Demographic Variables as Predictors of Risky Sexual Behaviour among University Students in South East, Nigeria

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Abstract

Introduction: Risky sexual behaviour (RSB) has increasingly become an issue in academic discourse at the turn of the century, even in the Nigerian context. It is however, either often studied uni-dimensionally or studied for its health promoting and aetiological implications. This study thus set out to determine the predictive capacity of demographic variables (gender and religiosity) over dimensions of risky sexual behaviour such as early sexual debut, random sexual activity and disregard for protection during sex among university students in South East Nigeria. Method: The correlational research design was adopted for the study. A research question was asked and a null hypothesis was formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance to guide the study. Multistage sampling was used in selecting 1200 students for the study. The Undergraduates' Risky Sexual Behaviour Questionnaire (URSBQ) was used to collect data for the study and it consisted of 15 items. The research question was answered using Pearson Correlation statistics. The null hypothesis was tested using multiple regression analysis. Data analysis was done using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23. Results: The correlational matrix of variables indicated a significant positive relationship between gender and the three dimensions of risky sexual behaviour. Religiosity had a significant negative relationship with total RSB and only two dimensions of RSB (random sexual activity and disregard for protection during sex) except early sexual debut. The multiple regression analysis for predictor variables and total risky sexual behaviour gave an indication that the predictor variables jointly contributed 3.2% to explain the variances in response. Each predictor variable made significant individual contributions to the variances in response, based on the standardized Beta coefficients, among other findings. Discussion and Conclusion: The findings of the study formed the fulcrum of the discussion, which extended to the multiple regression analysis for predictor variables and each of the dimensions of risky sexual behaviour with respect to their joint and individual contributions to the variances in response. It was thus concluded among others that gender and religiosity both significantly predicted total risky sexual behaviour, but religiosity did not significantly predict all three dimensions of the criterion variable.

Keywords: Demographic variables, risky sexual behaviour, gender, religiosity

Introduction

As individuals progress from childhood to the youth stage, there are several changes that occur, spanning from emotional through bio-social changes, notable among which is the development of interest in the opposite sex. Despite parental and societal efforts to provide proper sexual information for youths, it does not preclude the fact that the youths are individuals on their own. They are capable of having their own varying degrees of interest and participation in sexual matters, as sex remains a conspicuous object of fascination among youths the world over.

With the development of secondary sexual characteristics, curiosity emerges in youths about the opposite sex, which leads them to want to engage in sexual relations with one another as attending hormonal changes occur, thereby increasing sexual urges (Billings, Hastie & Jenkins, 2007). A good majority of these youths are found in universities as undergraduates, where they are exposed to the opposite sex; hence, curiosity develops among the sexes about each other. They might also tend to practice what they might have subtly imbibed from adults as well as from the mass media. One of such cases of imbibed behaviours includes the acting out of sexual roles in situations where the opposite sex can be found, such as in universities. These sexual role emulations are reported to be often acted out in institutions of higher learning, such as universities through students' engagement in sexual activities ranging from kissing to outright copulation (Ugoji, 2014). However, sexual behaviours often move from safe to unsafe, depending on how the need to express such behaviour comes, that is sexual urgency. When sexual behaviour is unsafe, it is often referred to as risky sexual behaviour (RSB).

According to Kalina (2012), RSB has to do with individuals engaging in behaviours that are threatening to their sexual health. Such behaviours, Kalina continued, include but are not limited to early sexual debut, indiscriminate sexual partnering, irregular or disrespect for protection during sex, and compulsive sexual engagement.

In allusion to this, Ilesanmi, Ige and Alele (2014) posited that risky sexual behaviour is characterized by exhibition of non-normative behaviours such as casual unprotected sex, early sexual initiation, sex with multiple partners, sex for monetary gratification and so on. These portend grave consequences such as adolescent parenting, unwanted pregnancies and the risk of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).Amu (2014) has it that RSB can predispose persons to infection from the Human Immune Deficiency Virus (HIV), and that RSB is common among university students. Ilesanmi, Ige and Alele (2014) opined that most of the RSBs exhibited by undergraduates are prohibited by their both immediate societies and respective religions, since marriage is a universal norm to qualify for engagement in any form of sexual activity in the typical Nigerian society. This view is supported by Morhason-Bello,et al. (2008). Preceding research however, indicates that there are demographic variables (such as religiosity and gender) that could impact on risky sexual behaviour among students.

Stolz (2008) defines religiosity as individual preferences, emotions, beliefs, and actions that refer to an existing (or self-made) religion. Gallagher and Tierney (2013) see religiosity as an individual's belief, spirituality, and reverence towards a divinity. It thus suffices to regard religiosity as the totality of an individual's attitude and behaviours that depict their involvement in an organized religion or belief system. In terminology and usage, it is expedient to always disambiguate religiosity from religion. Wusu (2011) hinted that religion itself simply is one's professed faith (in the case of Nigeria, this can be Christianity, Islam and traditional worship system). Penhollow, Young and Denny (2005) posited that most conventional religions (Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and others) strongly discourage premarital sexual activity, permissiveness and adultery. In the study by Wusu, it was discovered that religiosity was significantly related ($p < 0.05$) to multiple sexual partnerships at both the bivariate and multivariate levels of analysis among females. However, rather than examining the mediating capacity of gender in the relationship between religion/religiosity and risky sexual behaviour (RSB), this study looks at the contributions of both gender and religiosity as demographic variables.

Despite the fact that males have been found in research to engage earlier in sexual activities than females on the average, females have been found to be more likely than males to indulge in RSB than their male counterparts (Mturi & Gaearwe, 2014).Odimegwu and Somefun (2017) undertook a study in Nigeria on ethnicity, gender and RSB. It was discovered in the study that although males began to engage in sex a little later than female participants, 81 percent of them did not utilize protection during sex with known and unknown persons, compared to 35 percent of females in this regard. The elevated risks of first sex were found to be higher in Hausa/Fulani females and in Yoruba males. This indicated a mediation of ethnicity in the association between gender and RSB, but this aspect does not concern this study.

Again, Ugoji (2014) studied the determinants of risky sexual behaviour among secondary school students, with religiosity among the four independent variables. All independent variables were found to have jointly contributed to risky sexual behaviour (RSB) significantly, accounting for 43 percent of the variation in responses. In addition, religiosity was found to be the most potent in terms of the relative contributions of each of the independent variables ($\beta = 0.648$; $t = 10.511$; $p = 0.05$). This indicated that the greater an individual's religiosity, the less likely the individual will be to engage in RSB. Morhassan-Bello, et al (2008) carried out a study on in-school adolescents' sexual behaviour in Ibadan, Nigeria. Of the respondents found to be sexually active in the study, 37.80 percent were males and 19.20 percent were females. Alarmingly, approximately 40 percent of these males and females had engaged in sex with a partner in under twenty-four hours of meeting them. 77 percent of respondents indicated also that their first sexual experience was with a random partner. Respondents were also found (27%) to have engaged in sex by the time they were in senior secondary class one (SS1 or 10^{th} grade).

Udigwe et al (2014) also discovered in their study that among female adolescents, 16-17 years old girls were highest among those who had ever had sex. They also found that factors associated with the tendency for early sexual debut and other RSBs included living outside the parents' homes and low socioeconomic status. This potentially poses a risk factor to whatever influence religiosity would have over early sexual debut. Isiugo-Abanihe and Oyediran (2002), discovered a general situation of early sexual debut, meaning it cuts across class or creed, with minimal sociodemographic variations. Those who had access to media and belonged to high SES families were also reported by Isiugo-Abanihe and Oyediran to be more sexually exposed than their counterparts.

Implicit in research findings is the fact that a good number of Nigerian adolescents who can be found in secondary schools and tertiary institutions engaged in RSBs such as early sexual debut, random sexual activity and disregard for protection during sex. However, in South East, Nigeria, these three subscales of RSB appear not to have been jointly studied as dependent variables, going by the apparent paucity of works in this regard. It is in view of this that this study becomes expedient.

Research Question

The following research question was posed to guide the study:

Do gender and religiosity have a relationship with early sexual debut, random sexual activity and disregard for protection during sex among university students in South East, Nigeria?

Null Hypotheses

The following research null hypothesis tested at 95% confidence interval guided the study:
Gender and religiosity do not significantly predict early sexual debut, random sexual activity and disregard for protection during sex among university students in South East, Nigeria

Method

The study was carried out in South East, Nigeria, which is one of the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria, comprising five predominantly Igbo-speaking states namely: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States. The study adopted the correlation design in order to determine the magnitude and direction of the relationship between the variables of interest. To steer the study, one research question and one null hypothesis were respectively used to find out the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variables, as well as the predictive capacity of the former over the latter. The population of the study comprised 169,000 university students in the geopolitical zone's 10 public universities (all coeducational) as at the time of the study. The study sample comprised 1,200 students selected through a multi-stage sampling procedure.

Three out of the five states in the South East Geopolitical Zone were selected in stage one using simple random sampling, each state having two public universities each and a total of six universities obtained for the three states. The second stage involved simple random sampling in selecting two faculties each from the six selected universities, making a total of 12 faculties in six universities from three states. At the third stage, two departments were selected from the 12 faculties using the same sampling method, leading to a total of 24 departments. In stage four, simple random sampling was also used to select 50 students each from the 24 departments, yielding a total target sample of 1,200 undergraduates for the study.

The instrument was used in collecting data for the study was the Undergraduates' Risky Sexual Behaviour Questionnaire (URSBQ), which was an adaptation of the Youth Risk Behaviour Survey (Banspach, Zaza, Dittus, Michael, Brindis& Thorpe, 2016). Literature review also formed a source for the questionnaire's items. The response format of the URSBQ is dichotomous. It contained 15 items covering the three dimensions of risky sexual behaviour investigated (early sexual debut, random sexual activity and disregard for protection during sex). The URSBQ was validated by two experts in educational psychology and an expert in educational measurement and evaluation. On administering the instrument on a group of university students in another area of study but with similar sample characteristics, a reliability coefficient of .81 was obtained using the Kuder-Richardson 20 statistic. The research question was answered using point biserial correlation, while the null hypothesis was tested using multiple regression analysis. Data were screened to capture only valid items to be used in analysis and they were analyzed under the SPSS 23 platform.

Results

Table 1*Correlational Matrix of the Variables*

Variables	Gender	Religion	Total Risky Sexual Behaviour	Early sexual debut	Random sexual activity	Disregard for protection
Gender	1					
Religiosity	-.041	1				
Total Risky Sexual Behaviour	.146**	-.107**	1			
Early sexual debut	.144**	-.028	.719**	1		
Random sexual act	.088**	-.137**	.875**	.423**	1	
Disregard for protection	.121**	-.089**	.827**	.385**	.637**	1
Mean	-	-	26.20	8.67	8.92	8.55
Standard deviation	-	-	4.10	1.53	1.93	1.58

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 1 showed that gender is positively and significantly related to risky sexual behavior and its dimensions while the students' religiosity significantly but negatively related to total risky sexual behavior, random sexual activity and disregard for protection. It was not significantly related to early risky sexual debut.

Table 2Multiple Regression Analysis for Predictor Variables and total risky sexual behaviour

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	26.656	.821		32.475	.000
	GENDER	1.168	.261	.143	4.475	.000
	RELIGIOSITY	-2.132	.668	-.102	-3.189	.001
	R	.178[a]				
	R^2	.032				
	F	15.618				0.000

The result in table 2 shows that the multiple regression coefficients (R) were .178 while R^2 was .032. This is an indication that the predictor variables jointly contributed 3.2% to explain the variances in response and the corresponding F (2,1006) = 15.618, is statistically significant ($p<.05$). Using standardized (B), the table indicated that both gender and religiosity made significant individual contributions to the variances in response.

Table 3Multiple Regression Analysis for Predictor Variables and Early risky sexual debut

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	8.178	.296		27.650	.000
	GENDER	.438	.096	.143	4.579	.000
	RELIGIOSITY	-.157	.237	-.021	-.663	.507
	R	.146				
	R^2	.021				
	F	10.897				0.000

The result in table 3 shows that the multiple regression coefficients (R) were .146 while R^2 was .021. This is an indication that the predictor variables jointly contributed 2.1% to explain the variances in response and the corresponding F (2,1006) = 10.897, is statistically significant ($p<.05$). Using standardized (B), the table indicated that only gender made significant individual contribution to the variances in response.

Table 4 Multiple Regression Analysis for Predictor Variables and random risky sexual activity

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	9.778	.370		26.430	.000
	GENDER	.321	.121	.083	2.653	.008
	RELIGIOSITY	-1.279	.298	-.134	-4.298	.000
	R	.161[a]				
	R^2	.026				
	F	13.172				0.000

The result in table 4 shows that the multiple regression coefficients (R) were .161 while R^2 was .026. This is an indication that the predictor variables jointly contributed 2.6% to explain the variances in response and the corresponding F (2, 1006) = 13.172, is statistically significant ($p<.05$). Using standardized (B), the table indicated that both gender and religion made significant individual contributions to the variances in response.

Table 5 Multiple Regression Analysis for Predictor Variables and disregard for protection

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	8.693	.309		28.148	.000
	GENDER	.376	.100	.119	3.766	.000
	RELIGIOSITY	-.678	.251	-.085	-2.706	.007
	R	.148[a]				
	R^2	.022				
	F	11.035				0.000

The result in table 5 shows that the multiple regression coefficients (R) were .148 while R^2 was .022. This is an indication that the predictor variables jointly contributed 2.2% to explain the variances in response and the corresponding F (2,1006) = 11.035, is statistically significant ($p<.05$). Using standardized (B), the table indicated that both sex and religion made significant individual contributions to the variances in response.

Discussion

Data from Table 1 which is in answer to the research question indicates that gender has a significant positive relationship with risky sexual behaviour (RSB) and its studied dimensions while religiosity has a significant but negative relationship with total RSB, random sexual activity and disregard for protection during sex. However, religiosity was not found to have a significant relationship with early sexual debut. Unlike what Ugorji (2013) found in her study that religiosity had the most potent relative contribution of each of the independent variables she utilized (gender inclusive), this study has discovered gender to have greater potency in relative contribution of the independent variables. This means that across genders, RSB was likelier to exist than across religiosities of participants. Findings on the relationship between gender and random sexual activity also agree with Morhassan-Bello et al (2008) who found that 77% of respondents had their first sexual experience with a random person.

The non-significant relationship of religiosity with early sexual debut agrees with Ilesanmi, Ige and Alele (2014), who explained that pre-marital sex in Nigeria is often frowned at by both religion and culture. In this case, religiosity could be serving as a protective factor against one starting to have sex from an early age, but due to the non-significant relationship, this can be a mere probability. Despite the finding on the relationship between the religiosity and early sexual debut dimension of RSB, Udigwe et al (2014) is able to explain the relationship between gender and early sexual debut with the finding that the tendency for early sexual debut and other RSBs were associated with living outside the parents' homes and low socioeconomic status. The part of living outside the home and its concomitant challenges is exemplified in the wanton of campus life.

Table 2 showing the multiple regression analysis for the predictor variables and total RSB indicated that both sex and religion made significant individual contributions to the variances in response at 3.20 percent ($R^2 = .032$), using the standardized Beta coefficients. This means that both independent variables had a statistically significant relationship with total RSB. Again, this agrees with the findings of Ugorji (2013) on the dependent variable in total, though not based on individual contribution. Famutimi and Oyetunde (2014) also discovered that majority of their study participants in Oyo State, South West, Nigeria, were involved in unprotected sex, and too early sexual debut, with gender significantly contributing to this finding. Mediators such as making new friends and the realization of sudden unimagined freedom could as well explain the dissonance between one being religiously inhibited to engage in early sexual debut and the lure to engage in it, given a change of circumstance.

In table 3, the multiple regression analysis for the predictor variables and early sexual debut shows that a statistically significant contribution was jointly made by the former ($p<.05$) in explaining the variances in responses ($R^2 = .021$) at 2.1 percent. However, only gender made a significant individual contribution to the variances in response, meaning that religiosity as a standalone variable did not have an individual contribution that was significant. There is an indication that religiosity was a protective factor against early sexual debut since it was sinful and hardly anyone likes to displease God the Creator. Therefore, there is a probability that religion is both preventive and dissuasive of early sexual debut in a sanctimonious society like South East, Nigeria.

Table 4 indicated that the predictor variables made jointly (2.60 percent) and individually statistically significant contributions to the variances in responses ($R^2 = .026$) based on the standardized Beta coefficients. However, while gender made a positive contribution, religiosity made a negative contribution, albeit that both were significant. This means that it is likelier to have students of both sexes involved in random sexual activity than to have the religious ones engaged in it because there is an inverse relationship between religiosity and random sexual activity.

Analysis of data in table 5 indicated that the predictor variables jointly and individually had a statistically significant contribution to the variances in responses. This agrees with the findings of Penhollow et al (2005) that frequency of worship attendance and degree of religious feeling significantly predicted sexual behaviour after logistic regression generally interpreted results. However, in this study, an inverse relationship was found between religiosity and disregard for protection during sex. In this regard, religiosity seems to have played the part of protective factor here. That is the more religious the student was, the less the likelihood to engage in RSB at all, even the dimension under discourse.

Conclusion

It can be concluded from the findings that gender and religiosity both significantly predicted total risky sexual behaviour, but religiosity did not significantly predict all three dimensions of the criterion variable significantly.

Significant negative relationships found between religiosity and two dimensions of RSB indicate that the likelihood of engaging in RSB is less for students who identify as religious. Findings also hinted that in both sexes, RSB was likely to occur.

Recommendations

The study therefore recommends the following:

1. Students in universities should be constantly re-educated on the negatives of engaging in risky sexual behaviour, especially the dimensions studied herein.
2. Religious bodies need to do more beyond instilling fears and taboos about sex in the minds of youths. This is because once these youths move away from places where such instillations are reinforced; they are likely to break taboos across genders, which is worrisome. Religious bodies need to emphasize the biomedical hazards accruable to RSB as much as the spiritual implications (such as the threat of hellfire).
3. Self-efficacy skills should be taught in universities in order for students to be able to withstand the worldly and bodily pressures that often lead them into irrational decisions.

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