

Adolescent Sexuality and Family Life Education in South Western Nigeria: Responses From Focus Group Discussion

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KEYWORDS Sexuality; attitude; behaviour of adolescent; reproductive health activities; focus group

ABSTRACT This study reports the results of a primary qualitative investigation of teaching of family life education in schools as a panacea to the ever-lingering adolescents' sexuality problems. The study is based on interviews and focus-group discussions with parents, teachers, school guidance counselors and students who are stakeholders in education. The family life education and different sexuality behaviours of the adolescents were described. The question is whether these stakeholders will subscribe to teaching of family life education in schools as a solution to the increasing reproductive health problems including endemic HIV/AIDS disease. The survey confirms the extent of sexuality awareness of adolescents and the fact that reproductive health problems including HIV/AIDS is in every nook and cranny of the society; be it rural or urban. The qualitative investigation suggests that the samples are of the opinion that teaching of family life education in schools will be a vital solution to adolescents' sexuality problems.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescents' sexuality behaviour in Nigeria and sub-Saharan Africa is seriously going through transformation from what it used to be in the past. This can be attributed to the effect of modernisation caused by industrialization, education, exposure and enculturation through importation of various foreign cultures, which were alien to the Nigerian culture in particular and African as a whole.

Sexual behaviour display by adolescents are of various types and it is worthy of note that modalities in sexual activities have changes with young people more willing and eager to experiment different discovered through intuition or otherwise variations in foreplay and coitus. Infact, the large numbers of pictorial books combined with the licit and illicit movies have contributed in no small measure toward the removal of guilt, fear and shame associated with unconventional activities.

Owuamanam (1982) listed five types of sexual behaviours found among adolescents in his study – kissing, breast/genital fondling, embracing, holding and sexual intercourse. That of Diepold and Young (1979) included dating, petting, masturbation and homosexual contact. Another sexual behaviour discovered is oral general contact (Alzae, 1978; Soyinka, 1979). A

lot of concern has been expressed about the delinquent behaviour of adolescents in connection with sexual matters and various analysis of adolescent sexuality behaviour in sub-Saharan African have pointed out to a transformation in the nature of sexual activity and child bearing among the young. With rapid urbanisation and the breakdown of moral values, sexual permissiveness have become a characteristic of the social life of adolescents and there have been growing incidents of pregnancy and contracting of sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS among unmarried teenagers. More than one-third of these pregnancies are aborted, with almost half of the pregnant ones being admitted in hospitals for bleeding, anemia and fatigue (Nwanko, 1983) and also other complications (Fasuba 1995). Some have been confirmed HIV positive while some are already dead or are at the point of death because of AIDS. For instance, studies in Cote D'Ivoire, Malawi, South Africa, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Nigeria confirmed that young women in their teens and early twenties had highest seroprevalence rates (Verkiyl, 1995; Briggs, 1995; Abdvol Karim et al., 1992). Often, the society frowns at these adolescents due to series of problems they face. Most of them drop out of school, live on welfare, often below poverty line, while their health and that of their babies (in the care of pregnant ones) suffer.

In the past, before the advent of Western

Education, young people were given informal education to prepare them for life (Fafunwa, 1974). The traditional system of education in Nigeria saw to it that young men and women were taught to acquire a healthy attitude towards sex as part of their preparation for adult life. Baker and Rich (1992) also confirmed the availability of traditional authority structures governing marriage and sexual behaviour as well as the familial and community support networks that eased young people's transition to adulthood. During this period, an adolescent have little opportunity for full sexual expression until his late twenties (Bledsoe and Cohen 1993). In Ghana, like other sub-Saharan Africa, adolescents' sexual experience was not encouraged. Elders were concern of the very young participated in sexual activity. Such activity occurring too early was said to cause "a boy becoming weak and impotent and a girl to become barren and lazy" (Barbara et al., 1999; Grindal, 1982). But with the disorganization of primary societies, and resort to urban life, when people move away from their roots and loose their otherwise rich cultural values in their bid for better social status and atonements, there is bound to be problems. One of such problems is the inability of the adolescents to handle their newly awakened sexual impulses. This problem over time, has led to sexual flippancy which made issue of teenage or premarital pregnancy, abortion, illegitimate children and venereal diseases including HIV/AIDS the recurring natural consequences which require a lasting solution that could stand a test of time.

Thus, this paper intend to make a case for the use of family life education in the school system as a means of training the adolescents to have knowledge and positive attitude as regards sexuality attitude and behaviour. It intends to air the views of the stakeholders; Parents, teachers and students on the adoption of family life education as a teaching subject in the school system.

FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION

Family life education is one of the core aspects of population education. It encompasses of issues on family life, sex, the environment and health. The supposed family life education content is based on some universally applicable basic concepts, which make the subject to be an appropriate panacea to the problem of adoles-

cents' sexuality behaviour. Among the considered basic concepts are:

- (a) The need to have respect for others, especially persons of the opposite sex. This is based on the premise that if young ones can truly learn this, it will make them to understand what respect means and hold on to it as a value so that they could be refrained from behaviour, which is potentially harmful to others.
- (b) The need for self-respect, self-esteem and high self-concept. Although this is pertinent to both boys and girls, it is more important for girls. This concept will allow the young one to be exposed to the variety of life options they will encounter while giving up, get them prepared for life eventualities and also tactically equip them to make appropriate choice in the presence of different alternatives for example chosen to finish their formal education and avoid early pregnancy.
- (c) The need to know that young ones should learn to plan. This includes the importance and feasibility of family planning. It is proper for young ones to know that when children leave school, at whatever age, they need to understand the importance of planning the first pregnancy in terms of benefit (health, social, and economic) that planning can bring to them and their children. They need to also understand that, ideally, children are borne out of a conscious, carefully throughout decision on the part of loving parents
- (d) The need to know that behaviour has consequences. This is on the premise that since it is possible for individuals to control their behaviour, they must be ready to accept the responsibility for whatever the consequences of their behaviour is. For example in the area of reproductive behaviour, they should understand that consequences of such behaviour always have lifelong implications.
- (e) The need to learn how to withstand social pressures. This is based on the fact that young ones are prone to face pressure on many issues from many quarters while growing up. Pressures may come from their peers in society where early adolescents sexual activity is prevalent; pressures may also come from parents or other relatives and neighbours on many other life issues. Family life education will help adolescents to

recognize these types of social pressure and help them to deal with other in a responsible manner.

An overview of what the level of effectiveness of family life education would be can be ascertained from what operates in the country that had made related education compulsory from time immemorial. Martnison (1972) discussing Sweden, a country where sex education had been made compulsory since 1956, said Sweden has a home choice rate that is less than the United States, one of the lowest rape rates in the world, and has effectively avoided the population explosion and that the rate of occurrence of sexually transmitting disease is considerably lower. While joining issues with the opponents of whatever form of comprehensive reproductive health education, the Advocates for Youth, a non – governmental organisation, discusses and enumerates the effectiveness of reproductive health education bringing their argument on the report of studies conducted by their researchers in some European countries where they operate. The report Advocate For Youth (1955) reveals that reproductive health education such as Family life education / sex education:

- (a) Eliminate ignorance –while sexuality is a normal, healthy part of living, too many families maintain harmful silence about the issue, giving young people the message that sexuality is bad. Ignorance flourishes in such a situation and prevent adolescents from making informed and responsible decisions about abstinence, contraception, sexuality and relationships.
- (b) Teaches about abstinence, and helps teens build skills to remain abstinence if they so decide.
- (c) Allows total dissemination of information to the youth since withholding information does not help young people make informed and responsible choices. Sexuality active teens feel stigmatized by messages that only abstinence is safe or appropriate and may be less likely to use contraception when they have intercourse. After all, latex condoms provide infinitely more protection from unwanted pregnancy and STDs than no contraception at all.
- (d) Does not lead young people to experiment with sex. It helps teens delay sexual intercourse and to use contraception effectively. It provides information about sexuality and

age when appropriate comprehensive reproductive health education that begins early and sustained can help teens delay sex and use more effective methods of birth control once they become sexually active.

- (e) Stresses Values. It allows students to examine behavioural values, and norm in order to weigh the consequence of their decisions. The value-based components’ help young people identify their own values based on their culture, family and religious background. Comprehensive reproductive education does not attempt to replace family values, but rather help young people to identify them so they can be more aware of which decisions are right for them and why.
- (f) Promotes positive sexual health. Quality reproductive health education focuses on both factual information and skill development. Skills components address setting goals communicating about whether to have sex, negotiating abstinence or contraceptives use, resisting peer pressure and other important abilities.
- (g) Gives room for sexuality educators to work in concert with parents to promote healthy adolescents sexual development. The supplement educations received by parents through sexuality educators help them overcome the difficulties they face when they are the sole providers of information and guidance.
- (h) Leads to open communication between parents and children on sexuality matters. It eliminates the anxiety expressed by parents about not knowing what to say when to say it or being uncomfortable talking with young people about intimate issues. Comprehensive sexuality education enhances young people’s knowledge, clarifies their values, improves communication skills and encourages sexually active teenagers to use contraception.

The above report therefore show that family life education will promote attitudes that are necessary for adolescent to function positively and responsibly in the society. In order to take into account the needs, the aspirations and cultural characteristics of the African Societies (at large), recognition would be accorded the impression, which the word ‘sex’ connote and spread amongst all, and sundry. It is in this regard that this paper is showcasing family life

education rather than sex education even though both are synonymous, family life education is more comprehensive and encompassing than sex education in all ramification. This is to make the curriculum of the subject to be sensitive to the local culture and be acceptable to parents and all other stakeholders in education.

DATA COLLECTION

Subjects for the focus-group discussions and in-depth interviews were chosen among teachers, school guidance counsellors, parents (who are not teachers) and students. Each group were considered as independent group. The procedure used for group selection was varied. The teachers' members of the group were chosen from the randomly selected schools in Ife Central Local Government Area of Osun State in Nigeria. The teachers group was made up of thirty teachers. The guidance counselor of each chosen school suggested names of these teachers. The guidance counselors group was made up of the guidance counselors of the purposively randomly selected schools. This group was made up of ten school guidance counselors because each school has only one officially appointed guidance counselor. The parents group was made up thirty parents of ten men and twenty women. They were chosen through the assistance of the Parent and Teachers Association Secretary of each school after being briefed of the purpose for the selection. The general body of Parents, nominated the sample parents during the Parents and Teachers Association meeting of each school. The students group was made up of twenty students. This comprised of two students (a male and a female) nominated by students of each randomly selected schools. The nomination of the students was co-coordinated by the assistance of each school's guidance counselor.

Twelve focus group discussions were conducted with each focus group meeting three times. Each focus – group discussion last for one and half hours and it was noted that all participants spoke during discussions during each session.

During the focus group discussion, respondents were made to discuss adolescent sexuality: moral values, sexual permissiveness, sexual behaviour, adolescent pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS and the family life education as a way out. The participants

were intimated with what family life education entails before it was discussed as issue of contention as a panacea to adolescent sexuality problems.

Responses from focus-group discussions were analysed by collecting all statements about a particular aspect, by summarising the main point if consensus existed among focus-group respondents and by noting the differences if there were disagreements, and by selecting illustrative comments for inclusion.

TEACHER'S FOCUS-GROUP

Remarkable unity is evident among respondents in their opinions about the issue of adolescent sexuality. For the most part, informants say that sexual permissiveness, sexual behaviour and adolescent pregnancies, which cannot be overtly observed nor felt at homes in the past within the community talk less of the families or the school, has been turned to public affair irrespective of where it is been exhibited while the social ostracism discipline that enforced adherence to the respected customs of the society has wane. This practice (laxity) is remarked to be unhealthy and painful.

Students discusses the issue of boy friend / girl friend in the class as if they are discussing a topic in a particular subject, they exchange love letters and meet themselves openly in the nooks and crannies of the school without fear (A male mathematics teacher).

Some students leave their houses for school in their uniform but without getting to school at all. They move around in mufti they have hid in their bag before leaving their homes. So instead of coming to school, they end up in an arranged place known to the opposite sex student who will not come to school too. Some even follow those who are much older than them (A male social studies teacher).

In the past, you hardly heard of students being pregnant and if it happens at all, it was would be one or two at the interval of over ten school sessions. Now, every session always have one, two or three students who are pregnant and have stayed away from school. At times, they will stay in school until it is detected before they will stop coming to the school (A male principal).

Parents do not have time for their children again. Not unlike in the past when every moves of the children are being monitored. Poverty has

made everybody to now concentrate on how to make ends meet at the detriment of children training (both moral and otherwise). Parents prefer students to leave school and go to lesson where nothing is being taught rather than coming home straight from school since they would not be home to monitor them [A Vice-Principal (F)].

Well, if family life education or is it sex education will bring back sanity, let it be introduced but it should be handled by qualified and discipline tutors while all the school staff must be involved. All staff must be given a role to perform [A teacher (F)].

I think family life education will be better than sex education in the school. Apart from the name, family life education will be more appropriate since it entails broader scope [A teacher (F)].

Let government recruit and post one or two guidance counselors who will be full time school counselors to schools. They are trained to handle morals of students in the school systems [A teacher (M)].

THE PARENTS FOCUS-GROUP

Respondents' comment about adolescent sexuality is almost a mirror image of those cited by the teachers' focus group. Respondents' say that adolescent sexuality expressions have defied all culturally accorded respect given to it in the time past. The nowadays adolescents do not have respect for culture, do not ready to wait or learn about life from elders nor have respect for their bodies. They mentioned the issue of preponderance of family planning.

Adolescents' sexual behaviour can only be likened to that of dog these days. They don't have shame and are fearless. Some are even ready to walk around in nude (50-year-old female).

Government has made things worse. Poverty has allowed decadence to pervade all aspects of our morals that homes has totally failed in its duties since parents do not have time to handle their children like before in the name of survival. The entire responsibilities cannot be pushed to school. Teachers too have their own problems (A 62-year-old man).

Something must be done. The youth's way of life has changed in totality. During our own days, you hardly heard of boyfriend/girl friend discussion among adolescent students; we don't even know it or which girl will want people to see her in one corner with a boy except the known

outcast and they were extremely few but now, they do it with impunity and pride. The home, school and government have to find a way out of this moral laxity. (53-year-old woman)

Foreign culture and way of life is what is really getting the youth and even some old people corrupted morally. It is in every home that they watch films now and our children are copying what they see the white people in developed countries doing. Children watch all these films in the absence of the parents. These things are purely the influence of civilization and modernization. Our person comes in from foreign countries with their imported way of dressing, behaviour and money, which they flaunt before others. The ignorant children will have to copy them (98-year-old man).

It is a fact that something has to be done but I don't think it should be sex education. This will aggravate the behaviour we are complaining about. I think family life education is better than sex education but the onus is really on homes to do something about their wards. Family life education only cannot be the solution to the adolescents' sexual misbehaviours. Parents should have time for their wards (40-year-old male).

Societal problems are getting increased everyday. We see or hear of terrible things about our adolescent behaviour (sexually), which are unimaginable. Government should come out with policy statement that can sanitize our society before it gets worse than what we have now. Whether sex education or family life education the school should adopt one and fine tune how to go about its teaching in the school. But homes too must be ready to contribute their own quota (46-year-old woman).

Everything boils down to indiscipline either in the school or at home. I strongly feels disciplinary measure of high standard should be adopted by the school in order to check the awkward menace (52-year-old man).

Times have changed and things are not as they used to be with education now. The children seem to feel that they know better than their parents so they do not take to what they tell them. I strongly believe that family life education may help. If it can be entrenched into the school curriculum, adolescents will know all they should and thereby behave themselves (48-year-old man).

Honestly, there should be a way out because

none of the adolescent students can be exonerated from these societal induced terrible sexual acquired behaviours. Infact, no parent can confidently say his/her ward is excusable. It is only those that were caught or seen that are considered as offenders. All of them are culprits. School should teach family life education. Things have changed (46 year-old woman).

THE STUDENTS FOCUS GROUP

Participants expressed considerable concern about the consequences of various unsanctioned sexual behaviour common among the adolescents. They confirmed that they would support a firmer hand and greater discipline at home and school and also the fact that family life education, as a subject will be preferred to sex education even if the contents are the same.

Sex has become part of life, believed to be what builds love between a boy and a girl without thinking about its repercussion. That is why it has become the order of the day (18 year-old female).

Exposition to various vices at home and society in general is the main cause of this bad behaviour. Many parents' lack of money to be given to their children to take care of their needs pushed them to follow men about. When older ones do this, the younger ones too copy it. Even, behaviour of some parents in the presence of their children is nothing to write home about (15 year-old female).

As adolescents, when we exhibit some kinds of behaviours, it would be good for our parents to warn or cane us to correct us (16 year-old male).

Many video-film and the advertisement of some family planning materials contributes greatly to adolescents sexual behaviour problem. We all know what should not be known (15 year-old female).

Some fathers and mothers do not question their children to know what they do. And some that sees their children moving with opposite sex will not bother to call them to order and advise. Instead, they rather throw insults at them trying to prevent them. When this is done, the girl and boy will start to hide to see themselves (18 year-old male).

I think some of us got introduced to these behaviours through our friends. There are bad friends and good friends (16 year-old male).

It is better if school can teach us all we should

know if our parents will find it difficult so that we will know the consequences of our behaviours (15 year-old female).

I will support family life education in school. Sex education look very odd (16 year-old male).

Behaviours of young ones should be properly monitored and controlled. The way we students get ourselves involved in sexual activity and behaviour is too bad and I thing there should be a laid-down rules to be followed before one starts to (relate) follow opposite sex (18 year-old male).

GUIDANCE COUNSELORS FOCUS GROUP

Respondents' responses in this group are not different from the way the adolescents' sexual behaviours and activities were viewed and perceived by other four groups. They have the same opinion about the source of the problems and the terrible rampant state at which different vices culminating in sexual behaviours of the adolescents are being overly displayed. They support the introduction of family life education as a subject into the curriculum of schools including primary school but with the warning that those who are trained to teach it should handle it. They also opined that other teachers in the school system should be ready to assist in guiding the students not in hostile manner since adolescence period is a delicate period, during which young ones veer wrongly if not properly guided.

Denying that the level of morality among the adolescents (students) is under control is an understatement. It has reached a level in which both home and the school should come together and decide on what to do to curb it. It is now difficult to vouch for any student or else one will be disappointed (42 year-old school counsellor).

Today, many parents cannot give their children enough food talk less of paying school fees and meeting their other needs. Some of these young ones go after those that can provide for their needs. These are elderly people who request for sex as gratification from them [32 year-old school counselor (F)].

We are in this state and level because there are all sorts of entertainment around us while the parents too are not there to monitor their children. Children do not sit with their parents to learn from them through the old style of story telling, they will rather watch an uncensored films. How won't they be wayward? (38 year-old school counsellor).

People are not totally realistic and they

Table 1: The demographic status of the focus-group members

| Group | No. | Religion | | Sex | | Age | Marital Status | |
|---------------------|-----|-----------|--------|------|--------|-------|----------------|--------|
| | | Christian | Muslim | Male | Female | | Married | Single |
| Teachers | 30 | 22 | 8 | 20 | 10 | 29-45 | 26 | 4 |
| Guidance Counsellor | 10 | 8 | 2 | 6 | 4 | 32-42 | 9 | 1 |
| Parents | 30 | 19 | 11 | 10 | 20 | 40-62 | 30 | - |
| Students | 20 | 12 | 8 | 10 | 10 | 15-18 | - | 20 |

pretend as if it is sex education (as subject) that will expose their children to various sexual activities which they already know instead of being bothered with what the content of sex education (as subject) is. Some are involved in these activities while some are not but the fact that they were taught what should be known will make them to be knowledgeable, prepared for life, know the repercussion, and be careful. And, with the home taken care of the expected responsibility, adolescents will live in a more decent and responsible way and manner (42 year-old female guidance counsellor).

Sex education or if it is family life education should be taught in the schools by competent hands. Government should also organise workshops for them from time to time while other members of school staff should always help in complementing their efforts because one person cannot only handle moral training (39-year-old school counsellor).

Honestly, it is very difficult to prevent the adolescents from misbehaving sexually. The rampant discuss of family planning method openly and the clamour for the use of condom because of STDs/HIV/AIDS by government nowadays does not help matters. These young children along with all these watch various kinds of foreign and even local films that encourage immoral behaviour. Even the cultural values are gone. Then society must be prepared for the eventuality [40 year-old school counselor (F)].

CONCLUSION

Contemporary behaviours and sexual activities of the adolescents have overtly showed that fundamental transformation has taken place in the lives of young people in recent years. Adolescents are confirmed to have much greater autonomy than they did in the past, and parental involvement in their everyday life including moral guidance is declining. With the reduced influence of elders, the inability of the adolescents to handle their sexual impulses have come to the open, and

as observed by Adelabu and Henry (1998), adolescents now engaged in one form of sexual experimentation or the other for pleasure.

Alteration in the context of adolescent sexual activities which often lead to pregnancy and eventually, abortion or out of marriage births are regarded as an urban phenomenon but this qualitative investigation of adolescent sexual behaviour and imminent panacea in a relatively remote or rural area of South-Western Nigeria has revealed that the behaviours that have been ascribed to the urban settings are now found in high magnitude in the rural settings.

In spite of the fact that discussion of sex openly is a taboo in the Nigeria societies and also coupled with the fact that parents in Africa constitute a very small percentage as source of sexual information to their children while school has not yet taken up the responsibility to teach reproductive health education, to primary school or secondary school students. (Fagbemi, 1979; Obadofin, 1984; Amazigo, Silva Kautman and Obikeze, 1997) the socio environment faced by adolescents and the reproductive behaviour they exhibit appear to have change. The teachers who teach the adolescents, the students who are adolescents themselves, the parents and the guidance counselors in schools acknowledged the rise in premarital sexual activities of the adolescents. The increase in the level of poverty among parents, the introduction of video films and importation of foreign culture and habits including clothing styles has obviously undermined traditional parent-child relationships.

In the light of the above given evidences, it should not come as surprise that despite the rurality of Ile-Ife, it is not immune to the reproductive health and sexual activities noted immemorial as social trade mark of the urban and cosmopolitan cities of Nigeria in particular and that of the universe in general. The views expressed also confirmed that the government through policy statement or school system to curb or reduce irresponsible sexual behaviours of the

adolescents has taken no concrete step. This may be achieved if subject that will promote health education and information about sexuality is being taught in the school. Family life education as a subject in the school system, will teach sexuality as primarily, an education that will expose adolescents in totality to what human beings are, whether male or female. It will enable students to acquire knowledge, attitudes, values, life skills and services needed to live responsibly.

According to Esiet (2003), Sexuality education is not only related to the physiological or biological being, it has a psychological component, social component, emotional component, religions and spiritual component of our being. She observed that it is very easy for people to be judgemental when sexuality education is mentioned because they link it to sex and sexual intercourse. She further remarked that this education tries to focus on the way healthy young people cope with what life demand which is cognitive in nature because it demands for provision of information about our emotions, value, humanness and how we express it, and the skills with which to cope with the challenges of being somebody. Furthermore, Fawole, 1981; Oikeh, 1981 and Ojo, 2000 has over the time suggested the teaching of sex education or family life education in secondary schools in order to prevent irresponsible sexual behaviours of the adolescents that most of the time lead to unwanted pregnancies, school drop-outs, contracting of sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS and the possibility of death from illegal abortion by quack doctors.

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