

PATTERNS OF SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR AMONG PERSONS WITH DISABILITY IN EKITI STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Literature is replete with patterns of sexual behaviour among the non-disabled and adolescents, but few studies exist on the patterns of sexual behaviour among persons with disabilities, despite their sexual vulnerabilities. It is based on this background that this study seeks to examine the patterns of sexual behaviour among persons with disability in Ekiti State, Nigeria. The objective of this study was achieved through the instrument of an in-depth interview. Data obtained from 13 in-depth interviews were analyzed using manual content analysis. The study revealed that persons with disability engage in sexual intercourse, experience early age at sexual debut, some males initiate sexual intercourse and both gender experienced rape. Furthermore, supports from non-disabled friends enabled persons with disability to initiate sexual relationship and avoid risky sexual activities. Support systems should be provided for persons with disability in order to enhance their sexual behaviour and prevent risky sexual behaviour.

Key words: Risky sexual behaviour, sexual vulnerabilities, sexual intercourse, persons with disability

INTRODUCTION

Globally, sexual behaviour is not a new concept in empirical studies as it has either been discussed as either safe or risky. Kessel (2001) discussed sexual behaviour from the safe sex perspective, while other scholars have emphasized the risky perspective of sexual behaviour (Kessel, 2001; Karen Faisandier, 2011; Ayoade, Blavo, Farotimi, & Nwozichi, 2015; Kumari & Nair, 2012). However, empirical studies that examined risky sexual behaviour among persons with disability are limited.

Contrary to the general belief that persons with disability are asexual, empirical studies have shown that they are sexually active and fecund (McCabe & Taleporos, 2003; Greenwood & Wilkinson, 2013; Enhancing Nigeria's HIV and AIDS Response Programme (ENR), 2015; Mulindwa, 2003; Aderemi, Pillay, & Esterhuizen, 2013). A study in Uganda revealed that 80% of the persons with disability had experienced sexual intercourse (Mulindwa, 2003) while another study in Nigeria revealed that persons with mild intellectual disability had more experience of sexual intercourse than the non-disabled adolescent persons (Aderemi, Pillay, & Esterhuizen, 2013).

Furthermore, persons with disability irrespective of their gender find it difficult to establish stable marital partnership or relationship and many of them end up being used for sex or engage in sex for pay, all of which increases their sexual and reproductive health risks. Some of the risks include high rate of sexually transmitted infections (STI) including HIV, unwanted pregnancy and unsafe abortion, sexual abuse which is experienced by men and women alike, though more predominant among women with disability. Also, they experience difficulty in assessing healthcare facility for sexual and reproductive health related issues (Handicapp International, 2011; Enhancing Nigeria's HIV and AIDS Response Programme (ENR), 2015; (Mulindwa, Study on Reproductive Health and HIV/AIDS among Persons with Disability in Kampala, Katakwi and Rakai Districts, 2003).

Despite being established from literature that persons with disability engage in sexual intercourse (Aderemi, Pillay, & Esterhuizen, 2013), yet their patterns of sexual behaviour which includes sexual initiation, sexual negotiations and sexual partnership are inadequately examined. Questions such as how they request or demand for safe sex from their partners and age of sexual debut are yet to be adequately answered in literature.

Research Questions

What is the pattern of sexual behaviour among persons with disability in Ekiti State?

Which risky sexual activities do persons with disability become vulnerable to in Ekiti State?

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to reveal the patterns of sexual behaviour among persons with disability in Ekiti State, Nigeria. The specific objectives include, to:

- i. Describe the pattern of sexual behaviour among persons with disability in Ekiti State
- ii. Assess the risky sexual activities that persons with disability are vulnerable to in Ekiti State

Theoretical Background

Protection Motivation Theory was used in this study. This is because it is not all sexual behaviour that are volitional. Sexual behaviour that are influenced by drug use or threats such

as rape cannot be referred to as sexual behaviour that occurred from free volition. Therefore in order to predict non-volitional sexual behaviour, protection motivation theory would be used. This theory would be included in this study because it can predict behaviour that are associated with threats and vulnerability to threats which theory of reasoned action and social cognitive theory cannot predict. It opines that individual's perception of the severity of their vulnerability to the threat are seen to inhibit maladaptive responses such as avoidance, denial and wishful thinking. Therefore, if an individual has a high perception of vulnerability to risky sexual behaviour, the person may avoid or protect himself against such behaviour (Conner & Sparks, 2005).

Protection motivation theory opines that various fear appeals and intrapersonal or internal sources of information can instigate two distinct processes which include threat appraisal and coping appraisal. Threat appraisal deals with individual's perception of the severity and the extent to which they are vulnerable to the threat which in turn deters their maladaptive responses. It also states that at certain instances, some factors such as pleasure and social approval may increase the tendency to perform maladaptive behaviours. Coping appraisal reveals that increase in the probability of an adaptive behaviour is a function of response efficacy and self-efficacy. Response efficacy is the belief that the recommended behaviour would be able to reduce the threat and self-efficacy is the belief that one can perform the behaviour (Conner & Sparks, 2005).

Methodology

The population of study are persons with disability within the ages of 15-69 years. Persons with disability considered in this study are limited to those with hearing, speech, vision and physical disability. The coverage areas for this study was Ikere Ekiti and Oye Ekiti. The school of the blind at Ikere Ekiti was visited from which persons with visual and hearing disability were interviewed. Other persons with hearing and physical disability were interviewed in Oye Ekiti. This study used data obtained from in-depth interview guide. The in-depth interview guide consist of questions that probed into the sexual behaviour of persons with disabilities as well as their vulnerabilities to risky sexual practices. A total of 13 respondents were interviewed in this study.

Results

The results obtained from the study revealed that persons with disability engage in sexual intercourse contrary to the norm. Both male and female persons with disability revealed that they have experienced sexual intercourse at one time or the other. A female deaf respondent has this to say "Yes, it happened at the age of 8 and cannot really explain the experience". Another blind female respondent has this to say "Yes, when I was 20 years, I was forced into it"

Male persons with disability report having ability to initiate sexual intercourse. A male blind respondent has this to say "Yes, it was couple of years ago. She was a friend then that was introduced to me by another friend in my peer. It was the friend that gave me the girl I had sex with. They told me it is an interesting experience. He further said "Ever since the first intercourse, it became easy to have initiation with sexual partners". This experience revealed that social networking system helped in sexual initiation among persons with disability. This is because the respondent revealed that a female friend introduced the person she had sexual intercourse with to him. It was further revealed that eventhough he was able to initiate sexual intercourse, it was difficult for him. The male blind respondent have this to say "It is so difficult. It was difficult then because I don't relate with people with disability but with people

without disability, that make it difficult due to my status” He further said “It was terrible and difficult as I had to persuade the sexual partner. It was somehow stressful and difficult.

The study also revealed that persons with disability are exposed to rape. It was revealed that both male and female respondents have reported either being forced to have sex or being raped. A male respondent reported having the experience of being forced to have sex. The respondent has this to say “. After that, I had couple of sex. The one I was able to control myself I did, and I was forced by my partner in which I don’t have option than to do”

Two of the female respondents reported rape and one reported attempted rape. A female respondent has this to say. “Actually it was a case of rape and she did not inform her parent about it. It was a bitter experience” Another female respondent has this to say “Yes, when I was 20 years, I was forced into it”.

Another person with disability reported attempted rape. A female visually impaired person has this to say “Yes, an individual wanted to force me trying to take advantage of my vision impairment. He entered the house while I was in the toilet and held me but I shouted which made him to run away” Persons with disability have reported that other people wanted to take advantage of them because of their disability. Another blind female respondent reported another case of someone who wanted to take advantage of her. She has this to say “there is someone who I went to and asked him to help me financially to go to school. The person now asked to allow him to sleep with her, that he will give her hundred thousand naira”.

Another blind female respondent reported a case of attempted rape, she has this to say “There was a time like that, my friend and I went to a birthday party and they were doing some games... In the process, one person picked a paper and the person was asked to bring a girl and take her out, in the process everything scattered and they wanted to be harming the girls, there me and my friend left in the night.... My friend called me, ran to me and held my hands, so we left, and called a bike and left..... The person is sighted.. Our principal said : afoju to n lead ara won, where would they be heading to? The pit... This means that a blind that is leading another blind will fall into the pit. Yes, I go out with my friends. This experience revealed that social network system also helped this blind female respondent to escape danger or rape. It also revealed that having good education can also help persons with disability to avoid social danger. This blind female remembers what her principal tells her that two blind persons cannot lead themselves and that helped her during danger. This is the effect of proper mentoring and adequate education.

This blind female respondent has not established any relationship yet despite some pressures from interested partners on social media. She has this to say “... they even call you on video...they just feel it is right to chat unnecessary things like demanding for sex on social media...I can’t allow them. I don’t have the time for now”. This female blind respondent is in school and that may be the reason why she does not have the time for sexual relationship now.

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