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PARENTAL COMMUNICATION STYLE AS PREDICTOR OF ADOLESCENTS' SEXUAL RISKY BEHAVIOR AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN IMO STATE

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated parental communication style as predictor of adolescents' sexual risky behavior among secondary school students in Imo State. The design used for this study was a correlation research design. Two research questions and two null hypotheses guided the study. The population of the study was 14800 which comprised students in SS1 and SS2 of public secondary schools in Imo State. The sample size was 450 students from SS1 – SS2 from the randomly selected secondary schools in Imo State. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire titled Predictors of Sexual Risky Behaviour (PSRB). This instrument was also validated by three experts. The internal constituency was tested using Cronbach Alpha which yielded 0.87, 0.73 and 0.57. The research questions were analyzed using simple logistics regression. Null hypotheses were analyzed using chi square at 0.05 level of significance. Findings of study revealed that parental communication styles such as authoritarian and permissive, significantly predict sexual risky behaviours among adolescents. Additionally, results showed that parental communication styles relate to adolescent sexual risky behavior. Thus, there is need to adopt authoritarian parental communication styles as they are related to low involvement in sexual risky behaviour among adolescents. Based on the findings the study recommends that authoritarian and permissive parenting styles should be practiced by parents to help their children to grow in an environment that will not engage them in sexual risky behavior. This could be done through having in place restrictive rules at home and parents being watchful of the activities of children and their peers. Various stakeholders such as the government, non-governmental organizations, counselors, and relevant advocacy groups should encourage parental monitoring to help adolescent avoid indulging in sexual risky behaviour.

Keywords: Adolescence, Parents, Sexual Risky Behaviour, Parenting style

Introduction

Sexual risky behaviour among adolescents is an underrated public health problem. Secondary school students are faced with challenges of navigating safely through adolescence in a world where the culture of sexual activities is growing fast. Parent-adolescents sexual communication has received considerable attention as a major factor that may impact on adolescence

sexual risky behaviour. Parents also play key role in socializing adolescents on social norms. However, the extent to which parental communication style predetermine adolescents' sexual risky behaviours and gender involvement remain obscure. Adolescents have an almost insatiable curiosity about the mysteries of sex (Osei, Olusanya and Jegede, 2022). Adolescents wonder whether they are sexually attractive and think about how to behave sexually and what the future holds for their sexual lives.

According to Chawla and Sarkar, (2019), sexual risky behaviour is defined as sexual activities that expose an individual to the risk of having sexual and reproductive health problems. It includes engaging in unprotected sexual behaviour, having sex at a young age, having sex with multiple sexual partners, and having sex while under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Modernization has brought in shifts in the social norms, especially those of adolescents, including their sexual behavior (Nurmala, Ahiyanasari, Wulandari, and Pertiwi, 2021). Premarital sexual behavior is a common behavior in adolescence. The high curiosity of adolescents about human sexual life makes the m look for information about sex, whether it is through books, films or pictures that are done clandestinely. Nevertheless, involvement/ engagement of adolescents in sexual risky behaviour cannot be ruled out because larger proportion of this bracket are single, young, hyperactive in nature and get excited with the unlimited freedom of staying away from their parents during schooling hours or activities. Research has shown that parenting practices such as parent-child communication have a major influence on children's and adolescents' well-being and life satisfaction (Boniel-Nissim, et al. 2022). Adolescents also believe they have the sovereignty to handle their own affairs and take certain decisions which predisposes them to highly sexual risky activities.

According to studies on global view there are 1.8 billion 10-24 years old young people across the globe, 90 per cent of whom live in developing countries including Nigeria, where they tend to make up a large proportion of the population (Adolescent and Youth Demographics, 2022). In a recent study World Health Organization (2023), opined that population in this age group is estimated to continue to increase until the year 2040. However, the prevalence of sexual risky behaviour among the adolescents is overwhelming and its complications/consequences still remain the major health problems of young adults worldwide.

In Nigeria, Nnebue, et al. (2017) have duly noted the direct proportionality in trend between sexually transmitted infections and proliferation of the popular media outlets among youths. Also, the sexual health needs of adolescents remain high, as evidenced by the rates of pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. These negative outcomes could be controlled or averted by ensuring good knowledge of sexual risk behaviors and associated factors among this age group.

In addition, according to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (2019), which states that Nigeria has an estimated population of 200 million

people and has the second largest HIV epidemic in the world and one of the highest rates of new infections in sub-Saharan Africa. Out of 1.9 million people living with HIV in 2018, about 1.5% were within age 15-49 years although efforts have been made to limit the spread of HIV/AIDS in the country but it still retains an upward trajectory in certain states due to engagement of youths in risky sexual behaviours which is as a result of their curiosity, enthusiasm and keenness in attempting various new things neglecting the negative consequences of such deeds. While in Imo State, Ifeadike et. al (2017), reported that about six out of every ten sexually active respondents had sexual intercourse in the last three and/or 12 months preceding the study.

Furthermore, a complex interaction of factors between adolescents and their surroundings, such as parents, peers, neighborhoods, schools, community, health care systems, media, social norms, policies and laws affects their health, safety and well-being which collectively affect t their ability to appropriately make healthy decisions (Adijat, Ojubayo, Temitoayo, and Tolu, 2023). The family institution is the first arena and medium of socializing children, other institutions are also indispensable. Parents play a cogent role in sexual socialization of their children and in helping them measure the consequences of their behaviours.

According to Ogunnowo (2016), conducted research on parent-adolescent sexual health communication between immigrant Nigeria and American families, showed that Nigeria parents viewed sexual communication with children as sensitive, disgraceful and likely to promote promiscuity. Most parents in the study perceived that sexual communication with their adolescents is immoral and against the Nigerian culture which regards such communication as a taboo. This cultural taboo makes adolescents not to freely involve in sexual communication with their parents, which in turn can expose the adolescents to sexual risky behaviour.

Additionally, according to Maccoby and Martin (2016), there are four parenting styles which are duly recognized. They are authoritative (high on demandingness and responsiveness), authoritarian (high on demandingness but low on responsiveness), permissive (low on demandingness but high on responsiveness), and neglecting (low on both demandingness and responsiveness).

The predictive factors are explained below. The first predictive factor is the authoritative parenting style, which tends to present a balanced parenting approach that is high on warmth, communication, moderate on discipline and expectations of maturity (Niaraki and Nahimi, 2013). It allows an open home environment which fosters great emotional support, independence, social and academic competence, self-reliance for children and adolescents (Garcia and Santiago, 2021).

Furthermore, the second predictive factor is permissive style of parenting, this has few behavioural expectations for the child. It is indulgent, lenient, non-traditional and high in responsiveness, but low in control or exigency (Garcia and Santiago, 2021). Permissive parents are high in nurturance and acceptance but highly undemanding of compliance and conformity to standards.

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They are often too open and kind; and as long as a child's action or decision does not bring physical harm, they accept and support, so as to avoid confrontation (Gracia and Santiago, 2021). Children from this background interestingly tend to be friendly, sociable, creative and with a high level of wellbeing. They are however often aggressive, verbally impulsive and highly confrontational, resistant when limits or boundaries are set for them and with lower levels of achievement (Bakar, Ahmad, Dolah, Halim and Anuar, 2022).

Parenting styles and its association with self-esteem of adolescents have received good attention in the literature but limited to western and Asian cultures, leaving a major gap in African research in this area. In Nigeria in particular, parenting style studies are still emerging, and the few existing studies have focused on finding links between parenting styles and several other outcomes among adolescents, and not self-esteem. Only the work of Aihie (2023) was found to have examined the self-esteem outcomes of various parenting styles.

In addition, parental styles can significantly influence sexual risky behaviour in adolescence. With authoritative and authoritarian parenting style generally associated with lower risk behaviors, while permissive parenting styles are often linked to high risk due to lack of guidance and monitoring, potentially leading to poor decision making around sexual activity. In the context of this study, the researcher will examine authoritarian and permissive communication styles exhibited by parents. Therefore, the study aims to address the gap of potential parental communication style as predictors of adolescents' sexual risky behaviour among secondary school students in Imo state. The findings from this study would benefit adolescents, teachers, health workers, parents, administrators and policy makers, future researchers. Hence, the findings would provide an insight on the need for adolescents to bond properly with parents so they could be enlightened on sex and sexual behaviours that are risky.

Statement of the Problem

Adolescents are exposed to and indulge in sexual risk behaviour. Adolescents from ages 10-19 years are largely exposed to sexual health risks due to the negative and risky sexual behaviours they often engage in. This is followed by a high level of poor and misinformed knowledge on sexual and reproductive matters. Parents, adolescents and older sibling communication styles on issues about sex is considered an important aspect of adolescent development and well-being, as it ensures informed decision-making good behaviour and a protective factor for adolescent sexual risky behaviour. It can result in the transmission of family values, curbing of negative sexual health outcomes and promoting of healthy sexual attitudes and behaviours among adolescents.

Despite the critical role of parents towards raising adolescents, parental communication to adolescents on issues of sex and sexual risky behaviour has been downplayed. Most parents do not communicate and discuss with those adolescent's issues of sex and sexual life directly regardless of educational

qualification. This gap created by these parents are either filled up by the social media and peer group which most times are inaccurate and inappropriate. The adolescents in order to satisfy their high sexual drive and curiosity, they engage in sexual risky behaviours like; unprotected sex and unsafe sex habit which predisposes them to reproductive health problems.

Parental communication therefore empowers adolescents to manage the several challenges
associated with sexual and reproductive health. In the same vein, studies have noted that while
most adolescents preferred their parents as a reliable and main source of information on sex,
hitherto, only a few obtain such information from them, and this has led to increased practice of
risky sexual behaviour among adolescents in Imo State in particular. This unsatisfactory state of
affairs bother the researcher; this has given rise to determine the prediction between parental communication style as a predictor of adolescent's risky sexual behaviour in secondary schools in Imo State.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to determine parental communication style as a predictor of adolescents' sexual risky behavior among secondary school students in Imo State. Specifically, this study determined if.

1. authoritarian parental communication style as a predictor of adolescents' sexual risky behavior
2. permissive parental communication style as a predictor of adolescents' sexual risky behavior among secondary school students in Imo State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study.

1. To what extent does authoritarian parental communication style predict adolescents' sexual risky behaviours among secondary school students in Imo State?
2. To what extent does permissive parental communication style predict adolescents' sexual risky behaviours among secondary school students in Imo State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. Authoritarian parental communication style will not significantly predict adolescents' sexual risky behaviour among secondary school students in Imo State.
2. Permissive parental communication style will not significantly predict adolescents' sexual risky behaviour among secondary school students in Imo State.

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Methodology

The study adopted correlation research design. Correlation research design is a study in which the relationship existing between two or more variables of interest to the researcher is established (Nworgu, 2015). The study was conducted in Imo state, it is one of the Southeastern states of Nigeria. My personal experience has shown that most parents in the state engage in daily business adventure thereby leaving the monitoring and some parental guidance of their children at the hands of their peer group, teachers, or public. The population of this study comprised of 14,800 senior secondary government school students from SS1-SS2 in Imo State. Adolescence students within the age of 14 to 19 years were enrolled for this study. The sampling procedure adopted was multi-stage sampling and the sample size for this study was 450 senior secondary school's adolescents. First, the area was stratified into three stratums: Owerri, Orlu and Okigwe education zones. The researcher worked with the three education zones: Owerri, Orlu and Okigwe zone. Three local government areas each were randomly chosen from the three-

education zone. And from the randomly selected local government areas, three secondary school were selected randomly from each zone of the state and a total of nine secondary schools from the zones was selected randomly and represented. However, from the selected nine secondary school, 50 students were selected purposively from each school, making it a total number of 450 students from SS1-SS2 were selected and adopted. The researcher adopted parenting style and sexual behaviour questionnaire as instruments for data collection (PSSBQ). It is made up of three sections, A, B and C. A sought information from the respondents on their personal data. Section B contained 53 items of two clusters of 1-authoritarian and 2-neglectful with response mode of strongly Agree (SA) 4, Agree (A) 3, disagree (D) 2, and Strongly Disagree (SA) 1. While Section C also contained sexual behaviour with 20 items. with a four-point response format of strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and strongly Disagree (SD) weighted 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively.

The validation of the instrument was done by three experts. This is to ensure its appropriateness in relation to language, clarity, adequacy of content and ability to elicit accurate information. The reliability of the instrument, internal consistency was conducted using twenty-two school adolescents from different senior secondary schools SS1-SS2 in Imo State, which will not be used for the study were selected and the instrument administered to them to enable the researcher to generate data for computing reliability index. The internal consistency reliability was calculated using Cronbach alpha correlation with a coefficient of 0.73 for permissive parenting style, 0.86 for authoritarian parenting style and 0.57 for sexual risky behaviour. The researcher used the direct delivery method to administer the questionnaire with the help of three research assistants which were brief before the collection of data. The data collected were analyzed using simple regression analysis. Where: 0 - 0.1 = weak, 0.1- 0.3=modest, 0.4 - 0.5 = moderate, > 0.5 = strong. For the hypotheses, p-value was used to determine the significance of the prediction. Where the calculated p-value is less than the stipulated level of significance (0.05), the null hypothesis was rejected. Whereas the null hypothesis was not rejected where the calculated p-value is greater than the stipulated level of significance (0.05).

Results and Discussion

Research Question 1: To what extent does authoritarian parental communication style predict adolescents' sexual risky behaviors among secondary school students in Imo state?

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Table 1. Summary of Simple Regression Analysis with Authoritarian Parental Communication Style as Predictor of Adolescents' Sexual Risky Behaviors

	R	R^2	Adj.R^2	*B*	SE B	β
Constant				59.83	1.32	
	.24	.06	.06			.24
Authoritarian Parental Communication Style				.18	.03	

The summary of the simple regression analysis as shown in the above table indicates that authoritarian parental communication style is a weak predictor of adolescents' sexual risky behaviors among secondary school students in Imo state. This is shown by the regression coefficient (R =.24) and the coefficient of determination (R^2 = .06) which indicates that authoritarian parental communication style explained 6% of the variance in adolescents' sexual risky behaviors.

Research Question 2: To what extent does permissive parental communication style predict adolescents' sexual risky behaviors among secondary school students in Imo state?

Table 2. Summary of Simple Regression Analysis with Permissive Parental Communication Style as Predictor of Adolescents' Sexual Risky Behaviors

	R	R^2	Adj.R^2	*B*	SE B	β
Constant				26.05	1.95	
	.70	.49	.49			.74
Permissive Parental Communication Style				1.70	.08	

Table 2 indicates that permissive parental communication style is a moderate predictor of adolescents' sexual risky behaviours among secondary school students in Imo state. This is shown by the regression coefficient (R =.70) and the coefficient of determination (R^2 = .49) which indicates that permissive parental communication style explained 49% of the variance in adolescents' sexual risky behaviours.

Hypotheses One: Authoritarian parental communication style does not significantly predict adolescents' sexual risky behavior among secondary school students in Imo state.

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Table 3. Test of Significance of Simple Regression Analysis with Authoritarian Parental Communication Style as Predictor of Adolescents' Sexual Risky Behavior

	R	R^2	F	*P-value*	Remark
Authoritarian Parental Communication Style	.24	.06	29.48	.00	Sig

The analysis in Table 3 shows that the simple regression coefficient (R) is .24 while the R^2 is .06. The F-ratio associated with these is 29.48 and the *P*-value = .00, since the *P*-value is less than the stipulated 0.05 level of significance, it was decided that authoritarian parental communication style is a significant predictor of adolescents' sexual risky behaviour among secondary school students in Imo state.

Hypotheses Two: Permissive parental communication style does not significantly predict adolescents' sexual risky behavior among secondary school students in Imo state.

Table 2. Test of Significance of Simple Regression Analysis with Permissive Parental Communication Style as Predictor of Adolescents' Sexual Risky Behaviour

	R	R^2	F	*P-value*	Remark
Permissive parental communication	.70	.49	439.00	.00	Sig

The analysis in the Table above shows that the simple regression coefficient (R) is .70 while the coefficient of determination R^2 is .49. The F-ratio associated with these is 439.00 and the *P*-value = .00, since the *P*-value is less than the stipulated 0.05 level of significance, it was decided that permissive parental communication style is a significant predictor of adolescents' sexual risky behavior among secondary school students in Imo state.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study are discussed as follows:

1. Extent of authoritarian parental communication style can predict adolescents' sexual risky behaviors among secondary school students in Imo state
2. Extent of permissive parental communication style can predict adolescents' sexual risky behaviors among secondary school students in Imo state.

Extent of Authoritarian Parental Communication Style can Predict Adolescents' Sexual Risky Behaviors among Secondary School Students in Imo state.

Authoritarian parental communication style is a parenting style characterized by high demands and low responsiveness (Baumrind et al, 2010). Authoritarian parental communication style is a weak predictor of adolescents' sexual risky behaviors among secondary school students in Imo state.

Regarding adolescent risky sexual behavior, the study established that almost half of the adolescents were sexually at low risk. Similar findings were revealed by Kamuhanda, (2016) regarding the high adolescent risky sexual behavior in secondary school adolescents. The study found out how different parental communication styles significantly related to adolescent risky sexual behavior. It was established that adolescent sexual risky behavior was lowest when the parenting style was authoritarian. It increased when the parenting style was authoritative, permissive and uninvolved parental communication styles, respectively. This is because both authoritarian and authoritative parenting styles have elements of more controlling, supervising and monitoring of adolescents by their parents. The findings of this study emphasize the importance of parental communication styles in relation to adolescent sexual risky behavior. Berk (2000) and Ojiambo support the findings of this study as they were of the view that those adolescents who were closely supervised and controlled by their parents have a lower amount of sexual risk taking compared to those adolescents who have low amounts of supervision and controlling from their parents. However, these results are contrary to the findings of Rodgers (2019), who observed that adolescents who are allowed psychological autonomy develop the psychological maturity and moral internalization necessary to make mature sexual decisions and to demonstrate low-risk sexual behavior.

Other reasons as to why adolescents' sexual risky behavior is low where the perceived parenting communication styles are authoritarian and authoritative, while it is high where the perceived parenting styles are permissive and uninvolved could be attributed to the findings of other researchers. For example, it was revealed that children raised under the authoritative model are treated with respect and allowed to participate in decision-making and rule setting. Thus, by knowing that their opinions are valued, adolescents are more likely to be socially competent, responsible, and autonomous, which may enable them to behave responsibly in their adolescent stage Mahwah, et al. (2020). As for the authoritarian parenting style, low sexual involvement could be associated to the findings of Baumrind (1991) who revealed that adolescents of authoritarian parents learn to follow parental rules, and adherence to strict discipline is valued over independent behaviour.

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Extent of permissive parental communication style can predict adolescents' sexual risky behaviors among secondary school students

Permissive indulgent parent provides little control to the child with a lot of warmth. The parent-child communication is child centered, with parent not giving rules to be followed but listens to the demands of the child. There is little or no monitoring or supervision, the child is allowed to regulate his/her own behavior (Baumrind, et al. 2010).

The findings of the study shows that there is a significant relationship between permissive parental communication style and in-school adolescents 'sexual risky behaviour in Imo States of Nigeria. It was observed from this finding that a high positive relationship exists between permissive parental communication style and in-school adolescents 'sexual risky behaviour which means that as permissive parenting style increases, involvement in sexual risky behaviour increases. This finding is in tandem with the findings Ugoji and Ebenuwa-Okoh (2015), who investigated parenting styles, peer group influence as correlates of sexual risky behaviour among adolescents and found that permissive parenting style has a significant relationship with sexual risky behavior. The findings however disagrees with that of Abu and Akerele (2006) whose study on parental influence on adolescents' sexual behavior found that giving freedom to children by parents hold sway on sexual behaviour of adolescents in any of the known stage of adolescence. The findings disagree with that of Mbua and Adigeb (2015), who reported that with regard to sexual risky behaviour, adolescents with permissive parenting style do significantly better than their counterparts with authoritative and authoritarian parental communication styles. Also, in disagreement with this finding is that of Ugwu (2011) who found that permissive parenting was not an indicator of antisocial behaviour among adolescents.

The findings of this study as observed could be why Luyckx et al (2011) asserted that permissive parents showed steep decreases in monitoring once their children reached adolescence and these children increased their levels of externalizing behaviour. This externalizing behaviour could be in the form of adolescent's sensitivity to sexual behaviours. Also, Nancy (2011), asserted that parents with permissive parenting style do not respond or have control over their children. These parents are preoccupied with their own problems without discharging their responsibilities as parents, as such children who are raised by permissive parents are not able to control themselves, they are impulsive and less self-reliant. Permissive parents do not set rules, engaging in behavioural control, and set few behavioural expectations for adolescents, this could expose the adolescents to early sexual risky behaviours that can affect their lives.

Summary of the Findings

From the analysis the following findings were made:

1. A positive predictor was found between authoritarian parental communication style and sexual risky

behaviour among secondary school students.
2. A positive predictor was found between permissive parental communication style and sexual risky behaviour among secondary school students.
3. Authoritarian parental communication style was a significant predictor of sexual risky behaviour among secondary school students.
4. Permissive parental communication style was a significant predictor of sexual risky behaviour among secondary school students.

Conclusion

The study concludes that parental communication styles significantly predict secondary school students' sexual risky behaviors in Imo State. The different parental communication styles; authoritarian, and permissive provide a variety of predictions for in school adolescents. Each parental communication styles influences the adolescents' sexual risky behaviour differently over the time the adolescent child is with the parent. The relationships between each communication style bring about development of various competencies or hinder development of such competencies in the adolescent child. Such competencies may include those that help the adolescent to navigate safely through sexual risky behaviours or situations. Authoritarian parental communication style accounts for the best styles in reducing sexual risky behaviours among adolecents students in Imo State secondary schools. The study concludes that authoritarian and permissive parental communication styles related to low adolescents' sexual risky behavior compared to uninvolved parental communication styles. The implication of the finding is that the magnitude of influence that parenting communication tyles exert on adolescents 'sexual risky behaviors indicate a clear need for parents to be more demanding over their children and responsive and to retain most of their authority and control over their children to improve adolescent sexual behavior outcome.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, discussions and implications of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Authoritarian and permissive parenting styles should be practiced by parents if they are to help their children to grow in an environment that will not engage them in sexual risky behavior. This could be done through having in place restrictive rules at home and parents being watchful of the activities of children and their peers. This is likely to minimize adolescents' involvement in activities that relate to sexual risky behaviour.
2. Various stakeholders such as the government, non-governmental organizations, counselors, and relevant advocacy groups should provide interventions to parental monitoring to help adolescent avoid indulging in sexual risky behavior.

For example, the government and non-governmental organizations should help arrange for training seminars and workshops in parental monitoring. The counselors should provide counseling services in parental monitoring and the advocacy groups should advocate for various people and organizations to provide support to parental monitoring training seminars and workshops.

3. The results in this study showed that parental communication styles relate to adolescent sexual risky behavior. Thus, there is need to combine authoritarian and authoritative parental communication styles as they are related to low involvement in sexual risky behaviour among adolescents.

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