

# The Influence of Knowledge and Awareness of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) on Change in Sexual Behaviour of Fresh Undergraduates of the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria

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## Abstract

The study examined the influence of knowledge and awareness of sexually transmitted diseases on change in sexual behaviour of fresh undergraduates with a view to providing useful suggestions for positive sexual behaviour of adolescents. The study adopted the descriptive survey design. A sample of 600 fresh undergraduates was selected from the thirteen Faculties in O.A. U.; Ile-Ife, using convenience sampling technique. An adapted instrument titled "Questionnaire on Knowledge, Awareness of STDs and Sexual Behaviour" (QKASSB) was used to collect information from the respondents. The results showed that 93% of the fresh undergraduates had knowledge of the meaning of STDs, 88% of the respondents reported that they had awareness of STDs through media such as radio, television, internet etc. 88% of the respondents considered maturity as the first reason for change in fresh students' sexual behaviours. Finally, the result revealed a significant influence of sexual behaviour of fresh undergraduates before and after gaining admission into university ( $t$ -test = 9.039,  $p < 0.05$ ). It was concluded that fresh undergraduates had better knowledge and got awareness of STD; But their exposure to new school environment had predisposed them to change in sexual behaviours.

**Keywords:** *knowledge; awareness; STDs; sexual behaviour and fresh undergraduates*

## 1. Introduction

The fresh undergraduates of university are in the adolescence stage, which falls between 14 to 22 years of age. It is a critical stage in life because this is the time that a debut is made into sexual maturity and teenagers are prone to exploring their sexuality. Also, it is a period of independence decision when the individual assumes an adult role in the society. Hence, it is the period in which patterns of behaviour which has long-life consequences are formed and become established. The youth, who are students at this period are sexually active and are thus potentially at risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDs and unwanted pregnancy.

In humans, the onset of puberty stage marks the appearance of mature sexual desire. Sexual expression can take the form of masturbation or sex with a partner. Sexual interests among adolescents, as among adults, can vary greatly. This is because the physiological changes in reproductive organs that have occurred in the life of adolescents often serve as a motivating force in their quest to experiment with sex. As a result, some naturally explore and take risks in many aspects of their lives, including sexual relationships. Those who have sex may change partners frequently and have more than one partner in the same time period or engage in unprotected sex. According to Arowojolu, Ilesanmi, Roberts and Okunola (2002), these risky sexual activities may subject the adolescents to STI/HIV and unwanted pregnancies.

In his own contribution, Azuzu (1994) expressed that a normal adolescent of 14 years would have developed a natural feeling that would want him to be touched, loved, and cared for by someone of the opposite sex. Also, Okanlawon (2004) believed that majority of the adolescents of ages 12 years and above have developed a normal

sexual drive which is normally present in all people. During this stage, sexual thoughts, feelings, and behaviours, present throughout life, are often accentuated during adolescence. As a result of the biological and physiological changes, most adolescents will like to experiment their heightened sexual desire. However, in the process of experimentation of their sexual feelings, they resort to engaging in pre-marital sexual intercourse without having adequate knowledge or awareness of the danger inherent in it. This perhaps explained why Abu and Akerele (2006) concluded that adolescents and even the virgins among them may behave in ways that put them at risk for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

Furthermore, Mulwo (2009) argued that students' effort to comprehend the meaning of their sexual feelings and their sexual orientation makes them to seek instant pleasure with little or no thought of the consequences. Many adolescents do not perceive themselves to be at risk of contracting and STDs or other sexual related problems. For instance, some adolescents are of the opinion that sexual intercourse commonly plays a strong role in human bonding, they believed that it is meant to cement their emotional bonds. However, a study by Bhagwanjee (2006) and Breier (2010) found that although students became sexually active at a very early age before joining university, little is known about how they viewed sex and relationships.

In the Nigerian society today, it has been established that people no longer have respect for culture and customs and these are making many of the traditional values to be gradually fading away (Naswen, 2001; Ezeh, 2001; Arumala, 2005 & Eruesegbefe, 2005). According to Alo and Akinde (2010), Nigerian adolescents experience change in sexual behaviour as a result of sexual revolution that came with western culture. One of such traditions that western culture has eroded is the issue of girl virginity. Osisoma (1998) confirmed the attitude of people to the acceptance of pre-marital sex in a loving relationship. Osisoma (1998) lamented that in Nigeria, culture no longer has a grip on the youth as the society seems to be plagued with decayed moral codes and values and so the sense of right and wrong is eroded.

Several surveys that have been carried out in the past by WHO (1993), Owuamanam (1995) and Odewole (2000) have revealed the sexual attitude of adolescents is more liberal than that of adults. As a result of the above point, it has been established that the increase in adolescent pre-marital sexual activity in conjunction with the multiplicity of sexual partners have led to an increase in the incidence of unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) (ARFH, 1997). According to United Nations on AIDs (UNAIDs) (2000), sexually transmitted diseases rank among the five most important causes of healthy productive life loss in developing countries. As at 1999, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimated that the global incidence of new cases of selected curable STDs- Gonorrhoea, Syphilis, Chlamydia and Trichomoniasis was 340 million. The United Nation's (2000) reported that the prevalence of STDs in Nigeria was between adults of ages 15-49. Also, Gueilla & Madise (2007) revealed that prevalent rate was highest among adolescents aged 15-22 years. The above revelation can be supported by the attitude of students to their sexual behaviour. For instance, the reluctance of adolescents to use condoms is another possible explanation for the increase in STDs. Most students believe that they cannot live without sex, and that condoms are obstacles to sexual enjoyment.

Similarly, Owuamanam (1995) in his study of adolescents' sexual behaviour showed that various behaviours such as kissing, breast fondling, embracing, hand holding and sexual intercourse are widely practiced among Nigerian adolescents. In corroborating the above, Odewole (2000), Omotoso (2003) and Slap, Lot, Huang, Daniyan, Zink and Succop (2003) affirmed that these behaviours are also prevalent with the undergraduates. While looking at it from another perspective, Adedipe (2000), Ndu, (2000) and Nnachi, (2003) indicated that Nigerian youths involve themselves in heterosexual activities such as sex abuse, sex offences, sexual misconduct, sexual immorality, sexual promiscuity, and sexual maladjustment. Also, Nnachi (2003) observed that in terms of behavioural problems, sex abuse appeared to be one of the most serious offences committed by children and adolescents. Obiekezie-Ali (2003) supported this stance with a United Nation's (2000) information on reproductive health, which showed that many Nigerian girls are known for starting involvement in active sexual intercourse at the early age of thirteen years.

As a result of this, an adequate knowledge is crucial to clearing misconceptions about sexually transmitted diseases (STD), and in promoting healthy sexual behaviours among adolescents and young adults. Although Baker and Rosenthal (2002) disclosed that accurate knowledge alone is insufficient to produce changes in attitude and behaviour, but it is a necessary component towards a person's developing the motivation to change his or her behaviour. Also, Turner (1989) opined that knowledge of patterns of sexual behaviour is necessary to understand the potential spread of sexually transmitted diseases. In his own view, Kraft (1993) asserted that knowledge is an important prevention factor for sexually transmitted diseases. According to Katie (2005), adolescents get information about STDs mostly from friends, magazines, school and television and movies. But that may not make them

knowledgeable especially towards developing positive behaviour related to STDs. In the opinion of Lahai-Momoh and Ross (1997), knowledge about STDs transmission might influence sexual behaviour among adolescents.

Jayson (2005) acknowledged the economic reason as a contributing factor to the practice of pre marital sex. Apart from this, fresh undergraduates are subjected to the influence of peers or friends, teachers, new environment, freedom from parents and youthful exuberance (Omoteso, Adeniyi & Bada 2010) in their sexual behaviours thereby exposing themselves to unpleasant sexual behaviour. In view of the above points, the knowledge and awareness of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) is crucial to promoting positive sexual behaviours among fresh undergraduates in Nigeria, as this will serve as a precursor against risk of contacting the diseases. The above points therefore suggested that there is need to investigate the knowledge and awareness of STDs on sexual behaviour of students.

## 2. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were to

- investigate the knowledge of fresh undergraduates of the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife about the spread of STDs;
- examine the sources of awareness of STDs by fresh undergraduates;
- investigate the reasons for the change in sexual behaviour of fresh undergraduates; and
- determine the influence of gaining university admission on change in sexual behaviour of fresh undergraduates.

## 3. Research Questions

- 1) What knowledge do fresh undergraduates of the Obafemi Awolowo University have on the spread of STDs?
- 2) What are the sources of awareness of STDs by fresh undergraduates?
- 3) What are the reasons for change in sexual behaviour of fresh undergraduates?

## 4. Research Hypothesis

- 1) There is no significant influence of sexual behaviour on fresh undergraduates before and after gaining admission into the university.

## 5. Methodology

The design adopted for this study was a descriptive survey. All the fresh undergraduates of the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State, constituted the population of the study. A sample of 600 fresh undergraduates was selected from the thirteen Faculties in the school, using convenience sampling technique. The instrument was administered on the fresh undergraduates in the lecture classes to those who showed interest in the questionnaire administration. The information on the knowledge, awareness of STDs and sexual behaviour of students was collected, using an adapted instrument titled "Questionnaire on Knowledge, Awareness of STDs and Sexual Behaviour" (QKASSB). The QKASSB was divided into six sections. Section A comprised four items on personal data such as part or level of student, sex and place of residence. Section B comprised 15 items that sought information on knowledge of students on STDs. Again, section C was made up of 10 items on sources of awareness of STDs. Sections D and E comprised of 12 items each on sexual behaviour of students before and after entering university. Lastly, section F contained 12 items that requested for information on the reasons for the change in sexual behaviour of students. The instrument was dully validated through expert judgment and the reliability test of the instrument was also carried out. Thus the results of the two types of reliability tests indicated that QKASSB yielded Alphas of 0.87 and the Split-half correlational result of 0.92. The results of the reliability tests authenticated that the instrument was appropriate for the study. The data collected were analysed using simple percentage, rank order and t-test statistical methods.

## 6. Results

**Research Question One:** What knowledge do fresh undergraduates of the Obafemi Awolowo University have on the spread of STDs?

In order to answer the research question on the knowledge of fresh undergraduates on the spread of STDs, the information collected was analysed using simple percentage analysis. The result is presented in Table 1 below:

**Table 1.** Simple Percentage Analysis of Knowledge of Means of Transmission of STDs

Knowledge of Means of Transmission of STDs	Yes (%)	No (%)
1. STDs means Sexually Transmitted Diseases	556 (93%)	44 (7%)
<b>STDs can be Contracted Through:</b>		
2. Hugging one's partner	26 (4%)	574(96%)
3. Having unprotected sexual intercourse	541(90%)	59(10%)
4. Kissing one's partner	82(14%)	518(86%)
5. Having sex with unhealthy partner	414(69%)	186(31%)
6. Having sex with same sex partner	291(49%)	309(51%)
7. Engaging in oral sex	257(43%)	347(57%)
8. Having multiple sex partners	484(81%)	116(19%)
9. Blood contact during sex	463(77%)	187(23%)
10. Having sex with STDs infected partner	531(89%)	69(11%)
11. Regular sexual intercourse	292(49%)	308(51%)
12. Occasional sexual intercourse	230(38%)	370(62%)
13. Having sexual intercourse with animals	378(63%)	222(37%)
14. Breast stimulation	149(25%)	451(75%)
15. Rape	432(72%)	168(28%)
16. During masturbation	128(21%)	472(79%)

From Table 1 above, it was revealed that 93% of the fresh undergraduates had knowledge on the meaning of STDs while 7% did not know the meaning. It was shown that 90% of the respondents believed that having unprotected sexual intercourse could lead to STDs. Also, 89% indicated it can be contracted through having sexual intercourse with STDs infected partner, 81% believed it could be through multiple sex partners, 77% indicated that through blood contact during sexual intercourse, 72% indicated it could be contracted through rape and 69% of the respondents revealed that it can be contracted through having sexual intercourse with unhealthy partner.

**Research Question Two:** What are the sources of awareness of STDs by fresh undergraduates of the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife?

In order to answer the research question on the sources of awareness of STDs by fresh undergraduates, the information collected was analysed using rank order. The result is presented in Table 2 below:

**Table 2.** Rank Order Analysis of Sources of Awareness of STDs

Sources of Awareness of STDs	Yes (%)	Rank
1. Through media e.g. Radio, Television, Internet etc.	529 (88%)	1 <sup>st</sup>
2. Reading about it	481(80%)	2 <sup>nd</sup>
3. Health talks, seminars, or workshops on STDs	430(72%)	3 <sup>rd</sup>
4. Peer group/friends	384(64%)	4 <sup>th</sup>
5. Parents or family members' counselling/advice	371(62%)	5 <sup>th</sup>
6. From the hospital	283(47%)	6 <sup>th</sup>
7. From my place of worship	253(42%)	7 <sup>th</sup>
8. Through classroom lectures	228(38%)	8 <sup>th</sup>
9. Through my boy/girlfriend	129(22%)	9 <sup>th</sup>
10. After contacting STDs	83(14%)	10 <sup>th</sup>

Table 2 above shows the sources of awareness of STDs by fresh undergraduates. From the Table, media such as radio, television and internet with 88%. were rated first by the respondents as the sources of awareness of STDs. Reading about it was rated second (80%) and through health talks, seminars or workshops on STDs was rated third with (72%). Lastly, through classroom lectures, my boy/girlfriend and after contacting STDs with 38%, 22% and 14% were rated eighth, ninth and tenth respectively.

**Research Question Three:** What are the reasons for change in sexual behaviour of fresh undergraduates?

In order to answer the research question on the reasons for change in sexual behaviour of fresh undergraduates, the information collected were analysed using rank order. The result is presented in Table 3 below:

**Table 3.** Rank Order of Reasons for Change in Sexual Behaviour of Fresh Undergraduates

Reasons for Change in Sexual Behaviour	Yes (%)	Rank
1. Maturity	525(88%)	1 <sup>st</sup>
2. Exposure to new environment	516(86%)	2 <sup>nd</sup>
3. Influence of friends or peer group	510 (85%)	3 <sup>rd</sup>
4. Social Background	505 (84%)	4 <sup>th</sup>
5. Enjoyment or fun of it	503 (83.8%)	5 <sup>th</sup>
6. Youthful exuberance	485 (81%)	6 <sup>th</sup>
7. Freedom from parents/guardians	476 (79%)	7 <sup>th</sup>
8. To satisfy my partner's demand	473 (78.8%)	8 <sup>th</sup>
9. Change in body structure	461 (76.8%)	9 <sup>th</sup>
10. To gain academic favour	438 (73%)	10 <sup>th</sup>
11. Financial reason	424 (71%)	11 <sup>th</sup>
12. To gain favour from friends	282 (47%)	12 <sup>th</sup>

Table 3 shows the responses of the respondents to change in their sexual behaviour. From above, it was revealed that maturity (88%) was the first reason the respondents claimed responsible for change in sexual behaviour. The second and third reasons as indicated by the respondents were exposure to new environment 86% and influence of friends or peer group 85%. Conversely, to gain academic favour 73%, financial reason 71% and to gain favour from friends were considered as the tenth, eleventh and twelfth reasons respectively.

**Research Hypothesis One:** There is no significant influence on sexual behaviour of fresh undergraduates before and after gaining admission into university.

In order to test the hypothesis on influence of gaining admission into university on sexual behaviour of fresh undergraduates, the information collected was analysed using t-test statistical analysis. The result is presented in Table 4 below:

**Table 4.** T-test Analysis of Influence of Gaining Admission on Sexual Behaviour of Fresh Undergraduates

Variables	N	M	SD	Df	t-test	P
Sexual Behaviour Before Gaining Admission	600	2.2	3.4	599	9.039	* < 0.05
Sexual Behaviour After Gaining Admission	600	3.2	3.5			

\* $p < 0.05$  (Significant)

Table 4 revealed the t-test statistical analysis of influence of gaining admission into university on sexual behaviour of fresh undergraduates. It was shown that mean and standard deviation values of sexual behaviour before gaining admission were 2.2 and 3.4 respectively. The mean and standard deviation values of sexual behaviour after gaining admission were 3.2 and 3.5. Also, the t-test value was 9.039,  $df = 599$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . The t-test value was significant at  $p < .05$  level. This result rejects the stated null hypothesis that there is no significant influence of gaining admission into university on sexual behaviour of fresh undergraduates.

## 7. Discussion

The results that emanated from the knowledge of fresh undergraduates showed that fresh undergraduates demonstrated satisfactory overall knowledge of STDs. For instance, majority of students had understanding of the meaning of STDs. The students believed that STDs could largely be transmitted through having unprotected sexual intercourse, sexual intercourse with STDs infected partner and through multiple sex partners.

It was revealed that fresh undergraduates largely got awareness of STDs through electronic media (such as radio, television and internet), reading about it and through health talks, seminars or workshops on STDs as well as from peer group/friends. The above findings agreed with that of Katie (2005) that the sources of students' awareness of STDs were friends, television, movies and magazines. From all indication, one may tend to agree with the findings because, from the practical experience, adolescents are usually comfortable with advice received from agents such as peers or media such as television, radio and internet than the one given by their significant others or schools.

Again, it showed that maturity, exposure to new environment and influence of friends or peer group were the major reasons for changed in sexual behaviour of fresh undergraduates. The findings was in agreement with Oladele (2004), Adedipe (2000) and Ndu, (2000) that factors such as peers or friends, teachers, new environment, freedom from parents and youthful exuberance are the factors that influenced sexual changes in adolescents. More so, Freud (1964) described this in psychosexual theory as a period of sexual experimentation. The period of sexual energy that adolescents will like to experiment their heightened sexual desire because of the freedom they have. Hence, adolescents develop explorative attitudes, and may be exposed to peer-pressure, youth exuberance in their sexual behaviour.

In conclusion, the results of the hypothesis indicated that there was a significant influence of gaining admission into university on sexual behaviour of students. From the foregone, it could be deduced that fresh undergraduates experienced sexual changes as a result of their entrance into the new system and way of life. This findings upheld the hitherto fact that factors such as peers or friends, teachers, new environment, freedom from parents and youthful exuberance were the factors that influenced sexual changes in adolescents. Considering the mean and standard deviation values obtained above, it could be affirmed that fresh students experienced tremendous change in sexual behaviour as compared to when they were yet to enter into the new environment. For instance, Odewole (2000) and Omoteso (2003) had earlier established that dishonest sexual behaviours were generally prevalent with the undergraduates. However, this contradicted the findings of United Nation's (2000) and Obiekezie-Ali (2003) that many Nigerian girls are known to start involvement in active sex at the early age of thirteen years. Although, there is a disagreement of opinions among the scholars about the above issue, but it can be concluded that most fresh students irrespective of their sex upon entering into higher institutions experience transitional nature to university life and want to adjust to a new social environment. Thus trying to establish a realistic perception of themselves by integrating all they know about themselves. Hence, they now believed that they are matured to establish stable interpersonal relationship with opposite friends, colleagues and mates thereby having sexual awareness of themselves.

## 8. Conclusion

This study had established that most fresh undergraduates of the Obafemi Awololwo University actually had better knowledge and got awareness of STDs through television, movies, friends and magazines. However, it was believed that the acquired knowledge and awareness did not have significant influence on positive sexual behaviour of fresh undergraduates. It is therefore recommended that more enlightenment programmes such as sex education and health talks and shows are needed as remedies against risk of contacting the sexual-related diseases and also to promoting positive sexual behaviours among fresh undergraduates.

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