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# Determinants of Reproductive Health Awareness among Secondary School Students in Northern, Cross River State, Nigeria



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## ABSTRACT

Reproductive health education is an approach to addressing adolescent's needs that take into account notion of right, equity, empowerment, self-determination and responsibility in relationships. Lack of accurate reproductive health education means that there are a lot of myths and misconception about sex, STIs, HIV/AIDs, family planning and unwanted pregnancies. This study examined factors that determine reproductive health awareness among secondary school students in Northern Cross River State, Nigeria. A cross-sectional descriptive design was used. A proportionate multistage sampling technique was used to get 1,060 students used for the study. The instrument for data collection was questionnaire with reliability coefficient of 0.89. Data analysis was done using independent t-test and analysis of variance at 0.05 level of significance. Finding revealed that the females were more aware of reproductive issues than male students with t-calculated of -2.79, -3.87 and 2.07. Urban students were more aware of reproductive issues than rural students; in family planning with critical t-value of 2.92. There was no significant influence of students' age on reproductive health awareness with calculated F-ratios of 1.308, 2.316 and 1.315. This calls for intensive reproductive awareness for rural students and inclusion of reproductive health program in secondary school curriculum.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Reproductive health is a spectrum of conditions, events and processes through life, ranging from healthy sexual development, comfort and closeness, joy of childbearing to abuse, diseases disability and death<sup>1</sup>. It covers a wide range of services in International Conference on Population Development Program of action such as family planning counseling, prevention of sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDs, prevention of unwanted pregnancy, and active discouragement of harmful traditional practices etc<sup>2</sup>.

Currently, there is a low level of access to quality reproductive health information, and services especially to some vulnerable groups such as adolescence<sup>3</sup>. Awareness of reproductive health among adolescents is a crucial part of general health and a central feature of human development. Adolescents in Nigeria as in other developing countries have little or no access to adequate and correct information on reproductive health<sup>4</sup>. Research carried out in Calabar by<sup>5</sup> on influence of gender and school locations on sexual behavior revealed that reproductive health awareness in the state is low, paramount among the factors responsible for the current high levels of ill reproductive health among adolescents are the observations that for many reasons, the average age at first intercourse has declined. There is greater practice of unprotected sexual intercourse with multiple and casual sex partners by both boys and girls in Cross River State<sup>6</sup>.

The formal school system is tailored according to traditional values that see sex as a topic best left alone<sup>7</sup>. Reported comparative study of rural and urban school going girls in Jammu. The result showed that 64% of urban students and 36% of rural students could identify family planning as a component, in the area of prevention of HIV/AID/STI, the scores were urban 31% and rural 30%. In prevention of unwanted pregnancy, urban girls scored 24% rural 22%. On knowledge of discouragement of harmful traditional practice, urban girls scored 34%, rural girls, 30%.

The result was at variance with<sup>8</sup> studies who found no relationship between the two groups. In another study by<sup>9</sup>. On influence of gender on reproductive health awareness, prevention of abortion and HIV/AIDs/STI was actually higher in urban girl than in rural girls. By implication, 80% of abortions were said to occur due to sexual intercourse among rural dwellers. It could mean that the youths in the rural areas were more sexually active than their urban counterparts.

Also, Okereke<sup>10</sup> conducted a study on influence of adolescents age on reproductive health in Owerri, the results revealed no significant influence of age on reproduction health awareness. This may be because they were all exposed to the same curriculum and their notion concerning reproductive health was the same irrespective of age.

The trend of adolescent's reproductive ill-health has attracted parents, religious leaders policy makers in government, school authorities and other social organizations to involve in activities curbing this reproductive ill-health among adolescents through media, campaign, organization of seminars and conferences. In spite of all these efforts, there has been little positive result. This is why this study is necessary and compelling.

The general purpose of the study was to examine factors determining the awareness of reproductive health awareness among adolescents in Northern, Cross River State, Nigeria.

Specifically, this study is undertaken to;

- i. Establish whether students' gender influence their awareness of reproductive health.
- ii. Find out influence of students' school geographical location on awareness of reproductive health.
- iii. Examine influence of students' age on reproductive health awareness.

## **2.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **2.1 Research design**

A cross-sectional descriptive survey design was adopted for the study.

### **2.2 Setting**

The study was conducted in Cross Rive State which is one of the thirty-six states in the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Cross River State has eighteen Local Government Areas. Northern Cross River State the focus of this study is made up of five local government areas namely, Ogoja, Yala, Bekwarra, Obanliku and Obudu.

### **2.3 Population**

The population of study consisted of all the public secondary schools in Northern Senatorial District of Cross River State. The number of students as at the time of study stood at 10,600.

## **2.4 Sample and sampling technique**

Multistage proportionate sampling was used to select 25 public secondary schools in the area. Thereafter, 15 urban and 12 rural secondary schools were selected. Simple random sampling was used to select 1,060 students with 530 from urban and 530 from rural schools. The inclusion criteria were senior secondary school students who form the bulk of adolescent's age brackets of 13-19 years that were willing to participate in the study. The exclusion criteria were students from JSS 1-JSS3. 10% of the total population was used.

## **2.5 Research instrument**

A self-developed structured questionnaire was used to elicit information from the students. Positive comment by psychometric experts was suggestive for the face validity of the instrument, while a test-retest reliability was conducted and Cronbach coefficient alpha reliability method was used with a reliability coefficient of 0.89.

## **2.6 Human right and ethical consideration**

The subjects were chosen according to criteria. Informed consent was received from the subjects who participated in the study. Researchers explained the purpose and objective of the study to the students in groups and reassured them of protection of their privacy and also assured them that any information obtained would be strictly confidential.

## **2.7 Statistical design**

Data generated were coded for entry and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics with independent t-test analysis and One-Way Analysis of Variance with 0.05 level of significance.

### 3.0 RESULTS

**Table 1: Showing independent t-test analysis of the influence of gender on awareness of reproductive health**

Awareness of reproductive health	Gender	N	X	SD	t
Family planning practices	Male	540	2.14	3.21	
	Female	520	3.53	3.29	-2.79*
Prevention of STI and HIV/AIDs	Male	540	16.73	15.64	
	Female	520	18.18	14.96	-3.87*
Prevention of unwanted pregnancy	Male	540	16.16	2.74	
	Female	520	16.42	2.70	-2.07*

\*Significant at the 0.05 level of significance, df = 1058 critical-t = 1.98

The result presented in table 1 showed that the t-values of -2.79, -3.87 and -2.07 were greater than critical t-value of 1.98 required for significance at 0.05 with 1,058 degrees of freedom. Observing the mean values, it is clear that females were significantly more aware of reproductive health than their male counterparts. Hence, the null hypothesis that student's gender does not significantly influence their awareness of reproductive health was rejected.

**Table 2: Showing independent t-test analysis of the influence of school location on awareness of reproductive health**

Reproductive health	School location	N	X	SD	t
	Family planning practices	Urban	530	21.23	15.59
Rural		530	13.73	14.16	2.92
Prevention of STI and HIV/AIDs	Urban	530	3.61	3.05	
	Rural	530	2.08	2.99	1.36
Prevention of unwanted pregnancy	Urban	530	5.51	4.58	
	Rural	530	3.57	4.08	1.91

\*Significant at the 0.05 level of significance, df = 1058 critical-t = 1.98

The result as presented in table 2 showed that school geographical location does not significantly influence student’s awareness of prevention of STI HIV/AIDS and awareness of prevention of unwanted pregnancy. But in awareness in family planning practices, school location was significantly influenced with critical t-value of 2.92. This means that urban students were more aware of family practice than their rural counterparts.

**Table 3: Showing one way analysis of the influence of age on students’ awareness towards reproductive health**

Reproductive health		Source of variance	Ss	df	Ms	F.
Family planning practices	Between group		28.737	3		
	Within group		139.694	1057	14.368	
	Total		13168.430	1060	10.986	1.308
Prevention of STI and HIV/AIDS	Between group		540	3		
	Within group		520	1057	30.658	
	Total		15900.731	1060	13.244	2.315
Prevention of unwanted pregnancy	Between group		4.658	3		
	Within group		20586.268	1057	2.329	
	Total		20590.926	1060	17.213	1.315

Not significant at the 0.05 level of significance;  $df = 3,1057$ ; critical F-ratio = 2.64

The information in table 3 shows that the calculated F-values of 1308, 2.316 and 1.351 were significantly less than the critical F-ratio of 2.64. This means that age does not influence reproductive health awareness in Northern Cross River State. Hence the null hypothesis was upheld.

#### 4.0 DISCUSSION

The findings of this study revealed that females were more aware of reproductive health problem than their male counterparts. The finding is supported by <sup>5</sup> studies which result revealed a significant positive influence between females and males towards reproductive health awareness. This finding may be as a result of females being aware of their vulnerability to reproductive ill health than their male counterparts. Also in the state,

awareness creation on reproductive health is conducted by girl's power initiative for adolescent girls by non-governmental organization to create awareness.

This calls for supportive education program to improve adolescent male awareness on reproductive issues. The result also revealed that students in urban secondary schools were significantly more aware of family planning services than those in rural secondary schools.

School location has no influence on students' awareness on prevention of STI, HIV/AIDS and prevention of unwanted pregnancy. This result agreed with Aggrawal and Ajuwon<sup>8,9</sup> whose result showed that highly scored aspect of reproductive health issue was identification of family planning methods by urban girls.

The result also shows that the environment an individual lives can affect his or her reproductive health status. The urban students may benefit from an abundance of information available while the rural dwellers may not have such privilege. The result also revealed non-significant difference in STI HIV/AIDS prevention and prevention of unwanted pregnancy. The reasons for the similarities between the two groups may be as a result of non-inclusion of reproductive health issues in their curriculum. Regarding influence of adolescent's age on reproductive health awareness, the study revealed that there was no significant influence of age on students' awareness on reproductive health.

The result was supported by Ojong and Okereke<sup>5,10</sup> whose studies showed a non-significant influence of age on reproductive health awareness. The reason may be because they were all exposed to the same course content in which there is no adequate information on reproductive health. There was need to inculcate reproductive health education into their school curriculum.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, this study concludes that awareness of family planning practices is limited among adolescents in rural schools because of this they were prone to unwanted pregnancies with unsafe abortions. Also, adolescent males were still ignorant of available reproductive health issues for adolescents so they were at risk of having deadly diseases like STI and HIV/AIDS. The freedom to discuss reproductive health issues in schools is still limited. And this was discovered during data collection where respondent's expressions on this sensitive issues posed as a limitation to the study. Similar study should be conducted in southern Cross River for comparison.

## 6.0 Recommendations

- Secondary school students residing in rural areas should be more enlightened on reproductive health issues by parents, teachers, guidance counselors and non-governmental organizations.
- Extensive and supportive educational program to improve reproductive health awareness should also be conducted for adolescent males in the study area.
- Educational planners at all levels should see the need to include reproductive health education in the formal academic curriculum for senior secondary schools students in the state.

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