

Parents Perception of the Teaching of Sexual Education in Secondary Schools in Nigeria

Konwea Patience Esohe¹ and Mfrekemfon PeterInyang^{2*}

1.Dept of Human Kinetics and Health Education, Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria

2.Dept Of Human Kinetics And Health Education, University Of Port Harcourt,Choba, Nigeria.

Abstract

The study investigated Parents' perception of the teaching of sexuality education in secondary schools in Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria. The population of the study was parents of secondary school students. A sample of 400 parents was randomly selected for the study. The instrument used for the study was a questionnaire which was validated by experts with a reliability coefficient of 0.76. Data collected were analysed using frequency counts and percentages. The result showed that most of the Parents wanted sexuality education to be taught at all levels in secondary schools. They perceived that sexuality education will expose children to experimentation with sex but will also reduce the rate of teenage pregnancy and abortion. A higher percentage of the respondents wanted areas of sexual development and reproduction, delayed sexual activity and abstinence. Based on the findings, it was recommended that parents should receive orientation on the issues to be included in the curriculum.

Keywords: Parents, Perception, Sexual Education, Teaching, Secondary Schools.

1. Introduction

In traditional Nigerian setting, children are expected to obey their parents' instruction without asking questions. It is assumed that the best way to prevent sexual immorality among youth and young adults is by keeping them almost completely if not completely ignorant of sex and sexuality matters, sometimes until their marriage night^{1,2,3}. Some anxious parents might only mention one or some warnings about their daughter's first menstrual experiences, while for the boys it is total black-out. In some Nigerian homes most especially in a rural set up children are shy at times to ask questions about sex and sexuality and those who are brave enough to ask are often stigmatized and constantly watched.^{1,3}

Early sexual activity among teenagers is on increase in many societies of the world today including Nigeria. This may be as a result of ignorance, lack of appropriate guidance and counseling, faster biological development, indiscipline and lack of moral education, inadequate parental care, bad role model of parents, adolescent rebellious attitude, child abuse, certain cultural influences and practice and the likes.⁴ However, traditional belief and taboos relating to assumption that sex education could lead to early knowledge of sexual matter and practice has resulted in resistance to teaching sex education in schools⁵. However there is growing concern in the Nigeria society about

increase in moral laxity, promiscuity, unwanted pregnancies and cases of abortion among youths. The incidence of these problems has been attributed to ignorance of youths about sex and sexuality issues.

It has been observed that most parents seem to have neglected their family responsibility in imparting necessary information about sex to their children^{3,4}. Women tend to fear when talking about sex with their offspring's because they feel it will lead to sexual experimentation.^{1, 2, 4,6}

Parents and guardian should be the primary sexuality educator of their children⁷. However, it has been emphasized that the parents may need support, resources and expertise from schools and other organizations and that it is important that young people received sexual health information and develop practical skills that are appropriate with their age.^{3,8,9} Some parents want both the school and the church or other religious group to support the conservative value of the home. They hope that teachers in schools and churches will help perform their task of imparting essential sexual information and controlling sexual behavior.^{2, 3,5,10}

It has been observed and reported that many educators feel anxious or tentative in tackling the topics of sex, sexuality and sexual health⁹. They may also feel overwhelmed about where to start or confused about what to teach and when to teach it.⁹ Some teachers do not approve the inclusion of sex education in the school curriculum for fear that it would lead to promiscuity, while there are some who are not willing to offer sex education to adolescents under their care.^{11,12,13}

Sex education seeks to assist in having clear and factual views of sexuality. It is a process of acquiring information and forming attitudes and beliefs about sex, sexual identity, relationships and intimacy. It is also concerned with helping young people to develop skills that will help them make informed choices about their behavior and feel confident and competent about acting on the choices they make.⁹ Sex education is also a means by which young people can protect themselves from abuse, exploitation, unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases and HIV and AIDS. The skills which young people develop through sex education are those that would enable them to communicate, listen, negotiate with others, ask for help and identify the sources of help and advice. These skills also help to improve their ability to make and take the right decision and to be assertive. They will thus be able to recognize pressures from other people and be able to resist them. They will be able to deal with, challenge prejudice as well as be able to seek help from others. They also will be able to differentiate between accurate and inaccurate information.^{9, 14,15}

Most parents are ignorant of their children's needs on sexual matters. It also seems that the parents do not actually know the areas or topics that will be included but only assumes that it would be all about issues that will expose their Children to sexually experimentation. However it is most likely that if topics that are not acceptable to parents are included in the curriculum, it would lead to resistance from the parents. This is evident in the document posted on a site where the author claimed that the sex education that was proposed to be added to the curriculum of both primary and secondary schools is no more than poor perception and that it was an obvious sign of collapse in moral principles in the society ¹⁶. This was in protest to the nature of the proposed curriculum, which in the authors opinion would help spread HIV/AIDS instead of reducing the rate because it would further degenerate what is left sacred in the morals and ethical behaviors. The controversy about sexuality education stems from the fact that most people do not have accurate understanding of what it is all about and the benefits that could be derived from it. ^{15,17} It was therefore recommended that there was need to strategise on how to carry parents along in sexual education. ¹⁷ There is therefore need to ascertain the areas or topics that parents feel their children should be exposed to or that should be included in the sex education curriculum so as to reduce resistance from them.

This study was therefore designed to examine parents' perception about teaching sex education in secondary schools in Ado-Ekiti. It also examined areas or topics in sex education parents that want to be included in the school curriculum, who the parents think should provide the information to children and the level or class parents think sex education should be taught in secondary schools in Ado Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria

2. Materials and Methods

The study is a descriptive research of the survey type. The sample consisted of 400 Parents of selected students in junior secondary schools class one (JSS 1) in Ado Ekiti, Ekiti state, Nigeria. Six secondary schools; three private and three government owned schools consisting of two boys only, two girls only and two mixed were selected using stratified random sampling procedure. Systematic random sampling technique was used to select the parents of pupils in the junior secondary class one during Parents'/ teachers' forum organized by the schools..

The instrument used to collect data was a questionnaire that included items designed to elicit information regarding the demographic characteristics, parents perception of teaching sex education, the areas they want to be included in the curriculum, who should teach and when to teach sex education. The module on the areas parents want to be

taught in the secondary school sex education program items were in five areas of sexual development and reproduction, contraceptives and birth control, sexual related problems and issues, abstinence and delay of sexual activities and relationships and sexual interactions.

The instrument was validated by experts in health education, guidance and counseling and test and measurement. To ensure the reliability of the instrument the test-retest method was used. Twenty parents’ of secondary school students that were not included in the study filled the questionnaire twice within an interval of two weeks. The scores from two administrations yielded a correlation coefficient of 0.75 using Pearson Product Moment Correlation..The administration of the instrument was done by the first author with the help of four trained research assistants. The questionnaire was self administered since the participants could read and write. The questionnaires were retrieved immediately from the respondents after completion. Out of the 480 copies of the questionnaire that were administered 400 (making 80% return rate) were properly filled and found useable for the study. Four research questions were raised answered in this study.

3.Results Responses were obtained from 400 parents of students in the selected secondary schools in Ado Ekiti.

Table 1 shows that a higher percentage of the respondents were female (57.3%), Christians (84.8%), between 41-50 years, had a degree (44.8%) and was married (48.5%).

Table 1:Distribution of the respondents according to demographic characteristics.

Variables	Group	Male		Female		Total	
		f	%	f	%	f	%
Sex	Male and female	171	(42.8)	229	(57.3)	400	(100)
Religion	Muslim	30	(17.5)	31	(13.5)	61	(15.3)
	Christian	141	(82.5)	198	(86.5)	339	(84.8)
	31-40	40	(23.4)	58	(25.3)	98	(24.5)
	41-50	79	(46.2)	118	(51.5)	197	(49.3)
	50 and above	51	(30.4)	53	(23.2)	105	(36.1)
Educational Level	School-certificate	35	(20.5)	36	(15.7)	71	(17.8)
	NCE	26	(15.2)	45	(19.7)	71	(17.80)
	OND	19	(11.1)	28	(12.2)	47	(11.8)
	First Degree	75	(43.9)	104	(45.4)	179	(44.8)
	Master Degree	12	(7.0)	14	(6.1)	26	(6.5)
	Ph.D	4	(2.3)	2	(9)	6	(1.5)
Marital Status	Married	87	(50.9)	107	(46.7)	196	(48.5)
	Widowed	5	(2.2)	5	(2.2)	10	(2.5)
	Separated	3	(1.8)	5	(2.2)	8	(2.0)
	Divorced	15	(8.8)	12	(5.2)	27	(6.8)
	Single	61	(35.7)	100	(43.7)	161	(40.3)

Research Question 1

What is the perception of parents towards the teaching of sex education in secondary schools in Ado Ekiti Local Government Area of Ekiti State?

Table 2: Percentage response on Parents’ perception of the teaching of sex education in secondary schools.

S/N	ITEM	SD f (%)	D f (%)	A f (%)	SA f (%)
1	Sex education should be taught at all levels or classes in secondary schools	18(4.5)	32(8.0)	128(32.0)	222(55.5)
2.	It is too early to teach sex education to secondary school children	135(33.8)	127(31.8)	71 (17.8)	67(16.8)
3.	Sex education should be taught secretly	163(40.8)	106(26.5)	82(20.5)	49(12.3)
4.	Sex education should be taught as a separate subject in schools	62(15.5)	82(20.5)	157(39.3)	99(24.8)
5.	Sex education should be taught along with other subjects in schools.	30(7.5)	83(20.8)	160(40.0)	127(31.8)
6.	Parent should are in the best position to teach sex related issues to their child	23(5.8)	62(15.5)	151(37.8)	164(41.8)
7.	Government should employ better trained personnel	15(3.8)	31(7.8)	194(48.5)	160(40.0)
8.	It is the responsibility of the school to teach sex education to the students	20(5.0)	62(15.5)	196(49.0)	122(30.5)
9.	Teaching of sex education in schools expose children to sex the more	75(18.8)	105(26.3)	127(31.8)	93(23.3)
10	Teaching of sex education in school reduces the rate of abortion in the society	39(9.8)	53(13.3)	151(37.8)	157(39.3)

Majority of the respondents were of the opinion that sex education be taught at all levels (87.0%); it is not too early to teach sex education (65.6%) and that it should not be taught secretly (67.3%). But that it should be taught alongside other subjects in the school(71.8%);that parents are in the best position to teach sex related issues to their children(79.6%) but that the government should employ better trained personnel to teach sexuality education(88.5%) because it is the also the responsibility of the school to teach it (79.5%). The Parents were also of the opinion that sex education will expose children to experiment with sex (55.1) but that it would also reduce the rate of abortion in the society(77.1%).

Research Question 2

What aspects of sex education do parents want to be included in the school curriculum.

Table 3: Percentage response on topics parents want their children to be taught in sex education in secondary school.

	Topics to be taught	Total positive reponse	
		f	%
1.	Delay of sexual activities until marriage	249	62.3
2.	Abstinence	277	69.3
3.	Birth control method and their effectiveness	191	47.8
4.	Sexual transmitted diseases and their effect	272	68.0
5.	The use of contraceptives	123	30.7
6.	Functions of the sexual organs in the body	345	86.3
7.	Abortion and consequences	271	67.8
8.	Menstruation and menstrual cycle	240	60.0
9.	Ejaculation and wet dreams	112	28.0
10.	Sex with many partners and consequences	209	52.3
11.	The used of condom	25	6.3
12.	What can cause childlessness	254	53.5
13.	Changes that take place in the body	316	79.0
14.	How pregnancy occur, fertilization and conception	216	54.5
15.	Masturbation	65	16.3
16.	Sexual harassment and what to do	302	75.5
17.	Virginity and its pride	290	72.5
18.	Rape and how to avoid it and report	97	24.3
19.	Response to sexual avoidance	250	62.5
20.	How to be assertive and communicate issues related to their sexuality	297	74.2
21.	Homosexuality, lesbianism and gay issues and problems	90	22.5

The topics or areas parents want their children to be taught were put in five major areas of (i) Sexual development and reproduction (items 6,8,13, and 14) with more than 65% of the parents who agreed that these topics be included and taught to the students (ii) contraception and birth control (items 3,5and 11) with only 47.8% agreeing to the teaching of birth control methods and their effectiveness. And just 30.7% and only 6.3% agreed to the inclusion of the use of contraceptives and condom respectively. (iii) sexual related problems and issues (items 4, 7,9, 12, 15,

16,18, and 21). The positive responses to the inclusion of topics on STDs, abortion, childlessness and sexual harassment was more than 50% while responses to issues of ejaculation and wet dreams, masturbation, rape, and homosexuality received responses that were far below 50%. (iv) Abstinence and delay of sexual activities (items 1,2,17) all received approval of more than 60% especially issues on virginity and its pride. (v) Relationships and sexual interactions (items 10,19,20) all received positive responses of 52.3%, 62.5% and 74.2% respectively.

Research Question 3

Who do parents think should provide sex education/information to students in secondary schools?

Table 4: Percentage response on those the parents think should provide sex education in schools.

S/N	SOURCE	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	
		F (%)	F (%)	F	%
i.	Health Education Teacher	22 (12.9)	48(21.0)	70	17.5
ii.	School Nurse	27(12.9)	28(12.2)	55	13.8
iii.	School Guardian and Counselor	62 (36.3)	85(37.1)	147	36.8
iv.	Physical Education Teacher	18(10.5)	23(10.0)	41	10.3
v.	Biology Teacher	15(8.5)	13(5.7)	28	7.0
vi.	Integrated Science Teacher	13(7.6)	16(7.0)	29	7.3
vii.	Invited Trained Personnel	9 (5.3)	12(5.2)	21	5.3
viii.	Invited parent	3(1.8)	1(4)	4	1.0
ix.	Invited medical doctor	2(1.2)	3(1.3)	5	1.3

Majority of the respondents (36.3%) were of the opinion that sex education should be taught by the school guardian/counselor. Next to this is the health education teacher (17.5%) and the School nurse (13.8%). Only very few parents agreed to the use of invited trained personnel, invited parents or invited medical doctor.

Research Question 4: At what level do parents think sex education should be taught in secondary schools.

Table 5. Percentage distribution of Parents perception on the class to teach sex education to secondary school students.

S/N	Level	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
		f (%)	f (%)	f (%)
1	JSS1	64 (37.4)	109 (47.6)	173(43.3)
2.	JSS2	22(12.9)	20(8.7)	42(10.5)
3.	JSS3	34(19.9)	36 (15.7)	70(17.5)
4.	SSS1	26 (15.2)	34(14.8)	60(15.0)
5.	SSS2	13 (7.6)	12 (5.2)	25(6.3)
6.	SSS3	12 (7.0)	18 (7.9)	30(7.5)
TOTAL		171 (100)	229 (100)	400(100)

A higher percentage of the Parents (43.3%) both among the male (37.4%) and the female (47.6) respondents were of the view that sex education should start from the first year in secondary schools (JSS1). About 71.3% agree that sex education should be included from the junior classes while the remaining 29% were of the opinion that sex education should be included in the senior classes in the secondary schools

4 Discussions

The findings of this study show that the Parents were in support of teaching sex education to students starting from the junior secondary school class one which is currently the lowest or first level in the secondary schools. Though in some studies parents were of the opinion that sex education can start early in life, from the primary or elementary schools with emphasis on abstinence only lesson^{18,14,19} or after attaining menarche for girls.¹⁵ The parents agreed that sex education would reduce the rate of abortion in the society like the parents agreed in a similar study that it is the backbone of preventing and controlling several sex related problems.¹⁸

Most of the parents agreed to the inclusion of all the aspects related to abstinence and delaying sex as against those related to the use of contraceptives. It was reported in a previous study that parents are overwhelmingly in favour of abstinence until marriage education to comprehensive education.^{21, 22,23} Instead of trying to deter or frightening young people away from having sex it is better to work on their attitudes, beliefs and develop skills in them that will enable them to choose whether or not to have a sexual relationship taking into consideration the potential risks of any sexual activity Also attempts to impose narrow moralistic views about sex and sexuality in young people through sex education and the current wave aimed at promoting abstinence have failed^{9, 15,23}

Parents are of the opinion that the school guardian counselor, the health education teacher and the school nurse should teach sex education in schools. This is different from the finding that the school teachers and doctors are the most appropriate persons for providing sex education.²¹ Parents who participated in a similar study were also not of the opinion that teachers in schools are better trained to carry out the sex education lessons.¹⁰ People who provide sex education have their own attitudes and beliefs about sex and sexuality but it is important that they do not let these influence the sex education they provide negatively. A person may believe that young people should not have sex until they are married, but this does not imply withholding important information about safer sex and contraception.⁹

5 Recommendations

There is need to educate parents about the concepts and areas that seem not to gain approval especially in topics related to sexual issues /problems of young people and the use of contraceptives and birth control methods. Thus ensuring that they have better understanding and support the teaching of these areas. This will make it possible for students who are experiencing sexual health problems to get help. It is also necessary for the Government to train and employ guidance counselors, health education teachers and nurses in schools to teach sex education.

There is also need to include or allow young people or students themselves in the developing and providing sex education as the practice can serve as a means of ensuring the relevance and acceptability what is provided. Hence it has been recommended that there is need to consult with young people at the point where programmes are designed as this will help to ensure that they are relevant to their needs.

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Biography

First Author PhD in Health Education. Masters in Health Education (M.Ed) and Bsc.(Hons). Currently working with Dept of Human Kinetics and Health Education, Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria. Has several publications in reputable local and international journals. Regular attendee and paper presenter in local and international conferences. Belongs to several professional bodies.

Second Author PhD (Health Education and Promotion) 2009, Masters in Health Education (M.Ed) 2003 Bsc.(Hons)1997. I am currently working with the department of Human Kinetics and Health Education, Faculty of Education, University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. I am a member of International Council for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, Sports and Dance (ICHPHER.SD). I am a regular attendee and paper presenter at local and international conferences. I have up to thirty publications in reputable local and international journals. I am a member of such professional bodies as International Society for Environmental Geotechnology and ICHPER-SD HEALTH EDUCATION COMMISSION. My research interest is in Adolescent reproductive health and general wellbeing. I have published books with such titles as Socio-Cultural factors that predict the sexual behaviours of adolescents, Seminar Papers and Research writing simplified and Family Living and Reproductive Health.