
The Imperatives of Sex Education on Adolescents in Nigeria

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Abstract

Sex education consists of instructions on the development of understanding of the physical mental, social, emotional relations as they are affected by adolescent male /female relationships. There had been a high level of pre-marital sex, teenage pregnancy, chronic abortion, child dumping, rape, casual sex, HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), uncontrolled and excessive libido, multi-dating among young people, promiscuity and high level of sexual permissiveness among the adolescents in the Nigerian society. These trends had placed most of our teenagers in state of dilemma, which calls for serious attention. Consequently, these undesirable behaviours have also led to other anti-social vices such as truancy indiscipline and poor academic performance, stealing, prostitution, cultism, frustration, image depreciation, school dropout, disobedience to parents, elders and constituted authorities etc. It is the place of this paper to review and examine the positive impact of sex education on adolescents in the Nigerian society. It also reveals the concept, objectives, content, adolescent awareness of sex education. Recommendations are also made in order to help in giving accurate information about sex education that will help to modify and reduce risky behaviours.

Keywords: Sex Education, Adolescents, Behaviour, HIV/AIDS, STDs, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

In most traditional societies of the world including Nigeria, sex was a taboo especially for the adolescent or the young. It was rarely talked about, but whenever it was absolutely necessary to be discussed, it was done in the most secretive and reluctant manner. No wonder, why even in our modern societies, the issues of sex education still have a lot of misconceptions, which generates a lot of anxieties whenever it is mentioned. It is indeed pertinent to note that the ability of the individual to sail through the adolescent stage of life cycle without hindrances can lead to a meaningful adult life, while mistakes at this stage can leave indelible marks in the life of the adolescent.

An adolescent is a stage of transition from teenage to adult. It is a period of storms and stress, where adolescents experience a lot of challenges during development. This makes sex education necessary.

Akinade and Suleman (2010) defined sex education as a process of acquiring information, forming attitudes and beliefs about sex, sexual identity and sexual behaviour. It

is desired to replace ignorance, fear, secrecy and guilt with knowledge, understanding, openness and rationality. Sex education also embraces sexuality education, gender education, morality education and relationship education.

Action health incorporated (2013), described sex education as a planned process of education that fosters the acquisition of factual information, the formation of positive attitudes, belief and values as well as the development of skills to cope with the biological, psychological, socio—cultural and spiritual aspects of human sexuality, it involves learning about the anatomy, physiology and bio-chemistry of the sexual response system which determines identity, orientations, thoughts and feeling as influenced by values, beliefs, ethics and moral concerns. In other words, sex education is all about developing young people's skills so that they can make informed and responsible choices about their behaviour and feel confident and competent about acting on these choices. Although some people perceive sex education as an education in the mechanics of sex act, while others positively regard it as a holistic learning intended towards improving the growth of the young. From the above assertions, there is an indication that the adolescents have right to sex education partly, because it is a means by which they are helped to protect themselves against abuse, exploitation, unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted disease (STDS) and HIV/AIDS etc.

The Objectives of Sex Education

Adepoju (2015) explained that the objective of sex education is to promote the proper development of personality, sexual well-being and quality of life of the population as a whole and thus implies that its contents cover all aspects of life in society namely economic, political, social, legal, health, cultural and spiritual, making sure that both individual and collective interests work in harmony for the goodness of individuals and the society as a whole.

Agbakwuru and Ekechukwu (2009) also specifically designed several objectives of sex education for the adolescent which are explained below:

To Instill Moral Education in Adolescents/Youths

Moral education is aimed at promoting in the individual a desire to gain the greatest possible knowledge and understanding of whatever kind that will help him/her make autonomous choices that are based on careful and informed thinking about the issues involved. For this to be actualized, moral education counsellors are needed to assist the adolescent in developing their moral responsibility and a belief that moral behaviour is worthwhile.

Helping Adolescents Avoid Getting Involved in Premature or Unwanted Pregnancies

When an adolescent gets pregnant in school, she is forced to terminate her education pursuits whether temporarily or permanently. She also suffers lot of guilt and long run problems of catering for the “unplanned baby. So sexuality education programme is a panacea to the problem of unplanned pregnancies amongst adolescents. Sexual ignorance among adolescents/youths has glaring consequences of making them become fathers and mothers before marriage. Apart from the complication of delivery, many adolescent are tempted to engage in abortion which most often is crudely carried out. In order to avoid this, the adolescent need sexuality counseling.

Preventing Incidence of High Rate of School Dropout

The significance of these objectives can best be appreciated if it is noted that in all public schools, premarital pregnancies are frowned at and viewed as serious abomination. It attracts

serious punishment which usually takes the form of expulsion. So it is therefore hoped that a well-articulated and managed sex education counseling programme would go a long way in helping the students or adolescents to be properly informed about conception and how to avert it.

Helping the Adolescents Avoid Getting Involved in Child Abandonment and Child Abuse

The curtailing of unplanned pregnancies is the surest way of arresting the incidences of child abandonment and child abuse; this can only be facilitated through a sound and effective sex education counseling programme.

Helping Adolescent Gain Sufficient Knowledge about Venereal Diseases

Adolescents' fall victims of sexually transmitted diseases such as gonorrhoea, syphilis, HIV/AIDS, etc. These diseases can cause untold lifelong effects on the victims. Apart from the effects on the health of the victim, the disease can also make them infertile. A strong need can therefore be seen to exist for adolescents to be sufficiently informed about the symptoms, causes and very importantly the effects and ways of preventing these diseases:

- Helping adolescent acquire knowledge on the implicating of abortion on fertility and human health.
- Imparting knowledge of body functions and facts of life to adolescents.
- Helping adolescents gain knowledge of proper sex role in order to get prepared for a satisfying marriage life. This objective was conceived in the light of one guiding principle to successful marriage which is the ability of each of the couples to understand and accept role expectations and responsibilities that are incumbent on them.
- Helping adolescents acquire knowledge of how to maintain proper body hygiene. Menstruation in adolescent girls and nocturnal emission in boys comes to them unprepared. They therefore need information about such things and are prepared.

The Contents of Sex Education

Sexuality education seeks to equip young people with the knowledge they need to determine and enjoy their sexuality physically and emotionally, individual and in relationships. Agbakwuru and Ekechukwu (2009) confirmed that sexuality education programme should be adapted to the age and stage of development of the target group. Below is the essential content, which sexuality education among adolescents should cover.

Gender: Sex education explores gender roles and attributes, understanding perceptions of masculinity and femininity within the family and across the life cycles. Society changing norms and values, manifestations and consequences of gender bias, stereotypes and inequality.

Sexual Citizenship: Young people need knowledge of international human rights and national policies, laws and structures, and the understanding that culture is dynamic. They also need information on available services and resources and how to access them, participation, practices and norms, advocacy choice protection consent and the right to have sex only when one is ripe and ready, that is when one marries that is to say sex outside marriage is unhealthy and could land one into trouble.

Sexual/Reproductive Health: Adolescents need to understand what sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are. Also, they need to know how to prevent them from pregnancy wrong information etc.

Pleasure: Adolescents need to understand that sex should be enjoyable and not forced. They also need to understand that sex is much more than intercourse. They need to understand the biology and emotions behind the human sexual response, gender and pleasure, masturbation, love, lust and relationship, interpersonal communication, etc.

Diversity: Young people need to recognize and understand the range of diversity in life (e.g., faith, culture, ethnicity, socio-economic status, ability/disability, HIV status and sexual orientation).

Relationship: Young people need information on different types of relationships (e.g. family, friends sexual, romantic, etc.). They need to understand emotions, intimacy. They also need to understand rights and unhealthy or coercive relationship.

Menstruation/Nocturnal Emission: Adolescents, both boys and girls are full of anxiety. They have so many questions especially in early puberty. This will enable both girls and boys to be acquainted with the knowledge about menstrual period and nocturnal period.

Adolescents Level of Awareness of Sex Education in Nigeria

Uzoka and Kadurumba (2013) reported that secondary school students in the rural area encounter the problem of pre-marital sex, teenage pregnancy, chronic abortion, child dumping, rape, casual sex, HIV/AIDS, Sexually transmitted diseases (STDS), uncontrolled and excessive libido (sexual desire), multi-dating among young ones, promiscuity and high level of sexual permissiveness, etc. They also added that the above vices contribute to other ills such as truancy, indiscipline and poor academic performance, disobedience to parents, elders and constituted authorities, image depreciation, frustration, cultism, prostitution, armed robbery, school dropout etc.

In recent times, the Nigerian Association for the Promotion of Adolescent Health and Development (NAPAHD) reported that age 10-24 and 36% of Nigeria population are found to be highly vulnerable to antisocial behaviour such as violent crimes, unsafe sexual activities and drug abuse etc.

They also alerted that a hospital based research has shown that 80% of parents with abortion complication are adolescents. This assertion was based on the fact that, over 16 percent of teenage females reported first sexual intercourse by age 15 while 8.3% of boys of these adolescents health dilemma has been attributed to their great lack of information and knowledge about the implications of their populated behaviour on their sexual health and the general welfare of the nation. Furthermore, the Nigerian rural societies, like any other society is be-set by these disabling problems of her citizens which call for various kinds of intervention from government, parents, social workers and counsellors in order to assist citizens particularly adolescents in the rural area to resolve issues that are connected to lack of sex education.

It is an observed that Nigeria's quest for economic, social, political, educational improvement, self-reliance, societal stability, peaceful marital lives amongst others will be thwarted if the above anomalies are allowed to persist.

It is also discovered that majority of adolescent in our society take pleasure in the above undesirable behaviours while some are confused with respect on how to overcome the

dangers of the abnormal behaviour. So there is evidence that in the Nigerian society, that these trend are alarming which calls for serious attention.

It is because of the above abnormal behaviours that this paper is written in order to educate and sensitize the adolescents in the Nigerian society about the positive impact of sex education and to help in giving accurate information about sex education that will help to modify and reduce risky behaviours.

Imperatives of Sex Education for Adolescents in Nigeria

Sex education consists of instructions on the development of an understanding of the physical, mental, social, emotional relations as they are affected by adolescent male and female relationship (Agbakwuru & Ekechukwu, 2009).

It is also about developing young people skills so that they can make informed and responsible choices about their behaviours and feel confident and competent about acting on these choices. This is to say that there is an indication that skills and attitude impacted early in life are more effective and they go with a greater part of life cycles (Nnachi, 2008).

Sex education is considered important to young people because it is a means of helping them to protect themselves against abuse, unwanted pregnancy, exploitation etc. It is an aspect of education mainly concerned with the understanding and controlling of sexual behaviours. It should therefore help people to be aware of all vital information pertaining sexual behaviours and values enabling them to satisfy and control their sexual needs. However, sex education will help to reduce the misconception of what sex is actually not. Thus helping to fight as well as reduce, if not eradicating sexuality problems that pose great threat to Nigerian societies today. Hence, sex education is of paramount importance to the young, old and the society at large.

CONCLUSION

Sex education has been discovered to develop young people's ability to make decisions over their lifetime. It is also seen as an assistance given to those approaching maturity to help them to cope with and survive the challenges they face as they undergo the transitional periods of life which determine the failure or success in life struggles.

There is also a need to give the young people right information for them to be acquainted and get a right orientation in order to regulate wrong feelings and to pay attention to the need of specific groups of young people like young lesbians, gay, bisexual people etc. as well as those who may be out of touch with services and schools.

Formal programmes with elements of sex education have been shown to increase young people's level of knowledge, feeling and orientation about sex. So sex education need to be supported by links to sexual health services, parents, teachers, counsellors and for the adolescent to be effective.

Recommendations

- The introduction, teaching and implementation of sex education into primary and secondary school in Nigeria should be given a paramount priority.
- Establishment of counseling unit in the rural and urban schools and employment of professional counsellors to render efficient services to the adolescents should take front burner.
- An enlightenment programme (campaign on sex education should be executed in order to sensitize the adolescent to be fully involved, for them, to be acquainted with

sex information, objectives, content, its importance with a view to dispelling sex ignorance, wrong ideas or information and myths among them.

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