# Attitude towards Receiving Information on Sexual Relationship among Female Secondary Students in Ebonyi State, Nigeria

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Adolescent girls who are mostly found in secondary schools lack formal programme of instruction on sexual relationship education. The pieces of information they get concerning sexual relationship through few selected school subjects are not enough to equip them with comprehensive sexual relationship information. As a result, the young girls resort to information from their community, friends, relatives, amongst others. The information from the sources may be defective and uncensored thereby affecting the girls' sexual attitude and behaviour. Establishing attitude of the girls on sexual relationship information may be a precursor to mounting intervention programmes to correct misinformation and misconception capable of negatively affecting the girls' sexual health. The purpose was to determine attitude towards receiving information on sexual relationship among female secondary students in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. The cross-sectional survey research design was used to study1080 female students. The instrument for data collection was a self-structured questionnaire which had a reliability of r = 0.90. The results of the study showed that, attitude of the female secondary school students towards receiving information on sexual relationship was positive. Class level of the female secondary students had significant influence on their attitude towards information on sexual relationship. The study concluded that female secondary students in Ebonyi state, Nigeria indicated interest in receiving information on sexual relationship and recommended among others, that there is urgent need for coherent sexual relationship education intervention by schools, government, policy makers and NGOs in order to promote the adoption of sexual health behaviours during relationship among young girls.

Keywords: Attitude, female secondary students, information, sexual relationship

#### 1. Introduction

Avert. Org (2012) considered information on sexual relationships a major topic to be included in sex education. Information on sexual relationships contains factual information on different kinds of relationships, love and commitment, marriage and partnership and the law relating to sexual behaviour and relationship. Talboth (2008) emphasized on imparting factual sexuality information that will enhance sexual relationships, decisions and practices. This may be because, despite the various biological, cultural and psychosocial restrictions posed to the girl-child, two out of every five secondary school girls have had at least one previous pregnancy and 50% of the deaths recorded in Nigeria's high maternal mortality figures are adolescent girls due to illegally induced abortions (Action Health Incorporated, 2003). The scourge of Human Immune Deficiency Virus (HIV)/Acquired Immune deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) which tend to affect all aspects of the lives of young girls was on the increase. Also, most young girls seem to initiate sexual intercourse much earlier than in the past and consequently, young mothers suffer from various maternal complications (Action Health Incorporated, 2003). The situations undoubtedly, could have been shelved by shaping the young girls' sexual knowledge, attitude and practice through factual information on sexual relationships (Action Health Incorporated, 2003).

Being a planned process of instruction, information on sexual relationship as a component of sex education, fosters the acquisition of factual information, the formation of positive attitudes, beliefs and values. It also deals with the development of human skills to cope with the biological, psychological, socio-cultural and spiritual aspects of human sexuality (Action Health Incorporated, 2003; Sugh, 2011). California Family Health Council, Incorporation (CFHC), (2012) noted that information on sexual relationship is much more than anatomy and physical act of sex but involves a host of important lessons for the youth. Action Health Incorporated (2003) revealed contents to be included during adolescent girls' sexual relationship information. They include information on family relationships, friendship, love, dating, parenting, marriage relationships and life commitment. Providing information on sexual relationships is beneficial in meeting the needs of the young people by decreasing inappropriate sexual behaviours and enhancing social skills among them (Henault, 2005).

However, in Ebonyi state of Nigeria, the female secondary students seem to be deprived from accessing such relevant information.

It is unfortunate to note that at this crucial stage of a girl-child's life (secondary school or post primary school era), which most times, heralds her adolescence stage characterized by uncertainties and confusions (Action Health Incorporated, 2003), she is denied the opportunity to gather comprehensive factual sexual relationship information from her teachers and those she considers significant in her life. In almost all the secondary schools in the state, it has been personally observed that none seemed to be offering formal programme on sexual relationship information/education as a separate school subject with its full duration accorded to it. The only avenue for some contents of sexual relationship information being offered is through correlated or integrated approach with other subjects like biology and integrated science. This restricted pattern fails to achieve full delivery of comprehensive sexual relationship information/education to the students and does not ensure adequate coverage of the vast sexual relationship information contents (Sugh, 2011). In the quest for more information so as to fill the gap, the young girls tend to rely on unlimited sources of sexuality information like the media, peers, spiritual directors and older siblings. As a result, some of them acquire wrong and defective information and engage in behaviours inimical to their sexual health, although, this depends on their perception of the sexuality message. Any unhealthy perception of the sexuality message by the girls makes them vulnerable to physical, mental, emotional and social health problems (Nevid & Rathus, 2005). The situations as noted could be curtailed by allocating sexual relationship information/education full time in the secondary school curriculum so as to pave way for greater coverage on the sex education component (Action Health Incorporated, 2003; Sugh, 2011). Further, it would also create room for greater transmission of factual sexuality information so as to correct misinformation and misconceptions among the female secondary students. In order to succeed as suggested, attitude towards information on sexual relationships among the female secondary students needs to be sought firstly, so, as to fashion out the best sex education intervention strategy to be adopted for them.

Attitude refers to favourable or unfavourable evaluative reactions toward something or someone, exhibited in ones beliefs, feelings or intended behaviour (Arnold, 2012). In the present study, determining attitude of the female secondary students towards information on sexual relationships invariably refers to determining the students' attitude or affective feeling of liking (positive) or disliking (negative), towards information pertaining sexual relationship. Alleydog (2014) posited that attitude influences behaviour. In the present study, any attitude shown by the students at the end would elicit the best intervention strategy to bring about desired change in behaviour in line with McLeod (2001) ABC model of attitude. Human Services Policy (2008) revealed that most high-school female teens had positive attitude towards marriage and other romantic relationships and feel well prepared for it. This was in consideration by the students that a person enjoys fuller happiness being married than to go through life single. However, some of the female teens in the author's study, showed negative attitude towards dating relationships due to dating violence or teen relationship abuse.

There are factors that have been found to influence female adolescents' attitude to information on sexual relationship. Such factors include level of education, among other factors (Wang, Xiaomingli, Shah & Thomas, 2012). Caldwell and Caldwell (1990) posited that the amount of education necessary to cause change in attitude towards sexual relationship information varies. Caldwell and Caldwell (1990) observed that in developed countries, higher educational level for females were associated with positive attitudes to sexual relationship information was made about adolescent female secondary school students in the developed world and the same scenario could be applicable to those in the developing world. In the light of the fore going, the present study aimed to find out attitude of female students in Ebonyi state secondary schools towards receiving information on sexual relationship and also to determine how educational level of the female secondary students would influence their attitude towards information on sexual relationship.

# 2. Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- 1. What is the attitude towards receiving information on sexual relationship among female secondary students in Ebonyi state, Nigeria?
- 2. How does education class level of the female secondary students influence their attitude towards receiving information on sexual relationship?

# 3. Hypothesis

One null hypothesis was rested as follows:

1. Education class level of the female secondary students has no significant influence on their attitude towards receiving information on sexual relationship.

#### 4. Methodology

Between April and July 2014, the cross-sectional survey was carried out among 1,080 female adolescent secondary school students who were drawn through the multistage sampling procedure. The first stage involved grouping the state into three exclusive education zones, namely: Abakaliki education zone, Onueke education zone and Afikpo zone. The second stage involved the selection of six schools from each zone using simple random sampling technique of balloting without replacement. This process yielded a total of eighteen secondary schools. The third stage involved purposive selection of 10 JSS I students, 10 JSS II students, 10 JSS II students, 10 JSS II students, 10 JSS II students, 10 GS I students, 10 GS II students and 10 SS III students. This process yielded a total of 60 female students drawn from each of the 18 sampled schools.

The instrument for data collection was a self-structured questionnaire titled: Attitude towards Receiving Information on Sexual Relationship Questionnaire (ARISRQ). In order to measure the suitability and usability of the instrument, 70 female students that were not among the population being studied were used. Data collected from these students were subjected to exploratory factor analysis. This procedure reduced the original no of items from 25 to 16 useable items. The questionnaire was arranged in two sections, A and B. Section A, contained information on the respondent's education class level and section B, consisted of 16 items containing pieces of information on sexual relationship. The respondents were required to indicate on a 4-point scale, the degree of agreement or otherwise to the items in the questionnaire as follows: strongly agree (SA) = 4, agree (A) = 3, disagree (D) = 2 and strongly disagree (SD) = 1. Five experts in health education from two institutions of higher learning in Enugu State, not included in the study, were used for validating the ARISRQ. Thirty undergraduates of both genders in a State University, not included in the study were used for test of reliability. The data yielded a Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of 0.90. The reliability coefficient was higher than Ogbazi and Okpala's (1994) criteria of 0.60 acceptable for good instruments.

Permission was granted from the Principal of each secondary school participating in the study prior to data collection. A consent note with the explanation for the research purpose, method of response and assurance of anonymity was attached to each copy of the ARISRQ. One thousand and eighty copies of the ARISRQ were administered on the students during free play period and were collected immediately after completion.

All the 1080 copies of the ARISRQ administered were returned and used for analysis. Means and standard deviations were used to describe the respondents' attitude towards information on sexual relationships. A criterion mean of 2.50 was set for making decisions. In this case a mean of 2.50 and above was judged positive attitude towards information on sexual relationship. On the other hand, a mean below the criterion mean was adjudged negative attitude towards information on sexual relationship. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to analyze data in order to ascertain the differences in attitude of the students towards information on sexual relationship in relation to class level. An alpha level of 0.05 was set for the ANOVA. All data analyses were done with IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 20.0 for Windows.

#### 5. Results

#### 5.1 Research question 1

What is the attitude towards receiving information on sexual relationships among female secondary students in Ebonyi state of Nigeria?

# Table 1: Attitude towards Receiving Information on Sexual Relationships among Female Secondary Students

| S/N | Information on sexual relationships   | $\overline{x}$ | SD   | Decision |
|-----|---|----------------|------|----------|
| 1.  | Sexual relationship does not necessarily indicate there is a friendship   | 3.07           | 1.08 | Positive |
| 2.  | Through friendship, a girl shares information with others.  | 3.12           | 0.97 | Positive |
| 3.  | It is quite good for a girl to know as much as she can, about a boy's character before accepting to go out with him on a date | 3.29           | 1.03 | Positive |
| 4.  | During dating, a girl's inability to communicate assertively to her male partner may result in sexual assault.                | 2.86           | 1.09 | Positive |
| 5.  | Sexual activity in a relationship does not necessarily indicate that there is a relationship                                  | 2.82           | 1.09 | Positive |
| 6.  | Dating partners share responsibility for the quality of the relationship.   | 2.95           | 1.08 | Positive |
| 7.  | Disclosure of any confidential relationship information reposed in a friend is bad.   | 2.80           | 1.16 | Positive |
| 8.  | Love relationship does not emphasize on physical characteristics  | 2.90           | 1.14 | Positive |
| 9.  | Girls opt for marriage due to the need to be loved.   | 2.84           | 1.14 | Positive |
| 10. | Infatuation which emphasize on the concept of love at first sight is not acceptable to most girls.                            | 2.87           | 1.11 | Positive |
| 11. | Some girls get married due to perceived romance in marriage.  | 2.79           | 1.12 | Positive |
| 12. | Teenage girls are not usually biologically mature to take on the responsibilities of marriage.                                | 2.78           | 1.15 | Positive |
| 13. | Dating is a normal activity among teenage girls.  | 2.86           | 1.08 | Positive |
| 14. | Challenges and difficulties associated with teenage girl's parenting are numerous.  | 2.82           | 1.18 | Positive |
| 15. | An adolescent mother may suffer social abandonment.   | 2.90           | 1.13 | Positive |
| 16. | Most marriages fail because most teenage girls  | 2.97           | 1.16 | Positive |
|     | tend to be in love with the image of the man rather   |                |      |          |
|     | than the man himself  |                |      |          |
|     | Overall   | 2.92           | 0.61 | Positive |

From the data in Table 1, all the items scored above the criterion mean of 2.50 and with overall mean of 2.92 and a standard deviation of 0.61. This implies that female students in Ebonyi State secondary schools have positive attitude towards receiving information on sexual relationship.

#### **5.2 Research question 2**

How does education class level of the female secondary students influence their attitude towards receiving information on sexual relationships?

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#### Table 2: Influence of Education Class level on the Attitude towards Receiving Information on Sexual Relationships among Female Secondary Students

| Variable  | Classes     |             |             |             |             |             |  |  |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--|--|
|   | JSS I       | JSS II      | JSS III     | SS I        | SS II       | SS III      |  |  |
|   | SD          | SD          | SD          | SD          | SD          | SD          |  |  |
| Attitude towards receiving<br>information on sexual<br>relationships among the<br>female secondary students | 2.83 (0.51) | 2.84 (0.80) | 3.50 (0.14) | 3.12 (0.43) | 2.91 (0.480 | 2.61 (0.72) |  |  |

Figures in brackets are standard deviations

The data presented in Table 2 show that in determining attitude of the female students towards receiving information on sexual relationships in relation to class level, the female students in all the classes scored above the criterion mean of 2.50. The data show JSS III class have the highest score of 3.50 followed by SS I with a mean score of 3.12 and then SS II with a mean score of 2.91. The JSS II class followed next with mean score of 2.84 and the JSS I scored 2.83. The least score was by SS III class with a mean score of 2.61. The variation not withstanding, the scores imply that the students in all the classes have positive attitude towards receiving information on sexual relationship.

#### 5.3 Hypothesis

Education class level of the female secondary students has no significant influence on their attitude towards receiving information on sexual relationships.

| Table 3: Summary of ANOVA on Attitude towards Receiving Information on Sexual Relat | ionships |
|---|----------|
|   |          |

| S/N | Information on sexual relationship   | F-ratio | p-value |
|-----|--|---------|---------|
| 1.  | Sexual relationship does not necessarily indicate there is a friendship.   | 5.343*  | 0.005   |
| 2.  | Through friendship, a girl gets to share information with others.  | 7.916*  | 0.000   |
| 3.  | It is quite good for a girl to know as much as she can, about a boy's character before accepting to go out with him on a date. | 2.892   | 0.056   |
| 4.  | During dating, a girl's inability to communicate assertively to her male partner may result in sexual assault.                 | 7.736*  | 0.000   |
| 5.  | Sexual activity in a relationship does not necessarily indicate that there is a friendship.                                    | 11.678* | 0.000   |
| 6.  | Dating partners share responsibility for the quality of the relationship.  | 11.678* | 0.002   |
| 7.  | Disclosure of any confidential relationship information reposed in a friend is bad.  | 7.098*  | 0.001   |
| 8.  | Love relationship does not emphasize on physical characteristics.  | 8.107*  | 0.000   |
| 9.  | Girls opt for marriage due to the need to be loved.  | 9.176*  | 0.000   |
| 10. | Infatuation which emphasizes on the concept of love at first sight is not acceptable to most girls.                            | 7.721*  | 0.000   |
| 11. | Some girls get married due to perceived romance in marriage.   | 7.236*  | 0.001   |
| 12. | Teenage girls are not usually biologically mature to take on the responsibilities of marriage.                                 | 10.469* | 0.000   |
| 13. | Dating is a normal activity among teenage girls.   | 11.841* | 0.000   |
| 14. | Challenges and difficulties associated with teenage girl's parenting are numerous.   | 9.295*  | 0.000   |
| 15. | An adolescent mother may suffer social abandonment.  | 3.493*  | 0.000   |
| 16. | Most marriages fail because most teenage girls tend to be in love with the image of the man rather than the man himself.       | 3.563*  | 0.000   |
|     | Overall  | 18.386* | 0.000   |

\* p < 0.05

Table 3 shows the test of analysis of variance (ANOVA) based on education class levels of the female secondary students. The analysis indicates that education class level have a significant influence on the respondents' attitude towards receiving information on sexual relationship judging from the fact that the p-value is less than 0.05 significance level.

#### 6. Discussion

Research question 1 sought to find out the attitude towards information on sexual relationship among female secondary students in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. The results in Table 1 indicated that the attitude of the female secondary students towards receiving information on sexual relationship was positive ( $\bar{x} = 2.92$ ). This index could imply that the female students in the area under study favoured receiving information on sexual relationship. Such information includes those on friendship, dating, love, marriage and parenting.

The result was in line with Human Services Policy's (2005) finding that most high school female teens had positive attitude towards romantic relationship and feel well prepared for it. The result of the study also supports National Association of Social Workers (2005) when it reported that 80% of female students it investigated had positive attitude towards the contents of school health education such as sexual relationship. According to this study, the students, their teachers and parents showed similar concern about receiving information on sexual relationship and other sex education contents. The result of the study is also in consonance with Ogunjimi (2006) who discovered that female students he studied showed positive attitude towards receiving information on sexual relationship. In the same vein, Paire, Don and Maggi (2001) posited that adolescent girls who have been exposed to a variety of traditional and most especially non- traditional living arrangements such as co-habitation tend to have more positive attitude towards love relationship.Wang, Simony and Wu (2006) also found that female adolescents who lived with both biological parents reported more positive attitude to sexual relationship and thus demonstrated less sexual activity than those not living with both biological parents.

The positive attitude towards sexual relationship might have been enhanced by the clarion call and efforts by the Non Governmental Organizations (NGO), parents, caregivers, community and youth leaders for excellent sexual practices among young people. The current outspread of STI, especially HIV, appears to have led to creation of positive environment that support and nurture positive self worth, responsibility, understanding, acceptance of diversity and sexual health. The ideas are in line with Hirsh (2007) who asserted that positive attitude towards sexual relationship enhances excellent practices among young people.

Furthermore, the female secondary students might have realized that a woman enjoys fuller happiness being in a marriage relationship than going through life single (Human Services Policy, 2008). Therefore, it is not surprising to discover that the female students favoured receiving information on sexual relationships. Ebonyi state government has also done a lot of work through Ebonyi State Agency for the Control of AIDS (EBOSACA), to convince adolescents, particularly girls about the reality of incidence of STI. EBOSACA has been carrying out HIV/AIDS intervention programmes in various parts of the state thereby creating the much needed awareness on adolescent's risky behaviour preventive measures. Consequent upon the measures adopted by Ebonyi State Government and other co-operating bodies, it is not surprising that students' attitude favoured receiving information on sexual relationship. The finding is also supported by Ogunjimi's (2006) study which discovered that female students he studied favoured receiving information on sexual relationship.

Research question 2 sought information on how education class level influenced the female secondary students' attitude towards information on sexual relationships. Results in Table 2 showed variations in the classes' attitude towards information on sexual relationship as follows: (JSS I,  $\bar{x} = 2.83$ ), (JSS II,  $\bar{x} = 2.84$ ), (JSS III,  $\bar{x} = 3.50$ ), (SS I,  $\bar{x} = 3.12$ ), (SS II,  $\bar{x} = 2.91$ ) and (SS III,  $\bar{x} = 2.61$ ). This variation is in line with Caldwell and Caldwell's (1990) report that the amount of education necessary to cause change in attitude towards information on sexual relationship varies. The results of ANOVA in Table 3 imply that class level impacted significantly on the specific and overall attitude of the female students towards receiving information on sexual relationship except for, of course, 'it is quite good for a girl to know as much as she can, about a boy's character before accepting to go out with him on a date' (F = 2.892, p = 0.056). The results are in line with Ogbuinya's (2015) report that education class level of female secondary school students she studied earlier had significant influence on their attitude towards receiving information on sexual relationship.

#### 7. Implications for Sexual Relationship Education

The findings of the study imply that health educators, parents, educators, care givers, religious leaders and peers may have been providing some skeletal informal health information on sexual relationship. Hence, such

sexuality education although informal, might have been imparted to the students before coming to the school. Nevertheless, such pieces of information may have been received from uninformed sources.

The findings of the study also imply that notwithstanding the absence of a codified subject on sexual relationship education in secondary schools, the integration of sex education components in subjects like health education, biology, home economics and integrated science might have contributed to the positive attitude shown by the female students towards sex education. The outcome of this study has implication for an urgent and immediate need for sexual relationship education intervention programmes. Such programmes expectedly should contain factual information with regard to adolescent female sexual relationship. The results of the investigation point to the fact that every school child irrespective of class level should be exposed to all relevant information concerning sexuality and all the necessary sexuality skills needed to negotiate and decide on sexual behaviour during relationship.

#### 8. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made to the government at various levels, school and public educators, peer educators, health counsellors, Non-governmental organisations, policy makers, curriculum planners health agencies, parents, educational stake holders and other interest groups in the area of adolescent health.

- 1. Government at all levels should develop a health education curriculum and ensure that all schools adopt it and adhere strictly to its implementation taking into consideration both private and mission schools. This is to ensure that adequate coverage is granted to all aspect of sexual relationship education considered to be broad.
- 2. In providing sex education, the school and public health educators, peer educators, health agencies and care givers should place emphasis on personal sexuality skills component of sexual relationship education so that the girls would be equipped with rightful skills with which to exercise assertiveness and negotiations in times of sexual behaviour and decision making.
- 3. Health educators and other relevant school of thoughts should mount health education interventions for different age groups and genders. Such interventions will enhance sexual health among the young ones and help to prevent unwanted pregnancies and STIs that may arise from inadequate and wrong information on sexual relationship.
- 4. Institutions of learning in providing sexual relationship education should eschew all barriers that would enable adequate coverage of the subject matter. It would ensure that the students irrespective of education level and gender are not denied of all relevant information.
- 6. Government should implement professional handling of adolescent sexual relationship education in order to ensure accuracy of information.

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