

DEMOGRAPHIC PREDICTORS OF PREMARITAL SEXUAL BEHAVIOURS AMONG UNDERGRADUATES

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ABSTRACT

Previous studies have implicated premarital sexual behaviours in abortions, teenage mothers, and sexually transmitted infections. Less research attention has focused the extent to which age and gender predict premarital sexual behaviours among undergraduates; a lacuna this study aimed to fill. A total of 198 undergraduates (104 males; 94 females) were sampled from a public university in southwestern Nigeria. Their age ranged from 15 to 39 years ($M = 23.20$ years; $SD = 3.17$). Results revealed that age and gender did not significantly predict premarital sexual behaviours. There was no gender difference in undergraduates' premarital sexual behaviours. It was, therefore, concluded that premarital sexual behaviours cut across undergraduates irrespective of their age and gender.

Key words: Premarital behaviours, university student, undergraduate

INTRODUCTION

Premarital sexual behaviours have become a subject of attention among scholars and researchers in recent decades. Martin, Martin, and Martin (2001) reported that the number of young adults engaging in premarital sexual behaviours has increased 63% in the last 20 years. Also, the World Health Organizations (2001) submitted that premarital sexual activities among young adults are high and increasing in Africa in which Nigeria is one of them.

This may be well placed if one considers the fact that premarital sexual behaviours such as kissing, fondling, oral sex, and sexual intercourse could be associated with teen pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV and AIDS, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in young especially, the undergraduates (Koeing, 2000; Odewole, 2000; Omotoso, 2006; Adeoye, Ola & Aliu, 2012; Ugoji, 2008).

Most of the studies conducted on premarital sexual behaviours in

Nigeria tend to focus more on factors like family background, parental marital status, and religion as major determinants of premarital sexual behaviours (Adeoye et al., 2012; Alo & Akinde, 2010; Odewole, 2000; Omoteso, 2006; Ugoji, 2008). Less attention has been on the demographics predictors (age and gender) on premarital sexual behaviours, especially among the undergraduates in Nigeria.

The aim of this study is therefore to investigate the influence of age and gender on premarital sexual behaviours among Nigerian undergraduates. Undergraduates have been the focus of this study because premarital sexual behaviours are more rampant among them (Alo & Akinde, 2010). This is because most of these students are young (15-24 years). In school, they enjoy more freedom, independence, and are less monitored by either their parents or guardians.

In its simplest form, premarital sexual behaviours refer to sexual activities perpetrated prior to marriage (Alo, 2008). Such behaviours include, but not limited to, kissing, hugging, romancing, fondling of the genitals, oral sex, and sexual intercourse (Odewole; 2000; Omoteso, 2003).

Unlike before, when the culture of premarital sexual behaviours used to be a taboo in Nigeria (Alo, 2008), present day youths have abandoned this valued tradition for the inglorious culture of premarital sexual activities (Adeoye et al., 2012). The Nigerian culture highly frowns at premarital sexual behaviours, especially among the females (Alo, 2008). Because females usually are more prone to negative consequences of premarital

sexual behaviours such as gynecological problems, unwanted pregnancies as well as STIs than the males; females are, therefore, expected to keep their virginity until they get married.

Alo (2008) submitted that premarital cohabitation has become a common phenomenon among the Nigerian University undergraduates. To this author, cohabitation among individuals of opposite sex is a predisposing factor to the initiation of sexual activities. Another of the major factors that may influence undergraduates' premarital sexual behaviours is their gender. The gender of students has significant influence on their premarital sexual behaviours. Westera and Bennett's (1994) study on premarital sexual behaviours among high school revealed that 88% of high school males and 84% of females showed attitudes supportive of premarital sexual behaviours.

In addition to that, Feigenbaum, Weinstein and Rosen (1995), drawing sample of undergraduates from a college, reported that 69.9% of males and 59.5% of females engaged in premarital sexual behaviours. In the like manner, Adeoye et al. (2012) reported that gender had a significant influence on undergraduates' premarital sexual behaviours. Ugoji (2011) also submitted that premarital sexual behaviours among undergraduates is determined mostly by their gender. These studies did not indicate whether male engaged in premarital sexual behaviours than the females. Koeing (2000), Carpenter (2000), and Shearer, Hosterman, Gillen and Lefkowitz (2005) generally reported that male college students displayed a higher

level of premarital sexual behaviours than females despite their high level of religious and cultural restrictions.

Most studies conducted to examine age and premarital sexual behaviors reported that early young adults were mostly prone to premarital sexual behaviours. Martin et al. (2001) reported that individuals within the ages of 15-17 were more involved in premarital sexual behaviour than the late young adults. Furthermore, a study conducted by Alo and Akinde (2010) on premarital sexual activities revealed that 14.2% of young female adults engaged in this act before age 14 while 84% admitted that they had sex before their 20th birthday. Adeoye et al.'s (2012) study on premarital sexual behaviours among undergraduates in a Nigerian university found that age categories of 14-15 years and 19-25 years experienced premarital sexual behaviours at the same level and as such, age did not have any significant influence on youth sexual behaviours. Based on the above literature, the following hypotheses were generated and tested.

Hypotheses

1. There will be a significant independent and joint influence of age and gender on premarital sexual behaviours.
2. Female undergraduates will exhibit a significantly higher level of premarital sexual behaviours than their male counterpart.

METHODS

Design and Participants

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey design. Sample was 198 undergraduates selected across faculties and departments in a public university in southwestern Nigeria. They comprised 104 (52.5%) males and 94 (47.5%) females with an age range of 15 to 39 years. The mean age of the participants was 23.20 years ($SD = 3.17$). With regards to their marital status, 183 (92.4%) were single, while 15 (7.6%) were married. In the case of religious affiliation, 176 (88.9%) were Christians, 20 (10.1%) were Muslims, and 2 (1.0%) were traditionalists.

Measure

Premarital sexual behaviours were measured using Intimacy Permissiveness Scale (IPS) developed by Carpenter and Christensen (1962). IPS was a 12-item scale designed to measure individual's attitude towards illegitimacy, premarital virginity of the partner, premarital sexual relations under conditions of affection and non-affection. IPS was rated on 6 points scale (Disagree Strongly = 1; Agree Strongly = 6). Sample items include: "I believe that kissing is acceptable for male or female before marriage when he or she is engaged to be married" and "I believe that full sexual relations are acceptable for male or female before marriage when he or she is engaged in love". Christensen and Carpenter (1962) reported that IPS had a reliability coefficient of .90 and coefficient of scalability of .65. A Cronbach's alpha of .89 was obtained in this study. Respondents who scored

high on the scale displayed high premarital sexual behaviour while those who scored low exhibited low premarital sexual behaviours.

Procedure

Using accidental sampling technique, the undergraduates were sampled from lecture rooms across departments and faculties in a public university. Moderate information on the research and the slight psychological inconvenience they might experience in the course of the research was disclosed to the participants. They were also informed that participation was purely voluntary and that they were free to stop whenever they felt uncomfortable to continue with the research. Each participant was assured of confidentiality and anonymity. To further conceal the identity of the participants, they were not requested to

indicate their names on the questionnaire. The questionnaires were distributed, only to participants that consented to participate in the study. Out of 220 questionnaires administered, 198 were duly completed and found usable.

Data Analysis

To determine the contribution of each of the independent variables and their joint contribution to the dependent variable, a multiple regression analysis was conducted to test hypothesis 1. In the case of hypothesis 2, a *t* independent test was used to analyze the data.

RESULTS

The results of the descriptive and correlations among the variables are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Mean, SD and Inter- variable Correlations

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3
1. Age	23.20	3.17	1		
2. Gender	-	-	-.10	1	
3. Premarital sexual behaviours	39.46	14.33	-.01	-.01	1

As shown in Table 1, there was no significant relationship among the variables in the study. Age did not have a significant relationship with premarital sexual behaviours among undergraduates [$r(196) = -.01, p > .05$]. In the same vein, gender did not

have a significant relationship with premarital sexual behaviours among undergraduates [$r(196) = -.01, p > .05$].

A multiple regression was conducted to evaluate hypothesis 1. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary of Multiple Regression on Premarital Sexual Behaviours

Predictors	β	t	p	R	R^2
Age	-.01	-.12	> .05		
Gender	-.01	-.17	> .05	.02	.00

The results in Table 2 revealed that age ($\beta = -.01$, $t = -.12$, $p > .05$) and gender ($\beta = -.01$, $t = -.17$, $p > .05$) did not exert significant independent effects on undergraduates' premarital sexual behaviours. There was no significant joint effect of age and gender on premarital sexual behaviours

among undergraduates. The two variables only contributed 2% to the observed changes in premarital sexual behaviours. Hypothesis 1 was not confirmed by these results.

To test hypothesis 2, a t independent test was conducted. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Summary of t Independent Test on Gender Difference in Premarital Sexual Behaviours

Gender	N	M	SD	df	t	P
Male	104	38.59	16.53			
Female	94	38.24	13.79	196	.16	>.05

Table 3 shows that there was no significance gender difference in undergraduates' premarital sexual behaviours [$t(196) = .16$, $p > .05$]. This implied that, irrespective of gender, undergraduates engaged in premarital sexual behaviours. Hypothesis 2 was, therefore, rejected.

DISCUSSION

This study investigated the extent to which age and gender predicted premarital sexual behaviours among undergraduates. The results of the study did not confirm the hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1, which predicted age and gender effects on premarital sexual behaviours, was not confirmed by the results in Table 2. The results of the present study negated the findings

of Martin et al. (2001) and Adeoye et al. (2012). These authors found that young males engaged more in premarital sexual behaviours than females. The findings of the current study may be connected with the fact that most of the undergraduates in the population sampled lived off-campus; where they had unlimited opportunities to cohabit. Premarital sexual behaviours have been associated with cohabitation among undergraduates (Alo, 2008).

By virtue of the fact that most of the undergraduates sampled in the current study lived off-campus, cohabitation might have increased premarital sexual behaviours without age or gender restrictions. Apart from cohabitation, globalization (epitomized in unrestricted access to pornographic materials) coupled with the sudden and

unlimited freedom enjoyed by undergraduates might have further made them vulnerable to premarital sexual behaviours.

Contrary to the expectations of hypothesis 2, there was no gender difference in the premarital sexual behaviours of undergraduates. This result contradicts the findings of Shearer et al. (2005), Koeing (2000), Carpenter (2000), and Ugoji (2011). These authors submitted that male students engaged in premarital sexual behaviours than the female students. Environmental factors and social influence might be responsible for the results of the current study. Most undergraduates in Nigeria are in adolescence -- a stage when peer influence may be predominant in male and females. Due to the fact that majority of the undergraduates who participated in this study lived off-campus with less supervision from parents and the school authority, peer pressure might be a strong factor predicting premarital sexual behaviours rather than gender.

CONCLUSION

It can therefore be concluded that demographic variables of age and gender did not have independent and joint influence on premarital sexual behaviours among undergraduates. Based on the findings of the present study, premarital sexual behaviours cut across undergraduates, irrespective of age and gender. A contribution of the present study to knowledge is that, one may need to look beyond age and gender in explaining premarital sexual behaviours among undergraduates in

Nigerian public universities; especially where students live off-campus.

This research has some limitations that suggest areas for future research. First, the study was limited to a public university and the sample size was rather small. Perhaps, a larger sample size representing more public and private universities might have yielded different results. Thus, the external validity of the study was limited. Second, this study was based largely on students who lived off-campus. Such students could be more prone to pressures from peers and be more vulnerable to premarital sexual behaviours than those who live on campus.

Against this background, future studies should select a larger sample size that represents more public and private universities and cover students who live both within and outside the university campus. The role of peer pressure in premarital sexual behaviours should also be investigated.

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