

## Perception of Secondary School Students on Factors Militating against the Teaching of Sex Education in Calabar Metropolis, Cross River State, Nigeria

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### Abstract

*The study investigated the perception of secondary school students on factors militating against the teaching of sex education in Calabar Metropolis, Cross River State, Nigeria. The study employed the descriptive survey research design. Participants were three hundred secondary school students. A valid and reliable instrument was used to measure students' perception of the factors militating against the teaching of sex education. ANOVA and t-test were used as statistical tools. The study identified parental apathetic behavior, wrong conception of child bearing and shyness among adult family members as factors militating against the teaching of sex education in secondary school. Results further showed no significant religious ( $t= 0.025$ ,  $P>0.05$ ) and gender ( $t= 1.432$ ,  $P>0.05$ ) differences in students' perception of the factors militating against the teaching of sex education in secondary school. The insignificant differences observed between religion and gender implied that both entities held similar viewpoints on the issue of sex education. Based on the findings, it was preferred that parents, teachers and students should be aware of the fact that sex education is a wide concept, which involves important aspects of the students' life, and not about sex only, therefore should not be seen as taboo. Hence, should be included in the school curriculum*

**Keywords:** Sex education, Gender, Religion, Parental apathetic behavior

### Introduction

Globally, the issue of sex education has taken the centre stage of discussions in health related forum. The need for sex education has always been debated upon and the importance of it to be enshrined in school's curriculum has also been advocated. In the present era of increased in health related ailments such as HIV/AIDS and issues of unplanned or unwanted pregnancies, the need for adequate sex education has become more necessary. This is important to educate and equip secondary school students with the necessary information and tools for safe sex activity. Indeed, Nigeria today like other countries in Africa is faced with the rate of increase in problems related to adolescent sexual development. Adolescents in secondary schools are confronted with sexual perversions like homosexuality, lesbianism, rape, prostitution and sexual harassment (Omo, 2011). In our schools and among secondary school students, cases of unwanted pregnancies resulting in abortion, high mortality rate, and premature pregnancy resulting in Vesico Virginal Fistula (VVF) are prominent among our girls (Njoku, 2003). The continuous increase in pregnancy related issues in recent time has called on the need for sex education to be freely taught and discussed in schools. This is essential in order to control the aftermath of unsafe and unprotected sexual perversion among adolescents.

Sex education is the process through which information is obtained and which helps to form appropriate attitudes and beliefs related to sex, sexual identity, relationship and intimacy. Sex education if properly integrated helps to develop adolescents' reproductive health, interpersonal relationship, body image and gender roles (National Guidelines Task Force, 1996; Omo, 2011). Sexual drive and anxiety is acknowledged to be high during adolescence (Iwara & Alonge, 2014); and these desires ought to be controlled to enable adolescents avoid unnecessary sexual perversion. Adolescence represents a steady evolution from childhood to adulthood and during this stage, the individual's psychological and physiological processes changes abruptly with inherent effect on sexual activity.

The safety and health of the adolescent during this stage is of great value (Adeyemo, 2001); and it is during this period of their transition that they need to be informed and guided on the need to develop positive attitudes on sex. Regrettably, parents who ought to provide the primary sex education to their children and communicate to them specific value about sex play the least role as a source of accurate information on sexual matters (Ogwu, 2001). Similarly, the schools which is also a primary institution that is supposed to communicate sex values to the children is faced with challenging opportunity and obligation to contribute their knowledge and understanding of the roles both sexes play, as well as to correct the distorted view of life receive from cultural beliefs and moral laws. In our society, pre marital sexual relationship is seen as a taboo and open discussion on it is usually avoided. This has dare implication on adolescents' sexual development during adolescence. In the absence of adequate sexual education both at home and in the school, adolescent has to struggle to ensure that his or her behaviour does not go at variance with the norms, values and ideas of the society (Adunola, 2005). As a result of the restriction placed on sexual matters by culture and religion, secondary school students find it difficult to express their sexual affection to their parents and teachers as well as loved ones. Peers become the only source of sex education, where issues related to sex are freely discussed with inaccurate measures and direction. This situation creates problems among adolescents which affects their understanding on sexual matters.

Most adolescent engage in heterosexual activities which often result in pregnancy and sometimes abortion. Such abortion may lead to death. The unwanted pregnancy may lead to severe disturbances which can affect the adolescent's concentration, coping abilities and interpersonal relationship. Newton also maintained that lack of sex education makes many adolescents engage in sexual relationship which do not only affect inter personal relationship but could result in some sexually transmitted Infections (STI) including Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). These disease conditions may make the adolescents vectors, or lead them to untimely death. Adolescent sexual activities if not controlled could also lead to pregnancy among immature girls, hence resulting in Vesico Vaginal Fistilae (V.V.F) (Abdullahi, 2003). Such victims may face expulsion from school which may terminate their school career and most of them may indulge in other social vices in the society such as drug abuse, drunkenness and theft which are part of the society ills today. These problems among others are associated to improper sex education. It is against this backdrop that this study is carried out. The study evaluated secondary school students' perception on factors that hinder the teaching of sex education in Calabar Metropolis, Cross River State, Nigeria. During the course of this study, answers would be provided to the following questions.

1. What is students' perception on the factors militating against the teaching of sex education in secondary schools?
2. Would there be religious difference in the students' perception of the factors militating against the teaching of sex education in secondary school?
3. Would there be gender difference in students' perception on the factors militating against the teaching of sex education in secondary schools?

## ***Materials and Methods***

### **Design**

The study employed the descriptive survey research design.

### **Population**

The target population consisted of all secondary school students in Calabar Metropolis.

### **Participants**

Six secondary schools were randomly selected in Calabar Metropolis. 50 secondary school students were subsequently drawn from the 6 schools employing the stratified sampling technique. Thus in all, 300 students constituted the study sample. The participants age range between 10 and 19 years with a mean age of 14.5 years. Gender composition was 155 males and 145 females.

### **Instrument**

A self developed instrument was utilized in the study, namely: Sex Education Questionnaire (SEQ).

### Sex Education Questionnaire (SEQ)

The Sex Education Questionnaire (SEQ) assessed secondary school students' perception of the factors militating against the teaching of sex education. It is a twenty item scale, ranging between 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree).

A typical item of the scale is: "parents feel uncomfortable talking with their children about sex". The test re-test over a period of two weeks was used to establish the reliability of the questionnaire at 0.76 reliability index.

### Procedure for Data Collection

The instrument (Sex Education Questionnaire) was administered to three hundred participants by the researcher employing two research assistants. The researcher obtained the permission of the school principals, class teachers and the consent of participants' parents. A hundred percent response rate was achieved.

### Data Analysis

Data analysis was carried out with the aid of t-test and ANOVA analysis.

### Results

#### Research Question One

What is students' perception on the factors militating against the teaching of sex education in secondary schools?

**Table 1: Students' assessment of factors affecting the teaching of sex education**

Statements	SA	A	D	SD	Mean values	Rank
Parents feels uncomfortable talking with their children about sex	211	42	17	30	158.25	1
Parents feels reluctant to expose their own lack of knowledge about sex information	77	174	45	14	123.95	2
Parents worry about how much information to give to their children and at what age	144	110	76	0	117.01	3
Conception and child bearing are in God's hands	124	99	61	26	95.40	4
Adults family members shy away from actively educating youths about issues relating to sexuality	88	124	64	24	92.64	5

In order to provide answer to the first research question, the responses of students were weighed and then ranked using their mean values. This enabled the first-five items with the highest scores to be chosen out of the twenty items used to explain factors that militate against the teaching of sex education in secondary schools. The selected five items provide different perspectives on the factors that affect the teaching of sex education. From Table 1, the statement that "parents feel uncomfortable talking with their children about sex" was ranked first. It sees parents as the number one militating factor against the teaching of sex education in secondary schools. This is apparent as some parents see it as a taboo for sex education to be taught in schools. They believe that it is bad and discussions concerning sex should not be taught in schools. Some believe that the teaching of sex education will further worsen sex behaviour among the students, as such, it should not be taught in secondary school. The second ranked item was "parents feel reluctant to expose their own lack of knowledge about sex information". This is true as many parents do not have adequate knowledge about safe and unsafe sex and as such would not want their children to be taught sex education. The third and fourth ranked items were "parents worry about how much information to give to their children and at what age" and "conception that child bearing is in God's hands".

These two factors serve as impediments to the teaching of sex education to students in secondary schools. Many parents do not know the exact age for sex education and find it difficult to discuss sex education with their children. Also, the belief or wrong conception that procreation is in God's hand has made many parents to oppose the teaching of sex education. These parents believe that teaching the children sex education is a sin and against the will of God. Finally, the fifth ranked item or statement was "adult family members shy away from actively educating youths about issues relating to sexuality". This indeed is responsible for the continuous rate of teenage pregnancy and unwanted pregnancies. Many family members do not know how to address the issue of sex to their wards or younger siblings, cousins, nephews and relatives even when they are aware that the children or person involved needs sex education.

The way and manner to approach the issue and the person concerned remains a serious issue of concern. Thus, the main factors that militate against the teaching of sex education are presented in Table 1.

### Research Question Two

Would there be religious difference in the students' perception of the factors militating against the teaching of sex education in secondary school?

**Table 2: T-Test result of religious difference in the students' perception of the factors militating against the teaching of sex education in secondary school**

Religion	N	Mean	SD	t-cal	t-critical
Christianity	179	60.13	64.73	0.025*	1.968
Muslim	119	60.16	88.81		

\*Difference between means is insignificant at 5% alpha level; df =296

Answer to the second research question was provided using t-test. The result of the analysis is presented in the Table 2 and it showed that the computed mean and standard deviation values of Christians and Muslims were (60.13, 64.73) and (60.16, 88.81) respectively. The result further revealed that the calculated t-value of 0.025 was less than the critical t-value of 1.968 at 5% level of significance. Since the calculated t-value is less than the critical t-value, it therefore means that there is no religious difference in the students' perception of the factors militating against the teaching of sex education in secondary school.

### Research Question Three

Would there be gender difference in students' perception on the factors militating against the teaching of sex education in secondary schools?

**Table 3: T-Test result of gender difference in students' perception on the factors militating against the teaching of sex education in secondary schools**

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t-cal	t-critical
Male	155	60.94	60.08	1.432*	1.968
Female	145	59.54	84.74		

\*Difference between means is insignificant at 5% alpha level; df =298

Answer to the third research question was provided using T-Test. The result of the analysis is presented in the Table 3 and it showed that the computed mean and standard deviation values of Male and female were (60.94, 60.08) and (59.54, 84.74) respectively. The result further indicated that the calculated t-value of 1.432 was less than the critical t-value of 1.968 at 5% level of significance. The result obtained implied no significant gender difference in students' perception of the factors militating against the teaching of sex education in secondary school.

### Discussion of Result

Result of the first research question identified parental lackadaisical and apathetic attitude toward sex education as the main factor that affects the teaching of sex education. In a similar study, Akpama (2013) alleged that parental perception of the teaching of sex education to adolescent in secondary schools is significantly negative that is, all parents, irrespective of their gender or education status perceive the teaching of introductory sex education to youths as a bad, moral issues that should not be encouraged. The assertions made above lean credence to earlier studies on sex education. Similarly, Omo, (2011) noted that parents who are the primary sex educators do not communicate sex values to their children

The second research question showed that there is no religious difference in the students' perception of the factors militating against the teaching of sex education in secondary school. This result is evident as both religions hold similar view points on the issue of teaching sex education. Nevertheless, a look at the mean values showed that Christian parents relatively feel stronger on the factors militating against teaching of sex education than Muslim parents. However, the result presented in Table 2 provided answer to the second research question that there is no significant religious difference in the students' perception of the factors militating against the teaching of sex education in secondary school.

The result obtained agreed with the study of Omo (2011) who also reported that there is no significant difference in the perception of students from different religious background on the teaching of sex education in Kaduna State secondary schools. In addition, the third research question indicated that there is no gender difference in students' perception on the factors militating against the teaching of sex education in secondary schools. This result is apparent as both genders have similar thoughts and viewpoints on the factors militating against the teaching of sex education in secondary schools. This is true as issues of sex education affect both male and female students and both are exposed to the effect of sex education if not adequately taught. Simply put, both gender are victims of sex education. However, a look at the mean values revealed that male perceived the barriers of sex education more differently than their female counterpart. Thus, the result presented in Table 3 provided answer to the third research question that there is no significant gender difference in students' perception on the factors militating against the teaching of sex education in secondary schools. Similar result was reported by Omo (2011). Omo (2011) observed no significant difference among the students in their opinion on the issue of sex education in the secondary schools.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made.

1. Parents and teachers should give their consent for sex education to be included in the school curriculum and taught as a subject in schools.
2. There is need for professionals like counselling psychologists, psychologists, doctors to carry out health promotion programmes to empower teachers, parents, students and the society at large.
3. Parents, teachers and students should be aware of the fact that the sex education is a wide concept, which involves important aspects of students' life, it is not about sex only and therefore should not be seen as a taboo.
4. In-service training programmes should be put in place to empower teachers with the skill to handle the subject (sex education) with confidence.

### **Conclusion**

The study revealed that unlike parental apathetic attitude toward sex education, the study revealed no significant religion and gender difference in the students' perception of the factors militating against the teaching of sex education in secondary schools.

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