

## **An Examination of University Students' Attitude to Contraceptive Use**

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### **Abstract**

*The incidence of prostitution and all forms of promiscuous behaviour associated with students of tertiary institutions and other anti-social sexual behaviours, coupled with the widespread of sexually transmitted infections and teenage pregnancy amongst undergraduates is of great concern to the society. Consequently this study attempts to investigate the attitude of undergraduates towards contraceptive use. The study is a survey study which employed the use of questionnaire in sampling the attitude of 1,500 students from six tertiary institutions in Delta State. Two null hypotheses were formulated to guide the investigation. The analysis revealed that one of the hypothesis was rejected while the other was accepted leading to the findings that: the attitude of students towards contraceptive use do not differ significantly on the basis of gender; There is a significant relationship between students' attitude and their knowledge of contraceptives. Given the above findings the study recommends that sex education should be taught in secondary schools both by teachers and parents; The teachers and parents require specific training on the subject so as to impact correct information to the students; The government should be actively involved in awareness programmes on contraceptives so that the vulnerable group will be properly informed.*

### **1. Introduction**

In the 1970s, social scientists and governments confronted rapid population growth by focusing on family planning, but by the 1980s, they learned that contraceptive technology alone did not slow population growth (Sclarra, 1993). Thus, they integrated maternal and child health with family planning and focused on maternal and child health. In 1987, various groups like planned parenthood organization and pathfinder formed the safe motherhood initiative to reduce maternal mortality. The initiative incorporates adequate primary health care and family planning, comprehensive prenatal care, help of trained delivery personnel for all women in childbirth and effective access to maternity hospital services for women with high rate of pregnancies and for women in dire emergencies. Family planning programmes strive to prevent unwanted pregnancies, help achieve birth spacing and help couples limit family size so as to reduce maternal mortality. The health care needs of the adolescent and how these needs may optimally be met is the focus on contraception and the adolescent. The patients profile has changed in adolescent pregnancy between the 1950s and the present and contraceptive options have increased (Hardee 1991).

The lack of education and family planning services led to increased rates of unwanted pregnancy at tremendous social, economic and emotional costs. Prevention involves making wise sexual choices and access to contraceptive services and counseling to discourage premature sexual activity until education is completed. (Ugoji, 2004). According to Eschena (1993) most adolescents prefer oral contraceptives but have misconceptions about the relationship of oral contraceptive use to breast cancers and reproductive tract cancers. Barrier methods particularly condoms, need to be encouraged because of their effectiveness against the spread of Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

According to Barker (1999) adolescents who are well informed about sexuality and contraception and trained in decision making, self-esteem and responsible parenthood are likely to postpone sexual activity. Information on sex and contraception should be made available at puberty and should include the form of use, contraindications, advantages and disadvantages of all methods appropriate and they should understand that it is not abnormal or does not imply homosexuality and that other avenues of sexual expression are available.

Access to contraceptives has become increasingly crucial for adolescents because many are sexually active at earlier ages than in the past. Research done by Kahn in (1999) in Gambia showed that during the mid-to-late 1950s 8% of adolescent females had intercourse by age 16, in contrast with the mid – 1980s where 21% of female teenagers had sex by age 16. Also in 1990s 50% had sex by age 18 compared with 27% of adolescents of similar ages in the 1950s. The proportions who had done so by age 20 were 76% and 61% respectively. Although increased numbers of adolescents are sexually active, pregnancy rates among sexually experienced teenagers declined by 19% between 1972 and 1990, from 254 to 207 pregnancies per 100 sexually active adolescent. Unwanted pregnancy rates decreased between 1981 and 1994 from 78 to 71 per 1000 adolescents, and abortion rates decreased from 43 to 32 per 1000 adolescents. The primary explanation is increased contraceptive use. Kiragu (1995) carried out a study in Kenya and is of a different view about young adults and contraceptive use. According to him sexually active young people are less likely to use contraceptive than adults. Why do more young people not use contraceptives if they are having sex? The most common reasons that both young men and women give for not using contraceptives is that they did not expect to have intercourse. The second most common reason is that they did not know about contraceptive use.

Eggleston, Jackson and Hardee (1999) investigated sexual attitude and behaviour among adolescents. The study revealed that sexual attitude and behaviour of adolescents have been significantly sharpened by socio-cultural norms. According to them young adolescents need better sex education and greater access to family planning services. Eggleston, Jackson and Hardee (1999) surveyed a total of 490 girls, 455 boys measuring firm specific variable relating to reproductive health. These were knowledge of reproduction, attitude about sexual behaviour, attitude about family planning and attitude towards pregnancy. Some findings arising from the study shows that male students are more favourably disposed in their attitude towards knowledge of reproduction with 77.7% as against 52.5% of their female counterparts.

Similarly Speizer, Mullen and Amagee (2001) reported that women 57.5% disapprove positive attitude towards sexual and reproductive behaviour as against 70.1% of male that approve positive attitude towards sexual and reproductive behaviour. Serlo and Aavarinne (1999) investigated the attitude of University students towards HIV/AIDS in Finland. The purpose was to assess University students attitude and feelings towards HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections. The findings revealed very significantly that the knowledge in reproductive health does not increase the use of safe sex but limits sexual behaviour. Female students were also reported to be more sexually active than male students.

In a study of sexual behaviour and attitude of unmarried urban youths in Geneva, Gorgen, Yansare, Marx and Millimounour (1998) reported that young people are exposed to health hazards through sexual behaviour and attitude. The study recommends that timely gender specific sexuality education must be made available. This recommendation results from the finding that majority of young men and women are sexually very active and have limited knowledge with respect to the use of contraceptives. Several studies on reproductive health knowledge and attitude have been carried out in the Nigerian setting such as those of (Orubuloye, Caldwell and Caldwell 1991; Feyisetan and Pebley 1989; Otoide, Oronsaye and Okonofua 2001; Okonofua Odimegwu, Ajobor, Daru and Johnson 1999). The studies identified above investigated at various times in different parts of Nigeria, the attitude of Nigerian young adults and adolescents towards reproductive health knowledge.

Young people often know little or have incorrect information about contraception. Young men are more likely than women to mention lack of knowledge and are much more likely to say that it is their partners' responsibility to avoid pregnancy. Even when young people can name contraceptives they often do not know where to get them or how to use them. Adolescents have negative attitudes about contraception, have heard false rumour and have received misleading information about contraception. For example, students in Kenya and Nigeria had heard about contraceptives but incorrectly cited dangerous side effects (Barker, 1991). Even when young adults know about contraceptives, few use them. This may be because it is more difficult for young adults to obtain contraceptives than it is for older married couples. They do not know where to go and many are unable to pay for services.

Often laws prohibit or limit providing contraceptive services or even information to young people. Even where access is not restricted by law, some family planning services have policies or prejudices against serving unmarried people (Kahn, 1999). Even when young people have information about contraceptives and access to services, many contextual factors affects their contraceptive practices.

The extent of communication between partners attitudes about social and sexual roles and the taboo nature of their sexual activity all influence young adults sexual decision making. For example in many cultures young unmarried people are less likely to discuss contraception. Many of them see it as something only for married adults who want to space children.

The poor correspondence between knowledge and use of modern methods has drawn attention to adolescents perceptions about the positive and negative aspects of modern contraception. In a study concluded in Burkina Faso, Gorgen, Biraga and Diesfeld (1993) noted that the reluctance to use modern methods stemmed from a fear that uses might cause infertility, that the contraceptive pill might produce damaging side effects and that forgetting to take the pill was a serious risk. Another perceived barrier to method use stems from the alienation that many adolescents feel when they attend maternal and child health clinics, the primary sources of contraceptive methods, they are looked at as commercial sex workers. Because of overt social disapproval of premarital sexual activity and the general lack of privacy at these clinics, many adolescent girls feel that when they attempt to procure contraceptives they subject themselves to gossip and to negative attitudes from health personnel (Gorgen, Biraga and Diesfeld 1993; Berglund 1997, Senderowitz 1997).

Other adolescents believe that condoms are unnatural that they reduce pleasure or sensation (Agyei and Epema 1992. Havanon, Bennett and Knodel, 1993) and that their use indicated a general lack of respect for the female partner (Agyei and Epema 1992). While some girls feel that a partners wish to use a condom suggest that they, the girls are not clean, that they are commercial sex workers, or that they are involved in extra – relationship sexual activity (Feldman, Peggy and Yinglu 1997). Girls who carry condoms around may be perceived as being ready for sex or sexually available, a situation that would reduce their eligibility as potential wives. Such beliefs have been found to produce a strong negative attitude to past condom use and to current intentions to use condoms among students in tertiary institutions (Edom and Harvey, 1995). This study therefore tends to examine the knowledge and attitude of university students towards contraceptive use.

### **1.1 Research Questions**

- Is there any significant relationship between students attitude and their knowledge of contraceptives?
- Is there any significant difference between the attitude of male and female students towards the use of contraceptives?

### **1.2 Hypothesis**

- There is no significant relationship between students attitude and their knowledge of contraceptives.
- There is no significant difference between the attitude of male and female students towards the use of contraceptives.

## **2. Research Methods and Procedures**

This is a survey study with a population comprising of all students in all tertiary institutions in Delta State from were 1,500 male and female students were sampled from six tertiary institutions using simple random sampling technique.

An instrument titled the examination of university students attitude to contraceptive use (TEUSACU) was developed by the researcher. The instrument adopted the four Likert scale technique ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The instrument was validated by experts in psychometrics in the faculty of education. The test re-test method of reliability was used and the r-value obtained was 0.82 which showed a high degree of reliability. The researcher administered the questionnaire personally to enhance large returns.

### **2.1 Data Analysis**

Data collected was analysed using t-test and Pearson product moment correlation.

**Hypothesis 1:** Hypothesis one states that there is no significant relationship between students attitude and their knowledge of contraception.

**Table 1: Summary of Pearson correlation coefficient (r) showing the relationship between students attitude and their knowledge of contraception.**

Variables	X	SD	N	r	r-crit	Remarks
Students attitude towards use of contraceptives	25.52	4.32				
Knowledge of contraception	48.03	15.70				

Table 1 reveals that the r-calculated of 0.52 was greater than the r-critical of 0.50. The hypothesis was therefore rejected. This implies that there is a significant relationship between students attitude and their knowledge of contraception.

**Hypothesis II:** Students attitude towards the use of contraceptives do not differ significantly on the basis of gender.

**Table 2: Summary of t-analysis showing the difference in the attitude of male and female students towards contraceptive use.**

Group	N	X	SD	DF	t-cal	t-crit	Level of sig.
Male	750	25.15	3.47				
Female	750	25.87	4.98				
Total	1500						

Table 2 reveals that t-calculated is less than t-critical. The hypothesis was therefore accepted in other words there is no significant difference in the attitude of male and female students towards contraceptive use.

### 3. Research Findings and Discussion

The null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between students attitude and their knowledge of contraception was rejected. This implies that there is a significant relationship between students attitude towards contraceptive use and their knowledge of contraception. In other words the study reveals clearly that students attitude affects their knowledge of contraception. This finding corroborates with the findings of Orubuloye, Caldwell and Caldwell (1991) which investigated sexual networking in Nigeria and reported that attitude of Nigerian young adults and adolescents affects their knowledge of reproduction. In another study on attitude towards abortion and contraception, Oronsaye and Odiase (1983) reported a similar attitude of secondary school boys and girls towards illegally induced abortion. The findings reported above by Oronsaye and Odiase (1983) agrees with this present study, which affirms a similar attitudinal disposition towards knowledge of reproduction.

The finding that there is a relationship between students attitude and their knowledge of contraception as reported in this study agrees with Eggleston, Jackson and Hardee (1999) which investigated sexual attitude and behaviour among adolescents and revealed that sexual attitude and behaviour of adolescents have been significantly sharpened by socio-psychological factors and consequently affect their knowledge of contraception. According to them, young adults need better sex education and greater access to family planning services. This study reveals in hypothesis two that there is no significant difference between the attitude of male and female students towards contraceptive use. This finding agrees with the findings of Speizer, Mullen and Amagee, (2001) that investigated the gender differences in adult attitude towards reproductive behaviour of adolescents. In their findings Speizer, Mullen and Amagee revealed that of the average, both male and female adults share similar views towards reproductive behaviour of adolescents. However women hold a more conservative attitude than men towards adolescent sexuality.

In their study a bivariate data analysed, indicates that 58% of adult women and 48% of adult men disapprove premarital sex among adolescents. In other study on attitude towards abortion and contraception among secondary school girls, a near collaborative finding was reported in which an investigation of first sexual intercourse of adolescent boys and girls were established by Oronsaye and Odiase (1983). In their study the average of 15 years was established for girls and 16 years for boys. The findings of the studies above agrees with this present study which reveals that students attitude towards contraceptive use do not significantly differ on the basis of their gender.

#### 4. Conclusion and Recommendations

Knowledge of reproduction centres around the phenomena of sex is important because the sex drive in man is potent and very powerful. Sex is necessary for the purpose of procreation and preservation of human race Ugoji (2004). Today in Nigeria the emphases on sex has assumed a wider dimension in both economic and social activities. Issues on advertisement, films and magazines depends heavily on sex to get their messages across. These have many and varied implications and some of these implications include adultery, prostitution, rape, illegal abortion as well as single parenthood, illegitimate children and sex perversion.

This study is tailored towards understanding students attitude towards contraceptive use. Consequently, the study investigated differential attitudes of students towards knowledge of contraception and indeed their attitude on the basis of gender. Based on the findings arising from these investigations, the study recommends that: The scope of sex education should be structured to cover all aspects of individuals sex life considering the fact that some adolescents are naturally sexually active. Consequently the following should be incorporated into the General Studies (GST) Curriculum content of University students: knowledge of human reproduction, prevention of sexually transmitted infections, family planning techniques and their side-effects, understanding of boy-girl relationship. Parents and older adults in the society should equally be educated in this regard to enable them uphold their responsibilities towards their children's sexual development. Orientation and induction programmes should be provided to re-educate students in tertiary institutions towards appropriate sexual behaviour as well as the acquisition of relevant and adequate valid and usable knowledge of reproduction.

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