

Knowledge, Attitude and Practice of Premarital Sex among Adolescent Students in Secondary School, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Background: Premarital sex activities among adolescents is on the increase worldwide. This makes adolescents vulnerable to reproductive diseases such as sexually transmitted infectious including HIV/AIDs, unwanted pregnancy, and abortion. The aim of this study was to assess knowledge, attitude, and practice of premarital sex among adolescent students in Uselu Secondary School, Benin City, Edo State. **Materials and Methods:** This was a cross-sectional descriptive study of 154 adolescent secondary school students. Data was analyzed and presented in frequency, pie-chart, and percentages. **Results:** Findings showed that 15(9.7%) have poor knowledge, 79(51.3%) have fair knowledge while 60(39.0%) have good knowledge of premarital sex, a majority 86(55.8%) of the adolescents had positive attitude toward premarital sex while 65(44.2%) had negative attitude. Majority 118 (76.6%) are not sexually active while 7(19.4%) have had sexual intercourse. Factors that influence attitude towards premarital sex include family background, sex education, curiosity, peer group influence, financial gratification, and exposure to pornographic content. **Conclusion:** The researchers concluded that majority of adolescent students have fair knowledge, positive attitude, and low practice of premarital sex. Sex education should be encouraged at home, schools, by religious bodies and non-governmental organizations, to equip the students with adequate information and skills on premarital sex, sexuality and its consequences.

Keywords: Premarital sex, adolescents, knowledge, attitude, practice.

Introduction

In recent years, increased attention has been focused on the knowledge, attitude, and practice of adolescent students between the ages of 10-19 years towards premarital sex in Nigeria (1). The adolescent period represents one of the critical transitions in life span and is characterized by a tremendous pace in growth and formative time of transition to adulthood. The interest in adolescent health stems from adolescents' characteristics and size in the society. They are the future of every country and if their needs, particularly sexual reproductive health needs are not addressed, they have the potential to jeopardize their future. This attention stems

from the realization that inadequate knowledge of sex and the traditional attitude of treating sex as a taboo subject when adolescents are concerned has not helped in the education of adolescents on sexual health. To give adolescents sufficient information to enable them make informed decisions on premarital sex, sexual health is now being promoted in our secondary schools and even in religious programmes(2). Sex education as part of the school curriculum will serve as an effective means of improving knowledge and reducing premarital sex among adolescent in developing countries. This paradigm shift is an educational approach to prepare the adolescent to deal with issues of premarital

sex. At the fore front of this paradigm shift are the school system, non-governmental organizations, and religious groups.

In Africa, most parents do not discuss sexual health issues at homes, so far it is still considered taboo in many communities. Therefore, adequate knowledge on premarital sex is needed to improve the health of the adolescent. There are indications that the traditional attitude towards sex has not prepared the adolescent to deal with premarital sex is evident in our society. Many adolescents face pressures to use alcohol, cigarettes or other drugs to initiate sexual relationships at earlier ages, putting themselves at high risks for intentional and unintentional injuries, unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) (3).

Premarital sex is sexual activity practiced by unmarried persons. In traditional Nigerian society, sex outside marriage was forbidden, and adolescents were not allowed to openly express their opinions and views on love, sex and marriage. It was accepted that the bride and the groom be ignorant about sexual act until the night of their marriage. However, over the years, attitude towards premarital sex have been changing and acceptance of premarital sex is becoming more evident. Premarital sex was mostly unacceptable in most Nigerian societies that regarded marriage as the legitimate relationship for sexual permissiveness (4). With modernization and globalization, premarital sex among adolescents is quite high (2). The current surge in premarital sex among adolescents is being propelled by the internet, pornography, and films. These developments contribute to shaping the evolving attitude and practice of premarital sex among adolescents in Nigeria (4).

The World Health Organization (WHO) reported that much of the sexual activity that begins in adolescence is high-risk, unsafe, and oftentimes non-consensual (1). This is since a majority of adolescents do not have correct information on the use of contraceptives or the prevention of pregnancy and STIs, and youth-friendly reproductive

health services are not readily available. Consequently, premarital sex among adolescents predisposes them to unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions, pregnancy related complications, and sexually transmitted infectious (STI) including HIV/AIDS. The United Nations estimated that about half of new HIV infections in African countries occur among young people aged 15 to 24 years (5). Recent studies have shown that whereas the Western world like Europe and America have long realized the importance of sex education and are using it to curtail and moderate their sexual culture in the best possible direction. Adolescents in Nigeria are left unguided because of inadequate knowledge on sex-related problems such as, unintended pregnancies, dumping of unwanted babies and illegal abortions (6).

Adolescents practice premarital sex because of a number of factors, which include uncontrollable sexual urges, peer pressure, youthful exuberance and financial or material benefits (3). The influence of socioeconomic development has made the sexual attitude of adolescents to become more open and independent from the ties of traditional, cultural and sexual behavioral norms (7). Being economically dependent on a romantic partner hinders adolescents' ability to abstain from premarital sex. There is however, a widening gap between sexual debut and age of marriage in Nigerian modern societies, and this has increased the possibility for sexual activity before marriage (8).

A study in Vietnam revealed that students did not have enough knowledge of reproductive health and safe sex. Males were less knowledgeable than females in terms of consequences of premarital sex. This have made the males students to be more sexually active than their female counterparts. Furthermore, male students have more permissive attitude towards premarital sex than females. It was noted that gender, age group, marital status, knowledge of consequences of premarital sex and attitude towards premarital sex were associated with the practice of premarital sex. It was therefore

recommended that reproductive and sexual health education for bedsit-living students should be reinforced (9). Another study in Malaysia showed that students have positive norms conducive to the prevention of premarital sex behavior and control and positive attitude to premarital sex. It was also noted that subjective norms and perceived behavioral controls in this study did not affect adolescent attitudes to prevent premarital sex behavior (10). A study in Jakarta China showed that majority of unmarried migrant females lack sexual knowledge and a substantial proportion of them are engaged in premarital sexual behaviors (11) while premarital sexual behavior was high. It was recommended that it is essential to coach (counseling, training and extra-curricular activities) adolescents on reproductive health issues, especially sexuality, to remind teenagers in particular, to always be vigilant and avoid deviant behaviors such as premarital sexual behavior (11).

Studies in Nigeria revealed positive attitude towards premarital sex (12,2). No significant difference was observed between male and female adolescents on attitude towards premarital sex, but age of adolescents and their religious affiliation have significant influence on attitude and practice of premarital sex. Other factors that influence the adolescents' attitudes and practice of premarital sex include showing off, large family, gender, family background, satisfying sexual urges, practicing what they learn from friends (3,13). A similar study in Pokhara, sub-Metropolitan City, Nepal revealed that a majority of the students affirmed premarital sex while a few reported that engaging in premarital sex is inappropriate. Twenty-five percentage of the respondents who had discussed sexual matters with friends had a 2.62 times higher chance of having premarital sex than those who had not study students have had sex. The main reasons given by the adolescents for the start of first sexual act was desire, followed by chance, curiosity, fun, and love. The study concluded that although Nepalese society doesn't accept sexual activities outside marriage, young people are

challenging these social norms and values. Adolescents in Nepal now have a different perspective and feel more comfortable in each other's company and initiate sexual relations before marriage (14). Another study in Lalitpur, Nepal reported adequate knowledge on sexual and reproductive health among the adolescents. It was noted that almost all participants (87.3%) agreed that men can have sex before marriage and (73.1%) disagree that women should not have sex before marriage (15).

Another study in Indonesia revealed that adolescent students in Denpasar, Bali had a fair level of knowledge in some sexual and reproductive health (SRH) aspect, a few students reported permissive attitude and involved in premarital sexual behaviors. Therefore, providing comprehensive sexuality education is worth considering improving knowledge and equip them with appropriate skills to prevent risky sexual behavior and consequences (16). An Indian study showed factors identified as influencing young college students on premarital sex include sex education, knowledge of contraceptive, peer pressure, being forced to have sex, sexual urge, socio-economic background, the sexualized media, religion, age, and the environment that one finds him/herself in. It was recommended that special programmes for awareness generation be organized on a large scale (17).

Studies in Ethiopia revealed that prevalence of premarital sex is high, and more than half of participants were sexually active. Age at first sexual practice was 17 and 18 for males and females respectively (18,19). Premarital sex among adolescent students is becoming worrisome as many now see sex as a norm, which invariably exposed them to unsafe sex, unintended pregnancy, as well as the risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS. Similar study conducted in Ebonyi State, Nigeria revealed that premarital sex was practiced among the students. Yet most of them know and practiced safer sex. It was also noted that males were significantly more likely to engage in premarital sex than females in the

adolescent period. The most prevalent reason why they practiced premarital sex was exposure to eroticism through television, magazine, and internet (20).

Another study in Ogun State, Nigeria revealed that at least one out of every four in-school adolescents in the state is sexually active and most likely to engage in unsafe sexual practice (21). Study in Edo State Nigeria revealed that more than half 55.6% of the secondary school students indulge in premarital sex even though 89.6% of the students did not approve of premarital sex. It was concluded that males across the teenage years were more exploitative in indulging in sex than their female counterparts (22).

There is dearth of literature on knowledge, attitude, and practice of premarital sex among adolescent students in Edo State. Therefore, the objective of this study was to determine the knowledge, attitude, and practice of premarital sex and specifically to identify factors that influence attitude of premarital sex among adolescent students in Uselu Secondary School, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria. The findings of this study would no doubt provide the necessary information for planning useful intervention programme which would sharpen the knowledge, attitude and practice of premarital sex among adolescent students in Nigeria.

Methodology

The study adopted cross-sectional descriptive design. A cross-sectional descriptive design is a design in which the condition and potentially factors are measured at a specific point in time for a defined population. The

design was chosen to assess the health need of a population (11).

Study Setting

The study was carried out in Uselu Secondary School, Benin City, Edo State. Uselu Secondary School is in Egor Local Government Area of Edo. It is one of the eighteen local government areas in Edo State. The Local Government Area is cosmopolitan comprising people of different ethnic backgrounds, people of different strata of the society as well as different works of life. It is located in the state capital Benin City. It is 90% urban and 10% rural with total population of 229,681. Occupation of the inhabitants includes farming, trading, and the civil service.

Population

The target population for the study was senior secondary school one (SS 1) to senior secondary school three (SS 3) with the age range of 11-19 years comprising 250 adolescent students in Uselu Secondary School, Egor Local Government Area. This is the period of maturity and active sensitivity to external stimulus.

Sample Size Determination and Sampling Technique

Taro Yamane's formula was used to determine the sample size of 154 adolescent students (21). Simple random sampling technique (balloting with replacement) was used to select the sample for the study. Cochran formula was used to assign sample to strata (approach of proportionate stratification) (24).

Table I: showing how the students were sampled

Class	Total Population	Sample Size (n)
SSS 1	101	62.2
SSS 2	97	60
SSS 3	52	32
Total	250	154

The Instrument for Data Collection

A self-developed structured questionnaire which consists of four (4)

sections with closed ended questions was used. Section A covered the socio-demographic data of the respondents. Section

B covered the knowledge of premarital sex, Section C covered attitude towards premarital sex while. Section D practice of premarital of sex while Section E – factors influencing attitude of premarital sex.

Validity and Reliability

The instrument was validated by two experts in Public Health and Measurement and Evaluation. Content and face validity was done by an expert. A test-retest method was used to ascertain the reliability of the instrument using Cronbach Alpha. The statistical result of the instrument reliability was 0.81 which was considered reliable.

Method of Data Collection

Data for this study was collected through the administration of copies of the questionnaire to the respondents with the help of research assistants (class teachers). The research assistants were trained on the aim, objectives of the study and questionnaire administration before commencing the study. Respondents gave written consent to participate in the study.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was done using descriptive statistics such as frequency, pie chart, and percentage.

Ethical Consideration

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Ministry of Education, Iyaro, Benin City. Ref. Number: SP/304/TI/158. Informed consent was obtained from respondents before participation.

Results

Table 1 shows the demographic data of respondents. Respondents' gender shows that 57(37%) were males, 97(63%) were females. Respondents' religion shows that a majority 148(96.1%) were Christians, 5(3.2%) were Muslims, 1(0.6%) practiced other religions. Class of respondents shows that 67(43.5%) were in SS1, 56(36.4%) were in SSII, 31(20.1%) were in SSS III.

Table 2 shows knowledge of premarital sex. It was reported by

130(84.4%) that premarital sex occurs before marriage, 116(75.3%) reported that premarital sex is sexual activity practiced by youths before marriage, 123(79.9%) reported that girls and boys should remain virgin until they marry, 16(10.4%) reported boys and girls should have sex before they become engaged to see whether they are suited to each other, 31(20.1%) reported premarital sex is acceptable if couple is engaged, 92(59.7%) reported a man loses respect for a woman who has had premarital sex, 14(9.1%) reported that sex education in school will cause a rise in premarital intercourse, 70(45.5%) reported easy access to birth control interventions and devices encourage premarital sex, 45(29.2%) reported that birth control before marriage is a female responsibility, 139(90.3%) reported that dangers of premarital sex includes regrets, loss of self-respect, pregnancy, pregnancy abortion, 76(49.4%) reported stigma are attached to premarital sex in Nigeria, 44(28.6%) reported a girl is not expected to be alone with boy or boys, 131(85.1%) reported there are consequences of premarital sex for girls and boys, 139(90.3%) reported that it is the responsibility of the both boys and girls to seek information from youth friendly reproductive health services on contraception, pregnancy, abortion or sexually transmitted diseases.

Figure 1 shows the level of knowledge about premarital sex. It shows that 15(9.7%) of the respondents have poor level of knowledge, 79(51.3%) have fair knowledge while the remaining 60(39.0%) have good level of knowledge.

The above-mentioned means were > 2.5 significance mean level which indicates a positive attitude towards premarital sex by respondents, while all the other variables had means < 2.5 which also indicates respondent's negative attitude in that regard.

Table 1: Demographic data of respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage
11 - 13yrs	21	13.6
14 - 16years	94	61.0
17 - 19years	39	25.3
Gender		
Male	57	37.0
Female	97	63.0
Religion		
Christianity	148	96.1
Islam	5	3.2
Others	1	0.6
Class		
SSI	67	43.5
SS II	56	36.4
SSS III	31	20.1

Table 2: Knowledge of Premarital Sex

	Yes	No	Don't know
Premarital sex occurs before marriage	130(84.4)	16(10.4)	8(5.2)
Premarital sex is sexual activity practiced by youths before marriage	116(75.3)	8(5.2)	30(19.5)
Girls and boys should remain virgin until they marry	123(79.9)	15(9.7)	16(10.4)
Boys and girls should have sex before they become engaged to see whether they are suited to each other	16(10.4)	115(74.7)	23(14.9)
Premarital sex is acceptable if couple is engaged	31(20.1)	77(50.0)	46(29.9)
A man loses respect for a woman who has had premarital sex	92(59.7)	31(20.1)	31(20.1)
Sex education in school will cause a rise in premarital intercourse	14(9.1)	109(70.8)	31(20.1)
Easy access to birth control interventions and devices encourages premarital sex	70(45.5)	38(24.7)	46(29.9)
Birth control before marriage is a female responsibility	45(29.2)	69(44.8)	40(26.0)
Dangers of premarital sex includes regrets, loss of self-respect pregnancy, pregnancy abortion	139(90.3)	0(0.0)	15(9.7)
Stigma are attached to premarital sex in Nigeria	76(49.4)	39(25.3)	39(25.3)
A girl is not expected to be alone with boy or boys	44(28.6)	54(35.1)	56(36.4)
There are consequences of premarital sex for girls and boys	131(85.1)	0(0.0)	23(14.9)
It is the responsibility of the both boys and girls to seek information from youth friendly reproductive health services on contraception, pregnancy, abortion or sexually transmitted diseases	139(90.3)	0(0.0)	15(9.7)

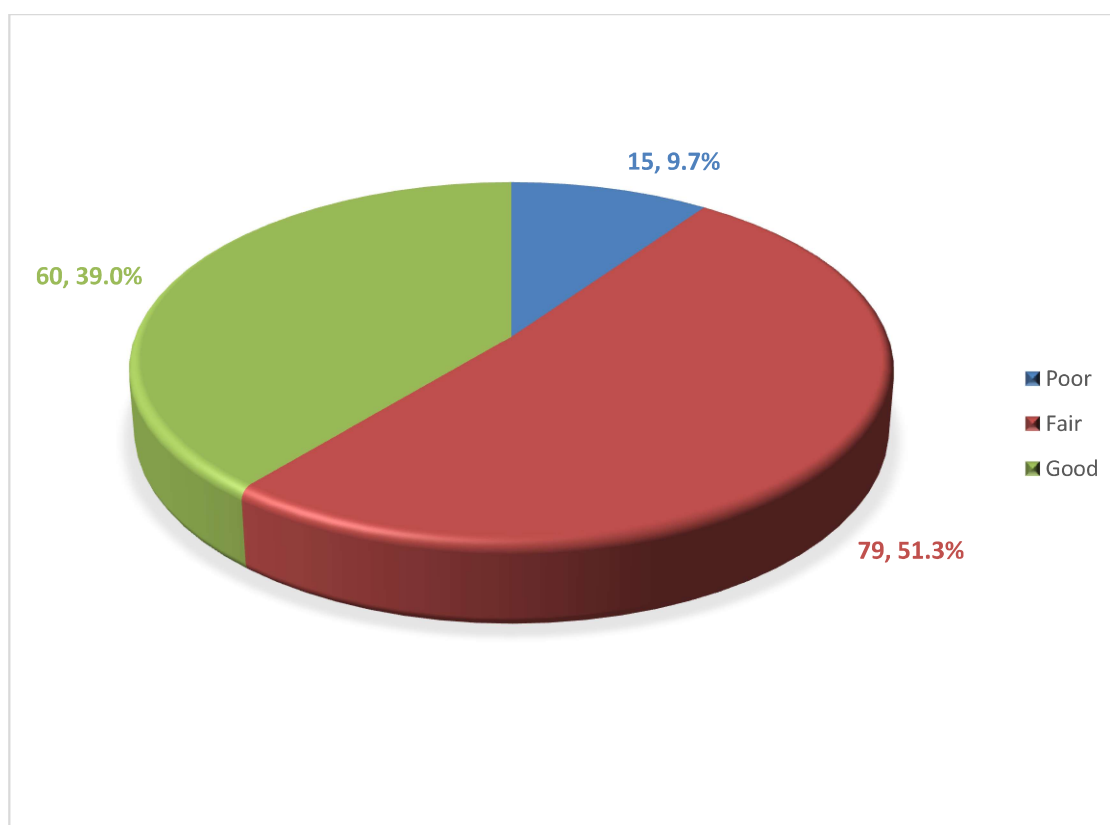


Figure 1: Level of knowledge about Premarital Sex

Table 3: Attitude towards Pre-marital Sex

	SD	D	A	SA	x	St.D
Neither a boy nor a girl should engage in premarital sex	47 (30.5)	13 (8.4)	19 (12.3)	75 (48.7)	2.79	1.33
A girl should be a virgin at marriage	19 (12.3)	12 (7.8)	37 (24.0)	86 (55.8)	3.23	1.04
A boy should be virgin at marriage	24 (15.6)	18 (11.7)	40 (26.0)	72 (46.8)	3.04	1.10
Premarital sex should be absolutely prohibited	26 (16.9)	16 (10.4)	44 (28.6)	68 (44.2)	3.00	1.11
Premarital sex is a normal phenomenon, it is a kind of biological need	78 (50.6)	25 (16.2)	30 (19.5)	21 (13.6)	1.96	1.12
Premarital sex should be acceptable because it can help to select an ideal wife/husband	98 (63.6)	24 (15.6)	17 (11.0)	15 (9.7)	1.67	1.02
Premarital sex is acceptable if a "couple" practice safe sex (using a condom)	69 (44.8)	36 (23.4)	27 (17.5)	22 (14.3)	2.01	1.10
Premarital sex is acceptable if the "couple" plan to marry in the future	70 (45.5)	30 (19.5)	19 (12.3)	35 (22.7)	2.12	1.22

SD-Strongly disagreed, D-Disagreed, A-Agreed, SA – Strongly Agreed

Table 4: Practice of Sexual Intercourse

	Frequency	Percentage
Do you have boy/girl friend?		
Yes	35	22.7
No	119	77.3
How many partners do you have?		
1	21	60.0
2	0	0.0
3	7	20.0
4 and above	7	20.0
Have you ever had sexual intercourse?		
Yes	36	23.4
No	118	76.6
If yes, at what age did you have your first sexual intercourse?		
11-12 years	7	19.4
14-16 years	22	61.1
17-19 years	7	19.4
How often do you have sexual intercourse?		
Only once and that is all	29	80.6
Daily	0	0.0
Weekly	0	0.0
Monthly	7	19.4
Do you use contraceptives?		
Yes	14	38.9
No	22	61.1
What type of contraceptive do you use?		
Tablets	0	0.0
Condoms	0	0.0
Injectables	0	0.0
Creams	0	0.0
traditional	0	0.0
What is the main reason for not using contraceptives?		
Trust partner	7	31.8
Decrease satisfaction	7	31.8
Partner refuse	0	0.0
No knowledge	8	36.4

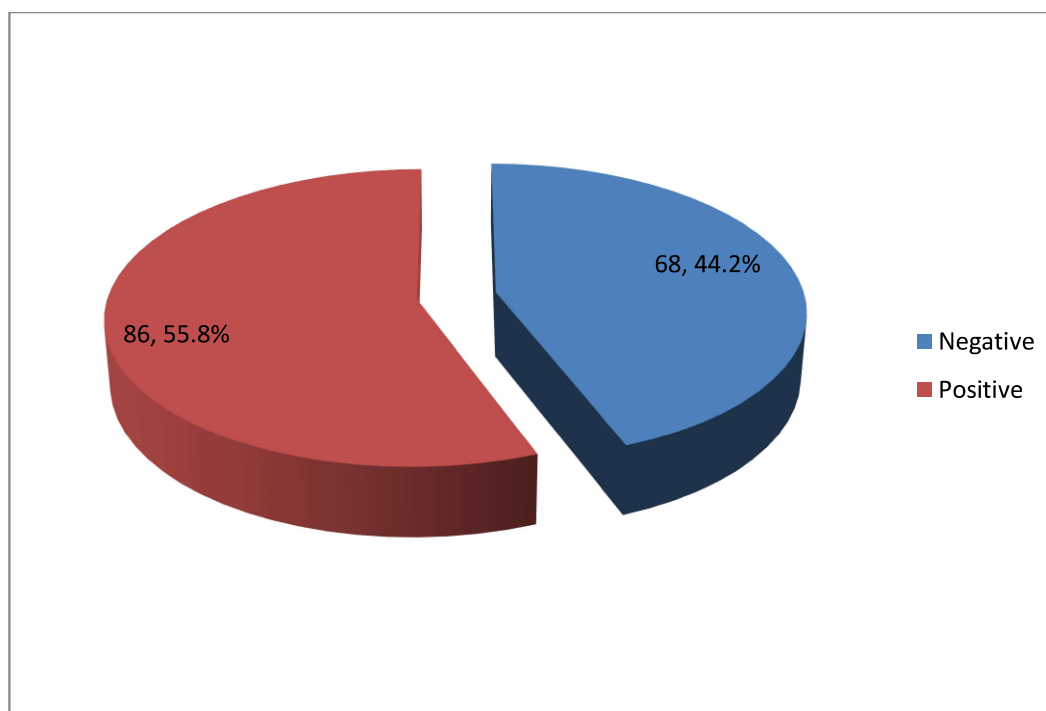


Figure 2: Attitude of respondents

Table 5: Factors Influencing Attitude of Premarital Sex

	Yes	No
Family background	95(61.7)	59(38.3)
Traditional belief	69(44.8)	85(55.2)
sexual health fun	72(46.8)	82(53.2)
Sex education	81(52.6)	73(47.4)
Alcohol and drug use	78(50.6)	76(49.4)
Peers group influence	99(64.3)	55(35.7)
Financial gratification	84(54.5)	70(45.5)
Curiosity	97(63.0)	57(37.0)
Gender	69(44.8)	85(55.2)
To derive happiness/pleasure	77(50.0)	77(50.0)
For sexual gratification	74(48.1)	80(51.9)
To satisfy their sexual ego	76(49.4)	78(50.6)
To show off	55(35.7)	99(64.3)
Religious belief	54(35.1)	100(64.9)
Exposure to pornographic content	89(57.8)	65(42.2)

Figure 2 shows attitude of respondents on premarital sex, 86(55.8%) had positive attitude, 68(44.2%) had negative attitude.

Table 4 shows respondents' level of practice of sexual intercourse. It was reported by 35(22.7%) that they have boy/girlfriend, majority 119(77.3%) reported they did not. it was reported by 21(60%) that they had one

partner, 7(20%) each reported they had 3 partners and 4 partners and above respectively. It was reported by 36(23.4%) that they have had sexual intercourse, majority 118(76.6%) reported they have not. It was reported by 7(19.4%) that they had their first sexual intercourse between 11-12 years, 22(61.1%) had theirs between 14-16

years, 7(19.4%) had theirs between 17-19 years. It was reported by 29(80.6%) that they had sexual intercourse only once and that is all, 7(19.4%) had sexual intercourse monthly. It was reported by 14(38.9%) that they use contraceptives, 22(61.1%) reported they didn't make use of contraceptives. It was reported by 7(31.8%) each that the main reason for not using contraceptives is because they trust their partner and decrease satisfaction respectively, 8(36.4%) had no knowledge of contraceptives.

Table 5 shows factors influencing attitude premarital sex. It was reported by 95(61.7%) that family background was a factor that influenced premarital sex, 81(52.6%) sex education, 78(50.6%) reported it was alcohol and drug use, 99(64.3%) peer group influence, 84(54.5%) financial gratification, 97(63%) reported it was to show curiosity, 54(35.1%) religious belief, 89(57.8%) reported it was exposure to pornographic content.

Discussion of Findings

The study was to determine the knowledge, attitude and practice of premarital sex and specifically to identify factors that influence attitude towards premarital sex among adolescent students in secondary school in Benin City, Edo State. A majority of them were in SS1 and most of them were Christians. The gender of the participants was mostly females. Finding showed that 51.3% of the students have fair knowledge of premarital sex. This is in tandem with studies in Indonesia and Vietnam respectively which reported fair knowledge of sexual and reproductive health (9,16). It was also reported that 39.0% of the students have good knowledge of premarital sex. This is supported by a study in Lalitpur (Nepal) that recorded adequate knowledge on sexual and reproductive health among adolescent (15). It is important to note that majority of the students have the knowledge of where to seek relevant information as regards sexual and reproductive health.

The study revealed that adolescent students' attitude towards premarital sex was

positive. This is like previous studies carried out in Vietnam, Jakarta, Nigeria (9,11,12,2). The result implies that many of the adolescent students may have a good moral upbringing keeping their chastity till after marriage and have knowledge of the implication of premarital sex. This finding is also at variance with Pokhara, Nepal study which revealed that most of the adolescent students affirmed and were permissive of premarital sex (14). The plausible reason could be globalization where young ones are challenging the norms and values of the society. It was noted that in Pokhara Nepal, young men and women have a different perspective and feel more comfortable in each other's company and also initiate sexual relations before marriage.

The finding of the study revealed that family background is one of the factors influencing attitude of premarital sex. This implies that family background is the bedrock of success in any society which means a good family background has positive influence on the society but an unstable family background would produce problematic children to the society. Findings revealed that sex education, curiosity, peer group influence, financial gratification, exposure to pornographic content were factors that also influence their attitude towards premarital sex. This is consistent with studies carried out in Nigeria and Indian (2,17). These suggest that sex education is key to getting information on sexuality and curiosity. Peer group influence and pornographic content are specific factors that may be responsible for adolescent's adventurous and exploratory behavior. It is expected that religion and traditional belief should influence adolescent attitude towards premarital sex. Surprisingly, religious and traditional belief were not reported as factors that influence attitude of adolescent students toward premarital sex. Religious and traditional belief are expected to instill in individual the moral values in the prevention of premarital sex. Nigeria is a very religious country that has deep rooted traditional and cultural norms which influence the way individuals behave but in this study the reverse is the case. This may not

be unconnected with generational changes where the world has turned to a global village, the era of information technology which now does not limit young ones' access to information about different spheres of life where adolescents of this age react to life. This would have influenced their world view, the way they view sex and sexuality. Then the advent of information technology and the use of smart phones by these young adolescents have given a lee-way to access all sources throughout the world. There is possibility that this exposure to internet, watching of pornographic films, videos, interacting with young and older partners may have to a large extent influenced how they view premarital sex.

Finding revealed that majority of the students are not sexually active. This is at variance with studies in Jakharta, China where migrant females have high premarital sexual behavior, Indonesia and Ethiopia reported to have few and more than half of the students involved in premarital sexual behaviour(11,16,17). In addition, adolescent students were reported to be sexually active in Ogun and Ebonyi States respectively in Nigeria (20,21). With majority of respondents having fair knowledge coupled with positive attitude reported in the study may be responsible for the low practice of premarital sex. It is pertinent to note that the few that engaged in premarital sex claimed

that they did not use contraceptive which indicated that they are involved in risky sexual behavior.

Conclusion

It was concluded from this study that majority of the adolescent students have fair knowledge, positive attitude and low practice of premarital sex. Factors that influence their attitude to include family background, religious beliefs, sex education, curiosity, peer group influence, financial gratification and exposure to pornographic content.

Recommendation

Sexual education should be encouraged at home, schools, by religious bodies, and non-governmental organizations, to equip adolescent students with information and skills on premarital sex, sexuality and its consequences.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicting interests.

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