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Risky behaviours of undergraduate students of Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria during Christmas period

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Abstract

Festive periods Christmas inclusive, is a time for fun, socializing and partying with its attendant risky behaviours that predispose young people to infections and unintended pregnancies. This phenomenon has not been fully explored in Nigeria. This study therefore explored the risky behaviours of undergraduate students of the Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt, Rivers State Nigeria during the Christmas period. A descriptive cross-sectional design was employed among 600 students selected from 5 faculties of the University using a stratified random sampling technique. Data was collected by a pretested semi-structured questionnaire. Analysis of data was done using descriptive statistics. More respondents were (52.5%) females, 33.8% were in the science faculty and 50.6% were within the 20-24 year age group. More than half (59.7%) had ever taken alcohol and 14.5% had ever smoked. About 46% of respondents keep friends that take alcohol, 23.8% keep friends that smoke cigarette, 42.9% had ever attended night party with friends and 39.4% attended night parties with friends during the Christmas preceding the study: 75.7% reportedly had sexual intercourse during the Christmas period and 32.2% of these did not use any form of protection. Young people exhibit risky sexual behaviour during the Christmas period. Sensitization and educational programmes targeting risky sexual practices among young people during festive periods should be instituted.

Keywords: Risky behaviour, Christmas period, students.

INTRODUCTION

Behaviours that contribute to poor sexual health of young people have been found not to be constant throughout the year but peak around Christmas and peak again during the summer months (Chief Medical Officer's Medical Advisory Group, 1998). Furthermore, activities during these festive periods have been found to be accompanied by levels of teenage pregnancies substantially higher than other periods (Vivancos et al., 2010; Bellis et al., 2004; Bellis et al., 2000). Due to the cold weather during Christmas, people often consume alcohol in excess and, in some cases, subsequently engage in unprotected sex (Chief Medical Officer's Medical Advisory Group, 1998). Likewise, the summer holiday provide a similar escape from the social norms of family, work, or education and is accompanied by

increases in sexual risk (Fenton et al., 2001; Johnson et al., 2001). As a result, both periods are followed by rises in demand for emergency contraception, increased attendance at sexual health clinics, and additional requests for terminations among young people (Chief Medical Officer's Medical Advisory Group, 1998; CDS 2000).

An increase in the number of people presenting at the health services with STIs during the Christmas period and in January, had also been documented. A similar pattern is also found during the summer holiday months (Wellings et al., 1999). Abortion rates also rise during February as a result of unintended Christmas time conceptions. STI data indicate a clear link between holiday periods and high risk sexual behaviour. The

increase in STIs during holiday periods unfortunately coincides with a time when access to, and availability of both clinical and preventive services as well as associated laboratory and screening services tends to be even more limited than usual due to national and staff holidays (Wellings et al., 1999). Furthermore, increase in the demand for emergency contraception has also been documented (Okereke, 2010; Wellings et al., 1999; Parnell and Rodgers, 1998).

All these are possible as much effort and money is expended in purchasing process and social gatherings (Schudson, 1985) which provide escape from the social norms of family, work, or education and accompanied by increase in sexual risk (Bellis et al., 2000).

This study therefore examines the risky behaviours of undergraduate students of the Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt, Rivers State Nigeria during Christmas period.

METHODOLOGY

Study design

This study adopted a descriptive cross sectional design that explored risky sexual behaviour at Christmas among students of Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt, Rivers State Nigeria.

Study setting

Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (IAUE) was founded on the 14th of June 1971 as a College of Education with an initial intake of 116 students for the National Certificate Examination (NCE). By 1981, the institution started a degree programme and had a student population of 3169 and was affiliated to the University of Ibadan. However, it became autonomous in 2010 as a full fledge University of Education. The University is located in the Rivers State capital, Port Harcourt and have three campuses, Rumuolumeni campus, St John's campus and Ndele campus. The University has six faculties and 27 departments. Four faculties and Home Economics department (part of the faculty of Vocational technology) are sited on the main campus and one faculty each in the other two campuses. This study was carried out on the main campus of the University as majority of the students are on this campus. As at the time of the study, the University has a student population of 3,778 students comprising 1365 males and 2413 females.

Sampling techniques and sample size

The sample size for the study was determined using EPI

2000 statistical package. Stratified, proportionate and simple random sampling techniques were adopted in the selection of 600 student respondents, from a total of 2100 students during the 2011/2012 academic session in the 5 faculties which included the Home Economics department a part of Faculty of vocational technology on the main Campus. The respondents were stratified based on their faculty of study, while sample size was allocated proportionately to each of the faculties. The unit of study were finally selected using simple random sampling techniques

Instrument for data collection

A questionnaire designed based on reviewed literature on risky behaviour of young people during festive seasons was used for data collection. The questionnaire was self administered and it collected information on respondents' socio-demographic information, risky behaviours such as alcohol intake, smoking, night party attendance, at risk sexual behaviours such as unprotected sexual intercourse and contraceptive use.

Validity and reliability of instruments

To ensure the validity of the instrument, a draft of the questionnaire was subjected to review from peers and other experts in the field. The instrument was pre-tested in a location sharing similar characteristics with the study location. The pretested questionnaire was subjected to a reliability test using the Cronbach's Alpha model. Reliability co-efficient of 0.72 was obtained. Modifications were made to the instrument as phrases not easily understood were re-phrased, those who were superfluous were removed and the questions were re-ordered to follow a logical sequence.

Data Collection Process

The researchers gave an overview of the research including the objectives of the study to the respondents before distribution of the copies of the questionnaire. The respondents were told not to write any name on the questionnaire for confidentiality purpose and they were told that they were free to withdraw from the study at any point they feel like doing so. They were also encouraged to ask questions on what they do not understand in the questionnaire. The copies of the questionnaire were retrieved back from each respondent immediately after completion and reviewed for completeness.

Table 1. Socio: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Socio-Demographic characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Faculty		
Education	203	33.8
Social-sciences	164	27.3
Sciences	136	22.7
Humanities	82	13.7
Vocational technology	15	2.5
Total	600	100.0
Sex*		
Male	282	47.5
Female	312	52.5
Total	594	100.0
Age (years)*		
15-19yrs	27	4.9
20-24yrs	277	50.6
25-29yrs	178	32.5
>29yrs	65	11.9
Total	547	100.0
Mean age= 24.6±2.3yrs		
Religion*		
Christianity	560	93.6
Islam	20	3.3
African Traditional Religion (ATR)	18	3.1
Total	598	100.0
Level of study*		
100	56	9.5
200	196	33.1
300	219	37.0
400	121	20.4
Total	592	100.0
Marital status*		
Single	506	84.5
Married	77	12.9
Cohabiting	13	2.2
Divorce/separated/widowed	3	0.5
Total	599	100.0

* Non responses were excluded

Data Analysis

Each copy of the questionnaire was scrutinized for completeness, coded and entered into the computer. The SPSS Version 15 was used in analyzing the data. Descriptive, statistics were used for data analysis.

Ethical Considerations

The study followed the ethical principles guiding the use of human participants in research. Informed consent was obtained from each respondent. All research respondents were informed that the survey was voluntary, and that they did not have to participate if they chose not to or could withdraw at any time. Respondents were assured that confidentiality of responses would be maintained during and after data collection. Only questionnaire

numbers were assigned to each questionnaire and no name was required on the questionnaire. The numbers were to facilitate data entry and analysis and no one can link the identity of the participants with the registration numbers.

RESULTS

Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

More of the respondents (33.8%) are in the science faculty followed by social sciences (27.3%), 52.5% were females with 85.1% from the south-south region of Nigeria. A little above half (50.6%) were within the age group 20-24 years, 93.6% were Christians, 37.0% were in 300 level of study and 84.5% were single (Table 1).

Table 2. Risky behaviours engaged in by respondents

Risky behaviour engaged in	Frequency	Percentage
Ever taken alcohol		
Yes	356	59.7
No	240	40.3
Total	596	100.0
Still take alcohol		
Yes	185	52.9
No	165	47.1
Total	350	100.0
Ever smoked cigarette		
Yes	85	14.5
No	501	85.5
Total	586	100.0
Still smoke cigarette		
Yes	33	38.4
No	52	61.6
Total	85	100.0
Keep friends that take alcohol		
Yes	271	45.9
No	319	54.1
Total	590	100.0
Keep friends that smoke cigarette		
Yes	142	23.8
No	455	76.2
Total	597	100.0
Attends night parties with friends		
Yes	256	42.9
No	341	57.1
Total	597	100.0
Attended night parties with friends during Christmas		
Yes	233	39.4
No	359	60.6
Total	592	100.0

Risky behaviours engaged in by respondents

Risky behaviours of respondents during Christmas was assessed using variables such as self alcohol intake, self smoking, having friends who smoke and drink alcohol and night party attendance. More than half (59.7%) of the respondents had ever taken alcohol, 59.2% still take alcohol at the time the study was conducted, 14.5% had ever smoked with 38.4% of them still smoking, 45.9% keep friends that take alcohol, 23.8% keep friends that smoke cigarette, 42.9% had ever attended night party with friends and more than a quarter (39.4%) attended night parties with friends during Christmas preceding the study (Table 2).

Risky sexual behaviour engaged in at Christmas

Majority of the respondents (80.4%) are in a sexual relationship, 61.6% reportedly live in the same city with their partner, and 38.8% reported that they see their partners once in a week. Frequency of sexual activity showed that 75.7% had sexual intercourse with someone at least once during the last Christmas period; of these, 36.1% had sexual intercourse twice and 32.2% of them did not use any form of protection. Majority (91.9%) of those that use a form of protection used condom during their last sexual episode and 50.2% of those that use condom as a means of protection sometimes use it during sexual intercourse at Christmas (Table 3).

Table 3. Risky sexual behaviour at Christmas

Risky sexual behaviour	Frequency	Percentage
In a sexual relationship		
Yes	481	80.4
No	117	19.6
Total	598	100.0
Live in same city with partner		
Yes	292	61.6
No	182	38.4
Total	474	100.0
Had sexual intercourse		
Yes	364	75.7
No	117	24.3
Total	481	100.0
Sexual intercourse frequency at Christmas		
1	99	27.7
2	129	36.1
3	80	22.4
4	7	2.0
>4	42	11.8
Total	357	100.0
Used contraceptive during the Christmas period?		
Yes	242	67.8
No	115	32.2
Total	357	100.0
Contraceptive used		
Condom	194	91.9
Oral contraceptive	13	6.2
Coitus interruptus (withdrawal)	4	1.9
Total	211	100.0
How often did you use contraceptive at sexual intercourse		
Always	104	49.8
Sometimes	105	50.2
Total	209	100.0

DISCUSSION

More of the respondents in this study are in the science faculty; this may be due to the fact that the science oriented courses are giving more quotas during the admission time in-line with the present agitation of the government to give more attention and encouragement to the teaching of science in schools. The result of the study also showed that there are more females than males; this may be due largely the fact more females chose the schools (IAUE) for their higher education study compared to the males as it is reflected in the school students' statistics. The high number of respondents of both south-

east and south-south origin is not surprising since the University is situated in the south-south geo-political zone of the country and the institution is established primarily to serve the catchment area of people in this geo-political zone. Also, the high number of people who are of the Christian faith is because Christianity is the main religion of the people in the region.

A majority of the respondents 89.5% are within the age range of 15-24 years and majority were single. This may be because the educational system in Nigeria is such that students are expected to spend six (6) years in primary school, three (3) years in junior secondary school, three (3) years in senior secondary school and

four (4) years in higher institution (6-3-3-4 system) coupled with the incessant strike by workers in the educational sector in recent time such that one find people that are of age spending more years in school and some are sexually active and they also engage in risky behaviour; this most of them do without knowing the consequence of what they do (Onoh et al., 2004; Olaseha et al., 2004; NPC/ICF, 2004; Smith, 2003; Peltzer, 2004).

Respondents' at risk behaviours

In this study, some questions were asked the respondents to know if there are things they do that can predispose them to some risky behaviours. More than half (59.7%) of the respondents had ever taken alcohol with 52.9% as current users. This finding collaborate the findings of Carlini et al. (2007); Galduróz et al. (2008); Roche et al. (2007); Kypri et al. (2009); which documented that alcohol drinking in those aged 18-24 years have increased in the last decade and this calls for the need for population health approaches that tackle young people's erroneous beliefs about alcohol consumption and related harms.

The result also revealed that less than a quarter of the respondents reported that they had ever smoked cigarette with 38.4% as current users. Several studies in both developed and developing countries affirmed these findings that young people are increasingly indulging in the use of drugs including cigarette smoking without knowing the consequences of what they do (Slovic, 2001; Weinstein, 2001; Ehlinger, 2000; Johnston et al., 2005). The reason adduced for this is the association that has been established between students cigarette use and having multiple sex partners (Lenz, 2004; Rigotti et al., 2000; Rigotti et al., 2002; Atwoli et al., 2011; Bamidele et al., 2007). This finding call for the government to speed up action on the passage of the anti-tobacco bill which is before the legislators in Nigeria in order to regulate the sales and distribution of cigarette in Nigeria most especially among young people. The school authority should also include lectures that have to do with healthy lifestyles for newly admitted student during the orientation week; extensive and comprehensive piece on smoking, alcohol and the danger in unprotected casual sex should be included in the lecture.

A little below half in this study keep friends that smoke cigarette and drink alcohol. This finding is supported by findings of previous studies which indicate friends as major influencing factor to taking substance including drugs (Ogwell et al., 2003; Peltzer et al., 2001, Rozi et al., 2007). Many studies have also demonstrated that peer pressure is a risk factor for young people's alcohol and cigarette use (Bauman et al., 2001; Kirke, 2004; Ennett et al., 2006; Ennett et al., 2008). The implication of this finding is that alcohol use is probably still regarded as

being fashionable among university students and very few social sanctions exist to discourage this behaviour by the university authority. Chances of moving from use to abuse and dependence are therefore heightened, especially considering other factors such as age of onset and frequency of use (Makanjuola et al., 2007).

In this study, more than a quarter of the participants had ever attended night party with friends with more than a quarter of them also attending with friends during Christmas preceding the study. This may be due to the fact that young people have been found to easily yield to peer pressure (Afenyadu and Goparaju, 2003) and the Christmas period create an atmosphere for such pressure since the festive mood of the period is characterise with more social gatherings and excesses (Schudson, 1985). This finding also agrees with other studies conducted in Ghana, Uganda and Malawi which show that young people most especially those not married prefer to go to clubs, discos and dance with friends to meet opposite sex and often peers do pressurize and encourage them to engage in sex even though they might not be ready to do so (Amuyunzu-Nyamongo et al., 2005)

Risky sexual behaviour at Christmas

Social environment plays an important role in adolescent sexuality. A better understanding of the environmental influence and the social context in which some risky sexual behaviour takes place among young people will better inform programmatic initiatives seeking to reduce negative health outcomes resulting from high risk sexual activities in the country and Africa at large (Petersen and Tailor, 1980; Hofferth and Hayes, 1987). In this study, some questions were asked the respondents in order to have an understanding of what they do at Christmas, know if they are in a relationship and also know their sexual life during the period.

Majority of the respondents are in a romantic sexual relationship, this implies that there is a high chance that they engage in opportunistic sexual encounters and high risk sexual behaviours. This finding affirms the findings of the 2008 National Demographic Health Survey (NPC/ICF, 2009) which revealed that nearly half (48.6%) of young people aged 15-19 are sexually active. Also in this study majority had ever had sexual intercourse, about less than half of the respondents had sexual intercourse twice during the Christmas period and more than a quarter did not use any form of protection and those that use condom did not use it consistently. This is revealing in that after about three decades of the first case of HIV/AIDS in Nigeria and the invested effort both human and material, on Behavioural Change Communication (BCC) targeting vulnerable groups including young people, findings of this study still indicates that young people are still engaging in risky sexual behaviour.

The fact that a good number of the respondents did not use any form of protection calls for reawakening and the need to re-strategizing intervention programmes on BCC in order to correct this lingering sexual behavioural lapse among the young people in Nigeria. The findings of this study further affirms the assertion that young people's behaviour changes when holidaying away from their usual residence (Josiam et al. 1998; Bellis et al., 2008; Bellis et al., 2004) most especially, while on short holidays like the Christmas holiday; most of the noticed excessive behaviours during the holiday period among this population have been attributed to the holiday environment of indulgence (Josiam et al., 1998; Bellis et al., 2004; Paz et al., 2004).

It is also worthy to note that condom topped the list of contraceptives used by the sexually active respondents in this study during their last sexual episode. This corroborates the findings of the 2008 NDHS which shows that condoms is getting more popular among young people as a contraceptive as 50% of the sexually active respondents of the survey agreed that they used condom during their last sexual episode (NPC/ICF, 2009).

Usually there is an increase in the number of people who visit health centres presenting with STIs after festive periods, Christmas inclusive. Public health activities are more effective if it is targeted at high risk groups and Christmas holiday season provides a good opportunity for affecting people's behaviour during a high risk period of time.

CONCLUSION

The festive period including Christmas holiday is marked with lots of activities and socialisation of people which are done in excesses compared to formal activities. This study revealed that during this period, young people exhibited risky sexual behaviour. Hence, the findings of this study constitute a useful data bank for the reawakening and redesign of Behavioural Change Communication strategies at all time more especially during Christmas targeting young people.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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