

Debut Age for Sex and Sexual Behaviour Among Secondary School Students in Nsukka, Enugu State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Background: This study evaluated the debut age for sex and the sexual behavior and practices among secondary school adolescents in Nsukka, Enugu state, Nigeria.

Materials and Methods: A Cross-sectional study design was adopted. Multistage sampling method was used to select respondents over a period of 3 months (April – June 2022). The study participants were students in selected public secondary schools in Nsukka, Enugu State between the ages of 10 and 19 years. A self-administered, 25 multiple-choice item English language questionnaire was used.

Results: The result of this study reveals that 26% of our participants have had a sexual encounter and the mean debut age of sex being 13.42 ± 2.96 years. Also, 69% of our respondents engaged in unprotected sex, and the reason for not using protection varied between males and females. 23% of our respondents who have ever had sex had multiple sexual partners and motivation for engaging in sex varied between males and females.

Conclusion: The study's findings indicate that adolescents in secondary schools in Nsukka, Enugu, Nigeria, are beginning to have sexual relationships at younger ages and that risky sexual activity is very common among them.

Keywords: Nigeria; Males; Females

Introduction

Adolescence is a stage of development in a person's life that is typically characterized by secondary sexual development, psychological growth, reproductive and sexual maturity, as well as a move from total dependence to relative dependence [1,2]. Around puberty, secondary sexual growth, hormonal changes, and changes in emotional, cognitive, and psychosocial development take place, leading to sexual interest and exploration [2].

Adolescents become aware of their sexuality as a result of these biological and psychological changes, and they regularly bargain with and accommodate rising expectations for a more independent lifestyle [2].

Young people's sexual activity rates have steadily increased and this is quickly becoming a public health concern [1,3]. Because of its strong relationship with sexually transmitted illnesses,

emotional and psychological harm, as well as teenage pregnancy, sexual activity among young people is considered problematic [4]. A person between the ages of 10 and 19 is referred to as an adolescent [5].

Oral, penetrative, penile-vaginal and anal sex as well as masturbation is among the types of sexual activity that teenagers most frequently engage in, along with same-sex relationships [1,6]. There are hazards associated with these teens' sexual behavior, many of which include STIs like HIV/AIDS, unintended pregnancies, underage pregnancies, and abortion-related deaths [1,2,6,7]. These dangers result from having several sexual partners, engaging in unprotected sex, and engaging in sex while intoxicated or high [1,6,7].

Parents avoid taking on their primary roles as their children's first teachers in educating them about sex [6]; also sex education lacks the standardization it needs to properly drill students, especially those in secondary schools, on sex matters and sex related issues in developing nations [8]. Nigeria created a national reproductive health policy in 2000 with the goal of preventing harmful adolescent sexual behavior [5,9]. However, the initiative has been limited by outdated and insufficient data regarding the sexual knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of teenagers in Nigeria [9].

Adolescents are not a uniform group, and their demands vary greatly depending on factors like age, gender, geography, social status, cultural environment, etc. Similar to this, different groups, ethnicities, and religions have quite distinct needs in terms of sexual and reproductive health [1,6,10-12].

Adolescence is a transition period [4,12] and most adolescents respond to cultural sexual expectations and standards. While many adolescents transit successfully, others are exposed to a number of circumstances that impede their development and put them at risk for life-threatening illnesses [4]. High levels of sexual activity among teenagers of both sexes with progressively lower debut ages, dangerous sexual behaviors, including unprotected sexual contact with many partners, have been documented in studies from around the Nigeria [1,4,6]. High incidence of sexually transmitted diseases and adolescent pregnancy coincide with this high level of sexual activity among adolescents [1,13]. The review of a sex education

intervention in Nigeria emphasizes the significance of identifying needs before taking action⁹. There is however, paucity of data on debut age for sex and sexual behavior among adolescents in Enugu, Nigeria. Therefore, it is crucial to study the sexual behavior and debut age of adolescents Enugu, Nigeria. This study evaluated the debut age for sex and the sexual behavior among secondary school adolescents in Nsukka, Enugu state, Nigeria.

Materials and Methods

Study design

A Cross-sectional study design was adopted.

Sampling technique

Multistage sampling method was used to select eligible respondents over a period of 3 months (April – June 2022). In the first stage a Local Government Area was selected in Enugu state using stratified sampling method. The second stage involved selecting four (4) coeducational public secondary schools were selected using stratified sampling method from over 100 public secondary schools in Nsukka Local Government Area in Enugu state. The third stage involved selection of respondents in the classes of JSS3, SS1, SS2, and SS3 using simple random sampling method, thus 472 students utilized the instrument used for data collection.

Study area

Enugu state is an Igbo dominated state, located in the South-East region of Nigeria. The name Enugu is derived from the two Igbo words *ÉnúŪgwú*, meaning "hill top", denoting the city's hilly geography [14]. It occupies an area of 556 km², elevation of 180m and a population of 4.4 million people [15].

The state is divided into three senatorial zones namely; Enugu north, Enugu East and Enugu West. The state is also divided into educational zones, namely Agbani, Awgu, Enugu, Nsukka, Obollo-Afor and Udi zone. There are more than 2050 pre-primary and primary schools, 587 private and public secondary schools [16].

Nsukka is a town and a Local Government Area (LGA) located in the Enugu North senatorial zone in Enugu state. It is one out of the 6 LGAs in the zone, made up of Mkpunano, Nru and Ihe'n Owere. There are 20 co-educational public secondary schools in

Nsukka LGA. The enrolment population census of junior and senior secondary students in public schools in Nsukka, conducted by the Enugu state ministry of education was put at 12,502 (junior) and 11,073 (senior) [16].

Study participants

The study participants were students in selected public secondary schools in Nsukka, Enugu State between the ages of 10 and 19 years. Community Secondary School, Nru-Nsukka, Model Secondary School, Nsukka, Community Secondary School Ede-Oballa, Nsukka And Government Technical College Nsukka.

Sample size

The sample size was derived from table for determining sample size¹⁷. The table indicates that when the size of the population is greater than 100 000 and the confidence level is 95%, the sample size should be 400. A total of 472 questionnaires were shared among students. A total of 450 of these questionnaires were correctly completed, returned, and correctly filled out, yielding a response rate of 95.3%.

Data collection

For the study, a self-administered, 25 multiple-choice item English language questionnaire was created. Most of the questions were modified from already-written surveys. Nigerian teenagers and health professionals assessed early versions of the questionnaire to ensure that it was clear and acceptable. The items included seven on participants’ sociodemographic characteristics, nine on debut age for sex and sexual behaviour/practices and nine on sexual histories for sexually active students.

Selection criteria

Inclusion criteria: Students between the ages of 10 and 19 years who gave their oral and written consent to participate in this study and whose school authority gave permission were recruited into this study.

Exclusion criteria: Students with significant physical or mental handicap, which could affect their ability to respond validly to this study instrument, were excluded from this study.

Half-filled questionnaire of which vital information were not ticked or answered will be excluded from being used for this study.

Data analysis

Data were entered and analyzed using Statistical package for Social science (SPSS), version 23 (IBM Computers USA). Data was summarized using mean ± SD. All quantitative variables, such as age, etc., were given descriptive measures, while categorical variables were given frequency distributions. One way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to test for differences between mean. The Chi-square test was employed to see whether categorical variables were associated. Statistical significance will be considered at P < 0.05.

Results

Table 1 shows demographic characteristics of secondary school adolescents in Nsukka, Enugu state. The mean age of students in our study was 15.86 ± 1.49 years. Christians made up the bulk of study participants (98.65%).

Demographic information	Male Mean ± SD/No (%)	Female Mean ± SD/No (%)	X ²	P-Value
Age	16.16 ± 1.52	15.61 ± 1.42		0.000
Class of subjects			18.376	0.001
JSS3	33(16.2)	64(26.0)		
SS1	81(39.7)	75(30.5)		
SS2	44(21.6)	75(30.5)		
SS3	46(22.5)	31(12.6)		
Religion			1.398	0.706
Christian	201(98.5)	243(98.8)		
Muslim	1(0.5)	1(4)		
Others	2(1.0)	1(4)		

Denomination			1.786	0.618
Catholic	165(80.9)	192(78.0)		
Protestant	30(14.7)	44(17.9)		
Orthodox	9(4.4)	9(3.7)		
Family structure			1.590	0.452
Monogamous	179(87.7)	208(84.6)		
Polygamous	25(12.3)	37(15.0)		
Living situation			0.601	0.896
Live with both parents	156(76.5)	182(74.0)		
Live with mother only	21(10.3)	26(10.6)		
Live with father only	2(1.0)	2(0.8)		
Live with guardian	25(12.3)	36(14.6)		
Socio-economic status			3.552	0.169
High Socio-economic status	29(14.3)	22(9.0)		
Medium Socio-economic status	57(28.1)	66(26.9)		
Low Socio-economic status	117(57.6)	157(64.1)		

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of secondary school adolescents in Nsukka, Enugu state.

79.5% of the participants in our survey identified as Catholic. The majority of participants in this study (86.2%) are from monogamous homes and (75.3%) are raised by both parents. The majority of the study’s participants (60.4%) were from low socioeconomic families.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of debut age for sex. The youngest age for initiation of sexual activity in our study was 5 years. By age 13 and 16 years, 44.4% and 86.2% respectively, of our respondents who have ever had sex, have had their sexual debut.

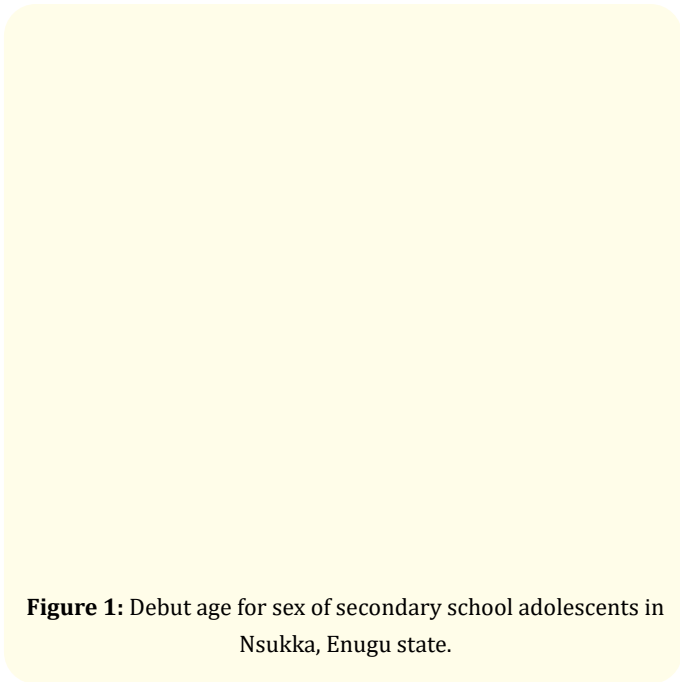


Figure 1: Debut age for sex of secondary school adolescents in Nsukka, Enugu state.

Table 2 shows the mean debut age of sex and sexual behaviour/ practices of Secondary school students in Nsukka, Enugu state. The results reveal that that 26% of our subjects have had sexual intercourse. In this study, 13.42 ± 2.96 years were the mean debut age for sex. On sexual acts engaged the result indicates that penile-vaginal intercourse was the most common (84.5%) method of sex for the male subjects who had ever engaged in it. Oral Sex (58.6%) came next and the least was anal sex (6.9%). The majority of the female individuals who had ever had sex engaged in penile-vaginal intercourse (79.7), followed by oral sex (48, 41.0%) and fingering (27.1%). The least was anal sex (8.5%). There was no significant (p > .005) difference in the sexual acts engaged in by males compared to females.

Our results also indicate that the penile-vaginal method of sex was the most preferred (43.1%) by the male participants who had ever engaged in sex, followed by oral sex (11.1%), and fingering (6, 5.1%). Penile-vaginal intercourse was the preferred method of sex for the majority of the female participants in this study who had ever engaged in sex (39%), followed by oral sex (15.3%), and masturbation (10.2%). Male and female preferences for sexual behaviors were not significantly different (p > 0.05).

Sexual behaviour parameters	Male Mean ± SD/No (%)	Female Mean ± SD/No (%)	X ²	P-Value
Have you ever had sex?	58(28.4)	59(24.0)		
Debut age for sex	13.60 ± 3.14	13.15 ± 3.10		0.435
Sexual acts engaged			0.631	0.331
Oral sex	34(58.6)	32(54.2)		
Anal sex	4(6.9)	5(8.5)		
Fingering	8(13.8)	16(27.1)		
Penile-vaginal sex	49(84.5)	47(79.7)		
Masturbation	5(8.6)	11(18.6)		
Sexual acts preferred			0.709	0.396
Oral sex	9(15.5)	9(15.3)		
Anal sex	0(0.0)	1(1.7)		
Fingering	3(5.2)	0(0.0)		
Penile-vaginal sex	25(43.1)	23(39)		
Masturbation	2(3.4)	6(10.2)		
Condom use during last sex	24(41.4)	13(22)	6.469	0.011
Reasons for not using condom			0.026	0.015
Condom makes sex unreal	19(32.8)	13(22)		
It is more pleasurable without condom	5(8.6)	13(22)		
It is painful because of friction	4(6.9)	11(18.6)		
It is too expensive	1(1.7)	5(8.5)		
It is uncomfortable	9(15.5)	2(3.4)		
Condom causes allergies	2(3.4)	0(0)		
How many sex partners do you have?			3.413	0.637
1 Sex Partner	43 (74.2)	76 (79.6)		
2 Sex Partner	8 (13.8)	5 (8.5)		
3 or more Sex partner	7 (12)	7 (11.9)		
Age range of sex partners			1.570	0.814
13-15 years	15(25.9)	10(16.9)		
16-18 years	19(32.8)	22(37.3)		
19-21 years	15(25.9)	14(23.7)		
22-24 years	3(5.2)	2(3.4)		
≥25 years	2(3.4)	3(5.1)		
Reasons for engaging in sex			10.749	0.005
Peer-pressure	19(32.8)	30(50.8)		
Personal satisfaction	26(46.8)	1(1.7)		
Monetary gain	0(0)	10(17.0)		
Out of curiosity	13(22.4)	7(11.9)		
Gift items	3(2.1)	12(20.3)		

Table 2: Debut age for sex and sexual behavior of secondary school adolescents in Nsukka, Enugu state.

The last time they had sex, 31% of participants who have ever had sex used condoms. Condoms make sex unreal, which was cited by the sexual active males as the main justification for not using

one during the most recent intercourse (32.8%), followed by it is uncomfortable (15.5%) Its cost was cited as the least frequent excuse for not wearing a condom during last sex by the male

participants (1.7%). For the sexually active females Condom makes sex unreal (22%) and It is more pleasurable without condom (22%) were the most cited (11.9%) as the justification by for not using a condom during the last intercourse, followed by It is painful because of friction (18.6%). There is a significant ($p < .005$) difference in reasons for not using condom during last sex in males, compared to females.

The result shows that most (77%) of the participants who have had sex have one sex partner. The study participants who have engaged in sexual activity most frequently have partners who are 16-18 years old (35%), followed by those who are 19-21 years old (24.8%) and 13-15 years. The least were 22-24 years (4.3%) and ≥ 25 years (4.3%).

This result shows that the majority (46.8%) of males who had had sex cited personal satisfaction as their primary motivation. Peer pressure (32.8%) and curiosity (22.4%) were the next most

popular reasons. Peer pressure was cited by the majority (50.8%) of females who had sex as the cause of their sexual behavior. Gifts (20.3%), monetary gain (17%) and curiosity were the next most common responses. Males and females differ significantly ($p < 0.05$) in their reasons for having sex.

Table 3 shows the sexual history of our respondents. 59%, 12% and 29% of our respondents who have ever had sex, had one, two and three or more sexual encounters respectively, in the last three months. 44.1% of the study's female participants and 77.6% of the study's male participants who are sexually active watched pornographic videos. In comparison to female respondents, there were significantly ($p < 0.05$) more male subjects who watched pornographic content. 70.7% of the male participants said pornographic videos made them want to have sex, while 28.8% of female participants said it made them want to have sex. The proportion of males that desired sex after viewing ponographic clips differs significantly ($p < 0.05$) from that of females.

Frequency of sex in Last 3 months				
Once	34 (58.6)	35 (59.3)	10.745	0.217
Twice	5 (8.6)	9 (15.3)		
Thrice or more	19 (32.8)	15 (25.4)		
Do you watch pornographic clips/movies?	45(77.6)	26(44.1)	12.440	0.000
Did watching pornographic clips/movies make you want to have sex?	41(70.7)	17(28.8)	23.005	0.000
Regret for starting to have sex when you did?	23(39.7)	20(23.9)	0.212	0.899
Are you in any relationship?	30(51.7)	42(71.2)	4.681	0.031
Have you ever been forced to have sex?	10(17.2)	12(20.3)	0.296	0.863
Forcefully been touched in inappropriate places?	29(50)	34(57.6)	0.397	0.528
Ever been tricked to have sex?	27(46.6)	25(42.4)	0.207	0.649
Ever been beaten to have sex/during sex?	4(6.9)	12(20.3)	4.640	0.031

Table 3: Sexual histories of students who report ever having had sexual intercourse.

36.8% of participants who have ever had sex regret having sex when they did. The findings of this study reveal that 71.2% of the female participants are in a relationship, compared to 51.7% of the male participants. The number of females in a relationship is significantly ($p < 0.05$) higher than that of males.

18.8%, 53.8% and 44.4% of participants who have ever had sex have been forced to have sex, forcefully touched in inappropriate places and tricked to have sex, respectively. 20.3% and 6.9% of the study's female and male participants, respectively who have ever had sex have been beaten to have sex or during sex. The number of females have been beaten to have sex or during sex is significantly ($p < 0.05$) higher than that of males.

Discussion

Adolescents experience rapid changes during puberty that heighten their curiosity, self-awareness and sexual urges [18]. In the Nigerian educational system, sex education is not strongly founded [5,9]. Due to lack of sex education, neglect from parents, coupled with exposure to pornography, adolescents indulge in sex at a very young age that places them at the risk of unwanted early pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases [1,6,7]. This study evaluated the debut age for sex and the sexual behavior and practices among secondary school adolescents in Nsukka, Enugu state, Nigeria.

The result of this study reveals that 26% of our participants have had a sexual encounter. This is comparable to the report of Idowu., *et al.* [7], they reported 25.5% in Oyo state. It was however, lower when compared to the reports of Odeigah., *et al.* 65.1% in Illorin [6], Owolabi., *et al.* 63% in Osun state [19], Aomreore., *et al.* 61.1% in Port Harcourt [20], Alex-Hart., *et al.* 42.9% in Port Harcourt [21], Slap., *et al.* 42.3% in Plateau state [9], Eyam., *et al.* 41.5% in Calabar [4], Duru., *et al.* 34.4% in Anambara state² and Olugbenga-Bello., *et al.* 31.5% in Osun [22]. This suggests that a relatively high proportion of secondary school students in Nigeria are sexually active. Sexual activity among adolescents in Nigeria has been associated with polygamy [9], loss of moral values and peer pressure [21,22] and lack of family cohesion [6]. Religious affiliation has no bearing on the sexual behavior of adolescents in Nigeria [9].

Duru., *et al.* [2] suggested a decreasing age of initiation and indulgence in sexual activity among adolescents in Nigeria and Idowu., *et al.* [7] opined that adolescents in Nigeria have their sexual debut before the age of 14 years. The youngest age for initiating sexual activity in our study was 5 years old and the mean debut age of sex being 13.42 ± 2.96 years. By age 13 and 16 years, 44.4% and 86.2% respectively, of our respondents who have ever had sex, have had their sexual debut. Mean debut age for sex in this study was consistent with the reports of Idowu., *et al.*⁷, Durowade., *et al.* [23] and Gabriel-Job., *et al.* [24]. It was however lower than that of Ajuwon., *et al.* [25], Olugbenga-Bello., *et al.* [22], and Duru., *et al.* [2], who reported mean debut age for sex in their studies as 15.8 years, 15.2 years and 15.08 years respectively. Johnson and Bassey [26], reported a mean debut age for sex in their study as 11.7 years, this

was lower compared to our finding. The early debut age for sex among adolescents in Nigeria may be as result of Peer pressure, exposure to pornographic content, and rapid urbanization with lax parental supervision² and possibly child sexual abuse. Sexual debut at age 5 years is a public health concern, since these minors may have been deceived into engaging in sex without their consent and those in positions of power need to take a new look at the problem of child sexual exploitation [27].

Adolescence is the most turbulent time in a person's development. It is characterized by risky sexual conduct [6], and while many adolescents transition smoothly, others are presented with a number of circumstances that impede their development and raise their risk of getting life-threatening diseases [4]. Sexual contact with a person who is neither a spouse nor a cohabiting partner is referred to as high risk sexual behavior [6]. Our findings show that participants in our study preferred and indulged most in penile-vaginal sex. In their most recent sexual experience, 69% of our respondents engaged in unprotected sex, and the reason for not using protection varied between males and females. Also, 23% of our respondents who have ever had sex had multiple sexual partners and motivation for engaging in sex varied between males and females. Most male participants in our study had sex for personal satisfaction, while most females cited peer pressure. The result of this study further reveals that 44.4% of our study participant who have ever had sex where deceived into having sex. Early sexual initiation, child sexual abuse, culture, poor parenting, lack of family cohesion and drug abuse are a few factors that influence high-risk sexual behavior of adolescents in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The study's findings indicate that adolescents in secondary schools in Nsukka, Enugu, Nigeria, are beginning to have sexual relationships at younger ages and that risky sexual activity is very common among them.. The development of intervention programs is required to support the promotion of sexual health by identifying risk factors among vulnerable adolescents.

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