

***Sexual Behaviour Patterns and the Perception of HIV/AIDS Preventive Measures among In-School Adolescents in Cross River State, Nigeria***

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**Abstract**

*This paper examined the relationship of sexual behaviour patterns and the perception of HIV/AIDS preventive measures in terms of its mode of transmission and its being a killer disease among in-school adolescents. The research design adopted for the study was survey method. Data for the study was collected from 600 in-school adolescents using a validated questionnaire with 0.79 to 0.84 as reliability coefficient. One hypothesis was tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient while frequency and percentages were used to answer the research question. The results showed that there was an inverse relationship between adolescents keeping of multiple partners as sexual behaviour patterns and their perception of HIV/AIDS in terms of mode of transmission. However, there was a significant relationship between in-school adolescent keeping of multiple partners and perception of HIV/AIDS in terms of its being a killer disease. In response to the research question, female adolescents' perceived knowledge of HIV/AIDS preventive measures was lower than that of the males in terms of being exposed to reproductive health education. It was recommended that more useful information and counselling on preventive measures of HIV/AIDS should periodically be made available to in-school adolescents. The teaching of Reproductive Health Education should be enforced among in-school adolescents right from the junior secondary school levels. Implications for girl-child counselling were highlighted.*

**Keywords:** Sexual Behaviour, Counselling, HIV/AIDS and Adolescent.

## **Introduction**

Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) is a global health problem which has posed a serious health threat among adolescents especially girls in Nigeria and in the world at large. This disease affects every continent in the world with the largest percentage of patients found in sub-Sahara Africa. Out of more than 40 million people afflicted with HIV/AIDS worldwide, 25.4 million (64%) are estimated to live in this region of Africa (UNAIDS, 2004). In Nigeria, the HIV/AIDS is devastating and there is no controversy that HIV/AIDS pandemic presents a major obstacle and challenges to the adolescents especially the girl-child. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2002) describes HIV/AIDS as constituting a crisis for gender as women are particularly susceptible to the infection in relative to men. The issue of higher infection rates among women and their current economic vulnerability may consequently lead to women dying sooner than men. A dearth of knowledge about the causes of HIV/AIDS among the adolescents may be a major challenge to the control of this global scourge.

The Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is a retrovirus that damages the human immune system by causing infections which may consequently lead to Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). People living with HIV/AIDS are socially stigmatized, some are faced with inhuman treatment, neglect and some undergo a lot of psychological trauma which translates at times into withdrawal syndromes, substance abuse and other forms of anti-social behaviours. HIV/AIDS leads to a great reduction in body mass which if not early checked, may scare people from having close contacts with people living with HIV/AIDS.

Women and children, adolescents and young adults are the most affected by HIV and AIDS. Although adequate information about its spread is on the increase, most adolescents still may not believe on its existence and as such they cannot engage in less risky behaviour like safer sex. The spread of the disease evoke various responses from various people. Many have responded with fear, others by denial. Initially the HIV scourge was believed to be associated with female prostitutes and their male clients but nowadays evidence has indicated that everybody who does not practice safer sex is vulnerable especially within the sexual active age bracket (adolescents). In spite of the number of Nigerians who have died of AIDS and those who are suffering from it now, many people especially adolescents still believe that AIDS is not real but a disease for the white man. Omotesho, Adeniyi and Bada (2012) outlined the causes of HIV in Nigeria to include lack or little of sex education for young people and lack of accurate information about sexual health.

In a survey of knowledge and perception of HIV/AIDS and sexual behaviour among 723 randomly selected Secondary School adolescents, aged 13 to 18 years, in Uganda; it was discovered that over 94% of the study population was aware of AIDS, while 64% rightly knew that AIDS could be transmitted through sexual intercourse. The same study upholds that more than 77% of the same population were sexually active and of these, 35% had multiple sex partners and only 26.9% practiced the use of condoms during sexual intercourse (Ahmed, 2000). However, the study of Effiong (1995) and Abang (1996) indicated no relationship between knowledge of routes of transmission and awareness of preventive measures because most of the subjects believed that HIV could be transmitted through mosquito bites. Cultural practices influence the beliefs of females who are unable to discuss the use of contraceptive and condom by their male counterparts. Choice is limited by the female whose male partner fails to heed the advice to use condom or has other female sex partners. According to Undelikwo, Nkpoyen, Ogar and Undelikwo (2005) and Udofia (2008), these factors put the female more at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS.

A study was carried out by Egbo and Chukwu (2015) on awareness of HIV/AIDS among women farmers in Ebonyi State, Nigeria, using 120 rural women farmers. Data obtained was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Results showed that general level of awareness about HIV/AIDS was high, 85 percent perceived that HIV/AIDS exists and has no cure. All the women in the study area had knowledge of strategies for HIV prevention such as total abstinence from sex, having one sex partner and screening of blood before transfusion. Another study was carried out by Oladejo and Fayemi (2011) on perceptions about sexual abstinence and knowledge of HIV/AIDS prevention among in-school adolescents in a western Nigerian city. A total of 420 respondents (52% male and 48% females) selected through multistage sampling technique, completed a semi-structured questionnaire. Data analysis indicated that HIV preventive measures which respondents knew included abstinence (81.0%); using new needles for each injection (77.6%), regular condom use (66.2%) and faithfulness to one partner (60.9%). Majority, 80.7% of male and 81.5% of female abstinent respondents, favoured the promotion of abstinence as an HIV/AIDS prevention strategy compared with 76% male and 64.0% females of the sexually active group.

### **Statement of the problem**

HIV/AIDS is a global health problem which has affected and is still affecting a high percentage of the world's most active population, the adolescents. Osarenren (2000) lamented that adolescents' involvement in unguarded and indiscriminate sexual behaviour is on the increase and has led to increase in unintended/pre-marital pregnancy and HIV/AIDS. It is sad that most people are not still practicing safe sex

or protecting themselves against this epidemic called HIV/AIDS which is one of the greatest challenges facing the global community. Some people still believe in the slogan, "Something must kill a man" and this has caused most adolescents to be involved in sexual relationships without taking cognizance of the spread of HIV/AIDS. The incidence of this deadly sex-related disease is alarming, threatening and killing human beings in millions. Early exposure to dating due to observation of adult models, media, peer group, social contact with western cultures, poverty level of most families have influenced in-school adolescents negatively in their sexual behaviour pattern. This has led to in-schools adolescents keeping multiple sex partners and involving in pre-marital sex.

In order to combat the HIV/AIDS pandemic, government has organized seminars, workshops and talks both in schools and churches yet the disease is persistent among young people particularly in some local government areas of Cross River State such as Yala, Boki, Obubra, Bekwarra, Ikom and Ogoja where adolescents are trafficked daily for sex and other menial jobs. Currently, very few Nigerians have access to basic HIV/AIDS prevention, care, support and treatment/services. The discussion of sex education with teenagers, especially girls is still seen as indecent. The problem investigated in this study is to determine the relationship that exists between keeping of multiple sex partners and the perception of HIV/AIDS preventive measures among in-school adolescents in Cross River State, Nigeria.

### **Research question**

What are the male and female adolescents perceived knowledge of HIV/AIDS preventive measures among in-school adolescents?

### **Hypothesis**

There is no significant relationship between keeping of multiple sex partners and the perception of HIV/AIDS preventive measures among in-school adolescents.

### **Methodology**

The research design adopted was the survey method. This design was chosen because it considered only a part of the population and the finding from this is generalized to the entire population. This research design is always applicable when studying what people think, do and when studying the relationship which exists among sociological and psychological variables. The research area is Cross River State which is situated in the South-South geo-political region of Nigeria. The population consists of all the secondary school students from all the 225 public secondary schools in the state. This gives the population of 82,539 secondary school students. The sampling procedure was in stages involving, stratified random sampling techniques. The first stage involved the stratification of the schools into the

three educational zones which are Calabar, Ikom and Ogoja. Out of 225 schools in the state, 30 were selected using the simple random sampling technique such that ten schools were selected from each educational zone. In each of the schools, the students were carefully stratified into male and female and this ensured an equal selection of respondents from the two genders. Accordingly, the sample consisted of 600 students (300 male and 300 females). This sample was drawn using 3% proportion of the students from each school by sex.

An instrument called “Adolescents’ Sexual Behaviour and the Perception of HIV/AIDS (ASBP-HIV)” questionnaire was constructed by the researchers and validated by two experts in Measurement and Evaluation and also by two experts in Guidance and Counselling, all from the University of Calabar. To ensure its reliability, it was trial-tested. A standardized alpha of 0.79 to 0.84 was obtained which indicated that the questionnaire was reliable.

The questionnaire (ASBP-HIV) was made up of three sections, A, B, C. Section “A” had items which sought for personal data of the respondents. Section “B” sought information on adolescents’ sexual behaviour patterns while section “C” sought information on the perception of HIV/AIDS. The questionnaire required the respondents to indicate by a tick against each item on the scale the extent of their agreement with each statement. It was administered by the researchers to the students with the assistance of their class teachers in the sampled schools. A total of six hundred copies of questionnaire were administered, retrieved successfully and used for the study. The data generated was analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation.

### **Presentation of results**

**Hypothesis:** There is no significant relationship between keeping of multiple sex partners and the perception of HIV/AIDS preventive measures among in-school adolescents.

**Table 1:** Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation of the relationship between keeping of multiple sex partners and perception of HIV/AIDS (N=600)

Variables	$\sum X$ $\sum Y$	$\sum X^2$ $\sum Y^2$	$\sum XY$	r
Adolescents’ sexual behaviour in terms of keeping of multiple sex partners (X)	11869	248873		
Perception of HIV/AIDS (Y <sub>1</sub> ) in terms of mode of transmission	11264	267440	220875	
Perception of HIV/AIDS as a killer disease (Y <sub>2</sub> )	9235	150891	185713	.273*

\*P< 0.5; df = 598; critical r = 0.081

Results of the analysis as in Table 1 show that the calculated r-values of -.069 for the relationship between keeping of multiple sex partners and perception of HIV/AIDS in terms of mode of transmission was lower than the critical r-value of 0.081 at 0.05 level of significance with 598 degrees of freedom. The result implies that there is no significant relationship between keeping multiple sex partners by in-school adolescents and their perception of HIV/AIDS in terms of mode of transmission. The null hypothesis is hereby retained. However, the result also showed an inverse relationship between keeping of multiple sex partners and perception of HIV/AIDS preventive measures (mode of transmission = -.069).

Results of the analysis (Table 1) also indicate that the calculated r-value of 0.273 for the relationship between keeping multiple sex partners and perception of HIV/AIDS in terms of its being a killer disease was higher than the critical r-value (0.081) at 0.05 level of significance with 598 degrees of freedom. The null hypothesis is hereby rejected. There is therefore a significant relationship between keeping multiple sex partners and adolescents' perception of HIV/AIDS in terms of its being a killer disease.

**Research question:** What are the male and female adolescent perceived knowledge of HIV/AIDS preventive measure among in-school adolescents?

To answer this research question, ten questions were ask to the 600 respondents (males = 300; female = 300) to ascertain their knowledge on HIV/AIDS preventive measures. Analysis was carried out using frequency and percentage.

**Table 2A:** Male adolescents perceived knowledge of HIV/AIDS preventive measures (N=300)

	Preventive measures against HIV/AIDS	Knowledgeable		Not knowledgeable	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%
1.	Use of condom reproductive	224	75	76	25
2.	Health education on HIV/AIDS	127	42	173	58
3.	Avoiding sharing of sharp objects	151	50	149	50
4.	Keeping of one partner (faithfulness)	135	45	165	55
5.	Use of native charms	187	61	113	39
6.	Use of drugs and herbs	155	52	145	48
7.	Refraining from unsafe sex	191	64	109	36
8.	Abstinence from sex	255	85	45	15
9.	Withdrawal method	261	87	39	13
10.	Transfusing untested blood	161	54	139	46

Results of table 2A indicate that male adolescent students are generally aware of the existence of preventive measures in some aspects such as the use of condom (75%) and abstinence from sex (85%). But surprisingly some still believe that the use of native charms (62%) and withdrawal method (87%) can still be used to prevent HIV/AIDS. More reproductive health education (42%) needs to be made available to them to enhance their knowledge on preventive measures of HIV/AIDS.

**Table 2B:** Female adolescents perceived knowledge of HIV/AIDS preventive measures (N=300)

	Preventive measures against HIV/AIDS	Knowledgeable		Not knowledgeable	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%
1.	Use of condom reproductive	241	80	59	20
2.	Health education on HIV/AIDS	91	30	209	70
3.	Avoiding sharing of sharp objects	141	47	159	53
4.	Keeping of one partner (faithfulness)	187	62	113	38
5.	Use of native charms	191	64	109	36
6.	Use of drugs and herbs	175	58	125	42
7.	Refraining from unsafe sex	198	66	102	34
8.	Abstinence from sex	230	77	70	23
9.	Withdrawal method	225	75	75	25
10.	Transfusing untested blood	157	52	143	48

Results of table 2B indicate that about 80% of the female are aware of the fact that condom use is a means of preventing HIV/AIDS transmission. It can also be prevented by keeping one partner 62% and abstinence from sex (77%). But surprisingly the female adolescents believe that withdrawal method (75%) used during sex will prevent them from contacting HIV/AIDS. Some of them (58%) indicated that the use of drugs/herbs and the use of native charms on their waists (64%) are also ways of preventing the HIV/AIDS. Looking closely to the table about 70% of them are not knowledgeable on reproductive Health Education. Girls in secondary schools need more enlightenment on preventive measures against HIV/AIDS.

### **Discussion of findings**

#### *Keeping of multiple sex partners and the perception of HIV/AIDS*

The findings of this study revealed that there is a significant relationship between adolescents' sexual behaviour in terms of keeping of multiple sex partners and their perception of HIV/AIDS in terms of its being a killer disease. This result replicates the study of Ahmed (2000) who studied knowledge and perception of HIV/AIDS and

discovered 77% of the sample were sexually active and of this, 35% had multiple sex partners and only 26% practiced the use of condom during sexual intercourse. However, the results indicate that there is no significant relationship between adolescents keeping of multiple sex partners and their perception of HIV/AIDs in terms of its modes of transmission. This result is in conformity with the study of Effiong (1998) and Abang (1996) whose results showed no relationship between knowledge of routes of transmission and awareness of preventive measures because most of the subjects opined that HIV could be transmitted through mosquito bites. Some adolescents and even adults are still ignorant of modes of transmission as some strongly believe that the disease (HIV/AIDS) is a manipulation by witches and wizards to inflict the human race. That is why some are involved in unsafe sex and this carefree attitude leads to the continuous spread of HIV/AIDS. There is a strong need and demand for more information on HIV/AIDS to be circulated to update adolescents' knowledge from time to time. Risky sexual behaviour which is observed among youths nowadays is disastrous and dangerous for individual and societal survival. The state of moral decadence and prostitution among teenage girls need drastic reversal from sexual indulgence before marriage to abstinence from such act.

#### *Gender and Perception of HIV/AIDS*

The findings of this study revealed that female adolescents are not as knowledgeable on reproductive health education as their male counterparts. About 70% of females indicated not knowledgeable while 58% of males indicates not knowledgeable (see table 2a & 2b). This is in agreement with Omotesho, Adeniyi and Bada (2012) who stated that there are many factors contributing to the spread of HIV in Nigeria. These include little or no sex education for young people and lack of accurate information about sexual health. Sex is a very private subject which is rarely discussed with adolescents especially girls. Lack of information on health issues has led to many girls dropping out of school due to teenage pregnancies, early marriage, contracting of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. This has marred the future of many promising young girls.

HIV/AIDS is a serious public health problem facing the world at large and Nigeria in particular. In most Nigerian societies, it is more socially acceptable for males to desire sex, have multiple sex partners while females are encouraged to be abstinent or monogamous. Despite this, female teenagers still die of this disease due to inadequate information as discussing sex with young girls is seen as a taboo in some traditional Nigerian settings. The poor perception of HIV/AIDS among adolescents has encouraged indiscriminate sex, promiscuity and other immoral behaviour which has led to the spread of HIV/AIDS.

A large percentage of the respondents (males 75%, females 80%) are knowledgeable about the use of condom as a preventive measure against the spread of HIV. Despite this, Emmanuel and Hisako (2002) found out that most of their respondents who were sexually active had never used condom though they had adequate knowledge of HIV/AIDS. Economically, women are not empowered and socially they are disadvantaged to take decisions affecting their sexual and reproductive health. Their work tends to be domestic in nature and they are less likely to negotiate for safer sex (The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), 2003). Cultural practices influence the beliefs of females who may feel unable to speak about many issues like contraception and safer sex. Choice is limited or non-existent for the female whose male partner fails to heed the advice to use condom or has other female multiple sex partners; this put females at risk of HIV/AIDS (Undelikwo, Nkpoyen, Ogar & Undelikwo, 2005; Udofia, 2008).

Adolescent's sex had been reported to influence students' knowledge about HIV/AIDS. This study is in line with Aluede, Imhonde, Maliki and Alutu (2005) who found that male students had higher knowledge of HIV/AIDS than female counterparts. However, the study of Omotesho, Adeniyi and Bada (2012), indicated no gender difference in the overall knowledge of the students. Adolescents whether male or female must be exposed to reproductive health education which seeks to address the socio-economic problems of unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted disease, abortion, contraception, female genital mutilation and infertility.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that keeping of multiple sex partners by students is related to their perception of HIV/AIDS in terms of its being a killer disease. Premarital sexual activities of secondary school students relate to their perception of HIV/AIDS as a killer disease. The findings also showed an inverse relationship between the keeping of multiple sex partners and the perception of HIV/AIDS preventive measures, which means that adolescents who kept more sex partners had a lower perception of HIV/AIDS. The study also revealed that most male in-schools adolescents were knowledgeable on reproductive health education than their female counterpart. Based on the findings it was recommended that in-school adolescents should be adequately educated on reproductive health in order to help them understand the problem of HIV/AIDS from early age. This will help them to avoid pre-marital sex.

### **Recommendations**

Base on the results of this study, the following recommendations were made: For the proper upbringing of adolescents in schools, counsellors must create effective awareness programmes in schools and make the students more

knowledgeable on HIV/AIDS. Empowering a girl-child through proper education by counsellors to acquire life skills, will divert her attention from early sexual indulgence which comes with negative consequences like teenage pregnancy, contracting of sexually transmitted diseases (STD), contracting of HIV/AIDS and early unplanned marriage.

Furthermore the counsellors need to routinely interact with in-school adolescents through group counselling to discuss issues like HIV/AIDS preventive measures and importance of good sexual behaviour changes. This will help to promote a better perception of the disease by the in-school adolescents. Sex working, nude films, pornography, sex suggestive posters, sex acts billboards and all such seductive posters and morally destructive media advertisements that may lure and entice girl-child to illicit sex experimentation should be banned. This will enable them to be focused and remain HIV-negative.

The counsellors should organize intensive workshops and seminars on the modes of transmission of HIV/AIDS and means of prevention as well as management when one is infected. HIV/AIDS awareness educational campaigns should periodically be carried out by the school counsellors for all the students. The counsellor should ensure that Reproductive Health Education is exposed to the students, and that the spread of HIV/AIDS through sexual transmission can be avoided by teaching girls total abstinence before marriage. More useful information and counselling should be given to girls on preventive methods such as avoiding casual sex and staying with one faithful partner. For those who are already infected, they should be enlightened and guided about the available drugs such as Anti-retroviral therapy that can sustain them for a long time. When all these are implemented, the impact of HIV/AIDS on in-school adolescents as a whole will be drastically reduced. Each school should organize regular HIV/AIDS counselling services (Heart to Heart) and periodic HIV screening as necessary preventive health service to young people. The teaching of reproductive health should be encouraged as well as other health issues particularly the ones which affect the female child.

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