**Factors predicting premarital sexual activities of literate emerging adults in Nigeria**

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| ARTICLE INFO |  | ABSTRACT |
| Article history  Received  Revised  Accepted |  | The increasing tolerance of antenuptial sexual acts among youth in contemporary society has directed research interest to its consequences on varying health outcomes. Weighing various negative effects of premarital sexual activities, it is pertinent to inquire into the factors that predict emerging adults’ engagement in these activities. The focus of this investigation was to explore myriad of factors (grouped under six categories) predictive of emerging adults’ engagement in antenuptial sexual acts This study inquired into these factors utilising a descriptive survey, gathering data with a validated questionnaire with reliability index of 0.60. Factor analysis and regression were used for data exploration. Results emphasized Biological, Educational and Personal factors as predictive of emerging adults’ sexual activities regardless of religion and ethnic background (except for economic factors). The implication of the findings is the need for counsellors in tertiary institutions and in the community to plan sex education programme as avenue for emerging adults to discuss the burning issue of prenuptial sexual acts, the consequences so as to help them understand and clarify personal values, improve their knowledge and make healthy sexual decision. |
| Keywords  Factors  Literate Emerging Adults Premarital Sexual Activities |  |

Introduction

Emerging adulthood is a term that sociologists seek advocacy for its identification as an additional human developmental stage. The stage follows the adolescence prior to full adulthood and spans between 18 and 30 years of the youthful age (Arnett, 2000). Attributes like housing status, university/college attendance, weakening hormonal variations and development, autonomous living, self-governance and limited reliance on adults distinguish the stage from adolescence (Arnett, 2004). During emerging adulthood, erotic and sexuality are greatly explored and considerably favoured by significant adults (Lefkowitz et al., 2006; Olsho et al, 2009). Relationships seem more tenuous than in adulthood and romantic relationships constantly change (Regnerus & Uecker, 2011), focusing more on sexual behaviours that are enjoyable, moral and appropriate for their age group (Le Vay & Valente, 2003). Contemporary youths in Nigeria experiment more than ever before with premarital sexual activities (Aderinola, 2013; Buhari, 2015).

Varying factors could be responsible for premarital sexual activities during emerging adulthood especially among the literates. This includes the belief in the nurturing ability of premarital sexual activities and experiences regarding skills that facilitate effective partner choice, interaction with partners, exploration of sexual behaviours, uncovering sexual uniqueness, understanding one’s romantic needs and preferences (Collins et al., 2009), poor conception of abstinence from sex, lack of self – control and curiosity (Odebiyi, 2015). Studies (Ayoola 2017; Buhari, 2015; Calzo, 2013; Garcia & Reiber, 2008; Lewis et al., 2007; Monto & Carey, 2014) and reports (The National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, NCRIM, 2005) attributed escalation in prenuptial sexual acts of literate emerging adults in developing countries to a logical consequences of the falling age at puberty, rising age at marriage, increased schooling rates, the need for youth to focus on their education/career while they gratify their erotic desires, the penetration of mass media, historical changes in sexual norms, turbulent economic circumstances, entertainment, increasingly common ideas about individualism, the erosion of traditional social controls, peer influence and courtship tradition. In this study, these numerous factors among others grouped into biological, economic, educational, family, personal and social are investigated as to whether they are predictive of emerging adults’ premarital sexual activities in Nigeria especially the literate who are assumed to have facts regarding the consequences of unprotected sexual activities.

There are inconsistencies in research findings regarding differences in ethnic groups and religion of practice in the review of premarital sexual behaviours. Researchers (Sheela and Audinarayana, 2003; Fuller & Narasimham, 2008; Sambisa et al., 2010; Adetayo, 2015) found ethnicity to be imperative in adolescents’ and youth’s sexual behaviours while others (Martson & King, 2006; Azuike, et al., 2015; Ayoola, 2017; Odimegwu & Somefun, 2017) did not. Sheela and Audinarayana (2003) revealed that Hindu females from middle and higher classes like the Yoruba or Igbo ethnic groups may likely marry after completion of their education, whereas those at the lower socioeconomic level are likely to marry earlier (Fuller & Narasimham, 2008). This assertion may not hold for girls in the northern part of Nigeria whether from high/middle/lower socioeconomic status as they get marry earlier which may reduce chances of premarital sexual acts. There is still controversy underlying the mechanism through which religion affects sexual behaviour of adolescents in Nigeria. Certainly, religious values are the basis of moral prohibitions for many individuals, the teachings of the major religions in Nigeria are likely to play imminent role in the formation of individual attitudes, values and decisions. Findings regarding influence of religion on sexual behaviours have been mixed. Researchers (Odimegwu, 2005; Owusu, 2011; Adamczyk & Hayes, 2012; Aderinola, 2013., Akande, 2013; Muhammed et al., 2017; Abboud et al., 2020) have documented significant effects of religion (Traditional religion, Christianity, Islam among others) on perceived prevalence, attitude, and/patterns of premarital/risky sexual activities. Omotesho (2006) Saadu (2016) revealed insignificant variation in the premarital sexual behaviours across respondents from varying religious background in Nigeria.

Literate emerging adults have been attributed with high sexual exploration and experimentation (Lefkowitz et al., 2006; Olsho et al, 2009) without commensurate readiness to assume adult roles due to fewer job opportunities after schooling, hence, they delay marriage, but in the course of satisfying their sexual urge, they engage in cohabitation, premarital sex and birth control. It appears that literate emerging adults in this contemporary society considered that engaging in premarital romantic relationships would help shape their intending long-term committed relationships at adulthood. However, this assertion appears unfounded considering the rate of divorce among young couples. Rather, involvement in a premarital sexual relationship has been reported to have numerous consequential effects. Studies (Agunbiade & Aransiola, 2016; Akande, 2013; Olugbenga-Bello et al., 2010) reported high rates of risky sexual activities, unwanted (unintended) pregnancy, abortion, high birth rate outside wedlock and STIs including HIV/AIDs among adolescents and youth. With abundance research outcomes on the consequences of premarital sexual activities and documentation of increasing premarital sexual activities among the youth of varying educational qualification; expanding an empirical survey regarding a holistic view of various factors predicting premarital sexual activities of literate emerging adults becomes necessary with the aim of developing an all-inclusive approach in addressing this issue of premarital sexual activities among literate emerging adults.

Based on the knowledge of the researchers, perhaps, little studies exist in the locale which considered literate emerging adults as a population, multiple factors were less reflected in one single study regarding their influence on literate emerging adults’ sexual activities. This is the gap observed in the previous studies that the researchers filled by investigating the factors predicting premarital sexual activities of literate emerging adults in Kwara State, Nigeria.

Research Focus

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the factors predicting premarital sexual activities among literate emerging adults in Kwara state, Nigeria. It also examined the influence of gender and family forms on respondents’ views regarding factors predicting their premarital erotic activities.

Research Question

1. What are the factors predicting premarital sexual activities of literate emerging adults?

Research Hypotheses

1. Religion will not significantly correlate factors predicting literate emerging adults’ premarital sexual activities.

2. Ethnic group will not significantly correlate factors predicting literate emerging adults’ premarital sexual activities.

Method

The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population scope for this study encompasses the entire literate emerging adults in Kwara State, projected to be six hundred and eighty-eight thousand, eight hundred and twenty-eight (National Population Commission of Nigeria, 2018) with a suggested sample magnitude of 384 based on the calculation of the (Research Advisor, 2006) which was expanded by 10% (38.4) to cater for attrition, thus, making a total of 423 literate emerging adults that responded to the questionnaire.

A multi-step selection process was applied in the selection of 423 literate emerging adults following through proportional, simple random, purposive and stratified sampling techniques. Nine of the sixteen Local Government Areas (LGAs) were proportionally selected from the three senatorial districts of Kwara South, North and Central in ratio 4:3:2 respectively. Forty-seven study sample were randomly selected from each of the 9 selected LGAs. Emerging adults were purposively sampled from ministries, tertiary institutions and government parastatals. Participants were later stratified on bases of the religion they practiced and their ethnic group.

Researchers developed self-report titled “Factors Predicting Premarital Sexual Activities Questionnaire” was employed to amass data for the inquiry. It has segments: A and B. The first gathered respondents’ demography while the second segment has thirty items grouped into six factors predicting premarital sexual activities of literate emerging adults. The content of the instrument was validated by five experts from the researchers’ Department. To determine the reliability of the instrument, the Cronbach alpha procedure was adopted and a coefficient value of 0.72 was obtained, hence, the instrument was adjudged reliable for use.

The data gathered were scored and analysed using percentage, factor analysis and regression.

Table 1

*Demographic Characteristics of Respondents*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  | Frequency | Percentage |
| Religion  African Trad. Rel. Christianity  Islam  Total |  |  | 02  160  235 | 0.5  59.2  55.2 |
|  |  | 397 | 100 |
| Ethnicity  Baruba  Hausa  Igbo  Nupe  Yoruba  Total |  |  |  |  |
|  |  | 60  10  20  88  219 | 15.1  2.5  5.0  22.2  55.2 |
|  |  | 397 | 100 |

Table 1 depicts the distribution of respondents across their various religious and ethnic groups. Out of the total copies (423) of the questionnaire forms distributed and filled by the respondents; 397 copies were found adequate for analysis. Out of the 397 respondents, 2 (.5%) were African Traditional Religion adherents, 160 (40.3%) were Christians; while 235 (59.2%), which forms the majority, were Muslims. With respect to ethnic group, the majority numbering 219 (55.2%) of the respondents were Yoruba, 10 (2.5%) were Hausa tribe, 20 (5.0%) were Igbo tribe, 88 (22.2%) were from Nupe tribe; while 60 (15.1%) represents the Baruba tribe in North Central Nigeria where this study was conducted.

Results

Out of the 423 copies of the questionnaire form administered, 397 were adequate for data analysis.

Research Question: What are the factors predicting premarital sexual activities of literate emerging adults?

Table 2

*Principal Components on Factors Predicting Premarital Sexual Activities of Literate Emerging Adults*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Items | Components   1. 2 3 | | |
| Biological factors  Educational factors  Personal factors  Social factors  Family factors  Economic factors  Eigen values  % Variance explained |  |  | .892  .656  .717  .902 |
|  |  | -.674  .745    1.998 1.140 1.018  33.297 19.004 52.301 |

Notes: Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure Sampling Adequacy = .573; ᵡ = 341.715; df = 15; Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity Significance = .000; EV = Eigen value; TVE = Total Variance Explained

Table 2 depicts the summary of factor analysis results using Principal Axis Factoring and Orthogonal Varimax Rotation which was conducted to identify the factors that are significant in predicting premarital sexual activities of emerging adults in North-Central Nigeria. Table 2 shows that all KMO values for each of the factors (>.90) were well above .5 and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure (KMO) was .573, indicating that the data was sufficient for exploratory factors analysis. The Bartlett’s test of sphericity chi-square (15) = 341.715, p˂ .000, which reflected patterned relationships among the six factors. Employing Eigen values cut-off of .50 shows there are three factors that explain a percentage variance of 33.297, 19.004 and 16.959 respectively. This is indicated by the factor loading after rotation using a significant factor criterion of .50 which shows that, accordingly, biological factors (.892), social factors (.902), economic factors (.745) are the significant factors in the model.

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis One:

*Religion will not significantly correlate factors predictive of literate emerging adults’ premarital sexual activities*.

Table 3:

Multiple Regression Analysis Showing Religion as Correlates of Factors Predicting Respondents’ Premarital Sexual Activities

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Variables | Religion |  |  |  |  |
|  | R | R2 | F | β | ρ |
| Constant | .101 | .010 | .675 | 1.598 | .000 |
| Biological |  |  |  | .003 | .810 |
| Social |  |  |  | -.010 | .466 |
| Family |  |  |  | .015 | .146 |
| Educational |  |  |  | -.007 | .402 |
| Economic |  |  |  | -.010 | .349 |
| Personal |  |  |  | .008 | .409 |

Table 3 presents the summary of the multiple regression analysis for religion as correlates of factors predicting premarital sexual activities among literate emerging adults. The table shows that R value of .101 has a very low degree of correlation; while R2 value of .010, that is, 1.0% of the total variation in the factors predicting respondents’ premarital sexual activities (dependent variable) can be explained by their religious affiliations (independent variable) and this is very low too. The F (6, 390) = .675 indicates that regression model did not fit the data, that is, the independent variables have no correlation with the dependent variables. This is represented by β values of (.003, -.010, .015, -.007, -.010 and .008; p = > 0.05) for Biological, Social, Family, Educational, Economic and Personal factors respectively, that predict premarital sexual activities among literate emerging adults; hence, the hypothesis is retained. This means that religion has no influence on all the predictive factors of premarital sexual activities among literate emerging adults.

Hypothesis Two:

Ethnic group will not significantly correlate factors predictive of literate emerging adults’ premarital sexual activities.

Table 4:

Multiple Regression Analysis Showing Ethnic Group as Correlates of Factors Predicting Respondents’ Premarital Sexual Activities

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Variables | Ethnic Group |  |  |  |  |
|  | R | R2 | F | β | ρ |
| Constant | .191 | .037 | 2.471 | 1.717 | .027 |
| Biological |  |  |  | .070 | .051 |
| Social |  |  |  | .028 | .520 |
| Family |  |  |  | -.033 | .322 |
| Educational |  |  |  | .021 | .453 |
| Economic |  |  |  | -.088 | .013 |
| Personal |  |  |  | -.014 | .660 |

Table 4 presents the summary of the multiple regression analysis for ethnic group as correlates of factors predicting premarital sexual activities among emerging adults. The table shows that R value of .191 has a low degree of correlation; while R2 value of .037, that is, 3.7% of the total variation in the factors predicting respondents’ premarital sexual activities (dependent variable) can be explained by their ethnic groups (independent variable) and this is as well low.

The F (6, 390) = 2.471 indicates that regression model fit the data, that is, the independent variable has a correlation with the dependent variables. This is represented by β values of (.070, .028, -.033, -.021 and -.014; p = > .05) for Biological, Social, family, Educational and Personal factors respectively; while β = -.088; p < .05, for Economic factor that predict premarital sexual activities among literate emerging adults; hence, the hypothesis is retained for other predicting factors but rejected with respect to economic factors. This means that ethnic group has no influence on Biological, Social, family, Educational and Personal factors predictive of premarital sexual activities among emerging adults; while it has influence of the Economic factors.

Discussion

The findings of the study revealed Biological, Social and Economic factors as significant in predicting premarital sexual activities of literate emerging adults in Kwara State, literate emerging adults emphasized that drop in age of puberty and unhealthy sexual desire are the major biological factors predisposing them to premarital sexual activities. This finding is in line with the assertions of Ajiboye et al (2014) and Garcia and Reiber, (2008) which stated that the phase of the lifespan of the youth is significant in prompting their involvement in prenuptial sexual activities. They noted that the unique development of sex organs and structure, high sexual urge that accompanied the adolescent stage and decline in the age of puberty as biological factors responsible for adolescents’ involvement in such activities.

Findings of the study also revealed that the acceptance of premarital sex as a social norm and media influence are the topmost social factors leading literate emerging adults into premarital sexual activities. These results corroborate the findings of Ghaffari et al., (2019); Thanh-Hang Dinh & Edwin (2019), Ayoola (2017); Aderinola (2013); Sambisa et al., (2010) and Onipede (2009) which revealed media (satellites and internet) and social changes as social factors predisposing tertiary institution students’ involvement in premarital sexual deeds. Current trends around the globe have change the social norms regarding premarital sex. The strong cultural and religious beliefs regarding abstinence from sexual acts has been relaxed especially among supposed adults (literate emerging adults) who are delayed into entering family life pattern based on varying factors (education, unemployment, poverty etc.); thereby the acceptance of premarital sex as a social norm emerged as the topmost social factors predictive of emerging adults’ involvement in premarital sexual activities. The wide spread use and misuse of internet among other media as also been pointed out to be paramount social factor predicting emerging adults’ involvement in premarital sexual acts. It is glaring that adolescents and young adults are so much engrossed in the use of various media in obtaining different kind of information, learning, and interacting. Many of the materials they are exposed to are capable of prompting them to engage in premarital sexual acts. It is therefore not surprising that influence of media appears as social factor predicting the acts. From the findings of this inquiry, it has been revealed that literate emerging adults from low economic family setting who desire to be financially buoyant before marriage and love materialism are likely to engage in premarital sexual activities to meet their needs and to sustain economic adversity. The results are in line with the submissions of Aderinola (2013).

The outcomes of this study pointed out that respondents irrespective of their religious background and ethnicity are similar in their perception of factors predicting literate emerging re ethnicity influence respondents’ perception. The results verify previous reviews’ outcomes (Omotesho, 2006; Aderionla, 2013; Akande, 2013; Saadu, 2016; Ayoola, 2017; Muhammad, Shamsuddin, Sulaiman, Amin & Omar, 2017). The researchers considering varying samples and settings found that religion did not moderate the perception of their respondents on the prevalence of, attitude toward; causes and consequences of premarital sexual activities. In contrary, researchers (Agha, Hutchinson & Kusanthan, 2006; Adamczyk & Hayes, 2012; Somefun, 2019) reported significant religious difference in the premarital sexual activities of individuals residing in a Muslim cultured nation. The difference in the findings could be due to the fact that this particular study inquired about the perception of literate emerging adults from differing religious affiliations regarding factors predictive of premarital sex while other studies sought for impact of religious differences and level of religiosity on youth’ engagement in premarital sex. While religion/level of religiosity might impact sexual practice of individuals, individuals from differing religious background may view the causes of premarital sex in the same way.

Regarding ethnicity, researchers (Sheela and Audinarayana (2003; Narasimham, 2008; Sambisa et al., 2010; Adetayo, 2015) found ethnicity to be imperative in adolescents’ sexual behaviours while others (Martson & King, 2006; Azuike, et al., 2015; Ayoola, 2017; Odimegwu & Somefun) did not. Sambisa, Curtis and Stokes (2010), had earlier noted that certain sexual behaviours (hazardous sexual practice, self-restraint, usage of condom) are peculiar to definite Zimbabwean youth. Sheela and Audinarayana (2003) revealed that Hindu females from middle and higher classes like the Yoruba or Igbo ethnic groups may likely marry after completion of their education, thereby predisposing them to increase risk of premarital sexual acts whereas those at the lower socioeconomic level are likely to marry earlier (Fuller & Narasimham, 2008). The findings of this study regarding impact of ethnicity on factors predictive of literate emerging adults are justified by the past reviews. Ethnicity did not impact respondents’ perception on factors predictive of emerging adults except with regard to economic factors which Sheela and Audinarayana (2003); Fuller & Narasimham, (2008) had earlier asserted.

Conclusion

This inquiry increases investigation regarding sexual behaviour through the exploration of wide range of factors predicting sexual behaviours of literate emerging adults. The inquiry also focused on whether respondents’ perception of these factors will be moderated by their religious or ethnic groupings. From the findings of this study, it can be inferred that social, biological and economic factors are significant in predicting premarital sexual activities of literate emerging adults in Kwara State, Nigeria. Media such as internet (Social factor) exposes emerging adults to sexual contents through unsolicited adverts, music laden with sexual messages, pornography in movies among others which lead to unhealthy sexual desire (Biological factor); these coupled with societal acceptance of sexual acts as social norms (social factor) predispose literate emerging adults into sexual activities. Literate emerging adults from low economic family setting that desire to be financially buoyant before marriage and love materialism are likely to engage in premarital sexual activities during economic adversity. Literate emerging adults across religious backgrounds and ethnic groups hold similar views regarding factors predictive of literate emerging adults’ sexual activities, however, they differ regarding their views on economic factors. The findings are significant for the value reorientation on sexual behaviour, need to understand the implications of media on unhealthy sexual desire. Individuals emerging adults should find means of gainfully engage in economic venture and reduce materialism. 1. Parents should provide children with the nurturing environment that promotes the development of positive self – control on risky behaviours as they grow

2. Regardless of the fact that emerging adults are older, stakeholders should engage them in discuss (sexuality education) that will enlighten and guide them on the aftermaths of premarital sexual deeds and been too materialistic

3. Counsellors should engage emerging adults across ethnic and religious groups on effective management of their sexual urge since biological factors cannot be put on hold; they should also help emerging adults build their self-esteem, shape their perception and equip them with life skills that will empower them to make reasonable decisions regarding healthy sexual conduct

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