

SEXUAL ATTITUDES OF DELTA STATE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: COUNSELLING IMPERATIVES

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Abstract

This study examined sexual attitudes of undergraduate students of Delta state university, Abraka Nigeria and its counseling imperatives. Three research questions were raised and two hypotheses formulated to guide the study. The study adopted descriptive survey research design to examine the attitude of students' unethical sexual practices. Student Sexual Attitude Questionnaire (SSAQ) was used to collect data for the study from the 801 students who were drawn using proportionate stratified random sampling technique from eight Departments in Faculty of Education in the University. The instrument was face validated by two experts in Faculty of Education and Cronbach alpha reliability was computed for the instrument which yielded a coefficient alpha of .62, $P < 0.05$. Mean ratings, standard deviation were employed to answer the research questions and z-test was used to test the hypotheses. The major finding of the study showed that even though premarital sexual intercourse, kissing/fondling, masturbation, oral sex, homosexuality among others were prevalent sexual attitudes, a high proportion of the students frowned at such practices; the finding also revealed that male and female student's sexual attitude in Delta State University, Abraka is negative even though the level of negativity varies between the male and female students. The finding showed that there was significant difference in sexual attitude of male and female students in higher institutions in Delta State. It was recommended that counselors should be employed in sufficient number in the counselling centre of the university. Also, it was advocated that sexuality education be entrenched into the curricula of the educational system at all levels.

Keyword: Undergraduate students, Sexual Attitude, Delta State University, Sexuality Education

Introduction

Sexual behaviour has a long history of emotionally charged social and cultural expectation, rules, taboos, myth and misconceptions. According to Marecek, Crawford and Pepp (2004) "normal" versus "dysfunctional" or "deviant" sexual behaviors are determined arbitrarily and are tied to social

norms of a particular time and place. The range of sexual values across cultures is indeed substantial. According to Nieto (2004), some cultures consider sexual pleasures “weired” or “abnormal”. In contrast, in some other cultures, young boys are taught about masturbation and are encouraged to engage in it as long as they like. Santrock (2006) identifies two well-known sexual- script in America. They are the traditional religious script and the romantic script. In the traditional religious script, sex is acceptable only within the confines of marriage. Extramarital sex is a taboo, especially for women. Sex means reproduction sometimes affection. In the romantic script, sex is synonymous with love. If two people establish a relationship and fall in love, it is acceptable to have sex with the person whether they are married or not. In Nigeria, these two sexual orientations/scripts are easily discernible among the population. Sex and different sexual activities are everywhere. Advertisers use sex to sell about everything ranging from cars to detergents. Sex is explicitly portrayed in movies, television, shows, videos, lyrics of popular music and internet websites (Galician, 2004; Petit, 2003).

Despite the media’s trivialization of sex, its’ profound significance for adjustment is often too apparent to individuals. Sexual behaviour is the manner or way in which individuals experience and express their sexuality through engaging in sexual activities such as non-penetrative sex, oral sex, masturbation, penetrative sex, kissing, breast fondling among others. Thus, the concept of sexuality and sexuality education should not be ignored by the various stakeholders. Sexuality is here construed to mean sexual act and sexual behaviors, individual’s attributes and behavior on sexual issues. It includes individuals’ preference about sexual acts such as masturbation, kissing or sexual intercourse and other sexual behaviors such as dressing (Akinade & Sulaiman, 2005). In fact among Nigerian youths, two dominant sexual orientations now exist. These are the heterosexuals and homosexuals. This situation has made sexuality education imperative. It has become especially more important for the young adult in higher institutions for various reasons. It is common knowledge that incidence of unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) especially HIV and AIDS is high among students. These have their attendant psychological consequences on the learners (Akinade & Sulaiman (2005). According to the American Social Health Association (2003), each year in American, more than one million teenagers become pregnant with 65percent of them resulting in babies born out of wedlock. Also, between 2.5 to 3million teenagers acquire a sexually transmitted infection of one kind or another. The net effect of this scenario is high incidence of forced withdrawals from school as well as disillusionment and depression among this vulnerable group.

There is no doubt about the growing recognition of the potentially powerful role of tertiary education for national, economic, social and political growth and development. Indeed, tertiary education plays a critical capacity building role in support of all the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (Materu, 2007). Tertiary education is seen as the education that is given after successful completion of secondary education. The Federal government of Nigeria defines it as the education given after secondary education in Universities, colleges of education, polytechnics, monotechnics, including those institutions offering correspondence courses (FRN, 2014).

Higher education is generally understood to cover teaching, research, and extension (community services). By elaboration, higher education is the source or feeder system in all works of life and therefore supplies the much-needed human resources in management, planning, design, teaching and research (Mishra, 2006). Also according to Hanishek and Wossmann, (2007), tertiary institutions play the role of supporting other levels of education in the following ways: seeking and cultivating new knowledge to engage vigorously and fearlessly in the pursuit of the truth and to interpret old knowledge and beliefs in the light of new needs and discoveries; to provide the right type of leadership in all works of life; to identify gifted youth and help them develop their potentials to the full by cultivating physical fitness; developing the new powers of the mind and cultivating the right interest; attitude and moral and intellectual values; and to foster in the teachers and students generally the attitude and value needed for developing the good life in individuals and society at large.

From the above, it can be inferred that although skills development is critical to the success of students in the job market, skills are of no value in the absence of any appropriate value system. The higher education institutions have the responsibility of inculcating a desirable ethical value system in students. It is essential then that students imbibe values commensurate with social, cultural, economic and environmental realities at the local, national and universal levels. However, it is to be noted that higher education institutions are regularly associated with negative energy and tendencies prevalent in the larger society. According to Peretomode (2008:24), “all vices of the wider society such as corruption, kidnapping, cultism, rape, strike, robbery, killing among others also rear their ugly heads in the academic institutions”. Indeed among many vices plaguing adolescents and younger adults in universities and other tertiary institutions is inappropriate sexual behaviours and attitudes (Hapern, Uly, Campbell, Suchindran, 1993). Youngsters engage in a spectrum of sexual behaviours ranging from fantasy to self-stimulations to various forms of intercourse. Erotic fantasies in adolescents serve the

function of creating pleasant sexual arousal and expressing sexual needs (Crockett, Raffaelli & Moilanen, 2003). Like fantasy, masturbation allows adolescents to explore their sexuality in a safe and private way (Katchaolourian (1990). However, masturbation is regarded as an inappropriate sexual behaviour and taboo in Nigeria and many other parts of the world. Also, it is observed that most adolescents in tertiary institutions engage in physically intimate behaviours even if they do not have intercourse—a habit referred to in literature as “making out”. This entails genital touching, kissing, robbing, necking or petting above the waist which eventually build up to outright intercourse (Crockett, et al, 2003).

A lot of factors have been identified as to how youngsters acquire sexual attitudes (Crockett, et al, 2003). Among these factors are biological influences, socio-cultural influences, family influence, peer influences as well as neighbourhood and media influences. This position lends credence to Kohlberg (1969) earlier view that moral value education starts early but proceeds at very different speeds according to domestic circumstances of the small child. According to the author, the knowledge of right and wrong conduct moves from early pre-conventional stage in which moral understanding of fairness are intertwined with egocentric self-interest and concrete concern for obedience to social authority to conventional moral understanding of morality and social justice as defined by conformity oriented and normative regulation. The post conventional level of Kohlherge’s model which is from age 16 and above is concerned with contractual legalistic orientation and conscience or principled orientation.

Recent decades have seen dramatic revision in gender roles which are expectations that prescribe how females and male should think, act and feel (Lenton & Blair, 2004; Lippa, 2005). Indeed psychologists have been concerned about how gender differences emerge. For example, Eagly (2001) proposed social cognitive theory which state that gender difference results from contrasting roles of women and men. In the author’s view, women adapted to roles with less power and less status in society, they are more cooperative and possess less dominant profiles than men. According to this view, children’s gender development occurs through observation and imitation as well as reward and punishment for gender appropriate and inappropriate behaviour (Bursey & Bandura, 1999). In other words, gender plays significant roles in sexual attitudes of males and females and in way they view and indulge in sexual activities. Some studies reported that males are more erotophilic (extreme positive attitudes towards sexuality) and develop more interest in various sexual behaviours and fantasies than their female counterparts, though the differences are not much (Garcia-Vega, Menendez,

Fernandez, & Rico, 2010); and older students were less likely to engage in risky sexual behaviours than younger students in the universities (Larranaga, Yubero & Yubero, 2012).

Based on the factors that influence male and female sexual attitudes, the discrepancy between “what is” and “what ought to be” in sexual attitudes of university students should be assessed and addressed through guidance and counselling in the tertiary educational institutions. Guidance and counselling which is a para-educational service is conceptualized as a programme that aims at assisting individual student to achieve a balanced personality, physically, emotionally, intellectually, socially and vocationally based on individual needs (Fakolade, (2008). Okrodudu (2010:15) defines counselling as “a process involving a professionally trained individual in the application of psychological principles and practices in assisting individuals and groups to cope with their life adjustment needs in the society”. Considering the fatal consequences of illicit sexual behaviours amongst adolescents in higher institutions of learning, it is incumbent on counsellors and teachers to have a sound knowledge of the sexual attitudes of students. This is with the view of helping those with inappropriate sexual orientations become better adjusted with their sexuality. The question, therefore, is: how do students in higher institution of learning in Delta State express their sexuality? In other words, what are the dimensions of the sexual attitudes of students in Delta State University, Abraka?

Research Questions

Three research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. What are the prevalent sexual attitudes of students in Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria?
2. Do sexual attitudes of students in Delta State University differ on the basis of gender?
3. Do sexual attitudes of students of Delta State University differ on the basis of level of study?

Hypotheses

Two research hypotheses were similarly formulated to guide this study:

- Ho₁: There is no significant difference in the sexual attitudes of male and female students of Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria.
- Ho₂: There is no significant difference in the sexual attitudes of students of Delta State University on the basis of level of study.

Methodology

This study is a descriptive survey research. The research did not manipulate any variable. The population of this study was made up of 2,957 male and 4,845 female students of the Faculty of Education of Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria. The population estimate is put at 7805 (Source: Academic Planning Unit, Office of the Vice Chancellor). This figure is made up of 2,957 (38%) male and 4,845 females (62%). The stratified random sampling technique was used to draw proportional number of participants from the gender and academic level of students. A sample of 801 participants representing over 10% was drawn for the study. Of this figure, 20 of the questionnaire were wrongly filled i.e. omission of the demographic information and thus eliminated from the sample. The researcher used a questionnaire titled “Students Sexual Attitude Questionnaire” (SSAQ) for this survey study. It was adapted from Santrock’s (2008) “My Sexual Attitudes’ Self-Assessment Scale”. This initial 22 items instrument was reduced to 15 after it was face validated by two experts in Measurement and Evaluation and Counselling Psychology Delta State University, Abraka. The modified instrument was trial-tested by administering 50 copies to 300 level students of the Faculty of Arts who were not part of the study. The Cronbach alpha reliability was computed for the selected 15 items yielding a coefficient alpha of .62, $P < 0.05$. This is indicative of good reliability of the instrument. The 15-item questionnaire measured the attitudes of students towards pre-marital sex, oral sex, masturbation and homosexuality. The researcher administered the SSAQ instrument to 801 respondents. The researcher was assisted by coordinators from the eight (8) departments of the faculty of Education, Delta State University. The researcher was assisted in scoring and coding of the data by two Post-graduate Diploma in Education students of Delta State University, Abraka. The arithmetic means, standard deviation and z-test statistics were employed in answering the research questions and testing the null hypotheses respectively.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the prevalent sexual attitudes of Delta State University students?

Table 1 Mean rating and standard deviation of prevalent sexual attitudes of students of Delta State University, Abraka

	Items	N	Agree	Disagree	Mean	Std. Deviation	Decision
1	Premarital intercourse between consenting	781	388	393	2.61	1.28	Disagree

2	adults is acceptable Masturbation is acceptable when the object is simply to obtain sensory enjoyment	781	242	539	3.07	1.15	Disagree
3	Oral sex should be viewed as an acceptable form of sex play	781	362	419	2.68	1.32	Disagree
4	Homosexuality should be regarded as a personal choice	781	299	482	2.88	1.22	Disagree
5	Relieving tension by masturbation is healthy	781	180	601	3.27	0.94	Disagree
6	Women should experience sexual intercourse before marriage	781	309	472	2.85	1.24	Disagree
7	Men should experience sexual intercourse before marriage	781	310	471	2.84	1.22	Disagree
8	Homosexual practices are acceptable between consenting adults	781	146	635	3.40	0.99	Disagree
9	The religious teaching that sex is acceptable only within marriage should be rejected	781	191	590	3.30	1.08	Disagree
10	Oral sex can provide more effective stimulation than intercourse does	781	203	578	3.13	1.10	Disagree
11	If I develop a relationship with someone and fall in love, it is acceptable to have sex with the person whether we are married or not	781	280	501	2.96	1.12	Disagree
12	Kissing amongst the unmarried is a normal expression of love	781	398	383	2.49	1.28	Disagree
13	No dressing pattern is good or bad in so far as it satisfied the individuals taste	781	324	457	2.84	1.15	Disagree
14	It is normal to have multiple sex partners at	781	87	694	3.61	0.82	Disagree

	a time						
15	It is wrong to secure sex from even an unwilling partner	781	179	602	3.23	1.06	Disagree
	Summated Mean and Standard Deviation			45.16		16.97	
Grand Mean				3.01	1.13		

In order to properly interpret the items in table 1, an arbitrary logical neutral point of 2.5 forming the average score was calculated for each item. Thus variables above 2.5 are negative (disagree) and all variables below 2.5 mean mark are considered positive (agree). This was done by comparing the item mean scores against the bench mark of 2.5 for each item. From the above therefore, all items except no 12 were above the average mark of 2.5 indicating that even though the above listed items were prevalent sexual attitudes, a high proportion of the students frowned at such practices.

Research Question 2: Do sexual attitudes of students in Delta State University differ on the basis of gender?

Table 2: Mean rating of the sexual attitudes of male and female students of Delta State University, Abraka.

S/N	Items	Mean Male N=306	Std. Deviation	Mean Female N=475	Std. Deviation
1	Premarital intercourse between consenting adults is acceptable	2.34	1.25	2.78	1.27
2	Masturbation is acceptable when the object is simply to obtain sensory enjoyment	2.75	1.24	3.28	1.04
3	Oral sex should be viewed as an acceptable form of sex play	2.38	1.32	2.88	1.29
4	Homosexuality should be regarded as a personal choice	2.81	1.21	2.93	1.29
5	Relieving tension by masturbation is healthy	3.15	0.97	3.34	0.91
6	Women should experience sexual intercourse before marriage	2.75	1.28	2.92	1.21
7	Men should experience sexual intercourse before marriage	2.64	1.25	2.97	1.18
8	Homosexual practices are acceptable between consenting	3.36	1.03	3.43	0.95

	adults				
9	The religious teaching that sex is acceptable only within marriage should be rejected	3.17	1.14	3.39	1.03
10	Oral sex can provide more effective stimulation than intercourse does	2.96	1.09	3.24	1.10
11	If I develop a relationship with someone and fall in love, it is acceptable to have sex with the person whether we are married or not	2.85	1.13	3.03	1.10
12	Kissing amongst the unmarried is a normal expression of love	2.51	1.28	2.47	1.28
13	No dressing pattern is good or bad in so far as it satisfied the individuals taste	2.70	1.18	2.93	1.12
14	It is normal to have multiple sex partners at a time	3.58	0.09	3.63	0.76
15	It is wrong to secure sex from even an unwilling partner	3.07	1.15	3.33	0.99
	Summated Mean and Standard Deviation	43.00	17.43	46.55	16.47
	Grand Mean	2.87	1.16	3.10	1.10

Table 2 revealed that the mean scores of all items were above the average decision mean score of 2.5 indicating that male and female students' sexual attitudes in Delta State University, Abraka are negative even though the level of negativity varies between the male and female students.

Research Question 3: Do sexual attitudes of students in Delta State University differ on the basis of level of study?

Table 3: Mean rating of sexual attitude of students in Delta State University on the basis of level of study

S/N	Items	Mean 100L N=169	Mean 200L N=203	Mean 300L N=101	Mean 400L N=289
1	Premarital intercourse between consenting adults is acceptable	2.28	2.72	2.18	2.85
2	Masturbation is acceptable when the object is simply to obtain sensory enjoyment	2.81	3.37	2.58	3.19

3	Oral sex should be viewed as an acceptable form of sex play	2.72	3.08	2.24	2.55
4	Homosexuality should be regarded as a personal choice	2.79	3.41	2.57	2.70
5	Relieving tension by masturbation is healthy	2.96	3.73	2.75	3.32
6	Women should experience sexual intercourse before marriage	3.18	3.14	3.09	2.39
7	Men should experience sexual intercourse before marriage	3.21	2.97	3.08	2.48
8	Homosexual practices are acceptable between consenting adults	3.57	3.73	3.30	3.11
9	The religious teaching that sex is acceptable only within marriage should be rejected	3.44	3.22	3.01	3.37
10	Oral sex can provide more effective stimulation than intercourse does	3.42	3.27	3.10	2.87
11	If I develop a relationship with someone and fall in love, it is acceptable to have sex with the person whether we are married or not	3.25	2.83	3.06	2.85
12	Kissing amongst the unmarried is a normal expression of love	2.90	2.36	2.70	2.25
13	No dressing pattern is good or bad in so far as it satisfied the individuals taste	3.21	2.79	3.29	2.49
14	It is normal to have multiple sex partners at a time	3.73	3.40	3.54	3.71
15	It is wrong to secure sex from even an unwilling partner	3.26	3.18	3.31	3.22
	Summated Mean and Standard Deviation	46.75	47.22	43.80	43.35
	Grand Mean	3.12	3.15	2.92	2.89

Table 3 revealed that the mean values of all items were above the average decision mean score of 2.5. The result showed that all the items mean scores were above the average mark of 2.5 indicating that even though the above listed items were prevalent sexual attitudes, all the 100L-400L students in Delta State University, Abraka frowned at such sexual attitudes.

Hypotheses 1: There is no significant difference between the sexual attitudes of male and female students of Delta State University, Abraka

Table 4: t-test for the difference between the sexual attitudes of male and female students in Delta State University, Abraka.

	N	Mean	SD	Df	z- calculated	z-critical value (.05)	Remark
Male	306	2.87	1.16	779	25.522	1.960	Rejected
Female	475	3.10	1.10				

$P \leq 0.05$ level of significance

The result of the z-test for the difference of two independent means indicated a significant difference between sexual attitudes of male and female students in Delta State University, Abraka. The hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference between male and female sexual attitude of students in Delta State University is therefore rejected due to the fact that the calculated z-value of 25.522 was greater than the critical value of 1.960 at 0.05 level of significance.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference between the first year (100L) students and the final year (400L) students' sexual attitudes in Delta State University, Abraka.

Table 5: T-test for the difference between first year (100L) students and the final year (400L) students' sexual attitudes in Delta State University, Abraka

	N	Mean	SD	Df	z- calculated	z-critical value (.05)	Remark
First year (100L)	169	3.12	1.06	456	25.696	1.960	Rejected
Final year (400L)	289	2.89	1.10	456			

$P \leq 0.05$ level of significance

The result of the z-test for the difference of two independent means indicated a significant difference between the first year (100L) students and the final year (400L) students' sexual attitudes in Delta State University, Abraka. The hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference between the first year (100L) students and the final year (400L) students' sexual attitude in Delta State University is therefore rejected due to the fact that the calculated z-value of 25.696 was greater than the critical value of 1.960 at 0.05 level of significance.

Discussion of Findings

The finding of the study showed that even though premarital sexual intercourse, kissing/fondling, masturbation, oral sex, homosexuality among others were prevalent sexual attitudes among students in Delta State University, a high proportion of the students frowned at such practices. This finding is in agreement with the findings of Hapern, Ulry, Campbell, Suchindran (1993) which reported that among many vices plaguing adolescents and younger adults in universities and other tertiary institutions are inappropriate sexual behaviours and attitudes. The authors further revealed that youngsters engage in a spectrum of sexual behaviours ranging from fantasy to self-stimulations to various forms of intercourse. The finding also revealed that male and female student's sexual attitudes in Delta State University, Abraka is negative even though the level of negativity varies between the male and female students.

Also, the finding revealed that among undergraduates of Delta State University, female students have more positive sexual attitudes than their male counterparts. This study agrees with some studies which reported that males are more erotophilic (extreme positive attitudes towards sexuality) and they develop more interest in various sexual behaviours and fantasies than their female counterparts, though the differences are not much (Garcia-Vega, Menendez, Fernandez, & Rico, 2010). The finding showed that there was a significant difference in sexual attitudes of male and female students in Delta State University. The difference in the scores of male and female students' sexual attitudes should be sought from other institutions of civil society. These institutions are the family (Crockett, et al 2003) and the church (Santrock, 2006). Among Southern Nigerian peoples, the girl child receives better attention and care from parents than their male siblings. It is also easily discernible that female population in churches far outweighs that of the males. Here they receive sound teachings or moral principles that help them maintain a healthier sexuality.

The result also showed that the newer students (100L) have a more positive sexual attitude than the final year students. This finding is consistent with Kohlberg's (1969) theory which identified three (3) broad stages of moral development. The theory starts from early pre-conventional stage and terminates at the post-conventional. The 100 level students who are relatively newer in the university would just be leaving the conventional stage and tend to be better behaved. Generally, the respondents showed a reasonable level of positive sexual behaviour. They seem to align with the traditional religious script (Santrock, 2006). The finding is in contrast with the finding of Larranaga, Yubero and Yubero (2012) which revealed that older students were

less likely to engage in risky sexual behaviours than younger students in the universities. However, with the ever-increasing exposure of adolescents and even children to obscene and pornographic materials, electronic media especially the internet, the shift to the romantic script is just a matter of time.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study looked at the sexual attitudes of adolescents in Delta State University, Abraka. From the data gathered and the consequent analysis made, it can be inferred that students generally have an appreciable positive sexual attitude despite the emerging permissive sexual culture of the western world, female undergraduates have a better positive sexual disposition than their male counterparts and freshmen or newer students have better positive sexual attitude than the stale or older students. Findings from this study have implications for guidance and counselling in higher education. Thus study made the following recommendations:

1. Guidance and counselling centres in higher institutions should be adequately staffed with professionally trained guidance counselors and the centre should be well equipped with books and counseling gadgets or equipment. A situation where the director of the university counselling centre who also doubles as a counsellor-educator is the only professional in the centre should be corrected.
2. Considering the high-risk factor associated with sexual misdemeanors among adolescents, sexuality education programmes should be entrenched into the curricula of the three tiers of the educational system.
3. Public enlightenment campaigns against illicit sexual behaviours should be undertaken by guidance counsellors in concert with other relevant stakeholders within higher educational institutions. The recent rebuff of America and other European nations by the national assembly on the issue of legalizing gay marriages is highly commendable. Counsellors should follow-up this position by organizing seminars and conferences for students to enlighten them on the evils of homosexuality and other sexually related abuses.
4. Lecturers should take up their statutory traditional responsibilities of acting as counsellors, role models and mentors to students.

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