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FACTORS INFLUENCING PREMARITAL SEXUAL INTERCOURSE AMONG STUDENTS OF COLLEGE OF HEALTH SCIENCES AND TECHNOLOGY IDAH, KOGI STATE: A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Premarital sexual intercourse among young adults in tertiary institutions is a significant public health challenge in Nigeria, associated with increased risks of unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV, and psychosocial consequences. Students of health sciences, despite their training, are not immune to these risky behaviors. This study aimed to determine the prevalence, assess knowledge and attitudes, and identify key socio-demographic and psychosocial factors influencing premarital sexual intercourse among students at the College of Health Sciences and Technology Idah. A facility-based analytical cross-sectional study was conducted between April and June 2024 among 350 randomly selected students. Data were collected using a structured, self-administered questionnaire. Data analysis was performed using SPSS version 26, with logistic regression to identify predictors. The response rate was 94.3% (n=330). The mean age was 22.4 ± 3.1 years. Overall, 68.5% demonstrated good knowledge of sexual health, but 49.1% reported engaging in premarital sex. Significant predictors were: peer influence (AOR=3.2, 95% CI: 1.9-5.4), exposure to pornography (AOR=2.8, 95% CI: 1.6-4.9), lack of parental monitoring (AOR=2.5, 95% CI: 1.4-4.3), and alcohol use (AOR=2.1, 95% CI: 1.2-3.7). A significant gap exists between knowledge and practice. Interventions must address psychosocial factors through comprehensive sexuality education, peer counseling, and parental involvement programs.

KEYWORDS: Premarital Sex, Sexual Behavior, College Students, Health Sciences, Risk Factors, Reproductive Health, Nigeria.

1. INTRODUCTION

Sexual and reproductive health behaviors among adolescents and young adults in tertiary institutions constitute a major public health focus globally, and particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa [1]. In Nigeria, premarital sexual activity is associated with a heightened risk of negative outcomes, including unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions, high dropout rates among female students, and the transmission of STIs/HIV [2]. Despite being future healthcare professionals, students in colleges of health sciences are embedded within the same socio-cultural milieu that encourages risky sexual behaviors, and their academic knowledge does not always translate to protective personal practices [3]. This study therefore seeks to assess the prevalence and to comprehensively identify the factors influencing premarital sexual intercourse among this unique student population.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Study Design and Setting

A descriptive cross-sectional study design was employed at the Kogi State College of Health Sciences and Technology, Idah.

2.2 Study Population and Sampling

A minimum sample size of 350 was calculated using the Cochran formula. Stratified random sampling was used to select participants from various departments.

2.3 Data Collection and Analysis

A structured, anonymous, self-administered questionnaire was used. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, and binary logistic regression were performed.

2.4 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the College Ethics Committee (Ref: KSCHST/REC/2024/045). Written informed consent was obtained from all participants.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Socio-demographic Characteristics

Out of 350 students sampled, 330 participated (94.3% response rate). The majority were females (62.1%), within the age group of 18-25 years (84.2%).

Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of Participants (n = 330)

Characteristic Frequency (n) Percentage (%)

Gender

Male 125 37.9

Female 205 62.1

Age Group

17-20 years 98 29.7

21-25 years 180 54.5

25 years 52 15.8

Department

Nursing Science 115 34.8

Public Health 85 25.8

Medical Lab Science 70 21.2

Community Health 60 18.2

Living Arrangement

On-campus hostel 85 25.8

Off-campus (with peers) 184 55.8

Off-campus (with family) 61 18.5

3.2 Knowledge, Attitude, and Prevalence

The overall mean knowledge score was 75.6% ($SD \pm 14.2$), with 68.5% categorized as having "good" knowledge. However, 49.1% (162/330) reported having engaged in premarital sexual intercourse.

3.3 Factors Influencing Premarital Sexual Intercourse

The most frequently cited factors are presented in Figure 1.

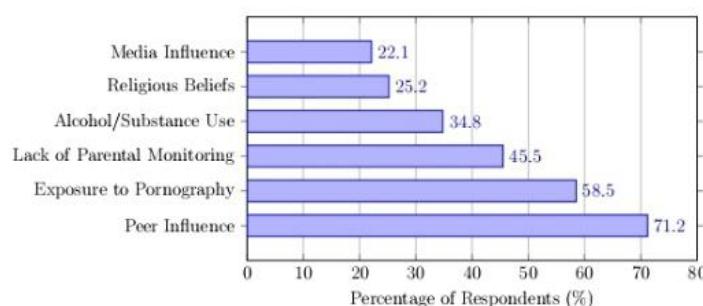


Figure 1: Reported Factors Influencing Premarital Sex Among Students (n=330)

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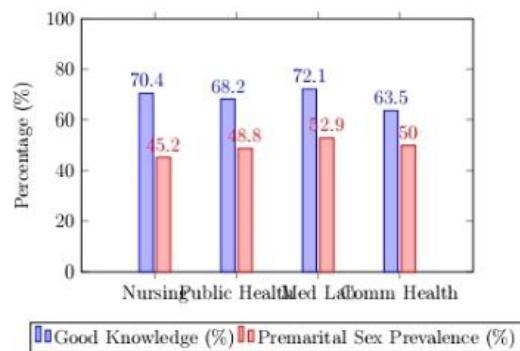


Figure 2: Knowledge-Practice Gap: Comparison of Good Knowledge vs. Premarital Sex Prevalence by Department.

3.4 Predictors of Premarital Sexual Intercourse

Binary logistic regression identified four independent predictors (Table 2).

Table 2: Logistic Regression Analysis of Predictors of Premarital Sexual Intercourse
Predictor Variable Adjusted OR 95% CI p-value

Strong Peer Influence 3.2 1.9 – 5.4 0.001*

Frequent Exposure to Pornography 2.8 1.6 – 4.9 0.001*

Low Parental Monitoring 2.5 1.4 – 4.3 0.002*

Use of Alcohol/Substances 2.1 1.2 – 3.7 0.008*

Gender (Male) 1.4 0.8 – 2.3 0.210

Good Knowledge Score 0.9 0.5 – 1.6 0.750

*Statistically significant (p<0.05)

3.5 Knowledge-Practice Gap by Department

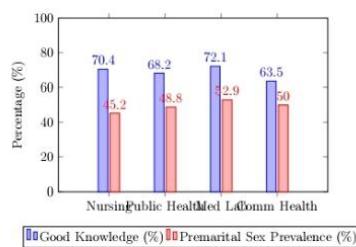


Figure 2: Knowledge-Practice Gap: Comparison of Good Knowledge vs. Premarital Sex Prevalence by Department

Figure 2 illustrates the discrepancy between knowledge levels and reported premarital sexual activity across department.

4. DISCUSSION

This study reveals a high prevalence (49.1%) of premarital sexual intercourse among health science students. The observed gap between high knowledge (68.5% good knowledge) and high-risk behavior underscores the limited power of information-alone interventions. The strongest predictor was peer influence (AOR=3.2), highlighting the powerful role of perceived social norms during young adulthood. Exposure to pornography emerged as a significant novel predictor (AOR=2.8), reflecting the digital age's impact. The significant association with low parental monitoring (AOR=2.5) reinforces the protective role of family connectedness.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, premarital sexual activity is prevalent among students, driven predominantly by psychosocial and environmental factors rather than a lack of knowledge. This calls for a paradigm shift in campus health promotion strategies. Based on the findings, we recommend:

1. Implementation of peer-led intervention programs.
2. Integration of comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) into the curriculum.
3. Strengthening parent-institution partnerships.
4. Enforcement of campus substance use policies.
5. Leveraging technology for confidential SRH services.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data Availability

De-identified data are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Author Contributions

J. M. Ojoma: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing – Original Draft.

D. M. Abayomi: Formal Analysis, Validation, Writing – Review & Editing, Supervision.

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