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## FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH RISKY SEXUAL BEHAVIOURS AMONG ADOLESCENT IN NIGER DELTA

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### ABSTRACT

*Risky sexual behaviours are major global issue prevalent in Nigeria with regional variations. Major implications observed in Nigeria affect both migrant and non-migrant population yet factors associated with it remain scanty in literature. The implications of Risky Sexual Behaviours among young population have contributed immensely to high rate of mortality and morbidity worldwide especially through HIV and AIDS. This study examined factors associated with risky sexual behaviours among adolescent in Niger Delta. The study found that parental influence, economic reasons, peer influence, pleasure, search for academic advantages, community factors and loss of self-respect are factors associated with Risky Sexual Behaviours among Adolescent in Niger Delta. The study concludes that Social context of early adolescence means a lot for adolescents' sexual experience in later phase of life. When parents provide their children the right information about sex, it can protect them from risky sexual behaviours as they grow older. Furthermore, environment, culture, religion, peer have also been identified as sexual risk factors. It recommends that Parents should as a matter of responsibility, monitor and pay regular attention to their children's sexual life, Parents should educate their children on the dangers of risky sexual behaviours, Adolescents should mind the kind of people they keep as peers and adolescents should study to avoid being used by lecturers because of grade.*

**Keywords:** Risky Sexual Behaviours, Adolescent, Niger Delta

## Introduction

Adolescents otherwise known as young people are important segment of Nigerian society where it makes up about 210,050,728 (Nigerian population 2021). Members aged 18-29 years according to the new youth policy (2019) as stated by (Akande 2014) Nigeria's large and growing population. Adolescents are generally defined as meaningful, young persons under who are within the ages of 10-19 and 10- 24 years old according to World Health Organization (WHO, 2001). It is a period of life from puberty to attainment of full maturity (adulthood) or growth, a time of being young when one's appearance is full of freshness, vigour and young spirit. Adolescents also share certain characteristics that distinguish them from other generation. Such characteristic include, desire for independence, jealousy, radicalism, rebellions, curiosity, sexual risk behaviours, etc. It is both a period of opportunity as well as a time of vulnerability- a time of experimentation with new ideas and options and marked with vulnerability to health risk and those related to unsafe reproductive health outcomes (Furlong, 2013; Akande, 2014).

In the last three decades, a substantial increase has been observed in the proportion of adolescents who engaged in sexual activity while at school (Sedgh, Singh and Hussain, 2014). Adolescents are known to be an adventurous group, and often engage in risky behaviours such as smoking, drinking alcohol, using drugs, and early unprotected sexual activity (Linbee, Valencia, and Cromer, 2000). Practices such as homosexuality, lesbianism, and sexual orgies are indulged in just for the reason of experimentation and peer influences, owing to a wealth of uncensored information they are exposed to, through an intensifying wave of westernisation, the Internet, and electronic media. Perhaps this explains why adolescence has also been described as a time of 'storm and stress' (Hall, 2010). In his review, Dahl (2014) indicated that the dramatic increase in morbidity and mortality during this period of life is not attributable to illness or infection, but rather to 'difficulties in the control of behaviour and emotion.

The sensation-seeking and reckless behaviour seen among youths is thought to be responsible for the surge in accidents, suicide, drug abuse, violence, and risky sexual behaviour notable during the period of adolescence. Risky sexual activities could result in varying problems ranging from unwanted pregnancy, to abortion, to contacting STDs including HIV, and even to death. In fact it is estimated that one-half of all HIV infections occur among people younger than 25 years (Merson, 2013). Therefore, it is no surprise that the sexual behaviours of teenagers should be a thing of concern considering the fact that the ages at which teenagers engage in sexual activities is decreasing with increased urbanization and modernization of communities. There is no much study carried out about this topic.

Objectives of the study are to:

1. Examine the extent to which self-esteem ,
2. Parental involvements and
3. Social Media
4. Religiosity predicted risky behaviours among woman in Niger Delta.
5. Economic reasons
6. Peer influence

### Factors Associated with Sexual Risk

Although sexual content in the media can affect any age group, adolescents may be particularly vulnerable. Adolescents may be exposed to sexual content in the media during a

developmental period when gender roles, sexual attitudes, and sexual behaviors are being shaped (Jones and Boonstra, 2005). This group may be particularly at risk because the cognitive skills that allow them to critically analyze messages from the media and to make decisions based on possible future outcomes are not fully developed.

Analyses of broadcast media content indicate that, on average, teenaged viewers see 143 incidents of sexual behavior on network television at prime time each week with portrayals of three to four times as many sexual activities occurring between unmarried partners as between spouses (Ward and Friedman, 2006). As much as 80% of all movies shown on network or cable television stations have sexual content. An analysis of music videos indicates that 60% portray sexual feelings and impulses, and substantial minority display provocative clothing and sexually suggestive body movements. Analyses of media content also show that sexual messages on television are almost universally presented in a positive light, with little discussion of the potential risks of unprotected sexual intercourse and few portrayals of adverse consequences (Szabo, 2006).

### **Parental influence**

The supply and amount of parental emotional resources for control can have a significant influence on the youth to have or not to engage in risky sexual behavior (Magwaza & Bhana, 1991) family factors such as the relationship between the parents and adolescents in the area of care and protection, single parents, monogamy and polygamy and the parenting style cannot be ignored in the study of risky sexual behavior. Family is the first socializing agents that a child comes in contact with, and it goes a long way in defining and determining what the child will be. The most powerful sources of social influence are parents and family members. Another aspect of parental control is parent-child communication. Conventional wisdom would suggest that adolescents whose parents frequently engage in discussions (particularly discussions on reproductive and sexual Health issues) would be less likely to be sexually delinquent. Some researchers have noted that in sub-Saharan Africa, parent-child communication usually fraught with discomfiting, especially with fathers. Family as the first agent of socialization helps in shaping the life of an individual. The socialization given to one in the home has a big role to play in one's life in the tertiary institution. Some student involve in risky sexual behavior because of lack of parental control and home training. They come to school and behave anyway they like.

Ukoha (2004) stated that some parents know the sexual life of their children. He added that, some of these parents appreciate and accept the phenomenon as a Mark of modernity and tend to have no control over their children's sex life. He also makes us understand that, in some cases, parents see sexual activities among their children as a natural physiological phenomenon that could be hard to control. According to him, some believe that the activity should be enhanced for comfortable and healthy living.

In some cases, parents are ignorant of the sexual level of the youths. Thus, the youths are not properly guided in their acts, leading to incalculable amount of risks. The school then becomes the primary and most potent agency for offering effective education on sex matters. Due to lack of parental care, Ifelunni and Okorie, (2003) pointed out that, there is every indication that the youths indulge in unguarded sexual experimentation that is dangerous for so many reasons. Evidences show that some youths have unusual and very serious sexual drives that lead to promiscuity (Isangedighi, 1994; Ifelunni & Okorie, 2003; Onuzuike, 2000 Ukoha, 2004).

Over protective and over demanding parents hire adolescents into risky sexual behaviour. Also child rejection and child neglecting of the parent can form the adolescent's personality making the adolescent search for love thereby indulging in risky sexual behavior (Roe, 2001).

### **Economic Reasons**

This is a group of reasons that include the need for money, materialism and other valued goods like cellular phones, laptop, expensive clothes and shoes etc. Economic reason is the main reason why student indulge in risky sexual behavior rather than the other (influence, pleasure and academic) explanatory factors given in students have modern technology-driven material and enough money to lavish around. Students need money to make ends meet and some of them can do anything to get the money.

The desire for high social status or fashion and material goods among the students is another factor for engaging in risky sexual behavior. Most students, after satisfying all their basic needs, go ahead to acquire things like sound sets, expensive dresses, cars, iphones, television sets, etc. They go the extra mile acquiring things for themselves in immoral ways. Most students strive to acquire false status by pretending to be rich or to be from rich families. Poverty or economic depravity has also been linked with risky sexual behavior among students. Girls whose parents are economically disadvantaged or less empowered are often times unable to adequately provide for their daughters and thus, their daughters are exposed to seek financial favours elsewhere. In this regard, research has shown that the most likely sources of obtaining such financial favours are from young and older men who in turn ask for sexual favours from such girls. According to Ankomah (1999) observed that some females entered into risky sexual relationships ostensibly for financial reward; because their parents could not meet their basic needs such as paying for tuition fees.

### **Peer Influence**

Peers like roommates, classmates, club associates and other members of one's social group members equally influence one to be a deviant or conformist. Research has shown that some students engage in one form of risky sexual behavior or the other as a result of the influences of their mates. Peer pressure is another factor that influences student sexual behavior. As students begin to socialize with their peers, they tend to shift and values they learnt from home socialization to reliance on their peers. Hammer and Bangers (2010, p.290) state that a commonly cited reason for initiating sexual relations among adolescents was pressure from society and their peers. In their quest for a sense of belonging and to avoid rejection by the group the adolescents succumb to this pressure.

It has been shown that young people whose friends are sexually active or who perceive their friends to be sexually active are more likely to be sexually active themselves (Kiragu, 2001; Blum & Mmari, 2004). In a Nigeria study, Boyce and colleagues (2003) observed that students who stated that more than half of their friends had sex were also more likely to have had sex themselves. Yet, others engaged in sexual activity to raise their ego or status among their peers.

### **Pleasure**

Benda and Leon (1995) observe that when students are in the transitional stage of like, pleasure and sensation is what most of them seek on campus. Meeker and Calves (1997) argued that while some people engage in sex for money and love, others do so for the pleasure of it. This study has revealed that students engage in risky sexual behavior for a variety of factors. A student may engage in risky sexual behavior with another person for

pleasure. Risky sexual behavior for pleasure is not rampant and it is associated with boys and girls who have enough money and materials. Students involved in pleasure sex do not have a permanent partner and consequently they are the potential victims of STDs/HIV/AIDs in most cases.

### **Search for Academic Advantage**

Students can occasionally engage in sex for academic advantage, specially the academically weak ones. Students who are academically weak become “lay ups” for any student that is academically sound and is ready to do his/ her assignments and exams. Some of the Lombroso’s (poor but intelligent students) are always willing to come to the aid of dull student. They sometimes engage in sex with them and also collect money. As a result of search for academic advantage, female students sleep with male students as a payment for his writing examinations, assignments, copying notes etc for her. Students know that if they don’t perform well in their academics, the school will withdraw (WAF) them from the school. They go the extra mile to maintain academic excellence or good grades.

### **Community Factors**

Community factors include relationships between organizations and groups; and groups that individuals belong to (mcleroy et al., 2008). Hepworth, et al. (2013) also illustrates that these include the context of the adolescent’s environment and includes the physical environment and social support systems. Examples of community factors include family, church, neighbourhood, and informal social networks. Lowry and Towles, (2019) propose that community level factors can influence adolescents’ sexual behaviours at two levels. One is where there are opportunity structures that influence how adolescents perceive the cost of engaging in early sex, such as exposure to STI’s and risking unplanned pregnancy.

Another one is normative environment where boundaries of acceptable behaviours are defined. Adolescents that are raised in poverty are at increased risk of a wide range of adverse outcomes that are identified at birth and can extend into adulthood (Fabes and Strouse, 2009). This is an example of opportunity, structures where adolescents perceives engaging in sex as beneficial for them, especially for those with limited resources. Adolescents growing up in dysfunctional households where there is exposure to domestic violence, substance use, neglect, parental death and incarceration are more likely to engage in risky behaviours. Adolescents, who had experienced some form of aces, were more likely to engage in early sexual debut (Kidman & Kohler, 2019).

Chandra-Mouli, et al. (2013) also illustrate that during the adolescent stage, gender and social expectations begin to shape how adolescents behave and relate with the opposite sex. Svanemyr, et al. (2015) argue that such expectations can promote adolescent girls to be submissive, hence preventing them to being assertive with their sexual partners (since young men can be taught to be risk takers in matters of sexual and health). These can be an example of normative environment as the community is the one prescribing such rules and norms.

Envuladu, et al. (2017) report that adolescents engaged in sexual relations because they are forced or because of what they perceived as societal expectations. Furthermore, gender roles and unequal power relations ascribed by the society can affect the reproductive health of adolescent. This is because of the superiority of the man and the expectations that a female should submit to the demands of the man (Oladepo & Fayemi, 2011). This can, therefore, result in adolescent girls being forced into unwanted sex, failure to negotiate condom use, among other factors (Chandra-Mouli et al., 2013). Underwood, et al. (2011) note that unsafe spaces like the market, bars where alcohol is sold, unregulated access to alcohol, unsafe

public transportation systems, unsafe housing, and poor electricity provision are some of the factors that may negatively influence adolescents' sexual behaviours.

Also, in communities adolescents' girls are exposed to sexual violence and physical violence where they are coerced to engage in sex (Skinner, Osman, & Schwandt, 2011). Svanemyr, et al. (2015) argued that mobilization of community leaders can foster intergenerational communication in support of adolescent SRH. In Botswana, there are certain behaviours that are sanctioned in the community which influence sexual risky behaviours among adolescents (Chilisa, et al. 2016).

There are cultural beliefs and practices that encourage men to have multiple sex partners, hence exposing them to HIV infection. As these are sanctioned in the community, adolescents tend to adopt them; as boys perceive sex as a sign of masculinity and power domination (Chilisa, et al., 2013). Some communities also have a level of condonation or even approval of customs such as child marriages, female genital mutilation, polygamy, and the general subordination of women and minority groups which might promote negative beliefs among adolescents leading to engaging in risky sexual behaviours (Ntseane, 2004).

### **Loss of self-respect**

Unregulated sexual activity is a mark of low self-value and low moral standard. This means that when individuals engage in risky sexual behavior especially prostitution, it leads to image depreciation. This is why Onwuzulike (2003), pointed out that, many girls take to sex trade with little or no knowledge of the health consequences of such promiscuous behaviour. He further explained that, some students take to sex business for life enjoyment whereas others take to it for the payment of fees and maintenance of the body without considering the side effects.

### **Religion and Sexual Behaviour**

Two things are growing among Nigerian adolescents- affiliation with religious group and sexually transmitted infections as well as HIV/AIDS. At every nook and cranny of Nigeria urban and rural settlements are religious houses with the majority of worshippers being youths, premarital sexual intercourse among adolescents in Nigeria is also growing at an alarming rate despite its prohibition by these religious groups. Researchers are of the opinion that in spite of the apparent pervasive religiosity in the country, premarital sexual practices that culminate to unplanned pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections are on the increase (Dorojaiye, 2009; Morhason-Bello, Oladokun, Enakpene, Fabamiro, Obisesan & Ojengbede, 2008).

A study argued that religion influence individual adolescents' sexual behaviour directly and indirectly through mechanisms of social support and social control interacting at multiple levels of the adolescents' social context (Durkheims, 1951). There is still controversy underlying the mechanism through which religion affects sexual behaviour of adolescents in Nigeria.

Certainly, religious values are the source of moral proscriptions for many individuals. The teachings of the churches are likely to play a role in the formation of individual attitudes, values and decisions. The extent to which specific doctrines and policies of the religion influences individual attitudes and behaviour is yet to be determined given Rohrbaugh and Jessor (1975) were of the opinion that religion generates social control through four pathways;

- (a) by embedding the individual in an 'organised sanctioning network (p.137) that is supportive of conventional activities and opposed to unconventional ones,
- (b) by making the individual sensitive to moral issues and acceptable standards of behaviours, (c) by offering a deity as a source of punishment and wrath, and
- (d) by generating devoutness, thus creating an obedience orientation (p.137).

Findings regarding influence of religion on sexual behaviours have been mixed. For example, study by Odimegwu (2005) using 1,153 campus-based adolescents aged 10-24 years show a strong relationship between religiosity and adolescent sexual attitudes and behaviour. Similar finding was reported by Owusu (2011) using 1026 adolescents between 12 and 19 years of age in Lagos metropolis result show that religiosity is significantly related to multiple sexual partnerships.

Findings in other contexts found that religious attendance delayed the sexual debut of males (Jessor, Costa, Jessor & Donovan, 1986). Crockett, Bingham, Chopak and Vicary(1996) also found that females who attended religious services more frequently were more likely to delay sexual debut. Whereas, others (Mott, Fondell, Hu, Kowaleski-Jones & Menaghan, 1996) indicate that attendance was a predictor only when the adolescents' male friends also attended religious activities. Other studies reported non-significant findings for males (Miller, Norton, Curtis, Hill, Schvaneldt & Young, 1997).

### **Consequences of risky sexual behavior**

According to McDowell (1996, p.282) today's youth are more susceptible to the dangers of illicit sex than previous generations. Unfortunately, some Nigerian youths actively engaged in risky sexual behavior despite the detrimental consequences associated with it. However Ukor (1990, p.39) believes that many adolescents indulge in sexual relationship with the opposite sex without really knowing the implications. The primary effort of this section is to make bare these harmful consequences of risky sexual behavior. According to Akpede (2007) sex has created and is still creating problems for many of our youths, parents and the entire society, such as unplanned marriage, abortion, premature deaths etc. Many scholars like menses (2008) and Bong (2012) believe that the most prominent effects of risky sexual behavior are sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancies. The consequences include:

### **Unplanned Pregnancy**

This is often associated with risky sexual behavior. When a pregnancy is an outcome of risky sexual behavior, most students resort to abortion as a way of concealing their acts in order to avoid embarrassment. The girl feels ashamed to carry a pregnancy that is out of wedlock while the boy responsible for the pregnancy is not mature enough to tackle the responsibilities of fatherhood. According to Dike (2000, p.92) this act is most commonly associated with females while males co-pilot the affair. An unsuccessful abortion could lead to death or the destruction of the womb. It could also lead to childlessness at later years. Risky sexual behavior has given birth to illegal child trafficking. Young female students can now take in, only to deliver and dump babies' accordance with the management of such homes. Such babies are later adopted by couples who are childless. The practice of sharp-sharp sex was said to contribute for some unwanted pregnancy among to students. Sharp-sharp is carried out mostly in party venues and some of them are drunk and engaged in sex without condom.

### **Health Effects**

Scholars such as Okoye (2006), Brennen (2011) and Tant (2013) strongly believe that risky sexual behavior poses a lot of health challenges to those who engage in it. Students who engage in risky sexual behavior run the risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections (STI) such as AIDs, HIV, Chlamydia, Gonorrhea, Genital herpes, general Warts, Trichomoniasis, syphilis and so on. These diseases are life-threatening, painful and can cause infertility. Students who engage in group sex, sharp-sharp sex and sodomy account for a greater proportion of STI's victims.

### **School Drop Out**

Unwanted pregnancy often disrupts the education of female students, thereby increasing the chances of dropping out of school. When a girl becomes pregnant and drops out of school, she may never resume again except in rare cases. Even when the girl decides to remain in school, the challenges of unplanned pregnancy and motherhood may lead to poor academic performance. This had prevented many female students from achieving their educational goals. Consequently poverty may set in because job opportunities have decreased as a result of lack of education.

### **Feeling of Regret or Guilt**

In as much as a sexual act can be pleasurable, it leads to guilt and regret. Guilt about past sexual acts ends up crippling people when they become parents and most often they become very strict with their children's sexual behavior, which in turn makes such children curious about sex acts and thus easily get involved when the opportunity comes up. Some female students regret losing their virginity because money or material things that won't last. Guilt is a form of regret, a feeling that a person has gone against his/her conscience or has done something morally wrong. Guilt comes as a result of the fear that parents are aware of one's sexual acts or would be upset if they know one is having sex. It's terrible when the guilt comes.

### **Conclusion**

Social context of early adolescence means a lot for adolescents' sexual experience in later phase of life. When parents provide their children the right information about sex, it can protect them from risky sexual behaviours as they grow older. Furthermore, environment, culture, religion, peer have also been identified as sexual risk factors.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the researcher recommends the following;

1. Parents should as a matter of responsibility, monitor and pay regular attention to their children's sexual life.
2. Parents should educate their children on the dangers of risky sexual behaviours.
3. Adolescents should mind the kind of people they keep as peers.
4. Adolescents should study to avoid being used by lecturers because of grade.



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