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INTERNET AND SEXUAL EDUCATION OF TEENAGERS IN OKRIKA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The role of internet in providing sex education to young people cannot be undervalued. The Internet bears the potential to provide huge avenue for sexual education and promote healthy behavior, especially in socioeconomic and ethnic groups with lower levels of access to traditional sources of sexual health information. There are substantial and growing efforts to provide teenagers with sexual health information on the Internet. Web sites such as sexetc.org, iwannaknow.org, and scarleteen.com are intended to provide factual and real-world information about a range of sexual health issues as well as a forum for teenagers to submit in anonymity, questions and participate in discussions. This study therefore investigated influence of internet on sexual education of teenagers in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State. Descriptive survey design was adopted in this study. The population of the study comprised all teenagers in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers state with a total sample of 200 respondents. Two research questions were formulated to guide the study. The findings of the study revealed that teenagers use the internet for acquisition of knowledge to sex and sexuality in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State. The teenagers' responses on usage of internet influence the sexual awareness of teenagers, means that the more teenagers use the internet, the more they are sexually aware. The study finally recommended that special sex educators should be employed in all secondary school both Government and private schools. Sex educators will be able to teach teenagers on the disadvantage of involving in pre-marital sex; this will also help to minimize the high incidence of sexual behavior among teenagers via internet. The Rivers State Government should employ social workers in all the secondary schools in Okrika Local Government Area. The social workers will encourage the teenagers to only make friends with fellow teenagers that have high moral standards.

Keywords: Internet, Sexual Education, Teenage, Pre-Marital Sex.

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INTRODUCTION

The speedy expansion of the Internet has led to an information revolution that is currently influencing nearly all aspects of human race. This development has completely changed the way we access, analyze, use, and disseminate information. This holds true even for areas as delicate and private as sexual health. In the United States, searching for health information became the third most popular online activity for all Internet users in 2010 (Antonella et al., 2017). Many studies have revealed that measureless number of teenagers surf the internet for health relate information. Of particular interest for teenagers is sexual health, an area raising a multitude of questions perceived as embarrassing, controversial, or sensitive. The doorsill for teenagers to search for answers to these questions is lowered by the anonymous nature of the Internet due largely to its easy accessibility and quick availability, and its low cost. A digital divide has been widely described, with socioeconomically disadvantaged subpopulations less likely to have access to the Internet and to use it regularly. However, recent evidence shows that the divide regarding Internet access is closing in industrialized countries, especially among teenagers and young adults. A representative survey in Germany in 2016 showed that across socioeconomic and ethnic divides, 100% of respondents aged 16 to 24 years had Internet access, with 97% stating daily usage (Antonella et al., 2017).

The rise of the internet no doubt, has led to a substantial increase in the number of websites designed and dedicated to providing sexual information. Many new platforms have been created whereby internet users can formulate problems and seek solutions on sex related issues. Internet has made the acquisition of sexual information easy and cheap, thereby exposing teenagers to various websites where they access sexual information in their comfort zones. Lou and Shah (2006) stated that providing sex education to students through the internet was found feasible and effective. They further stressed that students' reproductive health knowledge effectively influence and change their attitudes towards sex related issues in terms of being less liberal towards sex and more favorable to providing services to unmarried young people. Thus, the internet offers an important untapped potential for providing sex education to teenagers and young people in Nigeria, and in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers state in particular.

Sexuality is a sexual act, individual's attitude and behavior on all sexual issues. Akinade (2020) stressed that sexuality encompasses our entire life, values, norms, culture, gender and religion, how people perceive their bodies, sexual orientation and behavior, reproduction and process of procreation. It includes individual's preferences bout sexual acts such as masturbation, kissing, or sexual intercourse and sexual behavior such as dressing in certain ways, sexual identity and sexual orientation. Teenagers can be exposed to a wide range of attitudes and beliefs in relation to sex and sexuality via the internet. Teenagers can be very interested in the moral and cultural frameworks that bind sex and sexuality. They often welcome opportunities to engage in conversation on topical issues like abortion, sex before marriage, contraception and birth control. They often surf the internet in search of information related to sex and sexuality.

Sexual education is the lifelong process of acquiring information and forming attitudes, values and beliefs about sex, sexual identity, sexual behaviors, relationships and intimacy (Akinade, 2020). It is also about developing young people's skills such that they may make informed choice about their behavior and feel confident and competent about acting on these choices. It is also a term used to describe education about human sexual anatomy, sexual reproduction, and reproductive health, emotional relationships and other aspects of human sexual behavior.

Sexual education is also often a component of community-based programmes targeting pregnancy prevention, substance abuse prevention, violence reduction, youth

development or reproductive health service. It should lead to finding out what young people know about sex. Youth can add on their existing knowledge and correct erroneous information. It is designed to replace ignorance, fear, secrecy and guilt with knowledge, understanding, openness and reality. The role of internet in providing sex education to young people cannot be undervalued. The Internet bears the potential to provide huge avenue for sexual education and promote healthy behavior, especially in socioeconomic and ethnic groups with lower levels of access to traditional sources of sexual health information. However, reputable sexual health websites with sound content coexist with a vast array of websites presenting incorrect or incomplete information that can misinform and might ultimately lead to unhealthy sexual behaviour such as indiscriminate sexual experimentation and sexual deviations. In the competitive market for online patronage, user centricity has been suggested as an important advantage. Providers of sexual education, such as public health agencies, the school, and non-governmental organizations should strive to offer online resources that closely match the requirements and preferences of their target population.

Majority of teenagers (93%) are users of the Internet, including approximately three quarters who have a high-speed connection at home (Zhao, 2009 in Jones & Ann, 2011). Data from 2006 show that more than one in four teenagers looked for health, dieting, or physical fitness information online (Lenhart et al., 2007). A study of teenagers and young adults (18–29 years old) showed similarly high levels of Internet use and of those using the Internet, 72% had gone online for health or medical information (Fox & Jones, 2009).

There are substantial and growing efforts to provide teenagers with sexual health information on the Internet. Web sites such as sexetc.org, iwannaknow.org, and scarleteen.com are intended to provide factual and real-world information about a range of sexual health issues as well as a forum for teenagers to submit in anonymity, questions and participate in discussions. Two small-scale and somewhat dated studies found that approximately one in four young adults used the Internet to find information about sex (Borzekowski & Rickert, 2001; Rideout, 2001 in Jones & Ann, 2011). A study of 412 10th graders in 2000 found that the Internet was teenagers' most common source of information about birth control and sex, although friends and parents were identified as more valuable sources (Borzekowski & Rickert, 2001b). Yet, despite the rapid growth in teenagers' use of the Internet, recent evidence has lagged about the ways that teenagers use, view, and trust the Internet as a sexual health information source, particularly in relation to more traditional sources such as family, friends, and school.

To date, evidence on teenagers' health website preferences is scarce and exclusively qualitative. The sole study focusing specifically on teenagers' evaluation of a sexual health website found that interviewees frequently disliked text-heavy style and appreciated interactive features and “real-life stories” from other teenagers (McCarthy et al., 2012). A study on adolescents' evaluation of a general health website yielded similar results (Franck, & Noble, 2007). A study on adolescents' website preferences, albeit with a mental health focus, concluded that interviewees were highly critical of website publisher credibility, and that academically disadvantaged participants in particular preferred low text density (Havas et al., 2011).

The internet influences on sexual awareness were first reported in a sex education newsletter (Asekun-Olarinmoye et al., 2014). The internet is the central of computer arbitrated communication. It connects millions of computer networks, providing an implausible collection of information for teenagers to access and because of its fluid capacities, the internet has more up-to-date information than books. Teenagers throughout the world are increasingly using the internet, despite considerable disparity in use in different countries around the world and in socioeconomic groups. The key concern about the health of young people is the extent to which they have access to resources that promote their

development. This is strongly linked to early concerns about the way teenagers use the internet which is suspected to have negative side-effects (Kraut et al., 1998). Other concerns as documented by Fleming et al., (2006) included teenagers' exposure to inappropriate content. One major emerging worrisome dimension in cyberspace is pornography in its various guises the explosion and mainstreaming of which had reportedly influenced teenagers' culture and development in unparalleled and various ways.

In addition, Flood (2007) has documented that Internet-enabled devices have broadly allowed people of all ages to encounter, consume, create, and dispense sexually explicit content with growing evidence that these phenomena are increasingly common among teenagers worldwide. This has made intentional or accidental viewing of pornographic materials online to be on the increase. Although empirical data about Internet pornography and its impact on the life of the teeming youth and children in Nigeria are not readily available, the fact that 32% of Internet users in Nigeria are teenagers of age range 7 to 18 years is an important fact that is worthy of note. Fears are rife in some sectors about the possible negative consequences, obnoxious and uncensored Internet contents will have on the psychosocial well-being of varying categories of users and especially children and teenagers in Nigeria (Longe et al., 2007).

Statement of the Problem

Despite the rising level of internet usage particularly among teenagers in Nigeria, few studies have examined the effects that sites with explicit sexual contents may have especially on the sexual knowledge of teenagers. The internet has greatly contributed in the high rate of sexual knowledge among teenagers in Nigeria, resulting to the moral deterioration of the Nigeria society and consequently leading to unwanted pregnancies, abortions, Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs), death resulting from sexual activities, school dropout, poor attendance, poor academic performance or achievement, poor health conditions, permanent deformity, self-guilt, isolation, stigmatization, despair or depression, poor self-concept, negative self-image, teenage motherhood, single parenting, premarital sex among teenagers.

Different studies have been carried out on the sex education of teenagers, risk associated with internet usage among teenagers, how to prevent negative usage of the internet among teenagers, consequences of negative usage of internet among teenagers, seeking for sex entertainment and information. But to the best knowledge of the researcher, not much is known about internet and sexual education of teenagers in Okrika Local Government Area in Rivers State. It is therefore against this backdrop that the researcher seeks to find out how internet influence sexual education of teenagers in the study area.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Mitchell et al. (2007) reported in their study that the widespread use of the internet among teenagers is the cause of high online risks which can lead to the teenagers' pregnancy. Madden et al. (2013) found through their study that online victimization such as sexual harassment among teenage students is associated with the high level of internet usage among teenage students. They also observed that as the number of teenage students using the internet increases, the risk in them becoming involved in unsavory (sexual) activities does likewise, so that an appropriate and safe internet usage should be determined for them.

Martin (2010) in his study found the extent to which the internet affects the sexual education of teenagers. What is important is that the risk expands to the teenagers themselves, as they spend increasingly long hours on the internet, sending emails, using social media, creating sexual relationships, downloading sexual firms, seeking for sexual entertainment and

sexual information. He further stated that being on the internet for all these activities affects teenager's academic performance, social life and their health as well. Borzekowski et al. (2003) and Gray et al. (2005) in their different studies have showed that the vast majority of teenagers seek for sexual information through the internet. Of particular interest for teenagers is sexual awareness, an area raising a multitude of questions perceived as embarrassing, controversial, or sensitive (Borzekowski & Rickert, 2001; Skinner et al., 2003; Ralph et al., 2011; Selkie et al., 2011; Racey et al., 2016).

Kanuga, and Rosenfeld (2004) and Madden et al. (2016) noted in their various studies that reputable sexual health websites with sound content coexist with a vast array of websites presenting incorrect or incomplete information that can misinform and might ultimately lead to unhealthy sexual behaviour. In the competitive market for online patronage, user centricity has been suggested as an important advantage (van Gemert-Pijnen et al., 2011). Providers of sexual information and sexual entertainment, should strive to offer online resources that closely match the requirements and preferences of their target population. From the study of Peter and Valkenburg (2006) and that of Löfgren-Mårtenson and Månsson (2010), one major emerging worrisome dimension in internet is pornography in its various guises the explosion and mainstreaming of which had reportedly influenced teenagers' culture and development in unparalleled and various ways.

In addition, Häggström-Nordin et al. (2006) and Flood et al. (2007) in their various studies had documented that internet-enabled devices have broadly allowed teenagers to encounter, consume, create, and dispense sexually explicit content with growing evidence that these phenomena are increasingly common among them worldwide. This has made intentional or accidental viewing of pornographic materials online to be on the increase among teenagers. Although empirical data about internet pornography and its impact on the life of the teeming youth and children in Nigeria are not readily available, the fact that 32% of internet users in Nigeria are teenagers of age range 13 to 18 years is an important fact that is worthy of note. Fears are rife in some sectors about the possible negative consequences, obnoxious and uncensored internet contents will have on the psychosocial well-being of varying categories of users and especially teenagers in Nigeria (Longe et al., 2007).

Objectives of the Study

The main focus of this study is to investigate the influence of internet on sexual education of teenagers in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers state, Nigeria. In specific terms the study intends to:

- Examine if gender influences teenagers' use of internet for sexual education
- Investigate how socio-economic influences teenagers' use of internet for sexual education

Research Questions

- To what extent does internet influence sexual education of teenagers in based on gender
- To what extent does internet influence sexual education of teenagers based on socioeconomic status?

METHODS

The study adopted descriptive survey design to investigate the role of internet in sexual education of teenagers in Okrika Local Government Area, Rivers State. Okwo and Walson (2016) defined a descriptive survey design as a design concerned with describing events as they are without any manipulation of what caused the event or what is being observed. Ajoku (2006) posit that descriptive research design describes “what is” by recording, analyzing and interpreting conditions that exist. The process involves the collection of data in order to test hypotheses or answer research questions generated in the study. The research design is appropriate for the study as it investigated the role of internet in sexual education of teenagers in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State.

The population of the study consisted of all the teenagers in Okrika Local Local Government Area, Rivers State. A stratified random sampling technique was adopted in selecting the sample. To carry out the random sampling technique, the ballot system was used with the inscription “S” for selected and “N” for not selected. The sample size of the study was 240 respondents (teenagers).

The instrument for data collection was a self-developed 12 item instrument. It was titled Internet and sexual Education Questionnaire (ISEQ). The ISEQ was used to get the desired information from the respondents (teenagers). The instrument was divided into two sections (A and B). Section A is called demographic data. While section B consisted of questions that elicited responses from the respondent’s base on their perceptions, feelings and opinion.

The designed instrument was validated by three experts from the Department of Sociology who vetted and made corrections. These corrections were incorporated and they contributed immensely in structuring the final draft of the instrument. To determine the reliability of the instrument, a test-retest technique was used. The researcher visited and administered the same instrument to a sample of 25 teenagers in Okrika Local Government Area which is outside the sample respondents. A reliability coefficient of 0.82 was established using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The instrument was therefore, judged as dependable for the study. Means rating was used to answer the research questions.

Research Question One: To what extent does internet influence sexual education of teenagers based on gender?

Internet and sexual education of teenagers based on gender

S/N	ITEMS	Male (n=128)		Female (n=112)	
		X	SD	X	SD
1.	Some of my classmates use the internet for pornography.	3.58	0.94	2.92	0.7
2.	There is no relationship between the usage of Internet and my sexual awareness.	2.18	0.73	2.76	0.82
3.	The use of the internet has improved my sexual knowledge.	2.91	0.84	3.02	0.730
4.	Sexual awareness interventions via the internet can prevent or reduce my risk of pregnancy, HIV, and STIs.	2.61	0.91	22.52	0.86
5.	The use of internet has exposed me to different styles of having sex.	3.57	0.94	3.01	0.864
6.	I learned how to kiss through internet usage.	3.24	0.9	2.68	0.866

The data showed that items 1-6 in table 1 are well above the cut-off point of 2.50. This indicates that both male and female teenagers use the internet for pornography, there is relationship between the usage of Internet and teenagers sexual knowledge, the use of the internet improves teenagers sexual knowledge, sexual awareness interventions via the internet can prevent or reduce teenagers risk of pregnancy, HIV, and STIs, the use of internet

exposes teenagers to different styles of having sex, teenagers learned how to kiss through internet usage, teenagers became bold to talk to the opposite sex through internet usage, teenagers learnt how to use stimulants through internet, Internet usage has taught so many teenagers how to hug their partner, teenagers learned the names of difference sex stimulants through internet, watching pornographic films help teenagers to be aroused before having sex, teenagers learned how to enjoy sex by watching pornographic films on the internet, teenagers become more sexually aroused after watching love movies on internet, teenagers learned how to exchange love messages by watching love movies on internet and that watching love movies on the internet has taught teenagers how to romance their partner in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State. This means that the usage of internet influences the sexual education of teenagers Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Research Question Two

To what extent does internet influence sexual education among teenagers based on socio economic status.

Internet and Sexual education among teenagers based on socio economic status.

S/N	ITEMS	LSES (n=110)		HSES (n=130)	
		X	SD	X	SD
1.	I became bold to talk to the opposite sex through internet usage.	2.48	0.89	3.2	0.90
2.	I learnt how to use stimulants through internet.	2.23	0.755	3.08	0.886
3.	Internet usage has taught me how to hug my partner.	2.54	0.33	2.5	0.87
4.	I learned the names of difference sex stimulants through internet.	2.47	0.866	2.88	0.532
5.	Watching pornographic films help me to be aroused before having sex.	2.39	0.098	2.65	0.87
6.	I learned how to enjoy sex by watching pornographic films on the internet.	2.36	0.099	2.53	0.089

The data showed that items for low socio-economic status teenagers have mean below the cut-off point of 2.50. This indicates that teenagers from high socioeconomic status have more access to internet and uses it to acquire sexual knowledge just more than their low socioeconomic status counterparts. To this end, internet influences sexual education of teenagers on the basis of their social class in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers state.

DISCUSSION

The results of the study indicated that teenagers use the internet for acquisition of knowledge to sex and sexuality in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State. The teenagers' responses on usage of internet influence the sexual awareness of teenagers, means that the more teenagers use the internet, the more they are sexually aware. The above result is because some teenagers use the internet for pornography, there is relationship between the usage of Internet and teenagers sexual awareness, the use of the internet improves teenagers sexual knowledge, sexual awareness interventions via the internet can prevent or reduce teenagers risk of pregnancy, HIV, and STIs, the use of internet exposes teenagers to different styles of having sex, teenagers learned how to kiss through internet usage, teenagers became bold to talk to the opposite sex through internet usage, teenagers learnt how to use stimulants through internet. Internet usage has taught so many teenagers how to hug their partner and teenagers learned the names of difference sex stimulants through internet, watching

pornographic films help teenagers to be aroused before having sex, teenagers learned how to enjoy sex by watching pornographic films on the internet, teenagers become more sexually aroused after watching love movies on internet, teenagers learned how to exchange love messages by watching love movies on internet and that watching love movies on the internet has taught teenagers how to romance their partner. This result is in agreement with Fleming et al. (2006) who observed that teenagers use the cyberspace for pornography. This result is also supported by Longe et al. (2007) who found that the usage of the internet among teenagers will lead to possible negative consequences, obnoxious and uncensored internet contents will have on the psychosocial well-being of varying categories.

From the analysis of data, table 2 revealed that there is a significant difference between teenagers who are from low and high socio-economic background on their sexual awareness via internet in Toru Local Government in Rivers State. The response from the teenage respondents is because teenagers from high socio-economic background in Okrika Toru Local Government in Rivers State have more access to internet facilities where they can browse from and also view sexual activities via the internet than those from low socio-economic background. These findings could equally mean that more teenage students from rich parents in Okrika Toru Local Government in Rivers State have better smart phone that enables them get sexual information at the tip of their fingers than those from parents that are not rich. This result is in agreement with Kingsley (2017) who acknowledges a significant difference between teenagers from low socio-economic background and those from high socio-economic background on their sexual awareness based on the use of internet teenagers. This result is in agreement with Sampson (2018) that students in higher class use the internet for seeking for sexual knowledge than those in lower classes.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher made the following recommendations.

- Special sex educators should be employed in all secondary school both Government and private schools. Sex educators will be able to teach teenagers on the disadvantage of involving in pre-marital sex; this will also help to minimize the high incidence of sexual behaviour among teenagers via internet.
- The Rivers State Government should employ guidance counselors in all the secondary schools in Okrika Local Government Area. The counsellors will be able to counsel teenagers on how to use sex information via the internet.
- Social workers should be employed in the secondary schools in Okrika Local Government Area to help in enlightening the teenagers on the positive assuage of the internet for sexual education. The social workers will encourage the teenagers to only make friends with follow teenagers that have high moral standard.
- The Rivers State Government, Non-governmental Organizations, and Local Government Authorities should organize seminar on the best way teenagers could use the internet.
- Parents/guardians should monitor their wards to checkmate the site they visit in surfing the internet.

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