

Female Undergraduate Students' Perceptions on Issues Relating to Transactional Sex in Universities in Nigeria

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Abstract

The study investigated female undergraduate students' perceptions on issues relating to transactional sex in universities in Nigeria. Specifically, the study determined students' perceptions on: reasons undergraduate female students engage in transactional sex; risks associated with transactional sex; and ways of curbing transactional sex among undergraduate female students. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Population was 8,864 female undergraduates of Kogi State University. Instrument for data collection was questionnaire. Data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. Findings include 10 perceived reasons why female students engage in transactional sex, which include: peer pressure (\bar{X} =3.13), lack of parental supervision (\bar{X} =3.27), among others. Other findings are nine perceived risks associated with transactional sex which include, high risk of physical abuse (\bar{X} =3.56), unwanted pregnancy (\bar{X} =3.12) among others; and eight perceived ways of curbing transactional sex, which include provision of scholarship scheme for indigent students (\bar{X} =3.54); provision of micro loans for students (\bar{X} =3.50), and others. Based on the findings, the study made three recommendations, including, among others that university administration should develop part-time job scheme for indigent students with females being given special considerations.

Keywords: Sex, Transactional, Female, Undergraduates, Indulgence, Students, Causes, Risks, Perceptions

Introduction

The occurrence of transactional sex between consenting adults is a phenomenon that has spanned generations, and evident in all cultures. Transactional sex involves the exchange of sex for money, shelter, gifts, services or other favours (Amo-Adjei, *et al*, 2014). It could also be defined as nonmarital sexual relationship motivated by an implicit assumption that sex will be exchanged for material support or other benefits" (Wamoyi, *et al*, 2019). It is mostly associated with adolescent girls and young women. Transactional

relationships, sex and prostitution may be thought of as lying on a spectrum. At one end, transactional sex may have very many apparent similarities with the practice of prostitution, particularly when cash is given by a sexual partner after a single act of sex, or where there is a 'relationship' involving multiple sexual encounters that is entirely sustained by receipt of material reward (Jewkes & Morrell, 2012). However, the difference is entrenched in fact that a primary motivation for the transactional sexual relationship is love which prostituting is devoid of.

According to Moore, *et al* (2007), motivations for engaging in transactional relationships are not mutually exclusive and often young women are driven by both subsistence and consumerist desires. Studies that have explored motivations to engage in transactional sex suggest a number of reasons like poverty and economic necessity which is the major key driver behind transactional sex. Dunkle, *et al* (2011) noted that areas with limited employment opportunities and high poverty rates, some females engage in transactional sex as a survival strategy by often depending on men for financial stability. Hence, transactional sex occurs in diverse contexts like the need for social mobility or status, which contains material goods such as clothes, jewelry, and technology devices among others. The pursuit of these goods often leads some young female to engage in relationships with older men, (Leclerc-Madlala, 2013). Some individuals also engage in transactional sex because they desire both the material benefits and the emotional or sexual fulfillment that comes with the relationship (Wamoyi, *et al*, 2011). It is also influenced by gendered socio-economic and cultural factors. For instance, Chatterji, *et al* (2015) observed that in some parts of Africa, it is considered appropriate for a man to provide gifts and monetary support to his partner in exchange for affection and sex. Transactional sex can thus be culturally embedded and reinforced by societal expectations, rather than solely driven by economic necessity. It often poses challenges to the health of the women involved.

Available reports indicate that women's biological susceptibility to infection and their inability to negotiate for safe sex in transactional sex

relationships place them at higher risk of contracting HIV particularly in the context of multiple concurrent partnerships (Higgins *et al.*, 2010; Foley & Drame, 2013). Despite the obvious effects of transactional sex, some undergraduate students still do indulge in it. Studies has shown various health issues relating to transactional sex. For instance, Ranganathan, *et al* (2016) reported that in South Africa transactional sex often coexists with other risky sexual behaviours such as an early sexual debut, multiple concurrent sexual partnerships, and inconsistent condom use. Irrespective of the context, evidence links transactional sex to undesirable sexual and reproductive health outcomes including sexually transmitted infections (STIs), unintended pregnancies and unsafe abortions (Choudhry *et al.*, 2014). Existing literature also reported that transactional sex is primarily motivated by basic survival or subsistence needs (Dunkle & Wingood, 2010).

There are various reports that transactional sex occur in universities in different countries, for instance there are studies in Uganda (Sagrove 2007; Samara 2010), and in Tanzania (Wamoyi *et al* 2020). In Nigeria, Ajayi & Somefun, (2019) based on their study of two public universities, reported existence of transactional sex, nothing among others, that 17.9 percent of their respondents had received money, gifts or various types of favour in exchange for sex. Another study by Okonkwo, (2016) on rethinking linear accounts of transactional sex in literature with structuration theory on female Nigerian university students indicates that components in which students' analytical external structure, such as gender structure, patterns their internal structure or habitus including their sexual

scripts, also suggests that women do depend on men for money, gift or favour in exchange for sex.

Earlier study by Nwokocha, (2007) attributed transactional sex to poverty and observed its socio-demographic consequences which include: dropping out of school, high rate of rural-urban migration, exposure to being raped, exposure to alcoholism, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), among others.

Furthermore, Azuike *et al.*, (2021) reported that transactional sex exchanges are frequently driven by socio-economic disparities, with students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds seeking financial support to meet their basic needs, while others may pursue luxury items or social status within peer groups. This practice appears to be widespread among female students, where economic hardship and social pressures contribute to the normalization of transactional sex.

Since transactional sex is a social problem, it is necessary to evolve ways of curbing it. A step in this direction could be to find out the perceptions of the female undergraduate students on issues relating to transactional sex, hence this study.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study was to investigate perceptions on transactional sex indulge among female undergraduates in Nigerian Universities. Specifically, the study determined female students' perceptions on:

1. possible reasons undergraduate female students engage in transactional sex.
2. risks that could be associated with transactional sex among undergraduate students.

3. ways of curbing transactional sex among undergraduate female students.

Methodology

Design of the Study: The study employed a descriptive survey research design.

Area of the Study: This study was carried out in one of the universities in Kogi State, Nigeria. Kogi State University, Anyigba was chosen because female students from various regions of Nigeria attend the university, fostering a diverse academic community. Kogi State serves as a bridge between northern and southern Nigeria, making it a melting pot of ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity.

Population for the Study: The population of this study was made up of 8,864 female undergraduate students within the age range of 18 to 25 from Kogi State University, Anyigba. Based on population data for the 2018/2019 academic session, the undergraduate female students were enrolled across eight faculties and the students represented a mix of urban and rural origins, with varying academic interests and career aspirations (Academic Planning Unit, Kogi State University, 2019). This diversity in academic disciplines and cultural backgrounds provided a rich context for the study.

Sample for the Study: The sample for the study was made up of 200 female undergraduate students. This was chosen using the population chart developed by Morrisson, & Murtin, (2011). The chart posits that populations below 10,000 should have samples below 300 respondents. Simple random sampling technique was used for deriving the samples. The sample was achieved by sampling 25 female students each from the eight faculties in Kogi State University.

Instrument for Data Collection: The instrument for data collection was a

questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed based on literature review and specific objectives of the study. The instrument a 4-point scale with response categories of Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1). It was validated by three university Home Economics experts. To establish the reliability of instrument, 20 copies were administered to 20 female students in Federal University, Lokoja, Kogi State. Data collected were analysed using Cronbach Alpha method to determine the internal consistency of the instrument, which a reliability coefficient of 0.956.

Method of Data Collection: Two hundred copies of the questionnaire were

distributed to the respondents by hand with the help of two research assistants. The two hundred copies were all completed and retrieved. This gave a 100 return rate.

Data Analysis: Mean and standard deviation were used for data analysis. Based on the 4-point scale of the instrument, 2.50 was taken as a cut-off mean. Any item that has a mean score above 2.50 were taken as “agreed”, while, any item that falls below 2.50 was regarded as “disagreed”.

Results

Table 1: Mean Responses and Standard Deviation of Female Undergraduate Students on Reasons Female Students Engage in Transactional Sex.

S/N	Reasons undergraduate female students engage in transactional sex	\bar{X}	SD	Remark
1	Peer pressure	3.13	0.95	Agreed
2	Lack of parental supervision	3.27	0.63	Agreed
3	Perception of men in society as the providers	3.49	0.78	Agreed
4	Perception of men having multiple partners as being acceptable	3.19	0.99	Agreed
5	Need to keep up with fashion trends	3.09	0.85	Agreed
6	For improvement of examination grades	3.11	0.87	Agreed
7	Pressure to keep up with new technologies such as phones	3.05	0.89	Agreed
8	Need for resources (money or other materials)	3.65	0.80	Agreed
9	Passing of exams	3.12	0.75	Agreed
10	Making up for poor family background	2.91	0.99	Agreed

\bar{X} = Mean responses of Undergraduates, SD = Standard Deviation of the responses

Table 1 shows that the ten (10) items with the mean score ranging from 2.91 to 3.65. These are therefore 10 possible reasons undergraduate female students engage in transactional sex as perceived by the respondents. Item No 8 - indicating that students engage in transactional sex due

to need for resources (money or other materials) scored the highest mean of 3.65 ($\bar{X} \leq 2.50$). This probably indicated that this could be one of the main reasons undergraduate female students engage in transactional sex.

Table 2: Mean Responses and Standard Deviation of Female Undergraduate Students on Perceived Risks Associated with Transactional Sex

S/N	Risks associated with transactional sex	\bar{X}	SD	Remarks
1	High risk of physical abuse	3.56	0.80	Agreed
2	Unwanted pregnancy	3.12	0.75	Agreed
3	Dropping out of school	2.04	1.03	Disagreed
4	Inconsistent use of condom	2.90	1.09	Agreed
5	Inappropriate use of contraceptive pills	2.75	0.96	Agreed
6	Unsafe abortion	2.50	1.00	Agreed
7	Contraction of sexually transmitted infections (STI)	3.83	0.60	Agreed
8	Contraction of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)	3.87	0.53	Agreed
9	High risk of HIV/AIDs contraction	3.24	0.93	Agreed
10	Higher risk of rape	2.88	1.05	Agreed

\bar{X} = Mean responses of Undergraduates, SD = Standard Deviation of the responses

Table 2 shows that the (10) items with the mean score ranging from 2.04 to 3.87. These are therefore the possible risks associated with transactional sex among undergraduate students as perceived respondents. Item No eight (8) indicate contraction of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) scored the highest mean of 3.87. This probably indicated that respondents saw this as a very common risks associated with transactional sex among undergraduate students.

Table 3: Mean Responses and Standard Deviation of Female Undergraduate Students on Ways of Curbing Transactional Sex

S/N	Ways of curbing transactional sex	\bar{X}	SD	Remark
1	Provision of scholarship scheme for indigent students	3.54	0.73	Agreed
2	Provision of micro loans for students	3.50	0.77	Agreed
3	Organizing of institution wide campaigns on contraceptive usage and its health effects	3.30	0.80	Agreed
4	Organizing of institution wide campaigns on transactional and its health effects	2.93	1.04	Agreed
5	Orientating students on the effects of abortion	2.98	1.06	Agreed
6	Encouraging abstinence through posters pasted around school	3.06	0.98	Agreed
7	Encouragement of gender equality to ensure men are not seen as sole providers	2.74	0.98	Agreed
8	Encouraging emotional support and caring (including for a partner's health, e.g., through testing for STDs and HIV)	2.99	1.03	Agreed

\bar{X} = Mean responses of Undergraduates, SD = Standard Deviation of the responses

Table 3 shows that the eight (8) items with the mean score ranging from 2.74 to 3.54. These are therefore possible ways of curbing transactional sex among undergraduate female students as perceived by the respondents. Item No 1 - indicating that provision of scholarship scheme for indigent students scored the highest mean 3.54. This probably indicated that the best ways of curbing transactional sex among undergraduate female students.

Discussion

The study identified the reasons undergraduate female students engage in transactional sex. The reasons identified by the present study is in line with findings in previous studies. Reasons undergraduate students engage in transactional sex as discovered by the present study include; peer pressure, lack of parental supervision, perception of men in society as the providers, perception of men having multiple partners as being acceptable, need to keep up with fashion trends, for improvement of examination grades, pressure to keep up with new technologies such as phones, need for resources (money or other materials), passing of exams and poor family background. These findings were consistent with studies conducted by Chatterji *et al.* (2015); Lander and Blanck (2015); Fuller (2012); and Steele (2013). A recent study by Dunaev, *et al* (2023) who emphasized that financial hardship and economic instability directly correlates with an increased likelihood of engaging in transactional sex as a means of survival. Also, Miri, (2022) agreed with the above findings that there are many reasons undergraduate students engage in transactional sex and these include the age of the individual, lack of employment opportunities, poverty and economic inequality, number of household members, structural and intimate partner violence, orphan status, educational level and among others.

The risks associated with transactional sex among undergraduate as identified by the study include the following; high risk of physical abuse, unwanted pregnancy, inconsistent use of condom, inappropriate use of contraceptive pills, unsafe abortion, contraction of sexually transmitted infections (STI), contraction of sexually

transmitted diseases (STDs), high risk of HIV/AIDs contraction, higher risk of rape, etc. These findings were also consistent with studies conducted by Atwood *et al.*, 2011; Lee, 2013; Choudhry *et al.*, 2014; Blommaert, 2014 amongst others. However, the rejected item which identifies dropping out of school as one of the risks associated with transactional sex was accepted in the study carried out by Zembe *et al.* (2013). In agreement with the above findings, the different risks involved in transactional sex include increased risks of STDs and higher risks of violence assaults leading to trauma and long-term health consequences (Decker, *et al*, 2019), stigma and discrimination which can lead to low self-esteem, depression, anxiety (Platt,2019), substance abuse (Duff, *et al*, 2019) and among others.

The study also identified possible ways of curbing transactional sex among undergraduate female students includes the following; provision of scholarship scheme for indigent students, provision of micro loans for students, organizing of institution wide campaigns on contraceptive usage and its health effects, organizing of institution wide campaigns on transactional and its health effects, orientating students on the effects of abortion, encouraging abstinence through posters pasted around school, encouragement of gender equality to ensure men are not seen as mere providers, encouraging emotional support and caring (including for a partner's health, e.g., through testing for STDS and HIV). These findings were consistent with findings made in studies conducted by several authors such as Brouard & Crewe, 2012; Van Der Heijden & Swartz, 2014; Zembe *et al.*, 2013; Shefer, *et al* 2012; Pettifor, 2015; Dworkin *et al.*, 2013 and Kyegombe *et al.*, 2014. Similarly,

studies suggested that transactional sex can be curbed through comprehensive sexual education programs on campuses (Blaise, et al, 2019), ensuring the availability of counselling support services from experts in Home Economics and her related fields (Choi. *et al*, 2019), creating safe and inclusive campus environment that will support dialogue about sex, relationship, and mental health (Sinha,2019), continuous monitoring and assessing the widespread and factors associated with transactional sex among undergraduate students (Blaise, *et al*, 2019).

Conclusion

The data suggest that most students who engage in transactional sex rarely use measures of protection such as condoms. This is not surprising. Most of the partners who engage students in risky sexual behaviour are of higher social and economic status who are more powerful to dominate scene of sexual encounters. Inequality in social and economic status makes it very difficult for the students to negotiate safe sex, hence, they are vulnerable to STIs and HIV. This study was purely quantitative and therefore generalization may be difficult. The insightful findings it has generated could be useful as a preliminary assessment of the prevalence of transactional sex and the associated sexual health problems among undergraduates.

Recommendations

In line with the findings of this study, the following are recommendations that would lead to curbing the menace of transactional sex among university undergraduates;

1. University administrations should develop part-time job scheme for

indigent students with females being given special consideration.

2. All stakeholders must invest deliberate effort to assist the vulnerable population from the risky effects of transactional sex.
3. The need to use protection in form of contraceptive devices may also be publicized in the university community with special emphasis on the student population.

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