

PATTERNS OF UNSAFE SEXUAL ATTITUDE AND PRACTICES AMONG STUDENTS OF TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN NASARAWA STATE NIGERIA

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to find out the patterns of unsafe sexual attitude and practices among students of tertiary institutions in Nasarawa state. To achieve the purpose of this study, four specific objectives with corresponding research questions were posed and four null hypotheses postulated. Descriptive survey research design was used for the study. The population for the study was 27,879 students while multi-stage sampling procedure was used to draw a sample of 696 students for the study. The instruments used for the data collection was the 25 item researcher design questionnaire called unsafe sexual attitudes and practices questionnaire (PUSAPQ) and the focus group discussion guide(FGD). The research questions were answered using means and percentages while null hypotheses were tested using the t-Tests, and Chi-square statistics. The following results were obtained: The students exhibited negative attitudes towards unsafe sex ($\bar{x} = 2.45 < 2.50$) while overall 24.9% practiced unsafe sex. Both male and female students indicated negative attitude towards unsafe sex with male slightly higher than female students (male $\bar{x} = 2.49 > \text{female } 2.38$). Male practiced unsafe sex more than female counterparts (male = 29.9% > female = 27.5%). Based on the findings and conclusions the researcher recommended intensification of campaign against unsafe sexual attitudes and practices, youth empowerment programmes, incorporation of comprehensive sexuality education in general studies courses in all the tertiary institutions in the state.

Keywords: Pattern, Unsafe sex, Attitude, Practices, Students

Introduction

The globe is awash with expressions of increasing concerns about a world under threat of diseases, especially, communicable diseases of sexuality through unsafe sexual attitudes and practices. The continued decimation of population through afflictions and spread of diseases appears to compete favourably with continued flow of natural disasters and wars (Campbell, 2009). According to Park (2010) unsafe sexual attitudes and practices have reportedly reached alarming prevalence in several countries especially sub-Sahara Africa.

Globally, excluding HIV/AIDS there are about 333 million new cases of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) per year (Afsar, Mahmood, Kaddir, Barrey & Bilgramir, 2005) United Population Fund (UNPF) (2007) reported that young people world-wide are at the centre of HIV/AIDS epidemic in terms of rate of infection and vulnerability.

Laksaman (2003) opined that students of Nigerian tertiary institutions seem to continue to engage more in unsafe sex practices such as pre-marital sex, homosexuality, having multiple sexual partners and abortion more than ever before, perhaps because of their liberal sexual attitudes. In a study by Obi (2011) among students of four universities in eastern Nigeria it was revealed that most respondents were sexually active and engaged in high risk sex such as casual sex, same sex, multiple sexual partners, and sex in exchange for money or favour. A study by Centre for Diseases Control (2008) reported that student's used of alcohol and drugs are on the increase and likelihood of high-risk sexual behaviours when they are drunk and high seem to be prevalent. College students are less likely to use safe sex techniques such as condom, or may use it incorrectly or inconsistently, because, substance use can impair judgment and lead students to make high-risk decisions.

Also Kabir et al (2007) and Simolu (2007) reported in their respective studies that there is a high rate of unsafe sexual attitudes among students of tertiary institutions despite knowledge of HIV/AIDS with male more.

In their study in South Africa Shumba et al, (2011) reported that male students had higher level of unsafe sexual attitudes than female, while in Nigeria, Obi (2011) and Uche (2011) reported that female are higher and that female without family support often engage in prostitution to support themselves in paying fees and other necessities.

In the area of study through experience and observation, students of tertiary institutions who are no more under the close supervision of parents easily fall prey to youthful exuberances. Some organize parties, social nights involving taking of alcohol and smoking, watching of pornographic movies, wearing of mini dresses, mostly by female students which expose sensitive parts of their body. These practices of students may imply that they may be involved in unsafe sexual attitudes and practices. Unsafe sexual practices often lead to consequences like unwanted pregnancies, unsafe and illegal abortions, HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. Therefore, it becomes necessary to study the unsafe sexual attitude and practices of the students to provide a base line data in their institutions.

Hornby (2007) viewed unsafe sex as sexual activity engaged in without precautions to protect against STIs. Slaymaker, Walker, Zabia and Collumbien (2005) defined unsafe sex as sexual act between a susceptible person and partner who has a STI without taking preventive measures against it. They further stated that unsafe sex occurs if a susceptible person has sex with at least one partner who has an STI, without taking measures to prevent infection. Therefore, unsafe sexual attitudes by students of tertiary institutions shall refer to the actions in which students experience and express their sexuality without adopting necessary precautionary measures to avoid contracting STIs/HIV, abortions, unintended pregnancies and emotional stress.

Erens, McManus, Field, Korovessis, Johnson, Fenton, and Wellings (2001) highlighted examples of unsafe sexual attitudes such as sexual permissiveness, unfaithfulness with sexual partner, lack of mutual respect and appreciation for sexual partner's opinion, negative opinion of HIV blood test before sex (sero-positive status), negative opinion of STIs diagnoses, injection of non-prescribed drugs before sex and opinion of having abortion when pregnant. UNAIDS' (2007) country report on Nigeria indicated that unsafe sexual attitudes are becoming more in institutions of learning. The report further mentioned that the consequences of this quagmire are very terrible.

Hornby (2007) defined practice as action not ideas. It is a way of doing something that is the usual or expected way in a particular organization. It could be habit or custom, something done regularly. Practices that are related to sexuality are known as sexual practices. Sexual practice therefore shall be referred to as consensual or non-consensual sexual activities engaged by students of tertiary institutions.

In several studies USAIDS (2007) and Euguellesse and Tamire (2007) reported high prevalence of unsafe sexual practices among university students such as multiple sexual partners, casual sex and inconsistent use of condoms. Also having relationship with sex hawkers and campus prostitution.

According to Hornby (2007) pattern is a regular way in which something happens or is done. Cowie (1990) refers to patterns as the various forms that something may take. Similarly, Farlex (2008) stated that patterns have to do with any act of conventional principles and expectations that are binding on any person who is a member of a particular group. There are several types of patterns. Pridemore, Andrew and Spivak (2003) classified patterns into three demographic, temporal and spatial patterns. Demographic pattern is a cogent parameter to understand human activity and behavior including unsafe sexual attitudes and practices. According to Maris (1981) and Stillion (1985) demographic pattern refers to variables of age, gender, level of education, marital status, occupation, socio-economic and health status. In the present study demographic variables of gender (male and female) on unsafe sexual attitudes and practices among students of Nasarawa state tertiary institutions shall be examined.

Nasarawa State has (6) tertiary institutions that are controlled by the state. They are College of Education, Akwanga; College of Agriculture, Lafia; Nasarawa State Polytechnic, Lafia; School of Nursing and Midwifery, Lafia; School of Health Technology, Keffi and Nasarawa State University, Keffi.

Statement of the Problem

The youths can be characterized as the most active segment of the population of any society. Youths are the bedrock on which the society is anchored, and often regarded to as leaders of tomorrow (Uche, 2011). College entrance marks a time of significant change in the life of young adults and offers greatly expanded opportunities for self governance and choice of career. The above calls for a study such as this among the youths in the state tertiary institutions in order to proffer solutions.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present study was to find out the demographic patterns (gender) of unsafe sexual attitudes and practices among tertiary institution students in Nasarawa State. Specifically, this study sought to find out:

1. unsafe sexual attitudes among students;
2. unsafe sexual practices among students;
3. demographic pattern of unsafe sexual attitudes of students among male and female;
4. unsafe sexual practices of male and female students.

Hypotheses

Two null hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significance at appropriate degrees of freedom.

1. There is no significant difference in the pattern of unsafe sexual attitudes according to gender.
2. There is no significant difference in the pattern of unsafe sexual practices of students according to gender.

Methods

In order to accomplish the purpose of this study, the descriptive survey research design was adopted. The population for the study consisted of all the students in tertiary institutions in the state (state owned) numbering twenty seven thousand eight hundred and seventy nine (27,879) (Dept of Higher Education, 2013). The sample for the study consisted of 836 subjects representing three percent of the total population of tertiary institution students of Nasarawa State. In order to select tertiary institutions to be used as sample for the study, the multi - stage sampling procedure was adopted which involves 5 stages;

In the first stage, the only state university was selected. In the second stage 2 institutions were selected from the 5 remaining institutions through random sampling technique. In the third stage, one faculty was selected and 2 schools in the university and colleges respectively through random sampling without replacement. The fourth stage 2 departments were selected from the faculty and also 2 each from the schools selected bringing the number to 6 selected departments and lastly the fifth stage disproportionate sampling technique was applied to select the 836 students used for the study.

Two instruments were used for data collection. They were the researcher designed 26 items questionnaire known as Patterns of Unsafe Sexual Attitudes and Practices Questionnaire (PUSAPQ) and 17 item Focus Group Discussion Guide also known as (FGDG). The reliability coefficient of the items using the Kuder-Richardson K-R20 formula was used to establish the internal consistency of the instrument which consists of dichotomously scored items. The obtained reliability index was .68, therefore, the PUSAPQ was considered reliable for the study by experts. The administration of the instrument was undertaken by the researcher and three research assistants. All the copies of the questionnaire were collected on the spot with a return rate of 89.7% (696 copies).

Method of Data Analysis

The data analysis was based on item by item to indicate responses based on frequencies and percentages of various cadres of respondents mean and standard deviation for attitudinal items. Frequencies and percentages were used to establish the unsafe sexual practices of students. The t-Test statistic was used to test hypothesis one, while Chi-square statistic was used to test null hypothesis two. All hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significance.

Results**Table 1****Mean Score Rating of Students in Tertiary Institutions in Nasarawa State (n = 696)**

Attitudinal Items	\bar{X}	SD	Decision
1. Sexual intercourse should be reserved for married couples only	3.03	1.05	Positive
2. Condom use hinders sexual pleasure	2.48	.97	Negative
3. Keeping a sexual partner who meets my financial needs is very good	2.31	1.10	Negative
4. Use of condom is unreliable	2.53	1.04	Positive
5. Culturally females are coerced to unsafe sex	2.66	1.09	Positive
6. Keeping many sexual partners to choose the best among them is very reasonable	2.14	1.04	Negative
7. Nude adverts on television and magazines may predispose youths to unsafe sex	2.93	1.06	Positive
8. Alcohol should be used to stimulate sexual urge before sex	1.95	.94	Negative
9. I may not resist sex without condom	2.39	1.07	Negative
10. Having sugar daddies/mummies as sexual partners is very pleasurable	1.90	1.01	Negative
11. Watching blue and pornographic films encourage unsafe sex	2.88	1.15	Positive
12. Having premarital sex is okay	2.03	1.00	Negative
Grand mean	2.45	1.04	Negative

Results in Table 1 show that the grand mean score ($\bar{X} = 2.45$) of students was below the criterion mean of 2.50. This implies that students exhibited negative attitudes towards unsafe sex ($\bar{X} = 2.45 < 2.50$; $SD = 1.04$).

Table 2**Frequency and Percentages of Unsafe Sexual Practices Prevalent among Students in Tertiary Institutions in Nasarawa State (n = 696)**

Items	Yes		No	
	f	%	f	%
1. I keep multiple sexual partners	201	28.9	495	71.1
2. I drink alcohol to stimulate libido before sex	123	17.7	573	82.3
3. I use to inject non-prescribed drugs before having sex	81	11.6	615	88.4
4. I engage in casual sex with students because they are safe	126	18.1	570	81.9
5. I use condoms when having sex	175	25.1	521	74.9
6. I engage in unsafe sexual intercourse with prostitute	97	13.9	599	86.1
7. I do not use condom consistently when having sex	273	39.2	423	60.8
8. I engage in casual sex with a regular partner	364	52.3	332	47.7
9. I always engage in homosexuality	87	12.5	609	87.5
10. I engage in selling sex	80	11.5	616	88.5
11. I consent to sex to receive favour/gifts	163	23.4	533	76.6
12. I cannot resist having sex because of the urge	223	32.0	473	68.0
13. I engage in unsafe sex without condom if my partner insists	267	38.4	429	61.6
Overall % Average	24.9		75.1	

Table 2 shows that overall 24.9 per cent of students practiced unsafe sex. Furthermore, the table shows that 28.9 per cent of students “kept multiple sexual partners”, 25.1 per cent “used condom during casual sex”, 39.2 per cent of the students “did not use condom consistently when having sex”, 52.3 per cent “engaged in casual sex with a regular partner” while 23.4 per cent “consented to sex in order to receive favour/gifts”. The table further shows that 32.0 per cent of the students “could not resist having sex because of the urge” while 38.4 per cent “engaged in sex without condom if their partners insisted”.

Table 3
Mean Score Rating of Unsafe Sexual Attitudes among Students in Tertiary Institutions in Nasarawa State Based on Gender (n = 696)

Attitudinal Items	Gender					
	Male			Female		
(n = 346)(n = 350)	\bar{X}	SD	Dec.	\bar{X}	SD	Dec.
1. Sexual intercourse should be reserved for married couples only	3.15	1.03	+ve	2.91	1.06	+ve
2. Condom use hinders sexual pleasure	2.60	1.03	+ve	2.37	.89	-ve
3. Keeping a sexual partner who meets my financial needs is very good	2.20	1.06	-ve	2.42	1.13	-ve
4. Use of condom is unreliable	2.57	1.10	+ve	2.49	.98	-ve
5. Culturally females are coerced to unsafe sex	2.64	1.08	+ve	2.68	1.09	+ve
6. Keeping many sexual partners to choose the best among them is very reasonable	2.32	1.11	-ve	1.96	.95	-ve
7. Nude adverts on television and magazines may predispose youths to unsafe sex	2.96	1.05	+ve	2.90	1.08	ve
8. Alcohol should be used to stimulate sexual urge before sex	2.01	1.03	-ve	1.88	.83	-ve
9. I may not resist sex without condom	2.47	1.08	-ve	2.31	1.06	-ve
10. Having sugar daddies/mummies as sexual partners is very pleasurable	1.96	1.02	-ve	1.85	.99	-ve
11. Watching blue and pornographic films encourages unsafe sex	2.89	1.17	+ve	2.86	1.14	+ve
12. Having premarital sex is okay	2.12	1.08	-ve	1.95	.90	+ve
Overall mean	2.49	1.07	-ve	2.38	1.01	-ve

Results in Table 3 show that the overall attitudinal mean score of male students ($\bar{X} = 2.49$; $SD = 1.07$) was slightly higher than that of female students ($\bar{X} = 2.38$; $SD = 1.01$) on attitudes towards unsafe sex, and they were below the criterion mean of 2.50, indicating negative attitude for both sexes.

Table 4
Frequency and Percentages of Unsafe Sexual Practices Prevalent among Students in Tertiary Institutions in Nasarawa State Based on Gender (n = 696)

Items	Gender							
	Male				Female			
	Yes		No		Yes		No	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1. I keep multiple sexual partners	89	25.7	257	74.3	112	32.0	238	68.0
2. I drink alcohol to stimulate libido before sex	54	15.6	292	84.4	69	19.7	281	80.3
3. I use to inject non-prescribed drugs before having sex	54	15.6	292	88.4	27	7.7	323	92.3
4. I engage in casual sex with students because they are safe	93	26.9	253	73.1	33	9.4	317	90.6
5. I use condoms when having sex	275	79.5	71	20.5	246	70.3	104	29.7
6. I engage in unsafe sexual intercourse with prostitute	58	16.8	288	83.2	39	11.1	311	88.9
7. I do not use condom consistently when having sex	136	39.3	210	60.7	137	39.1	213	60.9
8. I engage in casual sex with a regular partner	177	51.2	169	48.8	187	53.4	163	46.6
9. I always engage in homosexuality	58	16.8	288	83.2	29	8.3	321	91.7
10. I engage in selling sex	39	11.3	307	88.7	41	11.7	309	88.3
11. I consent to sex to receive favour/gifts	73	21.1	273	78.9	90	25.7	260	74.3
12. I cannot resist having sex because of the urge	124	32.0	222	64.2	99	28.3	251	71.7
13. I engage in unsafe sex without condom if my partner insists	126	36.4	220	63.6	141	40.3	209	59.7
Overall % Average		29.9		70.1		27.5		72.5

Table 4 shows that overall, male students practiced unsafe sex more than female students (male = 29.9% > female = 27.5%).

Hypothesis one

There is no significant difference ($p < .05$) in the pattern of unsafe sexual attitudes of students according to gender. Data testing this hypothesis are contained in Table 5.

Table 5: Summary of t-Test Analysis of No Significant Difference in the Pattern of Unsafe Sexual Attitudes of Students According to Gender (n = 696)

S/N	Attitudinal Items	Male		Female		df	t-cal	P-value
		\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}	SD			
(n = 346)(n = 350)								
1.	Sexual intercourse should be reserved for married couples only	3.15	1.028	2.91	1.059	694	3.091	.002*
8.	Condom use hinders sexual pleasure	2.60	1.032	2.37	0.891	694	3.184	.002*
2.	Keeping a sexual partner who meets my financial needs is very good	2.20	1.057	2.42	1.132	694	-2.622	.009*
3.	Use of condom is unreliable	2.57	1.102	2.49	0.980	694	0.913	.361*
4.	Culturally females are coerced to unsafe sex	2.64	1.085	2.68	1.097	694	-0.499	.618*
5.	Keeping many sexual partners to choose the best among them is very reasonable	2.32	1.110	1.96	0.946	694	4.579	.000**
6.	Nude adverts on television and magazines may predispose youths to unsafe sex	2.96	1.045	2.90	1.087	694	0.808	.420**
7.	Alcohol should be used to stimulate sexual urge before sex	2.01	1.034	1.88	0.830	694	1.853	.064*
8.	I may not resist sex without condom	2.47	1.082	2.31	1.055	694	1.935	.053*
9.	Having sugar daddies/mummies as sexual partners is very pleasurable	1.96	1.021	1.85	0.998	694	1.487	.137*
10.	Watching blue and pornographic films encourage unsafe sex	2.89	1.167	2.86	1.142	694	0.312	.755*
11.	Having premarital sex is okay	2.12	1.084	1.95	0.904	694	2.209	.028**
Overall		2.49	1.071	2.38	1.010		1.438	.204

*Significant

** Not significant

Table 5 indicates the t-calculated values with their corresponding P-values for students' unsafe sexual attitudes. Since the overall P-value ($P = .20$) is greater than .05 level of significance, the null hypothesis of no significant difference in the temporal pattern of unsafe sexual attitudes of students according to gender is, therefore, accepted. This implies that students' pattern of unsafe sexual attitudes are the same regardless of gender.

Hypothesis two

There is no significant difference ($p < .05$) in the pattern of unsafe sexual practices of students according to gender. Data testing this hypothesis are contained in Table 6.

Table 6: Summary of Chi-square Analysis of No Significant Difference in the Pattern of Unsafe Sexual Practices of Students According to Gender

Items	Gender								χ^2	2-Cal	P-value	*Dec.
	Male				Female							
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No				
(n = 346)(n = 350)												
Unsafe Sexual Practices	O	(E)	O	(E)	O	(E)	O	(E)				
1. I keep multiple sexual partners	89	(99.9)	257	(246.1)	112	(101.1)	238	(248.9)	3.338	.068	*	
2. I drink alcohol to stimulate libido before sex	54	(61.1)	292	(284.9)	69	(61.9)	281	(288.1)	2.018	.155	*	
3. I use to inject non-prescribed drugs before having sex	54	(40.3)	292	(305.7)	27	(40.7)	323	(309.3)	10.540	.001	**	
4. I engage in casual sex with students because they are safe	93	(62.6)	253	(283.4)	33	(63.4)	317	(286.6)	35.736	.000	**	
5. I use condoms when having sex	275	(259.1)	71	(87.0)	246	(262.0)	104	(88.0)	7.814	.005	**	
6. I engage in unsafe sexual intercourse with prostitute	58	(48.2)	288	(297.8)	39	(48.8)	311	(301.2)	4.582	.032	**	
7. I do not use condom consistently when having sex	136	(135.7)	210	(210.3)	137	(137.3)	213	(212.7)	.002	.965	*	
8. I engage in casual sex with a regular partner	177	(181.0)	169	(165.0)	187	(183.0)	163	(167.0)	.360	.548	*	
9. I always engage in homosexuality	58	(43.2)	288	(302.8)	29	(43.8)	321	(306.2)	11.432	.001	**	
10. I engage in selling sex	39	(39.8)	307	(306.2)	41	(40.2)	309	(309.8)	.034	.855	*	
11. I consent to sex to receive favour/gifts	73	(81.0)	273	(265.0)	90	(82.0)	260	(268.0)	2.067	.151	*	
12. I cannot resist having sex because of the urge	124	(110.9)	222	(235.1)	99	(112.1)	251	(237.9)	4.558	.033	**	
13. I engage in unsafe sex without condom if my partner insists	126	(132.7)	220	(213.3)	141	(134.3)	209	(215.7)	1.102	.294	*	
Overall									6.429	.239	**	

Table 6 shows the overall χ^2 calculated value with its corresponding P-value for students' unsafe sexual practices ($\chi^2 = 6.429$, $P = .239$). Since the overall P-value ($P = .239$) is greater than .05 level of significance, the null hypothesis of no significance difference in the pattern of unsafe sexual practices of students according to gender is, therefore, accepted. This implies that students' pattern of unsafe sexual practices are the same regardless of gender.

Discussion

Data in Table 1 indicated that students exhibited negative attitude towards unsafe sex. This findings is a surprise and unexpected. The findings of Laksama (2003), Park, (2010) and UNAIDS (2007) disagreed with this finding; they reported that unsafe sexual attitude was in the increase among students of various universities and colleges around the country. These disagreements may also be attributed to socially desirable responses (SDR).

Data in Table 2 revealed that 24.9 per cent of students in tertiary institution practiced unsafe sex. This finding was not surprising, because the FGD data gathered indicated these practices are more prevalent among young females attracted to older and wealthy males. Also, they may not have the power to negotiate for safer sex, because they are easily deceived or paid in return for sexual gratification offered.

The findings of Table 3 indicated male and female demonstrated negative attitudes towards unsafe sex with males slightly higher than females. This finding is surprising and unexpected because several researchers (Kabir et al., 2007; Simolu, 2005) reported a considerably high prevalence of unsafe sexual attitudes among their subjects. Ogunjana, (2002) asserted that in Nigeria most socio-cultural and religious groups epitomized that male usually play dominant role on sexual issues. This finding was expected and not surprising because the finding lent support to that of Adaramaja et al (2010) who reported that in Nigeria, many students in universities are adolescents; evidence show high involvement in risky sexual attitudes such as keeping of multiple sexual partners, coercive attitudes, resisting of condom usage, use of alcohol and substance abuse. The finding of Shumba, (2011) indicated that university students exhibit unfaithfulness despite high level of knowledge of STIs and HIV/AIDS both young men and women still maintain concurrent sexual relationship. Opinion from various FGD lent support to the findings that some students never use condom, watching of pornographic and blue movies, and access to sexual websites.

Data on Table 4 indicated that male students practiced unsafe sex more than the female students (male = 29.9% > female 27.5%). This is not surprising as several findings revealed that males practiced more unsafe sexual activities than females. The findings of Odimegwu (2005) showed that males display more liberal sexual activities than their female counterparts.

Conclusions

Based on the findings and discussions of the study, the following conclusions were reached.

1. Tertiary institution students exhibited negative attitudes towards unsafe sex.
2. Students practiced unsafe sex
3. All gender, groups of institutions students exhibited negative attitudes towards unsafe sex.
4. Males more than females practiced unsafe sex.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, discussions and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. All stakeholders in the tertiary institutions should be actively involved in funding campaigns against unsafe sexual attitudes and practices among youths. This can be implemented via youth empowerment programmes, health seminars, peer group education on healthy sexual lifestyles and adoption of safe sex, formation of HIV/AIDS clubs in the higher institutions of learning. These approaches may in turn have positive effects on the students and probably stimulate adoption of safe sex attitude and practices.
2. A comprehensive family and sexuality education programme should be developed, incorporated in tertiary institutions' curricula. Its implementation should be carried out by experts in Public Health, Health Education and other allied professions.
3. Authorities of tertiary institutions in the state should adopt and enforce dress codes that discourage nudity or body flaunting, which is predominant among female students. Also, cases of sexual coercion should be reported to appropriate authority.

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