

An Indepth Analysis of Pattern of Sexual Behaviour of Young Women Road Hawkers in Nigeria

¹Wale Adesina, ²Femi Tinuola and ²Iyaji Adejoh

¹Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ado Ekiti, Nigeria,

²Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, Kogi State University, Anyigba, Nigeria

Abstract: Hawking among young women is a common phenomenon in most countries of the sub-Saharan Africa including Nigeria and it has been a source of concern to the stakeholders in socio-economic conditions of women. This descriptive survey examines the patterns of sexual behaviour among young women hawkers in Igaland, North central Nigeria. Six hundred young women, selected on purposive sampling technique, who were engaged in hawking along a Federal road stretch of about 200 km in Igalaland participated in the study through a self administered structured questionnaire. Data were coded and analysed using SPSS computer package. Findings revealed risky sexual activity is prevalent among women hawkers and high rate of sexual networking, putting them at high risks of unintended pregnancies, abortion and infection with Sexually Transmitted Infection including HIV/AIDS. Factors indicated to have been responsible for high sexual networking; low age at first sexual intercourse and low age at marriage reported among the hawkers are socio-cultural and economic specific. Youth empowerment in form of job opportunities and vocational skills, financial support for self employment and sexual education is recommended to improve their economic conditions and ensure a healthy sexual living.

Key words: Sexuality, hawking, behavior, partner

INTRODUCTION

Despite the general recognition that the sexual practices of people especially among the youths places them on the high risks of acquiring sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS and unintended pregnancies, advances in mapping their sexual behavior have been slow. Increasingly, during the past two decades, demographers and public health specialists have emphasized the importance of research on risky behavior and vulnerability of young people with regards to reproductive health. A large number of studies have examined general aspect of people sexual and reproductive health including knowledge, attitude and risky behavior. Few studies have focused on the sexual behavior of young people who hawk. A consequence relatively, little is known about hawkers behavior and about how to incorporate such knowledge into program aimed at improving reproductive health of young people. In fact, they comparatively lack of attention paid to this area of research represent a miss opportunity for reducing the number of unintended pregnancies and curtailing the HIV pandemic.

The circumstances in which first sexual intercourse occur-age, use of protection, partners characteristics and

types of relationship-have been shown to be important makers for the long time well being of young people with regard to their reproductive health, subsequent sexual behavior and psychological welfare (Bongon and Kontula, 1998). Most demographic and health belief behavioral model focus on rational individual decision making. This model typically treats risky sexual behavior as being a function of individuals subjective values for which motivations and perception of risks are central. The nature of the relationship between partners is also a key element for understanding sexual behavior. Different types of relationship-committed young couples, casual partners who engage in spontaneous sexual experimentation and client. Sex worker arrangement are characterized by different level of emotional involvement and communication and by different motivations, attitudes and perceptions of risks and rewards of sexual decision (Juarez and Castro, 2003).

Partnerships are formed and exits within specific environment and contextual factors influence the type of relationships that occurs and both partners attitude, motivation, decision and capacity to act. Prevailing gender roles and the power relations they incur are central to the understanding of dynamics of partnership formation and to young people decision to have

intercourse and to use protection. In societies like Nigeria, which are characterized by traditional male values that places great emphasis on expression and virility, men tends to take the lead in initiating sex and deciding on whether to use protection (Hills *et al.*, 2004). Boys and girls often have dissimilar goals and expectation which regards to sexual relation. For most of the boys in Nigeria, early sexual experiences are the norms and they seek sexual relation to affirm their manhood to peers as well as to satisfy their curiosity. Girls may instead feel stronger social and fairly pressures to delay first sexual intercourse and place greater emphasis on sexual relations that occur within a stable relationship.

The nature of parents' relationship with their children-their success in transmitting social and religious values, their ability and willingness to guide and oversee their activities also influence the sexual behavior of the young people. In fact, contradicting messages about morality and desirability of pre marital sex are not unique to Nigeria, where poverty, inequality and unequal gender dynamics create additional pressures to young people, especially, young women to rely on sexual relationship to access resources (Tinuola, 2003). As a result of the prevailing economic circumstances in Nigeria, most young people take to hawking to meeting the basic necessities of life which their parents could not afford. The nature of the hawking exposes them to risky sexual behavior that makes them vulnerable to illicit sexual behavior at early age, incidences of unintended pregnancies, abortion and complications arising from adolescents' child birth.

This main thrust of this study is to examine the sexual behavior of young people involved in hawking with a view to unearthing the role social and economic factors in sex and the chances of being exposed to risky sexual behavior most especially in this era, when HIV/AIDS is ravaging a greater proportion of the population of people in Nigeria.

The main objective of this study is to examine the pattern of sexual behavior of young women, who are engaged in hawking business along Okene-Itobe-Ofu-Idah junction-Ochadamu-Anyigba and Ankpa Federal road stretching over 160 km in Kogi State Nigeria.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Igala, the study area, the largest ethnic group in Kogi State and the ninth largest ethnic group in Nigeria, occupy north central part of Nigeria with a numerical strength of about 1 million people (Smith, 2003). The notable settlements in Igala land are Idah, Ankpa, Anyigba (the State University town), Dekina and Itobe spread over 24 local council areas in Kogi State. The language of communication is Igala and older generations among the Igalas are noticeable with 3 stripes tribal marks

on the cheek. The paramount ruler is the Attah of Igala resident in Idah. There are three levels of road classifications based on the government agencies responsible for the maintenance. There are Federal, State and Local government roads. A major Federal road linking Igala land from the federal capital territory is from Okene through Itobe across river Niger connecting the Igala kingdom. This study derives its sample from the hawkers along the road from Okene-Itobe-Ofu-Idah junction-Anyigba and Ankpa. At each of the junctions are group of young women who engage in one form of hawking business or the other. The validity of the instrument of data collection was carried out by two Sociologists drawn from the Department of Sociology in Kogi State University and Benue State University respectively. A reliability test was conducted on the instrument arriving at 0.89 confidence level with the use of pearson product moment correlation Co-efficient. During the administration of the instrument, the oral consent of the respondents were obtained in all the respective study locations.

In all, a sample of 600 women between age 15-30 years were simple randomly selected from 6 road junctions, identified on the basis of systematic random sampling. Hundred respondents were selected from each of the junctions to respond to a structured questionnaire which contains both open and closed ended questions on issues bordering on their sexual behavior. Data were collected, collated and analysed with the use of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences in simple percentage and hypotheses tested with the use of chi square technique.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sample characteristics: Eight percent of the samples were between 10-13 years, 28% between 14-17 years, 24% between 18-21 years, 27% between 22-25 years and 12% were above 25 years. The mean age of the respondents was 19.4 years. Majority of the hawkers were within adolescents age, consequently, empowerment programs on youths can address some of the problems of hawkers in Kogi State. Out of 25%, who were in school, 37% were in junior classes, while the remaining were in senior secondary schools. Those in schools attended either morning or evening classes but were actively involved in hawking when out of school.

Thirty percent were had and resided with both parents, 23% had only father, 6% had only mother, the remaining were orphans. Those who reportedly had parents indicated that 90% of the fathers were peasant farmers and 85% of mothers were petty traders. The three major religions were reported by the sample, Christianity, Islam and Traditional. Half of the sample size was Christian, 43% Muslims while just 2% were adherents of African Traditional Religion.

A little above half (51%) have been engaged in hawking job in less than 4 years, 9% have worked for 4 years while the remaining 40% have been in the hawking business for over four years. The average number of years, the total sample has engaged in hawking is 4.3 years. An overwhelming majority (78%) engaged in hawking business there was no person to assist them and there was the need for them to earn living to meeting the challenges of basic necessities of food, clothing and shelter. Most of the orphans live in rented apartment irrespective of their age. Those in school attended either morning or afternoon classes, meeting the need of school uniform, fees and books was their major challenge of hawking.

A proportion of 12% of the sample who had left secondary school engaged in hawking for lack of government paid jobs and they could not raise money for tangible business, in this case, they engage in hawking to make ends meet and face the challenges of livelihood. On earnings from hawking, 72% earn less than 500 Naira daily, while the remaining 28% earn 500 Naira and above as income. The average income was found at N540 equivalent of USD 4.5 daily. The proceeds per day, however, respondents indicated depends on the number of vehicles that patronize the road, the purchasing power of the passengers and the hotness of the climate that facilitate the purchase of cold drinks.

On hours spent on hawking daily, half of the hawkers spent on-quarter a day, 1/6th spent 7 h and remaining spent a minimum of 8 h daily on hawking. 85% sell a combination of cold soft drinks of various varieties, with snacks made of different products. The remaining 15% only specialize in groundnut and plantain chips. However, the quantity of product displayed for sale depends on the financial capacity of the seller and the rate of turn over. One-third of the sample got into the job by self determination, when all other avenues of survival proved abortive. Thirty seven percent were introduced into hawking business by parents and relatives as a means of livelihood while 28% joined hawking business through encouragement from friends, who mentored them at the initial stage of the trade. However, 79% would quit the job for any better offer while the remaining will not quit even if there is alternative for them.

Patterns of sexual behavior: A little above 4/5th (83%) of the hawkers indicated were sexually active and have the feelings of sexual behaviour, about 77% have engaged in sex with their boy friends to satisfy their sexual org. Only 17% have not engaged in sex. The number of sexual partners varies from one individual to the other, but data show that a greater proportion of the hawkers were engaged in multiple sexual partnership, which has the propensity to increase the chains of sexual networking.

54% had a minimum of two sexual partners and the remaining 46% had only one sexual partner. The general argument rests on the principle of alternating partners in circumstances when there is absence of one partner, quarrel and the unpreparedness of the partners at the time of sexual desires. This finding confirms the initial report that heterosexual relationship is rampant among youths of the current generation.

This could have serious implications on the sexual health on women in the era where a greater proportion of Africa population is ravaged by the epidemics of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections, although this depends on the correct and persistence use of protective measures. Multiple sexual partnerships has been found to have increased the spread of HIV/AIDS in the sub-Saharan Africa, it increases and makes the chains of sexual networking complex. Previous research found that multiple sexual partnerships are common in Nigeria with backings from some sexual norms and values that are entrenched in the social structure.

The age at which one engages in sex is determinant of the nature, form of sex and the utilization of any family planning method for effective sexual health. It also influences the extent to which sexual health and rights can be guaranteed, apart from the reproductive health performance, precursored by fecundity. Thirty-six percent of the hawkers engaged in sex at age less than 14 years, about half (49%) had their first sexual experience at age between 14-17 years. The adolescence stage (10-17 years), is a period of many challenges of development to adulthood. Sexuality during adolescents have been identified and found common in most parts of Nigeria due to prevailing unfavorable socio-economic circumstances. The above finding corroborates the propositions, of the protagonists of rational adaptation theory that a proportion of young women engage in sex for economic reasons. Apart from the identified social and cultural sexual norms support supporting early marriages, the economic downturn witness by the citizens has further strengthened sexuality for economic and financial reasons. Teenage pregnancies have also been reportedly high most especially among adolescents where there is low level of contraceptives use. In some rural communities in southwest Nigeria, the incidences of adolescents' motherhood have increased in recent years (Tinoula, 2004). Just 15% had their first sexual experience at age 18-25 years. This data found the mean age at first sexual experience at 15 years. The results show dwindling years at first sex. Previous studies reported 17 and 16 years in some parts of southwest Nigeria respectively (Tinoula, 2004). The current data show a reduction by 1 year of the mean age at first sex.

At first experience of sex, 26% of respondents felt happy, 68% felt sad and embarrassed, 6% had guilty

conscience. Feeling sad and embarrassed at first sex cannot be discussed in isolation from factors such as low age, place of sex and nature of sex experience by the adolescent hawkers. Thirty-five percent had their first sex with boyfriends who were of hawking profession, artisans and motor cycle riders, who reportedly gave them financial inducements, 31% had first sex with their classmates in school, while 13% had their first sex with their teachers in schools who they reportedly induced them with marks and class promotion.

Noticeable in the data is that first sex was associated with financial, economic, marks and promotion inducement. These inducements were described as the necessity for survival, the reason why they were exchanged for sex. Those (52%), who could guess the age of their first sexual partner, reported their mean age of their first sexual partner at 28 years of age and 59% were no longer interested in having sex with the first sexual partner.

Responses on how frequently per week they had sex show that about one-third sexual intercourse more than thrice weekly while 41% reportedly engaged sex twice weekly and the remaining sex once per week. The mean number of times respondents had weekly sex was twice. This, They, reportedly depend on various factors such frequency of visit to sex partners, exchange of inducements and those in school reported higher rounds of sex with classmates and teachers at examination periods. Over half (55%) described sex as normal and part of the physiological needs of women because of the anticipated benefits and the feeling of maturity self actualization. An overwhelming proportion (86%) experienced sex in the past one week before the survey, inclusive of 23% who had engaged sex in the current week of this survey.

The nature of the sexual activity, i.e., whether sex is protected or not, is a determinant of pregnancy in a group where 50% have missed at least two menstrual cycle period. Anytime the menstruation is missing, the methodology of dealing with the problem is important because of the likely consequences on the sexual and reproductive health life. At pregnancy, adolescents are left to take decisions whether to leave the pregnancy or abort. In case, abortion is preferred, the termination of the pregnancy is faced with challenges of social and legal constraints in Nigeria where abortion is illegal. Just 60% of those who reportedly have missed the menstrual period at least had children. This may translates that all other factors held constraint, 60 out every 100 pregnancies will result in child birth. With absolute assumption that missing menstruation result pregnancies, 4 out of 10 pregnancies among adolescent hawkers will result in

abortion. A further research may found out the choice of outlets for carrying out these abortions considering the illegal status of abortion in Nigeria.

Correct and persistent use of condom offer dual protection from unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS. Its use in the sub-Saharan Africa has faced persistent challenges from the socio-cultural context. The perception about condom influences its use among young women in Nigeria (Tinuola, 2006). In the context of this study, condom use is measured by the ability of the females to compel their male sexual partner to use condom. Most respondents reported that they have never seen female condom. Fifty-two percent used condom, while 48% did not use condom during sex.

Factors reported by the adolescents hawkers to have influenced their use of condom include, availability during sex, causal sex and conviction of the male sexual partner and perceived efficacy of condom use. Even with the above report on condom use, 60% had no fear of getting pregnant. In case pregnancy occurs, 1/3rd will go into marriage and keep the pregnancy till child birth. The decision to keep the pregnancy is borne out of socio-legal constraints on abortion in Nigeria. A proportion fears the challenge of allowing quacks to perform abortion procedures on them because of their anticipated consequences on the sexual and reproductive health life. A little above half (53%) will abort the pregnancies irrespective of the status of abortion in Nigeria. The percent that opted for abortion is significant enough to trigger action towards legalization of abortion in Nigeria.

An over whelming proportion (82%) were aware that they could contact STIS including HIV/AIDS through unprotected sexual intercourse. Eighteen percent doubted the existence of HIV/AIDS, not even contracting it. Sixty percent were aware of the existence of HIV through news and print media i.e program on radio, television and print media, 23% got awareness through friends and 16% through parents. For the avoidance of infections during sexual intercourse, 58% prefer to compel their boy friends to use condom because femidom is very scarce and costly when found. Those who have used femidom complained of complex procedures of insertion and the risks of being forced in the vagina during intercourse. Just 8% preached abstinence, 15% preferred faithfulness to one uninfected partner.

Age and hawking: The alternate hypothesis states that age is significantly related with hawking business. The result of the chi-square $\chi^2_c = 66.4$ with a degree of freedom $df(v) = 15$ and tested at 0.05 level of significance, $\chi^2_t = 47.6$, $\chi^2_c > \chi^2_t$, indicating that an individual will

engage in hawking is significantly related with his age, the finding is further confirmed by data on age, indicating that 88% of the total hawkers were aged 25 and below. There is lower tendency that those older than 25 years will engage in hawking and vice versa, all other factors held constant. The propensity that those older than 25 years of age will go into hawking is low.

Age and fear of getting pregnant: The alternate hypothesis states that age at first intercourse is significantly related with the fear of getting pregnant. The result of cross tabulation obtained from chi-square show that $\chi^2_c = 23.7$, with a degree of freedom = 8 and tested at 0.05 level of significance, $\chi^2_t = 17.9$. $\chi^2_c > \chi^2_t$, indicating that age at first sex is significantly related with the fear of getting pregnant after sex. Data show that the lower the age, the higher the fear of getting pregnant after sex. Reason adduced for this, is the low level of knowledge of contraceptive use among people of lower age. Those who were 25 years and above exercised little fear about getting pregnant for knowledge of pregnancy preventive measures and most of these respondents indicated that they would marry if eventually they were pregnant.

Age and awareness of sexually transmitted infections: The alternate hypothesis states that age is significantly related with awareness of STIs.

The result of chi-square $\chi^2_c = 19.7$ with a degree of freedom $df (v) = 10$, tested at 0.05 level of significance $\chi^2_t = 25.8$. $\chi^2_c < \chi^2_t$, indicating that age is not significantly related with awareness of STIS. There is similar level of knowledge of STIS between people of lower and higher ages among the respondents. Factors indicated to have contributed include education level and age at first.

CONCLUSION

The main thrust of this study is to examine pattern of sexual behavior among young female hawkers in Igaland, North central Nigeria. In this study, finding shows that risky sexual behaviour is prevalent among young women especially in the rural areas. However, age at first sex continues to reduce based on studies of previous studies. Socio-cultural factors indicated to have contributed to the current extent of sexuality ranged from age at hawking, length of time involved in hawking and family background. This exposes them to high sexual networking, sex related out comes, which include among others, unwanted pregnancy which may lead to unsafe

abortion and death, contraction of sexual transmitted infections and HIV and AIDS and social consequences, like early marriage and school drop out.

It is therefore, imperative that measures such as provision of vocational training and employment opportunities are put in place for young people, especially the female folks. The government should monitor proper execution of the various poverty alleviation programs aimed at cushion the effects of the nation's on-going economic reforms for the adolescents and their poor parents who could not afford to send their wards to schools.

The youths should be empowered through sexuality education and relevant information to enable them adopt healthy behavior towards sexual and health risk activities. Reproductive health services should be made accessible to young women where they can freely discuss their reproductive and sexual health related problems in terms of counseling and clinical attention on contraceptive information, post abortion care, pre-and ante-natal care and HIV/AIDS- related services.

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