in the secondary schools as well as university system in response to the sex education needs of students on the dangers/associated risks of premarital sex outside marriage.
- iii. Parents and guidance of students should as a matter of urgency adequately provide for the needs of their children and wards in school as these will help to keep them away from any temptation of engaging in such acts for receiving money and other gift items.

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