

- SUB THEME: Gender, sexuality and culture

TITLE: Ethnic and Cultural determinants of Sexual behavior among Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba Youths: Implications for Sexuality Education in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Sexual Literacy among Nigerian Youths has been a subject of debate over a long period of time. Factors such as ethnicity, socio-cultural background, gender stereotypes and politics among others have been found to have great relationship with varied patterns of sexual behaviors among youths. Invariably, with the upsurge of the HIV/AIDS pandemic one thing that has remained difficult to understand is how far the combination of indigenous sexuality education and the structured sexuality education introduced into Nigerian schools have helped in shaping the sexual behavior of the Nigerian youths. How much and how well the indigenous sexuality education has served as a foundation for the structured sexuality education in the schools is something that requires attention in order to further improve the understanding of the youth about day to day sexual issues that surround them. In this vein, the study looked into variations in the patterns of youths sexual behaviors based on their socialization process and their perceptions of their sexuality before and after their exposure to sexuality education in the school. The Expost facto research design was adopted to examine the content of the in-school sexuality education, its mode of implementation, its methods of evaluation and its relationship with the indigenous sexuality education bearing in mind extraneous factors such as politics and religion to determine knowledgeable the Nigerian youths are about their sexuality and sexual issues. The study identified the missing gaps between the indigenous sexual literacy and the structured sexuality education and suggested changes and modalities by which sexuality education could be used to improve the sexual behavior of the youths, and suggests that sexuality education be given a wider reach through primary health care programmes at grassroots' level and school curriculum expansion for structured sexuality education to commence from primary school to ensure effective knowledge transfer.

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Introduction

Reports from studies around the world revealed an increased prevalence of sexually transmitted infections. (STIs) among the adolescent that is, young people aged 15 – 24, two thirds of them young women with an increased rate of teenage pregnancy and post abortion complications. 1/10 pregnancies occur among adolescent girls.

Also, over 3 million case of HIV/AIDS occurred among young people aged 15 – 24, two thirds of them young women and about 70% of premature deaths among adults result of behaviors that began during the adolescent years. Infection with HIV and the abuse of tobacco or alcohol are among the leading root causes.

There infection rates among teenage girls are higher than that of the boys. This is a reflection of girls' greater physical, biological and social vulnerability (HDI 2001, UNICEF, 2000). Also, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) associated violence against women with cultural patterns, harmful traditional practices related to gender race, genital mutilation, rape and forced early marriages. Generally youth in our societies have been subjected to physical, sexual and psychological assault, poor access to factual sexuality information and deprivation.

Critical sexuality issues that affect the youth (particularly the girls) have been identified as;

- Early exposure to sexual intercourse and its implications.
- Child marriages and problems of young mothers such as Vesico -Vaginal Fistula (VVF) common among the poor rural communities.
- Unwanted pregnancies, post abortion complications of uterine perforation, anemia and premature deaths.
- Contracting sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including diseases (STDs) and the ultimate HIV/AIDS.

Traditional educational theory suppressed important questions about the relations among knowledge, power and domination and considered school as a powerful instrument for the reproduction of capitalist relations and a means of legitimizing ideologies of everyday life. Adepoju (2007) recorded that in his philosophy of experience and cultural production (Freire) reiterated that culture is the representation of lived experiences, material artifacts and practices forged within the unequal and dialectical relations that different groups establish within a given society at a particular time, and that cultural processes are strongly connected with the structure of different social formations, particularly those that are related to gender, age, race, and class.

This position is crucial, highly important in highlighting the political function and importance of sexuality education, its propagation and institutionalization in the Nigerian schools. Since according to Freire “there is no theoretical context if it is not in a dialectical unity with the

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concrete context.” Theory is anticipatory in its nature, hence, it must take the concepts of understanding and possibility the tension indeed is the theory’s conflict with practice, since most of the time theory serves to hold practice at arms length in order to mediate and critically comprehend the kind of praxis needed with a specific setting at a particular time for the purpose of intervention.

Hence indigenous sexuality education should be provided at home and in the communities to reduce incidence of teenage pregnancy, unwanted pregnancies, abortion, post abortion complications coupled with wide spread ignorance in matters related to body functions and se sexuality issues. The society must work in partnership with the school to work out programmes of structured sexuality education as part of the formal solution to fill the gap created by indigenous sexuality education.

The Problem

Nigerian youths face several challenges which include diverse and contradictory values and messages, little access to formal channels of sexuality education and reproductive health practices, sexuality and reproductive health practices which are influenced by interrelated factors such as poor access to information, peer pressure, ideologies, belief systems and economic pressure. These transcend individual behavior, ethnic background and values, institutional support and societal factors. In view of this, there is need for educators to have clear ideas about the different challenges, what changes are desired, and what are the obstacles to such changes by examining the ethnic cultural determinants of negative youth influences and the circumstances which promote and sustain them.

In doing this the study provided answers to the following research questions.

- 1. What type of indigenous sexuality education exists at the various cultural levels?*
- 2. To what extent are the youth exposed to sexuality issues at their socio-cultural levels?*
- 3. To what extent do the youth receive indigenous sexuality education?*
- 4. How is indigenous sexuality education taught?*
- 5. What are the contributions of indigenous sexual literacy to sexual mechanisms and life coping skills among the male and the female?*
- 6. Is there any relationship between the youths’ perceptions of indigenous sexual literacy and structured sexuality education?*
- 7. Is there a relationship between indigenous sexuality education and the structured sexuality education in the school?*
- 8. To what extent does the government encourage/support sexuality education in the educational system in Nigeria?*

Theoretical Perspectives

The quest to fulfill the respective roles designed by nature has led to the development of behavior patterns that differ for male or female individuals. These roles in practice constitute

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sources of pleasure, challenges and anxiety. Prominent among them are issues of management of body hygiene, sexuality education and family life especially in young adolescents and youth. Oyekanmi, (2004) observed that young persons become curious as they develop secondary sex characteristics. However, adolescents and youth are expected to learn sexuality issues from other members of the community. Adolescence is a transitional period when young persons should receive guided information in order to develop into sound adults to enable them contribute effectively to nation building.

Adepoju, (2007) observed that Human sexuality involves the interaction of the biological, psychological, and socio-cultural factors with ethical, spiritual, cultural and moral issues. While HDI(2001) described human sexuality as a natural and an integral part of every human being that encompasses sexual development, affection, intimacy, body image, reproductive health, interpersonal relationship and gender roles .It revolves around issues associated with sex, sexual behavior pattern, sexual violence and well being .However, information on human sexuality are transmitted formally and informally, directly or indirectly through daily interactions, experiences and exposure to a wide variety of influences. Traditionally African elders are the custodian of knowledge referred to as indigenous knowledge. In practice sexuality information can be learnt through indigenous or structured sexuality education.

Warren (1996) described the indigenous knowledge as potential community based knowledge and decision making systems for providing communication bridge. It facilitates mutual understanding in problem situations, enhances participatory decision making and capacity building especially in young persons and youth. Berkes and Folkes (1992) confirmed that it is a “cultural capital” and is a highly valuable resource. In African countries like Nigeria, elders are the custodians of indigenous knowledge and children look up to parents and extended relatives to provide the various components of indigenous knowledge and information to support individual development and community wide decision making processes. Other sources of sexual learning include: friends, peer group, homes, schools, mass media, religious institutions, workplaces and health workers.

AHI (2003) observed that sexuality education is a part of planned processes which transmit factual information of positive attitudes, beliefs and values. It provides skills to cope with biological, psychological, socio cultural and spiritual issues of human sexuality. A cursory review of indigenous sexuality education among the cultures indicates some variations as further discussed.

Indigenous Sexuality Education among Ibo Youth (Girls & Boys) Parental teaching

- (1)Sex education is given by mothers as warnings for girls at puberty.
- (2) Female genital is referred to as “Ahu nwanyi” is sacred and must be guarded with care.

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(3) Girls are cautioned against interaction with male adults. No serious explanation is given except that pregnancy results from male touch. She is instructed to keep away from any kind of interaction with men.

Boys are free sexually. Occasional warnings or caution is given by mothers mainly to prevent unplanned parenthood.

➤ **Sexual Exposures**

Moonlight plays – boys and girls move to playing early evenings as part of the socialization process

Running of errands for older male relations- expose girls to early sexual experiences and sometimes rape

➤ **Behaviour Patterns**

Betrothal was done in some cases early but the girls moved in at puberty.

Initial sexual experience – is usually forced or planned especially in unexposed girls who occasionally hawk goods.

➤ **Challenges of Indigenous Sexuality education**

Traditionally among the Ibos girls are restricted hence adolescent girls and boys observed to be involved in sexual immorality are mocked through lyrics, songs and folk tales. Subsequently Parents of such youths are embarrassed publicly by members of the community. They are regarded as failures.

Obi(1970) in his work Marriage among the Igbos of Nigeria commented “The practice of a boy marching up and down the town with a girl did not exist, although it is coming in gradually today”. From all we have seen so far, it is evident that the Igbo do not step into marriage without preparation. It is a step which must be taken with the eyes wide open.

As soon as a boy comes to the age of reason, he undergoes a civic juvenile test by which he is initiated into the juju cult by *iba nammuo* (the walk to the spirit land)". By this ceremony he is initiated into the secrets of "*egwugwu*" and told of *ana-be-mmuo*'. These are secrets which, he can never reveal to anyone of the female sex or to the yet uninitiated of his own sex. This is an age-old ordeal meant to test the psychological balance and the sense of responsibility of the boy. It is a rigorous training in personal discipline and strict preservation of secrets.

Any young man who revealed these secrets was counted a big disgrace to his family. In the past he would either be killed or sold into slavery to a distant town.

Also, girls are discouraged from collecting gifts from peers or older males through the use of some remarks like "Onye richaakwa o kwuoa ugwo" meaning She who eats must pay back. Boys are free sexually but occasionally parents chip in few words to ensure moderation in sexual drive. In addition, boys who impregnate girls do not get as much embarrassment as the girls have.

Indigenous Sexuality Education among Hausa Youth (Girls & Boys)

➤ **Parental teaching**

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No sexual education for girl's sex related discussions are taboos

- **Sexual Exposure** Among
the Hausas Tsarance practice (hothouse 1969)
It also reported that Mothers are secluded hence the girls
Girls
Hawking of goods
Sleeping together with strangers and peers
Early marriages to pre adolescent's children
Current length of school period of school sexual experiment
Girls are unprepared for marriage.
- **Behaviour Patterns**
Hausa girls flirt and accept gifts from young men. They marry almost at puberty and could remarry as many times as possible. The boys engage in sexual play early with many girls even until marriage.
- **Challenges of Indigenous Sexuality education**
Hassan (1952) Reported sexually free adolescence. In early marriages first sexual experience is forced and aided with gishiri cut. (Callaway 1987)
Girls married to older men Kaemiler Bossaller (1992)

Yoruba Youths

Bamikale Feyisetan, Anne R. Pebley (1989) observed that Yoruba parents could not discuss sexuality issues with the adolescent until pre-marriage stage. They observed that girls are restricted or confined to their home boys were free sexually and got married early but remained at home. It was concluded that the socio- cultural, activities exposed the girls to older men. The also, slept with their peer group, married out early and are not likely to be in school to learn especially the Hausa youth. There was effort to protect both the Ibo and Yoruba girls to prevent Shame on his family. Early betrothal was practiced. Mothers cautioned against involvement with men.

Uzedike (1990) and Oyekanmi (2004) agreed that parental anxieties about sexual morality in the context of seeking modern lifestyles rather than immoral sexual behavior somehow associated with traditional culture that has increased the risks produced by poverty and inequality. The focus here on how men navigate modernity, morality, and masculinity as they engage in extramarital relationships while the girls are sent into slavery as in early marriage or secluded highlights the importance of intervening directly with men and address the issue of women's risk of contracting HIV. There is need to instill Public health interventions focusing on men in Nigeria and similar settings where men's extramarital sex is common and gender inequality is marked.

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Methodology.

The Ex post facto research design was used to examine to what extent the available indigenous sexuality education/ information and knowledge have shaped the sexual behavior of the Yoruba, Ibo and Hausa students from selected higher institutions in Lagos, Nigeria. Asika (1991) postulates that, Expost facto designs observe events that have indeed taken place in order to evaluate such events without manipulation.

600 youths aged between 18 and 24 years selected through stratified random sampling method comprised the study sample. The variables studied were; Types of indigenous sexuality education, Cultural influences, Sexual exposure, Sexuality education and Sexual behavior.

The instrument for data collection was a self developed, structured and validated questionnaire ($r = 0.88$). the variables investigated include; youth exposure to sex, content of indigenous sexuality education, cultural interventions, conduct of structured sexuality education and youth sexual behaviours among the Hausa, Ibo, and Yoruba youths.

Data analysis:

Descriptive statistics of frequency counts and percentages provided answers for the 4 research questions, chi square (X^2) and Pearson's correlation coefficient were used to determine the relationship between independent and dependent variables and to provide answers to the research questions at 0.05 alpha level.

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Results and discussions

Types of sexuality education at the various cultural levels;

The answers to this question revealed that, sexuality education among the Yorubas ranged from the care of self, menstrual hygiene, importance of virginity, manliness, respect for elders, motherhood, self-respect, importance of fraternity among others. The Ibos inculcated in their children through peer programmes such as coming of age and other ways as explained on the previous page, while the Hausas thought their children about chastity, early marriage, self-beautification and manliness using Quran injunctions.

Extent to which the youths are exposed to sexuality issues;

Exposure of the youth to sexuality issues was regarded as a taboo among the three cultures. A whopping 515(86%) of the respondents did not see the need for such exposure and in most situations the youth continue to feign ignorance as that is what is expected of them by the society.

Youths' perception of the relationship between indigenous sexuality education and the structured sexuality education;

Most of the respondents 305(50.8%) were not sure and agreed that although they are conversant with societies stand on sexuality issues and especially what they learn from their various religions, they have not necessarily encounter sexuality education at school. The remaining 156 (26%) who responded to the question saw a relationship. They claimed to have learnt some sexuality education through their exposure to Social Studies and Family life and HIV education at school.

How indigenous sexuality education is taught.

Responses to the questionnaire revealed that Indigenous sexuality education were taught by parents 435(71%), Relatives 320(53%), Issued to Youth as warnings 515(86%) and taught by peers 144(24%). This was confirmed by Hassan (1952) who reported that Hausa Youth learnt sexuality issues from parents towards marriage time. However, most girls got married before puberty hence they never had sexuality information at home. It was concluded that indigenous sexuality education was available but youth who married before puberty never received sexual health information

Extent of government's support for sexuality education in schools?

Responses to the questionnaire revealed that Structured sexuality education is available for Junior Secondary school 360(60%) while Sexuality issues awareness campaign were organized for students 420(70%). The relevance and appropriateness of content was 252(42%) which was taught by Health care providers 320(53%) or School health officers. Oyekanmi (2004) confirmed that the curriculum content of for Comprehensive Sexuality Education in Nigeria as prescribed by the National Task Force (1996), Guidelines include:

- **Information** – Provision of accurate information about human sexuality including growth and development, human reproduction, anatomy, physiology, masturbation, family life, pregnancy, childbirth, parenthood, sexual response, sexual orientation, contraception, abortion, sexual abuse, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.

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- **Attitudes, values and insight** – Provision of opportunities for individuals to question, explore and assess their sexual attitudes in order to develop their own values, to enhance self-esteem and to develop insights concerning relationships with members of both sexes, and understand their obligations and responsibilities to others.
- **Relationships and inter-personal skills** – Development of inter-personal skills, including communication, decision-making, astuteness and refusal skills as well as the ability to create satisfying relationships. Sexuality education programmes should enable individuals to fully understand their sexuality and help them develop the capacity for caring, supportive, non-coercive and mutually pleasurable sexual relationships.

Landry, Kaeser, and Richards (1999) submitted that while most states require schools to teach sexuality education, STD education or both, many also give local policymakers wide latitude in crafting their own policies. The latest information on state-level policies is available at www.guttmacher.org/pubs/spib_SSEP.pdf. **Sexuality Education in the Classroom**

They observed that various teachers failed to implement the guideline for different reasons such as:

- Sexuality education teachers are more likely to focus on abstinence and less likely to provide students with information on birth control, how to obtain contraceptive services, sexual orientation and abortion than they were 15 years ago.
- The proportion of sexuality education teachers who taught abstinence as the only way to prevent pregnancy and STDs increased from 1 in 50 in 1988 to 1 in 4 in 1999.
- The overwhelming majority of sexuality education teachers believe that by the end of the 7th grade, students should have been taught about puberty, how HIV is transmitted, STDs, how to resist peer pressure to have sex, implications of teenage parenthood, abstinence from intercourse, dating, sexual abuse and nonsexual ways to show affection.
- The majority of teachers believe that topics such as birth control methods and how to obtain them, the correct way to use a condom, sexual orientation, and factual and ethical information about abortion should also be taught by the end of the 12th grade.

Problems include: These topics are currently being taught less often and later than teachers think they should be. More than 9 in 10 teachers believe that students should be taught about contraception, but 1 in 4 is prohibited from doing so.

- 1 in 5 teachers believes that restrictions imposed on sexuality education are preventing them from meeting their students the needs.

Also, Martha Kempner, SIECUS' vice president for information and communications in SIECUS (2006) report observed the need for Health Educators to be focused. There is need to

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promote learning by using a variety of words and phrases to tell young people how important it is to delay sexual behavior. They suggested that Abstinence should be the watch word.

The contribution of indigenous sexual literacy to sexual mechanisms and life coping among the male and the female?

Responses showed that Parents 435(71%), Relatives 320(53%), Issued to Youth as warnings 515(86%) and taught by peers 144(24%).

Obi (1970) in his work Marriage among the Igbos of Nigeria commented “The practice of a boy marching up and down the town with a girl did not exist, although it is coming in gradually today”. From all we have seen so far, it is evident that the Igbo do not step into marriage without preparation. It is a step which must be taken with the eyes wide open. However, Traditional educational theory suppressed important questions about the relations among knowledge, power and domination and considered school as a powerful instrument for the reproduction of capitalist relations and a means of legitimizing ideologies of everyday life.

In the traditional view, schools were merely instructional sites. Those schools are also cultural and political sites represent areas of contention among differently empowered cultural and economic groups. It was argue that providing young people with opportunities to be involved in decisions that affect them enhances their health by helping them develop important decision-making and problem-solving skills, form meaningful relationships, and bolster self-esteem. Discussed ways of involving youth in health and community projects.

Indigenous sexuality education enforces discipline, encourages pretence and does not promote learning of sexuality issues. However, structured sexuality is expected to impart knowledge but there is difficulty in sustaining teaching and awareness campaigns.

Youths’ exposure to sexuality through either socio-cultural and traditional activities and their perceptions on structured sexuality education?

Responses to the questionnaire items indicated that socio-cultural activities 520(87%) ethnicity 320(53%) and psychological factors 411(68%).influenced the disposition are significantly related to sexual patterns consisted of Sex role play by boys and girls 530(88%), Flirting by girls 480 (80%) and early marriages 411(69%) and determine the sexual behavior of Nigerian youths.

Various studies observed the following issues of

Advocates of the concept of historical insertion believe that a critical sensibility is an extension of a historical sensibility. That is, to understand the present, in both institutional and social terms, educators must place all pedagogical contents in an historical context in order to see clearly their genesis and development. Hence indigenous sexual literacy serves as the historical perspective that reveals existing relations and social relations that inform their meanings and hidden legacies in terms of who we are as historical and social beings. In clearer terms, the history that is anchored in the cultural forms that give meaning to the way we walk, think, dress and act is subject to historical analysis (who we are and what we might become).

Conclusions, lessons learnt and policy implications

It is concluded that, sexuality issues awareness campaigns be given a wider reach through primary health care programmes at the grassroots’ level, school curriculum expansion for structured sexuality education to commence from primary school to ensure effective knowledge

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transfer. Emphasis should include the benefits of formal indigenous, home based sexuality education to improve sexual literacy among Nigerian Youths especially those who do not have access to formal education.

There is a need for the youth to:

- Have clear ideas about the different challenges, what changes are desired, and what are the obstacles to such changes.
- Have clear ideas about the challenges.

Many of the issues which exert a determining influence are outside the control of the youth. For example a situation of protracted economic crisis which manifests in massive unemployment, high inflation and poor welfare services can hamper desired change.

- Examine the growth of sex trade in and beyond the Nigerian shores sometimes with parental support.
- Revisit the political economic reality such as the recent introduction of tuition fees in the university and privatization of hostel accommodation seems to impose limits on what sexuality education can achieve.
- It is therefore crucial to incorporate individuals, groups and corporate institutions and policies of education, welfare, and youth development into adolescent reproductive health policy. Often reproductive health policy and intervention have concentrated on the first two domains.
- The challenge then goes beyond teaching the youth with sexuality and reproductive information and service or motivating the youth to change behavior in the light of new information and awareness but also creating the social and economic circumstances which make the needed change possible and sustainable.

Key Words: Sexual, Behaviour, Ethnicity, Youth, Implications for sexuality education.

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