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Experimental Analysis on the Awareness of Sexual Assault as a Class of Gender-Based Violence Among Teenagers

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ABSTRACT

Sexual assault, a critical form of gender-based violence risks among teenagers. This study investigates the awareness of sexual assault among secondary school teenagers to better understand their perceptions and knowledge of the subject. The research employed a descriptive survey design conducted in a selected secondary school within the study area. The target population consisted of teenagers in SS1–SS3, with a sample size of 65 respondents selected using a stratified random sampling technique. Data were collected using a validated questionnaire whose reliability was confirmed through a pilot test. Findings revealed that 55.8% of respondents were aged 14–17 years, 46.2% were aged 18–21 years, with no respondents aged 22 years and above. Females constituted 55.4% of the sample, while males accounted for 44.6%. Class distribution showed 29% in SS3, 37% in SS2, and 34% in SS1, with a dominant religious affiliation of Christianity (93.8%). In assessing awareness, respondents strongly rejected the misconception that rape is a sexual agreement (mean = 1.6) and accepted that it is forceful intercourse without consent (mean = 3.4). While rejecting the notion that a woman cannot be a rapist (mean = 2.0), they acknowledged that rape can occur between individuals of the same sex (mean = 2.7) and between relatives of opposite sex (mean = 2.6). A significant majority agreed that rape is a punishable offence (mean = 3.7). The study showed that while teenagers possess substantial awareness of the criminal nature of sexual assault, certain misconceptions persist, indicating the need for continuous sensitization and educational programs to address gaps in understanding.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescents experience sexual assault at significantly higher rates than adults, with one in three women reporting their first rape between ages 11 and 17 (Crawford-Jakubiak *et al.*, 2017). Rape is a subset of sexual assault involving penetration—however minimal—without consent (Schulhofer & Stephen, 2017). Globally, approximately 150 million girls have been subjected to forced sexual intercourse before age 18 (Pinheiro, 2016), with serious short- and long-term health and social consequences (Mangiloi, 2019). In Nigeria, rape remains a pressing public health concern, especially among female adolescents, yet underreporting persists due to social stigma and weak legal enforcement (Ogunyemi, 2014). The problem is aggravated by gender norms, victim blaming, and limited awareness of the full legal and health implications of sexual assault (Nelson, 2016). Multiple risk factors heighten the likelihood of rape. These include media influence—through pornography and sexually explicit materials—prompting adolescents to experiment sexually (Garland, 2018; Ubong, 2015), peer pressure, poverty, substance abuse, and prior victimization (Acierno *et al.*, 2019). Social norms also discourage reporting, while adolescence itself, with its cognitive and emotional immaturity, increases vulnerability (Finkel & Sapp, 2016). Preventing rape among adolescents requires a multi-layered approach. Health education in schools can raise awareness, build self-defense skills, and encourage safe relationships

(Eze, 2015). Public sensitization through mass media helps dispel rape myths and shift social norms. Social-emotional learning fosters respect and boundaries in relationships, while environmental monitoring by parents and teachers enhances early detection of risk (Ubong, 2015). Institutional frameworks—including clear policies, police sexual crime units, and survivor support services—are critical to deterrence and justice (Anderson, 2017). The consequences of rape span physical, psychological, and social dimensions. Health effects include sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancy, chronic pelvic pain, and urinary tract infections (World Health Organization, 2014). Psychologically, survivors often experience post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, self-blame, and social withdrawal (Patricia, 2016). Social consequences include stigma, school dropout, and forced marriage (Onu, 2016). In cultures with strict sexual norms, victims—especially females—may be ostracized, divorced, or even killed, a phenomenon known as secondary victimization (Wakelin *et al.*, 2017). The Health Belief Model (HBM) underpins this study, positing that an individual's decision to adopt preventive measures depends on perceived susceptibility, severity, benefits, and barriers (Becker, 2017). Applied here, adolescents' willingness to avoid risky situations or report incidents is influenced by how seriously they view the threat of rape and the perceived benefits of preventive actions. Studies across Nigeria and Africa reveal varied levels of rape knowledge among adolescents. In Ondo State,

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Aderanti *et al.* (2021) found that 54.2% of 295 female adolescents had good knowledge of rape, 82.4% believed girls are vulnerable victims, and 61.7% acknowledged that perpetrators can be anyone. In rural Tanzania, Muzdalifat (2015) reported that 58.3% of 1,560 respondents had poor knowledge of sexual violence, with 28% of girls and 13% of boys experiencing sexual violence before age 18. In Lagos, Bukola *et al.* (2021) observed that among 414 adolescents, 50.5% had good knowledge of sexual abuse, yet misconceptions influenced their perceptions of what constitutes rape. In Rivers State, Eke *et al.* (2015) found that while 83% of 1,050 students knew the general definition of rape, only 4% recognized that sex between an adult and a minor is rape, and 42.1% knew that perpetrators can be either strangers or relatives. In Southeast Nigeria, Adogu, *et al.* (2014) reported that 16.4% of 280 female undergraduates had experienced rape, with nightlife exposure identified as a major risk factor. These findings underline the urgent need for awareness programs, peer education, and school health initiatives. Rape among adolescents remains a serious yet underreported problem in Nigeria and globally. High vulnerability, coupled with limited awareness, cultural barriers, and systemic weaknesses, exacerbate the situation. Strengthening adolescent knowledge, addressing predisposing factors, and institutionalizing preventive and supportive frameworks are critical to reducing the incidence and consequences of rape. Empirical evidence confirms that targeted education, coupled with cultural and legal reforms, can significantly improve adolescents' understanding and protection against sexual assault. This study therefore focused on the level of knowledge of rape as a type of sexual assault among senior secondary school students in Government Technical College Enugu State. The findings of the study will be useful to the public in curbing the increasing rate of rape in the society and further profound the preventing measures. It will also be a source of information and reference material for further research studies when published.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The method used in obtaining data for this research includes; the research design, area of study, target population, sample size and sampling technique, instrument for data collection, validation/reliability of instrument. Method of data collection, method of data analysis and ethical consideration.

Research Design

The research design that was used for the study is descriptive survey design, which is to determine the people's interest and opinions about a particular phenomenon under investigation. It also described situations as they exist in their natural settings and entails the systematic collection and presentation of data to give a clear picture of particular situation.

Area of study

The study was carried out in Government Technical College, located in Abakaliki road Enugu State. It is bounded by Polo Shopping Mall (ShopRite) at the North, Ogui road at the South, Enugu State College of Education and Technology at the West and Okpara avenue at the East. It comprises of 29 classrooms, library, laboratory room and Administrative office. This area is suitable for research because it has other neighboring schools that can influence the behavior of the students.

Target population

The population of this study comprised of 650 students in SS1, SS2 and SS3 in Government Technical College Enugu State.

Sample size

The sample size was obtained using Nwana's approach which stated that 10% of the population is used if the target population is in few hundreds, thus for the population of 650, 10% of the target population will give: $\text{Sample} = 10/100 * 650/1 = 6500/100 = 65$

Sampling Technique

Convenience sampling Technique was used for data collection, in that those who were available during the data collection were used.

Instrument for data collection

The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was structured in such a way that through them, the researcher can achieve the objectives of the study. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. Section A; demographic data of respondents. Section B which contains a likert scale that reflects the objectives to the study on the respondents' specific knowledge of rape as a type of sexual assault among senior secondary school teenagers.

Reliability of the instrument

A pilot study was carried out using students in Government Secondary School Enugu State, 10% of the sample size was used. Copies of questionnaire was shared to 6 students that will not be part of the target population and their responses noted. After two weeks, the instrument was given to the same group of 6 students to obtain another data. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to obtain the reliability of the instrument, which the result of the instrument gave 0.7.

Method of data collection

Data collection was through the use of structured questionnaire. The researcher distributed 65 copies of questionnaire to the respondents with the aid of a research assistant. The content of the questionnaire was explained to the respondents for clarification and left

for them to tick their choice. The questionnaires were collected immediately after answering which ensured a 100% return rate.

Method of data analysis

Data were analyzed using percentage and mean values and presented in tables. Mean value was used to analyze questions on four points likert scale. Decision rule was made where the upper limit cut off point is 2.5 and above, while the lower limit becomes any value below 2.5. Any response having a mean score rating 2.5 or above is acceptable (agree) while any score rating below 2.5 is regarded as rejected (Disagree).

Ethical consideration

The researcher observed the following ethical considerations while carrying out the research in the proposed area of study.

1. Confidentiality: The researcher reassured the respondents that their responses will not be made open to anybody who is not directly involved in the study.

2. Voluntary participation: The researcher did not force the respondents to participate in the study and each person involved in the study was free to either participate or decline.

3. Informed consent: The researcher ensured that full information about the study was given and the questions were properly explained to the respondents.

4. Beneficence: The researcher ensured no harm to the respondents during the course of the study.

5. Plagiarism: The researcher ensured that all used words, ideas and concepts were referenced.

6. Anonymity: The researcher ensured anonymity of the respondents by not including self-identifying information like name on the questionnaires.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of data were presented here. The sixty-five questionnaires were distributed and all were retrieved which means that there were 100% return rate. The data were analyzed using different statistical approaches and represented in tables, frequency and percentages.

Table 1: Demographic data the respondents.

S/N	Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Group
1	14–17 years	35	55.8	Age Range
	18–21 years	30	46.2	Age Range
	22 and above	0	0.0	Age Range
2	Female	36	55.4	Gender
	Male	29	44.6	Gender
3	SS3	19	29.0	Class
	SS2	24	37.0	Class
	SS1	22	34.0	Class
4	Christian	61	93.8	Religion
	Muslim	4	6.2	Religion
	Total	65 per category	100 per category	

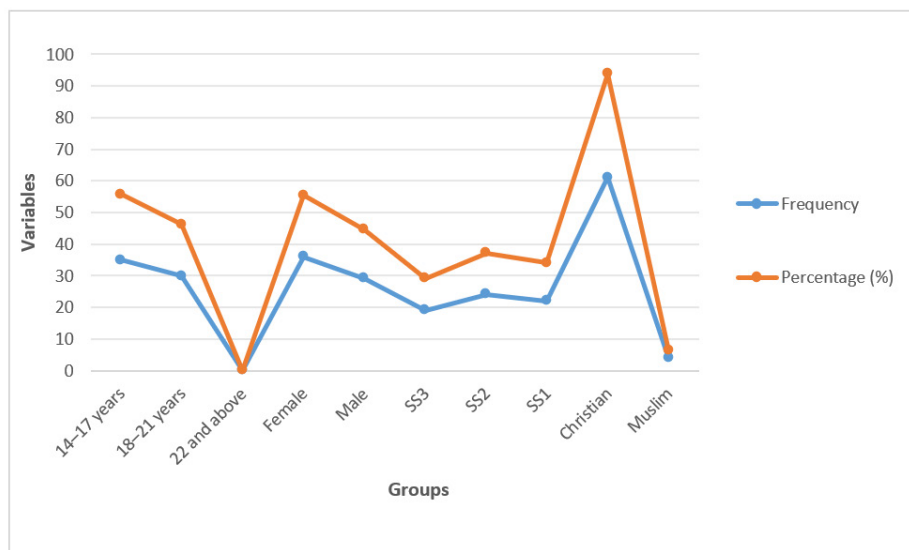


Figure 1: Graph of the demographic data of respondents.

Table 1 and Figure 1 revealed that out of 65 respondents 35(55.8%) fall within the age range of 14–17 years, 30(46.2%) were within the age range of 18–21 years whereas no respondents was 22 years and above. It showed that greater number of the respondents 36(55.4%) were

female and 29 (44.6%) were male. It also showed that 19(29%) were in SS3 class, 24(37%) were from SS2 class and 22(34%) are from SS1 class and also majority of the students 61(93.8%) were Christians, 4(6.2%) were Muslims.

Table 2: Level of knowledge of rape as a type of sexual assaults.

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Remarks
5	Rape is a sexual agreement between two people of opposite sex	2	4	28	31	1.6	Rejected
6	Rape is a forceful sexual intercourse with someone without consent	25	34	6	1	3.4	Accepted
7	A woman can be a rapist	7	9	29	20	2.0	Rejected
8	Rape can occur between people off same sex	19	21	14	11	2.7	Accepted
9	Rape can occur between two relatives of opposite sex	22	16	15	12	2.6	Accepted
10	Rape is a punishable offence	45	19	1	0	3.7	Accepted

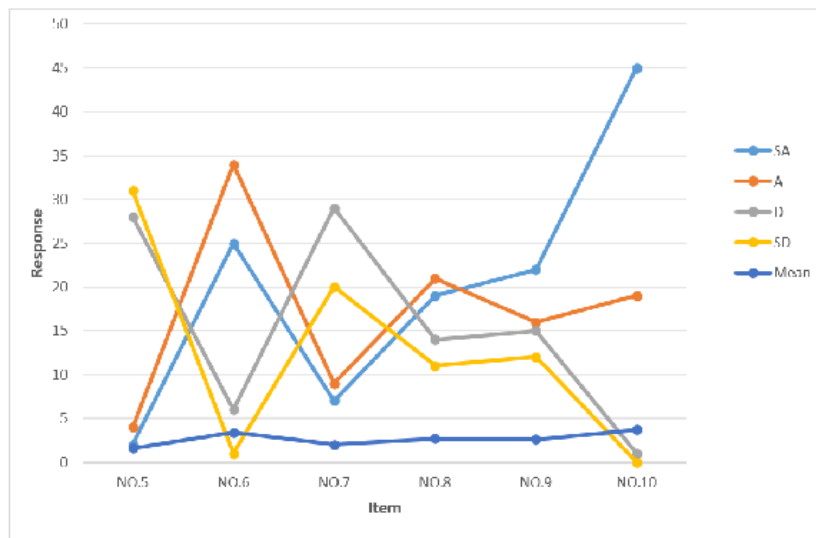


Figure 2: Graph of the knowledge of rape as a type of sexual assaults.

From the table 2 and figure 2 above, majority of the respondents disagreed that rape is a sexual agreement between two people of opposite sex, with the mean score of 1.6. The table also showed that the respondents accepted that rape is a forceful sexual intercourse with someone without their consent, with the mean score of 3.4. Also most the respondents were not in the opinion that a woman can be a rapist with mean score of 2.0, meaning that the statement was rejected. Majority of the respondents agreed that rape can occur between people of same sex, with the mean score of 2.7. Most respondents accepted that rape can occur between two relatives of opposite sex with the mean score of 2.6. From the table, it can be seen that most respondents agreed that rape is a punishable offence with mean score of 3.7.

CONCLUSIONS

The study established that teenagers in the study area

generally possess a high level of awareness regarding the definition and criminal implications of sexual assault, particularly rape. Most respondents correctly identified rape as a forceful act of sexual intercourse without consent and acknowledged that it can occur across different genders, between relatives, and among same-sex individuals. However, certain misconceptions—such as uncertainty about the possibility of women being rapists—indicate gaps in comprehensive understanding. These findings underscore the importance of targeted educational interventions to address residual myths and reinforce accurate knowledge on sexual assault as a form of gender-based violence. It is therefore recommended that schools should integrate comprehensive sexuality education into their curricula, emphasizing the legal, psychological, and health implications of sexual assault. Secondly, awareness campaigns should be organized regularly to dispel myths and clarify misconceptions

about rape, especially those involving female perpetrators and same-sex cases. Furthermore, stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and religious leaders, should collaborate to create safe spaces for teenagers to discuss sexual assault without stigma. Also, law enforcement agencies should partner with schools to educate students on the legal consequences of sexual assault and encourage prompt reporting of incidents. Further research should be conducted to assess the effectiveness of awareness programs and identify persistent knowledge gaps among teenagers in different socio-cultural settings.

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