

THE ATTITUDE OF TEACHERS TO SEXUALITY EDUCATION IN A POPULOUS LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA IN LAGOS, NIGERIA

I. A. Onwuezobe¹, E.E. Ekanem²

ABSTRACT

Objective: To determine the attitude of teachers towards the introduction of sexuality education in secondary school.

Methodology: Three hundred and twenty secondary school teachers with median age of 37 years were randomly selected and included in the study using self administered well structured questionnaires.

Results: Greater number of teachers views the teaching of sexuality education as the responsibility of the parents (46.1%) and as such sees home (43.7%) rather than school (38.6%) as the best place to impact such knowledge. Most of them (55.6%) considered ages 10 - 14 years or Junior Secondary School level as the appropriate period for introducing sexuality education. About 68% percent of the teachers perceived sexuality education as mostly beneficial in preventing unplanned pregnancy while 56.0% were of the opinion that it will promote early exposure to sexual relationship.

Although age played a role as older teachers between the ages of 45 - 49 years (86.8%), are more willing to teach sexuality education, higher educational qualification had a significant effect on their attitude towards sexuality education ($p < 0.05$).

Conclusion: There is significant relationship between the educational level of teachers and their willingness to teach sexuality education in secondary schools.

KEY WORDS: Teachers Attitude, Sexuality education.

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INTRODUCTION

Sexuality which forms a central aspect of being human is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationships.¹ The main goal of sexuality education is the promotion of sexual health by providing learners with opportunities to develop a positive and factual view of sexuality and indeed sexual health.² This on the long run contributes in the prevention of HIV/AIDS.

Adolescence is a time when young people experience changes in their bodies among which is the development of new sexual

1. A. Onwuezobe,
Dept of Medical Microbiology and Parasitology
College of Health Sciences, University of Uyo
Formerly Department of Medical Microbiology
And Parasitology, Lagos University Teaching
Hospital, Idi-Araba,
Lagos, Nigeria.
2. E. E. Ekanem,
Dept of Community Health and Primary Care,
College of Medicine, University of Lagos,
Nigeria.

Correspondence:

I. A. Onwuezobe,
E-mail: ifezobe@yahoo.com

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feeling, which they may not understand. This is also the period when most of them are in the secondary or high schools. They therefore will need information and assurance about what is happening to them. The incidence of adolescent sexual activity in Nigeria is high and increasing, although adolescents are given little information for making informed decision about it.³

Children and teenagers are exposed to a barrage of information related to sexuality which will require guidance from families and schools for healthy sexual development and responsible behaviour.

In an eighteen month review of abortion cases from records in a hospital in Nigeria, adolescents constituted 68% of all cases of induced abortion, 85% of them were students.⁴ More than 50% of these students had their first sexual experience at age 15 years with multiple sexual partners.⁴

Due to impact of Western civilization, there is need to supplement the training of young people in the art of family life by their parents and family members with a school-based sexuality education programme. This prompted the Federal Government of Nigeria in 1999 through the National Council on Education to incorporate sexuality Education into the National School Curriculum.

This has generated heated debates especially among parents. There is also the likelihood that even teachers might not perceive sexuality education in the light of reducing sexual promiscuity and its attendant complication like sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS.

Therefore this study aimed at determining the attitude of teachers to sexuality education in a populous area like Surulere Local Government Area of Lagos State, Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

The Surulere Local Government Area was mapped out into nine areas (Coker, Sanya, Ijesha, Lawanson, Ojuelegba, Randle Avenue, Eric Moore and Ikate-Aguda).

Sampling Proceeding: Two public secondary schools from each of these areas were randomly

selected by balloting. A take-all approach was adopted in identifying respondents in the selected schools. This involved administering questionnaires to all teachers in the two schools from each of the mapped-out nine areas.

A total of three hundred and twenty respondents were admitted in the study from the eighteen selected schools. This represented 1.5% percent of all the teachers in Lagos State public secondary schools.

Data was collected using structured questionnaires with few open-ended questions. A pre-test was done with a draft form of the questionnaire in another Local Government Area of Lagos with a high population of students and teachers. The questions on the questionnaire were grouped into three sections. Section A: for personal data of the respondents. Section B: for knowledge on sexuality education. Section C: for attitude of teachers to sexuality education.

RESULTS

Despite the attendant perceived benefit of prevention of unwanted pregnancy, STDs/ HIV and the risk of early exposure to sexual relationship held by teachers, higher educational qualification mainly affected their attitude towards impacting sexuality education to students.

The age of the teachers ranges between <25 and >50 years. Majority of them were married (77.5%) and some have children who were in Secondary Schools. While some of the teachers

Table-I: Age at which sexuality education should be taught by teachers.

| Variable | No. N = 293 | (%) |
|--|-------------|------|
| Age at which sexuality education should be taught. | | |
| Age | | |
| Under 10 | 31 | 10.6 |
| 10-14 | 163 | 55.6 |
| 15-20 | 78 | 4.4 |
| Above 20 | 13 | 4.4 |
| No response | 8 | 2.7 |

Table-II: Teachers view on who should teach sexuality education and the best place to teach sexuality education.

| Variable | No. = 293 | (%) |
|-----------------------------|-----------|------|
| <i>Whose responsibility</i> | | |
| Parents | 135 | 46.1 |
| Teachers | 24 | 32.1 |
| Pastors | 9 | 3.1 |
| Imams | 10 | 3.4 |
| Doctors/Nurses | 19 | 6.5 |
| Indeterminate | 26 | 8.9 |

taught in the Junior Secondary School classes (JSS₁ – JSS₃), others taught in the Senior Secondary School classes (SS₁ – SS₃). On the perceived benefit of sexuality education, 67.6% admitted that it prevents unwanted pregnancy, 43.6% for prevention of STDs/HIV, and 13% for family planning.

All the teachers were professionally trained to teach in Nigerian schools and have professional qualification among others of Diploma in education (N.C.E) 20.9%, Bachelors degree in education (B. Ed) 49.7%, and postgraduate degrees in education (M. Ed/PGDE) 13.4%.

DISCUSSION

In many communities in Nigeria, it is usual to protect adolescents from receiving education on sexual matters as it is falsely believed that ignorance would encourage chastity, yet the rampant unprotected sexual activities and the



Figure-1: Perceived Risks of Teaching Sexuality Education in Secondary School.

Table-III: Teachers view on the best place to teach sexuality education.

| Variable | No. = 293 | (%) |
|--|-----------|------|
| <i>Best place to teach sexuality education</i> | | |
| Home | 128 | 43.7 |
| School | 113 | 38.6 |
| Church | 4 | 1.4 |
| Mosques | 5 | 1.7 |
| Indeterminate | 43 | 14.6 |

devastating consequences is becoming too obvious⁵. Adolescence starts from the age of 10-24 years in the Nigeria’s context and most of the young people in this age range are in the secondary school.

It is usual to expect parents to be the primary sexuality educators of their children⁶. However, many adolescents do not feel comfortable having to discuss issues pertaining to their sexual feelings with their parents or other family members. They therefore need a place where they will obtain accurate information and/or be able to discuss their feelings.

The school-based sexuality education programmes can offer them these opportunities and teachers are in the position to handle these. Teachers’ attitude towards this form of education especially with the introduction of sex education in Nigerian schools varies.

Although higher number of teachers taught JSS2 and JSS3 students, many of them preferred

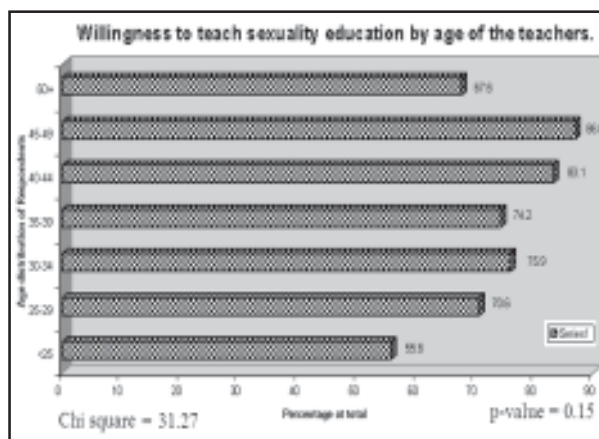


Figure-2: Willingness of teachers to teach sexuality education by age.

Table-IV: Relationship between teacher's level of education and attitude to sexuality education.

| Level of Education | Good Attitude | Percent | Poor Attitude | Percent |
|--------------------|---------------|---------|---------------|---------|
| NCE | 42 | 72.4 | 16 | 27.6 |
| B.Ed | 129 | 87.2 | 19 | 12.8 |
| PGDE/ M.Ed | 34 | 81.0 | 8 | 19 |
| Others | 28 | 84.5 | 5 | 15.2 |
| Total | 240 | 81.9 | 53 | 18.1 |

P = 0.026

JSS3 (26.3%) as the class for the first introduction of sexuality education. The target age for the introduction of sexuality education by the majority of the teachers is between 10-14 years. This may be related to the fact that most Nigerian adolescents have their first sexual intercourse below the age of 15 years when probably they are in the Junior Secondary School (JSS1 - JSS3).⁴

Prevention of unwanted pregnancy was perceived as the most important benefit of sexuality education followed by prevention of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI) including the prevention of Human Immunodeficiency Syndrome (HIV). This conformed to results of similar studies conducted in Port Harcourt and Ile-ife in Nigeria.^{7,8}

Despite the perceived benefits, the feared risk of exposure to early sex, ranked high among the teachers with the attendant sexual promiscuity as the next risk of teaching sexuality education in secondary schools. These fears may not change the already attendant bad situation without sexuality education as it is a known fact that two out of every five secondary school girls have had at least one previous pregnancy which may end in illegally induced abortion that has contributed highly to high maternal mortality recorded in Nigeria.²

Teachers' attitude to sexuality education is varied and was found to be related to some variables such as age and level of education. Age affected the willingness of the teachers to teach sexuality education though not significantly. Older teachers may have adolescent children and may be more willing to train and impact

sexuality knowledge to students as this will help them in teaching their children at home.⁹

Exposure to higher levels of education especially university education, improves teachers knowledge and attitude towards sexuality education. This was brought to the fore in this study as there was significant relationship between obtaining higher professional qualifications and willingness to teach sexuality education. This could form a prerequisite for recommending sexuality education training for teachers who may be involved in teaching sexuality education in secondary schools especially in some states in Nigeria where the programme has already started.¹⁰

CONCLUSION

The teachers' perceptions of sexuality education in secondary schools are varied. However, religion and educational level play an important role in their attitude and willingness towards propagation of such knowledge to students.

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