PSYCHOLOGICAL INCLINATIONS ASSOCIATED WITH ADOLESCENTS' SEXUAL BEHAVIOR: THE MODERATING EFFECT OF GENDER

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between authors AKO and AAB. Author AKO designed the study, performed the statistical analysis, and worked on the analyses of the study. Author AAB worked on the first draft of the manuscript, managed the literature searches, and did the discussion. The two authors jointly worked on the general corrections and approved the final manuscript.

ABSTRACT

Aims: The magnitude of the present day hetero-sexual behaviour can be traceable to several factors ranging from the developmental increase in height, size and weight to the high libido, lopsidedness in societal values, modem technology, and individual's psychological dispositions. The study examined some psychological inclinations associated with adolescents' sexual behavior among Nigerian adolescents. Also, the study investigated the effect of gender on psychological inclinations associated with adolescents' sexual behavior.

Methodology:3000 randomly selected adolescents from the Senior Secondary School students in the 4 educational zones (Remo, Ijebu, Yewa&Egba) in Ogun State, Nigeria took part in the study. Two instruments were used for collection of data; Multidimensional Relationship Questionnaire and a self-developed questionnaire tagged "Sexual Relationship Behavior Inventory (SRBI)'.

Results: Data collected were analyzed using descriptive analysis, Multiple Regression Analysis, and correlation coefficient statistical tools. Findings revealed no significant gender difference in adolescents' sexual behavior ($t = 1.791$, $p = .013$) while a significant difference was observed in the level of psychological inclinations between male and female adolescents ($t = 3.007$, $p = .000$). A significant relationship was found between adolescents' sexual behavior and psychological inclinations ($r = .697$; $p = .000$). Result also showed that 27.4 percent of the total variance in adolescents' sexual behavior is accounted for by the combination of the psychological inclinations ($F_{(12, 2948)} = 18.704$; $P = .021$). Male adolescents were found to have higher quality of relational esteem, internal control, relational motivation,

and relational satisfaction, while the female higher on relational preoccupation, consciousness, anxiety, assertiveness, depression, monitoring and fear.

Conclusion: On the basis of the findings, it was suggested that adequate parent-child interpersonal relationship and active listening to teens' languages and emotional concerns should be employed by the parents, if they are to assist their teens in building a viable sexual lives.

Key words: Psychological inclinations, adolescents, sexual behavior,gender

INTRODUCTION

In the Nigeria today just as in the western world, a high proportion of adolescents irrespective of their educational level as college students or not, living in urban or rural area are believed to be sexually active, and many engage in unprotected sex [1, 2, 3, 4]. As noted by Adebayo, Udegbe and Sunmola [5] this ever growing premarital behavioral pattern of adolescents continually exposes today's teenagers to be living in the world of great explorations. It has been observed also that premarital activities of today's youth that give liberty to close intimacy of reckless romantic explorations during dating [6, 7].

Most behavioral responses of adolescents habitually revolve around sexual activities. Inyang [6] rightly noted the usual aftermath of intimacy in emotion-laden romantic relationships. Since one thing will always lead to another, engagement in the pleasure of romantic intimacy, more often than not, usually end up in sexual intercourse between the adolescents. And because sexual relations proffer the most passionate pleasure, young people are not usually emotionally balanced to control the urge for the fun. This seems to explain the insatiable feelings in adolescents to always desire intimate relationship with the opposite sex; the practice that often sustains the inherent danger of recklesssexual risks [8].

Indeed some researchers found that increased incidence of adolescents' sexual behavior as well as the decreased age of sexual debut is a function of several variables such as parents' socio-economic background and poverty[9], adoption of western culture [10, 11], bringing about a change in societal values [12]; developmental increase in height, size and weight to the high libido [1, 3, 13]; adolescents' perception of sex symbol, values, risks and misconceptions [3].

There are enough observable indicators in our society to suggest that male and female adolescents no longer regarded virginity as a virtue as no sex before marriage is fading out gradually. Unintended, unwanted and unwise pregnancies sounded to be the first alarm of sexuality and poor display of knowledge on reproductive health, followed by the contemporary horrors of sexually transmissible infections. These situations affirm the urgency of the attention that adolescent sexual issues demand.

Also, the degree of sexual explosion among peers both at home and school and, more specifically, the sexual exploratory and experimenting behaviorof the young adults is a major challenge to psychosocial adjustment and mental health in adolescence. Sexual and/or romantic relationships occupy a major role in the lives of most young adults and its perception either negatively or positively as being satisfying are believed to promote emotional well-being and physical health. Attachment theory [14, 15] as

noted by Akindele-Oscar & Ayodele [1]; Collins, Ford, Guichard, & Allard[16] provides a coherent framework to understand individual differences in such relationships. One of the main assumptions of the theory is that adults enter relationships with a history of interpersonal experiences and a unique set of memories, beliefs, and expectations that shape how they think and feel about their relationships and how they behave in those relationships [16].

Genderand gender roles are one of the factors that influence the definitions of sex and appropriate sexual behavior. Traditional sexual behavior roles state that women are supposed to be restrained in their sexual interests, but men are expected to show this interest continuously and to engage in active pursuit of sexual pleasure [1, 3, 13]. It is generally considered more appropriate for a man to have many sexual partners than for a woman [17].

According toAkindele-Oscar and Ayodele [1], Makinde [18], and Ogunsanya [3] males report sexual behavior to be more appropriate when it happens in the context of a casual acquaintance than females, who find it appropriate primarily within the context of steady dating. This gendered perception of sexual activity is not only influenced by the relational context, but also by the behavior type. Men report a higher incidence of kissing, petting, and intercourse than women [19]. Furthermore, males rate oral sex and anal sex as more appropriate behaviors than females while women tend to perceive penile-vaginal intercourse as less appealing than men [20]. On the other hand, women tend to include more behaviors in their definitions of “having sex” than males [21].

In an examination of early sexual initiation, it was found that being a male was a good predictor of transitioning into sexual activity [22]. Similarly, a study looking at the factors associated with early sexual activity among urban adolescents found a greater number of boys than girls initiated sexual intercourse before age 16 [23]. Research also indicates that boys report significantly more sexual partners [1, 2, 3] and higher levels of sexual risk behavior [6, 7].

Sexual behavior depends not only on learning and pleasurable reinforcements but also on opportunities and limitations including those established by the individual’s own standards, concepts, perception, and wellbeing.Adebayo, UdegbeandSunmola [5] noted that the ever growing change in premarital behavioral patterns of youngsters continually exposes today’s teenagers to be living in the world of great explorations. However, Snell, Schicke and Arbeiter [24]identified various psychological variants that could be related with close relationships. These were: relational esteem, relational preoccupation, internal relational control; relational consciousness; relational motivation; relational anxiety; relational assertiveness; relational depression; external relational control; relational monitoring; fear of relationship; and relational satisfaction.The psychological dispositions believed to have influence on individual sexual behavior can be summarised as follows in Table 1 below:

Table 1: ***Psychological inclinations associated with adolescents’ sexual behaviour***

SN	Variable	Meaning
1	Relationship Esteem	It is the extent to which people derive a sense of esteem from the

		intimate aspects of their life, and the extent to which they feel confident about their intimate relationships.
2	Relationship Preoccupation	Is the tendency to become absorbed in, obsessed with, and engrossed with the intimate aspects of one's life, to the extent that one virtually excludes from one's mind thoughts of other matters.
3	Internal Relationship Control	It is the people's expectation that they themselves can exert an influence on their intimate relationships.
4	Relationship Consciousness	It is the people's tendency to think about and to reflect about the nature of their intimate relationships.
5	Relationship Motivation	It is the people's motivation to be involved in an intimate relationship.
6	Relationship Anxiety	It is the people's feelings of tension, discomfort and anxiety about their intimate relationships.
7	Relationship Assertiveness	It is the characteristic of being intimately assertive (i.e., decisive about one's intimate relationships and self-reliant about the pursuit and fulfillment of one's intimate relationships.
8	Relationship Depression	It is the tendency to evaluate one's intimate relationship in a negative fashion and to feel depressed about the status on one's intimate relationship.
9	External Relationship Control	It is the people's expectation that their intimate relationships are largely determined by forces which they themselves can neither anticipate nor influence.
10	Relationship Monitoring	It is the awareness of other people's reactions to one's intimate relationships.
11	Fear of Relationship	It is the extent to which people are afraid of intimate activity.
12	Relationship Satisfaction	It is the extent to which people indicate that their intimate needs are currently being met.

Source: Snell, Schicke, &Arbeiter [24]; Adenuga& Ayodele [22]

THE PROBLEM

Until now, there has been no study that evaluates close relationships among adolescents in a multidimensional and multivariable manner, and there is paucity of researches on the psychological inclinations associated with sexual behavior among Nigerian young adults (adolescents). Therefore, this study is designed to fill such research gaps in Nigeria. Against this background, this study will investigate the relationship between psychological dispositions and sexual behavior in adolescence, and the extent at which gender (being a male or female) will affect adolescents' sexual behavior.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study therefore was to investigate some psychological factors and their relationship to adolescents' sexual behavior. And also the extent at which gender will affect the relationship between the psychological factorsand adolescents' sexual behavior. This will help to give direction to programs aimed at improving the mental health of young adults through their sexual behavior. There are inconsistencies in previous research on the social factors predicting adolescents' sexual behavior as well as the scarcity of researches on the psychological factors influencing their sexual

exploration. Therefore, this study is crucial to the understanding of the sexual behavior among Nigerian young adults.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In orders to achieve the purpose of this study, the following questions were formulated for testing at the 5% error margin.

1. Would there be any significant gender difference in theadolescents'sexual behaviorand psychological inclinations associated it?
2. Would there be any significant positive relationship between adolescents' sexual behavior and psychological inclinations associated with it?
3. Would there be a significant combine effect of psychological inclinations on adolescents' sexual behavior?
4. Would there be any significant gender differential effect of psychological inclinationson adolescents' sexual behavior?

METHODOLOGY

***DESIGN*:** The research design adopted in this study is a correlational study. With this design, a systematic inquiry on the differential and interactive effect of psychological inclinations associated with adolescents' sexual behavior was conducted without any direct intervention on the outcome variables.

SAMPLE: The sample of the study was drawn from the Senior Secondary School students in Ogun State, Nigeria. Simple random sampling techniques were used to select twenty secondary schools from the four (4) educational zones (Remo, Ijebu, Yewa & Egba) in the state. After dividing the population into homogeneous groups (based on educational zones), 150 students were selected from each of the schools, that is, 50 students each from SS1, SS2, and SS3 classes. From each of the classes, 25 males and 25 females were purposely selected for the study. In total, 3000 students participated in the study. Out of this sample, 1,478 were females while 1471 were males. The age range was between 13 and 19 years. The mean age was 15.3 years. Out of the 3000 questionnaire returned, 2,949 were deemed to have been properly completed for analysis. Therefore, 98.3% of questionnaire administration was ensured

INSTRUMENTS: The Multidimensional Relationship Questionnaire (MRQ) by Snell, et. al[24] was used in this study,which measures intimate relationship with sexual attraction along 12 psychological dispositions. It is a 60 – item scale which consists of twelve positive relationship oriented subscales. Participants are to rate the extent at which each of the item applied to them on a 5-point likert scaling format ranging from 1 (not at all characteristics of me) to 5 (very characteristic of me). In this study, MRQ reported an

estimate of reliability of .68, and was found to be correlated with social association at .89[22, 25]. The internal consistencies of these scales were: relationship esteem (α=.76), relationship preoccupation (α=.71), internal relationship control (α=.67), relationship consciousness (α=.73), relationship motivation (α=.69), relationship anxiety(α=.69), relationship assertiveness (α=.73), relationship depression (α=.70), external relationship control (α=.75), relationship monitoring (α=.77), fear of relationship (α=.66), and relationship satisfaction (α=.74).

(2) The second instrument is the "Sexual Relationship Behavior Inventory (SRBI)." It is a24-item scale constructed in five-point likert format measured along Very characteristicof me (5) toNot at all characteristic of me (1). Sample items include: "It would bother me if my sexual partner neglected my needs"; "When I make love with someone I generally expect something in return"; and "If I were to make love with a sexual partner, I'd take that person's needs & feelings into account".A reliability test was also carried out on 50 adolescents using Pearson Product Moment Correlation, thus, SRBI has internal consistency reliability 0.86.

DATA ANALYSIS: This study employs descriptive analysis, Multiple Regression Analysis, as well as correlationcoefficient (Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient) statistical tools.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS: Each individual's right to privacy was respected and cherished during and after research. The respondents were not required to write their names on the questionnaires. They were also assured that the information they gave was to be treated confidentially. The ethical consideration involved having a written parental permission for their children or wards' participation in the study. This was to enable the researcher obtain their informed consent before collecting data.

RESULTS

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Table 2:*Descriptive Results of the Respondents' Sexual Behavior in the last 6 months*

S/N	Variables	Male N=1471	Female N= 1478	Mean
1	Has a boyfriend/girlfriend	1159 ***(78.8%)***	987 ***(66.8%)***	***72.8%***
2	Has once had sexual intercourse	1111 ***(75.5%)***	956 ***(64.7%)***	***70.1%***
3	Had sexual intercourse in the last six month	1111 ***(75.5%)***	929 ***(62.9%)***	***69.2%***
4	Had experienced attempted forced (coerced) sex	106 ***(7.2%)***	501 ***(33.9%)***	***20.6%***
5	Sexual initiating behaviour e.g. wooing, touching	907 ***(61.7%)***	437 ***(29.6%)***	***45.7%***
6	Sexual experimenting behaviour e.g. kissing, caressing	1007 ***(68.5%)***	950 ***(64.3%)***	***66.4%***
	Others			
7	Age: 13-15 years	575	941	

	16-18 years	869	528	
	19years above	27	09	
	Mean age	16.5	15.5	***16years***
8	Mean age of sexual debut	**15.5**	**13.5**	***14.5***
9	Mean number of sexual partners	**3.5**	**1.5**	***2.5***

The results presented in Table 2 above revealed that 78.8 percent(1159) male has girlfriends and 75.5 percent (1111) has once had sexual intercourse while66.8 percent (987) female has boyfriends and 64.7 percent (956) has once had sexual intercourse. Out of the 75.5 percent male and 64.7 percent female that has once had sexual intercourse, all the 75.5 percent male and 62.9 percent female has had sexual intercourse in the last six month respectively. The participants' sexual life revealed that 7.2 percent males had experienced forced sex while 33.9 percent of female experienced same. It was revealed further thatmale adolescents (61.7%) are more protruding in sexual initiating behavior such as wooing, touching compared to their female counterpart (29.6%), while both male (68.5%) and female (64.3%) adolescents are actually sexually active. The mean age of sexual debut for male was 15.5 years and 13.5 years for female;while themean number of sexual partners for male was 3.5 and 1.5 for female. The implication of all these findings was that the socio-cultural values of Nigeria favors male than the female.

Table 3: ***T-test analysis showinggender difference in the adolescents' sexual behavior and psychological inclinations associated it***

Variable	Factors	N	X	SD	Df	t-cal.	t-crit.	P
Sexual Behavior	Male Female	1471 1478	33.868 32.327	13.861 11.436	2947	1.791	1.96	.013
Psych. Inclination	Male Female	1471 1478	69.321 64.789	15.288 10. 174	2947	3.007*	1.96	.000

The results presented in Table 3 revealed that the obtained value of t is 1.791 for the sexual behavior which is less than the t- critical value of 1.96 at 2947 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance(t= 1.791, p = .013). This implies that there is no significant gender difference in adolescents' sexual behavior. On the other hand, significant difference was observed in the level of psychological inclinations between male and female adolescents(t= 3.007, p = .000).

Table 4: ***Relationship between Adolescents' Sexual Behavior and Psychological Inclinations***

		Psychological inclination	**Sexual behaviour**
Psychological inclination	Pearson Correlation	1	.697*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	2949	2949
Sexual behavior	Pearson Correlation	.697*	.697*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	2949	2949

**** Significant at .05 alpha level***

The result in Table 4 revealed a significant relationship between adolescents' sexual behavior and psychological inclinations (r = .697; p<.05). This implies that psychological inclinationsto a great extent influenced adolescents' sexual behavior.

Table 5: ***Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis of the combine effect of psychological inclinations on adolescents' sexual behavior***

Source of variation	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F-Ratio	P
Regression	3718.968	12	309.914	18.704	.021*
Residual	48640.712	2936	16.567		
Total	52359.680	2948			
Multiple R (Adjusted) = .523					
Multiple R^2 (Adjusted) = .274					
Stand error estimate = 15.432					

Going by the result presented in Table 5, all the psychological inclinationswhen put together yielded a coefficient of multiple regression (R) of .523 and a multiple regression square of .274. This shows that 27.4 percent of the total variance in adolescents' sexual behavioris accounted for by the combination of the psychological inclinations. The table also indicates that the analysis of variance of the multiple regression data produced an F-ratio value significant at 0.05 level ($F_{(12, 2948)} = 18.704$; $P < 0.05$).

Table 6: ***Differentialeffectivenessof the Psychological Inclinationsassociated with Adolescents' Sexual Behavior (separately for males and females)***

	Predictors	**Overall N = 2949**		**Male N = 1471**		**Female N = 1478**					
		X	**SD**	**X**	**SD**	**X**	**SD**	**B**	**β**	**t-value**	**sig**
1	Relationship Esteem	53.43	10.77	54.48	8.90	52.37	10.03	1.917	.404	3.001	.011
2	Relationship preoccupation	50.39	11.13	49.56	13.13	51.26	10.89	4.019	.489	3.424	.003
3	Internal Relation-ship Control	51.96	10.57	53.39	9.86	50.58	11.17	1.048	.307	-2.276	.020
4	Relationship Consciousness	51.56	10.69	50.19	11.19	52.91	9.89	1.017	.301	-2.191	.000
5	Relationship Motivation	50.97	11.59	51.84	10.80	50.11	11.18	3.707	.479	3.297	.101
6	Relationship Anxiety	50.39	11.31	49.71	13.11	51.07	10.99	1.889	.401	2.903	.021
7	Relationship Assertiveness	50.53	11.53	50.70	11.10	53.51	9.03	1.007	.490	-2.081	.054
8	Relationship Depression	52.11	10.17	50.81	11.00	53.03	9.93	1.500	.387	2.707	.023
9	External Relation -ship Control	50.50	11.72	50.51	11.04	50.49	11.13	1.363	.355	2.633	.013

10	Relationship Monitoring	52.17	10.09	51.26	10.63	53.08	9.79	2.060	.424	3.098	.111
11	Relationship Fear	50.98	10.17	50.17	9.05	51.78	10.69	1.329	.336	2.486	.054
12	Relationship Satisfaction	52.29	10.51	53.58	10.69	51.01	10.97	1.222	.319	2.303	.000

Generally, the study established a significant gender differential effectof psychological inclinations on adolescents' sexual behavior. Specifically, gender effect on the psychological inclinations associated with adolescents' sexualbehavior indicated that male reported significantly higher quality of relational esteem, internal control, relational motivation, and relational satisfaction.The female on the other hand have higher quality of relational preoccupation, consciousness,anxiety, assertiveness, depression, monitoring and fear. The results in Table 5 above revealed no significant differential effectof psychological inclination of external relational control on male and female adolescents' sexual behavior.

DISCUSSION

The study investigated psychological inclinations associated with adolescents' sexual behavior, and also the extent at which gender will moderate the relationship between the psychological factorsand adolescents' sexual behavior. Findings of the first questions revealed no statistical significant gender difference in the adolescents' sexual behavior. The only assumption that can be deduced from this finding is that both male and female adolescents of today cannot distinguish between love, infatuation, and sex. To them sex is love. Specifically, gendered perception of sexual activity is not only influenced by the relational context, but also by the behavior type. The finding of this study is line with the position of Ogunsanya [3] that adolescents nowadays sees abstinence as a forced value and that having sex early makes them discover their identity. Also, this result is in support of Akindele Oscar and Ayodele [1] that engaging in casual sex among their subjects was not necessarily a deliberate choice, often times it was due to lack of adequate knowledge or complete ignorance on the subject matter.

However, the differences observed in the psychological inclinations associated with adolescents' sexual behavior could not have occurred by chance. The only assumption that can be deduced from this finding is that male and female preferred proportions of the varying physical attributes to what constitute love. And as noted by O'Sullivan [26] that traditional sexual behavior roles state that women are supposed to be restrained in their sexual interests, but men are expected to show this interest continuously and to engage in active pursuit of sexual pleasure. It might also be that society still holds lenient attitudes toward male sexual activity that provide a lax context in which males are likely to translate their sexual desires into behavior. On the other hand, less permissive attitudes toward female sexual activity might prevent female adolescents from engaging in sexual behavior even if the desire is present. The findings lend credence to the issue of culture supporting male sexual behaviour [1, 13], whereby male show more preferences to sexuality than female [27].

The outcome of the second research questions revealed a significant positive relationship between adolescents' sexual behaviour and psychological inclinations associated with it. The implication

of this is that how knowledgeable the adolescent is in terms of reproductive health determines the totality of his/her sexual behavior and wellbeing. Thus, these psychological inclinations provide a distinct perspective wherein adolescents' sexual behavior is considered on a more macroscopic, rather than microscopic, level. This corroborates the report of Steinberg [28] that the most recent perspectives on adolescent risk sexual behaviour are consistent with the notion that the increase of risk sexual behavior in adolescence is a function of typical development.

Results examining combine effect of psychological inclinations on adolescents' sexual behaviorshowed that 27.4 percent of the total variance in adolescents' sexual behaviorist accounted for by the combination of the psychological factors.The reason for these findings is that a sociable adolescent could display adequate psychological adjustment, cooperation, good intra and interpersonal relationship. Quality social relationship can also bring about high mental health, morale, trust, respect, social competence, as well as relationship productivity that can transcend into workplace and family life.This finding support the work of previous researchers who found that emotional regulation difficulties [29, 30], feelings of insecurity and of the self as unworthy [31], feelings of loneliness and social isolation [32], and sexual promiscuity in young adults are manifestation of social maladjustment and poor psychological functioning [33].

The last research question established gender differential effect of psychological inclinations on adolescents' sexual behaviour. It was reported that male adolescents have higher quality of relational esteem, internal control, relational motivation, and relational satisfaction, while the female have higher quality of relational preoccupation, consciousness,anxiety, assertiveness, depression, monitoring and fear. The results is in favor of male adolescents which is in line with the work of earlier scholars who found that girls may be more likely and strongly affected than boys by tensions and strains in their best friendship [34]. Also, Rubin *et. al*[33] affirmed that girls may be more influenced by close relationship / friendship than boys are. Research generally shows that men are more oriented towards sexual acts and women are more oriented towards romance or the emotional aspects of sex [35], which would tend to support common social and cultural assumptions in the western world today. Also, various studies attribute a tendency towards sexually driven behavior to men compared with women [36, 37].

CONCLUSION

Adolescence marks a period of considerable experimentation and is characterized by increases in risky behaviors including risky sexual behaviors. The reasons why young people engage in sexual activity are complex and diverse and have been attributed to various psychosocial context and familial factors. This study however, highlights the psychological inclinations associated with adolescents' sexual behavior in Nigeria. It could be deduced from the outcome of these findings that young adults' perception of sex and sexual behavioral patterns are manifestation of some psychological inclinations enriched within the cultural milieu in which the adolescents find themselves.

The result of the study revealed that there are psychological inclinations that are associated with quality sexual behavioral patterns of young adults. These psychological depositions have their foundation from the early social attachment, which have direct influence on individual mental health and psychological functioning.

The implication of this study is that there is need for government, school management and / school counselors (counseling psychologist) to design quality programs at different level of education that will enhance positive sexual behavior among students at all levels, promote students' intra and interpersonal relationship skills, psychological functioning, and through skill building programs such as sex education, peer counseling, interpersonal communication, critical thinking and problem-solving skill trainings, and the likes.

Also parents as the primary caregiver and the first socialization agents should provide conducive home environment and provide quality interaction that must cater for the needs and yearnings of their children. Parents must come to the knowledge of how their teens grow and change; if they are to assist them through this important developmental stage of sexual exploration. Adequate parent-child interpersonal relationship and active listening to teens' languages and emotional concerns could be of great help.

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