

Perception on Pre-Marital Sexual Relationship among Private Secondary School Students in Bayelsa State

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Abstract

This study examined perception on premarital sex by private secondary school students in Bayelsa State and the implications for counselling. A survey research design was adopted for the study. 160 private secondary school students were sampled using the multistage sampling technique. Three research questions and two hypotheses were generated to guide the study. Data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation; hypotheses were tested using t-test and ANOVA. The study revealed among others that negative influence from friends, exposure to pornography via social media platforms, uncontrollable desire for sex and poor upbringing of children are the factors influencing students' participation in premarital sex; the consequences of indulging in premarital sex are unwanted pregnancy, contracting STDs, and setting a bad example to others. The findings also revealed that public enlightenment on the dangers of premarital sex and proper home training of children by their parents are strategies for managing students' involvement in premarital sex. On the basis of these findings and the implications for counselling, it was recommended among others that guidance and counselling services should be made available in all secondary schools, both public and private.

Keywords: counselling, perception, premarital, sex, students

Introduction

Adolescence is the phase of life between childhood and adulthood, from ages 10 to 19. It is a special phase in the development of a human being and an indispensable period for laying a solid foundation for a vibrant healthy life and a bright future. The adolescence stage spans from the point of puberty to adulthood, and is sub-divided into three phases namely: early adolescence (12 – 13 years); middle adolescence (14 to 16 years); and late adolescence, (17 – 21 years). At this stage, they are mostly in secondary schools. This period can be demanding and challenging for adolescents because they are more pre-occupied with discovering themselves and being accepted by the society. Adolescents also undergo a series of physical, cognitive and psychosocial transformation. This affects how they think, feel, interact with the world around them, as well as making decisions. During this stage, adolescents form a pattern of behaviour on various aspects of life such as substance use, eating habits, physical activity, as well as sexual activity (World Health Organization, 2022; Babatunde, 2019).

Amos and Baduku (2020) noted that in-school adolescents are increasing participation in premarital sexual activity worldwide and the repercussions accompanying such lifestyle

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have attracted the attention of academicians and the international community. WHO (2001) observed that the severity of involvement in premarital sexual activities ranges from nonsexual relationship to early sexual debut, unprotected sexual intercourse, and multiple sexual partners and prostitution. Sexual activities among adolescents have been reported to be increasing worldwide. Several studies in Sub-Saharan Africa have also documented high and increasing premarital sexual activities among adolescents (Owuamanam & Bankole, 2013; Onobumeh & Agbonifoh, 2020). Younger people are often faced with strong social, peer and cultural pressure to engage in premarital sex. As a result of this, significant number of adolescents are involved in premarital sexual activities at an early age (Aleke et al., 2021). Several studies have revealed that adolescents, both in and out of school, are involved in premarital sexual relationships (Kazura & Mazatu, 2009; Ankomah et al., 2011).

Alade (2019) described premarital sexual relationship as a consensual sexual pursuit involving a male and female who have not made any marital vows to each other. It is the sexual activity engaged in by both male and female who are yet to marry. According to Durosomo (2018), premarital sex is the involvement in sexual intercourse by persons who have not engaged in marital vow or culturally recognized as having been enrolled in marriage institution. Traditionally, sexual intercourse is expected to be practiced only in wedlock; however it has been noticed that pre-conjugal intercourse has continued to persist in modern time due to numerous factors with a lot of grave consequences for students. Premarital sex has been labelled a taboo in some cultures and sin in numerous religions (Stephen & Stephen, 2016). Even in the contemporary times, sex is not an easy conversation to carry out openly, even within the family setting (Aleke et al., 2021).

So many factors have been adduced as being responsible for this ugly trend of premarital sex among students. Offor and Offiah (2021) however stated that influence from peers is rated as one of the most prominent social cause of premarital sex because most adolescent students would not want to be tagged as foolish, archaic or primitive. This points to the fact that the lifestyle of a student is directly proportional to the type of friends one keeps. Whenever a student decides to remain chaste by not partaking in sex before marriage, they are often times made fun of by their friends, denied some basic favours as well as compelled to have sex against their will (Gaba, 2010). Concluding, Alade (2019) and Iyekolo (2021) outlined the following determinants as factors promoting premarital sex among secondary school students in Nigeria: family background, poverty, rape, alcohol influence, sex pleasure and indecent dressing.

The theoretical framework for this study is the Social Learning theory. This theory is founded on the assumption that people learn from their dealings with others in a social environment. People develop new behaviours when they observe the behaviours of others, imitate and reproduce those behaviours; especially when rewards or benefits are attached to the observed behaviours. This is also directly proportional to the relationship between the environment, perception by the individual and intrinsic motivation which would propel the individual to reproduce the observed behaviour (Nabavi, 2014; Edinyang, 2016).

Numerous researches have been carried out on premarital sexual relationship among school children with varied results and conclusion. For instance, Offor and Offiah (2021) revealed that cohabitation of students, poor socio-economic status of parents, peer group influence, indecent dressing among students, watching pornographic movies and pictures, quest for materialism and inability to control sexual urge were some of the reasons for indulging in premarital sex. The study thus recommended amongst others that parents should bring up their children properly, and that sex education should be incorporated into the academic curriculum of the students. Amos and Baduku (2020) initiated a study on the determinants of premarital sex among students in selected secondary schools in Kaduna State, Nigeria. The findings of the study revealed that transactional sex, the influence of western culture and media, neglect of religious instructions, proof of affection or love for one's boyfriend or girlfriend, as well as the influence of friends were responsible for indulging in premarital sex. It was recommended from the findings of the study that parents should endeavour to teach morals and chastity to their children.

Similarly, Babatunde (2019) investigated factors that induce adolescents to engage in premarital sexual intercourse among secondary school students in Nigeria. The findings of the study revealed that previous sexual abuse experience, smoking of banned drugs, peer influence and poor housing condition were the key factors which influenced sexual intercourse among adolescents in secondary schools. It was recommended that adolescents should avoid engaging in premarital sexual intercourse and reduce curiosity about sex. Adeola and Adams (2019) observed that students' involvement in premarital sexual behaviour puts them at risk of performing poorly in their academics. The study therefore recommended that to forestall this, a strong bond between parents and teachers should be developed in rearing-up morally sound students.

Worldwide, secondary school students are becoming more socially and sexually active than previous generations (Kothari et al., 2012; Adeoye et al., 2012; Bermudez et al., 2011). Although the prevalence of premarital sex is not properly documented in Nigeria, there is the general belief that this trend may be present among secondary school students. Thus this study therefore aims to explore the perception on pre-marital sexual relationship among private secondary school students in Bayelsa state and the implications for counselling. The purpose of this study therefore was to find out the perception on pre-marital sexual relationships among private secondary school students in Bayelsa State and the implications for counselling.

Research questions

The following research questions were used to guide the study:

- 1) Why do students in private secondary schools engage in pre-marital sexual relationships?
- 2) What are the consequences of students engaging in pre-marital sex?
- 3) How can students' participation in pre-marital sex be controlled?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were generated and tested:

Ho1: There is no significant difference in the perception of private secondary school students on pre-marital sexual relationship based on their gender.

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Ho2: There is no significant difference in the perception on premarital sexual relationship among private secondary school students based on their class.

Methodology

This study was conducted in Bayelsa State which is located in the southern part of Nigeria. With an estimated population of 1.9 million, the state has the 27th largest population in the country (2006 population census). There are eight local government areas in the state namely Yenagoa, Kolokuma/Opokuma, Ogbia, Nembe, Southern Ijaw, Sagbama, Brass and Ekeremor. The predominant ethnic groups in the state are the Ijaw, Epie, Nembe and Ogbia.

This study adopted a survey research design. Ponto (2015) stated that this type of research design enables a researcher to use different techniques to get participants, gather data, as well as employing different types of instruments. Both qualitative and quantitative strategies can be employed when using a survey research method. This design was employed because it is best adapted for data gathering, organization, presentation and analysis for the purpose of describing the occurrence of an event or phenomenon within a specified group.

The target population of this study was all 3,168 senior secondary school students in SSS 1-3 in privately owned secondary schools in the eight local government areas of Bayelsa State (National Bureau of Statistics, 2019). Attention was focused on this category of students because they are more mature and are likely to be experienced enough in sex-related issues than those in junior classes. The sample comprised one hundred and sixty (160) respondents selected from the population through multistage sampling technique. The state was stratified into the existing eight local government areas, and from each local government area, a community was randomly selected. From each community, one private school was selected, giving a total of eight schools. From each school, simple random sampling was used to select twenty students that participated in the study.

To cater for ethical considerations, participants were informed of the purpose of the study and what was required of them. Respondents who obliged participated voluntarily without any form of incentives. Participants were told not to give their names in order to keep their responses anonymous.

The instrument for data collection was a self-structured questionnaire titled “Students’ Perception on Pre-marital Sexual Relationship Scale (SPPSRS)”. The questionnaire had two sections: A and B. Section A focused on the background information of the respondents such as name of school, gender, age, class and religion. While Section B measured variables of the three research questions in three parts – I, II and III. Part I had eight items, while Part II and III had seven items each. It was a four point Likert scale instrument of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). For scoring purposes, Strongly Agree and Agree were collapsed into Agree, while Strongly Disagree and Disagree were collapsed into Disagree. The validity of the instrument was verified by the use of face, content and construct validation techniques by two lecturers of the Department of Guidance and Counselling, University of Africa, Toru-

Oroua, Bayelsa State. The experts made some corrections and suggestions which were incorporated into the final draft of the instrument used for the survey.

The reliability of the instrument, which was carried out in a public secondary school in Yenagoa on twenty students which were not part of the study, employed the split-half method. Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistics was used to determine the reliability of the instrument. It yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.77. The researcher and a trained assistant administered the instrument to the respondents. All the administered copies of the questionnaire were retrieved the same day thus ensuring 100% rate of return.

The research questions were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. 2.50 was adopted as the cut-off mark. Only items which scored 2.50 and above were accepted as “agreed”, while below 2.50 was considered “disagreed”. The research hypotheses were tested using independent sample t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) at 0.05 level of significance as a basis for rejecting or accepting the hypothesis. The analysis was carried out using IBM statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) version 25.

Presentation of results

Research question one: Why do students in private secondary schools engage in premarital sexual relationships?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation ratings of the respondents on why students in private secondary schools engage in pre-marital sexual relationship (n = 160)

S/N	Items	\bar{x}	SD	Remark
1	Bad influence from friends	3.20	0.90	A
2	Exposure to pornography on tiktok, Instagram and WhatsApp	2.89	0.93	A
3	Uncontrollable desire for sex	2.68	0.96	A
4	Poor parental upbringing of children	2.81	1.14	A
5	Use of drugs and alcohol	1.96	0.80	D
6	Negative influence from music artists and celebrities	2.60	0.96	A
7	Living in low-income housing areas	2.25	1.00	D
8	It is generally acceptable as a normal thing by students	3.30	0.67	A
Aggregate		2.71	0.92	A

\bar{x} = mean; SD = Standard Deviation; A = Agree; D = Disagree

From the data presented in table 1, the mean rating of respondents on item 1 (3.20), item 2 (2.89), item 3 (2.68), item 4 (2.81), item 6 (2.60) and item 8 (3.30) exceeded the criterion mean of 2.50 on a 4 point scale. They are therefore accepted as the reasons why private secondary school students engage in premarital sexual relationships. The aggregate mean of 2.71, and standard deviation range of 0.67 and 1.14 indicate that the responses of the respondents were close to the mean but not close to one another.

Research question two: What are some of the consequences of students engaging in premarital sex?

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Table 2: Mean and standard deviation ratings of the respondents on some of the consequences of students engaging in pre-marital sex (n = 160)

S/N	Item description	\bar{x}	SD	REMARK
1	It would bring disgrace to one's family	2.93	1.13	A
2	It will lead to unwanted pregnancy	3.49	0.90	A
3	It will make students to join bad gangs and cult groups	2.91	1.05	A
4	It will result to stubbornness at home	1.93	0.94	D
5	It can lead to students getting sexually transmitted diseases	3.14	0.96	A
6	It will make one popular in the school	2.15	0.92	D
7	It will serve as a bad example to other students	2.88	0.86	A
Aggregate		2.78	0.97	A

\bar{x} = mean; **SD** = Standard Deviation; **A** = Agree; **D** = Disagree

From the data presented in table 2, the mean rating of respondents on item 1 (2.93), item 2 (3.49), item 3 (2.91), item 5 (3.14), and item 7 (2.88) exceeded the criterion mean of 2.50 on a 4 point scale. They are therefore accepted as some of the consequences of students engaging in pre-marital sex. The aggregate mean of 2.78, and standard deviation range of 0.86 and 1.13 indicate that the responses of the respondents were not only close to the mean but were also close to one another.

Research question three: How can students' participation in pre-marital sex be controlled?

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation ratings of the respondents on how students' participation in pre-marital sex can be controlled (n = 160)

S/N	Item description	\bar{x}	SD	REMARK
1	Students who participate in premarital sex should be expelled	2.93	1.13	A
2	Parents should train their children well	3.16	0.89	A
3	Pornographic movies and shows on television should be banned	2.65	0.90	A
4	Students should learn self-control	3.24	1.17	A
5	Religious leaders should preach more against premarital sex	2.71	1.03	A
6	Students should report the opposite sex pestering them for sex	3.10	1.98	A
7	Public enlightenment should be carried out on the dangers of premarital sex	2.52	0.93	A
Aggregate		2.90	1.14	A

\bar{x} = mean; **SD** = Standard Deviation; **A** = Agree; **D** = Disagree

From the data presented in table 3, the mean rating of respondents on all items exceeded the criterion mean of 2.50 on a 4 point scale. They are all therefore accepted as ways through which students' participation in pre-marital sex can be controlled. The aggregate

mean of 2.90, and standard deviation range of 0.89 and 1.17 indicate that the responses of the respondents were not only close to the mean but were also close to one another.

Ho1: There is no significant difference in the perception of male and female private secondary school students on pre-marital sexual relationship.

Table 4: t-test analysis of differences in private secondary school students perception on premarital sexual relationship based on their gender (n=160)

Variables	N	\bar{x}	SD	Df	Cal. t-val	p-value	Decision
Male	68	2.94	0.40	158	0.106	0.196	Accepted
Female	92	2.93	0.25				

As shown on table 4, males had mean score of 2.94 with a standard deviation of 0.40, while females had a mean score of 2.93 with a standard deviation of 0.25. The calculated t-value was 0.106 while its calculated significance value is 0.196 at df of 158 and alpha level of 0.05. On this basis, the null hypothesis was accepted. This means that there is no significant difference in the perception of private secondary school students on premarital sex on the basis of their gender. The reason was that the calculated significance value (0.196) is greater than 0.05 alpha level ($p > 0.05$).

Ho2: There is no significant difference in the perception on premarital sexual relationship among private secondary school students based on their class.

Table 5: Summary table of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) on differences in the perception on premarital sexual relationship among private secondary school students based on their class (n=160)

Variables	Sum of squares	Df	Mean squares	F	p-value	Decision
Between groups	0.165	2	0.82	0.5266	0.592	Accepted
Within groups	24.549	157	0.156		0.592	
Total	24.713	159				

Table 5 shows an F-value 0.526 with a calculated significant value of 0.592 at 0.05 alpha level. Since calculated significance value of 0.592 is greater than 0.05 alpha level, the hypothesis is accepted. This implies that there is no significant difference in the perception of private secondary school students on premarital sex on the basis of their class. The reason was that the calculated significance value (0.592) is greater than 0.05 alpha level ($p > 0.05$).

Discussion of the findings

The findings of the study revealed that bad influence from friends, exposure to pornography on tiktok, Instagram and WhatsApp, uncontrollable desire for sex, poor parental upbringing of children, negative influence from music artists and celebrities, as well as accepting premarital sex as a normal thing by students are some of the reasons

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why private secondary school students engage in premarital sexual relationships. This result is in line with the findings by Owuamanam and Bankole (2013), and Ankomah et al. (2011) which pointed out that high libido for sex, peer pressure, exposure to social media and unhindered access to pornographic materials are causative factors for indulgence in premarital sex. However, this study disagrees with that of Alade (2019) which posited that alcohol consumption is a determining factor of premarital sex among students.

The findings of the study also revealed that some of the consequences of students engaging in premarital sex include bringing disgrace to one's family, unwanted pregnancy, involvement with bad gangs, sexually transmitted diseases and being a bad example to others. This agrees with the study by Offor and Offiah (2021) and Babatunde (2019) which noted that unwanted pregnancy, joining bad company and contracting sexually transmitted diseases are some of the consequences of engagement in premarital sex.

Furthermore, the study revealed that precautionary measures which could be adopted to curtail student's involvement in premarital sex include expulsion of sexually-active students, parents training their children well, banning of pornographic shows, exercising self-control by students and extensive public enlightenment on the dangers of premarital sex. This tallies with the study by Onobumeh and Agbonifoh (2020), Adeola and Adams (2019) which recommended that public enlightenment and parental upbringing of children can help curb involvement of students in premarital sex.

The finding of the null hypothesis 1 shows that the perception on premarital sex among private secondary school students does not differ based on their gender as the overall p-value of 0.196 is greater than 0.05 level of significance. This means that there was no significant difference in the perception on premarital sex by male and female private secondary school students. This finding is in agreement with the findings of studies by Aleke et al. (2021) who observed that there was no variations in the perception of male and female students on premarital sexual matters. However, the findings of this study is contrary to the findings by Babatunde (2019) who noted that females perceive premarital sex better than males.

Lastly, the finding of null hypothesis 2 shows that the perception on premarital sex among private secondary school students does not differ based on their class as the overall p-value of 0.592 is greater than 0.05 level of significance. This means that there was no significant difference in the perception on premarital sex by private secondary school students in SSS one, two and three. This findings is in agreement with the study by Iyekolo (2021) who noted that male and female students agree on the reasons for premarital affairs.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that the major contributing factors to private secondary school students engaging in premarital sex include bad peer influence, poor home training, corrupt social media, and access to pornography just to mention a few. Some of the consequences of premarital sex according to the study include

but not limited to bringing shame to one's family, unwanted pregnancy, joining bad gangs, contracting STDs and setting a bad precedent for younger generations to follow. Finally ways of curbing this trend in private schools include expelling sexually active students, public enlightenment on the dangers of premarital sex, self-discipline by students, as well as parents and religious leaders instilling morals into adolescents.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that:

- 1) Sex education and reproductive health should as a matter of urgency be introduced and implemented in the senior secondary school curriculum in Bayelsa State. This would enlighten the school children on what is expected of them.
- 2) Guidance and counselling services should be made available in all secondary schools, both public and private. This is necessary because school children face a lot of challenges and would need the care and advice of a professional counsellor to scale through these challenges of adolescence.
- 3) Parents, teachers and the community at large need to play their roles in bringing up children to become responsible individuals.
- 4) Parents and older relatives should also play their part by cautioning their secondary school wards on the dangers of engaging in pre-marital sexual activity.
- 5) Students should take the responsibility of restricting themselves access to pornographic movies as well as friends they associate with.
- 6) Government and non-governmental organizations should organize workshops and enlightenment campaigns in schools on reproductive health and sexual behaviour.
- 7) Lastly, there should be a regular campaign regarding the dangers of premarital sexual relationships on both print and electronic media.

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